



Newsletter

FEBRUARY 2003

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We have conveyed the members' message to the Board Chair and College President:

SPEAK OUT!!

GO PUBLIC!!

To the Minister of Advanced Education, Shirley Bond:

WE DEMAND EQUITY!!

Treat us as badly as you have others in the system but not **worse!**

Publicity and Action Committee

Since the new round of cuts were announced last month, the PAC has been very busy.

To give you an idea of what we have been doing since the last newsletter came out 3 weeks ago...

Letter Writing

As well as supporting a letter writing kit for those students who wish to write their MLAs we have done our own letter writing,(samples on pages 6 and 7) to

- ♣ Liberal MLAs
- ♣ Ministry Officials
- ♣ Former VCC Board members
- ♣ Shirley Bond, Minister of Advanced Education
- ♣ Premier Campbell
- ♣ Vancouver City Councillors
- ♣ Members of the BC Cabinet
- ♣ Gordon Barefoot, VCC Board Chair
- ♣ Dale Dorn, VCC President
- ♣ NDP MLAs

These letters generally provide information on what is happening at VCC and call upon the recipient, depending on their role, to take some action, to offer ideas, or to reconsider what they have planned.

We are following up letters with personal calls and hope that we will be able to set up meetings in the near future.

Media

Since January 28th we have received a fair amount of media. Lizz has been on numerous newscasts on many radio stations. There have been follow up TV news interviews and last Thursday, the 30th, Lizz, Christa Peters of the student associations and VCC VP Moira Henderson were the lead item on the Bill Good talk show on CKNW. We have had shorter printed media coverage, including some in Chinese language media. Students and Lizz will appear on the "Redeye," a co-op radio talk show 102.7 fm, Saturday, February 8th after 9 am. Chian Li Hsu has appeared on both Fairchild TV and radio where he debated Burnaby North MLA, Richard Lee.

College Board and College Administration

We have supported the members' resolutions through the "**Speak Out! Go Public!**" postcard campaign. The Board was greeted with the sight of hundreds of cards taped all over the walls of Room 240, with black balloons and other cards in front of them at their seats. While Lizz was speaking the hundreds remaining were put on the Board table. We await their response. It is clear that they have our message. Lizz has followed up with personal messages but we do not as yet have a clear response.

City Council

In what is a new level of advocacy for us we are attempting to set up meetings with City Counsellors. We feel that the cuts at VCC will have a negative impact on City

residents and that there are many cross points between the interests of our students and those of our city government.

CIEA and other Unions

We are extremely pleased to announce a generous gift from fellow CIEA local, the **Langara Faculty Association**, of **\$5000** to help with the expenses of our campaign. **Larry Warren, President of the LFA** will be at our next General Meeting. CIEA officers and staff are advising and helping us at any time we ask and are especially helpful with advice re the provincial level of our activities.

We are following up advice and suggestions from the BC Federation of Labour and the Vancouver and District Labour Council.

We are also holding meetings with officers of the two Vancouver unions for elementary and secondary teachers which may lead to some common activity around the theme of *"K to College, anywhere you need it, the Liberals take it away"*.

Community Groups

This is one area where threatened programs that have a well-developed Program Advisory Committee have an advantage. They have a ready source of community contacts and connections that can support them in advocacy work. Unfortunately the college has not done a good job in establishing these contacts and networks in areas of ESL and ABE. We are struggling to connect to interested parties. We have some leads which we are following. We could use some help though. If you have some ideas and names of people we could call on, please forward them to the VCCFA office.

Affected Programs and Departments

We are also working to offer support and advice to those members who in addition to dealing with their own personal situations in the face of layoff notice are called upon to fight for their students' access at such events as the Board forum on February 19th.

Our Student Associations

Throughout all of these efforts it is a great energizer to be able to work with the dynamic student activists of both the City Centre and KEC student associations.

There's more....

But that's enough for one newsletter: stay tuned....share your ideas.....call the office.....email.....leave messages.

Eight Factors contributing to the Mess at VCC

Why is no other large urban college facing such a level of cuts?

- 1) Overextension in the years leading up to 2001.**
- 2) Non funding of increased costs**
- 3) Projected decreases in funding in 03-04 and 04-05**
- 4) Less Flexible Instructional Delivery Options**
- 5) Block Funding**
- 6) VCC's Administrative Strategic Plan**
- 7) VCC's "get it over with" Approach**
- 8) The Nature of our Students?**

1) Overextension in the years leading up to 2001.

As you may remember, VCC prided itself on producing more than its base-funded level of instruction. In 2001-02 it reached something like 106%, every penny was being poured into education. However, overproduction became overextension because no reward came. VCC was left with no cushion when funding was tightened. That is why big cuts were made in 2002-03. Ironically, at its current level, VCC has been doing all right for 02-03, balancing this year's budget and meeting its FTE targets.

2) Non funding of increased costs

Approved increases were not funded for the college system. The roll-over for 02-03 took no account of higher salaries nor any inflationary pressures.

3) Projected decreases in funding in 03-04 and 04-05

In March 2002 and for the first time, the Ministry of Advanced Education gave all colleges projected funding numbers and FTE targets for 3 fiscal years, up to 04-05.

These projections showed actual funding decreases for most Lower Mainland colleges (but increases for BCIT and Kwantlen). However, VCC's projected decrease is actually proportionally greater than for any other college (so much for any reward for FTE over-production). By 2004-05, VCC's base grant is projected at almost 4% less than it was in 2001-02.

4) Less Flexible Instructional Delivery Options

Despite our Minister's comment that "every college is unique," there is a credible case for saying that VCC has more unique factors in its program mix than other Lower Mainland colleges. At VCC most of our programs are applied vocational, career-technical and developmental; all of which are intensive, small-class based without a high degree of flexibility in delivery method. There are few options for increasing class-size beyond the current sizes. Many average university-transfer classes, especially in the Lower Mainland, are 50-60% larger than VCC classes. In the current "user-pay" funding regime that means a huge disadvantage for VCC in turning to student fees to help fund the college even though our increases are as bad or worse than other colleges.

5) Block Funding

You may remember the college's Program Profile which listed each program and how many FTE the government was specifically funding for it and all the adjustments that were made to FTE so that more expensive programs were treated equitably.

With the 2002-03 funding letter that line-by-line funding approach was largely abandoned. This meant that the college received almost the same grant in 02-03 as it had in 01-02 but without the "strings" attached. It was free to fund some programs and not others. Given all the factors involved, this overly-simplistic approach will drive all colleges to the simplest, cheapest forms of education that can attract the most student tuition dollars. It is driving VCC away from what it has done so well for so many years.

6) VCC's Administrative Strategic Plan

A new Strategic Plan had been in the works for a few years but the funding crisis in 2002 caused senior Administration to fast track it at the same time as all the layoffs and budget considerations were proceeding, essentially a May to September exercise. In the VCCFA's view, there was inadequate consultation or community input, both internal and external. That is why we call it an "administrative" plan.

The plan allows the administration a quasi rationale for how they cut. They have severely cut back ESL and ABE in the name of an undefined concept of "balance," and because the tuition-free status of ABE was not compensated for by the government. They have targeted small programs and services, and eliminated larger programs that did not fit their idea of the College's future.

In almost every case current student demand was adequate. So perfectly viable programs are being cannibalized so that funding can be moved to areas the administration has favoured in its plan.

7) VCC's "get it over with" Approach

We understand that the Board has taken the Ministry's three-year funding projection and has essentially projected what it would take to run 04-05 at a near balanced position and decided to make all the cuts necessary to achieve that before the summer of 2003. We are therefore getting two years' worth of cuts in one year. This is despite the Minister's announcement that she'll "update" her 2003-04 letter, hinting it might not contain the same projections, and despite the notice in last year's letter that the government was actually going to act upon FTE production and perhaps move funding around depending upon performance.

We are asking if this risky strategy is to force the government to act or simply because they are tired of dealing with cuts. It would seem prudent to wait to see what the funding letter will contain.

8) The Nature of our Students?

Raising this issue is necessarily more speculative but many of our members are firm in the belief that it is a real factor. They ask, "Which part of the whole post-secondary system is suffering the worst hit in the past two years?" The answer is programs at VCC which serve immigrants and those which serve citizens who are not in Career or Academic streams. They feel media, administrative and political responses would have been far different if more "mainstream" programs had been threatened.

Yours truly, Lizz Lindsay

Excerpts from some VCCFA Letters.....

*** to Ministry Officials:**

.....the three-year funding projections are inequitable.....VCC's funding is projected to decrease proportionally more than other Lower Mainland colleges.....You know more than most members of the public that VCC programs help a crucial set of citizens and immigrants.....they are the heads of families who have well-honed life skills or they are already graduates of university or professional programs.....We believe "Goal #1" of the government, "to provide students with an accessible, affordable, high quality and relevant post-secondary education," has to apply to all students or potential students, including those who need to come to VCC...No other college has taken on the programs VCC did, as VCC tries to become more like them there is nothing to ensure that any other college will take up this programming.....We know you can't speak publicly on these matters but in whatever Ministerial deliberations you may have, we urge you to represent the lost opportunities these cuts will cause....

*** to the College Board Chair, Board members and President**

.....first of all, we want you to know that we do not hold the Board and Administration primarily responsible for the College's current situation. That responsibility must lie with the government
....We also know that the administration's Strategic Plan was in part a response to the government's new funding regime. While there are many parts of the Strategic Plan that deservedly enjoy wide support, it is unfortunately a flawed document in that has served to divide VCC rather than unite it. That was partially due to the lack of a truly consultative process
....You will find us criticizing your actions in concentrating so many cuts into one year. We do not know if this was a conscious strategy on your part to create such a fuss that the government would be forced to act or if it was simply a desire to avoid another round of cuts for 04-05. In any case it is a strategy of great risk. Once programs and people are lost they usually stay lost.
...Of more immediate concern though is your silence. Our members are disheartened at what seems to be "resigned compliance" on your part. They hear your reports or conjectures on the government's approach but they do not hear your voice being constructively critical of that approach. Expressing regret in what you are forced to do is no longer enough.....
Our members ask, "Where does the President and Board stand?" They have heard that Administration and the Board value these programs and don't want to make these cuts, so they now expect you to speak out and go public.
.....After consulting with and receiving direction from our members, we formally and publicly call upon you to take action and to speak out about the government's funding approach not working for VCC. It is time to make your concerns fully public, and to put them in writing. Please call upon the government to find ways to support these valuable programs. We believe that as trustees of this college Board members owe that duty to the community of the college.
....Our members have instructed us to convey this message and to say that they will be awaiting your response.....

✦ **to Former VCC Board Members...**

[After outlining the problem and our responses....]....

.....So, we would like to invite you to join our campaign in some way. You of course know best what you might be able to do. We believe your status as a former Board member would give your contributions some weight. Any contribution would be appreciated, and we do not mean money.....

✦ **to Vancouver Area Liberal MLAs (many of whom we've visited...)**

We have had the pleasure of meeting with many members of the Liberal caucus in the last few months....If these cuts go through, VCC and the post-secondary system in BC will be radically changed. Students will lose opportunities. The system will lose balance....Society will lose a path for citizens and immigrants to improve their skills...Please ask that ways be found to ensure that programs that are in high demand and which are not embraced elsewhere in the post-secondary system are not cut....

✦ **to Vancouver City Councillors**

We have another huge problem, which is why we are writing you in your role as a City Councillors. Governance in the College system is.....not accountable. The majority of Board members are appointed by the government and while the previous government attempted to distribute its appointments amongst representatives of as many political and community views as possible, the current government's appointees seem to speak with one voice. Or more precisely, they do not speak at all. Just at the time when we need the strongest possible advocacy for our students and the programs which have served them and the city well, our Board refuses to speak out.

✦ **to Shirley Bond Minister of Advanced Education**

We have some proposals we wish to discuss directly with you and your assistants. They involve a different designation for Vancouver Community College and dedicated funding for its key programming areas. We will be following this letter with calls to your office seeking to set up a meeting and we can meet at your convenience either in Victoria or Vancouver.....

Until such time as a more sustainable solution is found for VCC we ask that you use your good offices to request that the VCC Board delay its consideration of a 2003-04 budget until such time as they receive the funding letter from your office. To pass the budget at the end of March as they are currently planning may not allow for a full discussion of alternatives.

✦ **to Premier Campbell and members of Cabinet**

We are writing on a matter of some urgency....The New Era for Advanced Education document quotes you as saying, "Education is our top priority, because it is the key to any healthy, prosperous society."

We agree. We believe that that promise has to include every British Columbian.

Unfortunately, at Vancouver Community College the funding approach of the Ministry of Advanced Education is having what only could have been unintended results. Primarily because of the funding approach, thousands of VCC students will be denied access in 2003-04.....

The combination of block funding, reduced funding, VCC's program mix, classes that

need to be smaller, and we believe, an unfair allocation of funding resources (see attached), has led to a situation where in order to get close to balancing their budget in 2004-05 VCC's Board believes they have to cut drastically in 2003-04.

As you may be aware, some 1000 student FTE's are slated for removal from VCC's 2003-04 profile.....Their loss of access is everyone's loss. Their skills and talents will remain underutilized....We are asking you and your cabinet colleagues to give some attention to the one major urban post-secondary institution which seems to be having great difficulty. We ask that this anomalous situation be reviewed in order to affect a better result for these students and potential students. We would be more than willing to be part of that review and would welcome the chance to share some ideas.

While we acknowledge that we have what could be called a "special interest," we also have a wider common interest. It is a common interest which we share with you, we all want a sustainable, quality, affordable post-secondary education system.

We thank you for your attention and look forward to your response.