

# MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

SFU is a university that knows how to meet the moment. Since our founding, there has always been something special—something different—about us. In our early days, we were known as the “radical campus,” a university that wasn’t afraid to cause a little trouble and challenge the status quo.

Over the past decade, we have come into our own as Canada’s engaged university, set apart by our commitment to creating deep and impactful relationships with communities and people in B.C. and around the world. We defy expectations and lead the competition; we harness our innovative spirit and strengths in teaching and research to help create solutions to the world’s most pressing problems.

At every stage of our journey, from 1965 to present day, we have responded to the changing needs of both the world around us and the people and communities we serve. And now, it’s time for SFU to evolve again. We are living through a critical time in history. From a global pandemic and growing inequities to shifting geopolitics and the climate crisis, the challenges we face are complex and daunting. We’ve heard that our students, faculty, staff, alumni, and partners are ready and excited to tackle these issues and, as a public educational institution, we have a moral and civic obligation to do so. It’s time for us to take our next big step as a university and meet this moment in a way that only SFU can.

So, we launched a process to ask: what does the path forward look like, and how do we make the most of the opportunity in front of us? Informed by all we heard from our communities, *What’s Next: The SFU Strategy* is our response.

We are a leading research university, advancing an inclusive and sustainable future. This is our vision: who we aspire to be.

We create and connect knowledge, learning, and community for deeper understanding and meaningful impact. This is our purpose: why we exist.

We’re going to bring our vision and purpose to life by progressing four priorities that mean the most to us as a community: upholding truth and Reconciliation, engaging in global challenges, making a difference for B.C., and transforming the SFU experience. These priorities affirm and expand upon the three I established in the first year of my presidency. They represent our determination to do what we know is both right and needed, creating change not just in the world, but inside our institution as well.

This strategy makes explicit these shared areas of focus and it outlines the initiatives through which we will channel our individual and collective efforts. In so doing, it creates the crucial framework for decision making, resource allocation, and accountability that we set out to create in this process.

I am so grateful to all those who contributed their perspectives and ideas through thousands of engagements over the last year. This is our strategy, and it is a bold strategy. It will take all of us, working together, to bring it to life. But we have more than 50 years of incredible history from which to build. And we’re ready. I know we are.

Now we know what’s next for Canada’s engaged university, and I invite you to come along as we embark on this next stage of our journey. Let’s get started!



**Joy Johnson**  
President and Vice-Chancellor  
Simon Fraser University

# 1 THE CHALLENGE

Universities can—and must—change to meet the needs of a world in flux. We have the responsibility to prepare students for the unknown and the unknowable, and to provide opportunities for them to continue learning throughout their lives. We must embrace this agility in how we partner with those around us and how we work as an organization.

And what we heard from our community during the planning conversations was remarkably consistent. Students, faculty, staff, alumni, and partners want us to amplify our focus on commitments that have long defined SFU while also making significant changes throughout the university to enable this work. Many of these desires are a reflection of our stage in development as an institution; all reflect the current state of the world around us and the unique role we can play in making it a better place.

Together, members of SFU's communities are asking us to:

1. Centre the university's academic mandate
2. Embrace accountability for student learning, respecting the unique needs of SFU students
3. Support faculty and staff in their work and sustain the collegiality that makes SFU special
4. Continue to align expertise in community engagement with research and learning
5. Promote and protect the mental health and well-being of students, faculty, and staff
6. Advance social justice, inclusion, and climate action
7. Extend SFU's commitment to Reconciliation
8. Help bring the world to B.C. and embed a global perspective in our people and our work
9. Better connect disciplines, cultures, and campuses
10. Address pressing operational problems, making SFU a better place to work

Through this strategy, we are responding to the input of the members of SFU's communities. Our shared conviction that SFU can make a difference is a potent starting point. We are enabled by our expertise, resources, and responsiveness. Mostly, though, it is the people of SFU who equip us to succeed.

## 2 THE STORY

Through months of community conversation, we reviewed the vision and values that have guided the university over the last decade. We asked ourselves: what does Canada's engaged university do next? This strategy highlights the powerful hopes and ideals we embody and reinforces the fundamental importance of knowledge, discovery, and community. It describes the SFU we know and the SFU we know we can be.

### Vision: Who we aspire to be

#### **WE ARE A LEADING RESEARCH UNIVERSITY, ADVANCING AN INCLUSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE FUTURE**

Building from our progress as Canada's engaged university, our vision represents our ambitions for the next stage in SFU's journey, provincially, nationally, and internationally. The vision inspires and drives us, declaring both our goals as a global research community and our deeply felt and abiding commitments to belonging and climate action. Our challenge in this strategy is to consistently rise to the standards of the vision; our future and the future of the world depend on it.

### Purpose: Why we exist

#### **WE CREATE AND CONNECT KNOWLEDGE, LEARNING, AND COMMUNITY FOR DEEPER UNDERSTANDING AND MEANINGFUL IMPACT**

Our purpose as a university is the essence of SFU; it is what each of us strives to do daily. It reflects our belief that we are a community of citizens and scholars, working with partners to develop and share knowledge and make a difference in the world.

### Values: How we do it

Our values guide us as individuals and as an institution. The alignment and, in some cases, apparent tensions between the values encourage us to think carefully about the choices we make. The articulation of engagement as a value sets SFU apart from our peers and reflects the integrity of our position as Canada's engaged university. We will embed these values in every decision and every action, and hold ourselves accountable for doing so.

#### **ACADEMIC FREEDOM AND CRITICAL THINKING**

We honour the autonomy of intellectual enquiry and explore ideas with academic rigour.

#### **EXCELLENCE AND RESPONSIBILITY**

We aspire to high standards and truth in information, accountable to one another and the public.

#### **RESPECT AND RECIPROCITY**

We build and sustain relationships with care and a desire for mutual growth.

#### **EQUITY AND BELONGING**

We create an inclusive, supportive, and affirming community, where all thrive.

#### **ENGAGEMENT AND OPENNESS**

We seek and include diverse perspectives and a wide circle of involvement.

#### **RESILIENCE AND SUSTAINABILITY**

We steward resources effectively, with the needs of present and future generations in mind.

#### **INNOVATION AND ADAPTABILITY**

We learn, unlearn, and embrace uncertainty through discovery and failure.

There are clear connections across our vision, purpose, and values; we cannot advance any one aspect without advancing the others. How and why we do what we do are just as important—if not more so—than what we do. These interdependencies weave the strong fabric that supports this strategy and the university more broadly.

### 3 FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION

Four priorities represent our areas of collective focus. We will uphold truth and Reconciliation, engage in global challenges, make a difference for B.C., and transform the SFU experience. Each reflects deep commitment to progress, whether through our research and teaching, through our engagement with the world around us, or through how we work. The last is foundational for the other three.

Each priority builds from and extends activity already underway at the university. Each combines progress in teaching, research, and operations, so centring the academic mission. Together, they exemplify the balance that has always defined us, notably the convergence of external and internal orientation in our work. They are the lens through which we will achieve our vision and purpose, motivating and coalescing the efforts of everyone at SFU.

The initiatives identified within the priorities are the basis for action and resource allocation. While the strategy is not time bound, the initiatives describe our work for the next five years, though most will continue well beyond that point. Many are reinforcing, with success in one contributing to success in others. Each year, we will establish projects that ensure progress. While the initiatives are indicative of future direction, they are not intended to prescribe or constrain. We will learn and adapt as we move forward, consistent with the principles of continuous improvement.

#### UPHOLD TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION

SFU recognizes and honours the title and rights of Indigenous people as stated in UNDRIP and we respect and partner with the host Indigenous Nations on which our campuses are located. We have the responsibility to illuminate the truth of Indigenous people in Canada and around the world and to begin to chart a path of Reconciliation. **We will embrace** this critical and complex call, striving to create a strong and safe sense of belonging for all Indigenous people to strengthen and harness their inherent gifts.

Through this strategy we will:

- Improve the **support, mentorship, and recruitment** of Indigenous students, with continuing focus on curriculum innovation, welcoming spaces, and learner pathways
- Strengthen Indigenous **faculty and staff attraction** and retention through targeted hires and permanent positions, embedding Indigenous knowledge systems and ways of knowing
- Harness momentum and insight for sustainable change within and beyond SFU, aligning our priorities and approach through a new **Indigenous Strategic Plan**

#### ENGAGE IN GLOBAL CHALLENGES

With leading researchers in today's critical issues, from climate action to democracy to health outcomes, combined with our focus on developing entrepreneurship and a global mindset in our students, we effect positive outcomes. Working with peers and colleagues around the world, these efforts are underpinned by our shared commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals. **We will leverage** our experience, approach, and connections to help address humanity's most complex problems and questions.

Through this strategy, we will:

- Cultivate a **thriving research and teaching environment** that deepens the undergraduate and graduate experience and prepares students for varied careers
- Enable and value **interdisciplinarity and diverse forms of scholarship**, notably in community-centred climate innovation, to spark creativity and collaboration
- Invest in world-class **faculty and infrastructure**, while connecting SFU scholars with national and international research networks

## MAKE A DIFFERENCE FOR B.C.

SFU has an outsized impact on the province. For students, we are a global university in their communities, offering relevant, exceptional education. We attract learners from around the world and many of our alumni remain in B.C. after graduation, contributing their talents and enriching society. Through our people, research, partnerships, and spaces, we make our mark, bolstered by our collective attention to community engagement. **We will reinforce** our role as the university for B.C., using our capacity for social and economic change to strengthen the province and connect the world with B.C.

Through this strategy we will:

- Expand **experiential education, lifelong learning, and credential models** to improve student outcomes and accelerate regional impact and innovation
- Establish a socially accountable **medical school** and graduate physicians with the competencies to provide team-based health care and serve B.C.'s diverse communities
- Facilitate evidence-informed **public dialogue** that fosters pluralism and shared problem-solving across the province

## TRANSFORM THE SFU EXPERIENCE

To achieve these priorities, we need to put students at the heart of all we do, create the conditions for faculty and staff to flourish, and actively embrace possibilities and new ways of doing things. We must focus on the well-being of all those who learn and work at SFU, mindful of preparing students for an uncertain and complex world. **We will break** barriers, reduce biases, and create systems that promote student success, improve campus vibrancy, and create space for everyone to do their best work.

Through this strategy we will:

- Sustain the excellence of an SFU education, meeting the changing needs of learners through **curriculum and service enhancements** across our campuses that reflect the importance of mental health, affordability, and flexibility
- Integrate progressive **people practices** that centre equity, encourage healthy working practices, and ensure a thriving SFU
- Optimize **processes, technology, and facilities** to support people at SFU, propel the academic mandate, and reinforce responsible stewardship

# 4 ACCOUNTABILITY

The strategy will succeed through implementation. We will identify and track annual actions, responsibilities, and milestones that map from the priorities and initiatives, mobilizing working groups and resources to assure meaningful progress. We will align executive and governance processes with the strategy and manage strategic development through a scorecard of key performance indicators (KPIs).

*What's Next:* The *SFU Strategy* signals a shift in our planning ecosystem to converge upon a more streamlined and coordinated set of plans, including the Academic and Strategic Research Plans, each of which explicitly supports and is supported by the institutional strategy.

SFU will need to remain agile as the next months and years unfold, and this strategy serves as a vital compass to guide the university. It provides a powerful framework to help us make robust decisions, organize action, and hold ourselves accountable for progress. Perhaps most importantly, the strategy also articulates the story that we are proud to tell and fortunate to help shape as SFU continues its work of advancing inclusion and sustainability as a leading research university.