



DOUGLAS COLLEGE

# Questions and Answers for Funding Review

Submitted by  
Douglas College Senior Management Team

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**1. What are the most important contributions your institution makes to the economic, social, and environmental health of British Columbia?**

Douglas College is a profound agent for socio-economic advancement in BC. With some of the province's lowest academic and tuition barriers, and lowest FTE costs, Douglas offers students, the government, and taxpayers an incredible value for exceptionally high-quality post-secondary education. With a breadth of offerings and services rivalling those of universities, and an applied focus, the College truly gives students the best of both worlds. Douglas' access-based structure and ethos is also welcoming and supportive for students from traditionally marginalized communities, such as IBPOC, LGBTQ2S+, persons with disabilities, new immigrants, and others who face varying kinds of socio-economic or structural barriers.

With both main campuses directly adjacent to Skytrain rapid transit, Douglas College is one of the easiest-to-reach institutions in Metro Vancouver, further improving access, and reducing commute times and transportation costs for students. As a result, the majority of Douglas' 24,000 students (headcount) elect to take public transit, taking vehicles off congested roads and reducing climate-damaging greenhouse gas emissions.

The College considers itself a valued partner of employers and all levels of government, supporting priority initiatives and seeking direction to ensure our strategic goals are well aligned with the needs of the broader community. Douglas College programs directly support the *StongerBC Economic Plan* and the one million new jobs expected to open up over the next decade, combining much-needed hands-on skills with an academic foundation, creating resilient, career-ready graduates. The College's vision of graduating resilient global citizens with the knowledge and skills to adapt, innovate and lead in a changing world also attracts some 3,300 international students from over 90 countries each year, bringing rich cultural diversity to our campuses and helping boost local and provincial economies.

**2. What is your institution doing to promote Reconciliation with Indigenous People and First Nations?**

Douglas College campuses are located on the traditional and ancestral territories of the Coast Salish Peoples of the Qayqayt and Kwikwetlem First Nations. Over the years, Douglas College has developed a close relationship with our First Nation hosts. Indigenization is one of the core elements of Douglas College's strategic plan, with initiatives engaged across the institution in curriculum development, recruitment, outreach, support, and professional development. Kwikwetlem Chief and Council provided input into our definition of Indigenization and supported the raising of a Coast Salish welcome figure on our Coquitlam Campus in 2021, and Kwikwetlem elders will be involved in the development of an enhanced garden on campus, to feature traditional plants and medicines. Qayqayt Chief Rhonda Larrabee has been involved with Douglas for over 20 years and was recently awarded Douglas College's highest honour, becoming its newest Honorary Fellow. Notably, four of the past six awards have gone to members of the Indigenous community. In 2020, Douglas was proud to unveil its new Coat of Arms, the

first in Canadian history to have been designed and rendered entirely by an Indigenous artist.

Each of these efforts represents intentional steps in the journey of Reconciliation. Douglas College continues to grow its pathways, supports and outreach for the Indigenous community, with Indigenous navigator and recruiter-advisor positions, new student awards and bursaries, intercultural training offerings for faculty, staff and administrators, and the inclusion of more Indigenous art, language and culture on our campuses.

***3. What is your institution doing to promote equitable access for people who come from disadvantaged socio-economic circumstances?***

Equitable access is baked into the core of Douglas College. We actively work to reduce academic barriers, maintain some of the lowest tuition fees in the province, provide over \$2 million in student awards and bursaries every year, and support our students to graduation and beyond with a comprehensive suite of services that includes support for students who have aged out of care, Indigenous students, IBPOC students, LGBTQ2S+ students, differently-abled students, new immigrants and international students, and those who face other structural or financial barriers. Institutionally, the College is also providing ongoing Equity, Diversity and Inclusion training and support for faculty, staff and administrators.

***4. What are your major challenges in enhancing the contribution your institution makes to the economic, social, and environmental health of British Columbia?***

At present, Douglas College faces significant physical space constraints, as the College has grown out of its current campus facilities and has been leasing space to accommodate students and programs. The College is also currently unable to offer students housing opportunities on campus, which would improve access and increase the availability of affordable housing in the community. The College is actively working on plans to alleviate these challenges.

Douglas College also faces challenges similar to those faced by other institutions with respect to human resources. Filling job openings in the current labour market can be difficult. For some roles, Douglas is also hampered by a pay scale that favours other post-secondary institutions for similar jobs, which can leave Douglas at a disadvantage. Fortunately, Douglas offers a fantastic work culture to help make up for these recruitment challenges.

Unfortunately, Douglas also faces some barriers due to our college status. Some research universities and professional associations impose unnecessary hurdles when it comes to credential recognition for graduate program admission and access to professional certification exams, respectively.

**5. What are the most significant contributions your institution makes in collaboration with other parts of BC's PSE system?**

Douglas College provides some of the best course transferability in the post-secondary system, successfully transferring large numbers of students to other institutions in BC (and across Canada) every year, as well as accepting large numbers of students transferring in from other institutions. This flexibility is a hallmark of Douglas College and it extends to our collaboration with colleague institutions. Douglas has a number of joint programs and initiatives with other colleges and universities, including unique partnership degree programs with SFU. Douglas works closely with other PSIs, with several sector agencies, including *EducationPlannerBC*, BCCAT, BCNet, BCCIE, as well as with government ministries, PSEA, and other partners.

**6. What stands in the way of you collaborating more with the rest of BC's PSE system?**

As a college, it can be challenging and time consuming to get some research universities to recognize Douglas College and consult with us when developing programs that complement those we offer. Research universities seem to recognize colleges only as transfer institutions, despite the fact that colleges have been offering applied degree programs for nearly twenty years.

**7. What are the key economic, demographic, social and technological trends that will unfold over the next 30 years that will impact British Columbia's PSE system?**

Demographic data of various types (e.g., population trends, immigration statistics, post-secondary participation rates) contribute information about the number of traditional college/university-aged individuals in our region. Current historically low numbers of individuals in this age-range will continue to affect domestic enrolments in the short-term.

Long-term economic trends are notoriously difficult to assess, especially given today's global economic uncertainties, growing inflation, and rising interest rates. However, as noted in the *StrongerBC Economic Plan*, we will need to fill one million jobs in the next 10 years, most of which require post-secondary education. BC is well positioned for continued economic growth if we are able to meet this demand.

As a society, we are striving to become more equitable, ensuring previously marginalized communities have access to the same kinds of opportunities that others have enjoyed. The downside of this positive change is the growth of reactionary fringe groups that are fearful of change and continue to cause disruption and spread misinformation. We are also recognizing the challenges posed by a changing climate, as well as the opportunities that can arise when we tackle this problem in ways that can boost clean technologies and industries, taking advantage of the many benefits of making the transition to a less carbon-intensive economy.

New technologies and emerging fields always provide opportunities for economic growth, but new technologies also tend to create new challenges. BC needs to ensure that it has an educated population, grounded in critical thinking and the liberal arts, adept at recognizing and assessing these challenges and provide a balanced and thoughtful leadership approach.

Technology has also given us an opportunity to be more flexible in our work and study arrangements. However, this flexibility need to be balanced with the importance of social connection and engagement, as we know that most students greatly prefer to learn in person when possible.

Remote learning technologies, coupled with improvements to credit transfer and recognition, have the potential to make the BC PSE system much more efficient, focused, and effective. As institutions become less geographically constrained in their program offerings, they have the opportunity to share the provision of highly specialized programs.

### ***8. How do you think the PSE system needs to evolve in response to those trends?***

Demographics will continue to be an issue for several years. With relatively low numbers of citizens in the domestic post-secondary age group, BC will need to focus on increasing post-secondary participation rates, especially for historically underrepresented communities, while the PSIs focus on ensuring that students achieve their educational goals as efficiently as possible.

Efficiency may be well-served by adding applied content in undergraduate programs at all institutions, perhaps as embedded micro-credentials. Program revisions that improve graduation rates and reduce program-completion times should also be encouraged to meet labour market needs. Indeed, addressing labour market issues through undergraduate program revisions may be the most efficient way to prepare students for employment, and certainly more cost effective than developing new professionally-oriented graduate credentials (e.g., Masters of Management) that achieve virtually the same learning outcomes.

With rising interest and inflation rates, the system should also emphasize cost effective program models that educate more students for less money, while still ensuring high quality. Similarly, the post-secondary system needs to encourage the development of infrastructure and technology that support remote learning, and continue to invest in efforts to improve pathways as well as credit transfer and recognition to meet degree requirements. In addition, the PSE system needs to be more open to credential recognition for program admission, professional certification, and entry to practice/employment from colleges, as well as international institutions.

### ***9. How does your institution need to evolve in response to those trends?***

Douglas College needs to grow, both in programs and enrolments, to help meet coming labour market demands. Douglas will focus on increasing post-secondary participation, serving underrepresented communities and enhancing its value proposition of providing high-quality education at a lower cost. In addition, Douglas College needs to continue to advocate on behalf of graduates from our applied degree programs to ensure that professional organizations and graduate schools do not limit their opportunities for employment or further education, respectively. In addition, Douglas College will continue to provide foreign trained professionals with targeted programs to enable them to remove barriers and obtain employment within their areas of expertise.

***10. Considering the above, what modifications to the funding formula would you recommend?***

There is already a distinction between base funding and targeted funding for government priorities, each with corresponding enrolment targets and accountability requirements. It is understood that this review focuses on base funding. Douglas is not going to comment on the appropriateness of existing grants and enrolment targets at other institutions, except to note that there may be a need to adjust targets to reflect actual enrolments, especially where longstanding patterns exist.

Douglas College takes its enrolment targets very seriously and has worked hard to meet Ministry expectations. Approximately 10-12 years ago, when the entire budget was spent yet enrolments reached on 72% of the Ministry target, Douglas had to make significant adjustments to its program mix to achieve enrolment targets. Program revisions and the development of new programs enabled the College to close the gap between actual enrolments and enrolment targets. The College is now very cost efficient and targets are achieved or substantially achieved every year.

A significant part of the Douglas College approach to achieving enrolment targets is to ensure that the College's program mix is appropriate to meet the needs of our community. To that end, the College ensures an appropriate and sustainable proportion of programs that vary in terms of cost and demand, as well as target audience. Target audience includes high-school graduates, mature students, members of marginalized groups, and international students. For example, the College has developed a suite of post-degree programs that target international students. These two-year applied programs are well aligned with high-demand occupations with professional certifications. The revenues they generate contribute to the cost of student services, program development and revision, and capital projects.

The College manages its finances centrally, exercising a lot of discipline and caution. Discipline is aided by the College's long-term capital plans, which have considerable buy-in from the College community. The College only adds new expenses only when new revenues are expected. And when the College adds new expenses, such as financial investments in programs and services, such decisions are guided by long-standing formulas that are linked to enrolments. In fact, enrolment projections (domestic and international) are the first key decisions made in the budget process. The College adds and removes investments in programs and services using a 70:30 ratio, so that growth in revenues provides the basis for new expenditures (with 70% going to instruction, and 30% to services), and controls its rate of growth very intentionally.

With these decision-making strategies and controls in place, Douglas College is able to plan effectively for the immediate and long-term future. The College appreciates that if we weren't meeting our enrolment targets and serving the needs of our community, including the needs of marginalized groups, that the Ministry may be motivated to become more involved in our finances and more directive. We would hope that if this were to happen, the College would first be permitted the opportunity to take corrective action independently, as we have in the past. The College appreciates the ability to work within

the funding we receive and to exercise considerable autonomy to make decisions about programs and services. We hope we neither lose the amount of funding we currently receive nor the amount of autonomy we enjoy. With our track-record of sound planning and financial management, Douglas College is currently in a strong financial position.