

STRATEGIC RESEARCH PLAN

2023-2028

SFU'S 2023-2028 STRATEGIC RESEARCH PLAN

Simon Fraser University (SFU) has been one of the fastest growing research institutions in the country over the past 10 years. In that time, SFU scholars have been recognized both for traditional academic outputs and for community impacts. SFU is well-positioned to continue to expand its research activities, to deepen its engagement with community and to grow the impact of its scholars on the world. Our Strategic Research Plan (SRP) captures some of the breadth of activities at the university while identifying areas of strength and focus for 2023-2028. It is accompanied by an implementation plan that identifies specific actions that will be taken to support and enhance the impact of the university in these priority areas.

In preparing this plan, we have interacted with hundreds of community members through townhall-style meetings, survey responses and email. We have discussed their priorities and where they see their research going in the coming years. Clear themes emerged from these discussions, such as the role of SFU in confronting the climate crisis, the growth of human-health focused research at the institution, the need for the institution to value diverse forms of scholarship, the need to respect and incorporate Indigenous perspectives and knowledge(s) into research at the institution, and the need to support graduate students and other early career researchers in our community.

RESEARCH APPROACHES SUPPORTING SFU'S CORE VALUES

A broad consultation for the university's new strategic plan has been undertaken, led by the SFU president and the provost and vp academic, called "SFU: What's Next?". As part of the consultation, a draft set of core values was identified to help define our university.

Those draft values include:

- Critical thinking and academic freedom;
- Excellence and responsibility;
- Respect and reciprocity;
- Equity and belonging;
- Engagement and openness;
- Resilience and sustainability; and
- Innovation and adaptability.

To enact these values in the way we do research at SFU, there are several approaches we employ:

- **A Culture of Inquiry (critical thinking and academic freedom; excellence and responsibility; engagement and openness; respect and reciprocity; and equity and belonging):** We are here to advance knowledge and understanding on a wide range of topics from a wide range of perspectives. Our researchers will ask hard questions about challenging topics. SFU's support of academic freedom should create a safe environment in which these topics can be addressed.
- **Indigenous Approaches, and Knowledge(s) (respect and reciprocity; engagement and openness; equity and belonging; and excellence and responsibility):** To understand and then address the complexity and urgency of many of the problems our society faces, we recognize that we need a broad and inclusive understanding of the world that incorporates many knowledge systems and world views. Our commitment to reconciliation with Indigenous peoples includes reconciling different approaches to understanding the world. Frameworks such as two-eyed seeing and walking on two legs guide our approach.

- **Interdisciplinarity (engagement and openness; innovation and adaptability; excellence and responsibility; and respect and reciprocity):** Many of the most interesting academic questions are rooted in very complex problems that cannot be solved by a single researcher. Team-based work—often requiring team members from a variety of disciplines and trained in multiple methodologies—is the path to answering these questions. In addition to offering strong support for specialized disciplinary work, at SFU we support scholars working across disciplines by supporting partnerships both within the university and with other universities.
- **Linking Research to Teaching and Learning (excellence and responsibility, innovation and adaptability, engagement and openness):** We mentor students to be the next generation of researchers, innovators, and educators by engaging them in research processes. This enriches their education and the research produced. We embed practices of systematic inquiry, mentorship and apprenticeship in our research programs and extend and model these practices in preparation of educators who go on to work in early learning, K-12, community and post-secondary contexts.
- **Engagement with Partners or Communities (excellence and responsibility; respect and reciprocity; resilience and sustainability; engagement and openness; and innovation and adaptability):** In many fields of inquiry, engaging with communities outside academia leads to better scholarship. Those communities may include individuals, municipalities, First Nations, industry, NGOs or others. At SFU we support partnership within and outside academia to drive better scholarship and greater impact. This includes local and regional partnerships, national partnerships and international partnerships.
- **Knowledge Mobilization (innovation and adaptability; excellence and responsibility):** Research is not complete until the created knowledge is shared. That sharing happens via many mechanisms including traditional academic publication, policy creation, newspaper op-eds, white papers, social media, performances, creative artifacts, patents/licensing, new product development, creation of a company and other forms.

At SFU we embrace open science, data and publishing. We also foster a culture of innovation both in the way that we perform scholarly work and in the way that we support it.

PRIORITY AREAS

SFU is a comprehensive research university, with research and other scholarly activity spanning a wide range of disciplines and approaches. The priority areas identified below capture institutional priority areas for 2023-2028.

Each of the priority areas below spans multiple disciplines. As an academic institution we are committed to building multi-disciplinary communities of practice in these areas. We also note that these priority areas intersect with each other and that some of the most interesting research happens at those intersections. For example, climate change is precipitating biodiversity loss. The One Health approach, which is actively employed by SFU researchers, recognizes that human health is connected to the health of animals and the environment thus strongly linking priority areas #1 and #2 below.

The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide an international framework covering many of the most pressing issues of our time. Our university and our community members are committed to the SDGs and are putting them at the heart of our international engagement framework. Where relevant, links to SDGs are included in the priority area descriptions below.

Priority areas include:

1. Advancing Community-Centred Climate Innovation (C3I) (SDGs 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13)

Climate change represents one of the greatest challenges of our age. As a research topic, it crosses disciplines, touching deep societal, health and justice issues as well as climate science, mathematical modelling, biodiversity, and profound technological and economic change. While climate change is a global issue, its effects and the resources available to adapt and to mitigate future warming differ from community to community. Some communities will be pressed to adapt to drought and fire, while others will be combatting floods and landslides. Some will have access to considerable local renewable energy sources, and some will not.

Different communities may therefore embrace different paths to resilience. Helping communities become resilient to the effects of the changing climate by integrating low-carbon approaches into their planning and integrating low-carbon technologies into their infrastructures is a daunting multidisciplinary challenge. Working with these same communities to provide education and support for their citizens is another aspect of the challenge. SFU's approach includes developing solutions at the community and regional level, followed by sharing and scaling those solutions to make impacts globally. With research strengths that span all of the relevant disciplines, SFU is well-positioned to take on these challenges. This priority area engages our researchers with all levels of government, industry and community members.

2. Supporting Health and Wellness of Individuals, Populations and Communities (SDGs 1, 2, 3, 6, 10)

The connection between the health and wellness of an individual, and the (global) community in which they live has never been more obvious. As we write this plan, British Columbia is in the midst of two public health emergencies—the global COVID-19 pandemic and a sharp rise in drug overdoses and deaths (the “opioid crisis”). These simultaneous emergencies have together exposed the effects of deep social inequities and discrimination, the fragility of our health systems, the psychological consequences of isolation, a lack of trust in authority/science and many other profound issues that can only be addressed through world-class research. SFU researchers are engaged in responding to the threats and burdens of disease via many approaches, including basic research into fundamental molecular and cellular processes, development of new technologies, tests and treatments for individuals, as well as education and public health approaches. They are also leaders in transforming our response to health issues through social determinants and cultural critique. Harnessing big data, genomics, molecular and cellular tools and treatments, wearable technologies, digital technologies, and other technological and social interventions, our researchers are influencing therapeutic development, health policy and individual health throughout the lifespan. SFU researchers also generate wellbeing in the communities they work with by engaging in mutual, respectful and empathetic processes of knowledge production.

Harnessing research informed by indigeneity, nature-based experience, contemplation, and anti-racism can make important contributions to wellbeing, both individual and collective.

3. Expanding the Foundations of Knowledge and Understanding our Origins

SFU researchers ask fundamental questions about the natural world, as well as our societies and cultures. Insights that arise from this work change the way we think about the world and the place of humans in it. SFU researchers measure and predict natural phenomena on multiple scales from the subatomic to the cosmic, from a single gene to a multi-celled organism, and from single entities to complex interacting systems of those entities. A fuller picture emerges when we examine the development and progression of our languages, cultures and knowledge systems. This includes examining the role of human creativity and critical making in the production of new knowledge and understanding. Our researchers use data, quantitative techniques, as well as qualitative approaches across a wide range of disciplines within this priority area. With more thorough insights into our complex world—both natural and cultural—we are better equipped to look forward, pushing the boundaries of discovery into new frontiers. Driven by curiosity, our researchers are deepening our understanding of the world.

4. Strengthening Democracy, Justice, Equity and Education (SDGs 5, 8, 10, 16)

The polarization of our society, mis/disinformation, threats to democracy, population migration and changing patterns of convergence and conflict challenge the structures of societies and shape the ways we interact with each other. Researchers at SFU are deeply engaged in studies of data and media democracy, and in questions of equity and justice in relation to environmental, educational, health, economic and governmental systems. This includes the causes and consequences of poverty and inequality. Matters of social inclusion, identity, diversity and belonging are key drivers behind how individuals and groups perceive, connect with, and learn about society at large.

Considerations related to justice, equity and social responsibility also shape the ways we engage with communities, value their contributions, and inform a commitment to fostering dialogue, relationship building, imagination, critical design, and transformative learning. Environmental Social Governance research provides opportunities to foster the implementation of these values by industry. Fostering community participation in research is both a vehicle for social change and a critical source of scholarship.

5. Transforming Industry and Economies through Technology, Management and Policy (SDGs 9, 12)

Technology impacts every aspect of our lives—at multiple scales—from nanotechnology to satellite communication to technology for work and home life. These technologies are applied to all areas of human endeavor, from building a sustainable world, to improving human health, to transforming the way we teach and learn. SFU researchers are involved in new technology creation at all levels: creating the new materials that enable those technologies; engaging in design research and developing creative technologies that change how we interact with technology and each other; developing new types of hardware to enable future platforms like quantum computers; writing the algorithms required to process data and model the world around us as well as critiquing and educating people about the effects of those algorithms; and integrating and adapting existing technologies to a changing world.

The adoption and use of emerging technologies are guided by management and policy research as one means to create economic and societal value and to engage in critical modelling of alternative technological futures. These research domains investigate the economic, environmental, health, political, educational and societal tradeoffs between incumbent industries and technologies and the emerging alternatives. SFU researchers also study the processes that underlie the adoption and use of new technologies—the process of bringing technologies “out of the lab” and into the hands of consumers and communities, as well as inequalities in technological uptake and impacts.

**TO LEARN MORE AND GET INVOLVED, ENGAGE WITH US.
VISIT [SFU.CA/STRATEGIC-RESEARCH-PLAN](https://sfu.ca/strategic-research-plan).**

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