

July 24, 2024

Dr. Rachel Altman
SFU Academic Freedom Group

Dear Rachel Altman,

I am writing to respond to the letter from you and the SFU Academic Freedom Group, dated July 10, 2024, in response to SFU Graduate Studies' request for feedback on our proposal to become a faculty. We appreciate your thorough response.

In your letter, you requested that we adjust the phrasing of the proposal and associated Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) for the following three points:

1. Remove all references to equity, diversity, inclusion, Indigenization, and decolonization from these documents.
2. Clarify the meaning of "safe space" as it is used in the proposal.
3. Specify that training will be optional and that supervisors will be allowed to choose training modules that are relevant to their needs and interests.

You also identified specific areas where the three points occurred in the document and FAQs.

I have considered your feedback on these items and will address them below.

1. Remove all references to equity, diversity, inclusion, Indigenization, and decolonization from these documents.

Our office is committed to supporting the mission, vision and values of SFU, as expressed in the [SFU What's Next Strategy](#). Core components of this strategy include upholding Truth and Reconciliation and transforming the SFU Experience. Embedded within are initiatives to support Indigenization and decolonization principles and practices; and also, integrating progressive people practices that centre equity, encourage healthy working practices and ensure a thriving SFU. As such, Graduate Studies will continue to support the University in these areas. We will, however, adjust the language in the proposal and FAQs, so that it reflects this supportive role.

Our FAQ originally stated:

"A Faculty of Graduate Studies will guide programs in their work of embedding the principles of equity, diversity and inclusion as well as Indigenization and decolonization principles and practices as part of the work we all do at SFU."

We have adjusted this to:

“A Faculty of Graduate Studies will support programs looking to embed the principles of equity, diversity and inclusion as well as Indigenization and decolonization principles and practices.”

The Proposal originally stated:

“collegially-informed consideration of new academic standards (e.g., course unit assignment, candidacy requirements, embedding and upholding the principles of Truth and Reconciliation as well as equity, diversity and inclusion in graduate education and research) without requiring standardization”

We have adjusted this to:

“collegially-informed consideration of new academic standards (e.g., course unit assignment, candidacy requirements) without requiring standardization”

The Proposal originally stated:

“Moreover, it will provide academic units with curricular and policy-related guidance to ensure that principles of Truth and Reconciliation¹¹ and equity, diversity and inclusion are upheld in graduate education and research (e.g., via a set of guidelines to be implemented by academic units as appropriate).”

We have adjusted this to:

“Moreover, it will provide academic units with curricular and policy-related guidance to programs looking to embed principles of Truth and Reconciliation¹¹ and equity, diversity and inclusion.”

2. Clarify the meaning of “safe space” as it is used in the proposal.

We have removed the language regarding “safe space” in this context.

The Proposal originally stated:

“The INS attracts many Indigenous graduate students because Indigenous systems of knowledge(s) are inherently interdisciplinary and because of this it is a safe space to conduct research.”

We have adjusted this to:

“The INS attracts many Indigenous graduate students because Indigenous systems of knowledge(s) are inherently interdisciplinary.”

3. Specify that training will be optional and that supervisors will be allowed to choose training modules that are relevant to their needs and interests.

We have updated language to indicate that supervisor training will be optional.

The Proposal originally stated:

“In addition to the membership denoting one’s status as a supervisor, individuals who are registered as supervisors will receive training, workshops and PD sessions (e.g., the use of AI in theses, RA funding).”

We have adjusted this to:

“In addition to the membership denoting one’s status as a supervisor, training, workshops and PD sessions (e.g., the use of AI in theses, RA funding) will be made available to individuals who are registered as supervisors.”

Additionally, you requested that our office change our language around our office’s vision, mission and values. Graduate Studies’ vision, mission and values were created collaboratively with the participation and consensus of the entire Graduate Studies office, for the Graduate Studies staff. These will not be changed.

Consultation and collaboration are the keystones of these efforts and we appreciate your feedback to help strengthen our proposal. We hope that you will continue to join us in future consultations and through our feedback mechanisms, such as the form, on our website: <https://www.sfu.ca/gradstudies/faculty-staff/resources/projects/fgs-proposal.html>

Sincerely,

Mary Grantham O’Brien
Vice-Provost and Dean
Graduate Studies