

Letter to the editor
Georgia Straight
April 26, 2005

Re: Sucking It Up for School

I appreciate the *Straight's* continuing thorough coverage of the user-pay approach to post-secondary education ["Sucking it up for school", April 21-28]. I would like to add some details through the lens of Vancouver Community College.

It's useful to compare the Liberals' approach to 2001-02, the last year of NDP-style funding, which, ironically, was under the Liberal watch.

Then, VCC's total budget was \$76.5 million; 8.2 percent (\$6.27m) was from student tuition for government-supported programs. For the 2005-06 budget of \$83.1 million, 18.3 percent (\$15.3 m) is slated to come from student tuition in the same group of programs - more than double in dollar terms.

What's the government done? It's true they've increased funding, but at about one-third the rate students have. In 2001-02 government grants totaled \$47.15m. In 2005-06 they are listed as \$54.02 m. If we adjust for inflation at 2% for each the four years involved, they're only at \$3m above the last year of NDP funding, while students are contributing \$8.5m a year more after the same inflation adjustment.

The other sad point your article makes is that fewer students are attending. Funded training is not filling up. But VCC is making more money than it ever has. It was restructured in 2002 by the appointed College Board and senior administration to make VCC more like other colleges. It took advantage of funding changes to cut far more deeply than might have been necessary, and to create structural surpluses. In 2003-04 the surplus came in at close to \$7million. Aren't community colleges supposed to be non-profit? As the figures show, those surpluses are largely accounted for by student tuition. VCC is now planning to allocate those surpluses to capital and operating accounts, so in effect tuition fees have become tuition taxes.

That's no way to run a community college.

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