

DATE: January 18, 2007

TO: Education Council Faculty
Members in Departments Affected

- College and Career Access
- College Foundations: Humanities, Mathematics and Science
- College Preparatory English
- English Language Skills

FROM: Frank Cosco, President, VCCFA

SUBJECT: RE The Education Plan for 2007-08

On behalf of the VCCFA executive, I would like to raise some concerns regarding the Education Plan as presented by Alan Davis and Deanna Rexe at January's meeting. We understand it will be before Council on February 6th so Education Council can give its advice to the Board on February 8th.

- 1) the reduction in Arts and Sciences (by 106 student FTEs)
- 2) the "restatement" of FTE in Language Studies (from about 1800 to about 1570)
- 3) process points

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1) The Reduction in Arts and Sciences

This is a cut that will lead to job loss and loss of access for students. When asked at January 9th meeting, Dean Jewell said that it was because of low enrollments in ABE Intermediate levels. The access problems for these students caused by governmental policies have been well-noted. We understand quiet lobbying has been done by college officials. We have sought to make noisier efforts at every opportunity. The VCCFA has made presentations to the legislative standing committees on literacy and on finance. We have also made these points to Campus 2020 head, Geoff Plant.

Our provincial federation president, Cindy Oliver, using FPSE's Opening Doors paper, makes them at every opportunity to the Ministry of Advanced Education, most notably Minister Coell and Deputy Minister Quayle.

The provincial budget process for 07-08 is well underway and the budget is expected to be made public by March. We have some reason for hope that the provincial government may take heed of what they have been hearing and make some moves to restore access support for such students. However, it may take a while before that trickles down to the class room.

We have heard that free tuition may be restored. Also, there have been indications that government is aware that different ministries need to coordinate their policies and work to support ABE. We hope they will address the level of financial support provided by the Ministry of Social Services. Although it is true that low enrollment seems to be a factor, this

does not mean that the students are not out there. They are invisible because they are fragile and marginalized. They need extra support. With more support, coordinated ministries, free tuition, advertising and a commitment to speak up for ABE and these invisible students, we think we will see enrollment go up.

For that reason, we believe it may be hasty for VCC to cut its FTE by so much. Instead of responding by cutting, this is a time for VCC to step forward responsibly as a leader and advocate for these programs. The ABE courses are feeders for other VCC programs. The college has been reasonably patient in terms of running the courses with low enrollment, but that has not hurt the college financially--they continue to run large surpluses. It is good for students to have small classes. In some programs, further cuts may make the program too small to maintain itself. Would it not be a sad mistake to make such cuts just when the government is on the verge of finally making some significant changes?

Furthermore, VCC could be more assertive in its advertising. The school board, for example, has competing ads on the Skytrain and buses. Surely we should at least have a presence on the Broadway buses and Skytrain.

We would urge EdCo faculty members to make these points and for department heads affected and EdCo faculty to meet to discuss them so that the most effective presentation possible can be made at the February meeting. In the past, for example, affected departments have made their views known to Council by speaking at the meetings.

2) The "restatement" of FTE in Language Studies: ESL

After presenting the 06-07 numbers in a rather misleading way and only after direct questioning, it became clear that the College had unilaterally decided to cut out a significant amount of activity from its FTE calculations, specifically student tutorials in the CPE and ELS departments. They stated that there was no way so many students could possibly attend the sessions scheduled in the computer labs. Leaving aside the long history of tutorials and how they essentially came to be in their present form because the college needed them that way, the VCCFA stated at the January EdCo meeting that perhaps the college had gone too far. While it might be legitimate to reconsider the number of FTEs accrued through tutorials, there still was and is quite a lot of significant activity; therefore reducing it to zero would not appear to be justified.

We have initiated meetings amongst affected Department Heads to discuss a course of action. We are also beginning to consider what effect such a cut may have on working conditions. We have been assured that there's no job impact.

3) Process

The Education Plan is before Council very early in the year, even in advance of the provincial budget. Is this wise? Past practice was to have it start through its "public" phase later. Just because it may be neater to have it wrapped up by fiscal year-end does not mean it is best practice.

In Language Studies, we understand that these proposals were made without consultation with the departments concerned.

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Influencing change in the timing of the Education Plan or in its content may be difficult given the current window we now have. VP Davis may be open to making amendments prior to the EdCo meeting but that has not been recent practice at the college. The Council may propose a revision or amendments at the meeting and may ask the Board to delay its consideration. There are a number of possibilities that need to be discussed.

By this memo, we hope to inform and stimulate discussion. There is a specific difficulty regarding the Arts and Sciences issue in that the EdCo position representing that school is currently vacant. We hope that other EdCo reps help take on these issues.

Frank Cosco
President

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