



# Student Services: A student's-eye view

By

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**Abstract:** This article is a brief look through the eyes of a student at how the services of admissions offices, registrar's offices and other Student Services departments have changed at Simon Fraser University over the past forty years.

Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, British Columbia, celebrates its fortieth anniversary this year. A relatively new university, it has nevertheless seen tremendous changes over the past four decades. As admission officers, registrars and other Student Services professionals know, the rate of change is continuing to increase dramatically. But, fortunately, the focus is returning to the student after a few decades where it wasn't always clear that was the case.

Let's look at what the world of admissions officers and registrars has looked like from the point of view of a Simon Fraser University (SFU) student who started school in 1965, 1975 and so on.

BACKGROUND				
	Sixties	Seventies	Eighties	Nineties
US President	John F. Kennedy	Richard Nixon	Ronald Reagan	Bill Clinton
Canadian Prime Minister	Pierre Elliott Trudeau	Pierre Elliott Trudeau	Brian Mulroney	Jean Chrétien
world figure	Martin Luther King, Jr.	Chairman Mao	Margaret Thatcher	Diana, Princess of Wales
clothing	mini skirt	bellbottom jeans	power suits/aerobics gear	running shoes/designer jeans
food	TV dinners	fondue	sushi	pasta
movie	2001: A Space Odyssey	The Godfather	ET: The Extra-Terrestrial	Pulp Fiction
music group	The Beatles	ABBA	Metallica	Duran Duran
social change	the Pill	peace marches/feminism/gay rights	economic growth/reunification of Germany	globalization
technology	space exploration	mainframe computing	personal computers	cell phones/CDs
TV show	The Avengers	The Brady Bunch	Miami Vice	Seinfeld



## The Sixties

Jane<sup>1</sup> applied to SFU in the spring of 1965 and was accepted for the fall semester. As the university opened its doors for the first time in September 1965, she was deemed a Charter Student and received a commemorative certificate.

Although Jane didn't think much about it, it was a tremendous feat for SFU to admit and enroll 2,500 undergraduates in 1965. A January 1963 report from Dr. J. B. MacDonald to the BC Minister of Education recommended the creation of a new provincial university. A Chancellor was appointed in May 1963 and the firm of Erickson and Massey won the campus design competition. Construction began in spring 1964 and the university's physical structure was essentially completed in the summer of 1965. It was built to allow for a future enrollment of 18,000 students.

The new university was designed academically to complement the other universities in the province without unnecessary duplication of programming. It was planned to operate all year round, using a trimester system with intake possible in September, January, or May.

### **Admission**

As a grade 12 graduate of the BC secondary school system, Jane needed an average of 60% for basic regular admission. The admission requirements were comparatively simple and consequently easy to understand! She was required to submit two passport-type photographs with her application form. Upon acceptance, she had to have a medical examination and provide evidence of smallpox immunization before completing registration.

Those of Jane's friends who didn't qualify for regular admission could apply under the Special Entry category. They had to submit references, write entrance exams, and appear before the Admissions Committee.

### **Registration**

What were Jane's program choices as an undergraduate forty years ago? She could choose from 27 100- and 200-level courses in the Faculty of Arts; 17 courses in the Faculty of Science; and two courses in the Faculty of Education.

How did she register? With keypunched cards, of course (remember those?). She lined up at a table to get her registration cards from staff and lined up again at the cashier's office to pay. She paid a total of CAN\$214 for tuition for the semester, plus a \$5 student activity fee. Certified cheque, bank or postal money orders were acceptable forms of payment.

As a young woman active in the Girl Guide movement, Jane obtained a scholarship of \$100 from the Vancouver Girl Guides Council. With the scholarship, she accepted her stated “moral obligation” to maintain her ties with the Guide movement.

### **A time of change**

As a woman student in 1965, Jane did not worry too much about the fact that documents like the University Academic Calendar/Catalog used the third person masculine to refer to students (she’d never questioned the old rule of literature that “man embraces woman”). And she did not worry too much about gender imbalances in programs. She was a good, practical student, who handed in her assignments on time, progressed through her program, and graduated with a respectable B.A. in English. However, over the course of her studies she became rapidly aware of social changes going on both inside and outside of the university. Eight years after graduating, she came back for a couple of years as a Special Student, to take Women’s Studies courses in the new program administered by the Women’s Studies Coordinating Committee.

### **Student Services**

The Registrar’s office, with a grand total of 20 admissions and records staff, was located on the first floor of the library. The Registrar was responsible for admissions, records, the administration of examinations, degree granting, convocation, Calendar publication, the assignment of teaching space, data processing, residences, financial aid, foreign students and chaplains.

The Financial Assistance office managed 16 scholarships and awards and 31 bursaries. Other support services available to students were: a Health Services office, a Residence and Housing office, an Employment office and a Chaplains’ service. There was a Dean of Women, who rapidly achieved additional responsibilities in the first, turbulent couple of years.

*... early in September of 1965, the Registrar resigned, and the Dean of Women became the temporary Acting Registrar. There was no replacement appointed for the Dean of Women. The replacement Registrar (appointed in December of 1965) did not want responsibility for student services, and as a result, the University’s Board of Governors asked the Dean of Women (who had served as Registrar to that point) to develop an office of Student Affairs to administer and expand these services. This office took on the responsibilities of Counselling Services, foreign students, clerical work for Canadian University Students Overseas, preparation of student information booklets, the International Office, and the Day Care Centre.*

*– Caitlin Webster, Frances Fournier, Ian Forsyth, Enid Britt, Sarah Cooper (SFU Archives, February 1998)*

It is strangely nostalgic to discover that even 40 years ago we were combining registrarial functions with student affairs functions—and then separating them again a few years later!

## **Graduate Studies**

In 1965, there were 80 graduate students. With such a small population, the Graduate Studies staff support was very personal in approach. Every piece of paper—every application and every degree recommendation—was copied to the President of the University. Forms were created and typed up as the need arose.



## **The Seventies**

Between 1965 and 1975, there was a lot more shaking down, reorganization and expansion.

*In January 1970, the Board of Governors created a third vice-presidential position, Vice-President, University and Community Services. This office had responsibilities for fund raising, public relations, general studies, and University Services. By the time the position was filled in 1971, the name had been changed to Vice-President, Development. The name was soon changed to Vice-President, University Services.*

*Around this time, the name of the Student Affairs office was changed to that of University Services, and the title of the head of this office changed from Dean to Director ...*

*In addition to the Resources office, the Information office, and the School Liaison officer [who reported through the Admissions office], the office of Vice-President, University Services was responsible for the University Services office, which then contained Counseling Services, the Chaplains' Office, Housing Services, Health Services, the University Theatre, the Student Placement Office, and the Reading and Study Centre*

*– Caitlin Webster, Frances Fournier, Ian Forsyth, Enid Britt, Sarah Cooper (SFU Archives, February 1998)*

In 1973, a Faculty of Interdisciplinary Studies was created, comprising departments of Communication Studies, Criminology and Kinesiology, and programs in Computing Science, Africa/Middle East studies, Canadian studies and Latin-American studies. This rounded out the standard academic programs and began to define SFU's new areas of specialization in the BC post-secondary system.

As the university matured, the volume of information and regulations naturally enough expanded. From a slim handbook-sized volume of 112 pages in 1965, the Academic Calendar was now published as a 474-page undergraduate Calendar and a 222-page Graduate Studies Calendar.

Marcus<sup>1</sup> registered in the Communication Studies program in 1975. He entered a university with a reputation for having radical, socially active students (and some pretty lively faculty, too). But in some ways the university remained conservative:

- **Students were assumed to be school-leavers.** There were no evening classes, so as a mature student with family responsibilities Marcus found he had to juggle part-time work with full-time studies. However, there was a daycare centre on campus, albeit with a lengthy waiting list.
- **Privacy wasn't necessarily respected.** Grades were posted on office doors with students' names attached. Marcus complained and requested his instructor post student numbers instead.
- **Coordination of services was still a long way off.** Services were completely separate so students had to deal with different offices located all over the campus, learn different approaches, and deal with different hours of operation.

**“You felt like you were at the mercy of different, labyrinthine sets of rules.”**

*Janis Rutherford*

However, changes were taking place all the time. Official document language now used constructs like “him/her.” There was a Women’s Centre, functioning as both a drop-in space and a resource centre. Guest speakers talked about issues ranging from birth control to international politics; from sexual assault and harassment to the peace movement.

### **Registration**

In the early seventies, students filled out their registration forms and either mailed them in ahead of time or lined up on In-Person Registration Day to hand them in. Operators using terminals connected to the mainframe computer entered the data in priority order onto the computer system. Students lined up again if they needed to drop or add courses.

**“Graduate students [then as now], were treated as adults and potential colleagues by faculty.”**

*Marian McGinn*

Marcus flourished as an undergraduate and went on to become a graduate student. He became a student activist and lost his teaching assistantship after organizing a mock funeral for the president to protest tuition increases. However, he stayed on and eventually obtained his Ph.D. After a stint at another institution, he is now back at SFU as a faculty member.



## **The Eighties**

Kayleigh<sup>1</sup>, an Australian, was admitted in 1985 as part of SFU's quota of international students. Since her first language was English, she was not required to take the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL). The basic grade point average required for admission had risen to 2.5.

Even though she had no language problems, Kayleigh had some difficulties adjusting to studying in a strange country where she knew nobody at first. She was grateful for the support provided by the International Office, who met her on arrival at the airport. Fortunately, she applied early enough to get a place in the Madge Hogarth women's residence, where she quickly made friends. She made more friends through intramural sports arranged by the Department of Recreation. She made use of Health Services. Kayleigh was a "joiner," so she soon settled in and felt like part of the campus. When she needed help after the breakup of a relationship, she was grateful to find that support services included a Counselling Service, staffed by psychologists and graduate trainees. This office had existed since the early years of the university, despite the skepticism of some members of the early Board of Governors who doubted the need for such a service.

The mood on campus was much calmer —some thought a lot less exciting—than it had been in the previous decade. A business-like attitude predominated among students. There was an increasing demand for service more tailored to students' needs.

Additional support services available to students included the Academic Advice Centre. Now that a good range of classes was offered in the evening, advice was also available from 5:00 pm to 8:00 pm, four days per week.

## **Registration**

Kayleigh mailed in her course selection form with a \$100 registration deposit. She was assigned a registration priority number based on her cumulative grade point average and number of credit hours. It was a big improvement on lining up, though not the social event that the lineups could be!

## **Student Services**

The Office of the Registrar encompassed Admissions, Records, Scheduling, and Liaison officers. There were 25 people, including the Registrar and secretary. There were no personal computers in the office yet. Letters were individually typed.

Student records were kept in paper files in the vault. The vault was right beside the Registrar's Office coffee room and was never locked. Concerns about security of

records were yet to be raised, though in the next decade legislation balancing freedom of information with protection of privacy would change the way records were handled and paper records would be largely replaced by electronic records.

Financial Assistance was still an entirely separate department. At this time, they were responsible for the administration of almost 200 scholarships, awards and bursaries.



## **The Nineties**

James<sup>1</sup> was admitted in 1995 as an international student from Korea. International students were limited to not more than 7% of the year's undergraduate intake, but in practice the numbers admitted remained a little below that level. Still, increasing internationalization enhanced campus life.

It took a while for James to look through the array of programs available in the Faculties of Applied Sciences Arts, Business Administration, Education, and Science. He chose a joint major in Communication and Business Administration. By this time, the university's downtown Vancouver campus had been open for some six years and established significant links with the business community. James had his eye on the university's Master of Publishing program, based at the downtown Canadian Centre for Studies in Publishing, as a follow-up to his undergraduate studies.

The array of options for students was by now becoming dizzyingly complex. Programs could be Honors or Joint Honors; Major, Joint Major or Double Major; Major-Minor, Extended Minor, or Double Major. Study options included Evening and Distance Education studies, exchange programs in many other countries, and Co-op work placements.

James was assigned a registration date, after which he registered by telephone. The Registrar's Office had launched its first website in 1994. As a technically savvy student, James checked back frequently to see what information and (eventually) services were offered on the Web. A polite but outspoken student, he frequently offered technical critiques and suggestions!

## **Student Services**

Staffing of support services expanded, though perhaps never enough to fully manage the volume of students needing assistance. Organizationally, Financial Assistance had been incorporated into the Registrar's Office in the late eighties but the Cashier's Office remained in a separate location until all the existing Student Services departments moved to a new Student Services building, the Maggie Benston Centre, in 1996. This "one-stop shopping" approach was, of course, part of a general movement on the part

of post-secondary institutions to become more responsive to students' needs, to become more efficient in their operations, and to think in a student-centred instead of an institution-centred way. Diversity of the campus community became both a reality and a cause for celebration.



**2005**

### **Three campuses**

To its main campus in Burnaby and its downtown Vancouver campus, the university has added another campus, in Surrey, BC, that offers eight programming areas:

1. TechOne, a cohort-based, first-year, interdisciplinary studies program in the Faculty of Applied Sciences;
2. Interactive Arts and Technology, an interdisciplinary approach to performance and media arts, interaction design, new media environments, and technology in arts and design;
3. Computing Science;
4. Business Administration;
5. Explorations, a cohort-based program in the humanities and social sciences;
6. Science;
7. Mathematics;
8. Education.

In all, SFU offers over 100 programs.

### **Student Services**

The Registrar is also the Dean of Student Services. The department of Student Services comprises the following areas: Academic Resources, Admissions, Athletics, Childcare Society, Centre for Students with Disabilities, Communications, Financial Assistance, First Nations Student Centre, Health, Counselling and Career Services, Records and Registration, Residence and Housing, Senate support, Student Academic Affairs, Student Development and Programming, and U-Pass (an office managing transit passes for students). There are just over 200 full-time staff and some student assistants whose numbers vary according to the time of year.

Registration is done via the Web on a portal system called goSFU. A team of student assistants is available at extended hours to help with registration and other student record inquiries. The portal approach is no longer new, but its availability has helped continue to change the Student Services culture to one more tailored to students' needs. Self-service through the portal has cut down on the need to stand in line for routine transactions, so that staff can devote more of their time to assisting with complex problems.

Over 1,900 entrance scholarships are offered, with a value of CAN\$2.8 million. Although tuition continues to rise (currently basic undergraduate tuition for domestic students is at CAN\$145 per credit hour), there are more options than ever for students to put together a plan to finance their education that could include scholarships, bursaries, awards, loans and work-study positions.

New residences are being completed, bringing the total residence spaces available to 1,900.

### **Student statistics**

- Full-time undergraduate: 11,451
- Part-time undergraduate: 12,209
- Graduate: 3,401
- Women make up 56% of undergraduates and 55% of graduate students.

***So, where is SFU in 2005?*** The range of programs continues to widen and courses may be taken in person at three campuses, with some distance education and online options available. Many students study part-time, combining work with obtaining a degree or diploma. The last decade's notion of students as customers, combined with the availability of increasingly sophisticated technology, has led to most routine services being available on the Web. Staff time is freed up for unusual or detailed inquiries. Admission is becoming ever more complex in response to evolving priorities and knowledge gained through enrolment management, with new literacy and quantitative/analytic skills requirements being introduced for Fall 2006 entry.

Like other post-secondary institutions in today's competitive environment, SFU works harder on recruitment and retention. The two-year-old office of Student Development and Programming offers extensive student orientation, parent orientation, leadership programs and drop-in workshops.

We make fewer assumptions about who students are and what they want. Sometimes, we actually ask them what they want and reflect their answers in our programming and services! Our current three-year plan says, "In developing new programs or services, directors will place emphasis on (1) what, where, when, why, or how students will benefit, and (2) how the University will benefit and what value will be added." We partner with students on projects and employ them through work-study programs. Perhaps the continuing evolution of the role of students is the social change to watch for as we head into our fifth decade.

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Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Students described are composites

**Sources:**

- Simon Fraser University Calendars
- Admissions Office Secondary School and College Liaison Division Newsletters
- Student Services Three-Year Plan 2004–2007
- Draft article by Lolita Wilson, Dean of Women and Acting Registrar, 1965
- Material from Simon Fraser University Archives website
- Janis Rutherford, staff member and student
- Marian McGinn, Assistant Registrar, Graduate Studies