



School of Engineering Science and ESSS Semesterly Meeting - FA20

Meeting Date:

November 16th, 2020

In Attendance (Online):

Dr. Glenn Chapman - Director, School of Engineering Science

Nicolas Ramirez - ESSS President

Opening Statement

The Engineering Science Student Society and the Department of Engineering Science are working hard to accommodate all ENSC students to the best of their ability. We have been in contact with each other these past few weeks to make sure everyone is supported during this unprecedented time. I would like to thank everyone who sent in their feedback because it provides us with the opportunity to work toward solutions.

Brief Note

- All decisions were made while considering academic integrity, feasibility, and student feedback.
- Anything not mentioned here is still being considered within the department and faculty.

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ENSC Course Offerings

Due to the deterioration of quality of instruction created by covid, and the resulting challenges students are facing in succeeding in their courses, has the Engineering Science Department considered providing classes during alternate terms than where they are scheduled currently?

Yes, Dr. Chapman is currently working with our Faculty to provide increased offerings for courses across all years and streams. He has requested that the ESSS send out a survey for students to indicate which courses they would be most interested in taking during a term in which the course is not currently offered. In this manner, he can work to provide alternate course offerings for the most desired courses. This form has been attached to the email that includes this letter. I urge all students to fill this out as this will help our department make better decisions as we move forward through remote instruction.

It is also worth noting, that it is currently difficult to provide lab-intensive courses with the same level of quality. Hence, increasing offerings for courses without a significant lab component will be much more feasible to achieve. Take this into consideration when making your request in the survey.

The Director also mentioned that the department is actively working on improving lab quality for our courses. He gave me a brief, but promising demonstration of the equipment being installed in LAB 1 that grants remote access to the tools and devices we use in that room. This will enable students to simulate lab work with greater realism, particularly for courses like ENSC 220 and 225.

ENSC Minimum GPA, Minimum Courseload, and Honours Programs

Due to the fact that students are struggling to be successful in their courses, and advance in their programs as a result of the difficult shift to online learning, what policy changes is the department making to assist students advance in their programs?

Dr. Chapman has indicated to me that the minimum course load of 12 units per semester has been removed until shutdowns due to covid are lifted. He does not want to make students pay the price for the struggles brought by the virus. Details

will be provided by the department later this term. They will be keeping us informed on a term by term basis regarding the changes to these policies as we continue with remote learning or return to in-person classes in the future. In this manner, students will be able to select the courses they think they will be most successful in and take as many as they think they will be able to manage. This measure will reduce undue amounts of stress during the pandemic and increase the likelihood of student academic success. Nevertheless, the minimum GPA will remain in effect as it was in the pre-covid era. This is to maintain a level of academic performance from our students so that they are successful in the courses to follow. Some students have requested that the P Grade be implemented once again. This is an option to be considered by SFU administration as it is university-wide; thus, the Director cannot implement this himself.

After receiving submissions from students reporting their struggles in their fourth-year classes and the difficulties with pursuing a thesis whilst being remote, and reading the suggestions they made to the department, I proposed to the Director that during this period of online learning we make the honours programs, namely Biomedical Engineering and Engineering Physics, optional honours so that some students can graduate sooner and begin pursuing full-time employment rather than continuing to compete for a limited number of internships. Given that this is not a requirement set by the Canadian Engineering Accreditation Board (CEAB), Dr. Chapman has received the suggestion and will be proposing it to the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee (UCC).

ENSC Mandatory Co-op and enrollment to upper-division courses

In light of the pandemic and its effect on the job market, many students in second-year are struggling to acquire a co-op position for the spring term of 2021 and meet their first term co-op requirement to advance to upper-division courses. Several submissions requested that this requirement be lifted so that students can continue their education and gain skills to be able to compete for a limited supply of co-op positions.

The Director was in full agreement with this suggestion and will be implementing it in the upcoming Spring term. Details will be provided in an email from the department later this term. This was something put into effect during the Summer term of 2020 and the department plans on keeping this requirement lifted until the effects of the

pandemic on opportunities for co-ops have subsided. This will be something reviewed and announced on a term by term basis depending on the decisions made by the University administration and the protocols issued by our Provincial health officer.

In addition to this, Dr. Chapman has also been creating several research-based co-op positions with faculty to provide more opportunities for students to meet this requirement and assist these students in obtaining financial stability during these trying times. He aims to continue this effort in the academic terms to follow and has requested that the ESSS submit a survey to evaluate the interest of students in this initiative. If numerous students can demonstrate interest in this opportunity, faculty will be more receptive in creating these positions and more co-op positions will be offered in the upcoming term. These positions would include payment in the form of a \$1500+ honorarium and would include eligibility to take 2 courses alongside your co-op position. This will greatly assist students who are searching for their first co-op position and are struggling to compete against upper-year students for positions in industry. This survey has been included in the email where this report is attached. I urge all students to complete this survey as many students will benefit from this initiative.

ENSC Mental health

What is being done to provide mental health support for students in addition to the resources provided by mental health and counselling from SFU?

The Faculty of Applied Science is currently working with individual Departmental Student Unions like ourselves, the ESSS. At the moment, we are collectively developing initiatives that promote the mental and physical health of our students. These initiatives will likely commence in the Spring term of the upcoming year, so stay tuned. In the meantime, I encourage students to continue accessing the mental health and counselling resources provided by SFU.

Teaching Assistants

Several students reported that they were struggling to find help when trying to learn a difficult concept or complete a challenging assignment. They recount that the class teaching assistants often do not respond to emails or are not prompt with their replies. Is there a possibility of increasing the number of TA's or perhaps providing undergraduate TA's?

Dr. Chapman has received reports of this as well and indicated to me that sometimes TA's do not have a strong enough internet connection or the equipment for a good experience during office hours. He also indicated to me that depending on the class, students do not take enough advantage of the TA's and no one ends up attending their office hours or requesting help. Given this discussion, Dr. Chapman has been planning to set up a "Help Desk" sort of system where students can go to ask questions for any ENSC course and find immediate and valuable assistance.

There are a few concerns that must be resolved before this can be implemented but the Director reports he is actively working to resolve them.

That being said, I would urge students who have not reached out to their TA's or attended their office hours to do so. They are employed to assist you in your learning so make the most of these resources. In addition to the Director's idea, the ESSS is actively working to establish a tutoring program for students to provide additional support for students during this period of remote learning. Good things are coming your way and all parties are doing their best to bring these resources as soon as possible.

Exams and Professors

Is there a system in place to assist professors in their adoption of remote instruction? Such as a protocol, manual etc.

There is currently no manual set out by the ENSC department but SFU is providing general guidelines for professors. The department is limited in its regulation of how professors teach their classes due to policies like Academic Freedom. Nevertheless, I have suggested to the director to provide a manual of best practices for professors to follow if they believe it fits within the intended methodology of instruction of their course.

Common Room

Will we have a common room when we return to campus?

The Applied Sciences Building is currently undergoing renovations and several spaces have been affected including the Common Room. It is our understanding that there might be a possible shift in the location of the Common Room, but we will have a common room when we return to in-person instruction.

Additional Concerns

If you have made it this far, thank you for reading. We appreciate all the submissions made from our students and did our best to address as many concerns as we could in the time allotted. If this report did not address your specific concern, and your concern is time-sensitive, I encourage you to reach out to Dr. Chapman directly and he will assist you with your specific case. All submissions that were not addressed in this report will be prioritized at our next meeting in the Spring term of 2021. In January, I will be releasing another survey for students to submit their concerns for the next meeting with our Director.

Once again, thank you all for your submissions and for reading this report. The ESSS is proud to represent you in all aspects of the Engineering Science Program. If you have any further questions, do not hesitate to contact me at president@esss.ca.

Sincerely,

Nicolas Ramirez