

November 2005
VCCFA's Views
on VCC's Strategic Plan Update, 2005-08

What about the current "Vision for the Future"?

The 2002 strategic plan for VCC, *A Vision for the Future*, was to run from 2002 to 2007. It is now being updated or "refreshed" till the year 2008.

In 2002 it was introduced concurrently with the largest cuts any BC college has ever suffered. It was a top-down document. It came from the College President and the College Board without a significant effort to have real contributions into its drafting beyond administration into its drafting or to have a collaborative input before adoption. It created winners and losers amongst our programming areas. Furthermore, it could not be separated from the President and Board's need to rationalize the cuts.

The VCCFA came to the conclusion that the degree of cutting was neither necessary nor justifiable for budgetary reasons. In many cases, healthy affordable programming that was fulfilling a community need was cut simply because this administration had, on its own, decided to change the profile of VCC

As a result, and because this "refreshing" document does little to offer a reassessment of the direction we are going, the update arrives tarnished. Nevertheless, the VCCFA has the task of continuing to participate responsibly in the affairs of the college and to represent views that the majority of members can support. We will outline our views of the document and suggestions around process and content. We hope they may inform the discussion.

Points on Process

Timing

The process around this updating remains flawed. It was first introduced right in the middle of the fall teaching term with little regard for the ability of departmental groups to attend to it appropriately. The tight timelines would have prevented even Education Council members from liaising appropriately with those they represent. Only after and because of the intervention of Education Council members, has there has been some relaxation of the timeline. Input is now requested by early December. In our view, departments should have been encouraged to deal with through the term and through end of term meetings.

Unidirectional Input

Requests for input by the President emphasize individual responses and when received, are not, whenever possible, shared with the community. Many of the issues touched upon are best considered by departmental groups, not individuals. There is no way for departments to even hear what other departments are thinking. This is also true for community input, which we all really need to hear. As an example, the president mentioned at the November Education Council meeting that he had met with immigrant-serving groups for their views of VCC's plans. He made

no mention of asking them if he could share their views within the college. When the final draft comes out, the college community will have no idea of what other alternatives or views were not included.

Evaluation to Date

When asked at Education Council whether there had been any evaluation of what has occurred since 2002, the President said yes, that the College Board had received an evaluation at its June retreat. It's telling that that has not been shared with the community. Were departments asked to contribute to that evaluation? We think not.

Departmental Devaluation

Since this came out in September, at the busiest time of year, it has not been possible for most departments to make the time for meaningful discussion and debate within Departments, yet alone in Schools or Centres.

Points on Content

Introduction: "We're British Columbia's number one college."

Number one at what? Certainly, there are several aspects of the college for which no one would rank us number one. If we are to make this assertion, shouldn't it be about something that resonates? How about, "We are BC's number one college for student success?" Then, that could be the filter through which we view the objectives, strategies and actions that get listed in the plan.

The following five sets of comments roughly move down the large chart the President produced. They correspond to items grouped under the five headings under the major heading, Goals. Comments are not comprehensive. There's at least one aspect highlighted from each cluster. Comments sometimes jump amongst the three columns: Objectives, Strategies, and Strategic Actions.

Equity in Expanding Learning Opportunities

A real problem with the current plan is that it has created winners and losers. Inequities remain and this new document perpetuates them. If the designation of a School or a Centre is to mean something, why are not all Schools or Centres treated equitably? For example, if an overall objective (the first one listed) is to "increase the number of new programs," then the strategic actions connected to that objective should say something like, "Each School or Centre shall be challenged and resourced to develop new programs." A similar point can be made for the strategy, "Position Schools/Centres as Centres of Excellence." What strategic actions correspond to that for every school and centre?

Learner Success and Student Support

Nowhere in the "Increase Learner Success" section is there a mention of student support services. What is their place? Nowhere in this section is there a mention of increasing resources for instructor development. What is its place?

Maintain Financial Viability and Improve Organizational Effectiveness

This third cluster of goals is complicated. There are many sub-sections. It's quite odd that one finds the strategic actions of implementing program review, and strategies to improve recruitment, retention and development of employees cheek by jowl with "optimizing efficiency and effectiveness" and "developing capital assets management." It leads one to the conclusion that the college president is not thinking of how program review and instructor development should relate to improving learner success but to some undefined notion of effectiveness.

It's rather surprising to find that an objective of "achieving an appropriate balance of public, private and learner sharing of education and training costs" is listed. That must mean that the student share is going down.

Under the strategy, "improve information systems," it's depressing that while there is a lot about wireless networking and enrollment management and more accountability, there's nothing on finally improving the embarrassing lack of computer infrastructure to directly support for instructors. We are definitely not BC's number one college in this area.

Key Sector Alliances

This section focuses on the Olympics and fundraising. However, it omits what surely must be a key sector, the various immigrant communities. About one-third of our FTEs are dedicated to direct language instruction for immigrants and immigrants account for many spots in all our programming. Shouldn't there be a lot more about building alliances here? The proposed increase in immigration levels, which the federal government is talking about, is surely an initiative that we need to position ourselves for.

Marketing

The marketing of the college has improved over the last few years, which is commendable, and this update seeks to build upon that. There is one strategic action, "advance advocacy issues in the policy arena," where it would be a welcome change to have a VCC spokesperson in the public part of the policy arena; someone who could counteract the lack of a college voice in the Vancouver media.

The VCCFA's role

Through our Collective Agreement we have spots on Operations Council, we will not be voting to endorse the Plan. There is also the President's invitation to respond directly, which we will be doing. We are also sharing these views with our members, other stakeholders, Education Council and the VCC Board. We urge those making comments to share them with their Education Council representatives, so they can become part of that larger debate.

The VCCFA Executive