

SFU's architecture

The history of Simon Fraser University is reflected in its world-renowned architecture. Located atop Burnaby Mountain, SFU's design was the result of a competition held in 1963 by Dr. Gordon Shrum, the newly appointed Chancellor of the university. The goal of the competition was to produce five winners. One architect would be awarded first prize for the overall design of SFU, while four other architects would each be invited to build a section of the university under the supervision of the winner. In order to permit maximum accessibility to the competition, the formal guidelines stipulated that each applicant would be permitted to submit only three drawings. All entries were limited to applicants from British Columbia.

The informal guidelines for SFU's design consisted of a directive from Dr. Shrum entitled, "Notes from the Chancellor", which was distributed to the applicants. In this directive, Dr. Shrum noted many of the features that he felt were essential to the new university based upon his previous experience at the University of British Columbia. Among his recommendations were that students should be able to move from one part of the university to another without going outside, and that the large lecture theaters should be grouped together rather than scattered over the whole campus. Perhaps the most important of his criteria was that SFU should appear in 1965 essentially as it would look in 1995. In other words, it should look like a finished university, but also be designed for expansion.

The design chosen was that of a young UBC architecture professor, Arthur Erickson, and his colleague Geoffrey Massey. The four other winners were William R. Rhone and Randle Iredale; Zoltan Kiss; Duncan McNab, Harry Lee, and David Logan; and Robert F. Harrison. The Erickson and Massey design had been the unanimous choice of the judges, and had met all the requirements that Shrum had outlined in his memo.

Erickson's design was regarded as innovative in several key aspects. Its mountain top location inspired Erickson to reject multi-story buildings, which he felt would look presumptuous. Instead, Erickson turned for inspiration to the acropolis in Athens and the hill towns of Italy, where the mountain was incorporated into the design itself. This concept is evident in many aspects of the university's design. For example, the manner in which the buildings are terraced to remain in harmony with the contours of the landscape and the emphasis upon the horizontal rather than the vertical expansion of the buildings themselves.

Another innovative aspect of the design was its rejection of the traditional separation of faculties and departments into individual buildings. In emphasizing the universality of the university rather than the specialization of knowledge, Erickson wanted to facilitate interdisciplinary work and a closer relationship between faculty and students. To this end, the design incorporated

buildings which would house several departments as well as classroom space. This measure satisfied the practical requirements of both students and faculty by reducing the travel time between classes, as well as fostering an intimate learning environment.

The design of Simon Fraser University marked the beginning of what was a long and distinguished career for Arthur Erickson, one of Canada's most renowned architects. Simon Fraser University was completed in time for the opening ceremonies on September 9, 1965, and was widely heralded across the world as an architectural success. Its innovative design complemented the remarkable pace in which it was built, creating a structure that soon became known as the "instant university".

As the University continued to grow, its new buildings remained true to the original design principles conceived by its founding architects.



Academic Quadrangle



Academic Quadrangle, Convocation Mall level



Library, Convocation Mall level



Academic Quadrangle, north side



Library, northwest view



Leslie & Gordon Diamond Family auditorium



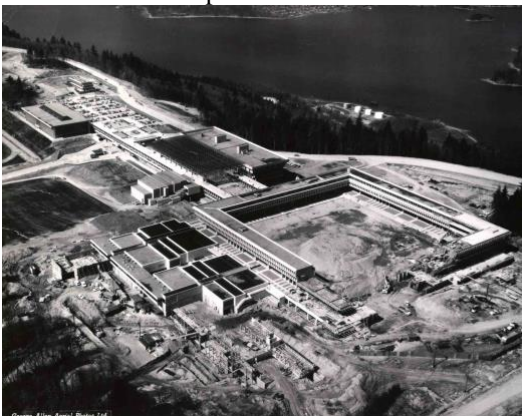
Library, north side



Lorne Davies Complex



Lorne Davies Complex



Aerial view of campus looking west



Aerial view of campus looking east