'Engaging Students, Research and Community 2013-2018'

Five Year Academic Plan of the Vice President Academic

1. Introduction and context

In common with most post-secondary institutions in North America, Simon Fraser University is in a period of consolidation, rather than growth, and the expectation is that this situation will persist for at least the next few years. The underlying causes of our current status include:

- Slow economic growth
- Government focus on deficit reduction
- Little anticipated growth in the 18-24 year old population
- Caps on enrollment growth, tuition fees and institutional debt
- Significant expansion of post-secondary and research capacity in the last decade
- Inflation
- Deferred maintenance costs

There will also be increased demands made upon SFU regarding social and economic development, efficiencies within the post-secondary system, and environmental sustainability issues.

A further demand which SFU has made upon itself is the intention to achieve accreditation with the NWCCU within this planning period.

2. Challenges and Opportunities

The next few years will continue to offer some unique opportunities for us. These include: refocusing our efforts to better suit the changing demographics of our student body, meeting the challenge of preparing students as engaged citizens and for new kinds of careers, and demonstrating the value of university education and research.

We are seeing two (perhaps related) trends regarding quality and accountability. First, universities are expected to provide greater support for students, not just in academic areas, but also in relation to personal or societal factors that may impede student access and success. At SFU, we also have the challenge of meeting the expectations of an especially diverse student population. Second, there is increased questioning from academia, governments and the general public about the value of a university education and the role of university research in economic development. This trend is evident around the world. Many faculty and staff will be familiar with articles in the press that have this theme, and recent books such as *Academically Adrift* (Arum and Roksa, 2011, University of Chicago Press) or *Academic Reform* (Clark, Trick and Van Loon 2011, McGill-Queen's University Press) have opened a new debate about educational quality. If universities are to maintain their autonomy, they must become more attentive to accountability, and they must be able to justify their existence with verifiable data on outcomes. We also need to respond to the

student satisfaction surveys which have indicated some areas of discontent among our student body.

It is appropriate during times of consolidation to ensure SFU is effective and efficient in all its operations and in January 2012 the NWCCU approved SFU as a Candidate for Accreditation. During the candidacy period, which could last up to five years, SFU will submit annual data reports including regular self-evaluation reports to the NWCCU and host periodic site visits from an evaluation committee that will review various aspects of our institution. Therefore in order to achieve accreditation SFU will apply 'best practice' in our academic operations including the development of learning outcomes and their assessment for all courses and programs.

International student numbers make up 18.3% of total student headcount. The benefits of having international students on campus are acknowledged. However, there are associated pressures on faculty, facilities and services provided to these students. Our intention is to improve our management of international student admissions through differential admission grades, and to provide better language support for all students for whom English is not the first language.
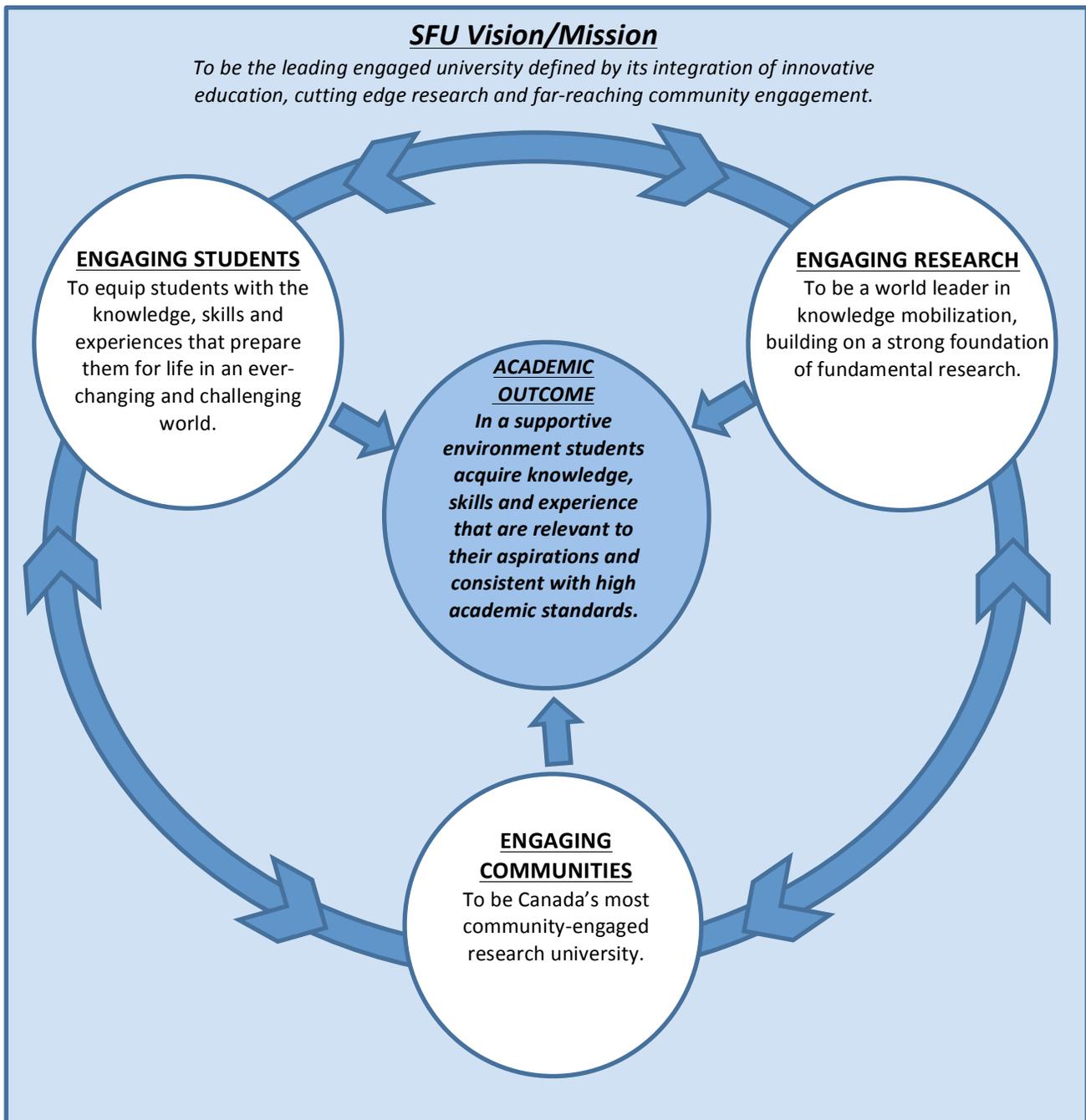
Another trend is the development of MOOCs (massive open online course). These online courses are aimed at large-scale participation with open access via the web and offered free of charge to students. Though they have much to prove, their presence has initiated much debate about online resources and their role in learning. SFU should examine carefully how online resources and mobile technology can be integrated into academic programs, and whether there is any potential to make content and learning more accessible and affordable without sacrificing quality.

All of these factors will add more pressure to allocation of scarce resources. But even if there is little capacity for growth, SFU is well positioned for success over the next few years. The new SFU Vision and Mission focuses on our strengths, and provides a high-level set of priorities and principles. The en**vision>SFU** process also showed that SFU is valued in the community, not only for undergraduate and graduate education, but also because of our contributions to research and community development. Demand for our programs is high, and our students, staff and faculty members have received numerous awards and honours that testify to the quality of what we do. Lack of opportunities for growth should not prevent us from striving for higher quality, new approaches to teaching and learning, reorientation of existing programs to reflect new knowledge and priorities, the development of new research fields, and greater contributions to the community.

3. SFU Vision/Mission

The Academic Plan is one of a number of institutional plans that collectively shape the overall direction and priorities for this diverse University. This Plan follows on the recently developed SFU Vision/Mission and is guided by the three Core Themes and their associated Goals determined in the Mission. This plan is aligned to the outcomes identified in the SFU Planning Framework and is consistent with the Underlying Principles of the SFU Vision/Mission.

The Vision/Mission, core themes and the overarching Academic Outcome are depicted below:

SFU Vision/Mission

To be the leading engaged university defined by its integration of innovative education, cutting edge research and far-reaching community engagement.

ENGAGING STUDENTS
To equip students with the knowledge, skills and experiences that prepare them for life in an ever-changing and challenging world.

ENGAGING RESEARCH
To be a world leader in knowledge mobilization, building on a strong foundation of fundamental research.

ACADEMIC OUTCOME
In a supportive environment students acquire knowledge, skills and experience that are relevant to their aspirations and consistent with high academic standards.

ENGAGING COMMUNITIES
To be Canada's most community-engaged research university.

As depicted in this diagram the three themes and their goals intersect in the academic programs, and the Academic Plan must demonstrate contributions to each goal, as well as encouraging linkages between them.

The ideas in this plan have been considered by the Deans, Chairs and Directors, and have been presented to the university on five occasions for comment. This has resulted in a well-supported high-level academic plan. The expected Outcomes for the end of this planning horizon have been developed, together with relevant Indicators to provide a qualitative or quantitative measure of progress. These are attached as Appendix 1.

This academic plan has the following purposes and characteristics:
- It provides a framework of priorities upon which more detailed Faculty, Department and support unit plans can be developed.
- It identifies academic priorities that have well-defined objectives with measurable outcomes.
- The plan covers top priorities, and is not intended to be a comprehensive overview of everything that SFU does. Many activities not listed in this plan will continue, and it is expected that those responsible for those activities to set goals consistent with the plan.
- It also identifies priorities for improved operational efficiencies.

The underlying principles of SFU's vision and mission will continue to influence all activities undertaken: academic and intellectual freedom; diversity; internationalization; respect for Aboriginal peoples and culture; supportive and healthy work environment; and sustainability.

4. <u>Academic Priorities</u>

In support of each of the three Goals identified in the SFU Mission, at least one Objective has been identified as an academic priority in this plan. Below each Objective is a number of supporting activities. These activities are meant as examples of what we should be focusing on in order to achieve the Objective but do not exclude any other activities that may further the aim.

In addition to these Objectives, a number of ongoing operational activities together with a number of strategic planning exercises, which will be developed over the next few years, are listed under a separate heading later in this document.

Implementation of the priorities of the Academic Plan is a collective responsibility, but it was suggested during initial consultations that some indication be given as to whether the impetus for initiatives will lie centrally with the Vice President, Academic or whether individual units are expected to take the initiative. The following sections incorporate this suggestion, but it should be recognized that the Vice President Academic intends to promote and support both centralized and decentralized activities.

> **GOAL 1: To equip students with the knowledge, skills, and experiences that prepare them for life in an ever-changing and challenging world.**

In support of this Goal two Objectives have been identified. One is aimed at the quality and relevance of our programs and the other is aimed at improving support for students.

Objective 1.1: Enhance the quality of education and student satisfaction.

Surveys of students and alumni demonstrate a fairly high degree of satisfaction with the SFU experience. However, there is room for improvement in a number of areas, including providing better access to high quality and relevant learning experiences in desired courses, increasing the diversity of teaching methods, linking curriculum to student needs after graduation, and increasing off-campus learning opportunities.

Graduate programs include research-intensive programs that focus on preparation of students for a career focused on research, as well as programs that are more oriented to professional development related to a non-academic career. While these two categories are not clearly demarcated, it should be understood that some of the following activities may apply differentially across graduate programs. For example, improvement in funding and supervision relate more to research-intensive programs, whereas curriculum design and pedagogy may be more relevant to course-based professional programs.

The following supporting activities are proposed for Objective 1.1:

1.1.1 **Provide more opportunities for faculty members to innovate and/or improve teaching methods**. (VPA)

Although student satisfaction with instruction is at reasonable levels, there is the potential for diversifying pedagogy, taking advantage of research on best practices in undergraduate education. In addition, individual faculty members may also wish to improve or diversify their teaching. The Teaching and Learning Centre will support a variety of activities to help faculty members achieve these goals.

1.1.2 **Implement learning outcomes and assessment to ensure all students understand the structure and content of curriculum and to establish data on achievement of student learning**. (VPA, Faculties and Departments)

By defining learning outcomes and assessing them, we can be more accountable to students, the general public and ourselves. There is evidence that definition of learning outcomes clarifies the purpose of courses and programs, and leads to greater student understanding and satisfaction. Assessment of learning outcomes makes the University accountable for design, content and delivery of its programs.
A number of academic units have already adopted this practice to meet their professional accreditation requirements. However the broader adoption of the practice for **all** Departments to develop learning outcomes and assessment is conditional on Senate approval.

1.1.3 Improve access to courses. (VPA, Faculties and Departments)

Difficulty in enrolling in courses is one of the most frequent complaints from undergraduate students. Although many factors must contribute to this, we can do more to make courses accessible to students. We also need to explore the possibilities offered by the potential of new technologies which support online and blended learning.

1.1.4 Increase experiential learning opportunities. (Faculties and Departments)

Students value opportunities to "learn by doing." Many faculty members have incorporated such approaches in their courses and Work Integrated Learning provides further opportunities for thousands of students annually. We will encourage further development of these opportunities.

1.1.5 Improve infrastructure to ensure it meets the learning and other needs of the students' environment. (VPA)

Appropriate physical and digital infrastructure can enhance student learning. Examples include study space for individuals and groups, properly equipped classrooms and labs, access to information through mobile devices, linkages between campuses, and online support for learning resources. The Vice President, Academic will work with other portfolios to create social and study space for students where possible.

1.1.6 Enhance graduate supervision. (Faculties and Departments)

Effective graduate supervision is key to success in research programs. The Dean of Graduate Studies will ensure that training is offered to faculty members, and that best practices are implemented in departments and faculties.

1.1.7 More effective use of graduate funding. (Faculties and Departments)

The University contributes millions of dollars annually to graduate student support, through teaching assistantships and scholarships. In addition, individual faculty members contribute further millions through employment of graduate students on research projects. We should investigate the effectiveness of this funding in ensuring it enhances the research mission and the timely completion of graduate programs and, if warranted, make changes to allocation to improve effectiveness.

1.1.8 Programs for mature, returning and non-traditional students. (Faculties and Departments)

As the demography of British Columbia changes, and as there is growth in world-wide demand for educational credentials, we should respond by developing new credit and non-credit programs, particularly for those who have not previously seen universities as relevant to their personal development. Where appropriate, new opportunities for distance, blended and online approaches should be developed.

Objective 1.2: Improve support for students.

As noted previously, there are greater expectations for academic and non-academic support for students. Currently, the University does a great deal in this area and there are many opportunities to enhance the support for students across all Faculties and at all campuses. There are a number of areas where we could focus greater attention, and the following supporting activities are seen as priorities.

1.2.1   **Improve support for EAL students.** (VPA)

About 50% of SFU undergraduate students do not speak English as a first language, and there are many graduate students who also need assistance. A plan for support of EAL students has recently been proposed and should be implemented over the next few years.

1.2.2.   **Improve access for under-represented communities.** (VPA, Faculties and Departments)

SFU has long been committed to making education more accessible, and puts considerable resources into this. Over the next few years we should focus on upgrading distance education and extension credit, creating partnerships with other institutions, and expanding non-credit activities for individuals for whom credit programs are not appropriate or relevant. We should also continue our efforts to increase the number of students from communities that are underrepresented, such as aboriginal and immigrant communities.

1.2.3   **Encourage community-building in academic units.** (Faculties and Departments)

Student societies and Student Services offer a wide range of extra-curricular programs to build a sense of community on campus. We should also ensure that all academic units provide opportunities (especially for majors and graduate students) to build connections to faculty and staff outside of formal learning activities.

GOAL 2: To be a world leader in knowledge mobilization, building on a strong foundation of fundamental research

In support of this Goal one very broad Objective has been identified.

Objective 2.1: Contribute to research excellence.

The primary role for the Vice-President, Academic in research excellence is ensuring that hiring, support and evaluation of tenure-track faculty members foster the development of high quality research. In some units this means concentrating on strong research foci, whereas in others it means maintaining appropriate diversity of research interests. In addition, research can be supported through policies and programs that link teaching and research and provide opportunities for students to participate in research. The following supporting activities are identified here:

2.1.1 **Ensure that the Faculty Renewal Plan contributes to maintenance of research excellence.** (VPA and Faculties)

The Vice-President Academic should ensure that an appropriate balance of teaching and research faculty members is maintained, and that approved positions and budget allocations contribute to the research strengths of academic units.

2.1.2 **Continue to influence University research priorities through the Faculty Renewal Plan.** (VPA and Faculties)

The development of an annual plan through consultation with Deans provides a strategic opportunity to direct resources to specific research areas. Decisions about new positions should be transparent, and based on clear criteria.

2.1.3 **Ensure students are involved in research**. (Faculties and Departments)

Create opportunities in all programs for the acquisition of research skills and research ethics. Continue to build opportunities for undergraduate students to participate in research.

GOAL 3: To be Canada's most community-engaged research university.

One broad objective has been identified to support this Goal.

Objective 3.1: Increase community engagement activity.

Academic programs already support significant levels of community engagement. For example, experiential learning takes students into the community, as do many graduate research projects; Lifelong Learning creates numerous formal and informal opportunities for interaction with the University. The following priority activities take into consideration the

fact that much of this activity is already under way, and that other areas of the University take on much of the responsibility for community engagement.

3.1.1 Increase opportunities for alumni to be involved in undergraduate and graduate education. (Faculties and Departments)

Our alumni are a great resource. Departments and Faculties should work with Alumni Relations and the Alumni Association to create opportunities to bring students and faculty together with alumni.

3.1.2 Promote and celebrate the value of research on communities and the mutual benefit of SFU/Community partnerships. (VPA, Faculties and Departments)

Work with researchers and the VP Research to inform our communities about the value and impact of fundamental, applied and community-based research and share knowledge with communities and vice-versa.

3.1.3 Create new links and opportunities for under-served communities. (Faculties and Departments)

Develop partnerships with a variety of communities to encourage better rates of transition to university and better retention rates. In particular, focus on communities where participation in post-secondary education has been lower.

3.1.4 Forge new institutional partnerships and opportunities. (VPA, Faculties and Departments)

Both local and global partnerships with other institutions can create academic programs that build on the strengths of each institution and create more diverse experiences for students. Focus should be on the creation of strategic partnerships and opportunities, where the emphasis is on enhanced outcomes for students.

5. Ongoing Operational Activities and Strategic Planning Issues

In addition to the development of priorities that will shape the academic planning of the University, we should also pay attention to the range of *current operations* that are underway and support academic programs. The following brief descriptions outline areas to which we will pay particular attention:

5.1   **Institutional Accreditation:** We will continue to pursue accreditation with NWCCU, in order to focus on adherence to best practices and to increase the accountability of the University to its students and supporters.

5.2   **Resource allocation:** We will continue to refine the budget process to align resource allocation with academic priorities; in particular, we will extend the "performance based" budget process to support units and to scholarship programs.

5.3   **Faculty Development:** In conjunction with Academic Relations, we will develop opportunities for faculty members to participate more effectively as leaders and administrators. This could include career management, leadership development, working with new technologies, etc.

5.4   **Revenue Generation and Advancement:** Continue to develop revenue generating activities across all areas of the Vice President, Academic portfolio and support all Advancement opportunities in conjunction with the Vice President, Advancement.

5.5   **Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM)**: Strengthen our approach to strategic enrollment management, a practice that conceptualizes enrollment as a process that begins with recruitment and concludes with a lifelong relationship with our students and alumni.

5.6   **Implementation of Aboriginal Strategic Plan:** Continue the implementation of the current Aboriginal Strategic Plan.

5.7   **Management of the deferred maintenance shortfall:** In conjunction with others continue to seek solutions to maintaining and renovating areas identified of particular importance to the campus environment.

5.8   **Review of policies and procedures**: ensure that policies and procedures are aligned to support strategic initiatives.

There are also a number of ***planning priorities*** that we must attend to over the next few years. These include:

5.9   **SFU Surrey:** As there is a strong public policy case to expand post-secondary education in the South Fraser Region SFU has identified the further development of the Surrey campus as a top priority SFU must be fully prepared for expansion of Surrey when funding becomes available and to this end an agreed mandate for the campus will be developed detailing its role and focus. This mandate will direct all future academic planning for the Surrey campus. A similar process will be undertaken for the Vancouver campus.

5.10   **International Partnerships:** SFU has a number of agreements with international institutions including dual degree programs, research collaborations and exchange agreements. These international opportunities offer students and faculty opportunities to contribute internationally and to experience an enriched understanding of languages, cultures and complex, important global processes. In cooperation with the Vice President, External Relations we should review our current international partnerships and make strategic decisions about the future of current partnerships and the number and kind of future partnerships.

5.11 **Better data capture on university activities:** We could improve our performance in capturing data about our educational, research and community engagement activities. We should investigate ways to record and archive relevant data systematically and to make access to such data more readily available to the public.

6. <u>Summary</u>

The academic plan proposed here builds upon the priorities established in the University's Vision and Mission. In a time of limited growth and restricted funding, the academic vision focuses on a relatively small set of objectives, recognizing that academic and support units will continue to work on a range of activities relevant to their individual missions that cannot be expressed adequately in an institution-wide plan.

The objectives of this plan should influence planning in all academic and support units, will be priority items for the Vice President Academic, and will also influence the development of collaborations with other vice-presidential portfolios.

Appendix 1: Outcomes and Indicators for 2018 – to be provided