Dear Dilson:

We, the Academic Freedom Group and other concerned faculty members, understand that you are seeking feedback on the SFU Academic Plan (Draft #3). We are writing to provide you with our comments.

We are very concerned about the language of the "Indigenization and Decolonization" section of the plan (p. 6). In particular:

- The plan commits to "[creating] safe and welcoming campus spaces for Indigenous peoples". The term "safe" is ambiguous. While, of course, everyone has the right to be physically safe on campus, "safe" has recently been used to describe spaces where opinions are not challenged — as in the term "safe space". Those sorts of spaces are inappropriate for a university, where all ideas and beliefs are supposed to be open to debate and discussion. We therefore recommend deleting the word "safe" in the statement in question.
- The draft states: "Expand professional development for non-Indigenous… faculty, including land-centred learning that deepens our understanding of the traditional territories on which our campuses reside." We recommend clarifying that these offerings will be optional (not mandatory) educational resources, available to interested faculty. Simply inserting the word "optional" before the word "professional" would avoid creating the impression that participation will be compelled and would ensure that the plan aligns with principles of academic freedom and voluntary professional development.
- The draft states: "Build scholarly knowledge on respectful and ethical research in and with Indigenous communities locally and globally." While we strongly support the importance of ethical research practices, we question the underlying assumption that a goal of scholarship should be to build "respectful" knowledge. The pursuit of scholarly knowledge must be grounded in a commitment to truth, intellectual honesty, and academic rigour. Knowledge, by its nature, is sometimes critical and can cause discomfort; it should not be constrained by the need to be "respectful". We suggest revising this statement to clarify that ethical research practices and respect for *research participants* are essential.
- The administration also plans to "[create] decolonized teaching and research", "[a]dvance the indigenization and decolonization of courses and programs", and "Indigenize and decolonize research tools, methods and networks". However, the administration cannot make such a commitment on behalf of faculty members because faculty members have the academic freedom to conduct teaching and research as they see fit. For example, "decolonization" (defined in the plan as "[a] process that focuses on upholding the sovereignty of Indigenous lands and the rights of Indigenous people to that land, [sic] and disrupting the settler relationship with power, land, and sovereignty by not defining that relationship solely through the Western perspective") is clearly a political ideology that faculty members cannot be compelled to adopt, as per the SFU/SFUFA Collective Agreement. As an alternative, the administration could commit to

providing *resources* for faculty members who *choose* to pursue such methods of teaching and research.

- A stated goal is to foster "teaching and learning environments that honour and amplify diverse Indigenous knowledge systems and world views". Again, faculty members, not the administration, are charged with disseminating knowledge in our respective areas of expertise. Moreover, the word "honour" is troubling because it could suggest that "Indigenous knowledge systems and world views" are beyond question. In a university setting, no idea is sacred; rigorous interrogation of ideas is, in fact, a responsibility of faculty members. We therefore request that you delete the word "honour" and rephrase the goal to make clear that the administration will not be taking over the role of faculty members in choosing which views to amplify and will not be sacralizing particular ideas and beliefs.
- The definition of "Indigenization" ("Led by and for Indigenous peoples, the enactment of Indigeneity in academic spaces involves meaningful inclusion of Indigenous ways of knowing and being that holds Indigenous cultural integrity intact") is circular. In the revised version of the plan, please provide a clear definition and avoid (undefined) jargon such as "enactment of Indigeneity", "Indigenous ways of knowing and being", and "Indigenous cultural integrity".

We also have the following concerns about the "Inclusive Excellence and Access" section (p. 7):

- This section focuses almost entirely on equity and access. There is little to no mention of excellence in teaching and research, which is an essential part of "inclusive excellence" if that term is to be meaningful in an academic plan. Furthermore, to support a truly inclusive academic environment, this section should explicitly mention the protection of academic freedom and viewpoint diversity, without which inclusive excellence cannot be fully achieved. Otherwise, efforts to advance inclusion could inadvertently suppress intellectual diversity and open debate, which are foundational to both scholarly excellence and genuine inclusion.
- While we support the goal to promote "diversity in student recruitment", we request clarification about the goal to promote "diversity in student… admission" (p.7). For example, does the administration intend on changing the admission processes so that a prospective student from an under-represented population will be more likely than a student from another population to be admitted, even if their academic qualifications are comparable? Or does "diversity" here refer to something else, such as viewpoint diversity or life-experience diversity?

We have the following additional comments about the remainder of the document:

- On p. 4, the draft discusses the launch of the SFU School of Medicine and promises to "deliver community-embedded, socially accountable, and culturally safe health care". We are surprised that *high-quality* health care is not mentioned. To ensure that the commitment to excellence in care is included alongside these important social values, we suggest that the wording be changed to "deliver high-quality, community-embedded, socially accountable, and culturally safe health care".

- On p. 5, one of the stated goals is "Strengthening democracy, justice, equity, and social responsibility". We suggest defining the word equity by adding "the removal of structural barriers to full participation" (as per the SFU Equity Compass) in parentheses. This modification would reinforce the university's commitment to fostering equal opportunities for individuals from diverse backgrounds — in alignment with principles of fairness, inclusivity, and universal human rights — while preventing the interpretation of equity as "equality of outcomes across different identity groups".
- The draft includes the following goal: "review and develop curricula that integrates [sic] global and decolonizing perspectives" (p. 8). It is unclear how the broader commitment to "[s]trengthen the university's connections, collaborations, and reputation across the globe" necessitates adopting a particular political stance — in this case, a commitment to decolonization — as a guiding framework for curriculum development. While encouraging global perspectives is certainly valuable, framing "decolonizing" as a required lens risks aligning the university with a specific political and ideological position. Such framing could inadvertently narrow, rather than broaden, intellectual debate. For this reason, we recommend deleting the words "and decolonizing".
- We continue to have concerns about the restriction of faculty positions to candidates of certain races or ethnicities (for example the plan to hire 15 Black and 15 Indigenous scholars, discussed on p. 9). Such discrimination contradicts SFU's commitment to "inclusive excellence", which includes, as per the definition on p. 7, "[c]ontributing personally and systematically to the prevention of all forms of discrimination". We ask that you instead commit to providing academic units with support to recruit widely and to implement hiring practices that minimize bias in decision-making.
- In the "Institutional Effectiveness" section (p. 9), we request that the plan include an additional goal related to research, namely "Strengthen institutional support for research faculty to enable high-quality research". This goal can be achieved, in part, by ensuring that high teaching loads and extensive service commitments are appropriately recognized in merit and workload evaluations. It complements the currently stated goal to "recognize the scholarly contributions of teaching faculty".

We look forward to your response and to seeing a revised version of the plan.