

FIVE-YEAR ACADEMIC PLAN 2019–2024





TRANSITION TO THE FUTURE

This academic plan is designed to ensure that SFU is taking the necessary steps to be the university it wants to be in 2024 and beyond. We want to provide exceptional and distinctive academic programming and an outstanding student experience, to continue to grow our world-class scholarship and creativity, to advance our mutually beneficial relationships with the community, and to contribute to social infrastructure for a better world.

This institutional-level academic plan has been co-created with the SFU community, building on the academic plans that faculties and their academic units have prepared, as well as other strategic plans, including SFU's 2016-2020¹ strategic research plan.

The plan aligns with SFU's vision/mission² to be the leading engaged university defined by our dynamic integration of innovative education, cutting-edge research and far-reaching community engagement.

¹ [sfu.ca/content/dam/sfu/vpresearch/pdfs/SRP/StrategicResearchPlan2016-2020.pdf](https://www.sfu.ca/content/dam/sfu/vpresearch/pdfs/SRP/StrategicResearchPlan2016-2020.pdf)

² [sfu.ca/content/dam/sfu/engage/StrategicVision_colour.pdf](https://www.sfu.ca/content/dam/sfu/engage/StrategicVision_colour.pdf)



5 CHALLENGES

THE PLAN FOCUSES ON FIVE EQUALLY IMPORTANT CHALLENGES:

Student life, learning and success - Enhance support and physical and virtual environments to make the student experience at SFU the best it can be.

Academic quality / curriculum - Take a hard look at today's curriculum and associated practices to ensure that they are meaningful, easy to navigate, and that they meet our diverse student needs for today and tomorrow.

Engagement - Further the connections between the institution and the broader community, with dialogue, outreach, knowledge co-creation and learning with, and in the community, as priorities.

Bridging divides / interdisciplinarity - Remove barriers and create an environment that supports collaboration across disciplines and administrative boundaries.

Faculty and staff renewal - Recruit and hire the best faculty and staff while supporting SFU's equity and diversity objectives and addressing career incentives to support existing and future priorities.

The following pages offer context and identify the commitments to progress. The plan then gives examples of the activities and strategies SFU will need to focus on over the next five years to ensure that we are prepared for and ready to withstand the challenges that lie ahead, and to allow us to be an active participant in the dialogue that shapes the future.

THE ENGAGED UNIVERSITY

The activities and strategies introduced in this plan are designed to support a vision of tomorrow while grounded in the realities of today, and to build on what SFU has achieved in the past.

SFU is recognized as a national and international leader among comprehensive and research-intensive universities. SFU has established a reputation for rigorous academic programming, high academic standards and a highly competitive research environment. SFU is also known as a leader: advancing community-engaged scholarship, engaging in dialogue to improve society, building social infrastructure, and championing community-based and experiential learning.

A little over 50 years old, SFU today operates a multi-campus environment that brings with it challenges and opportunities. SFU lives in a period of growing expectations of accountability from students, government and civil society at large. SFU has undertaken considerable data collection and analysis to understand our diverse student body, which primarily commutes to the university.

SFU's physical infrastructure is at capacity, given our student numbers and research enterprise. It also is of an age requiring considerable investment in refurbishing, which offers exciting opportunities to re-envision space for contemporary and future needs.

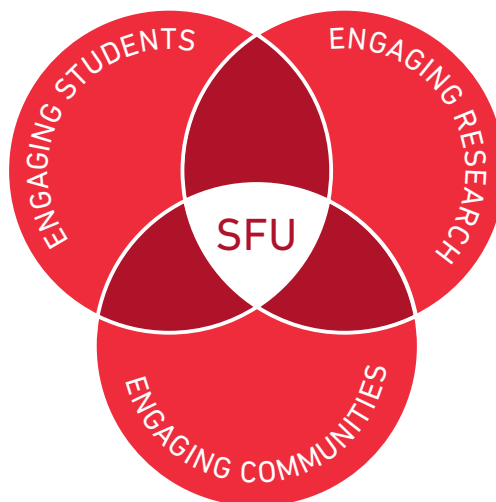
The university's budget, which supports academic programming, research and community engagement, has been relatively stable in recent years.

SFU's last academic planning period was guided by a mission/vision to demonstrate national and global leadership as an engaged university identified by three pillars (core themes) and their associated goals, namely:

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.

Engaging Communities: To be Canada's most community-engaged research university.



Academic planning over the last five years recognized that these core themes are not independent of one another, and that exciting opportunities and possibilities exist where the themes overlap.

The SFU community recently reconfirmed these three core themes as well as its mission/vision to be the leading engaged university, which will continue to drive the planning and priorities for SFU's 2019-2024 academic planning period.

Today's reality is a world of accelerating change driven in part by continual innovations and associated new opportunities³. To deliver on SFU's mission/vision and aspirations, we need to pay close attention to the world around us. Demographic trends and changing labour markets require careful thought around enrolment planning and academic program design and delivery. SFU needs to focus on ensuring that graduates are good global citizens who are prepared for today's knowledge economy and are also adaptable and agile enough to embrace the inevitable uncertainty and change that the future will bring.

All this requires the SFU community to understand and lead innovation, to ask hard questions of ourselves and others, and to take calculated risks. Fortunately, that is the culture and history that SFU has been built upon, as explained in *Radical Campus*.⁴



³Additional context and background can be found in the document Phase 1: Context, Challenges and Questions, which was distributed to all Faculties and support units to initiate the planning process late 2017.

⁴Johnston, H. 2005 *Radical Campus: Making Simon Fraser University*. Vancouver, Douglas & McIntyre.

OUR COMMITMENTS

The faculties, their departments and other administrative units have submitted plans that confirm a commitment to shared values, principles, processes and goals. SFU can't rest on its laurels. Continuing on the present path just because it is how we've always operated is not an option.

- making timely progress on the SFU Aboriginal Reconciliation Council's Calls for Action;
- delivering a welcoming, respectful, safe and healthy workplace, and an environment that commits to equity, diversity and inclusion, including recognizing and fostering the importance of building and strengthening a sense of community among our students, staff and faculty;
- striving to continually do better, being responsive to student and community feedback about SFU, paying attention to contemporary trends and transitions in post-secondary education and the world at large, and having a willingness to anticipate, recognize and adjust, as appropriate, to societal expectations, challenges and needs;
- being nimble and responsive in order to remain relevant and to serve society. This entails continuing the spirit of the 'radical campus' by taking calculated risks in anticipation of the future, harvesting the strength in diversity, adapting to new and flexible learning environments, empowering bottom-up initiatives, and providing a supportive, inclusive, safe and healthy environment where students acquire knowledge, skills and experience pertinent to their aspirations and consistent with the quality and excellence for which SFU is known;
- undertaking honest and critical periodic reviews of existing practices, structures, processes, policies and procedures to ensure that goals and objectives are met, and to remove barriers, recognizing that there is always room for improvements and/or opportunities for change. SFU must acknowledge and be prepared that this will, on occasion, require embracing transformational ideas even if they disrupt the status quo. In the process, traditional strengths, core values, mission and beliefs should not be compromised;
- ensuring that the knowledge and skills of faculty and staff are current and anticipate new and emerging directions;
- becoming a leader in the dynamic integration of innovative education, cutting-edge research and far-reaching community engagement, including strategic investments in associated academic programming, organizational reform and institutional support;
- rethinking how we allocate and use some of SFU's current space, find new space, and/or begin to take more advantage of the virtual campus;
- breaking down administrative silos, removing barriers to collaboration across the campuses, and finding opportunities to team up and seek win-win results;
- ensuring viable and dynamic academic programming on all four campuses (three physical and a virtual campus) building on, supporting and celebrating their unique roles and individual strengths, and acknowledging the significant opportunity for growth in Surrey, especially in health and wellness, creative technologies and professional schools.

Underlying all of the above commitments are core principles identified in SFU's vision and mission statement, namely:

- Academic and intellectual freedom
- Diversity
- Internationalization
- Respect for Indigenous peoples and cultures
- A supportive and healthy work environment
- Sustainability



RISING TO THE CHALLENGES

These principles will guide SFU in all aspects of its academic planning in this next cycle.

The planning process identified five challenges summarized in Phase 1: Context, Challenges and Questions⁵, namely:

- Student life, learning and success
- Academic quality/curriculum
- Engagement
- Interdisciplinarity
- Faculty and staff renewal

Faculties and departments have each prepared plans that address these challenges. The overarching 2019-2024 academic plan identifies a number of activities to help SFU meet its commitments and to advance on these challenges. The list of activities should be seen as indicative of the work to be undertaken in the next five years. It should not be considered exhaustive. The faculties and departments have identified their own additional activities to ensure progress.

⁵sfu.ca/content/dam/sfu/vpacademic/files/academic_planning/Academic-Plan-Phase-1-October-10-2017.pdf



STUDENT LIFE, LEARNING AND SUCCESS

SFU needs to further enhance the learning community by embracing diversity and ensuring all students have the support they need to succeed. This includes the highest standards of undergraduate and graduate advising, supervision, mentoring and tutoring in both curricular and co-curricular activities, all in a welcoming, inclusive, respectful and safe learning environment. This support must anticipate the changing and future expectations of students and society. Our physical environment and infrastructure must reflect our pedagogic values, be welcoming, inclusive and facilitate well-being, community-building, learning and teaching.

CHALLENGE

TO FOSTER A SUPPORTIVE CURRICULAR, CO-CURRICULAR AND PHYSICAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT THAT EMPOWERS STUDENTS FOR LIFE WHILE ENSURING TIMELY DEGREE COMPLETION.

Strategies and activities to support this goal will include but are not limited to:

- 1.1 Ensure the design of curricular and co-curricular programming supports students' sense of belonging, student development and communities of learning.
- 1.2 Review pathways and bridging and transition initiatives to ensure they welcome and support students from all walks of life.
- 1.3 Ensure course access and scheduling are not impediments to timely degree completion.
- 1.4 Build innovative learning spaces across the campuses.
- 1.5 Seek ways to leverage the commuter campus experience as a strength.
- 1.6 Build on the Student Experience Initiative and Healthy Campus Communities projects to make the physical campuses more accessible, inclusive, vibrant, welcoming, dynamic and engaging while advancing the idea of a "home away from home."
- 1.7 Enhance programming and services that address support for Indigenous students and their unique and varied needs.
- 1.8 Enhance programming and services to welcome, support and address the unique needs of students from international pathways.
- 1.9 Invest in diverse opportunities to improve spoken and written English-language competencies for all students.
- 1.10 Build on the Student Experience Initiative to ensure undergraduate, graduate and postdoctoral students have positive supervisory experiences.
- 1.11 Develop a university-wide strategy for communicating with students through uncluttered, student-friendly channels.
- 1.12 Ensure all students have access to in-person and on-line academic, professional and personal advising.
- 1.13 Ensure all students have easy access to mental health and wellness support that meets the varied needs of SFU's diverse student population.

CHALLENGE 1

ACADEMIC QUALITY/ CURRICULUM

SFU's curriculum has been built by sequential growth over a 50-year history. Over time it has become vast and complex. A comprehensive review of our curricula is opportune and timely, given a changing world and expectations as we welcome a growing number of new faculty to our campuses. Our vision is an innovative and progressive curriculum that meets educational goals and is delivered in a manner that is easy to navigate and understand, including intuitive and published paths to degree completion.

CHALLENGE

TO EMBRACE A COHERENT CURRICULUM REVIEW WITH FOCUS ON INNOVATIVE CURRICULUM DESIGN AND DELIVERY.

Strategies and activities to support this goal will include but are not limited to:

2.1 Support faculties and departments with reviewing the core assumptions underlying the curriculum and degree requirements and to consider the following:

- sequential flow, overlap and redundancy of curricula
- paths to degree completion using an SFU-consistent template
- societal needs for the future
- Indigenization of curricula, where appropriate
- Internationalization of curricula, where appropriate

2.2 Undertake a review of the practice of allocating variable credit for courses, and of underlying teaching practices and student expectations, with an eye to simplification and standardization.

2.3 Undertake a review of writing, quantitative and breadth (WQB) requirements to evaluate their effectiveness in meeting WQB goals and objectives, and consider alternative 'general education' models.

2.4 Continue to implement the design and assessment of course, program and institutional educational goals/learning outcomes.

2.5 Advance the student evaluation of teaching and courses (SETC) initiative and support conversation around alternative methods of assessing quality of learning, teaching and courses.

2.6 Support the re-design of courses and their delivery to facilitate diversity of pedagogy, and to embrace alternative learning styles. Provide the infrastructure to support these, including transition from the Centre for Distance Education to FLEX.

2.7 Explore opportunities for innovative degree credentials with special foci on professional degrees at the master's level, timely thematic undergraduate minors, joint degrees, dual degrees, and the laddering and stacking of courses leading to a degree, in the context of clearer pathways to degree completion.

2.8 Capitalize on opportunities and needs to advance innovative and exciting academic programming with particular focus on expanding the Surrey campus.

2.9 Promote and support Open Access to course materials and the distribution and mobilization of knowledge.

2.10 Keep sustainability and a respectful, inclusive, safe and healthy environment forefront of mind when advancing all aspects of academic programming.

ENGAGEMENT

Community engagement at SFU must have a strong focus on creating a doorway to deeper enquiry and meaningful dialogue. SFU needs to create more opportunities for experiential learning, work- and community-integrated learning and not-for-credit and international experiences. These initiatives will help students, faculty and staff become even more engaged with communities, ranging from local to global, in the continued quest to ensure a healthy planet and to improve the lives of the world's citizens.

CHALLENGE

STRENGTHEN THE CONNECTION AND COLLABORATIONS BETWEEN SFU AND THE WORLD.

Strategies and activities to support this goal will include but are not limited to:

3.1 Expand and strengthen international collaboration in teaching and research to grow international experiences for our students, faculty and staff, and to further raise SFU's international reputation and profile.

3.2 Expand access to community-integrated learning (CIL) opportunities, including student exchanges and international field schools, work-integrated learning (WIL), co-op, internships and transformative, community-focused learning opportunities. Build on experiences gained from initiatives such as the Semester in Dialogue, City Studio and Change Labs.

3.3 Increase the opportunities for all students to graduate with skills in innovation and entrepreneurship that will position them to be tomorrow's career-ready leaders and positive change-makers.

3.4 Support and foster close connections and collaboration between SFU's faculty, students and staff as well as partnerships, institutions and facilities that advance dialogue, knowledge co-creation and community-based learning, such as the Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue.

3.5 Increase the opportunities for students to participate in research locally, nationally or internationally as part of their program of study, including co-op.

3.6 Learn from the pilot for the elective Carnegie classification for community engagement in Canada. This includes measuring and assessing our community engagement to improve our practices and to ensure they are a doorway to deeper enquiry.

3.7 Develop training and education to advance best engagement and outreach practices for faculty, staff and students, including furthering media training and knowledge mobilization as well as to encourage recognition and reward for engagement and outreach activities.

BRIDGING DIVIDES/ INTERDISCIPLINARITY

SFU needs to create more opportunities for students to access interdisciplinary clusters of scholars and programming. This includes offering innovative degree credentials with special foci on thematic minors to understand and advance contemporary challenges that define our times and serve societal needs and expectations.

CHALLENGE

SEEK OPPORTUNITIES FOR RESEARCH AND TEACHING COLLABORATION TO ADVANCE DEFINING THEMES OF OUR TIMES AND TO OFFER INNOVATIVE ACADEMIC CREDENTIALS.

Strategies and activities to support this goal will include but are not limited to:

- 4.1 Facilitate dialogue to identify and act on best practices and opportunities as well as to remove barriers to advancing interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary academic programming and scholarship.
- 4.2 Support the creation of new interdisciplinary academic programming, internships and scholarship initiatives.
- 4.3 Increase opportunities for students to access interdisciplinary clusters of scholars and programming to understand and advance solutions to contemporary challenges that define our times.
- 4.4 Foster and reward teaching and research collaboration across the disciplines.
- 4.5 Remove perceived and real barriers to joint- and cross-faculty appointments and create opportunities for strategic academic searches that bridge the faculties, e.g. strategic Canadian Research Chairs (CRCs).

4.6 Create the opportunity for interdisciplinary thematic research centres and institutions to offer undergraduate and graduate academic programming, including the possibility of minors.

4.7 Identify opportunities for shared research space and infrastructure that create added capacity, increased efficiency and optimal use.

4.8 Engage in an emerging conversation around transition to a post-disciplinary conceptualization of knowledge.

FACULTY AND STAFF RENEWAL

Hiring is one of the most important things we do. SFU's faculty and staff renewal is 'mission critical' to advancing competitive scholarly and creative excellence, academic programming that meets the needs of today and tomorrow, and making progress on SFU's vision/mission.

Recruitment, hiring and career incentives must anticipate and address the needs and priorities of tomorrow as well as advance SFU's equity and diversity objectives.

CHALLENGE

ENSURE THAT ACADEMIC HIRING AND CAREER INCENTIVES ADVANCE EXCELLENCE IN SCHOLARSHIP AND CREATIVITY, INCLUDING THE DISCOVERY OF NEW KNOWLEDGE AND ITS APPLICATION, THE DEVELOPMENT OF HIGH-QUALITY ACADEMIC PROGRAMMING AND TEACHING, SUPPORT SERVICES AND ENGAGEMENT WITH THE BROADER COMMUNITY.

Strategies and activities to support this goal will include but are not limited to:

5.1 Continue to advance toward a three-year faculty renewal planning process that anticipates future needs and ensures succession that maintains and builds excellence and diversity in research and creativity, academic programming, teaching delivery and outreach.

5.2 Ensure that search processes and practices are unbiased, far-reaching and will attract outstanding applicants.

5.3 Ensure that faculty and staff renewal aligns with SFU's equity and diversity objectives, including support for targeted hires where appropriate.

5.4 Identify and remove barriers to the possibility of cross/joint appointments, grant-tenured faculty and professors of professional practice.

5.5 Encourage the creation of awards and nominations for achievers and those who advance the institution's core values. These awards, at the levels of academic unit, discipline, faculty, and institutional and external, will promote recognition of high-achieving faculty, staff and students at SFU as well as nationally and internationally.

5.6 Build academic policy and practice to:

- improve hiring and retention of new faculty and staff
- support professional development, mentorship and knowledge-sharing among faculty and staff, including paths to academic leadership
- identify best practices in the faculty-student relationship, including mentoring, supervision and advising.

5.7 Advance the planning and allocation of physical space and investment in research infrastructure to ensure that new and existing faculty have access to competitive, high-quality, research environments.



THE PATH AHEAD

It is expected that deans and chairs and others are moving forward in implementing their faculty and unit plans for 2019 – 2024. Implementation should be in the spirit of the commitments outlined in this academic plan. The challenges and goals as well as the associated strategies and activities outlined should help guide progress.

Over the next few months we will determine details for how to advance on the strategies/activities listed under each goal in this academic plan, including allocation of leads and tasks. Progress will require a community effort. All staff and faculty may find opportunities to contribute in one way or another.

It is our intention to undertake a review assessing progress a couple of years out and again before we begin planning for the next academic plan. These assessments will consist of measuring achievements against the expected outputs of the actions undertaken. These assessments could be either descriptive evaluations and/or metrics to establish a baseline and then measure improvement from that point. The expected outcomes and/or metrics will also be identified over the next few months.

The assessments' goals will:

- Provide a framework and information to support future academic planning efforts
- Confirm that actions taken are achieving desired outcomes
- Identify opportunities for new or increased activity
- Justify actions for validation, increased support and future resources

Faculties will also be expected to submit a review that assesses progress made with respect to their own academic plans, in due course. These progress reports will be consolidated in conjunction with the SFU academic plan 2019-2024 assessment and submitted to the senate and the board of governors for information. To seek efficiencies and to facilitate reporting, faculties are encouraged to establish their own assessment process, which will match and coincide with the vice-president, academic's assessment process as closely as possible.



THE PLANNING PROCESS

SFU has a planning framework that comprises a vision/mission and a number of underlying strategic plans/strategies, including an academic plan, a strategic research plan, an innovation strategy and a community engagement strategy which, together, support the academic endeavour at SFU. In addition, SFU has identified a number of institutional strategic priorities that influence the 2019-2024 planning cycle, including Aboriginal reconciliation, the student experience, big data, innovation and entrepreneurship and connecting the academy with the community.

The creation of this academic plan is guided by SFU's Senate Guidelines for Academic Plans. Following an initial period of broad consultation during spring/

summer 2017, the vice-president, academic and provost prepared and consulted on a document that provided context and a number of challenges and questions⁶ that the faculties and their departments then used during fall and spring 2017/18 to prepare their own academic plans. The provost also asked the departments and faculties to approach academic planning through the lens of equity, diversity, inclusion and Indigeneity. This academic plan is the final high-level plan that brings the faculties and their departments as well as other plans together⁷ and sets the institutional priorities and goals.

Further detail on SFU's planning process is available at sfu.ca/vpacademic/academic-plan.

⁶sfu.ca/content/dam/sfu/vpacademic/files/academic_planning/Academic-Plan-Phase-1-October-10-2017.pdf

⁷sfu.ca/vpacademic/academic-plan

*This Academic Plan is designed as a living document and will evolve through time and changing circumstances.

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