



DRAFT

Task Force on Flexible Education

Office of the Vice-President Academic and Provost

Status Report of TFFE Activity and Draft Recommendations

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INTRODUCTION

The Task Force on Flexible Education (TFFE) was proposed by the Vice-President, Academic (VPA) in January 2014 and approved by Senate in February 2014. Its mandate was to review SFU's teaching and learning environment in order to identify future needs, define short- and longer-term institutional priorities, and develop a strategic plan for implementing and supporting flexible education at SFU.

Through the TFFE, the VPA wished to consider ways in which the university could respond to the growing diversity of its students and the resulting call for programs that accommodate their varied needs. The VPA also wished to broaden the discussion of flexibility beyond the consideration of online programming and delivery systems and provided scope for the TFFE to consult widely across the university community.

The TFFE mission

Dr. Bill Krane, Task Force Chair, described the TFFE mission in May 27, 2014.

The TFFE will take a holistic view of SFU's teaching and learning environment.

Almost 50 years ago Simon Fraser University, dubbed BC's "instant university," began offering a distinctive learning experience to its students. Underpinning its unique suite of initial programs was the trimester system, which allowed students to attend classes year round if they wished, or space their programs over a longer period than the four-year norm. This flexibility became a hallmark of the SFU educational experience and attracted many students who either wanted to study part-time or whose circumstances required them to combine work and study.

During this nascent period, SFU also became known for its innovative use of technology in the classroom. For example, the seats in some lecture theatres were equipped with keypads through which students could respond to questions posed by their instructor who could tally and display the results instantly for analysis and discussion.

SFU has been a leader in online and distance education for decades. Online technologies are now routinely used in classroom-based courses to provide a "blended" learning experience for students and flexibility around the delivery of curriculum. A new, highly customizable, learning management system (Canvas) was recently implemented to enhance the student experience and support faculty innovation in this area.

The interest in technology-enabled learning and alternative pedagogies, such as flipped classrooms, has been intensifying. As SFU approaches its 50th anniversary celebration it is fitting that we undertake a comprehensive review of our present teaching and learning environment, identify future needs, define short- and longer-term institutional priorities, and develop a strategic plan for implementing and supporting flexible education at SFU. This is the work of the Task Force on Flexible Education (TFFE).

The TFFE will take a holistic view of SFU's teaching and learning environment. In addition to exploring the pedagogical landscape, SFU's instructional infrastructure, both physical and virtual, will be scrutinized. Support systems will be reviewed to ensure that students and instructors enjoy the highest levels of service possible. The process will be highly consultative. The TFFE, aided by a highly skilled project team, will rely on surveys, interviews, focus groups, town hall meetings, and working groups on selected topics to solicit input and opinions. The timeline is aggressive.

Final recommendations will be delivered to the Vice-President, Academic by June 2015.

Organization, terms of reference and guiding principles for the Task Force on Flexible Education

The VPA provided the TFFE with terms of reference and a set of principles to guide its work as it consulted across the university community.

Terms of reference

1. Engage in a broad consultation with the university community on the objectives for and issues concerning the development of flexible learning environments
2. Perform an environmental scan of trends and directions in flexible learning being used at other post-secondary institutions
3. Identify effective and leading-edge practices by referring to the academic literature and efforts undertaken at other institutions
4. Produce an inventory of institutionally supported technologies and units at SFU that support credit and non-credit programs
5. Rely on the investigative work carried out in 1 through 4 to establish thematic working groups consisting of members of the university community with appropriate expertise that would explore various aspects of flexible learning and develop recommendations on an institutional strategy for flexible education at SFU
6. Develop an implementation plan for putting the recommendations into effect, including a) a resource model which supports the growth and sustainment of flexible education at SFU and b) a compilation of examples of effective practice that could be adopted and/or refashioned by SFU to create its flexible learning environments

Principles to guide the TFFE's work

- Create high-quality learning environments and experiences for students and instructors
- Mobilize interest and leverage expertise from the university community, including students, instructors, and professional staff
- Engage in broad, inclusive consultations and communications in all phases of the TFFE's work: information gathering, identifying issues and approaches, and soliciting feedback on draft recommendations
- Capitalize on efforts of other task forces and working groups to date and the expertise of existing support units

TFFE members

Bill Krane (Chair) – Special Advisor to VP Academic, Office of the VPA	Jamie Mulholland – Senior Lecturer, Mathematics
Pat Hibbitts – VP Finance and Administration	Brian Naicker (non-voting) – Director, Centre for Online and Distance Education
Stephanie Chu (non-voting) – Director, Teaching and Learning Centre	Tim Rahilly – Associate Vice President, Students, Student Services
John Craig – Dean, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences	Tesicca Truong – Undergraduate Student, Environmental Science
Ehsan Jozaghi – Graduate Student, PhD Candidate, Criminology	Larry White – Director, Non-Credit Programs, Lifelong Learning
Mary-Ellen Kelm – Associate Dean, Students, Graduate Studies	Alyssa Wise – Associate Professor, Education
Kris Magnusson – Dean, Faculty of Education	

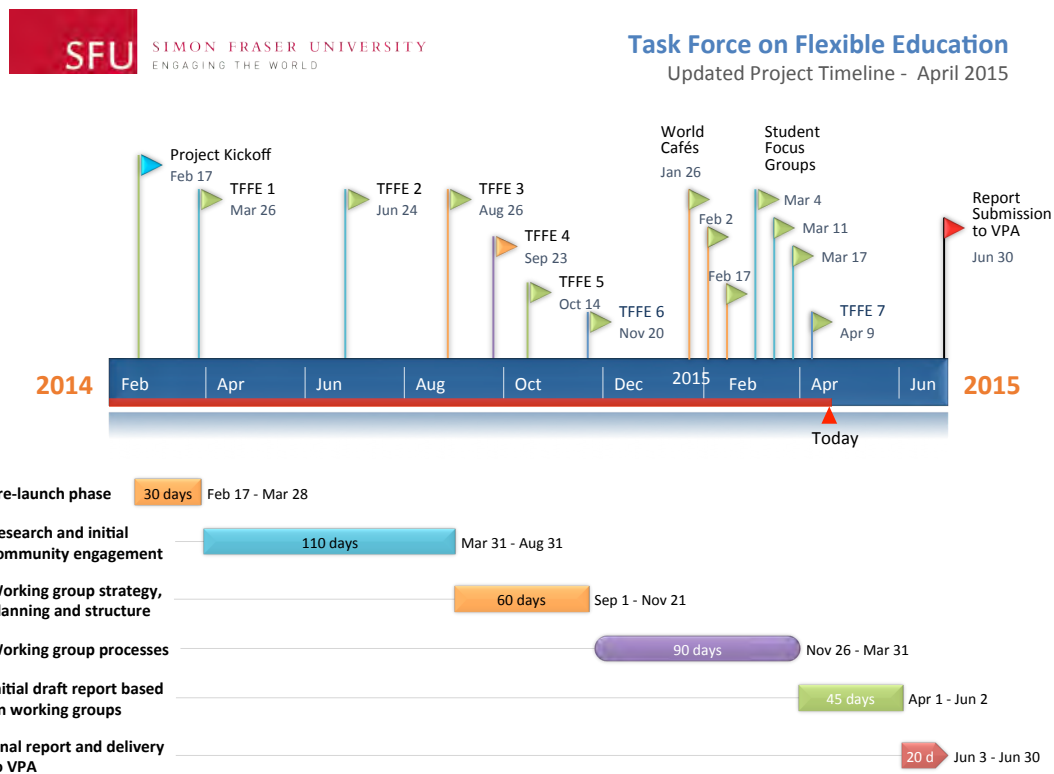
What is flexible education?

The term “flexible education” has been defined in many ways. During spring, summer and fall 2014 the TFFE project team conducted a literature review and community consultation process to develop an initial definition for the SFU context. The resulting definition, presented below, is deliberately broad:

“Flexible education at SFU encompasses the ways in which the university community collectively and individually designs and provides relevant community-engaged academic programs in response to changing student needs.”

The TFFE Activity Timeline

The TFFE began its work from a project office in the West Mall Centre in April 2014. The timeline below describes the meeting dates and activities of the TFFE project team and the Task Force members, as well as events that took place throughout the research and community engagement processes.



This report emphasizes that flexible education is about much more than “technology-enabled learning.” The intention is to support an environment across the university in which instructors and academic units can deliver learning experiences that respond to student needs in creative and innovative ways. It is part of the effort to support SFU’s strategic vision as an “engaged university” with the three-pronged goal of “engaging students, engaging research and engaging communities.”

How did the TFFE do its work?

April – August 2014

The TFFE project team took an agile approach to project management, dividing tasks among team members and research assistants (RAs), and used online systems for project management (Wrike.com), information analysis (Dedoose.com) and communications (Word Press).

Initial tasks included:

- Setting up a website for internal communication using Word Press
- Proactively communicating TFFE tasks, timelines and initial findings, as well as inviting input through online polls and questionnaires
- Identifying programs, projects, service units, groups and individuals for conversations and interviews
- Conducting small group conversations on dimensions of flexible education to help identify a definition that might work in the SFU context
- Gathering related internal reports from previous task forces and projects teams
- Gathering research literature on flexible learning and flexible education for review and summary
- Prototyping a survey for faculty and instructors that could be used during the summer semester

During the time period April – August 2014, the TFFE project team gathered external data on flexible education and from its conversations with individuals, program teams and departments within the university community. The project team also reviewed institutional reports from within SFU, as well as strategy documents and task force reports from external higher education institutions. Included in these document reviews were reports or strategy papers from the institutions and organizations listed below, as well as from many others in our reference list.

- University of British Columbia
- University of Calgary
- Cornell University
- Higher Education Academy (UK)
- MIT - Massachusetts Institute of Technology
- McMaster University
- Queen's University
- Royal Roads University

August 2014

In August 2014, the TFFE produced an interim report based on initial data collection and community engagement activities. However, the working group structure recommended for fall 2014 did not move forward. In its place the TFFE recommended a strategy and vision session to help refine TFFE directions, deferring further community engagement until January 2015. Link: <http://flexed.sfu.ca/?p=169>

October 2014

In October 2014, the TFFE members conducted a strategy and vision session to refine the direction provided by the interim report. At the strategy and vision workshop, TFFE members identified themes for further exploration. What was important to Task Force members was that “flexibility” be considered as an enabling strategy, not an end in itself. At the workshop session TFFE members defined a mantra for their work.

“Relevance is the goal; flexibility is the enabling strategy; responsiveness is the practice.”

November 2014

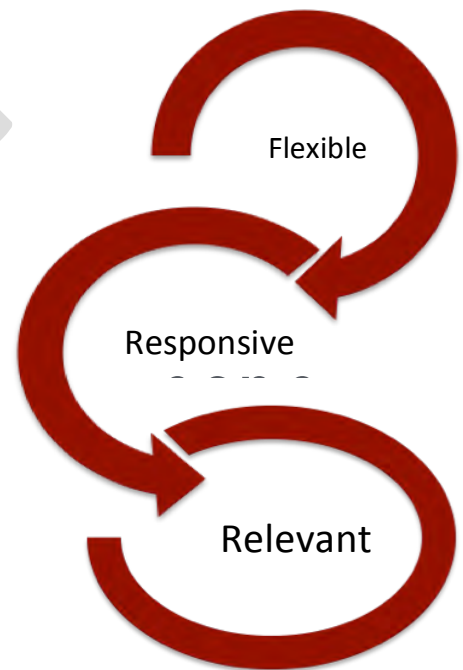
In November 2014, the TFFE re-organized itself into two working groups to explore themes that emerged from sources including vision and strategy session, from external reports, and from the initial community engagement process. Themes explored in the second round of community engagement were based on the notion of relevance.

What does it mean to say that a university education is “relevant?” And what is the connection between relevance and flexibility in education? How can SFU maintain, grow and enhance relevant learning experiences for its students?

“The meaning of relevance is constantly evolving. The primary role of the Task Force is not to define relevance for today, but to help create an environment that empowers and encourages the academic community to respond nimbly to changing needs and opportunities tomorrow and the day after.” – from TFFE strategy and vision session, October 2014

Members of the university community were invited to share their thoughts about the directions in which university teaching and learning is—or should be headed—at one of three Word Café style consultative events hosted by the TFFE in January and February 2015. The cafés provided a forum for large- and small-group dialogue organized around five themes:

- Relevance
- Program design
- Teaching approaches
- Infrastructure and support
- Student agency



January 2015

Working group co-chairs met in January 2015 and recommended that the TFFE project team proceed to develop a report and action plan soon after the conclusion of the second round of community engagement activities. The co-chairs also recommended that the TFFE team identify potential action projects that might follow from the report and recommendations, and begin some of those in advance, where appropriate.

January – February 2015

A series of three World Café style interactive events were hosted in Burnaby, Vancouver and Surrey for members of the SFU community.

March 2015

A series of three student focus groups were hosted by the TFFE. The theme of the events was, “If I ran SFU...” and conducted in the World Café style as interactive data collection sessions.

April – June 2015

During the April to June 2015 time period, the TFFE members and project team will assemble and review a draft report and recommendations prior to a final report submission to the Vice-President Academic that is due before June 30, 2015.

FLEXIBLE PROGRAMS ARE VISIBLE ACROSS THE UNIVERSITY

Throughout the task force community engagement process we approached faculty, students and service units to learn more about flexible programs and practices in which they were engaged. Some exemplars, which are currently underway, are highlighted in the sections that follow. There are many more examples, and these are but a few of the programs that are being developed and delivered across the SFU community.

Program innovations



Does a credit course need to be 13 weeks long? Do alternative formats provide any benefits?

Bruce Lanphear, a professor in Health Sciences, shed some light on these questions when he offered HSCI 483-3, an environmental health seminar, as a one-week intensive course during the spring 2013 semester break. Students praised the course (see the student comments below), and Lanphear, who co-taught the class with Glenys Webster, thinks he knows why: "If I had to single out the most

important factor of success, it would be the format that resulted in the positive student feedback."

"The condensed nature of the class allowed for a very high level of concentration and focus on one subject that allowed for more in depth learning. Unprecedented access to the profs for extra help, and the small class allowed for greater discussion and learning opportunities outside the classroom."

– HSCI-483-3 Student

Is the Web the professional portfolio space for our students?

For Suzanne Norman and John Maxwell of SFU's Publishing program, the "publication of self in everyday life" should be a core piece of the university experience for all SFU students. Their vision is a liberal arts course that complements academic programs and provides students with the opportunity to build a professional portfolio of accomplishments that matches their areas of interest. Their PUB 101 course, titled, not surprisingly, "The Publication of Self in Everyday Life," does precisely that.

"It's the kind of first-year course that everybody in university should take. You take an English course to insure you can read and write. You take this course so you'll know how to operate online, know what's beyond your keypad and know how to take responsibility for it," says Maxwell.



PUB 101 is part of the Print and Digital Publishing Minor, an increasingly popular choice for students of Communications, English, Business, and from SIAT (School of Interactive Arts and Technology) who are looking to build skills and increase their employability. It's an example of a flexible learning experience that provides students with new digital publishing skills as well as the know-how to build their own professional portfolio.

For Suzanne Norman, who currently teaches the course with Juan Pablo Alperin, the strength of the course is its requirement for students to manage their digital presence end to end: "The PUB 101 course is about taking responsibility for public presence—taking ownership with no parental guidance."

Teaching and learning innovations

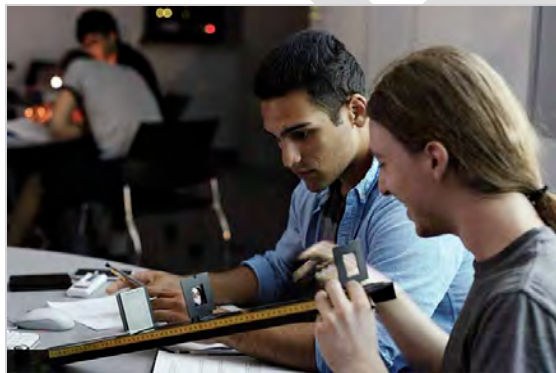
Harnessing new tools for visualization in math and science programs

Dr. Nabyl Merbouh's work in designing learning tools and replicas processed on a 3D printer is a great example of the diversity of the term 'flexible education.'

Along with research machinist Ken Van Wieren, Dr. Merbouh, a senior lecturer in chemistry, has provided an opportunity for thousands of students across the province to physically hold equations and geometrical structures. "Math and chemistry students often have problems visualizing concepts," Dr. Merbouh explains. Students studying anatomy can close their eyes, visualize their kneecap, and compare their intuition to a 3D model that they can then take home. Passive learning is transformed into an embodied experience in Dr. Merbouh's class.



The flexibility of Studio Physics



Dr. Daria Ahrensmeier's studio physics lab is buzzing with activity. Her students, in groups seated at round tables, begin class with a low stakes *iClicker* quiz on electrical circuits. After each polling result, the decibel level rises as students discuss why answers are either correct or incorrect. Rather than hurriedly moving on, Dr. Ahrensmeier, a theoretical physicist, is cool and calm. She smiles while those who got the correct answer gesticulate, draw diagrams, and talk it out with those who did not. In these conversations you can actually hear the students developing their own understanding of the process of electrical conduction.

Flipping math education

Dr. Jamie Mulholland, a senior lecturer in mathematics, and recipient of the 2011 Teaching Excellence Award, is renowned within the SFU community for his flipped calculus courses. Flipped classrooms are one example of flexible education—students watch lectures posted on Jamie's *YouTube* Channel, while class time is spent solving math problems.

Flexibility means "we aren't just confining education to a particular time of day, when education can be arranged around work schedules." Flexibility means "students can have open access to information, access to lectures and resources outside of the regular class time. Information should be free and accessible." Students often have gaps in knowledge that could be easily remedied by obtaining access to course resources from prior years. "What students should be paying for is not simply information, but the face-to-face component and course accreditation." Flexibility is also about "getting feedback—whether that's a computer graded system, or from TAs outside of regular hours."



Infrastructure and Support

How do enhanced physical settings affect learning?



On April 23, 2014, Peter Jamieson of the University of Melbourne (Australia) spoke at SFU about “Pedagogy in Place.” His presentation, the first public event organized by the Task Force on Flexible Education, was provocative in the best sense of the word. Jamieson’s research focuses on how physical environments affect learning.

In his remarks to a diverse group of SFU faculty and staff he advocated fundamental changes to the design of learning spaces inside and outside the classroom—all with

the goal of facilitating more active and effective forms of teaching and learning.

Sometimes you have to build your own learning system

For André Gerolymatos, a professor and director of the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Centre for Hellenic Studies, the problem was straightforward — how do you build a system for Greek-language training that is engaging, productive and works on the mobile devices that today’s students consider everyday-carry equipment? In solving the problem, Gerolymatos and his colleagues in Hellenic Studies, illustrated the role of faculty and departments in spearheading innovation and flexibility at SFU.



“We were facing a serious challenge in offering Greek language in a university with a very small population of Greek speakers, in a city that has a very small Greek population to begin with.”

– André Gerolymatos.

To address the challenge, he worked with Costa Dedegikas, the Centre’s technology manager and leader of a team of software engineers that recommended a modular approach to designing an online learning system that could host the language lessons. The design approach they took was future-oriented, allowing the learning system to be used with emerging mobile technologies, for learning languages other than Greek, and for use in other kinds of courses such as European history.

Open, digital learning resources may be a game changer for students and faculty



According to an article written by Max Hill, Features Editor for *The Peak* student newspaper, an increasing number of today’s students are finding ways to avoid amassing their own textbook collections by not even purchasing them in the first place. The impetus, he claimed, is due to the perceived high prices of texts – some of which many students don’t feel are worth their investment. Instead, he noted that over 50% of SFU’s students

are turning online to the ever-burgeoning private used/loaned textbook market. However, Hill argued that a new movement is quickly gaining traction that may even thwart the best efforts of those looking to ‘recycle’ their texts to recoup some funds. Hill was highlighting a need for a new infrastructure to support digital learning resources.

Student Agency

Change Lab: Becoming comfortable with discomfort

Creating student discomfort in the classroom may not be the first thing that comes to mind when you think of a positive teaching experience. However, this is exactly what the instructors in SFU's Change Lab aim to achieve.

The objective of this seven-credit experiential course, co-offered by the Faculty of Environment and the Beedie School of Business, is to challenge and empower students while equipping them with the skills required to create positive social change in a rapidly changing world with complex social and economic environments. From the beginning, students and instructors co-create shared values and rules of engagement to set the tone for the class. Depending on students' interest areas and level of understanding in creating change, instructors engage various speakers to share their expertise on relevant topics such as social change, design thinking, entrepreneurship and innovation.



Students are required to be self-directed in the Change Lab. They develop an idea for a socially relevant project and execute that plan. The plan must be meaningful and must address a social problem that exists for real people in a real community. Building student agency is also an outcome the Change Lab aims to achieve.

The connection between flexibility and student well-being



When Tara Black hears "flexible education," she thinks "student well-being."

Black is the Associate Director of Health Promotion in SFU's Health and Counseling Services unit. Her team takes a systemic approach to the creation of a healthy campus community by treating the university as an ecosystem and identifying factors that influence student well being. Inevitably, classrooms enter the conversation.

"If you think of SFU as a setting, the classroom is such a core part of the student experience," says Black. "Classrooms have a really profound impact on student well-being."

She's talking not just about the physical space, but about the academic experience, which can generate high levels of stress, isolation and depression in many students.

Often small adjustments in course design and delivery can dramatically reduce these negative aspects of the learning experience. Black cites the example of instructors who foster a sense of community by inviting students to introduce themselves at the beginning of a course.

"The idea isn't to create a ton of work. It's to raise awareness about the impact the classroom can have."

For Black, the link between flexible education and the promotion of student well being is the emphasis on being aware of, and responsive to student needs. She places particular emphasis on the value of providing students with choices and creating inclusive environments that support diverse groups of students.

And she notes that there is a pedagogical argument for this approach: “

There’s a definite connection between student well-being and academic success. If you have a positive classroom culture, the learning outcomes will be better.”

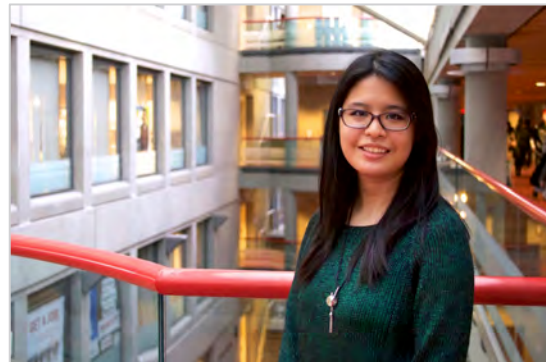
In collaboration with the Teaching and Learning Centre, the Health Promotion team partners with instructors and departments through its Well-being in Learning Environments Project.

Student agency is about being truly engaged

Raisa Crisologo, a BBA candidate (2016) provided her thoughts about flexible education in a TFFE blog post in December 2014 titled, Truly engaged: My SFU experience.

Flexible education – what does it really mean? I define flexible education through three aspects of what I believe are critical components of a flexible university education: balance, creative learning, and personal development. These three characteristics embody the kind of education that every educational institution should strive for.

Balance is a key aspect of flexible education. In terms of flexible education, this means that a university education should allow students to learn at their own pace, and in the way that works best for them. The university should be open to various types of learning structures, such that students are able to fit other spheres of their life (e.g., social life, family life) around their education. This means that students should have enough time to finish their degree, as well as have ample time to fulfill work commitments, to become involved with organizations, and to participate in social events and activities.



Flexible education should be an innately a creative learning experience. This means that there is not just “one way” of learning or of teaching a concept or an idea, but that there are different ways of doing so. A flexible education caters to various styles of learning – it essentially provides students a variety of avenues, methods, and learning techniques that allow them to learn in the best and most efficient way possible.

Lastly, flexible education should provide room for personal development, either through workshops and conferences, or through co-curricular components. A flexible education should include various opportunities for students to develop and grow into the best version of themselves. A great university produces responsible social citizens who are passionate about what they do, and are community-oriented. This to me is the mark of a stellar university. Thus, flexible education should provide room for students to personally grow and develop the necessary skills that they will need outside of university.

MATCHING SFU STRENGTHS WITH EMERGENT NEEDS

Changing student expectations

Student demographics at SFU are changing and so are the expectations of students who attend the university. The undergraduate student surveys for 2011 through 2013 provided snapshots of trend data that illustrated some of those changes. Table 1 provides some illustrative highlights.

Table 1: Highlights of findings related to flexible education that emerged from SFU undergraduate student surveys from 2011, 2012 and 2013

<p>What is the single thing that you would change at SFU? (2011, 2012, 2013) 2013: 1. Student life/Campus Community, 2. Facilities, 3. Course availability 2011/2012: 1. Facilities, 2. Course Availability, 3. Student Life/Campus Community</p>
<p>What are you hoping to get out of your education? 2013 – Good job (49), train for a career (40), fulfill desire for knowledge (34) 2012 – Good job (50), train for a career (37), fulfill desire for knowledge (35) 2011 – Good job (65), fulfill knowledge (56), meet new friends (55), train for specific career (50)</p> <p>* Increase in respondents choosing – build a network of role models, mentors, and professional contacts</p>
<p>Important Qualities/Skills/Experiences SFU students should have by the time they graduate. 2013: Critical thinking skills (45), Ability to apply knowledge/methods learned in life and work (41), solid foundation in their specific academic discipline (28) 2012: Critical Thinking Skills (45), Ability to apply knowledge/methods learned in life and at work (42), Solid foundation in their specific academic discipline (29) 2011: Critical Thinking skills (60), Ability to apply knowledge/methods learned in life and work (49), Oral communication skills (43)</p>
<p>2013 Highlights 55% currently employed or self-employed 58% respondents agree or strongly agree that SFU is a place that supports students to have a healthy work life balance 52% agree or strongly agree that they feel part of a caring community at SFU</p>
<p>2012 Highlights 56% respondents had taken an evening class 40% of respondents had taken an online class 61% of respondents indicated that they would be willing to take a required course if it were only available online 71% of respondents said they would be willing to take a required course if it were only available on an evening or weekend 59% of respondents said they purchased all of their required textbooks 53% currently employed or self-employed Technology: Respondents were most likely to indicate the following as very/somewhat valuable to their academic success: email (98), wikis (75), podcasts/webcasts and or web-based music or videos (70)</p>
<p>2011 Highlights 53% employed</p>

Ministry support for student passion, purpose and personalization in their programs of study

British Columbia's K-12 curriculum is changing, and that means students will soon be arriving in our classes with different skill sets and expectations. The implications for university teaching and learning could be significant.

In January 2015, the TFFE organized an open presentation by Jan Unwin, Superintendent of graduate and student transitions in B.C.'s Ministries of Education and Advanced Education, to provide a glimpse into the changes that could shape SFU's incoming students—and their



expectations—in the years ahead. Jan Unwin is one of the people leading curriculum reform and working to expand initiatives such as dual-credit programs and opportunities to allow secondary students to earn credits towards post-secondary. Her presentation provided an overview of K-12 curriculum changes, with an emphasis on how learner expectations and their recent educational experiences may be different than what the university has experienced from past student intakes.

The open event, sponsored by the TFFE, provided a forum for discussion of educational change and the need for flexible and responsive systems that can enhance the relevance of the university experience for new intakes of undergraduates. Unwin noted that from the Ministry of Education's surveys and focus groups with university-bound learners that passion, purpose and personalization were three elements that K-12 students viewed as fundamental to the ideal education system for their futures.

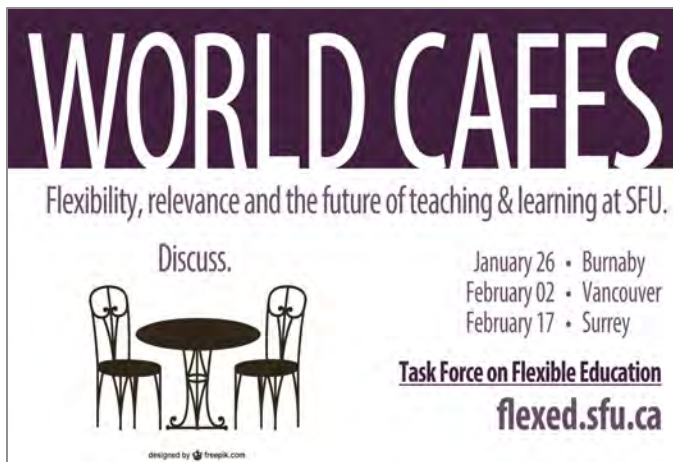
According to Unwin, the provincial government is taking a bold leap towards reimagining and restructuring the K-12 public education system to make it more reflective of today's diverse educational needs. "It's a mind shift," she said, adding that the current K-12 system is built on "systems and models and structures that were set up for a different age." Unwin indicated that the government had identified five key areas of focus for the next B.C. Education Plan: personalized learning, quality teaching and learning (including mentorship), flexibility and choice, high standards, and learning empowered by technology. A key question guiding the government's exploratory study went like this: Why should our education system be one-size-fits-all when we know that no two students are alike and that they come to us with different goals, aspirations and competencies?

Perhaps one of the largest pedagogical shifts within the proposed plan is the focus on competencies rather than content as the driver. Unwin described the vision as one in which teachers take on a coaching and mentoring role to assist students with finding their passion and a successful pathway to their future.

"We want to create the best possible life chances for kids and young adults, and we want them speaking about their entire educational experience with passion, purpose and pride... "We need to work collaboratively to get it right." – Jan Unwin, Superintendent of graduate and student transitions in B.C.'s Ministries of Education and Advanced Education

The proposed transformation of the K-12 system will have implications for post-secondary institutions like SFU. The TFFE has highlighted these types of issues and used its second round of community engagement to generate discussion about how the university could be more responsive to, and prepared for, students who will expect approaches to teaching and learning that mirror, at least to some degree, the reimagined K-12 curriculum.

A vision of engagement: students, research and community: World Cafés on three campuses



Over 80 faculty members, staff and students attended World Cafés hosted by the Task Force on Flexible Education at the Burnaby campus on January 26, in Vancouver on February 2, and in Surrey on February 17.

The participants, supplied with refreshments, writable table covers and a collection of coloured markers, moved from table to table to discuss key questions related to flexibility and responsiveness in education. The result—captured visually by graphic recorders—was a compilation of thoughts ranging from the cautionary to the visionary to the practical.

The World Café series provided additional input into the work of the TFFE as it developed recommendations to ensure that SFU instructors and programs receive the support and services they need to continue providing responsive and flexible learning experiences for our students.

The conversations during the World Café events focused on five themes identified by the TFFE for exploration: relevance, teaching approaches, program design, infrastructure and support, and student agency. A challenge for the task force was to sort through the many ideas proposed by participants in order to identify clear goals and actions. Participants, however, did seem to agree about broad principles, including the following:

- Progress toward flexible and responsive practices and systems will require institutional support, including a financial commitment, to foster cultural change.
- Change will require continuing dialogue with the various members of the university community (students, faculty, administration, unions, and other representational bodies) about the implications for SFU’s organizational and service structures.
- The university should build on existing “flexible” initiatives, in part by sharing more widely current achievements and exemplary models of practice across the SFU community.
- Long-term transformation will require changes to the infrastructure and services that support teaching and learning activities, making them more responsive to faculty and student needs.



In addition, World Café participants suggested a number of concrete steps to providing responsive initiatives that address changing student needs:

- Address students’ desire for marketable skills by being more explicit about how the strengths of a university education—including critical thinking, literacy, citizenship and writing skills—deliver what employers want.

- Conduct research to define the meaning of relevance within different departments and student populations.
- Incorporate experiential learning opportunities into all programs through capstone projects, community-based courses and other forms of active and community-engaged learning.
- Encourage and support inter-disciplinary work and provide budgetary incentives for faculty members to undertake such activities.
- Investigate new approaches to course structures, including their length, delivery modes and scheduling.
- Introduce a foundational course on lifelong learning in which students could learn study skills, critical thinking methods, assessment of scholarly materials, and other related skills.
- Provide better advancement opportunities for good teachers.

“If I ran SFU” - student focus groups

In addition to the World Café events that invited participation from across the university community, TFFE staff conducted a series of focus groups with approximately 35 students at the SFU Burnaby campus on March 4, 11 and 17, 2015. Following a similar format to the World Cafés, students were asked a series of questions that focused on the themes of relevance, program design, infrastructure and support services, teaching approaches, and student agency. The events were branded as, “How would you run SFU?” At the focus groups, students were asked to highlight aspects of their SFU experience that they viewed as positive, and to contribute ideas for improving the overall learning experience for students at SFU. Students did not hold back, and contributed freely with only minimal facilitation by TFFE team members.

When asked about relevance, students overwhelmingly pointed to their desire for experiential, “real-world” curricula that would provide them with the knowledge and skills to transition to a related career after graduation. This theme permeated most areas of the discussion. For example, students asked for professors to illustrate how their research and teaching applied outside of the university. First-year students highlighted their high-school education where they gained experience with volunteering and community-based projects, and questioned why these sorts of projects were not a part of the university experience for all students.

Two themes that emerged from discussions on infrastructure and support, focused on advising and mentorship, and physical spaces at SFU. There was agreement from students that there is room for improvement in the way student services are communicated to them initially when they transition to SFU from high school and throughout their time as students.

Students indicated that there are crucial times in their educational lives where they would like additional help – mainly at the “transition” points: when they first arrive on campus and are trying to adjust to university expectations, later when they are at a point in their degree where they have to commit to a major, and finally, when they are making decisions about career options and transitioning to employment.



From these discussions, a few clear themes surfaced as priority items for students.

- Students are looking for more action-based learning experiences that will prepare them for research careers, or employment outside of the university. These experiences include team-based and project-based experiences, community-based experiences, and a chance to work, as well as network, with local businesses and alumni.
- Students pointed out that SFU's strengths included its unique and interdisciplinary programs. They highlighted programs like Criminology, Health Sciences and Interactive Arts and Technology (IAT) as examples. They also appreciated the joint major and co-op opportunities available in most disciplines, and suggested the university provide more of these types of options.
- Students admitted to feeling overwhelmed and unsure of their direction throughout the duration of their programs, and therefore had difficulty making sound decisions. They admitted to often being unaware of the choices and options available to them in terms of university support services, as well as how their program and courses would translate into post-graduate employment.
- Students expressed a desire to feel supported, and be a part of a community. They highlighted first-year learning communities where the staff knew their names as a positive example. This theme also extended into the classroom where students valued instructors who were both passionate about the subject area, and about students.

Within these main themes, students provided a number of related action items for the Task Force's consideration:

- Allow students to 'try out' more classes, for example, more choices in courses outside of their discipline, and allow participation in more interdisciplinary courses.
- The option to attend classes either online or in person would be ideal and offer greater flexibility; however, having additional access to classes available through web streaming or lecture capture would also be helpful.
- "Take the fear out of asking for help." Provide more informal avenues to seek advice and assistance; provide additional mentorship opportunities.
- Increase advising options and availability – preferably earlier in their degree. Faculty and staff should be part of the student's experience from orientation program onward.
- Increase the level of department-specific career advising; integrate it as part of the program so that students can become more aware of career options available to them, and have a deeper understanding of how the knowledge and skills they are building in the classroom are valued by employers.
- Less emphasis on exams, more project-based, hands-on learning and assessment.
- More practitioners in the classroom, and more opportunity to apply theoretical concepts learned in class in real-life scenarios.
- Renovation of physical spaces to make them more comfortable and conducive to studying – additional electrical outlets to charge devices, new furniture, better lighting, more maintenance, etc.
- More intersession options (like UBC or UVIC), so students have some time off in the summer for reflection, employment, travel, volunteer opportunities, etc.

Overall from the discussions, students indicated that they were looking for an active learning environment at SFU, with more support and personalized service, especially in relation to their program and career choices. Because many of the students who participated in focus groups were also involved in community work or other employment, they also appreciated flexible measures that allowed them to have time of their own, and avoid having to come to campus when issues arose in their personal lives.

SUMMARY AND DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

Over the past 12 months, TFFE members and the TFFE project team have been engaged in a highly consultative process to gather information and feedback on aspects of flexible education from across the university community.

Throughout the community engagement processes, in meetings with students, instructors, and with program and service groups, ideas were proposed about how the university could move forward with educational programs and services that reflected the TFFE mantra:

“Relevance is the goal; flexibility is the enabling strategy; responsiveness is the practice.”

What follows are a set of recommendations and action opportunities congruent with the themes of TFFE has identified.

DESIGNING ENGAGING AND RESPONSIVE PROGRAMS

Recommendation 1: Provide opportunities for community engagement or practical experiences within all SFU programs

- Incorporate experiential learning into all university programs through capstone projects, community-based courses, team-based action projects, and other forms of active learning. Make these learning experiences a fundamental component of an SFU education
- Invest in community-engaged interdisciplinary courses and/or programs like City Studio, Semester in Dialogue, Change Lab, and others that seek to use community as a lab
 - Learn from these programs. Apply the principles of community-engaged programming across SFU
- Investigate e-portfolio systems and/or Internet portfolio strategies as an outlet for discipline-specific professional knowledge and experience. (e.g. PUB 101 - Presentation of Self in Everyday Life)
 - Investigate authenticated open badging as a way to recognize service learning, community projects, co-curricular activities and demonstrated practical skills obtained at SFU in addition to a transcript
- Investigate new approaches to course structure, length, delivery modes and scheduling.

FOSTERING STUDENT AGENCY

Recommendation 2: Create a foundational program on lifelong learning for all SFU students

- Introduce a compulsory foundational course on lifelong learning (could be faculty or discipline specific, or interdisciplinary) that eases the first year transition and prepares students for success – consider a cohort model.
 - Build on a model such as the Business Foundation Program (Beedie School of Business) or a University 101 program – make the program discipline-specific
 - Topics could include learning skills, study skills, teamwork, presentation skills, research and writing, critical thinking methods, assessment of scholarly materials, and other related skills of the discipline
 - Address students’ desire for marketable skills by being more explicit about how the strengths of a university education—including critical thinking, literacy, citizenship and writing skills—deliver what student will need to succeed in future endeavors
 - Introduce alumni and typical career paths in discipline-specific or professional programs

- Establish a first-year learning community model with proactive advising to support student transition from secondary education.
 - Provide an intentional transition and a first-year orientation program that communicates information about services, support systems and advising functions within departments and across the university
 - Require proactive advising for all first and second-year students

CONNECTING TEACHING WITH RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

Recommendation 3: Use research on teaching and learning to guide effective teaching practices

- Provide discipline-based workshops on scholarly approaches to teaching
 - Invest in training support for faculty and instructors to acquire new teaching skills appropriate for their discipline - financial, time, and technology support
 - Invest in “makerspaces” and instructional materials development centres across campus for faculty and instructors
 - Invest in grants for inquiry into discipline-focused teaching and learning and alternative assessment practices by faculty and instructors
 - Invest in grants that would enable faculty to incorporate their own research into teaching resources
- Involve students more directly in the design and delivery of teaching and learning
 - Provide opportunities for student input into researching alternative learning resources
- Engage students with in-class research projects beginning in first-year programs
 - Provide opportunities for co-research or co-creation of learning resources – e.g. ChemWiki (UC Davis)

Recommendation 4: Provide better advancement opportunities for teaching-oriented instructors

- Establish a clear teaching career path for instructors
 - Create staff teaching positions that provide more stability and commitment for good sessional instructors

BUILDING INFRASTRUCTURE AND SUPPORT SYSTEMS FOR ENGAGED LEARNING AND TEACHING

Recommendation 5: Create a digital infrastructure for instructional resource development and distribution

- Support a proactive approach to exploring online options for all SFU programs and courses with a view to actualizing the principles of flexibility and responsiveness for all SFU students
- Design, evaluate and implement a digital infrastructure for learning resources at SFU that integrates faculty and library resources, open textbooks and open educational resources (OER), and publisher provided resources.
 - A concept has been outlined in discussion paper created by the TFFE project team >> <http://flexed.sfu.ca/?p=37424> and http://www.sfu.ca/~tffe/TFFE_DLRM_discussion_paper.pdf
 - A pilot project is being planned for summer semester 2015
- Provide incentives for faculty to adopt, adapt or create open textbooks and open educational resources
 - Invest in an open textbooks and/or OER

- Invest in student co-op or RA positions to support faculty in creating, developing or updating course materials

Recommendation 6: Create renewed spaces for student life and learning across SFU campuses

- Use the Faculty of Education's *Learning Hub* design to inform renovations within departments and in common areas across SFU campuses
 - Flexible, moveable, modular furniture of varying heights and shapes allow for easy reconfiguration by students and study groups. Good lighting, sound dampening, semi-private spaces and access to display monitors allow for group activities
- Invest in a campus "greening" and clean up program in outdoor spaces to make them more attractive to students and to encourage outdoor meetings and study spaces

ALIGNING EDUCATIONAL SERVICES FOR THE FUTURE

Recommendation 7: Realign the TLC, ISTLD, and CODE under a single operating structure

- Universities and institutions across Canada are recognizing that learning and teaching in 2015 involves a continuum of practices that spans all delivery modalities: face-to-face, blended, and online learning. Institutions are reviewing and realigning their structures to bring existing service units and related research units together under a single operating structure to capture synergies. Examples include the University of Calgary, Carleton University, University of Ottawa, and BCIT.
 - Explore a matrix management model for a service unit realignment process to enable synergies. A matrix model would allow a project-based approach to providing educational services across the university. Such a model would allow for the deployment of the specific skills and experiences of staff members to support a range of learning design needs.
- Create an A/VP Teaching and Learning position to guide the operations of the re-aligned service units, to foster collaboration among its staff, and to design new structures as appropriate to provide responsive services across the entire SFU educational community
 - Integrated service units are typically managed by a senior administrator, like Student Services is at SFU