

A True Community College: SUVCC's Vision for the future

This submission has been compiled by the Students' Union of Vancouver Community College, a member of the BC Federation of Students. SUVCC represents over 13,000 students in the Lower Mainland and has been doing so for over 45 years. We are committed to advocating for accessible post-secondary education for that is fully funded, publicly funded, and of the highest quality.

Vancouver Community College is a part of BC's strong post-secondary system. A system that provides a wide variety of course offerings all over the province with the ability to transfer those courses between institutions. This integrated system ensures that no matter where or what you are studying in BC, students are learning valuable skills and receiving a high-quality education.

Institutions like VCC however are suffering from a major problem in the sector: institutional funding. Between 2000 and 2016, the proportion of provincial funding decreased substantially in BC and as a result institutions have looked to students to fill the gaps in their budgets. In the last 50 years, the proportion of public funding to BC colleges and universities has dropped to 43.6% of total operating revenue; down from more than 80% in the 1980s and more than 90% in the 1970s. This constitutes a massive divestment in public education for the current generation of young people compared to the support provided to those who attended college and university in past decades.

This funding review is an excellent step in the right direction in terms of addressing the funding issue by ensuring we have a funding model that is fairly and impartially distributed across the province. Redistribution of the total funding allocation will not solve all the problems, but it is a very important step in the next evolution of the world class system of post-secondary education we have today in British Columbia.

VCC's Contributions to BC

VCC is a unique Post-Secondary Institution in the Lower Mainland as it still adheres as much as possible to the model of a community college, offering a wide range of programs, for the diverse population in the Lower Mainland. From vocational trades and degrees, programs for folks with disabilities, as well as Adult Basic Education (ABE) and new immigrant education. In fact, VCC is the only institution that offers ABE at fundamental levels (from beginner to Grade 8), which is essential to the success of many newcomers, refugees, and other British Columbians who have had an interrupted education.

VCC is trying to be a true community college. The programs VCC provides give folks a real opportunity to skill up and improve their quality of life with the education to work in, and contribute to, our communities in BC. As part of their training, VCC students and faculty offer low-cost, on-campus services to the public, including food services, hairstyling, esthetics, graphic design, auto repair, and dental care.

Institutions such as VCC provide the framework to train workers for the current and future labour markets of our province. By providing diverse programming students can return to school at any point in their life and adapt to changing trends in the market.

VCC alumni have been essential in holding the province together through the COVID 19 pandemic. Workers in fields such as transportation, health science, culinary arts and heavy mechanical trades have put the skills they learned at VCC to the test by keeping the public safe and healthy through extraordinary conditions.

Cost of Delivery

VCC as a public institution works hard to follow the mandate given by the ministry, providing a wide variety of programming already mentioned. These programs have a tremendous impact on BC's economy and in many cases the well-being of members of our society.

However, many of these programs are incredibly expensive to run, often significantly more than the average FTE at other institutions. Programs like ABE and LINC (Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada), the programs for students with disabilities, and trades programs require significant additional infrastructure and support that is not necessary for many other programs. Despite the increased cost of running these programs, VCC does not receive appropriate funding to cover those costs. This lack of appropriate funding puts additional strain on other supports at VCC including SUVCC. VCC's many trades programs also must often upgrade their curriculum and training to ensure that student graduate with the education required by various industry bodies such as the Industry Training Authority. Rarely do these requirements come with additional funding. Also, since VCC is providing training to such a diverse group of learners who have high needs, the services are stretched to their limits: accessibility services, counselling, international offices, childcare, tutoring supports all suffer from long wait-lists and are trying their best to meet the needs of students. All while fighting against VCC's aging infrastructure, these costs continue to vastly outstrip the funding received. Under the current funding model, VCC has lacked the resources to tackle facilities issues such as a lack of accessibility in many older parts of the Broadway campus, and a rodent problem that has plagued the Downtown campus for years.

With no additional funding from the ministry, VCC is forced to look elsewhere to recoup those costs. More and more those costs are falling onto students, With the creation of additional fees, closing and re-opening programs to increase tuition and avoid the 2% cap on domestic tuition fee increases, and creating more international cohorts. While VCC's international students currently only make up roughly 15% of the population the fees they pay, which are often more than 3 times what domestic students pay, are used to offset VCC's deficit.

Future Impacts

Due to the nature of the programs it offers, VCC will be substantially affected by economic, technological, and demographic changes over the next 30 years. These will put enormous pressure on the services provided by VCC and the SUVCC and will require additional funding in order to grow and adapt to meet them.

Automation is projected to dramatically impact the labour force in British Columbia. Those workers who are affected will need re-training in new industries, and a very large portion of them will go to VCC to find that training due to the programs that are offered. Canada will also continue to attract more and more immigrants who will utilize the programs that VCC offers for either new training or to re-certify to be able to work in the fields they trained for in their country of origin. Not only will there be substantially increased enrollment, but many of these students will also be older. These older students will utilize services such as childcare more than younger students might.

Technological changes such as developments in clean energy, and electric vehicles will only increase in the coming years. Not only will this mean more enrollment from those wishing to enter the field it will require substantial re-training for existing fields. As standards and technology change it will also require considerable upgrades to the equipment used in programs such as Automotive Service in order to maintain industry certification. This will require more funding to do effectively.

VCC will also face increased costs for maintenance, infrastructure upgrades and software updates in the years to come. Due to the current deficit situation the institution faces, VCC has had to defer these projects into the future rather than tackling them in a timely manner. This delay will inevitably mean higher costs when they cannot be put off any longer.

Our Vision for Post-secondary education

As part of the BC Federation of Students, SUVCC wants to achieve a system of post-secondary education which is accessible to all, which is of high quality, and which is nationally planned; which recognises the legitimacy of student representation and the validity of students'

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rights; and whose role in society is clearly recognised and appreciated. Right now, our system over reliance on tuition fees cause numerous problems.

Vancouver Community College has been forced to make choices that will encourage enrollment above all else, which means we have seen:

- Over promotion of 'trendy' programs like business degrees over less desirable but still important programming
- Use of unscrupulous recruiters to get international students by any means necessary
- Reduction of language requirements to aid in the increased enrollment of international students
- Lack of support for departments who are less 'profitable' for the institution
- Increasing reliance on revenue from international student cohorts
- Continual deferral of maintenance, infrastructure upgrades, and program or software updates to balance the budget

In our view, the institutions in the post-secondary education system would be more cooperative than competitive by sharing more resources. Along with the funding model review, institutional governance should be reviewed to see if any institutions would be better served by being amalgamated to reduce redundancy and administrative overhead.

All in all, our view of the system is that there is a requirement for sustainable, predictable, funding that is regularly reviewed to ensure its meeting the needs of students. British Columbia provides world-class education in the province and significant investments have been made by government to ensure increasing access to education for all those who need it. However, it is now time for our funding model to be fixed so that we can continue building a system that works for everyone. Education is a crucial component to a happy and healthy community, society, and economy which needs to be prioritized appropriately.

Our vision for post-secondary would include a system that is rationally funded, with a funding model that aims to distribute resources considering an institutions regionality, mandate, course offerings, and student demographic. A re-distribution of resources would recognize the many contributions VCC makes to the community. It will allow them to not only continue on a more stable basis, but to grow in the future and be the community college we need.

Sincerely,

The Students' Union of Vancouver Community College Board of Directors