

SEEKING TO ENGAGE: RE-PLACING SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY'S BURNABY MOUNTAIN CAMPUS TO HELP ADDRESS ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS

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Abstract

Simon Fraser University, from the time of its opening in the 1960s, has striven to be a modernist and progressive educational institution. These characteristics are reflected in the architectural designs of its campuses, its epistemological orientations and offerings, and its policies. The university also states an ambition to be "Canada's most engaged university" on its website (sfu.ca/about.html). It is in considering this last point that this paper questions and considers SFU's 'engagement' in the context of the emerging environmental crisis. In particular, this paper focuses attention on the Burnaby Mountain campus and considers its place - geographically, architecturally, and culturally, and how these considerations of place intertwine and contribute or detract from a sense of engagement. Overall, this author posits that Simon Fraser's Burnaby Mountain campus is critically alienated from the in-situ forest that surrounds it, through character and gesture, and this is most unfortunate given a stated need by experts and educators to deepen engagement with natural environments in this time of crisis. Insights from place-based education identify that in-situ ecological knowledge, and insights arising from First Nations peoples, can help to grow new knowledge and awareness, deepen resiliency, and affect positive cultural change. The author suggests that Simon Fraser's Burnaby Mountain campus is an appropriate location to grow such a place-based education program and deepen its engagement in new, valuable ways.

Keywords: environmental crisis, sustainability, modernism, place-based education, First Nations education

Seeking to Engage: re-Placing Simon Fraser University's Burnaby Mountain Campus to Help Address Environmental Crisis

Disastrous climate change and energy shortages are near certainties in this century and global societal collapse a growing possibility that puts billions at risk.

– Rees, 2019, para. 44

Author's note: *This essay was originally written in early 2020, just as the COVID-19 pandemic was emerging as a global threat. It has been revised and includes some closing reflections on the pandemic, the largest disruptive event to K - post-secondary education, and western society, in generations.*

Throughout 2019, global environmental news consistently dominated headlines: searing droughts triggered raging wildfires, microplastics fouled vast marine ecosystems, warming temperatures melted huge ice sheets, and more. The dire reports, produced by scientific organizations like the International Panel on Climate Change, the United Nations Environment Programme, and the World Wildlife Fund, were clear in linking perilous situations and trends to human activities or 'anthropogenic' sources. And all of these problems were identified as contributing to predicted "global societal collapse" referenced in the quote above by Bill Rees, a respected academic (emeritus) and co-creator of the concept of 'environmental footprint'¹, while working at UBC in the 1990s.

As portentous as these reports were, I noted little recognition of them in the surficial activities at SFU's campus sites or the 'university life' in which I have engaged as an SFU graduate student. In fact, excepting a visit to British Columbia by Swedish climate change teen activist Greta Thunberg, which triggered campus walkouts throughout BC, any substantive news about environmental problems and the threats they pose to global health and welfare has largely been absent from university life since I began PhD studies in 2017. Walking the hallways of SFU campuses, checking out bulletin boards and websites and reading administrative email advisories, I have seen negligible evidence of any environmental issues that presage "societal collapse." Rather, I have seen much encouragement for students to get involved in campus life, register for social events, or consider bright futures in STEAM subjects where opportunities are pitched as plentiful. In other words, the predominant messaging is to maintain a *status quo* reflecting a singular agenda, as girded by messaging from official channels characterized in this style and substance: *Come to university, have a good time while you're here, graduate into a professional-oriented job.* A gap of acknowledging anything about the environmental crisis implies a conjectured message: *While here as a student, don't worry too much about bigger issues like the climate crisis or planetary ecocide, not while you're engaging in university life.*

¹ In 1996, Bill Rees, a professor in UBC's 'Environment and Resource Planning' department, published *Our Ecological Footprint* (New Society) with his-then graduate student, Mathis Wackernagel. The idea of calculating an ecological or environmental 'footprint' rested on tallying the energy and resource inputs associated with a lifestyle or aspect of lifestyle (e.g. trip, consumer choices, etc.). The concept has proved enduring.

I wish to make deeper sense of this situation, pondering whether this may be an oversight or gesture that seeks to obfuscate an uncomfortable truth. In doing so, I acknowledge that SFU, like other universities, has mounted some response to mounting environmental problems. For example, each of BC's main universities have 'Sustainability' offices and staff dedicated to pertinent issues and campus policies addressing things like recycling, transportation and energy use. These appointments, and the actions they undertake, demonstrate a willingness to show some sensitivity to emerging issues and to take some responsive action. But I can't help wonder if these are enough to substantively address looming environmental issues that potentially presage 'global society collapse.' For example, I question whether recycling stations are going to curb excessive production of single-use materials and significantly reduce waste? Will riding the bus or Skytrain to attend one of SFU's campuses help offset proliferating greenhouse gas emissions linked to university conferences in which thousands of participants fly-in and fly-out for a few days of meetings?

I pose these questions, and others, not seeking objective truth in answering them, but to help identify how these issues and actions matter in the context of a rising, global environmental crisis. And, while they may be rooted in only a small snapshot of 'university life,' I posit that my university life, as shaped by events, experiences and transmission of official knowledge, reflects a broad attitude that ignores and overlooks a responsibility that can be traced to a sense of *place*, to more substantively address the aforementioned environmental issues, about which society was warned by world leaders in the 1980s.²

The notion of *place* has etymological roots in medieval language of the 13th century, when it was used to designate a "particular part of space, extent, definite location, spot, site," and in years following, as "position or place occupied by custom, etc.; position on some social scale," "to know one's place," and "to put one in one's place."³ Thus, the notion of place is rooted in two references, one defining a location, the other, a social and administrative connotation of responsibility.

Our alienation, our dis-engagement, from environments and *places* that sustained us began thousands of years ago (ironically, where the first 'civilizations' are noted as arising), but the modern technocratic worldview — as espoused by and through contemporary education — has deeply accelerated this movement. Today, this alienation is driving thinking and behaviours that will not address root problems of our environmental crisis, but more likely increase them. To address these problems, education needs to redress the alienating characteristics it has baked into its design and processes.

In this essay I wish to show how the *place* of Simon Fraser University, and especially its Burnaby Mountain campus, intertwines both meanings of *place*, and that an integrated meaning arises as an important new and timely concept applicable to the university in the context of the environmental crisis. To clarify this argument, I will first present some general history of *the*

² 1987 marked the release of *Our Common Future*, following the Brundtland Commission. This report voiced many concerns about global environmental indicators and marked a watershed moment in raising public and academic awareness about mounting problems, and options to address them.

³ Reference: <https://www.etymonline.com/word/place>

university. Next, I will explicate some of the notions on which contemporary universities are predicated. Third, I will specifically hone in on notions of *place* specific to Simon Fraser's Burnaby campus, which offers a remarkable crucible of contrasting notions of place: at once exemplifying a thoroughly modern⁴ university at the same time it ignores and overlooks the geographical rootedness of the rich forest surrounding it and the cultural rootedness of First Nations people it has dis-placed, or mis-placed.

As a final thread I will integrate some ideas from both environmental and First Nations' perspectives on what 'place-based-education' (PBE) might offer SFU's mountaintop campus. PBE, increasingly emerging in experimental form in K-12 schooling across North America, encourages active learning in-place, beyond school buildings and classrooms. Its roots may be traced to notions of 'Forest School' that emerged in some educational sites in Scandinavia in the 1950s, promoting nature-based literacy and exposing elementary and kindergarten-age students to natural environments. Forest school programs have endured in Scandinavia and also been adopted by Canadian schools, as I will reference later.

The environmental crisis we all face is not a passing trend and many educators spanning different disciplines are responding and rising to help meet the challenges of this crisis, and hopeful signs and movements are emerging, some of which are shared in this paper. This is a time to support promising initiatives, stimulate pertinent conversations and challenge assumptions about collective beliefs, values and actions. This path is daunting, but ignoring it or leaving it for others, including future generations, is more perilous. Through this essay, I wish to contribute to stimulating dialogue and movement in suggesting an initiative by which Simon Fraser University might deepen its response to this emerging crisis.

A key to navigating this path lies in discerning patterns hanging and braiding together as *gestalten*⁵ that, according to philosopher and poet Jan Zwicky (2019), can help reveal "all understanding - not only of what logic is, but of what science is" (p. 4). In this case, it is also important to reflect on the provenance and scope of such logic and science and so deepen our understanding of *why we do what we do*. The importance of such analysis is paramount, according to the noted anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973), who asserted every culture is underlain by patterns influencing the organization and behaviours of social and psychological processes, "much as genetic systems provide such a template for the organization of organic processes" (p.216).

⁴ By modern, and modernism, both of which appear in this essay, I am referring to the philosophical and artistic underpinnings of these terms which thread back through a quest for rational knowledge (The Oxford Companion to Philosophy; 1995, p. 583) and are also considered as "a socially progressive trend of thought that affirms the power of human beings to create, improve and reshape their environment with the aid of practical experimentation, scientific knowledge, or technology" (Wikipedia, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Modernism>).

⁵ *Gestalten* (Ger) is defined as a perceptual pattern or structure possessing qualities as a whole that cannot be described merely as a sum of its parts; Collins Eng. Dictionary.

University and Place

The rise of the university as an educational institution is traced by scholars to the academies of ancient Greece in its Classical period. Hundreds of years later, and overseen by religious authorities, its presence grew in medieval European culture where facilities were established in many European countries and cities. Curricula from this time mainly focused on religious (Christian) studies but grammar, rhetoric, arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy were also taught as contributing to developing societies and cultures. Scholasticism mingled with religious ideology in these early universities until the tenets of the scientific revolution began to undermine the authority of the Monarchy and the Church, marking the beginning of the Enlightenment in the 1600s and 1700s. Universities soon became allies in the quest for, and promotion of, scientific knowledge, supported with government funding, new academies and private benefactors. This marked the beginning of the modern university, which distanced itself from religious doctrine in favour of the new, natural, physical sciences, the rules of which were defined in mathematical formulae and demonstrated in laboratory experiments. New technologies - girded by mechanical processes and discoveries like electricity - seeded the Industrial Revolution of the 1800s and established the utility of the modern university as its handmaiden. In the 1900s, industrialization spawned quests for new knowledge to learn about, and extend the projects of modernity from the sub-atomic to the macro-cosmic and, seemingly, everything in between, including the study of human society and its behaviours. Every project became linked to a university department, worldwide, and university knowledge - rooted in the epistemologies of engineering and human sciences - came to be seen as foundational to prosperous, professional life.⁶ This new sentiment helped universities of the 20th century secure their new *place* in the modern world - each one being linked to a geographic location where professors and students met to exchange knowledge, and also an imaginary locus that helped crystallize the revered character of the knowledge they imparted.

Placing Simon Fraser University, ca. 1960

In the context of a growing province and expanding need for professional knowledge, Simon Fraser University's Burnaby Mountain campus was built in the 1960s. Its design, conceptualized by Arthur Erickson, BC's renowned modernist architect, featured a self-contained, cement-steel-glass-and-asphalt colossus that displaced approximately 170 hectares (420 acres) of first and second growth coastal temperate rainforest atop Burnaby Mountain. The university's lofty perch afforded spectacular views, when visible, of the mountains of the north shore, the waters of Burrard Inlet, the Fraser Valley, and a western glimpse of the Salish Sea beyond West Vancouver and Stanley Park.

First Nations authorities confirm the region, and the mountain, were traversed and occupied for thousands of years before colonization by at least four tribes of the Salish Coastal Peoples: the Səl̓ílwətał (Tsleil-Waututh), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), the xʷməθkwəy̓əm

⁶ Reference: Wikipedia: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University>

(Musqueam) and the *kʷikwə́ləm* (Kwkwetlem) Nations. In 'Indigenous History in Burnaby: A Resource Guide' published by the City of Burnaby (2019) and distributed throughout the local school district, the authors report that indigenous inhabitants of the region developed knowledge hundreds of years ago to sustain communities year round, utilizing as many as 145 different species of plants for food, medicine and technology.

In a recent profile of Indigenous habitation of the region, SFU's *The Peak* newspaper described the four nations sharing resources acquired through hunting and gathering, and that nearby waters were sites of fishing and shellfish gathering (Puzon, 2017). The article further reports that when the university was being built in 1965, Burnaby Mountain was not part of any First Nations reserves, although people from many nations lived on reserves nearby. In the same article, William Lindsay, director of the Office for Aboriginal Peoples at SFU, says local First Nations, “weren’t asked for their input on building the university. The First Peoples had no say, really, on what was happening on the mountain at that particular time” (Puzon, 2017, para. 12).

Likewise, the knowledge of the Coast Salish peoples who inhabited the region of Burnaby Mountain prior to colonial expropriation and the building of the university, is rooted in generations of accumulated wisdom about living sustainably *in-situ*, or *in-place*. First Nations perspectives are increasingly being integrated into university life, especially as part of reconciliation efforts adopted by the university, but it remains a work-in-progress. In 2017, SFU's Convocation Mall (Burnaby campus) was the site of a *Kwis Ns7eyx*, or witnessing ceremony led by elders of the Coast Salish First Nations. This event was organized to make public SFU's promise to honour the Aboriginal Reconciliation Council, or ARC's, *Walk this Path With Us* report public, and keep the university accountable to 33 actions it had committed to, including acknowledging that SFU stands on unceded territories through art and signage, investing in safe and culturally appropriate spaces as well as ceremonial spaces, and providing funds for teachers who seek to indigenize their courses (Pabico, 2018).

Placing SFU, Today

*I respectfully acknowledge that we are on the traditional, unceded territories of the *xʷməθkʷəy̓əm* (Musqueam), *Sḵwəxwú7mesh* (Squamish), *Sel̓íl̓wítulh* (Tsleil-Waututh), and *Kwkwetlem* (*kʷikwə́ləm*) Nations.*

– common SFU acknowledgement in gesture of reconciliation

Our vision? To be Canada's leading engaged university.

– aspiration posted on SFU website⁷

Students attending Simon Fraser University today, or in recent years, will have encountered a version of the acknowledgement in the first quote above, and likely many times. Shaped by SFU administration, it has near-universal presence in all university greetings and on

⁷ <https://www.sfu.ca/about.html>

all forms of university correspondence. Its purpose is to set a context of recognition and movement, to move beyond its colonial roots.

For a university defined by a history bound to modernist strictures, the gesture of reconciliation is important, and implies an aspiration of engagement. Engagement is also the stated intention of the second quote, and so pertinent to reflecting on the inter-relationality between the university's engagement and its *placement* on Burnaby Mountain. To state the obvious, there is practically no engagement with its surrounding environment. The university complex is encapsulated by various ring roads and sidewalks that act as *de facto* barriers from encountering or engaging with the surrounding forest. Included within what is designated as the university are classrooms, parking lots, laboratories, stores, offices, etc., all comprised of cement, asphalt, glass, steel and laminate. Within, there are 'green spaces' and fountains, hedges and gardens, all pleasing architectural 'accents' maintained by sweeping and snipping groundskeepers. It's everything and more one might encounter on a modern university, and similar to any modern edifice you might find in a city or suburb.

And modernism sometimes comes with a price. In this case, a huge and costly renovation to the university's flat-roofed, Burnaby Mountain campus infrastructure - deemed award-winning when it was unveiled in 1968 - following the discovery that much of the campus has deteriorated in the temperate, rainy climate of the Pacific northwest (DH Vancouver Staff, 2017).

This disconnect between the university's design and the known climate bespeaks an attitude rooted in a modernist drive to control nature or manipulate it to its own ends. Sometimes, as in the case of constructing housing developments, even nuclear power facilities, in known flood or fire zones, results have been catastrophic.

But SFU's main campus isn't a housing development or nuclear power plant; its main purpose is educative, and around twenty thousand students attend classes there each year. Each student's experience of the university reflects the artifacts and sensibilities of its design; if something has been set aside or ignored in this, then, logically, there's little opportunity for engagement. Therein lies the crux of a loss that calls out for recognition and redress.

Educator and author Gregory Smith, writing in *Education and the Environment* (1992), describes modern schooling as accomplice to an alienating force not only from the natural world, but also our historic roots: "The modern industrial worldview," he writes, "has led to our detachment from a sense of participatory relatedness to the natural environment, from our own concrete experience of that environment, and from the collective wisdom about how to interact with that environment we inherited from our ancestors" (p. 32).

Smith further asserts how abstracted knowledge transmitted through modern schooling teaches, by inference, "real learning happens inside school buildings and is composed of something other than (students') own natural observations." Smith also warns that through emphasizing detached, abstracted knowledge, modern schooling aligns itself with a delusional underpinning of technocracy, through which "people conflate intellectual detachment with the possibility of actually liberating ourselves from our fundamental embeddedness in the physical matrix of our own existence" (p. 32).

Environmental activist Bill McKibben describes this alienation a little differently. Writing in *The Age of Missing Information* (1992), McKibben says,

We believe that we live in the “age of information,” that there has been an information “explosion,” an information “revolution.” We also live at a moment of deep ignorance, when vital knowledge that humans have always possessed about who we are and where we live seems beyond our reach. An Unenlightenment. An age of missing information.... Human beings—any one of us, and our species as a whole—are not all-important, not at the center of the world. That is the one essential piece of information, the one great secret, offered by any encounter with the woods or the mountains or the ocean or any wilderness or chunk of nature or patch of night sky. (p. 9)



Figure 1. Sky-Roads – Photo depicting the imposition of a modernist, technocratic mindset upon an environment, characteristic of a manner of being that is minimally engaged with existing, natural features, if at all. Simon Fraser’s Burnaby Mountain campus demonstrates a similar imposition. (images source: author)

Place-Based Education

More recently, Smith has become an advocate of 'place-based education' (PBE), which comprises deliberate educative gestures designed to promote learning anchored in the knowledge of the local, the neighbourhood, the immediate bio-region. Such learning, Smith (2012) says, can foster community and environmental renewal and enhance "wise stewardship and protection of natural resources and areas" (p. 213). Teachers of PBE, Smith continues, leverage learning opportunities by engaging with natural phenomena arising outside the classroom door. In this way, he says, "community and place become additional 'texts' for student learning." (p. 213).

With the help of Smith and many other educators, PBE has grown into a rising force in K-12 schools, worldwide, promoting content learning, extended field trips and immersion

projects. In British Columbia, several school districts offer full-time enrollment in elementary 'Nature' or 'Forest School' programs in which learning takes place, rain, shine or snow, outside the school walls in local fields, forests, ravines and beaches. One national organization advocating such programming, Child & Nature Alliance of Canada, counts dozens of formal and informal place-based learning programs linked to schools, parks and other initiatives across the country. A guidebook produced by the Alliance, *Forest and Nature Schools in Canada* (2014), lists physical and mental health improvements as benefits of attending a nature-based program, as well as learning new skills and knowledge about natural environments. The Alliance also says it encourages its educators to incorporate ecological and stewardship knowledge from indigenous peoples wherever possible.

SFU's Faculty of Education, in coordination with First Nations educators, assists in the training of educators wishing to develop professional skills in environmental education, including 'nature school' programming. This training is available to school districts requesting it on behalf of educators, through district-based and online offerings, and it is also available through summer residency programming in provincial locations such as Haida Gwaii.

In my perambulating SFU's Burnaby Mountain campus in recent years — both the built environment and surrounding trails— I have never encountered any evidence the natural environment is or has been engaged as a learning environment, or 'forest classroom.' Neither have I seen or received any notice promoting a learning activity extending into the surrounding forest. This is a regrettable oversight. If elementary and secondary schools value 'nature schools' and other kinds of immersive environmental learning, those same values are worthy of adoption at a post-secondary level, and they are needed more than ever. SFU's mountaintop forest, moreover, affords an opportunity to gain valuable ecological and cultural knowledge as surely as any interior classroom environment.

SFU's Burnaby Campus and Sense of *Place*

In his recent book, *Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topography*, author Jeff Malpas (2018) says, place is "that within and out of which experience arises. Any experience of the world, along with the appearing of things within the world, will thus always be from within the embrace of place" (p 202). Later, he writes,

place appears as the first and most primordial form of liminality, the latter term deriving from the Latin for threshold, *limen*, and connecting with the Latin *limitem* or *limes*, meaning limit our bound; and place appears as essentially adventual, as in 'arrival', 'event', 'happening', or, more literally, a 'coming to'. To be in place is therefore to be *at the threshold of the world* and to be taken up *in the happening of world*. (p. 209)

Malpas' phenomenological expression of place can be extended to the *experience of being* at SFU's mountaintop campus. Here, the "happening of world" is defined by what is experienced in this place; physically, the experience is shaped by the materials each person sees, feels, hears and touches. Given some experience of human voice and touch, almost all of these are synthetic, built, mass-produced. The liminality or boundedness is, quite literally, defined by the ring roads

and sidewalks that separate the university from the surrounding, nearly-impenetrable forest; any threshold to step beyond, into the forest, is not easily discernible. On circumnavigating the ring roads, I have discovered a couple of portals onto gravel trails leading into the forest which is designated as conservation land, but signage depicts the forested areas as barren, even “dangerous”. Thus, any opportunity to engage or "embrace" this place is largely imaginary.

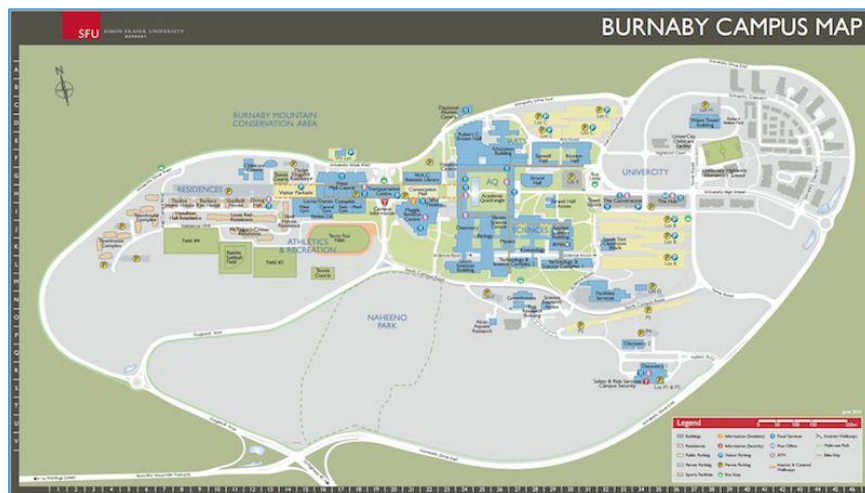


Figure 2. SFU Burnaby Campus Map – SFU’s Burnaby Mountain campus is surrounded by a lush forest in which First Nations traveled and lived for thousands of years. However, campus maps detail the sterile, built environment while excluding any evocation of the forest’s vitality and history. One map that is posted around campus identifies the forested area as “dangerous.” (image source: Simon Fraser University)

Two years ago, while attending the mountaintop campus, I started 'crossing the threshold' and dipping into the forest beyond the ring roads. Mainly, I moved freely through the bush, gently walking 'off-trail'. I encountered a little bit of garbage and one abandoned site where someone had been camping out but otherwise I experienced what the forest offered: towering hemlock, spruce and cedar trees, blackened tree carapaces from historical fires, a shintangle of intergrowing salal, salmonberry and swordtail ferns, and alder trees, mainly decaying and yielding to a new succession of conifers. The air is soft, fragrant and filled with birdsong, especially in spring. On the ground, in any square meter, are vast swatches of microfauna: lichens and fungi, and any handful of soil yields white threads of mycelia, the forest's 'biochemical internet' that help circulate nutrients among trees and plants. Centipedes, spiders and slugs abound.

Having lived and worked in 'the bush' earlier in my life I am very comfortable in this environment, and comforted by knowing that whether I step two or two hundred meters into this forest, I easily discover what local First Nations refer to as “Earth's Blanket”, the vital, terrestrial covering that constitutes, for them, the basis of life on earth. Ethnographer Nancy J. Turner (2008), writing in her book, *The Earth's Blanket: Traditional teachings for sustainable living*, says the concept comes from the depths of being of the Salish people of the southwest interior of

BC, a "deeply held belief in the integrity of their world and from the insightful understanding of the fragile and reciprocal relationship humans have with their environments" (p. 19). Helping protect the Earth's Blanket, Turner writes, was considered by First Nations as a sacred duty sustained over multiple generations.

Turner says the concept of the Earth's Blanket is similar to theories of interdependency rooted in the ecological sciences. And she asserts it is in direct contrast to an attitude of exploitation promoted by settlers and colonizing governments that have marginalized BC First Nations communities and cultures (p. 21). This attitude has driven a rush to log forests, create mines and dams, establish towns and cities, and build modern universities.

Conclusion: re-Placing SFU's Burnaby Mountain Campus

The difference in attitudes about engaging or embracing the environment, as exemplified by First Nations and ecological sciences, or ignoring and exploiting earth's resources, as exemplified in many modernist practices, demarcates a boundary, a *limitem*, as tangible as the boundary between SFU's mountaintop ring roads and the forest 'beyond,'

This boundary, I posit, is human-made and therefore changeable. And at this time, when global societies are predicted to be on a collision course with cascading environmental problems arising because of exploitation, excessive waste production and consumption of resources, and other human-related causes—it is essential that we change course to have any potential of averting disaster.

Education offers a key to this change, a point highlighted in a 2019 report by the International Panel on Climate Change. Focused on predicted vast effects of a further-warming climate, the authors of this *Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate*, are nonetheless clear in recommendations to build awareness and resiliency and help mitigate disaster:

Investments in education and capacity building at various levels and scales facilitates social learning and long-term capability for context-specific responses to reduce risk and enhance resilience (*high confidence*). Specific activities include utilization of multiple knowledge systems and regional climate information into decision making, and the engagement of local communities, Indigenous peoples, and relevant stakeholders in adaptive governance arrangements and planning frameworks (*medium confidence*). Promotion of climate literacy and drawing on local, Indigenous and scientific knowledge systems enables public awareness, understanding and social learning about locality-specific risk and response potential (*high confidence*)". (International Panel on Climate Change, 2019, p. 42).

SFU presents itself as one of Canada's foremost institutes of higher learning, striving to be "Canada's leading engaged university" and "an institutional leader in building a sustainable society." It offers many remarkable learning experiences for students and it has shown much leadership through its progressive policies. But these policies stop short of helping its students more deeply engage with *learning-in-place* beyond the university edifice.

As this essay detailed in its introduction, the emerging environmental crisis portends looming disasters, worldwide. Post-secondary institutions have important roles to play in disseminating knowledge about this and responding pro-actively to address the issues meaningfully. This extends to SFU which can do more and especially with respect to its self-promoted aspiration of "engagement." To this end, it must re-assess and re-*place* its physical and imaginary constraints of *place*, and especially its Burnaby mountaintop campus. A suggestion is for the Burnaby Mountain campus to re-conceptualize and enable its own, hands-on, *in-situ* place-based education program in which it deeply engages its surrounding forest environment – a magnificent natural classroom if ever there was one – and invites First Nations educators to lead in-place, *in-situ*, learning programs, sharing their knowledge about how to live, sustainably, in this place. This learning isn't found atop the asphalt or along the cement plazas and synthetic corridors of the built university but it is found in the living earth and the spirit and attitude held in the First Nations concept of "Earth's Blanket". I urge SFU leadership to activate this kind of learning, which will serve to deepen the university's aspiration of engagement.

Engaging meaningfully in and with SFU's natural environment on Burnaby mountain as a *learnscape* will expand notions of place for all who partake. Stepping beyond the edge of the sidewalk, you will encounter new knowledge, and patterns and *gestalten* will be revealed offering critical knowledge about the natural world and how First Nations lived in relation to it and sustained themselves for thousands of years. This world beyond the ring roads and sidewalks holds such knowledge and it surely offers keys to our survival as well. *This place* — waiting for us to get as curious about it as we are about engineering science, macroeconomics, linguistics and a thousand other subjects holding our fascination — will expand our notions of who we are and, especially, what we value, going forward in an uncertain future. Let's take that step.



Figure 3. Where the sidewalk ends – The author, stepping beyond the sidewalk into the forest surrounding SFU's Burnaby Mountaintop campus. This 'living classroom' — home to myriad forms of life and living processes — holds vital knowledge that is not learnable in a synthetic classroom. *Are you ready to engage?* (image source: author)

More Pictures

SFU Burnaby Mountain Forest – all photos taken by author



Figure 4. A burned-out Douglas Fir tree still stores large amounts of carbon, and will provide nutrients for many future plants and other organisms.



Figure 5. Colonies of mushrooms help to decompose leaves and trees and branches; some you can even eat!



Figure 6. 2nd or 3rd growth alder trees sharing the ground with sword ferns; these will yield to conifers in 20-30 years

***Author's closing note:** The pandemic of 2020, wrought by COVID-19, has forced human societies, worldwide, to adjust to many new realities. Obviously, we are changed and continue to change, because of it. The climate crisis and all other looming environmental issues, say many experts, pose equally if not larger risks. Reconceptualizing a sense of place, as I posit in this essay, is a way to awaken to new ways of being that may well help ensure our health during the time of this pandemic and beyond.*

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