

# **FASS STRATEGIC RESEARCH PLAN**

**2024-2029**





Place names provided by Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish) and səliłwətəʔ (Tsleil-Waututh) collaborators. Image courtesy of Bill Reid Centre.

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Simon Fraser University respectfully acknowledges the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish), səliłwətəʔ (Tsleil-Waututh), q̓ícəy̓ (Katzie), kʷíkʷəłəm (Kwkwetlem), Qayqayt, Kwantlen, Semiahmoo, and Tsawwassen peoples on whose unceded traditional territories our three campuses reside.

# MESSAGE FROM THE DEAN



In my first weeks as Dean, I was privileged to be a guest of the Squamish Nation, one of the Coast Salish peoples on whose land SFU resides. At this meeting, one community leader invited us as representatives of SFU to dream our future together. I found that to be an inspiring way of thinking about this planning process, and so I extend the invitation to all those who count themselves as caring about the future of FASS: Come and dream our future together.

Let us chart a future for FASS that enhances our research and brings it greater national and international visibility, that builds inclusive and vibrant intellectual community, and finds ways to integrate our research and teaching missions.

This plan represents an important step towards developing into the FASS we want to be. Research is only one piece of the plan: FASS has three overall objectives—research, teaching, and engagement—and three core commitments—reconciliation, equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI), and global engagement—which this plan must embody. This plan is part of envisioning the Faculty in a way that furthers SFU’s goal of being a leading research university defined by its dynamic integration of cutting-edge research, innovative education, and far-reaching community engagement.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'S. Weldon', written in a cursive style.

Dr. S. Laurel Weldon, FASS Dean

# INTRODUCTION

A strategic research plan is a document that explains how the Faculty will use current and prospective resources to support research, what its objectives are in supporting research, and what specific areas of strength or emerging excellence the Faculty intends to support. Writing such a plan is important for participation in many external funding opportunities, but it can also help to communicate to the public, to prospective funders and to faculty members themselves what is important to the Faculty, how it sees itself, and where it hopes to go in the future. Such plans tend to be written in broad terms, and are often accompanied by implementation plans that help to translate broad objectives into particular goals with specific timelines. Anticipate an in-depth implementation plan to follow, detailing the practical steps to realize the insights gleaned from this research plan.



# WHO WE ARE

Established in 1965, SFU is a leading research university, advancing an inclusive and sustainable future. Through strategic research planning and the *What's Next?* plan for the University, SFU has committed to reconciliation, to engaging in global challenges, to making a difference for British Columbians, and to transforming the SFU experience.

Canada's public research universities play a critical role in our country's higher education landscape. As one of British Columbia's research universities, research is at the core of SFU's identity and thus is a foundational pillar of FASS. This plan seeks to chart a research pathway that incorporates these commitments and strategic priorities.

FASS encompasses many highly-ranked departments, programs, and scholars with national and international visibility. Our Faculty includes 15 research centres, 12 members of the Royal Society, 8 Distinguished Professors, 4 Burnaby Mountain Chairs, 8 Canada Research Chairs (CRCs), a Canada Excellence Research Chair (CERC), and 14 endowed chairs/professorships. Our faculty also hold prestigious externally awarded awards, from the Bank of Canada to the Guggenheim.

The Ruth Wynn Woodward Chair housed in Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies is one of only 5 Endowed Chairs in Women's Studies established by the Canadian federal government. Our social science programs (e.g., economics, anthropology, forensic psychology) rank among the top 3 in the country, and SFU arts and humanities are ranked in the top 5 in Canada in Times Higher Education rankings for 2023.

FASS faculty secure considerable external funding each year, and this has been increasing year over year for a decade. In the 2022-2023 fiscal year, FASS faculty procured \$11,219,908 total in grants and contracts. FASS also benefits from the generous support of community groups, alumni, and others, adding to our \$86 million in extant endowments by raising \$5.5M in the 2022-2023 fiscal year to support new initiatives.

As this suggests, then, FASS is a highly visible, engaged Faculty with strong policy and public connections, both locally and globally. In undertaking this plan, FASS' diversity and scale is both an asset and a challenge. It is a challenge to develop a single plan for a diverse Faculty with so many centers of excellence but an asset to have so many strengths and Faculty-wide connections and themes to draw upon.

## FASS COMPRISES:

✓ 28 DEPARTMENTS, PROGRAMS, AND SCHOOLS

✓ 300+ CONTINUING FACULTY

✓ 800+ GRADUATE STUDENTS

✓ 8,800+ UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

✓ 130+ STAFF

# STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS AND FINDINGS

To bring our research community together, a Strategic Research Plan retreat was held in May 2023, complemented by three open sessions—two in person (one at Harbour Centre and one in Burnaby) and one session via Zoom—to garner faculty input. A follow-up survey was sent to all faculty, generating 102 responses (representing approximately 32% of all faculty). Faculty were asked to rank research priorities for FASS as a whole, and also to identify barriers to conducting their own research effectively and efficiently. Strengths identified included:

- Diversity of research focus, methodologies, perspectives
- Commitment to Indigenization, decolonization, social justice, and EDI across departments
- Growing capacity of the Department of Indigenous Studies and Indigenous Languages Program
- Intersectional, interdisciplinary, multi-disciplinary, and trans-disciplinary research
- Expertise in studying complex social problems
- Climate change research
- Community-engaged, participatory action, and policy-relevant research
- Knowledge mobilization
- Strong graduate student researchers
- Opportunities for undergraduate research

Faculty also expressed the desire to deepen our intellectual community, coming together as researchers to build connections across our many departments and programs and across the three campuses on which they operate. Deepening engagement in our research community requires ensuring that all may participate equally in our intellectual life, including addressing any inequities in research, teaching, and service that may be reinforced by biases in our hiring, merit review, and promotion process. FASS faculty are clearly hungry to find ways to allocate more time and other resources to supporting research, and keen to find new ways to assess innovative, interdisciplinary, and engaged research. Our faculty renewal process should undergird research clusters and strengths. We are looking for ways to improve and expand mentoring, and to further support our faculty at all stages, from junior faculty to directors of research centres.

## Aspirational Peers

We studied 38 leading research universities to identify best practices and innovative initiatives from which we could learn. Our aspirational peers included five universities in Canada, nine in Australia, eight in the UK, and eight in the United States. We also considered the landscape of research universities and higher education in British Columbia. We used this analysis to develop this strategic research plan and also to start work on an implementation plan outlining specific strategies for achieving our objectives as well as to define our strategic areas of focus.

# RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

## 1. ENHANCE RESEARCH ACTIVITY AND REPUTATION

Enhancing research activity, reputation and visibility of FASS researchers internally and externally.

## 2. BUILD VIBRANT AND INCLUSIVE RESEARCH COMMUNITIES

Building a vibrant and inclusive research community across all three campuses and integrating diverse faculty, staff, and students in an innovative and exciting intellectual life.

## 3. INTEGRATE TEACHING AND RESEARCH

Finding ways to deepen involvement of graduate and undergraduate students in our research.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

## OBJECTIVE 1: ENHANCE RESEARCH ACTIVITY, REPUTATION AND VISIBILITY OF FASS RESEARCHERS INTERNALLY AND EXTERNALLY

### Creating a supportive environment and enabling structures for FASS research

Supporting research visibility means developing the infrastructure and intellectual ecosystem that supports research. This includes initiatives that seek to:

- Promote interdisciplinary connections: FASS should seek to foster, support, and build interdisciplinary connections to spark more innovative projects and research with greater impact. An example of this type of initiative is the Breaking Barriers interdisciplinary grant-making initiative.
- Enable international connections, such as travel grants and funds to bring in external speakers, scholars, and fellows and to send our faculty abroad; FASS should also build connections with leading research universities around the world.
- Review Faculty Affairs processes (hiring, merit review, and promotion) to identify ways to expand time for research, advance equity in service and teaching activities, and improve mentoring.
- Expand the Faculty complement by working with the Provost and Advancement to expand resources for faculty recruitment and retention.
- Involve students—both graduates and undergraduates—in our intellectual life and research.
- Develop ways to measure and showcase research (e.g. FASS mini-conference).
- Create mentoring and peer-mentoring networks.
- Support community-engaged and globally-engaged research through grants, scholarships, and Dean-sponsored events and activities.
- Link FASS researchers to public policy analysis and other knowledge mobilization solutions.

## OBJECTIVE 2: BUILD VIBRANT AND INCLUSIVE RESEARCH COMMUNITIES

Building a vibrant and inclusive research community across all three campuses means integrating diverse faculty, staff, and students in an innovative and exciting intellectual life. This implies a range of activities such as:

- Launch FASS-wide Dean’s lectures and symposia.
- Support FASS research centres and provide mentoring to centre directors.
- Develop other regular presentation and feedback opportunities internally, so faculty and students can learn about each other’s research, make connections, and get feedback and assistance from colleagues and mentors.
- Create opportunities for social connection around shared research interests.
- Support recognition, social connection, and networking efforts of faculty and students.
- Provide support for research clusters in strategic areas and as supported by faculty and student interests and activities.



Behavioural Neuroscience undergraduate student, Taha Yildirim, at the Translational Neuroscience Lab located at SFU’s Burnaby campus.

## OBJECTIVE 3: INTEGRATE TEACHING AND RESEARCH

Finding ways to deepen involvement of graduate and undergraduate students in our research to the benefit of both the students and the Faculty and University as a whole will strengthen our unique character as a research university. Our talented, engaged students are an important support for our research, and are vital for building a vibrant intellectual community.

Currently, we offer many forms of enrichment to our graduate and undergraduate students. Each year, FASS offers a variety of opportunities for experiential learning including a well-regarded Co-op education program, field schools (akin to an extended, intensive field trip), study abroad, and internships. Many classes involve students in undergraduate research each year: for example, in 2024, more than 70 undergraduate students are participating in the various FASS honours programs, and undergraduate and graduate students are offered methods training in more than 100 courses on quantitative and qualitative methods encompassing (but not limited to) interviewing, survey research, and machine learning.

The *Strategic Research Plan* for SFU emphasizes the need to expand supports for graduate students and involve undergraduates in research. The SFU *What’s Next?* plan emphasizes transforming the SFU experience for students, faculty, and staff.

In FASS, our strategic priorities in this area include:

- Integrate faculty research and student education and experience into a coherent whole.
- Bring research priorities more fully into faculty renewal planning process at all levels and stages.
- Expand FASS’ graduate student complement as well as enhancing our supports for graduate students, including funding, professional development, and other supports.
- Develop connections between faculty research and the student experience, by integrating faculty research to enhance teaching and learning, funding for undergrad research and by building research activities into field schools.
- Expand connections between undergraduate research and faculty research.
- Provide opportunities for students to present their work, get feedback and meet other members of the SFU community or external stakeholders interested in their work, such as a FASS undergraduate research symposia or conference with poster presentations.
- Form connections between faculty research and the curriculum.
- Expand supports for students doing research outside of SFU, especially internationally, including travel grants, support for study abroad and field schools, and other international opportunities.

# CROSS-CUTTING COMMITMENTS

FASS shares three fundamental commitments with the broader SFU community and these commitments run through everything we do: Reconciliation; Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI); and Global Engagement.

## 1. RECONCILIATION AND PARTICIPATION IN INDIGENOUS RESURGENCE

## 2. EQUITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION

## 3. GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT BY LINKING TO UNIVERSITIES, COMMUNITIES, AND STAKEHOLDERS WORLDWIDE

### 1. ADVANCE RECONCILIATION IN FASS RESEARCH

FASS faculty have expressed strong support for upholding the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action to redress the harms done to Indigenous communities. FASS is guided externally by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and provincially by the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (DRIPA) Action Plan to ensure that universities work with Indigenous communities to develop culturally relevant and safe educational settings. As previously noted, FASS is further guided by the priority placed on Truth and Reconciliation in SFU’s *What’s Next?* framework for action to Uphold Truth and Reconciliation and SFU’s Strategic Research Plan that emphasizes valuing Indigenous approaches and knowledges in understanding the world. FASS is guided in our approach by the SFU-ARC *Walk This Path With Us* report, and the SFU *Indigenous Pathways* report.

We are proud of these efforts, but we know we must continue on our path if we aim to advance towards true reconciliation. Finding and sharing truth is a necessary component of continuing on this journey, which as the Aboriginal Strategic Initiative Final Report acknowledges is “uncomfortable, but change does not happen when we are comfortable.” Advancing reconciliation in FASS research requires guidance by and relationships with Indigenous communities. This requires a willingness to listen to people

and to recognize that different communities have different priorities and needs for research. It means that relationships are foundational for and need to precede research. To strengthen the research capacity of Indigenous faculty, staff, and students in FASS, we need to understand where they are coming from, who they are as researchers, teachers, and learners. This suggests the need to:

- Continue to implement the *SFU-ARC plan*<sup>2</sup>
- Provide the appropriate support that Indigenous faculty and graduate students need to thrive at SFU.
- Continue centering Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing in relationship building and research partnerships with communities around SFU, across B.C. and around the world.
- Increase the number of Indigenous researchers—faculty, staff and students—in FASS.
- Review Faculty Affairs processes (hiring, merit review, and promotion) to identify ways to recognize reconciliation, decolonization, and engagement with Indigenous communities (including both First Nations communities and urban Indigenous people and groups) as a priority.

### 2. ADVANCE EQUITY, DIVERSITY, INCLUSION (EDI) IN FASS RESEARCH

We recognize that meaningful and long-lasting change needs to be thoughtfully implemented and that progress will be neither linear nor quick, but the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences is committed to advancing EDI in all areas including research.

FASS researchers are already leaders in contributing to SFU’s Strategic Research Plan’s priority area: “Strengthening Democracy, Justice, Equity, and Education,” and building on these research strengths is one way we can further EDI.

Additional measures include:

- Increase the presence of underrepresented groups among the faculty and leadership of FASS.
- Review Faculty Affairs processes (Tenure and Promotion; Biennial Review; Faculty Renewal) to advance EDI.
- Seek out interdisciplinary partnerships with other Departments and Faculties on campus.
- Launch a new grants program to support work on EDI-related projects at SFU.
- Support community-engaged research.

### 3. ADVANCE GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT BY LINKING FASS TO UNIVERSITIES, COMMUNITIES, AND STAKEHOLDERS WORLDWIDE

FASS researchers conduct their research around the world, and many international researchers come to our three campuses seeking to connect with SFU faculty and students. This brings together different worldviews and ways of thinking to challenge our views and to expand our understanding of the world. In order to support SFU’s *What’s Next?* priority of engaging in global challenges to help address “humanity’s most complex problems and questions,” FASS will look for new ways to leverage our international research strengths. In order to expand our global connections we will:

- Expand international research connections and funding.
- Advance global engagement by linking FASS to universities, communities, and other stakeholders worldwide.
- Continue to bring in international visiting scholars and expand the opportunities for faculty to come here from abroad and for FASS faculty to travel abroad to lecture and study.
- Expand opportunities for international students to come to FASS and for FASS students to travel abroad to research and study.
- Increase the number of international graduate students in FASS.
- Build more international connections and collaborations in Britain (especially Scotland), Greece (and Europe more generally), USA (especially Cascadia), Australia and Asia-Pacific.

CROSS-CUTTING COMMITMENTS

**INITIATIVES AND PEOPLE ADVANCING RECONCILIATION IN FASS RESEARCH**

- The Indigenous Languages Program (INLP) offers students training in Indigenous languages, much of it offered in communities in partnership with Elders. This advances reconciliation in research as language revitalization is an important aspect of culture, cultural ways of knowing, and understanding the world.
- The FASS Reconciliation Working Group (RWG) is made up of faculty members, students, and staff and is co-chaired by Tim Michel, Director, Indigenous Relations, and Kate Slaney, Associate Dean, Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies. The RWG has developed the [Reconciling Curriculum Grant Program](https://www.sfu.ca/fass/teaching/resources/reconciling-curriculum-grant-program/background.html)<sup>1</sup> as part of FASS' ongoing commitment to reconciliation.
- FASS is proud to be home to the Department of Indigenous Studies, which has expanded from about three continuing faculty lines to almost nine faculty lines. This growth has expanded the research capacity in Indigenous Studies.
- Among the newest faculty in Indigenous Studies are Canada's first Indigenous Canada Excellence Research Chair, Nicholas Reo, as well as Zoe Todd, Tier 2 Canada Research Chair (CRC) in Indigenous Governance and Freshwater Fish Futures. These faculty members are leading an initiative to create a transnational, transcommunity network for sharing Indigenous knowledge about and approaches to coastal regeneration and other important aspects of environmental well-being.
- FASS is home to many Indigenous faculty and staff across several departments and programs, and attracts many Indigenous students: In 2023, FASS enrolled 48 Indigenous graduate students (20% of all Indigenous graduate students at SFU).



**ZOE TODD**  
Tier 2 CRC in Indigenous Governance and Freshwater Fish Futures; Associate Professor in Indigenous Studies.



**NICHOLAS REO**  
Canada's first Indigenous Canada Excellence Research Chair; Professor in Indigenous Studies.



**TIM MICHEL**  
Director, Indigenous Relations; FASS Reconciliation Working Group co-chair.



**KATE SLANEY**  
Associate Dean, Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies; FASS Reconciliation Working Group co-chair.

<sup>1</sup><https://www.sfu.ca/fass/teaching/resources/reconciling-curriculum-grant-program/background.html>

CROSS-CUTTING COMMITMENTS

**INITIATIVES AND PEOPLE ADVANCING EDI IN FASS RESEARCH**

SFU and FASS have many commitments and resources that support our work on equity, diversity and inclusion.

The University has committed to the [Scarborough Charter](#) on Anti-Black Racism and Black Inclusion in Canadian Higher Education. This Charter, together with the [Equity Compass](#) on institutional equity, diversity, and inclusion, and the Radical Inclusion report authored by SFU's Academic Women caucus, provide insight into the work needed to advance inclusive excellence in FASS.

Many of FASS' faculty have research and teaching interests in equity, diversity, and inclusion. Among these are Aftab Erfan, who brings her deep and practical knowledge as former Chief Equity Officer for the City of Vancouver, and Genevieve Fuji Johnson, author of the book, "Race, Racialization, and Antiracism in Canada and Beyond," and articles including "Whiteness, Power and the Politics of Demographics in the Governance of the Canadian Academy."



**AFTAB ERFAN**  
Associate Member in Public Policy; Executive Director of SFU's Centre for Dialogue.



**GENEVIEVE FUJI JOHNSON**  
Professor in Political Science; Dialogue Associate in SFU's Centre for Dialogue.

**AWARDS, PROGRAMS, AND PEOPLE ADVANCING GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT IN FASS RESEARCH**



Shivaji Mukherjee, inaugural Dr. A.H. Somjee and Dr. Geeta Somjee Professor in Indian Political Development.



Adrian De Leon, 2024-2025 Jack and Nancy Farley Distinguished Visiting Scholar in History.

- The establishment of Dr. A.H. Somjee and Dr. Geeta Somjee Professorship in Indian Political Development, which supports a research focus on political development and conflict in South Asia and support for graduate students studying South Asia.
- A new series of classes in World Languages and Literatures, supported by the Brazilian government, will teach Brazilian Portuguese language, literature, and Brazilian culture to undergraduate students.
- The Jack and Nancy Farley Distinguished Visiting Scholar program brings experts from abroad to our community. This year, for example, the Farley Scholar in History, Dr. Adrian De Leon, taught a special topics course on revolutionary movements in the Philippines.



# RESEARCH AREAS OF FACULTY-WIDE AND STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE INTEREST

## RESEARCH AREAS OF FACULTY-WIDE INTEREST

Meeting our research objectives will require initiatives focused on nurturing or strengthening particular research areas or clusters.

Enhancing research excellence Faculty-wide not only requires supporting individual faculty members, departments and programs in their goals but it also means building research communities and clusters across the Faculty. Such clusters are especially powerful where they are supported by internal resources such as interdisciplinary programs, research centres, journals edited on campus, existing faculty networks, and other supports for collective intellectual endeavour and community connection.

Areas or constellations of interest that are distinctive of SFU are of particular value, as they set us apart and develop our comparative advantage. Connections to the What's Next? strategic plan and the SFU Strategic Research Plan launched by SFU's Office of the Vice-President, Research and Innovation (VPRI) also add value.

Finally, some areas represent new areas of research or areas in which our region or country are underserved by other research universities. Taking these considerations into account, our consultation process highlighted eight areas of interest having particular support and potential both in FASS and University-wide.

**INDIGENEITY, RECONCILIATION, AND INDIGENOUS RESURGENCE**  
Language, culture, and ecology through Indigenous governance

**KNOWLEDGES AND METHODS / DATA SCIENCE AND EPISTEMOLOGY**

**ENVIRONMENTAL SOCIAL SCIENCE AND HUMANITIES**

**MARKETS AND MIGRANTS**  
Labour, citizenship, and globalization

**INTERSECTIONALITY, IDENTITY, AND INEQUALITY**  
Gender, race, class; diasporic networks and Black flourishing; language, linguistics, and bias

**PEACE, HUMAN SECURITY, VIOLENCE, AND ANTI-VIOLENCE**

**TECHNOLOGY, ETHICS, AND THE HUMAN FACTOR**  
Digital humanities and AI

**MEDICAL HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES**  
Social determinants of health and humanistic understanding of health



Assistant Professor, Janice Jeong (Department of History) presents a flash talk entitled "Conceptualizing Mecca as a Home for Muslim 'Minorities' in China" at the 2024 FASS Forum.

Posters at the 2024 SFU Undergraduate and Graduate Research Symposium.

Postdoctoral Fellow, Sally Sharif (International Studies) conducted field research in three border regions of Colombia affected by violent conflict, interviewing Indigenous and Afro-Colombian community leaders engaged in peacebuilding.

## CONCLUSION

This plan outlines in broad strokes the direction in which we, as a Faculty, wish to move. These are the pieces of the puzzle that combine to create our vision of a flourishing intellectual community that leads the world in meaning-making and solving the world's pressing problems.

With its excellent scholars and significant endowment of resources, FASS is poised to make transformational connections from mountaintop to the city, from our

Surrey programs and international partners, to our footholds in communities across the provinces.

When we can spark new connections across the various boundaries and walls that confine us, within and outside the University, we will be able to tell the stories and build the foundation of knowledge and truth that transforms not just our city or province, but the world that we bequeath to future generations.



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