



December 15, 2006

Special Advisor Geoff Plant  
Campus 2020  
PO Box 9133  
Stn Prov Govt  
Victoria BC  
V8W 9B5

Dear Mr. Plant,

Please find attached our submission to the Campus 2020 project.

The views herein have been vetted by faculty and are, we believe, an appropriate summary of the views of our members. The Executive of the VCCFA is responsible to its members for these views.

We are also members of the Federation of Post-Secondary Educators of British Columbia and have been involved in formulating its submission. We, therefore, will not be repeating points which have been well made there.

While the Vancouver Community College's own submission, under the names of the Board Chair and President, was not written in collaboration with faculty, it does include points which we support and there are references to them in our submission.

Frank Cosco  
President

**Vancouver Community College Faculty Association  
Submission to Campus 2020  
December, 2006**

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***1 Faculty and their Associations***

At 55, we are the oldest post-secondary faculty union in BC. We welcome this opportunity to have input into this unique report. Our 600 members have wonderful, fulfilling careers in post-secondary education at Vancouver Community College and desire only the best for the programs they have created and for all their students in those programs. Furthermore, they desire the best for their potential students who for whatever reason are not yet able to participate.

This is our first point. Programs for students at VCC and at every college, institute, or university-college are almost completely conceived, created, presented and evaluated by faculty.

As students experience it, the past, present, and future of post-secondary education has been, is, and will primarily be the responsibility of faculty.

Lately, the views of faculty and their democratically-selected representatives have been neglected. We hope the unique opportunity of Campus 2020 can help bring about structural change in how government relates to faculty and their representatives.

***2 Vancouver Community College***

We are certain that you and your staff know the post-secondary system well and that other presenters have highlighted the unique features of VCC. One small point arises from looking at the timeline Campus 2020 provides on its information brochure. There's no indication of the early beginnings of vocational schools for adults in BC. For VCC, the 1925 Vancouver School of Applied and Decorative Arts is noted and became part of VCC; however, there's no notation of the Vancouver Vocational Institute which opened in 1949 and is now an integral part of VCC. We point this out to re-emphasize the importance of applied learning.

### ***3 The VCCFA is a union***

As a union we must emphasize that The Public Education Flexibility and Choice Act of 2002 remains an unwarranted violation and intrusion upon freely negotiated provisions of our collective agreement. Its targeting of class size, distributed learning assignments, term lengths, professional development and vacation time, and the assignment of non-faculty members goes to the heart of ongoing professional issues which should remain the purview of joint collective agreements. The Government already has many ways to influence collective bargaining. The Act remains a block to the building of trust and co-operation between faculty unions and government. It serves no useful purpose.

### ***4 Examine the Past***

The Campus 2020 focus paper has a section of questions under the heading Understanding the Future. Before looking forward, where we can't see too clearly, it is important to examine the past.

*The 2001 Three-Year Service Plan included the following initiatives ...*

- *increasing institutional autonomy*
- *deregulating tuition fees*
- *providing block funding*
- *expanding authority to offer degree programs*
- *strengthening accountability processes*
- *developing new mechanisms for the delivery of industry training and apprenticeships*
- *clarifying the relationship between public and private PSE providers*

The above summarizes some of the changes enacted in 2001. The changes to the post-secondary system were enormous and need time to be reflected upon. We should be quite cautious not to just assume that these initiatives have worked. We should not continue in these directions, let alone include new initiatives, without some thorough review. Five years later, that comprehensive reflection has still not yet happened. Such reflection needs to include all constituencies and issues. There's no appropriate agency to conduct such ongoing comprehensive review. Perhaps there's no will.

### ***5 Institutional Autonomy and Accountability***

One point on the above list, increasing institutional autonomy, has to be examined. Who is the "institution?" Is it the somewhat arbitrarily appointed College Board? Is it the President? Who hears the voice of the local community the institution is serving? Perhaps local communities do not want more institutional autonomy if it is to be arbitrary autonomy. What is the appropriate place of the government and ministries who, on behalf of us all, supply the majority of funds? How effectively are the voices of students and potential students heard?

In our view, checks and balances on local autonomy need to be in place so that institutional futures are not solely under the control of whoever is in the boards' over-used in-camera sessions. It is relatively easy to allow for more autonomy, but how will an equal measure of accountability be ensured?

### ***6 Subsidiarity or Abdication?***

The government has said that subsidiarity was one of its guiding principles. Subsidiarity amounts to abdication if authority is not devolved to appropriate and accountable agencies. Currently, the college and institute boards are neither appropriate enough in terms of truly representing the public, nor accountable enough.

Furthermore, as long as boards remain appointed and resourced as they are, then administrations will wield inordinate influence over their decisions. Block funding allows them to take their influence to levels not seen before in the system. If the ministry does not maintain its levers of influence and control through funding mechanisms, then another level of checks and balances will have been lost.

Society will have lost much of its influence over a hugely important mechanism for ensuring the best possible development of its citizens and immigrants.

### ***7 Competition is not always better***

In any human endeavour there will be a measure of competition. We put limits on competition on areas of life which we feel are too important to be left to win-lose dichotomies because the consequences of failure will not just hurt the individual concerned but be too damaging for the well-being of our society as a whole. Every child gets high quality K-12 education, every one gets access to health care. It should be the same with post-secondary education. Lately, for the first time in BC, we see institutions devoting large sums of money to ad campaigns, lobbying efforts for degree programs or university status, and to essentially begging for charitable funds. Is this competition necessary or useful? We think not.

There will always be some competition, and to a degree it is energizing; however, the anarchic situation that currently prevails in BC's post-secondary system is leading to wasteful duplication, confusion regarding mandates, and real victims as necessary programming and courses are dropped for some "flavour of the month."

### ***8 It's a human right***

Under the Campus 2020 heading of Creating Opportunity, we support a point made on page 3 of VCC's submission. Tertiary or post-secondary education must be a human right. Think of what would flow from having that assertion given some legal or constitutional weight. So many points of discussion and current blockages to opportunity would melt away in the face of such a right.

Furthermore, it would remove obstacles to those adults who are not yet completely ready for tertiary or higher education: immigrants and their families who need further English language acquisition; people with disabilities; and our citizens who need literacy training, or completion and/or upgrading of their secondary education status in order to become fully functioning in this highly literate society.

With such a right, there would be no more penalties for adult basic education students who had the nerve to go back to school while on social assistance. No more overly high tuition for ESL students after the completion of their basic levels.

On the later point, how unfair and one might argue, unethical, is it to have people uproot their lives to come to Canada and then demand levels of English competency before they can access further training or work but then charge them at the same rate as other students who already have their English competency? As is done in other provinces, the amount of time immigrants need to upgrade their English should be realistically acknowledged and their training in colleges supported as long as they are progressing.

### ***9 Public institutions as the primary providers***

We also assert that the public post-secondary system has to be the primary locus for the exercise of the right to education. There are ample opportunities for private providers and non-profits to fill niches that the public system cannot do efficiently, but wherever possible public rights should be exercised in public facilities in order to ensure accountability and transparency. Those facilities have to be geared to handling adult students in adult environments, with the type of physical and educational support that is provided by colleges and institutes.

### ***10 Minimum Tuition***

Many have presented on the tuition fee issue saying they have to stop rising and eventually go down. We agree. Many say simply that they should be affordable. Affordable can mean different things to different people. What is affordable to one is punitive to another.

One can argue, as we have above for ESL and adult basic education, that there should be no fees as long as the student is progressing within a certain time frame. This already happens at doctorate levels in Canada, and more widely in European countries. If there are to be fees in the period up to 2020, then they should go down to a minimal amount.

They should not be designed to counter the weight of inflationary costs as they have been in the last few years. They should not be used to specifically create surpluses and help pay for capital projects as they have at VCC over the past few years.

It is clear that they have become a barrier to opportunity in BC. The fact that BC's tuition rates

### ***11 Why educate?***

Under the heading of Understanding the Purpose, Campus 2020 asks if we are educating people for jobs, intellectual achievement, informed citizenship or personal interests. The answer must include all of these and also that we are educating for the benefit of ourselves as a society. Society has to constantly renew itself and pass on its knowledge. But it must also think of itself as an organism that cannot remain healthy if it is divided against itself. A sure way to create division is to deny opportunity.

Wise and long-term strategies to make all forms of education at all levels truly available to all will only make BC one of the world-leading centres of culture, research and progress.

### ***12 Education is not just a classroom event***

Faculty includes the many dedicated librarians, counselors, advisors at VCC. They play crucial roles in ensuring that our adult students have authentic learning opportunities and

experiences at VCC. Too often at too many institutions they have been viewed as ancillary areas where jobs could be cut, de-skilled, or contracted out. Any serious discussion of the future of post-secondary education in BC will take it as a given that these skills need to be resourced and augmented in order for us to go forward appropriately.

### ***13 Long term capital planning***

We at VCC have seen first hand how a lack of attention to capital investment is just penny-wise and pound-foolish. Too often, political or short-term budget considerations have trumped wise investments. It would greatly assist all institutions if long-term mandated budgeting mechanisms were put in place so that when responses to expected and unexpected developments are needed, resources are there. As mentioned, we have got ourselves in the situation at VCC where current students are not only paying the highest proportional tuition fees in the college's history, but "surtaxes" on top of them in the form of compulsory contributions towards facility development.

### ***14 Invest in Faculty***

This point may at first glance get written off as self-serving self interest but, as we stated at the beginning of our submission, faculty are the true mind and body of the post-secondary system. It can be safely stated that, with so few exceptions that it proves the rule, faculty are unselfish. They are in a giving profession. However, they all need time for reflection, professional development, and renewal while at work. It's part of the nature of the work. Sometimes this happens while the person is working alone, often with their colleagues. In some parts of the post-secondary system, more commonly the academic or university-transfer sections, this need is recognized and enshrined. In the parts that form the majority of VCC programming: applied and developmental, it is not. The historical roots of these programs have affected how they have been funded and scheduled. We recommend that this need be recognized and the requisite investments be made.

### ***15 Conclusion***

In our view, if Campus 2020 is to be a success it will set out an immediate action plan for making the public post-secondary system truly accessible and integrated. The plan will attempt to ensure that the system is the focus and means for both individuals and society to re-invent themselves; it will also create truly consultative mechanisms for reflection and guidance on the way forward that include faculty and their representatives.

December, 2006

Frank Cosco  
President  
Vancouver Community College Faculty Association