

Towards Charting a New Course for British Columbia's College System

# LEARNER SUPPORT AND SUCCESS

Determining the educational support needs for learners into the 21st Century

Written by Ted James

Prepared for the British Columbia Senior Educational Officers Committee and Senior Instructional Officers Committee

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## Research Team

Ted James	Dean, Student Development Douglas College
Helena Fehr-Makinen	Associate Reseacher Simon Fraser University
Jennifer Kennett	Research Assistant Simon Fraser University

## Advisory Committee

Linda Arnold	Dean of Instruction Langara College Co-chair, SIOC representative
Jim Cooke	Dean, Student Services Capilano College Co-chair, SESOC representative
Susan Ashcroft	Librarian Douglas College
Wayne Avery	Coordinator, IBT project Vancouver Community College
Jim Bizzocchi	Senior Manager, Educational Technology Centre for Curriculum, Transfer and Technology, BC
Susanne Dadson	Coordinator, Services for Students with Disabilities Kwantlen University College
Amanda Hill	Student Placement Officer British Columbia Institute of Technology
Heather Hyde	Counsellor British Columbia Institute of Technology
Patty Lewis	Financial Aid Officer Douglas College
Dave Pearson	Coordinator, First Nations Services Langara College

## Additional Advisors

Lesley Andres	Assistant Professor, Centre for Policy Studies in Higher Education and Training, University of British Columbia
David Baxter	President Urban Futures Institute, Vancouver

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# Executive Summary

## Background

Three years ago British Columbia produced a strategic plan for its college system called *Charting a New Course*. This plan outlined several key goals to be achieved in the next few years. Yet, as institutions move to implement the plan, they face critical challenges that threaten success and new barriers which hinder progress. This seems especially true for the provision of educational support services.

Institutions are being asked to serve increasing numbers of learners, many of whom have non-traditional or particular needs. Institutions are also being encouraged to develop and deliver programming in new and different ways. Such developments are having considerable impact on how educational services can provide appropriate, timely, and cost-effective support to learners.

Recognizing the need for action, the Senior Educational Services Officers Committee and the Senior Instructional Officers Committee commissioned the research and production of a report to explore these circumstances as the basis for articulating a common response.

The production of this report was guided by a Project Advisory Committee, comprised of representatives of stakeholder groups who provide educational support services in the college system. The researchers reviewed available information regarding the future needs of learners as well as the forces affecting change within the college system. Broad consultation through focus group analysis was used to elucidate themes, to identify gaps or omissions, and to solicit recommendations on how the system should respond better to meet the educational support needs of learners in future.

## Changes in the profile of learners

The BC population is projected to continue to increase in coming years both among young people and adults. At the same time, demand for education and training is expected to continue to grow steadily. The combined effect will be increased enrollment pressure on post-secondary institutions in the next decade and beyond. Many of these new students will have characteristics and needs similar to those currently enrolled. But institutions will not only be attracting more of their traditional clientele, they will also serve a greater number of non-traditional as well as disadvantaged students. Indeed, such

students may become so prevalent in colleges as to form the new majority. One result will likely be considerable added demands on educational support services.

### ***More multi-generational blending***

Post-secondary institutions have traditionally served primarily a young adult population of learners who made direct entry immediately after high school graduation or a few years later. But the number of older students is rising and will continue to increase as a proportion of the student body. At the same time, the number of young people seeking access to post-secondary education will also increase for demographic and economic reasons. The combined effect of these trends will produce a wider generational mix of learners enrolled in post-secondary courses. This blend of students will have varying needs and expectations, especially among single-parents and recurrent learners juggling work and studies.

### ***Multicultural diversity growing***

The learner population in colleges, especially in the Lower Mainland, is increasingly diverse in linguistic and cultural background as well as ethnic origin. This reflects widespread and ongoing changes in the composition of British Columbia's population as a whole, especially in urban areas, resulting from three decades of sharply increased immigration.

### ***Greater participation by First Nations learners***

The BC government is gradually but increasingly trying to address the needs of Aboriginal people, including improving their access to post-secondary education. However, Aboriginals still face many barriers to participation along the way. As one First Nations Coordinator states, "...our biggest challenge is just getting people in the door. Then it's dealing with issues of discrimination in the classroom and inappropriate discussions or curriculum that's not [culturally] sensitive."

### ***Extended participation by learners with disabilities***

Colleges can expect more students with disabilities to arrive in future. Not only are participation rates increasing but the number and complexity of the disabilities to be addressed are also rising. Despite the progress made over the past two decades, many barriers to access and success remain, not least in facilitating smooth transitions for students both into and out of college.

### ***Rising number of part-time learners***

As formal learning becomes more lifelong, students will increasingly desire more opportu-

nities to study part-time, either because they cannot afford to enroll full-time or because they have other commitments that also demand their attention. For some types of student, part-time or reduced course loads improve success rates. For institutions, more part-timers mean more people to serve with constant dollars.

### ***Increasing financial burden***

Learners are increasingly being required to pay more of the costs of their education — despite frozen tuition fees in BC — and are shouldering a larger burden, including mounting financial debt, which most are still managing to repay. Since the lost opportunity costs of not pursuing post-secondary education may be huge, increased debt is not deterring many students from participating. But handling the debt is another matter. At the same time, employer support for training is available for only some employees. Whether recent federal initiatives will offer real progress remains to be seen.

### ***Additional disadvantaged learners***

Colleges are serving a greater cross-section of society, and attracting more students with various special and non-traditional needs. Recent initiatives of welfare reform provincially, and unemployment reform federally, continue to have significant ongoing impact although for now their long-term consequences are harder to gauge.

## **Changes in learners' expectations**

Living in a more time-conscious and quality-conscious world, today's learners of all ages have rising demands for the services they expect will be available to them, how they want to access these services, and how they want to be treated as consumers. When service is poor or their rights are infringed, they seek accountability.

### ***Desire for just-in-time service***

In response to rising pressures on their time, learners do not want to wait in line-ups or have to wade through unnecessary information. They want less just-in-case preventative help and more just-in-time responsive assistance. They want full-day, full-year access to services, organized around their schedules.

### ***Need for program flexibility***

Growing impatient with the need to advance their education swiftly, some learners, especially mature ones returning to learning, seek prior learning recognition services, ladder entry points, challenge exams, multiple credit, and flexible scheduling of learning support services.



### ***Need for individualized support***

While appreciative of workshop and other group formats, learners seek individualized assistance available to help their particular circumstances, such as for academic advising, academic tutoring, personal counselling or career exploration.

### ***Desire for non-traditional formats***

Recognizing the arrival of the information age, learners want ready access to information via labs or terminals equipped with recent and reliable technology. Those not familiar with computer applications want training on them. Remote learners in rural areas or time-conscious learners in urban areas are looking increasingly to apply, register, receive grades and access college information via electronic means, such as phone, fax, Internet, and television. They also want to order textbooks, pay bills, and participate in college life without always having to come on campus.

### ***Demand for accountability***

Some learners, especially those from equity or other disadvantaged groups, are increasingly aware of their legal and human rights. Others are increasingly prepared to assert their expectations for quality programming and service delivery. They are more willing than previous generations of students to complain or to appeal decisions. At the same time, institutional liabilities and duties are being extended via legislation or litigation.

### ***Desire for employment outcomes***

More vocationally-minded than their predecessors, learners today see college more as a means-to-an-end rather than an-end-in-itself. In response, they seek ways to reduce their financial burden and gain valuable work experience via work-study or co-op education, and they desire more help with finding work upon graduation.

## **Reviewing the purpose of services**

Colleges need to review why they provide services to learners. Some college personnel often view learner support services as secondary to the main business of instruction. This view, while inadequate in the past, may be dangerous for college survival in future. Instead, colleges should draw upon one of their past strengths to become learning support organizations. To implement this vision, they will need to re-engineer many aspects of how they presently plan and deliver learning support services.

### ***Previous significance of services***

Since their inception, BC colleges have focused primarily on being teaching institutions, geared to developing environments where a variety of students could be successful. Services have primarily played a role of improving access and participation. The ratio of these support professionals per student in colleges is much higher than at universities, reflecting different levels of student need. However, these support services have often suffered — across budget decision tables — from being viewed as secondary to the main instructional enterprise, often seen as extra overhead. Behind this view are sometimes latent attitudes about the perceived value of services.

### ***Advent of learning colleges***

The vision for the BC college system articulated in *Charting a New Course* is contextualized by increased cries for accountability and links to future prosperity. This vision sees institutions becoming “Learning Colleges” through the adoption of a more learning-focused paradigm. In the process, their mission becomes facilitating learning rather than simply the provision of teaching.

### ***Future role of learner services***

As the demands of learners widen and competition to serve them intensifies, the future success of colleges will rely crucially upon their past strength as providers of learning support services, carving this as their niche in the higher education market. As the learning colleges of the future become what Doucette (1998) calls providers of “learning options and experiences, learning support services and expertise,” their principal function will likely be to inventory learning options and experiences and to guide and support students accessing them, whether as brokers or deliverers of programming. In so doing, colleges will evolve into formal learning support centres. This will have key implications for faculty and staff roles, but will also increase the role played by many support services within each institution. In the process, colleges will need to re-examine many aspects of how they presently plan and deliver their learning support services to meet changing needs and changing delivery options. Along the way, the distinction between instruction and service may blur considerably into a single joint enterprise supporting learners.

## **Re-considering how to provide services**

To meet the changing needs and expectations of learners, colleges should explore how the delivery of services can be improved — adopting a more holistic approach, adjusting attitudes to improve quality, shifting to self-service formats, expanding the range of services available, making effective use of new applications of technology, centralizing the

provision of some services, and utilizing more opportunities for learners to help each other. Access to services for learners will become considerably transformed in the process.

### ***Providing services holistically***

Service divisions and instructional divisions need to become more integrated rather than planning and operating as separate silos. New forms of learning are turning instructors into learning facilitators and service personnel into instructors. This applies especially to advisors, librarians, counsellors, financial aid officers and learning support staff. In response, the whole institution needs to focus on collectively meeting learner needs by forging linkages and reducing fragmentation of services.

### ***Adjusting attitudes***

Calling them learners rather than students is a small change indicting a huge shift in focus. Indeed, creating more learning-centered colleges will challenge everyone's assumptions, especially those with a sink-or-swim attitude to student failure and those insensitive to cultural diversity issues. While learners may not be "customers" in some key respects, ensuring high service quality standards in each department should still be the goal, along with ensuring equitable service for minorities and distance learners.

### ***Shifting to self-service formats***

Learners can help themselves — as well as help colleges cope with increased demands — by having access to program or service information from kiosks or Web-based sources. Computer labs with user-friendly manuals or electronic libraries with tutorials can reduce help-desk pressures. Technological innovations also create self-service possibilities in registration, fee payment, advising and assessment services as well.

### ***Expanding the range of support***

As the learner population becomes more diverse, a wider variety of services is needed. Some, such as new student welcome centres or offices for mature students, may require new service units be formed. Others, such as providing information literacy skills or debt management skills, may need new courses or workshop modules to be developed. Still others may involve extending existing services — such as student employment services or wellness centres.

### ***Making effective use of technology***

Far-reaching improvements are being made in the availability and capacity of information technology. These transform the choices open to learners as well as the delivery options

available to service providers. Technology is already being used successfully by BC colleges to support both traditional offerings and the evolving distributed learning environment, as well as to re-invent the concept of local support centres for rural learners. Access via technology may also be especially helpful for learners with special needs and for remote learners including First Nations people. Despite difficulties — initial costs, systems reliability, and availability of technical support — effective use of information technology can improve services dramatically for learners.

### ***Collaborating to provide services***

Economies of scale and improved service levels can be achieved by amalgamating some service delivery into a central agency to assist access. SET BC and PAS BC are already examples of what is possible, so are the on-line BCCAT transfer guide and Directory of Distributed Learning Courses. Centralization of BCSAP applications has also been largely successful. Consideration should therefore be given to centralizing other services, such as legal services for human rights, sign language interpreting services, and various on-line services.

### ***Learners helping learners***

A variety of services can be delivered by learners themselves for other learners. Examples are peer tutoring services where senior students help junior ones with homework, lab, or other assignments. Peer mentoring services help new students and peer support services offer advice and assistance to students having personal or adjustment difficulties that interfere with learning. Aside from improving access to services that need not be provided by college personnel, this strategy helps bridge the emerging generational gap as the average age of such personnel becomes much older. Appropriate training and supervision of peer workers is needed though. Furthermore, forging new relationships and partnerships with local Student Society Associations should be explored.

## **Re-thinking the funding of services**

Fiscal responsibility needs to be exercised by government and institutions, exploring ways to make funds available and to ensure they are used effectively. Revisions to current allocation formulas as well as the use of special purpose funds are essential. Creative responses to charging user fees, earning contact revenue, and funding partnerships are also needed. Funding should address strategic goals.

### ***Revisions to formula funding mechanism***

Current provincial funding mechanisms are outdated. They do not reflect the range of

different variables that colleges face today and are insufficient as dynamic levers to support changing circumstances or promote responsiveness. *Charting a New Course* envisions a new envelope funding system which will refine and expand the Basic Operating Grant to reflect more than simply the number of FTE students enrolled. Specific funding for support operations is needed, reflecting multiple variables including semi-fixed costs, dispersed learning, and demand-driven services, especially ones that are legally required.

### ***Special purpose funds***

Despite reform to the Basic Operating Grant, changes to the way targeted funding is provided for disadvantaged groups — such as via the ASE Grant, First Nations Grant, and IBT Support Grant — need to reflect actual learner needs and numbers rather than standard allocations for each institution. Provision for melding these into the new basic formula may be needed to allow colleges to plan better.

### ***Direct user fees***

While freezing tuition fees and ancillary fees has met public policy objectives and assisted students, colleges have faced tighter restrictions on raising revenue to cover direct costs. The implications of this need to be considered so that needy students have better access to financial aid mechanisms and those students who can afford higher fees pay a greater share of the delivery costs. Finding ways to have a fair user-pay method for recouping expenses (e.g. on paper, lab materials, or technology costs) all need further exploration. Introducing some user-pay fees for learning support services that are currently offered free may be needed. Introducing differential fees to reflect the costs of technology-based or other highly expensive programs may be overdue for colleges. However, these policy decisions may require local variations to reflect individual college autonomy.

### ***Contract fees for services***

Some educational support services can provide opportunities for entrepreneurial activity which can earn revenues beyond their expenses, such as educational, vocational and other assessments to individuals or companies. Counselling and rehabilitation services can be offered on a contract basis to sponsoring agencies such as WCB, ICBC and others. Support services to local learners taking courses with remote or foreign institutions could be charged for assessments, accommodations, and counselling. Other contract services are possible income sources.

## ***Partnerships***

Many successful partnerships with sponsors have helped defray equipment, facilities or operation costs for service units. Using a consortia approach among colleges can offer economies of scale. Exclusive use agreements with vendors can be profitable. Joint-use agreements to share space — or service delivery with school districts, community agencies, and contractors — can save costs.

## **Supporting service providers**

The quality of service delivery depends upon the quality of the means of supply. Addressing the availability of technology and technical support, as well as the professional development of human service providers, will be necessary. Collecting information to measure and improve the impact of services for learners is also needed.

### ***Access to technology and technical support***

Providers of educational support services can only capitalize on the strategic improvements that information technology offers if sufficient attention is given to their needs. Institutions should target particular services incrementally and seek to introduce technological solutions where these make sense, allocating adequate capital and operating funds to permit adoption. Elsewhere, access to readily-available, on-going, expert support from technicians is essential to keep systems operating and maintain service standards to end users. Access to in-service training for service personnel also needs to be provided where not available presently.

### ***Training and rejuvenation***

Appropriate training support is needed to assist personnel to adjust attitudes, provide culturally-sensitive services and maintain high quality service standards. Mentoring or training-buddy systems can help disperse expertise and reduce training costs. Enlisting the support of local union bargaining units is crucial to the success of any employee development program. However, leadership from senior management is a first step to pulling together people from across the institution to support a common vision.

### ***Measuring the impact of services***

Services have tended to be provided in a vacuum without information about their actual impact on students' progress and success. This limits their potential effectiveness, even if the services are successful, because empirical data on utility and outcomes is missing. Through the Key Performance Indicator process, indices should be established, data collected, and service impact documented. Local feedback mechanisms, such as

customer satisfaction surveys or suggestion boxes, can provide valuable information to drive service quality improvements. Celebrating successes is also important to communicate impact and reward initiative, even if intangibly, through good service or unsung hero awards.

## **Conclusion**

The success of learners in the BC college system will increasingly rely on institutions being able to provide a range of high quality and flexible support services to learners. This is because the type of learners whom those institutions are serving is changing and the expectations of most learners are also changing. Therefore, institutions will need to address what services they provide, how they deliver those services, how those services are funded and paid for, and how the ongoing needs of the service providers themselves are supported.

Those in decision-making positions in the BC college system need to embrace this vision for the evolution of the purpose and delivery of educational support services and to plan locally and provincially to implement this vision.

# Preface

## Intended audience

This report speaks primarily to the key policy-makers in the British Columbia college system — board members, Education Council members, constituency group leaders, presidents and senior managers — as well as those in government and the Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology. The document will also be of interest generally to providers of educational support services within the college system, along with other interested decision-makers, researchers, students and educators.

## Purpose of the report

What are likely to be the educational support needs into the beginning of the 21st Century — specifically the immediate years 1999 to 2004 — for people seeking learning opportunities from public colleges, institutes and agencies in British Columbia? This report attempts to answer that question and to suggest how such institutions should best prepare to meet learners' needs successfully.

Publishing this report represents a response to some of the challenges articulated in *Charting a New Course: A Strategic Plan for the Future of British Columbia's College, Institute and Agency System* (1996). The report should be read within the context outlined in that plan.

The central purpose of the report is to inform those who make decisions about the implementation of *Charting a New Course* by providing them with information about the forces driving the provision of educational support services and the implications for the college system in British Columbia.

## Scope of the topic

Although aspects of the report will be relevant to universities and to private colleges in BC, the report focuses primarily on the college system because this was the focus of *Charting a New Course*.

Also, the expression "college system" is used to include all the public colleges, university colleges, institutes and agencies in BC. For brevity, the term "college" is used generally in this report to cover all institutions within the college system.

The expression "educational support services" used in this report is intended to cover the



wide range of services offered by the college system to support students and faculty:

- Registrar's office services
- Academic advising
- Assessment services and prior learning assessment (PLA)
- Library and learning resources
- Counselling services
- Student employment/Cooperative Education (Co-op)
- Athletics and wellness
- Financial aid services
- Learning assistance and tutoring
- Disability services
- First Nations services
- Distributed learning services
- Child care services
- Faculty development services
- Computer support services
- Human rights/harassment services
- Income assistance recipient (IBT) services

Educational support services here do not include facilities such as parking, cafeteria, student housing, bookstore services, or administrative services such as accounting or payroll.

As used in this report, the terms "student" and "learner" have different connotations but the same denotation. The important difference is explained on page 82. Nonetheless, the words are often used inter-changeably throughout this document to reflect the current changing culture within institutions.

## **Production of the report**

As a jointly sponsored project, this report was commissioned by two province-wide groups: the Senior Educational Services Officers Committee (SESOC) and the Senior Instructional Officers Committee (SIOC) to study how the provision of educational support services could have increasing importance for ensuring institutional viability and learner success within the college system in British Columbia.

The document was prepared and authored by Ted James with research assistance from Helena Fehr-Makinen and Jennifer Kennett. Madeleine Butschler contributed editorial assistance and Gloria Summerville prepared some bibliographic information. Rhonda Livingstone produced the layout of the report and Dan Dochstader designed the cover. Considerable logistical support was provided by Wendy Watt and Rosemary Burgess.

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**Kathleen Bigsby**, *Institutional Evaluation Officer*, Advanced Education Council of British Columbia;

**Dr. George Copa**, *School of Education*, Oregon State University;

**Bob Cowin**, *Director of Institutional Research*, Douglas College;

**Dr. John D. Dennison**, *Professor Emeritus*, University of British Columbia;

**Dr. Deborah L. Floyd**, *President Emeritus*, Prestonsburg Community College, Kentucky;

**Dr. Edward Franklin**, *Executive Director*, Arkansas Association of Two-Year Colleges;

**Susan Greathouse**, *Coordinator, Educational Technology*, Douglas College;

**Dr. Donna Hardy**, *President, Canadian Association of College and University Student Services and Director of Student Development*, Memorial University of Newfoundland;

**Tom Harris**, *Superintendent of Schools*, District 43, British Columbia;

**Don Jacob**, *Director of Continuing Education*, School District 41, British Columbia;

**Gillies Malnarich**, *Learning Outcomes Coordinator*, Centre for Curriculum, Transfer and Technology, BC;

**Dr. Lorna McCullum**, *Dean, Faculty of Languages, Literature and Performing Arts*, Douglas College;

**Dr. Terry O' Banion**, *President and CEO, League for Innovation in the Community College*;

**Dr. Sandi Oliver**, *President, National Council on Student Development and Vice President, Student Services*, Midlands Technical College, North Carolina;

**Dick Robertson**, *Vice President, Student Services*, MiraCosta College, California;

**Dr. Jack Russel**, *Student Development Centre, Faculty of Education*, University of Western Ontario;

**Robert Stevens**, *Dean of Student Services*, Nova Scotia Agricultural College.

In addition, **David Baxter**, *President* of the Urban Futures Institute in Vancouver and **Dr. Lesley Andres** of the *Centre for Policy Studies in Higher Education and Training* at the University of British Columbia both contributed valuable suggestions. Appreciation also goes to the British Columbia Council on Admissions and Transfer (BCCAT) for providing the Website location for the report and to **Dr. Frank Gelin**, *Executive Director* and *Co-Chair* of BCCAT, for his insightful contributions.

Finally, considerable thanks are due to all of the many students, faculty, staff and administrators who participated in the various focus groups — without their involvement the project could not have been completed.

# Introduction

*The future clearly won't unfold as simply a linear progression of the past.*  
**Atkinson (1999)<sup>1</sup>**

**T**hree years ago, British Columbia produced a strategic plan for its college system called *Charting a New Course*.<sup>2</sup> This plan outlined several key goals to be achieved in the next few years. Yet, as institutions move to implement the plan, they face critical challenges that threaten success as well as new barriers which hinder progress. This seems especially true for the provision of educational support services owing to the growing number and complexity of personal and learning needs presented by today's college learners which must be met with limited resources.

## Background

One of the major themes of *Charting a New Course* is student access. Increasing access to and participation in post-secondary education for learners has been a primary goal of the college system. Indeed, it was a key motivation for establishing that system some thirty years ago<sup>3</sup> and since that time British Columbia colleges have developed a wide range of educational support services.<sup>4</sup>

However, as the millennium arrives, the nature of access and the meaning of participation are undergoing significant changes.<sup>5</sup> Increasingly, institutions are being encouraged to accept larger numbers of students from previously unserved or under-represented populations. Institutions are also being encouraged to develop and deliver courses and programs in new ways, such as distributed learning, prior learning assessment, and training at the worksite. Institutions are also attracting a diversity of learners, many with unique needs.

These new expectations will have major impact not only on how institutions design and deliver instruction, but also on ways that they provide educational support services to learners and to faculty. Repercussions will be felt by all service providers — librarians, counsellors, systems technicians, financial aid officers, and registrar's office staff, to name just a few. However, our educational support services were often conceived, and are still often delivered, in ways that do not always meet the needs of today's learner.

Therefore, service providers are looking increasingly to those who are in decision-making

positions to provide leadership. Unfortunately, many policy-makers, board members, Education Council members and others feel unsure of how to respond to these issues faced by educational support services.

Recognizing the need for action, the Senior Educational Services Officers Committee (SESOC) and the Senior Instructional Officers Committee (SIOC) jointly commissioned the research and production of a report to explore these circumstances as the basis for articulating a common vision.

## **Project goals**

As determined by the Project Advisory Committee, the project was charged with achieving the following three goals:

1. To produce a position paper that articulates what the educational support needs into the next century (1999-2004) are likely to be and how institutions should best try to respond.
2. To collect evidence about the projected educational support needs of learners in the future — including statistics on trends, examples of issues, and case studies of best practices.
3. To use focus group analysis to provide input from current stakeholders and participants in the college system.

## **Methodology and participation**

The process of producing the report was organized into three phases conducted during the period from September 1998 to May 1999 and included participation from several sources.

### ***Literature review***

In the first phase, the relevant literature was searched broadly to identify what information might already have been gathered regarding the future needs of learners, the future directions for colleges and institutes in British Columbia, as well as the forces affecting, influencing and promoting change within that system. Various salient themes were identified from the data available. Evidence was assembled in the form of statistics, trend analyses and best practices from case studies. A draft document was created to present the key determining factors and was reviewed by the Project Advisory Committee and others.

## ***Focus groups***

In the second phase, the technique of focus group analysis was used to elucidate themes, to identify any gaps or omissions, and to solicit recommendations on how the system should respond better to meet the educational support needs of learners in future.

Focus groups were organized with representatives of the following groups and associations of stakeholders. (For a list of names of participants see the end of this document.)

Council of Post-Secondary Library Directors  
Registrars Association of BC  
College and Institute Counsellors Association for BC  
Disability Service Providers  
BC Financial Aid Officers Association  
IBT Project Coordinators  
Student employment services providers  
BC Colleges Athletic Association  
First Nations Coordinators  
BC Educational Technology Users Group  
Students at University College of the Cariboo  
Students at Northern Lights College  
Canadian Federation of Students (BC)

The thirteen focus groups each consisted of 5-10 participants who met with the researchers for 1-2 hours, sometimes in person and sometimes via conference call. The format of the focus groups was consistently the same: participants were asked to respond to a scenario predicting the typical post-secondary classroom learning environment in the year 2007. From a menu, a variety of primary and follow-up questions were asked by the researchers to gather data from each group tailored to its area of expertise or needs. The responses from participants were audio-taped. Transcriptions were made from the audiotapes and circulated back to each participant for validation. In addition, several individual interviews were held with people who could not participate in the focus groups.

Summaries of the themes emerging from each focus group are available as an appendix to this report along with access to the full transcripts. (For contact information see the end of this document).

## ***Final document***

Based on feedback from readers of earlier drafts of this report, as well as information gathered during the focus groups, a final draft including recommendations was produced and re-circulated for comment to focus groups participants and members of SESOC and

SIOC. Incorporating these further comments and suggestions, the final document was prepared and printed.

Since many of the ideas in the project emerged from the focus group process, the final document includes substantial verbatim quotations from focus group participants to allow their voices to be heard. However, the names of individual speakers are not given to maintain privacy.

### ***Project advisory committee***

This committee, comprised of representatives of many stakeholder groups who provide educational support services at colleges or institutes, played several roles. The committee directed the scope and boundaries of the project, ensured broad input was obtained that reflected the concerns of stakeholders, and determined how best to communicate and distribute the report. Some members of the committee also solicited representation from their constituencies to participate in the various focus groups. Regrettably, to keep the size of the advisory committee manageable, membership on the committee could not represent comprehensively all educational support service providers.

### ***Other consultation***

To help broaden the consultation process, a variety of experts were asked to read and comment on early drafts of the document. Several occupied positions within the college system in British Columbia or associated agencies. Others were similar professionals, academics or policy analysts living elsewhere in Canada or the United States. Their involvement further grounded the proposed recommendations.

### ***Limitations***

Obviously, a study of the expected determinants for the future provision of educational support services has considerable limitations. By definition, the future is unavailable for empirical scrutiny and can only be conjecture based on extrapolations projected forward in time. A variety of currently unforeseen factors — such as changes in government policy — could have an impact on future events, hence influencing greatly the actual outcomes for post-secondary institutions. At a time when the pace and extent of change are accelerating, the ability to foresee effects accurately becomes even more uncertain.

Although this tendency was mitigated somewhat by widespread consultation in and beyond the field, focus group participants were inevitably subject to the same limitations of vision. As a result, this report avoids making projections beyond the next 4 to 5 years and eschews making *predictions*, preferring to identify trends, raise questions, and suggest possible broad directions and strategies for change.

## Overview

The remainder of the report is organized into six main sections. The first, called *Changes in the Profile of Learners*, provides an environmental scan of how the characteristics of learners themselves are changing — especially how learners from equity groups and others with a wider diversity of backgrounds have a variety of particular needs which the college system will need to accommodate.

The second section, called *Changes in Learners' Expectations*, describes notable ways in which students are expecting different standards or relationships from their experiences in college.

*Reviewing the Purpose of Services* explores how the role of educational support services within colleges is undergoing a paradigm shift away from a focus on access towards a focus on learner success.

The fourth section, *Re-Considering How to Provide Services*, explores various ways in which the delivery of educational support services can be improved and provides a variety of current examples occurring in BC or other parts of Canada and the USA.

*Rethinking the Funding of Services* tackles the issues surrounding current and future funding formulas and strategies for the college system.

In the last section, *Supporting Service Providers*, the training and other needs of the people who will deliver educational support services to learners are discussed.

A list of all the recommendations contained in the body of the report is included at the end of the document.

## Endnotes

1. A. Atkinson. Keynote address for *Reflections and Projections*. Disability Resource Network of BC Forum. Vancouver, Feb 18, 1999.
2. *Charting a New Course: A Strategic Plan for the Future of British Columbia's College, Institute and Agency System*. British Columbia Ministry of Education, Skills and Training. Victoria, 1996.
3. See J.D. Dennison and P. Gallagher. *Canada's Community Colleges: A Critical Analysis*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 1986.
4. See *Intervention Strategies and Student Retention in British Columbia Public Post-Secondary Institutions*. British Columbia Ministry of Skills, Training and Labour. Victoria, July 1995.
5. See L. Andres. *Revisiting the Issue of Access to Higher Education in Canada*. CHERD/CSSHE Reader Series. (In press).



# Changes in the Profile of Learners

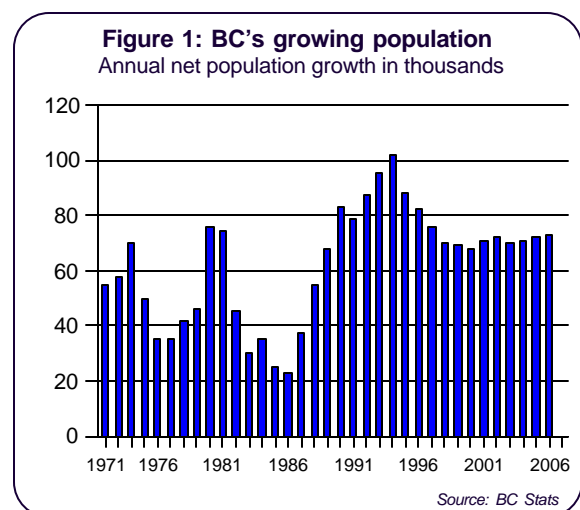
**T**he BC population is projected to continue to increase in coming years both among young people and adults. At the same time, demand for education and training is expected to continue to grow. The combined effect will be increased enrollment pressure on post-secondary institutions in the next decade and beyond. Many of these students will have characteristics and needs similar to those currently enrolled. But institutions will not only be attracting their traditional clientele, they will also serve a greater number of non-traditional as well as disadvantaged students. Indeed, such students may become so prevalent in colleges as to form the new majority. One result will likely be considerable added demands on educational support services.

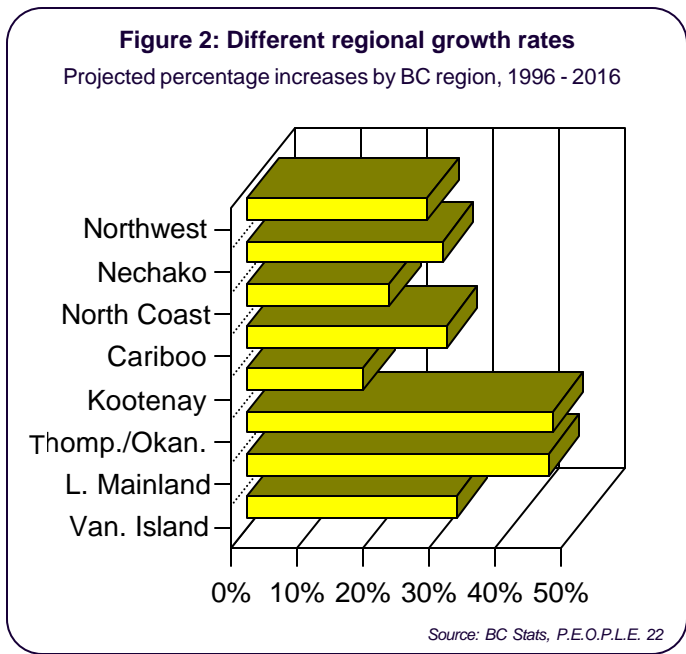
## More multi-generational blending

*If we are going to start to make up for the fact that in the past students were not educated at university and college at the same rate as other provinces, we have to target not only those coming out of high school but we also have to target those people who were missed 10 or 15 years ago when the government wasn't making the level of investment that we are today.*

**Andrew Petter, BC Minister of Advanced Education, Training and Technology (1999)<sup>1</sup>**

Post-secondary institutions have traditionally served primarily a young adult population of learners who made direct entry immediately after high school graduation or a few years later. But the number of older students is rising and will continue to increase as a proportion of the student body. At the same time, the number of young people seeking access to post-secondary education will also increase for demographic and economic reasons. The combined effect of these trends will produce a wider generational mix of learners enrolled in post-secondary courses. This blend of students will have varying needs and expectations.





### ***BC population increasing***

The population of British Columbia continues to grow and, while the rate of growth will fluctuate, the annual net growth is projected to increase the BC population by another 40% over the next 20 years. This will be due mainly to natural increases (more births than deaths), increased overseas immigration, and increased net in-migration from other provinces (see Figure 1). Most of this population growth is occurring in the metropolitan areas of the Lower Mainland and the Fraser Valley, as well as the Okanagan and Vancouver Island (see Figure 2).

### ***More youths in BC***

Colleges can plan on a rising number of young people in BC. The population of 18-24 year olds will increase by 26% in the next twenty years (see Figure 3). In fact, “current trends indicate that the number of births in British Columbia will increase each year from 47,825 in 1996 to 60,000 in 2021. On this basis, the number of children — to be educated, to be looked after, and to have things bought for — will increase at a rate of 1% per year in the coming decades.”<sup>2</sup>

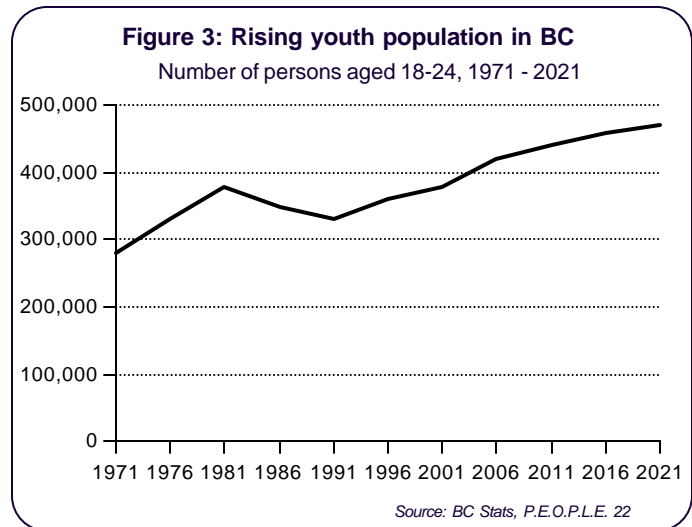
This is unique in BC. In the rest of Canada both school-aged groups aged 5-12 and aged 13-19 are projected to remain below the level of 1971, although the population in Alberta and Ontario continues to grow overall.<sup>3</sup> In comparison, similar growth is occurring in most parts of the USA, where demand by learners aged 18-24 for higher education is projected to increase by 30% in the next decade.<sup>4</sup>

### ***Participation rates higher***

BC has traditionally had one of the lowest rates of participation in post-secondary education compared to other Canadian provinces. However, this rate has been rising for both young people and adults in recent years. Participation by youth aged 15-24 has risen in BC and other provinces.<sup>5</sup> Almost half of all Grade 12 graduates now make direct entry into college or university from high school compared to only 41% a decade ago.

### **Youth employment lower**

In the new economy, not only are youth much more likely to secure only part-time employment<sup>6</sup> compared to other age groups, they also face much more competition than previously, regardless of the type of job wanted. The proportion of youth participating in the labour force has declined sharply since 1989 from over 70% to less than 62%. However, the main reason for this decline has been a corresponding rise in attendance in full-time education.<sup>7</sup>



### **Greater demand for skills**

Youth are returning to school largely in response to the decline in the number of job openings which are available to them without some post-secondary education or training. Increasingly they recognize that:

*A new iron law is taking over the workplace. If you have completed some form of post-secondary education — a university degree, a community college diploma, a training certificate — you're going to get a job. If you have anything less, you won't.<sup>8</sup>*

During the decade 1986 -1996, unemployment rates were consistently much higher for those who possessed no post-secondary exposure.<sup>9</sup> Recently, between 1991 and 1996, employment opportunities for those with less than high school graduation declined sharply by 37%. Demand for skills is expected to intensify as the share of employment openings that will require some post-secondary completion is expected to rise to nearly 70% in the period 1995 - 2005 (see Figure 4).

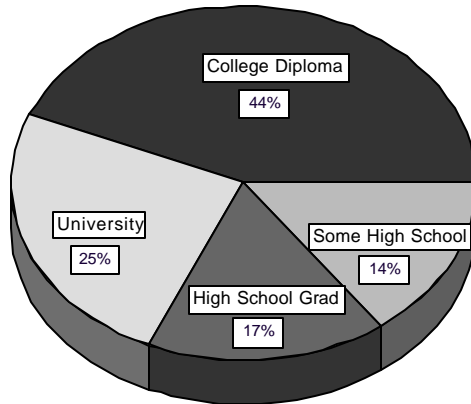
### **Growing adult participation**

The number of older students is rising steadily and will continue to increase as a proportion of the student body. During 1976-1996 the percentage of adults aged 25-64 attending school more than doubled, from 1.0% of the population to 2.1%.<sup>10</sup> In a narrower age band, the proportion of 35-54 year olds attending school had risen to almost 3% in 1996 (see Figure 5).

These trends will likely continue. Fully one third of all Canadian employees state they desire more training than they have received. This is higher than in many countries including the USA.<sup>11</sup> In BC, the rate of participation in higher education by adult workers rose almost 5% between 1991 and 1993 to 43% of the employed population.<sup>12</sup> In fact,

**Figure 4: Rising needs for education**

Requirements for projected new job openings, 1995 - 2005



Source: BC Stats

the participation rate in education or training by adults aged 25-70 has risen more in BC than other parts of Canada.<sup>13</sup>

As learning becomes much more of a lifelong enterprise, colleges will serve a larger number of adult students than ever before, many of whom will be “recurrent” students, returning for continuing professional education or as part of further career changes. Concurrently, as both the number of seniors and their life-expectancy increases, colleges can expect to serve many more from this sector of the population too, as seniors turn to formal learning for recreational purposes.

### ***Impact of additional mature students***

Mature students are slowly having a significant impact as their numbers swell in BC colleges. Their needs will increasingly shape how services are offered. This phenomenon is currently more pronounced in the USA than in Canada.<sup>14</sup>

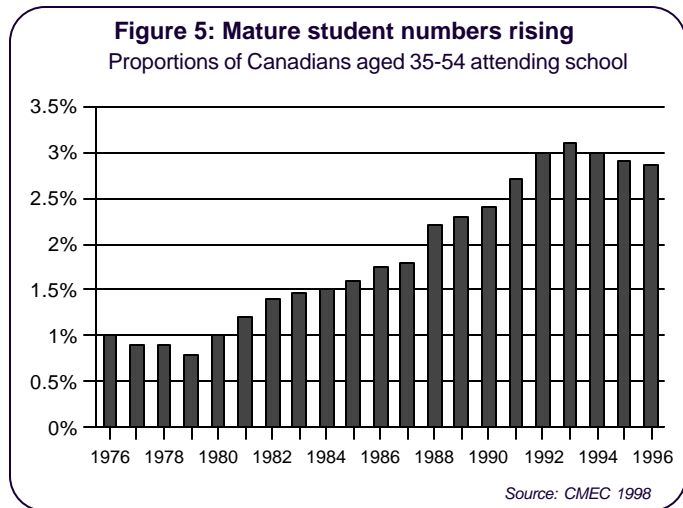
A recent American report found that:

*Students over 40 are key factors driving innovative approaches to post-secondary education and training. New methods of teaching and learning, spurred by technology and economic competition, are resulting in record numbers of students over 40 enrolling in post-secondary education.... [However,] the student aid system does not adequately address the needs of students over 40 ... [and] students over 40 must contend with a range of complex issues that can affect their ability to pursue or succeed in post-secondary education. One of the most important issues [they] must contend with is juggling work and academics....<sup>15</sup>*

Andres, Andruske and Hawkey (1996) found that mature students in a BC college experienced difficulties balancing domestic obligations and family related activities with the demands of college studies. Due mostly to time pressures, these mature students did not attend workshops or seek assistance from student service units, relying instead on informal networks.<sup>16</sup> If commuter campuses are to address the needs of mature students, they will first need to understand those needs better.

Indeed, a 1998 editorial in *Community College Journal* wondered whether the demographic wave of students over 40 could overwhelm the current infrastructure of traditional

higher education institutions, especially when combined with the baby boom echo of students who will begin enrolling around the year 2000. In fact, very little attention has been focused on the impact of the echo generation and their parents *simultaneously* participating in post-secondary education. The editorial concluded that “the over 40 cohort could place extraordinary demands on colleges and universities, generating an even greater need to increase faculty and staff, build new and different facilities, and enhance student services.”<sup>17</sup>



## Multicultural diversity growing

*I find a lot of Gen Xers are first-generation Canadians. They have one foot in one door, where at home they speak English and their parents answer in their mother tongue, and the other foot is outside amongst their peer group or at school and so they're straddling two value systems. In many ways I find this generation is treading on new territory in terms of interpreting new values on old ones but within a new context.*  
**Student**<sup>18</sup>

The learner population in colleges is increasingly diverse in linguistic and cultural background as well as ethnic origin. This reflects widespread and ongoing changes in the composition of British Columbia's population as a whole, especially in urban areas, resulting from three decades of sharply increased immigration.

### **More immigrants in BC**

One of the most noticeable changes in the profile of learners attending colleges is the swelling proportion of recent landed immigrants and new Canadians. Net immigration levels are largely driven by federal government policy, which currently sets the long-term goal of maintaining immigration to 1% of Canada's population.<sup>19</sup> However, BC's share of immigration in Canada has risen steadily since 1946. It is projected<sup>20</sup> to continue to grow well into the year 2006 in spite of the recent impact of the currency crisis in Asia and declining immigration from Hong Kong. At 18%, BC's share of immigration well exceeds its 13% share of the national population. Indeed, total off-shore immigration to BC has grown 2.5 times in size since 1971.

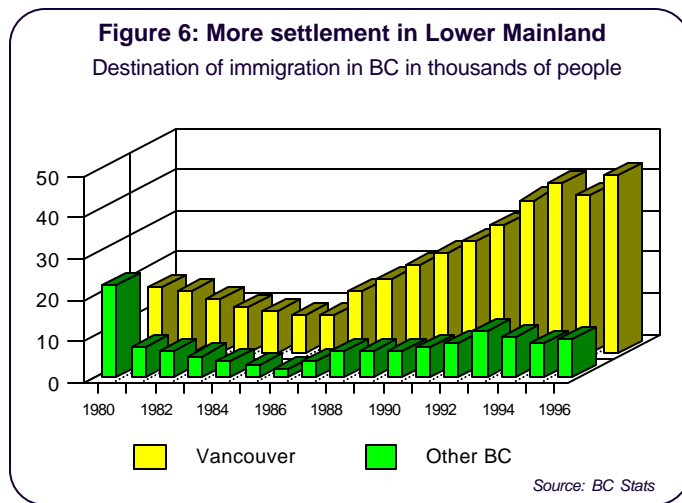
By far the large majority of new immigrants have settled in the Lower Mainland area. This had increased to 86% of all new immigrants to BC<sup>21</sup> by 1996, up from 68% a decade

earlier. The number settling in other regions in BC has declined significantly since 1989 with only a slight reversal of the trend in 1992 (see Figure 6). Indeed, by 1996 immigrants accounted for over 1/3 of the total Lower Mainland population.

### Changing ethnic mosaic

The source of immigrants has also changed dramatically in the past twenty years. Immigrants from Asia increased their proportion of total BC immigration from 26% in 1971 to 80% in 1996. In contrast, immigrants from the USA (including Mexico and Central America) declined from 35% to 3%, and Europe as an origin of immigration declined from 26% to 11% during the same period (see

Figure 7).



As a result, the ethnic origin<sup>22</sup> of the BC population is shifting away from predominantly European backgrounds to Asian ones, and English has declined as the mother tongue of the Lower Mainland population from 78% in 1981 to 64% in 1996. Meanwhile, the prevalence of Asian languages has risen, notably Chinese and Punjabi. In 1996, over 14% of the Lower Mainland population did not speak English in the home.<sup>23</sup>

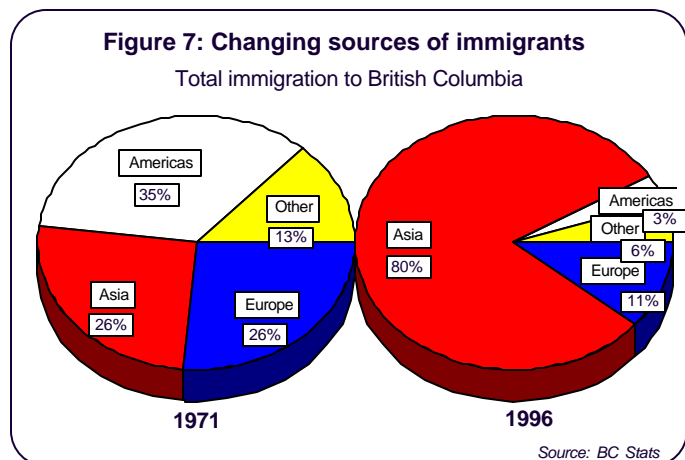
The *Employment Equity Act* defines visible minorities “as persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour”. The 1996 Census collected information under this definition and found visible minorities comprised 18% of the BC population, a higher percentage than in any other province.<sup>24</sup> Not surprisingly, about 85% of visible minorities lived in the metro Vancouver area. In 1996, one out of every three people living in the Lower Mainland was a member of a visible minority, compared to only one in five people a decade previously. Of this population, 90% were Asian with Chinese accounting for 48%.

The proportion of visible minorities in the BC population is projected to grow to almost 25% by the year 2016 (see Figure 8). The country of origin may become more diverse, perhaps with rising numbers from Eastern Europe among others.<sup>25</sup> This may bring even greater diversity to classrooms into the foreseeable future.

## Recognizing the value of diversity

As the multi-cultural composition of the classroom changes so has recognition for the social and economic value of multiculturalism and the desirability of promoting diversity within British Columbia society. For example, as the Lower Mainland Multicultural Education Project (LMMEP) recognized:

*The education system, like others, is challenged with becoming responsive to the diversity of needs that characterize our increasingly pluralistic society. School districts, colleges, and institutes are faced with: developing a service delivery system that is responsive, sufficient, and equal in access; providing a curriculum that recognizes and respects cultural diversity and racial differences; and ensuring that the education system in policy, staffing, and practice reflects the multicultural nature of the community.<sup>26</sup>*



Without a deliberate concerted effort, institutions may not create climates of acceptance and cultural sharing among their students, but fall victim instead to the kind of racial and ethnic tensions that have polarized some campuses in the USA.<sup>27</sup>

Internationalization of the campus can reach out to enrich students' experiences in a variety of ways:

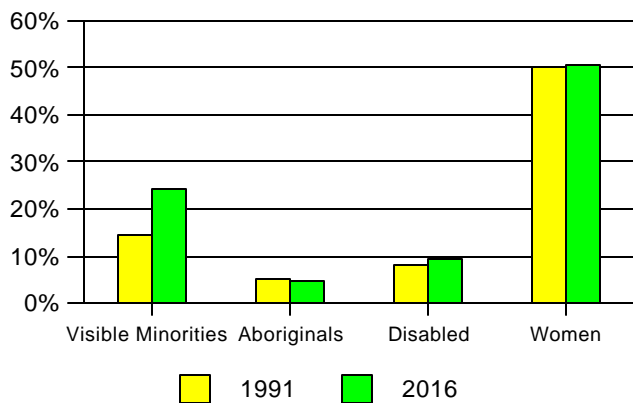
*Imagine that you are a student in the year 2005 entering your first year in a post-secondary institution renowned for its commitment to internationalization. What draws you to enrol at that institution? Is it the prospect of completing a diploma program which explicitly provides you with the skills needed to pursue an international career in Europe, Asia or Latin America or to pursue a career at home working in a multi-cultural environment with people of Malaysian, Russian, Chinese, Dutch or Indian and other ethnic backgrounds? Or is it the opportunity to integrate educational experiences abroad such as language study in Beijing or fine arts courses in Florence into your program?<sup>28</sup>*

## Need for language skills support

As the immigrant population has grown, so has the need for English as a second language (ESL) training. Three separate studies conducted by Malatest, Cumming, and Rivers in the early nineties<sup>29</sup> pointed out the burgeoning need for ESL instruction, among both adults and children. As a 1993 study found, 80% of immigrants do not have a high school education, increasing the upgrading required.

**Figure 8: Equity group population changes**

Proportion of projected total BC population



Source: BC Stats (ages 16-64 only)

The numbers of ESL students within the secondary school system has grown considerably. The Lower Mainland serves 90% of all ESL students in the province, and since 1990 growth in numbers of ESL learners in suburban areas has increased dramatically. Richmond and Surrey accounted for about 7% each of the total ESL school enrollment at the beginning of the decade. By 1997 these proportions had risen to 15% and 17% respectively. During the same time, Coquitlam went from having 760 ESL students to serving 5,712 representing a 449% increase.

Such instruction may ease the demand for second language instruction by the time these students enter post-secondary but will necessitate closer articulation between colleges and secondary schools.

Increased immigration rates will continue to mean that colleges are asked to serve a larger ESL population than current resources can provide. Unlike previous waves of immigration, new Canadians face a demand for highly proficient English as well as for higher levels of educational preparation. Research by Cummins<sup>30</sup> indicates the period of language development ranges from 5-7 years in most cases for adults improving their proficiency.

## Greater participation by First Nations learners

*Lack of social, emotional, and cultural support is prevalent in our colleges ... [whose] values, rituals and physical structures have seldom reflected those of Canada's aboriginal peoples. A lack of respect, reciprocity, and aboriginal representation ... has reduced aboriginal students' expectations of either welcome or success.*

**Baker (1995)<sup>31</sup>**

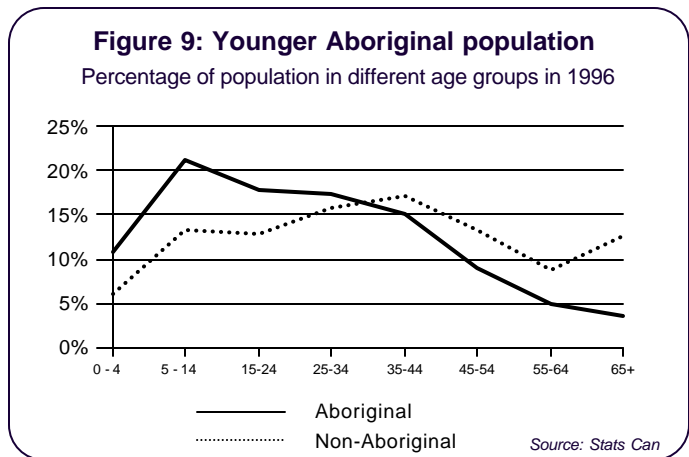
The BC government is gradually but increasingly trying to address the needs of Aboriginal people, including improving their access to post-secondary education. However, Aboriginals still face many barriers to participation along the way. As one First Nations Coordinator stated "... our biggest challenge is just getting people in the door. Then it's dealing with issues of discrimination in the classroom and inappropriate discussions or curriculum that's not [culturally] sensitive."



## Distribution of Aboriginals

Most recent data from the 1996 Census reports a population of 799,010 Aboriginals living in Canada, representing almost 3% of the total population. Of these, 18% live in BC, up from 12% reported in the 1991 Census. They represent nearly 4% of the BC population. Just over half of Aboriginals in Canada are Status Indians as defined by the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development.

The Aboriginal population in BC, as in the rest of Canada, is relatively young with over 1/3 being under the age of 14 years of age in 1996 compared to only 19% for the non-Aboriginal population. Even more striking, almost 50% of all Aboriginals are aged less than 25, compared to only 32% among the non-Aboriginal population. The opposite is true for the distribution of seniors. Indeed, in 1996 the average age of the Aboriginal population was 26 years, fully 10 years younger than the average in the non-Aboriginal population (see Figure 9). The implications of this for the college system were emphasized during focus group discussion:

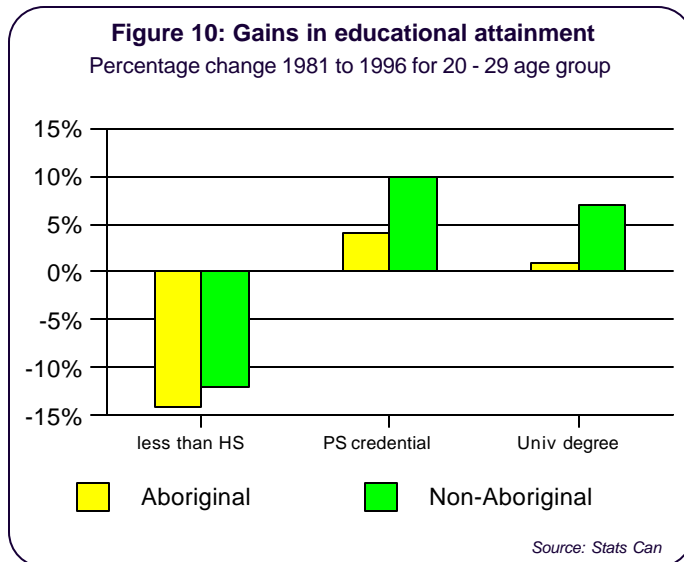


*One thing that we have in our communities is the younger people, like at Mount Currie [where] there's more than 50% that are under the age of 19 right now. It's kind of scary to think of all of these young people that are coming, ready to come to college and they don't know how [to succeed].* **First Nations Coordinator**

Census data indicate one in five Aboriginals live in the seven major metropolitan areas in Canada. Of these, 31,000 live within metro Vancouver, representing almost 2% of the local population and 22% of the Aboriginal population in the whole province. Urban areas also have noticeably large numbers of Aboriginal youth. Almost 1 in 3 Aboriginal children under the age of 15 live in single-parent families, twice the rate of the general population, and that rate too is higher in urban areas rising to 46% of Aboriginal children living with only one parent.<sup>32</sup>

## Participation in education

Aboriginal people have increased their participation rates in education and training at all levels over the past couple of decades. This is most clearly seen in the change for Aboriginals aged 20 to 29, where the number having less than high school completion dropped from 59% in 1981 to 45% in 1996. During the same period, those aged 20 to 29



who attained any post-secondary credential rose from 19% to 23% and those completing a university degree went from 3% to 4%.

However, at the same time, the non-Aboriginal population was achieving greater improvements in educational attainment. Therefore, in 1996, Aboriginals in their twenties remained over twice as likely not to have completed high school as in the non-Aboriginal population. Also, they were only half as likely to possess any post-secondary credential, and only 1/5 as likely to have graduated from a university (see Figure 10).

Aboriginal adults, though, were more likely to return to school as mature students, with 12% of Aboriginals aged 25 to 34 attending school full-time, compared to only 6% of the non-Aboriginal population. In the 35 to 44 age group, the proportions increased to 7% versus 3% respectively. This mirrored the rising significance of education for Aboriginals and was also reflected in the lower unemployment rates for those with higher levels of education. Only 7% of those Aboriginals aged 25 to 44 with any post-secondary credential were unemployed in 1996, while those with less than a high school education faced a 31% unemployment rate.

Results from the recently released *Aboriginal Former Student Outcomes Study in BC*<sup>33</sup> reveal that participation in post-secondary is proving beneficial for those who complete their studies. The study found high levels of participation by Aboriginals in adult basic education, suggesting a need to lay firm academic foundations, but found proportionately fewer Aboriginal students actually continue on to further studies than do their non-Aboriginal classmates.

### Key role of education

Statistics, of course, do not tell the whole story, perhaps not even much of the story. For many Aboriginals the real story is the historical nightmare from which they are trying to awake. For them this is a tale of cultural genocide, being forced onto reserves under the terms of the *Indian Act*<sup>34</sup> and of racism, forced assimilation, and abuse in residential schools. In response,

*... the 'system' needs to come to terms with ... the past and the legacy of the residential schools – that legacy has taken Aboriginal/First Nations' self-identity and esteem away from people. And I think until the existing system acknowledges that it has a responsibility to facilitate that going back to the people, then there's not going to be any changes.*

**First Nations Coordinator**

Within this context, education becomes empowerment, the route whereby Aboriginals can re-discover lost identities and improve economic prospects:

*We've got a student down here from Alkali Lake and one of the first things that he did was make a drum in class. He said, 'It's really ironic, I have to come down from the North to the city to find out how to be an Indian'. And I think that's an important point. That's giving the aboriginal learner types of things that have been taken away.*

**First Nations Coordinator**

Education also becomes the means by which Aboriginals develop the skills that can support self-sufficiency and self-determination, important goals of provincial policy in the post-treaty environment. In doing so, Aboriginals seek to exercise more influence in shaping their education, one that often involves different perspectives from traditional European approaches.

Building on various previous articulations of the educational needs of Aboriginals — reaching back to *Indian Control of Indian Education*<sup>35</sup> in 1972 — the BC Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education and Training Policy Framework in 1995 outlined provincial strategic priorities. This framework emphasized again the important need for addressing barriers, including systemic ones:

*Major impediments influencing the participation and completion rates of Aboriginal learners in post-secondary education [call for] strategies ... which enable the post-secondary system to respond to Aboriginal people as distinct societies capable of identifying their unique learning needs.<sup>36</sup>*

One of these barriers is the low level of funding available to learners for tuition and maintenance. Through the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, the federal government provides assistance to Status Indians via local Band Councils to support Aboriginals attending post-secondary institutions. Bands sponsor students to attend colleges, but, as more Aboriginals seek to participate, these limited funds are increasingly focused on university level programming rather than adult basic education. This can cause hardship since many Aboriginal students need to pursue considerable upgrading if they are to be successful. Many Aboriginal students are trying to survive on awards which have not increased in value since 1977:

*it's getting really, really, really to the critical point where literally people are not eating properly; there are students with families and their children are not eating properly .... The whole financial situation is ... crazy and getting worse by the year.*

**First Nations Coordinator**

While hiring Aboriginals as instructors is one strategy for creating a more culturally sensitive learning environment in colleges, the willingness of non-Aboriginal students to address their biases can be low:

*At [name of college] we've introduced First Nations Art History and due to our insistence First Nations artists are teaching it. And one of the things that happens in that course is the backlash of white learners and they're always sabotaging the instructor and the students find it difficult to even address those sabotages because they've been accustomed to dialoguing around issues beyond First Nations. So they have a really difficult time. And yesterday I presented at this class; I didn't know to what extent my students were having such a hard time.*

**First Nations Coordinator**

Indeed, as we approach the next millennium, Aboriginal students are still struggling to find ways to feel included, and colleges have yet to respond in many ways to meet this challenge.

## Extended participation by learners with disabilities

*If I look back 10 years, it's the numbers that have really, really increased. And I think that will also happen in the future.*

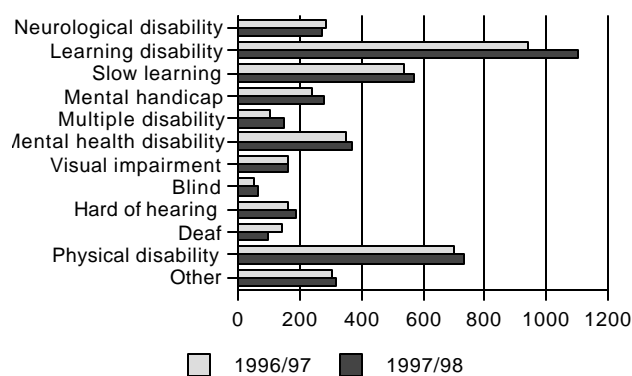
**Disability Services Coordinator**

Colleges can expect more students with disabilities to arrive in the future. Not only are participation rates increasing, but the number and complexity of the disabilities to be addressed are also rising. Despite the progress made over the past two decades, many barriers to access and success remain, not least in facilitating smooth transitions for students both into and out of college.

### Two decades of improvement

**Figure 11: Learners with disabilities increasing**

Totals by type of disability in BC colleges and institutes



Source: MAETT

The number of students with disabilities being served in colleges and institutes in BC has increased noticeably in the past decade. For example, the number grew almost 11% from 3,842 students in 1996/97 to 4,281 in 1997/98 (see Figure 11). The vast majority of students with disabilities attend institutions in the Lower Mainland, although each institution serves this population to some extent. That activity is described in the annual Adult Special Education Grant report submitted to the Ministry.

Although students with disabilities represent only about 5% of the college student population — compared to approximately 13% of the BC population with a disability — the participation rate in post-secondary education has been rising.<sup>37</sup>

### ***More students with disabilities***

A number of factors are likely to influence a rising demand by students who have a disability to enroll in post-secondary programs. First, there are increasing numbers of people living with disabilities in BC — and Canada generally — and they tend to have relatively low levels of education. People with disabilities are more than twice as likely to have less than a ninth grade education and only half as likely to have a university education as people without disabilities.

The K-12 school system is producing more graduates with disabilities as a result of improvements in accommodating and serving students with special needs. Many more students are receiving various forms of individualized support than a decade ago, and students are increasingly integrated into regular classrooms and included in all aspects of school life rather than segregated into isolated and modified programming. More students with disabilities expect to transfer to post-secondary education along with their peers than previously.<sup>38</sup>

Finding educational opportunities locally is becoming more common for people with disabilities rather than automatically assuming relocation to the Lower Mainland, or further afield, is necessary or desirable. Community-based support services have increased in number and quality in all regions of the province and local colleges have developed better expertise at assisting people with disabilities to be successful in their studies.

Recent changes in social policy and legislation, including *BC Benefits* and amendments to the *GAIN act*, have increased the expectation that people with disabilities can find higher rates of employment than previously and that eligibility for disability benefits can be reduced. At the same time, access to health benefits, hardship benefits and crisis grants have been narrowed for certain cases. Greater attention is now focused on employment as the primary income source rather than disability pensions or benefits.<sup>39</sup> Since employment opportunities for under-educated adults are low, the result is many more people with disabilities seeking training or re-training in colleges. Over 30% of people with disabilities are not currently participating in the workforce. However, attending school can also involve financial hardship. According to a 1993 study by the National Education Association of Disabled Students, more than 40% of students with disabilities found their finances insufficient for disability-related needs. Also, fully 61% of students with disabilities stated that their choice of courses or career has been affected by their disability.<sup>40</sup>

### ***Wider range of disabilities***

Although the range of disabilities currently present among those served by colleges is already quite extensive (see Figure 11), this range is expected to widen further. One factor is the extent to which a type of disability has broadened in scope. For example, at one time only serious psychiatric problems could be identified successfully. Now, milder problems can be diagnosed along with the possible occurrence of shadow syndromes which have psychiatric elements. Many disabilities are now viewed along a continuum or range of severity from mild to severe, so that documentation becomes important to determine the extent of the condition and which accommodations or other learning supports are justified. Today, when we talk about disabilities we are really talking about different levels of functioning and are struggling with how to determine appropriate eligibility criteria. Increasingly, much depends on how a disability is defined.

Another population of students that have seen a steady growth in their numbers are students with physical dexterity issues, such as carpal tunnel syndrome. More widespread use of keyboards is likely to increase the incidence of these conditions unless voice recognition or other technologies become more prolific. This is likely to be true for a variety of other disabilities that will become more prevalent for an aging population. Reduced vision is already an issue for some older students in large lecture theaters and hearing loss is another which will grow in significance soon. One in 10 people has a hearing impairment currently and 1 in 7 learners in the school system already has significant hearing loss due to loud music piped into ears via headphones.<sup>41</sup> Similarly, disability service providers are experiencing large increases in the incidence of students with neurological illnesses, which some neurologists believe are linked to environmental health issues.

*I think that there will be new disabilities in 10 years. Certainly when I started working 20 years ago, learning disabilities was really in its infancy and now it's a very large complex issue with many different types of disabilities. Fetal alcohol syndrome wasn't known. The research on hyperactivity and attention deficit was just beginning when I was in university doing my undergrad degree and now there are many people diagnosed with that. And I think there will be many more medical illnesses diagnosed.*

**Disability Services Coordinator**

### ***Rising complexity of disabilities***

Not only the range of disabilities but also their complexity is extending, and along with this the time, energy and resources needed also escalate. For some, such as adults with multiple barriers and needs, a case management system is required, pulling together internal and external care providers or agencies to address a variety of different service components to assist the student to be successful. In other situations, especially in rural areas, there may not be anyone else to liaise with. For instance, with the move to de-

institutionalize people with mental health disabilities, colleges are inevitably experiencing a rise in the number of mental health disabilities prevalent among their students. Counsellors and disability services providers are struggling sometimes to know how to address these needs, especially if other mental health support services in the community are stretched or nonexistent.

### ***Extension of learning disabilities***

Students are more likely to possess learning disabilities than any other type, including physical disabilities which is the next most common category reported provincially. Improvements in the ability to diagnose different kinds of learning disability are extending the range of conditions which service providers need to be familiar with. At the same time, this is a factor increasing the number of people diagnosed with a learning disability.

Besides those who have a documented learning disability, larger numbers of students are self-diagnosed and carry that label as a part of their identity. This has opened a large gray area of people lacking documentation or learning disabilities per se, but who do have some learning weaknesses or difficulties which require some support. Differentiating the appropriate levels of support is neither easy nor cheap. The more colleges require recent and specific psycho-educational or neurological reports to justify the availability of particular supports, the more students take issue with the \$800-\$1,200 cost of providing these reports, as the 1995 position paper of the BC Educational Association of Disabled Students concluded:

*Equal opportunity and equal access should not be delayed until after a student has proven the existence of a disability. Suspicion of legitimacy of disability is discriminatory in itself and is an impediment to equal access .... As well, the cost of assessment is itself a significant barrier to access to education if it is required for accommodation or services. If an institution or agency demands such assessments, it should be prepared, indeed required, to pay for them.<sup>42</sup>*

However, disability service coordinators feel the issue goes beyond simply cost to what level of service is to be provided and with what resources. As one explained:

*What has always been lacking, in my view, is certainly supports to get an assessment done, but just as important are the strategies to support the individual once they get an assessment done .... [Instead] we say, "OK, you've been labelled, now good luck!" We need to have learning specialists available and we'll need to have them more so in the next millennium.* **Disability Services Coordinator**

### ***Improving transitions***

Having to provide or pay for documentation is only one of the barriers faced by students with disabilities making the transition from secondary to post-secondary education. Many supports which they took for granted in their high school classrooms may not be available

by right or even at all during their college studies. This knowledge can come as a considerable shock. A decade ago, one provincial report expressed this dichotomy well:

*The recently released Ministry of Education 'Graduation Document' describes a graduating student named Jin-Ah, who is in a wheelchair, dependent on a ventilator, utilizing a specialized lap top computer, and reliant on a full time personal care attendant. In the case study, Jin-Ah is participating in a work experience at a university in preparation for her enrollment there in September. In reality Jin-Ah will discover that the university, like most post-secondary institutions in British Columbia, is relatively inaccessible to wheelchair users, that she will lose her specialized equipment and personal care attendant once she leaves the school system, and that she will have to struggle to overcome these barriers with little support.<sup>43</sup>*

Almost ten years later not much has changed to make the situation faced by some high school graduates any better today. The resources available to colleges for providing a variety of labour-intensive supports have barely increased, although access to equipment and electronic supports has been significantly improved through the provincial agency SET BC.

In addition, facilitating successful transitions away from college into university or into the workforce for students with disabilities<sup>44</sup> is a new role that the provincial government has been asking colleges to provide, again without providing ongoing additional funding resources to do so.

## **Rising number of part-time learners**

*The mix and flow of part-time .... The old motto was get out of high school and attend September to April and take every summer off and in two or four years you're done .... Now we have this mix of more than one institution and part-time and full-time, and summers and some winters off, and co-op and prior learning .... The lifelong learning model and the Canada Student Loan model sound like they are at serious odds.*

**Financial Aid Officer**

As formal learning becomes more lifelong, students will increasingly desire more opportunities to study part-time, either because they cannot afford to enroll full-time or because they have other commitments that also demand their attention. For some types of student, part-time or reduced course loads improve success rates. For institutions, more part-timers mean more people to serve with constant dollars.

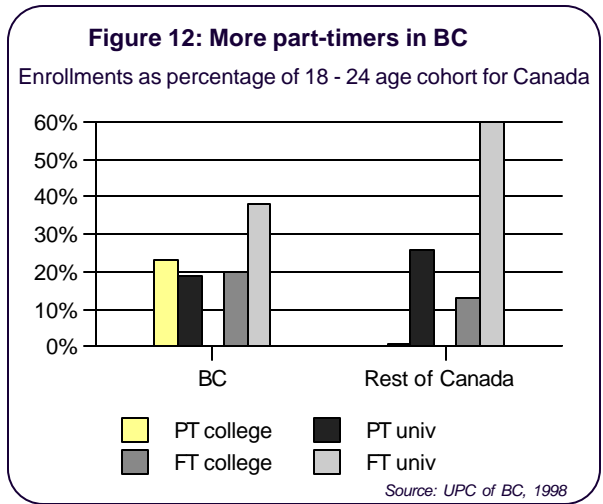
### **More part-timers in BC**

Although a high percentage of learners attend post-secondary institutions full-time, the number of part-time learners in college is greater than the number of those studying full-time and this percentage has been increasing (see Figure 12). Student enrollment in BC increased 45% between 1984/85 - 1996/97 due to additional funded full-time equivalent



(FTE) spaces provided by the provincial government as well as improved utilization rates by institutions. At the same time, the number of actual students per FTE has increased by more. Headcounts of part-time students were up by 47% during this period compared to full-time headcounts rising only 38%. Today, part-timers account for fully 42% of all post-secondary enrollments in BC, compared to 27% nationally.<sup>45</sup>

Also, the increases in part-time enrollment for all types of training have been most noticeable in BC, whereas some other provinces have actually seen a decline. This is true both for persons aged 20-24 and the older cohort aged 25-29.



### ***Part-time more successful for some***

Although full-time enrollment increases the chances of timely program completion for many learners, studying part-time is still preferable for other students. Many previously disadvantaged or under-educated learners are well advised to start college on reduced loads to increase the chances of making a smooth transition into their programs.

This applies to mature students who have been away from formalized learning environments for many years and who need to brush-up or re-learn good study habits and skills. But it also applies to many students with disabilities who require time-consuming or equipment-dependent accommodations, such as large print formats or audiotaped exams, which increase the out-of-class preparation needed by all involved. Many IBT staff or First Nations coordinators routinely advise “at risk” learners to reduce their first semester course load to the bare minimum to ensure a successful start.

As competition for grades intensifies, whether for university transfer or financial award purposes, many counsellors are also advising part-time study where possible as a success strategy. Over the past five years, the growth in the Canadian Study Grant for High-Need, Part-time Students has paralleled this trend.

### ***Flexibility creates opportunities***

Many of the initiatives outlined in *Charting a New Course* for developing a more responsive and flexible post-secondary learning system in BC are likely to increase substantially the numbers wishing to study on reduced loads. As more students take advantage of prior learning assessment opportunities, they will by-pass full program loads, taking only

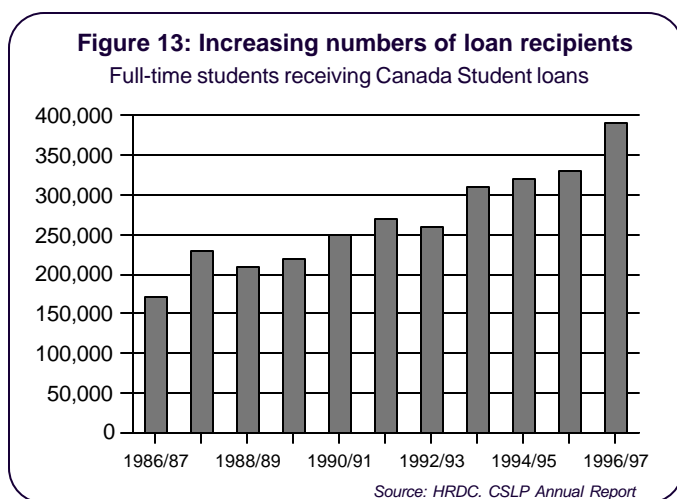
those courses they need. As more students pursue distributed learning opportunities, they can attend to family or work responsibilities without coming on campus full-time. As more students take advantage of distance learning opportunities, they may assemble a program of courses from different institutions, being a part-time student at each one. As more students return for continuing professional education courses to remain current in their field, they will be enrolled less than full-time while they remain at work.

Thus, as access and choice increases for students, so headcounts per FTE will invariably increase too and, perhaps, by more significant ratios. To date, little analysis has been done to determine the direct service cost increases this rise in headcounts will create.

## Increasing financial burden

*I am a 28-year-old university graduate who has been lucky enough to have survived the three years or so since I graduated .... For those who think that the younger generation is just a bunch of whiners, I ask you to try paying a student loan debt (average \$300 per month), rent and utilities (\$600 if you are lucky), food (\$50 a month if you eat only Kraft Dinner, milk and butter) and clothe yourself to look presentable -- when the minimum wage job gives you \$1,170 gross a month. We're already at \$950 and that doesn't include health care, transportation, shampoo or tampons. You do the math -- and don't forget to take off tax. Because we are working at short-term, low-paying jobs we receive no sick pay or benefits. A day off ill or a toothache means we sink deeper into debt and face a new battle with a new collection agency.*

**Student<sup>46</sup>**



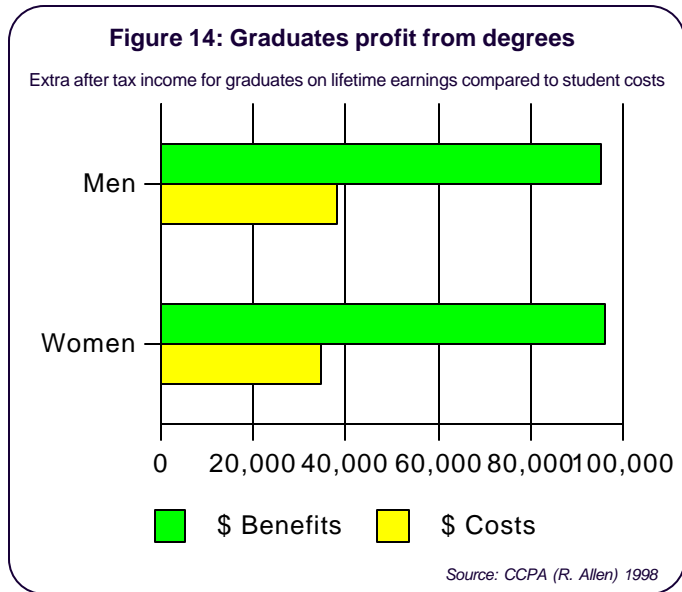
Learners are increasingly being required to pay more of the costs of their education and are shouldering a larger burden, including mounting financial debt, which most are still managing to repay, at least for now. Since the lost opportunity costs of not pursuing post-secondary may be huge, increased debt is not deterring many students from participating. But handling the debt is another matter. At the same time, employer support for training is available for only some employees. Whether recent federal initiatives will offer real progress, remains to be seen.

## Additional fees and costs

The cost of tuition has been rising significantly across Canada at post-secondary institutions; so has the cost of living on campus and the cost of textbooks and other materials.

Students are increasingly levied other fees for various services and amenities, such as computer lab fees or course photocopying expenses, many of which are compulsory charges.

Recent “de-regulation” of tuition in some provinces like Ontario has seen tuition fees rise steeply at some institutions. This mirrors trends in other parts of the world. In the USA, for example, student expenses at both public and private colleges have more than doubled in the past twenty years, in contrast to median family income which rose only 12% during the same period (and only 1.5% during the last decade). At the same time the proportion of student costs offset by grants has dropped in America from just under 55% in 1981 to only 39% today.<sup>47</sup>



In contrast to rising tuition fees elsewhere, the BC provincial government added a fourth year to its tuition freeze in 1999/2000 which has helped keep these costs constant for students attending BC institutions. The previous tuition-free status of basic literacy courses was also extended to all Adult Basic Education courses last year. How long BC can contain tuition fee increases is doubtful, partly because colleges have needed to receive compensatory funds from government to offset the resulting lost tuition revenues.

### ***Benefits out weigh costs for graduates***

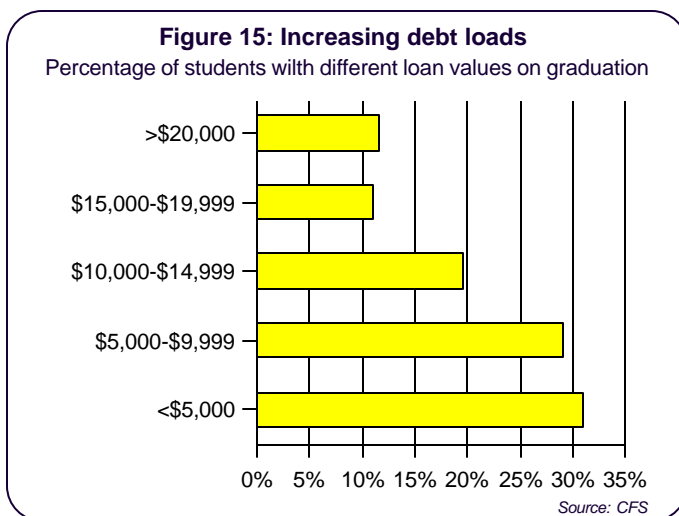
Another reason tuition fees are likely to rise is overwhelming demand by students to attend college due to economic pressures. Although students may balk at the sticker price, the actual monetary increase in lifetime earnings means going to school is worth the financial sacrifice for most students. As one university transfer student explains, “It’s a good investment. You can spend \$26,000 on a new car with a three year warranty, or you can get an education which will last you a lifetime.”<sup>48</sup> Indeed, BC Stats calculations indicate “the payoff for every additional year of schooling is becoming more and more pronounced.”<sup>49</sup>

Even after only 5 years in the workforce, college graduates saw a 14% increase in their incomes between 1989 and 1994 compared to a less than 2% increase felt by those without high school graduation.

Robert Allen from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives<sup>50</sup> suggests the payoff is evident even if you factor in the earnings lost by attending school and the greater taxes paid by higher income earners. For men, Allen calculates the average total cost of an undergraduate education during the 1990s at \$38,046. When compared with the average extra after tax income earned in a lifetime of \$95,117, graduates are better off by a return on investment of over 2 to 1. Allen finds women fare even better (see Figure 14).

### Greater indebtedness

More students have been taking out student loans. In the decade 1986/1987 - 1996/1997 the number of students receiving Canada student loans doubled (see Figure 13). Locally, at Okanagan University College for example, the number of students receiving some sort of financial aid as a percentage of the student population increased from 53% in 1994 to 81% in 1998.<sup>51</sup>



As students stay in school longer, they are accumulating higher debt loads. Rates of indebtedness among students have risen noticeably in the last decade (see Figure 15). In 1990, a student finishing four years of post-secondary studies had an average debt load of \$13,000 -- that average has now almost doubled to \$25,000. Also, in 1990 fewer than 8% of all students with loans had debts greater than \$15,000 but today the proportion is almost 40% and rising.<sup>52</sup> Adjusting for inflation, college graduates in 1995 owed 130% more than their counterparts graduating over a decade earlier in 1982.

As debt loads rise, students are having more difficulty paying back their loans. On average, college graduates in Canada in 1995 had repaid only 19% of their loans after 2 years, whereas their 1990 counterparts had repaid 35% within 2 years of graduation<sup>53</sup> (see Figure 16). With current interest rates charged at prime plus 2.5%, the resulting interest payments can mean thousands of additional dollars, depending on how quickly the debt is extinguished. Murray Baker, author of the *Debt-Free Graduate*, describes just how chronic the impact of such indebtedness can be:

These figures represent more than merely a debt that will force recent graduates to live frugally for a couple of years. Rather, they reveal a situation that will have a profound impact on the lifestyles of graduating students for many years into their working lives. The ability to afford vacations, to get married, to own a home, to have children, to buy cars, boats, and other consumer goods will all be severely hampered. Even the ability to create projects by which to generate capital (to pay off these loans), such as starting a business, will be impaired. Perhaps worst of all, graduating with a huge debt will affect an individual's ability to take advantage of such tax shelters as RRSPs to plan for their own future and RESPs to plan for the future education of their children.<sup>54</sup>

### Fewer summer jobs available

Students have traditionally supplemented the funds available to pay for their education by taking jobs during the summer. But these have been much harder to find in recent years. Between 1989 - 1997, the participation rate of youths in summer employment has declined from 78% to less than 69%, most of which is attributable to falling participation by returning students (see Figure 17).

At the same time, institutions were not able to mount expanded summer school offerings, leaving many students financially caught in the middle — unable to continue studying during the summer months and unable to earn the money that could justify the break in their studies and help pay next year's tuition. Students have had no choice but to increase their indebtedness to make ends meet or pursue higher levels of part-time employment during subsequent semesters to make up the shortfall. Either way, levels of financial stress have risen.

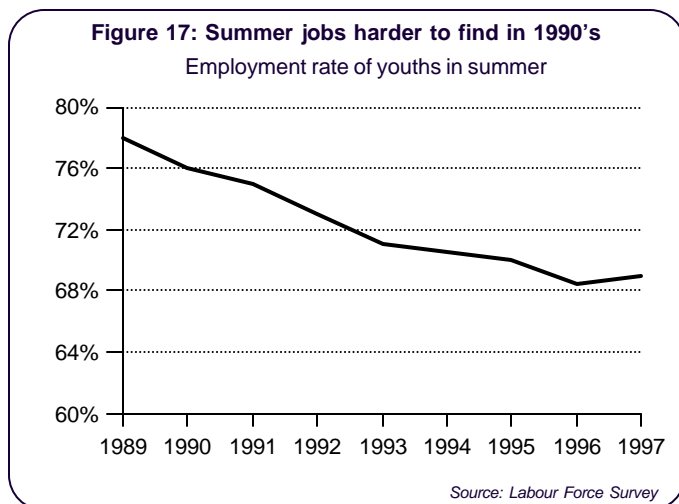
**Figure 16: Comparisons in reduction of loan debt**

	Year of Graduation			
	1982	1986	1990	1995
Amount owing on graduation (in 1996 \$)	\$4,000	\$6,200	\$6,700	\$9,600
Amount owed 2 years after graduation (in 1997 \$)	—	\$3,400	\$4,400	\$7,700
Average reduction in loans between graduation and 2 years later	—	4.5%	3.5%	1.9%

Source: National Graduates Survey, 1995

### Some relief in sight?

"Canadians do not need to be told that student debt has become a major problem. Students know it. Their families worry about it. Graduates must deal with it," claimed Paul Martin in his 1998 Federal Budget speech and proceeded to offer some tax relief for student debt by extending the maximum repayment period to 15 years and increasing maximum levels of financial aid from \$6,000 to \$9,000. In addition, last fall the federal government announced the creation of the *Millennium Scholarship Fund* aimed at providing 100,000 post-secondary students with \$3,000 per year beginning in the year 2000. Since national estimates put the number of students needing financial aid at



around 500,000, the board administering the fund has decided initially to use merit criteria — such as acceptance to a post-secondary institution, course load and the successful completion of courses (although perhaps not grades) — to determine eligibility criteria. However, Elizabeth Carlyle, chairwoman of the Canadian Federation of Students points out such criteria may discriminate against part-time students and others. She suggests instead: “We need a real grants program, one that is set up in the way that almost every other industrialized country

in the world has set up, based on need, where there’s no basis of merit.”<sup>55</sup>

In the attempt to streamline processes, the federal government has also proposed under a Memorandum of Understanding with the provinces to achieve “harmonisation” by September 1999. Currently a student completes a single application form and receives a single loan award, but 40% is provided through the BC Student Assistance Program and 60% via the Canada Student Loans Program (CSLP). How any new eligibility criteria may affect students is unclear.

### **Loan default myths**

One area where the federal government has made changes is to the *Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act* (BIA). Previously, students who declared personal bankruptcy could not discharge their student loan debts until at least two years after their studies were over. In June 1998, the BIA was amended and the prohibition period was extended to 10 years. The Canadian Federation of Students emphasizes how this effectively created a two-tier system: “one tier for consumer debtors and a second for student loan debtors.”<sup>56</sup> *Consumer Quarterly* in October 1997 went further: “... the ten year prohibition on discharging student loan debt is discriminatory and reinforces incorrect stereotypes about students’ track record on loan repayment. The changes to the BIA were implemented without any empirical evidence to suggest that students have misrepresented their financial need.”

Indeed, the myths surrounding how many repay their student loans almost qualify as Canadian folklore. In fact, fully 80% of all loans are repaid without incident. This leaves 20% of students who default technically on their loans by not maintaining consistent payments as scheduled originally, implying they are having difficulty repaying the amount.

Eventually 93% of all CSLP Loans are repaid in full, including interest owing. Thus, only 7% of loans are outstanding a decade after going into default.

Between its beginning in 1964 to 1996, a total of \$12.1 billion in CSLP loans were issued to 2.7 million students, of which fully 88% or \$10.7 billion has been collected to date, and this compares favourably with the repayment history of loans issued by Industry Canada from 1982 to 1997 where only 15% of such loans have been repaid, largely due to a high failure rate among new businesses.<sup>57</sup> Indeed, the chartered banks that took over CSLP debt management and collection from the federal government some years ago, settled for only a 5% risk premium in compensation for anticipated loan default rates.

### ***Employer-sponsorship varies***

Students already employed and wishing to upgrade their skills or pursue other forms of lifelong learning aren't able to count on receiving support from many employers. Instead, they usually finance their own training, directly or indirectly. While Canada has one of the highest per capita expenditures in the world on public education, the contribution to training the knowledge workers of the future coming from the private sector is relatively small and declining. For example, although many adult workers who participated in training in BC received some financial assistance from their employers to pay for tuition costs or release time, a great number self-financed their own learning.<sup>58</sup>

Employer-sponsored training favours people working in full-time jobs for large companies or in the public sector. It is more likely to be available for men in white collar and higher income level positions, and support is more likely to be available for people who already have a post-secondary credential. In fact, the percentage of employers undertaking formal training for their employees has actually dropped in BC from 73% in 1993 to 63% in 1995, mirroring a similar drop across Canada generally. When available, employer-sponsored training occurs 28% at the workplace, 17% at training centres, and 26% at conference centres or hotels.

## **Additional disadvantaged learners**

*Regular students ... what regular students? especially in career programs ... many, many students don't fit the regular kind of model of a younger, university-transfer student anymore. There are so many groups now with special needs because so many different sorts of people require training in order to find employment in today's economy. Those are the people that need the support ....*

***IBT Coordinator***

Colleges are serving a greater cross-section of society, and attracting more students with various special and non-traditional needs. Recent initiatives of welfare reform provincially, and unemployment reform federally, continue to have significant ongoing impact although

for now their long-term consequences are harder to gauge.

### ***Tradition of serving the disadvantaged***

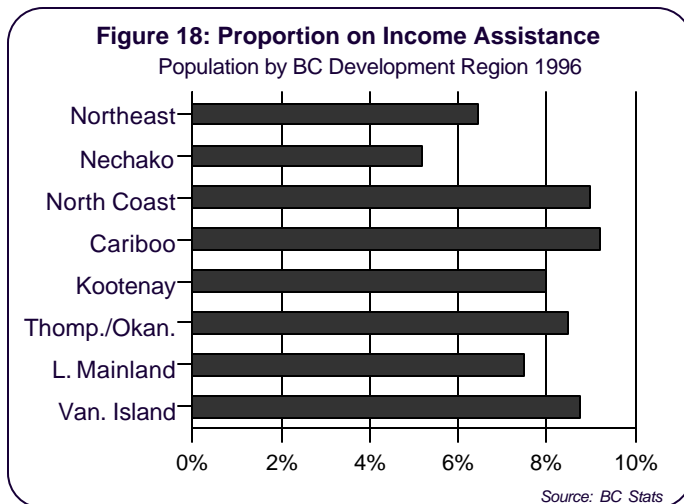
Part of the rationale for originally establishing a system of community colleges in British Columbia was to use them as an instrument of social policy to increase opportunities for participation in post-secondary education by those from less advantaged backgrounds. Colleges were to have a more “open-door” admissions policy which was anticipated to lead to a greater democratization of opportunity.<sup>59</sup> John and Suanne Rouche coined the expression “at risk” to refer to this group of college learners.<sup>60</sup>

In recent years, this mission has gradually been extended to include individuals with much more severe barriers to success.<sup>61</sup> Today the scope has widened to include people with mental health problems, people with multiple disabilities, those recovering from drug and alcohol addictions, those recovering from abusive relationships or upbringings ... to name but a few. The result has been quantitative increases in the numbers served by colleges as well as qualitative increases in the types of support services needed.

### ***Introduction of BC Benefits***

One group that has received considerable recent attention is those receiving income assistance (IA) otherwise known as welfare. In 1996, the provincial government introduced the BC Benefits initiative which eliminated access to welfare for youth aged 17-24

unless they actively participated in looking for work. Some job search information was provided to claimants, and access to further assistance with obtaining employment was provided to clients after periods of 7 and 9 months (periods which are currently under review). Those clients who wished to access post-secondary education or training were required to negotiate their own student loans, although those pursuing upgrading could access grant funding via the new Training Assistance Benefits if approved by their ministry training consultant.



Although the primary intention of BC Benefits was to move people off welfare into employment, the need to provide training and other supports was built into the program.



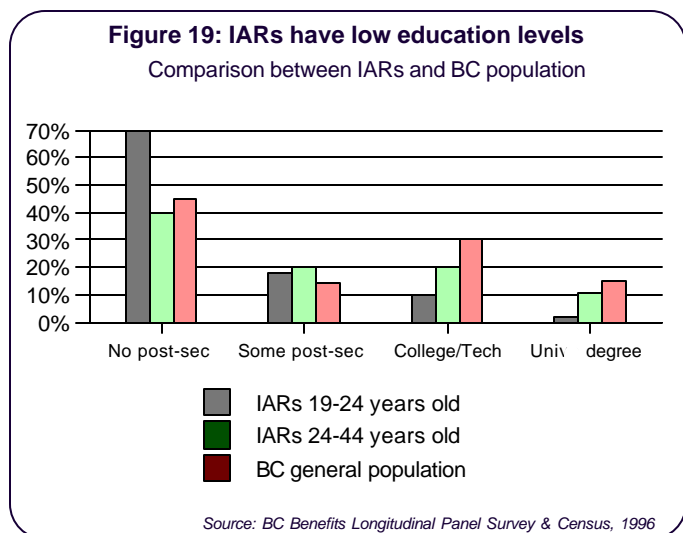
In addition to receiving more FTE to expand institutional capacity for this target group, the colleges each received a special grant of usually \$200,000 per institution in recognition that this new wave of clients would otherwise strain available resources for student supports.

In return, colleges were required to account for their spending of the funds to achieve the objectives of BC Benefits in ways that required considerable tracking and follow-up of clients. Called IBT projects, these institutional responses to BC Benefits were even charged with being change agents within their institutions, attempting to tackle larger issues of institutional renewal.

### Impact of BC Benefits

Since 1995, the number of people aged 19-24 receiving income assistance has dropped noticeably, levelling off in 1998. Around 9,000 people have been moved off IA in BC during that period, representing almost a 25% decrease in cases. Much of this has been attributed to the legislative changes surrounding BC Benefits. However, a large proportion of people have traditionally moved on and off IA each year. For example, the number of starters in 1996 was 164,276 and the number of stops was 189,128.<sup>62</sup> Only 16% are continuous users of IA with 76% cycling on and off IA depending on their circumstances. Furthermore, although the number of people aged 19-24 receiving income assistance has dropped, it is still proportionately higher than for other age groups in BC.<sup>63</sup> There is also significant regional variation in BC. The distribution of IA payments is proportionately greater in most areas than the Lower Mainland and greatest in the Cariboo and North Coast (see Figure 18).

Provincial data indicate changes occurring in the type of client now remaining on the BC Benefits caseload. A higher proportion of clients have previous dependency. Data shows 26% of clients are long term ones, having received benefits in excess of 13 months. The education levels of BC Benefits recipients remain low compared to the BC population (see Figure 19), especially for 19-24 year-olds where nearly 3/4 have no post-secondary training. Given the poor employment prospects of this group, the likelihood they will eventually arrive to enroll in some form



of upgrading and then vocational training within the public college system seems very high. As a result, colleges can expect the service-related difficulties associated with meeting this target population to increase, as more chronic recipients may re-cycle into programs.

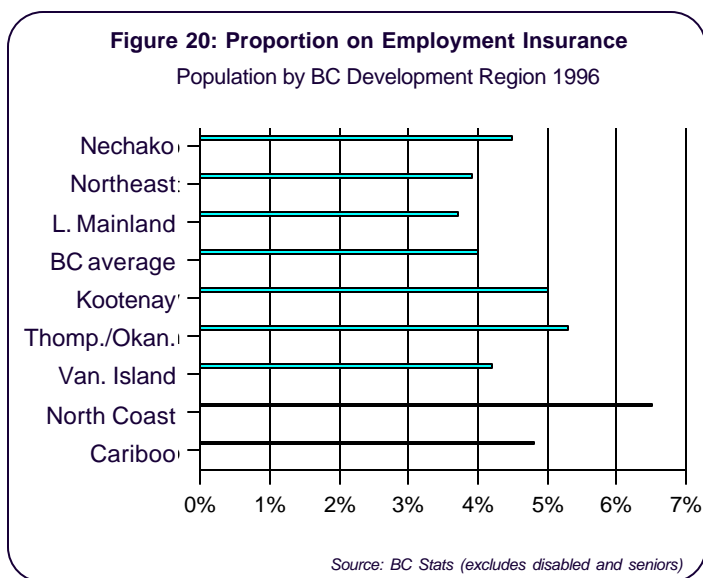
### **Fewer EI recipients**

Part of the reason for the increase in the number of people relying on IA is the drop in the number of employment insurance (EI) claimants. In the past few years, eligibility requirements for EI were changed by the federal government and now include a longer waiting period. While 74% of unemployed workers in 1989 qualified for benefits, only 36% were eligible by 1997.<sup>64</sup> Although some who are now ineligible or who have exhausted their benefits have cycled onto IA, the majority do not appear to have done so. Perhaps they have turned to self-employment or contract work to make ends meet during an economy in which the unemployment rate in BC has been rising, especially in some northern and interior towns, and for young people generally.

Flows on and off EI are proportionately even greater than for IA.<sup>65</sup> Similar to IA, the distribution of EI payments is proportionately greater outside the Lower Mainland and greatest on the North Coast and in the Thompson-Okanagan region (see Figure 20).

While case workers funded by Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) have sponsored many EI recipients to attend training programs delivered by public colleges, the previous practice of block-seat purchase by HRDC has been discontinued. Under the new *Employment Insurance Act* of 1996, no payments from the EI account can be made

to educational institutions or to governments after June 1999. Some confusion exists currently surrounding how the program of Skills, Loans and Grants may function to provide “training credits” which approved EI recipients can use to purchase training directly. Indeed, many aspects of the proposed model of devolved responsibility for programming under the Labour Market Development Agreement are still being negotiated. However, early indications suggest that continued targeted reduction in the number of EI claimants — and hence savings to the EI account — will remain a



primary goal.<sup>66</sup> More claimants could be required to apply for student loans to fund their own re-training. Any impact on the already-stretched staffing resources of Financial Aid Offices in colleges remains to be felt.

## Some lingering issues

*On the positive side, having a wider cross-section of society in college courses can be mutually beneficial: Primarily because they're single parents and they're older, and they have less formal education and lots more life experience, the other students learn from those students in the classroom, and that is a real help.*

**IBT Coordinator**

Nonetheless, Dennison in *Challenge and Opportunity* (1995) argued that, while various stakeholders, including the students themselves, might “regard colleges as agencies for social rehabilitation,” colleges are in fact ill-equipped “to deal with the complex personal problems which bear upon student performance in courses and programs.” Instead, he argued that the mandate of colleges lay elsewhere: as educational institutions. Although BC colleges have certainly risen to the challenge of extending their services ever wider to the disadvantaged in society, there may be practical limitations, aside from any philosophical ones, which could prove intractable without more resources.<sup>67</sup> As one IBT Coordinator indicated: “The academic part may be coming on fine, and the up-front access service is great, but we are finding that it is support once they're in the classroom where we find we're stretched to the maximum.”

Another issue has been the mounting communication necessary to case-manage each client within the college and externally among different support agencies:

*... I think we're having a lot of the same difficulties, the information flow for folks in the community, it's hard for us to get a handle on it and we have an external advisory committee where the players come to the table. As the legislation changes, and one person moves from a Financial Aid Worker to a Training Consultant — and now we have the mutual client — it's hard to get the whole picture and people get very frustrated being moved around the system. And then of course, we have our own bureaucracy which we have to help people through as well and it is challenging for folks ....*

**IBT Coordinator**

Facing considerable odds, disadvantaged students have greater potential for failure and dropout,<sup>68</sup> something which service providers continue to work hard to try to prevent:

*From what I've seen, they can become very easily discouraged and give up easily. They're already battling against odds to be there and then something goes wrong, you're going to lose them .... Then it goes really wrong because they've only done one year of the program and they're in that much more debt and they haven't accomplished much .... It just reinforces their sense of failure.*

**Financial Aid Officer**

Perhaps the most serious difficulty these students will face lies in their ability to repay their financial debt. There is at least anecdotal evidence that individual circumstances can vary tremendously:

*One recent graduate of our Psychiatric Nursing program was a single mother with three children. She graduated with a debtload of over \$30,000. She calculated that the payments on her student loan would leave her with nothing more per month left over than when she left welfare to enroll in the program. At least when she was on welfare she had full medical coverage.*

**Financial Aid Officer**

## Endnotes

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# Changes in Learners' Expectations

**L**iving in a more time-conscious and quality-conscious world, today's learners of all ages have rising demands for the services they expect to be available to them, how they want to access these services, and how they want to be treated as consumers. When service is poor or their rights are infringed, they seek accountability.

## Desire for just-in-time service

*To put it simply, students want to be treated like customers. They want a relationship like they have with their bank, their gas company, and their supermarket. Students now say, I want terrific service. I want convenience. I want quality control. Give me classes 24 hours a day ... and they do not want to pay for anything they are not using.*  
**McClenney (1998)<sup>1</sup>**

Students often complain about the level of frustration they experience simply navigating their way through the labyrinth of bureaucracy associated with the delivery of services in colleges. This is especially true at the beginning of semesters when students experience the "run-around" from one office to another, as students try to register in classes, pay bills or obtain textbooks:

*I remember my first year when I started back, I didn't have time. I was scrambling around, I spent 2 hours in a book line-up. There was no one telling me that if you would have waited 3 days you could have just walked in and bought your book without lining up. I think it could be totally discouraging for someone who's just starting to go back ... you miss your first week of classes and you're stressed out so you're looking at your debt already, you're looking at your cash, your loan and say, "Man, I've got to pay this back!"*  
**Student**

In response to rising pressures on their time, learners do not want to wait in line-ups or have to wade through, or provide, unnecessary information:

*I still haven't got it [child care subsidy] because I just got another phone call saying they need more information. I had two separate pieces of paper, saying how much my student loan was, and how much my tuition was on the other one. All they had to do was subtract the amount to see what I had left. They couldn't do that. They needed it all on one piece of paper. I can't take 2-3 days off to deal with this .... After a while you get so stressed out dealing with all that back and forth between offices.*  
**Student**

Students want less just-in-case preventative help which comes to them in large collections of information that they might need later but aren't able to process at the beginning of the semester:



*There's a lot of people who just don't read it [orientation package] who get an envelope, flip through it, and toss it.* **Student**

Instead, students want more just-in-time responsive assistance that's available to them when they actually need the information or the service. They also want full day, full year access to these services, organized around their schedules without having to wait weeks to be served:

*If you go in to get a counselling appointment, you're not going to get in right away. You might get in the next week, or the next 2 weeks because they're so busy. You go in to see an academic advisor and it's like, come back in a few days. For a lot of people, it's like I need help and I need it now. I'm not going to come back next week. I'm failing out of a course this week. I need to know what to do. Next week isn't going to help.* **Student**

For many students who were used to a single administrative office in their high school experience, the plethora of services at college can be daunting. Even finding out which services are available on which campus can be difficult. In contrast, students — especially new ones — say they want more of a 'single window' approach:

*There's no one point of entry for a student coming to a college, in terms of getting the full round set of advice .... You have to go from your academic advising meeting, to your student aid advisory meeting and which-ever-else meeting .... Who has the time or the knowledge to know that they need to go to each of these places and where to find them?* **Student**

As competition from the private sector for the provision of higher education intensifies, colleges may find themselves debating not the reasonableness of these student demands, but whether the college can afford not to cater to them.

## Need for program flexibility

*You've got more students who are out of work and wanting to get through the system as quickly as they can because they have family responsibilities.* **Student**

Facing considerable enrollment demand for some programs and courses, colleges are unable to mount sufficient classes. The result is lengthy waiting lists for admission, some a couple of years long. Some students, eager to secure enough courses for student loan eligibility, are forced to take courses they don't want or don't need.

None of this is new but the impact on students has become much more serious as the cost of being a student has risen. Timely program completion — a two year program in two years — is becoming an elusive goal even for those without family and job responsibilities:

*[Going to school] is a lot of work. I know students who live at home, have their parents looking after them, doing everything for them, cooking for them, and cleaning up after them. They have no responsibility whatsoever, and even they*

*can't do it: a full-time program and finish on time! To me it's unrealistic to even think about trying to finish [a degree] in 4-5 years.* **Student**

Students who do not complete their studies in a timely fashion reduce their eligibility for loan remission. This means that those who progress slowly — due to other responsibilities or the need to repeat courses or as a result of simply being ill — not only accumulate greater loan debt but also are more likely to have to pay back the full amount.

Growing impatient with the need to advance their education swiftly, some learners, especially mature ones, seek prior learning recognition services, laddered entry points, challenge exams, multiple credit, and flexible scheduling of learning support services.

Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) and various flexible admissions procedures, such as advance standing credit and challenge exams, are attempting to improve the ability for learners to make laddered entry into many programs.<sup>2</sup> To maintain standards, the process has been rigorous and developmental. Much further work is still needed to remove access barriers. A provincial Multi-Lateral Task Force, for instance, recently reported:

*The cost associated with the processes can be high. The requirements for assessment may be time consuming and complex. Some participants in PLA processes have indicated that it would have been less onerous to participate in the course than seek PLA credit. Experience has shown that PLA works best for large segments of learning, rather than on a course by course basis.<sup>3</sup>*

When students do manage to gain entry to college, they often complain they face scheduling barriers that do not recognize the multiple demands on their time and resources which often lie outside their control:

*I have a class that's at 2:00 pm on Tuesdays and Thursdays. It's going to have an exam at 8:00 am on a Friday ... who's going to take my kid to school or daycare in the morning? Other people have to talk to their boss who isn't particularly sympathetic already and tell him that they can't show up for work that day.... Changing a shift is a big deal. That just drives me nuts.* **Student**

Such structural and systemic obstacles to success also include the attitudes and assumptions of college personnel providing services or instruction:

*I think that instructors are very attached to the old model — which doesn't work when 40% of us have jobs and 10% of us have kids that get sick and all the rest of it. It's the model of 'you have to show up at class every time and here will be the specific dates when specific kinds of work will be due' and I think that just doesn't work for a lot of people. We might as well face it. There are people who try to go to college who have shift work, so sometimes they are not going to be in class. So should we just say to these people, you shouldn't be here because it doesn't fit the system?* **Student**

Student demands for more flexibility in the system extend to the desire for accommodation to the inevitable difficulties that they face in what remains largely as a rigid, time-bound system:

*And what opportunities are there for recovery for a student who screwed up to come back ... pretty limited in a system where most instructors have trouble saying, 'Okay I'll extend the deadline dates or waive the penalty as long as you [hand in] good work' ... It just seems to me that there's a whole restructuring of policies and professional training and all kinds of things that have to be done that say, 'Well, okay, has the student learned the material?' That's what's relevant here and how can we facilitate the student learning the materials when they're encountering these [systemic] problems.*

**Student**

Students also need flexible and time-shifted access to services which traditionally have been open to provide service only during regular business hours with limited evening or weekend hours. This is especially true for students taking distance education courses:

*The folks that have jobs and family responsibilities are probably, numerically, a bigger population than the folks that access distance education because of problems with distance ... numerically, it's about scheduling as much as about distance.*

**Distributed Learning Administrator**

Perhaps services should be organized with flexibility as a design feature so service providers are able to respond to the particular needs of the moment:

*Always have somebody available for drop-ins or crisis ... you have to have that built in ... because you can't be so busy doing workshops and having every possible minute scheduled with booked appointments that you can't respond to these crises.*

**Counsellor**

As the distinction between credit and non-credit blurs, colleges will also need to remain flexible to the options that students want to hold open:

*We can actually register students in credit courses for non-credit, with an option to come back and do the assessments later ... and we see the demand for that significantly increasing .... Business and industry on-site training will say, 'No, we don't care about the credit ....' But then the students will come back and say, 'Well, wait a minute, if I'm doing this and if there is the option for credit, I don't care what my employer says, I want it for credit'.*

**Registrar**

## **Need for individualized support**

*People are not going to be able to complete. You may get them in the door and into classes but they aren't going to finish and have completion rates if those services aren't available.*

**Student**

While appreciative of workshop and other group formats, learners want individualized assistance available to help their unique circumstances, such as academic advising, academic tutoring, personal counselling or career exploration:

*I failed one course [and] was put on academic probation .... I went to see somebody and they said 'You are enrolled in four courses, but you're on academic probation, why are you doing this? .... I said, 'Well, I have to be because I have to get 9 credits to get my student loan.' Okay, ding. Hit a button on the computer*

*and that was it. But nobody asked me 'Why did you fail the course, what happened there?...' I know that there are a lot of students and it would be hard to give that kind of individual attention, but ....*

**Student**

The recent provincial study of counselling<sup>4</sup> conducted focus groups with students and found the need for individualized support was consistently voiced:

*Students spoke loud and clear what they feel is that ... institutions often deliver content very well but when it comes to the individual student quite often they feel left out, and they really need things like a counsellor at times to allow them to be successful because their issue is not always 'I don't understand physics', their issue might be 'I don't know how to deal with studying'.*

**Counsellor**

Trying to meet the individual needs of students, some service providers are already stretched beyond their resources to serve the range of needs that students bring:

*In a lot of colleges with First Nations advisors, there has been a real effort in the last few years to have an office on campus and have an advisor there, but that person ends up being: advisor, counsellor, friend, and support group because there's so many needs that aren't filled in other support service areas of the college. That one staff person ends up taking on so much ... [but] simply having that person as a referral service isn't going to be adequate either.*

**First Nations Student**

Students increasingly feel that colleges have a responsibility to be proactive in caring for an individual student's welfare:

*All the colleges should have some intervention policies where they're watching things. The student who's been a B student one semester and is suddenly crashing the next semester, or a student is getting an A and an F on the same transcript, things like that. That's not somebody who's failing because they don't know how to do it, that's somebody who is having some trouble dealing with school for some reason. I think the institution should watch and identify those sorts of things and make the phone call.*

**Student**

Students often will seek individual service in their local community even if they are enrolled in courses at another institution. Already common in metropolitan areas, the increase in distance learning opportunities will spread this demand wider:

*I remember working with a student in the summer when we were very short-staffed and I went out to help a health sciences student, so I just made the assumption that it was a BCIT student. Finally, I ended up asking, 'Where are you taking this course.' 'Oh,' she said, 'I live in Surrey and I'm taking the course at the University of Victoria.' But here she was at BCIT and that's not uncommon at all.*

**Librarian**

## Desire for non-traditional formats

*Just as they do now with banking and everything else, if [students] can get it themselves they will want to do so. That will mean drastic changes in how we provide services and how they're organized.*

**Distributed Learning Administrator**

Today, over half of all Canadian homes possess at least one computer,<sup>5</sup> and the number of computers purchased by the public surpassed the number of televisions for the first time in 1997. Recent high school graduates are arriving at college with increasing levels of computer literacy and access to computers. Some Lower Mainland colleges, for example, were surprised to discover this year the apparently high level of computer penetration. A survey of students attending Kwantlen University College found 98% have access to a computer off campus and 94% already have a "fair" or "good" ability to use word-processing systems. Survey results at Douglas College in Fall 1998 reported 75% owned a computer with 45% owning a Pentium.

Already living in the information age, such learners want ready access to services provided via new forms of information technology. They want access to computer labs using recent and reliable technology. Those not familiar with computer applications want training on them.

Concurrently, advances in technology are facilitating an uncoupling of student and classroom, permitting access to almost anything, anywhere and anytime. Such distributed learning<sup>6</sup> can occur in a broad array of different formats: web-based, electronic mail, computer-mediated, satellite transmission, tele-conferencing or interactive television, to name but a few. These can occur face-to-face or at a distance, in real time or delayed.

Use of educational technology is growing in BC, building upon past commitments to telelearning and distance education, and spawning initiatives such as SFU's Virtual University and the Technical University of BC. In fact, growth in technology is both fuelling and responding to the desire for learners to access education more readily:

*The changing demographics and economic structure of most communities are affecting local demand for educational services. As a result, college populations are increasingly drawn from beyond the local region. Where local participation rates were once 75 per cent to 80 per cent of the total student body, in some colleges participation has declined to below 50 per cent .... [Today] the choice of one institution over another depends more on its particular program offering and available space than on its location.*

**Knowles (1995)<sup>7</sup>**

In the process, not only can colleges anticipate that greater numbers of learners will arrive expecting to be able to access education in non-traditional formats, but also wanting to access services in these new formats:

*You have to have people who are available to answer enquires by e-mail or by phone or by whatever other communication device you think distance learners might need. And you will need to have them over a much broader range of time ... [such as if] someone is searching a database at midnight ... or if they are learning in another time zone .... The commercial equivalent is a 1-800 number where you can get person-to-person tech support 24 hours per day.*

**Librarian**

Much is already occurring. Remote learners in rural areas or time-conscious learners in urban areas are looking increasingly to apply, register, receive grades and access college information via electronic means, such as phone, fax, Internet, and television. They also want to order textbooks, pay bills, and participate in college life without always having to come on campus:

*Juggling all the many school and family responsibilities makes it hard to attend school every day. I'd really like to be able to have more remote contact with college services so I can limit the travelling back and forth.* **Student**

In fact, technology offers the promise of being able to transform not simply the format by which services are offered but also the process by which those services are provided. This transformation can create a virtual student services operation which shifts many of the traditional assumptions about how services are delivered and how the learner accesses them (see boxed insert).

One example of an institution in BC already conceiving of learner services from this perspective is the Technical University of BC. According to Tom Calvert, Vice-President of Research and External Affairs, this new post-secondary institution plans to develop a virtual campus where students could meet in a virtual world:

*They would go to the virtual campus and do all the kinds of things they would do in a physical campus.... They would go to the registrar to deal with registration issues. They would access the library for information. Or they could meet a fellow student and go into a private room where they could chat. You don't need a model of a physical campus to do that, but maybe the metaphor is helpful.<sup>8</sup>*

## Demand for accountability

*The best antidote for ... institutional discrimination is to loudly, forcefully and repeatedly remind the decision-makers that the institution is there to serve the student, and not the other way around.* **Fichten (1995)<sup>9</sup>**

Some learners are increasingly prepared to assert their expectations for quality programming and service delivery. Viewing themselves as consumers, they are willing to assert their needs:

*I think other students need to be involved in what's going on ... but I'm going to keep coming back and put in my 2 cents worth because it's really important for me to voice my concerns and stuff like that.* **Student**

Students increasingly seek improved responsiveness in the service they receive and greater institutional accountability from administrators and institutional decision-makers, wanting their intentions to mirror college policies and their actions to match their words:

*There's a lot of bureaucracy to cut through .... They have a First Nations External Advisory Committee. A lot of people sit on it. I've been to their meeting, and to me what they're coming up with — the First Nations student policy — looks really*

Virtual Student Services	
Traditional Way	Future Way
• Students wait in lines	• Learners access services from any computer hooked to the Internet
• Students walk all over campus	• Learners access everything from one location
• Services open 8 hours per day, 5 days per week (perhaps)	• Services available 24 hours per day every day of the year
• Students gather stacks of printed material	• Learners download only what they want and print what they actually need
• College maintains multiple sources of information	• College maintains single electronic site, easily accessed and used
• Provider-focused	• Customer-focused
• Departmental silos	• Seamless service

Source: adapted from Michael Handberg. *Virtual Student Services*. Presentation at CUMREC, 1997.

*good on paper but how are you accountable for what you're doing and for what you're offering First Nations students .... There is no indication of how [the college] is implementing it ....*  
**First Nations Student**

Some learners, especially those from equity or other disadvantaged groups, are increasingly aware of their legal and human rights. At the same time, institutional liabilities and duties are being extended via legislation or litigation.

*... it is often stated that students are becoming increasingly litigious, as is society in general. Perhaps it would be more correct to say that contemporary students are more aware of their rights and likely more inclined to exercise those rights. Students may question administrative decisions more frequently because today's students fully realize the impact those decisions have upon them. They pay a high fee for the education of their choice: an education they rely on to guarantee entry to a professional faculty and a promising career.*  
**Smith (1998)<sup>10</sup>**

Consequently, some students are increasingly willing to complain or to appeal decisions:

*Students may file formal appeals not only because they disagree with the nature of a decision (substantive) but also because they perceive that the decision making process was not fair (procedural). Typically students report a lack of notice, a lack of explanation, limited opportunity to respond, and the futility of a response due to biased decision making.*  
**Smith (1998)<sup>11</sup>**

Some typical challenges brought by students against college administrative decisions are:

- Denial of admission
- Advance standing
- Assessment results

- Program waiver
- Late course withdrawals
- Fee refund refusal
- Academic discipline (e.g. for plagiarism)
- Suspension from class
- Expulsion from college

As a result of previous violence on campus, students expect — and the courts increasingly enforce — the provision of a safe environment on campus. This requires colleges to take corrective action under a ‘duty of care’ for college users:

*If a campus problem area has been identified, then corrective action, such as more security guards or patrols, escort services, better lighting, installation of emergency telephone services, etc. must be directed to those areas. As well, trees, shrubs, etc. should be trimmed or cut back to eliminate hiding spots for potential attackers.*

**DuPlessis (1993)<sup>12</sup>**

However, institutions need to avoid overreacting to the point where their actions are at cross-purposes with their mission:

*We have all these glass barriers and locked doors because of threats of violence and instances of violence. Now we’ve got whole areas of the college where not only do you not get your hand held, you can barely see the person through the glass.*

**IBT Coordinator**

Furthermore, colleges are also being held accountable by students for including them in consultation processes as part of the governance structure of the institution, as well as in practical applications, such as accommodation to students’ schedules:

*Talking to the two student board reps does not constitute consulting students .... [Instead] it means working with the Student Association .... It means having processes where information gets to the college on issues ... and hearing from the students ... about their concerns in general about services .... It varies from place to place .... It’s also about scheduling meetings .... We hear that a lot ... our local members swear they can’t make it to the meetings that are being scheduled because of class conflicts so whenever administrators are scheduling meetings that needs to be taken into account. The student’s schedule is way less flexible than anyone else’s on that committee is.*

**Student**

Aside from consultation with student union officials, students want colleges to pay more attention to actively seeking out consultation with less vocal and more marginal students to learn of their needs:

*The students who need the services the most are the ones who have the least time to be consulted ... and least time for providing info and feedback to the college.*

**Student**

Demands for accountability also extend to addressing the structural difficulties faced by students trying to satisfy the often conflicting requirements on their time and resources,



especially ones caused through lack of coordination by different services and agencies:

*I think another way we have to do better is to integrate with other Ministries and their activities. I've done advocacy for students who've come through BC Benefits who have disabilities and they'll be in situations where the instructor has one requirement for dealing with whatever might limit participation in class, the doctor will be giving advice to attend as only a part-time student, and the Ministry is trying to push them off the welfare rolls and into school on a full-time basis. There's a lack of co-ordination between the different elements of government on how to best serve people. It sometimes puts students in the position where they're not going to satisfy one of the parties no matter what they do. **Student***

## Pressure to contain costs

*I don't mind clipping coupons, I don't mind shopping at Zellers, you do what you have to. But ... it's so frustrating, it stresses me out even more, and to go without tampons for a month, it's like really devastating. **Student***

Although tuition fees have been frozen for four years, the cost of being a post-secondary student continues to be a major issue faced by many students.

For instance, the rising cost of textbooks is a sore topic with students, many of whom are unable to afford the cost and so continually wonder whether they can get by without purchasing all of their books:

*... in every class I have there are people who never buy the book because they don't have the money. Either because they don't want to borrow that much on student loans, or because they are already at the maximum .... In Nursing the books are \$600 and you have to have every single one of them .... In Philosophy class, half the class has ordered the book from Chapters [bookstore] because it's ... a lot cheaper than to go to our bookstore. **Student***

The cost of computer technology, owned or leased, currently is not recognized as an allowable expense under the standard assessment for student loans. Tech BC announced possession of a computer would be mandatory for some of their programs in Fall 1999 and other institutions have been setting requirements for laptops in some courses.

*The bottom line for now is that students who just meet their need with maximum BCSAP will be unable to enrol in an on-line program which has ownership or lease of a computer as an admission requirement. **Financial Aid Officer***

Some students with limited means will find these additional costs to be another barrier to access:

*If you tell me you have to have a laptop to go to school, is someone going to give me \$3,000 for the laptop? I wouldn't go to the school, I'd go to the school that didn't require that. **Student***

The funding of child care on campus, subsidized by both levels of government, is often

not provided as a core service. With the limited resources of student parents not covering operating costs, child care centres continually limit their spaces and live with the threat of closure. Alternatively, the provincial child care subsidy is too low for many BC Benefits student-parents to be able to afford adequate childcare.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, lack of access to affordable child care remains a chronic burden for some students:

*There's a lot of people that can't put their kids elsewhere. There's just nowhere else to put them. For 20 years people have been fighting for access to child care that's fair and reasonable ....*

**Student**

For other students, the value of their student loan is insufficient to meet normal living expenses, especially in urban areas, despite taking sensible measures to budget and conserve expenses:

*I have the least amount of good nutrition just as I'm preparing for my final exams .... Even if you plan well — I buy in advance — I still have problems. My rent is \$300 per month. [From my loan disbursement] I give the phone company a big deposit, and I pay all my rent in advance and go out and buy 3-4 months worth of groceries. I guess I didn't buy enough this time because now [at semester end] I'm living on a bag of rice .... I spend only on necessities. I have a small other source of income anyway but it's still not enough.*

**Student**

Despite taking on part-time jobs to subsidize their income, students often find it hard to make ends meet, especially when responsible for other family members. As a consequence, many students find a lack of money leads to a lack of dignity:

*I work really hard just to bring myself to the welfare rate, even then I'm living in a situation where I'm with my kid and I'm with my roommate and we don't have enough rooms for everyone so we rotate who has to live in the living room .... It's just ridiculous.*

**Student**

Even groups that receive targeted funding, such as Aboriginal students, find the money provided is unacceptable and degrading:

*I still have to take out a student loan ... because the money I receive from my Band is way below poverty level .... I'm starving as it is. It's up to the government to allot more money to funding Aboriginal students. I don't live on a reserve, my reserve is back in Ontario. People think that Aboriginal students, they get funding, they get this and that. But it's not acceptable, it's way below poverty level and I don't want to live that way. I don't think I should have to.*

**First Nations Student**

## Desire for employment outcomes

*Finding work on graduation is a different challenge than it was even a few years ago. The game is different and so are the rules. Students have become very savvy to that and are choosing programs with one eye on the job market.*

**Student Placement Officer**

More vocationally-minded than their predecessors, many learners today see college as a

means-to-an-end rather than an end-in-itself.

*I try my best not to think about it, otherwise I'd never go to school. That's what kept me from going to school before. I was scared to run up a debt .... Now my alternative was, I can go and waitress in a bar and hope to get good tips and do that for the rest of my life ... but I don't want it to be like that for ever, so [going back to school] was my only alternative.*  
**Student**

For youth, this vocationalism is partly due to the mounting loan debt students will need to repay later, as well as the perceived declining value of a credential:

*Educational inflation and underemployment often leave those lucky enough to have jobs chronically dissatisfied with their careers and always on the lookout for something better, and those who can't get jobs in the first place feeling bitter. Those with credentials ask, "What the hell did I waste five years for?" while those without either withdraw from the labour force altogether or [reluctantly] go back to school to get the requisite degree ... [consequently] the post-secondary education system is turning out a significantly high number of dissatisfied customers, while at the same time attracting people for the wrong reasons entirely.*

**Barnard et al (1998)<sup>14</sup>**

Indeed, a 1998 survey commissioned by Maclean's magazine revealed wide inter-generational differences between how Canadians view the role of higher education:

*Significant numbers of young people ... believe the university's primary roles are to train for jobs, to perform groundbreaking research and, generally, to keep Canada competitive. Their parents' generation ... see the university more as the wellspring of a broad intellectual experience. Their fear of the future, of where the next job will be, is not as palpable.<sup>15</sup>*

The growing number of private post-secondary institutions in BC is linked to a greater demand by many students for short-term job training and career enhancement. The types of programs available at private colleges are remarkably similar to the profile of career and vocational programs typically available at public colleges, suggesting the two systems may already be competing for enrollment.

When asked, 90% of those studying in private colleges say they were motivated to enrol for career-related purposes. Interestingly, only 30% of students were unemployed at time of enrollment.<sup>16</sup> The impact remains to be seen of last year's opening of a Vancouver site for the University of Phoenix and of virtual learning organizations such as the Western Governors University beaming signals into BC. But competition for career training and continuing professional development is likely to increase sharply.<sup>17</sup>

Mature students and those taking continuing education courses in public colleges are already much more conscious of their goals and less tolerant of poor service:

*I find the students that we have that are more non-traditional — the ones that are very focused: 'I have to finish this course, my job or promotion depends on this' —*

are the people that are ultra-demanding in their demands for service — they want it now, and it damn well better be perfect the first-time. **Registrar**

In response, students seek ways to reduce their financial burden and gain valuable work experience via work-study or co-op education:

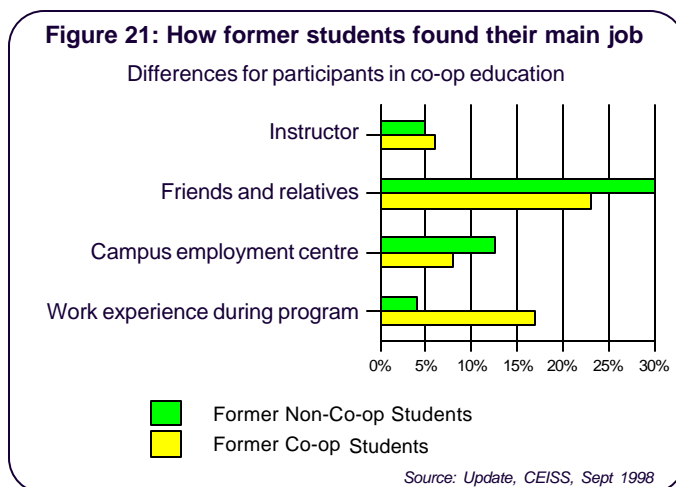
*I just talked to one of our practicum students that had a very successful experience and she was just glowing. She had found something that she really liked. You don't know sometimes until you try it. Other students have come and said, 'I worked on that work study project for that company and I don't ever want to work in that industry ever again' ... at least you find out what you like and what you don't like.* **Student Employment Officer**

To acquire more related employment experience, students have been enrolling in more co-operative education programs in BC post-secondary institutions. The number of co-op placement weeks in BC more than tripled from 30,000 to 110,000 in eight years between 1986/87 - 1994/95. Participation in co-op programs has been shown to lead to increased earnings on graduation and greater chances of obtaining full-time employment. The 1996 Co-op Student Outcomes report for BC colleges<sup>18</sup> found that:

- Co-op students emphasize job skills as their main reason for enrolling.
- Co-op programs do lead to employment.
- Former co-op students take less time to find employment.
- Former co-op students are less likely to transfer to further education.
- Former co-op students gave high marks to their colleges for providing useful training.
- Former co-op students are highly satisfied with the quality of skill development.
- Teaching quality and instructor availability received highest ratings.

Students are also becoming more aware of the value of acquiring employability skills<sup>19</sup>

and participating in other activities on campus which can augment their academic program and round out their resumes.



*Our programs are as valuable [as classroom instruction] in terms of real life skills that are cross-disciplinary because you can use them wherever you go. Team-work is a good example. Self-discipline is another. Those are ... very valuable skills that can be used no matter what career a person chooses.*

**Athletics Director**

Service learning is another way in which students are developing employability skills. Newly-imported from the USA, service-learning is a cousin to co-op education, integrating formal learning with community service for academic credit in the voluntary, non-governmental or international sector rather than with paid employment.<sup>20</sup> It extends learning into the community and can bring unexpectedly significant benefits:

*I prepared and sent students out to work in a homeless shelter. The educational returns were a revelation to me. The quantity of written work produced and the quality of classroom comments jumped up, and carried over into the rest of the course even when we'd left the topic of poverty. This one step, I saw, has set something powerful in motion.*  
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# Reviewing the Purpose of Services

*Virtually all college students need varying kinds of support if they are to realize their learning potential. Advocates of increased emphasis on student success frequently conclude that post-secondary institutions need to invest more of their resources in student support services. Apart from the fact that appeals for additional resources can only fall on deaf ears in these times, we may not be talking about a simple, incremental need. Rather, the whole organization of student support services in each college merits review, if only to determine whether the need is for more of what is already provided or for something quite different.*

**Gallagher (1995)<sup>1</sup>**

**C**olleges need to review why they provide services to learners. Some college personnel often view learner support services as secondary to the main business of instruction. This view, while inadequate in the past, may be dangerous for college survival in future. Instead, colleges should draw upon one of their past strengths to become learning support organizations. To implement this vision, they will need to re-engineer many aspects of how they presently plan and deliver learning support services.

Post-secondary institutions have always debated what level of responsibility they should take for providing help and support for their students, and they have drawn different conclusions historically based on the circumstances they face and the resources at their disposal.<sup>2</sup>

To meet the emerging needs and expectations of tomorrow's learners, colleges must re-examine which services to provide and how best to provide them. The first step involves re-visiting why services are needed and then re-framing what future role services should play in BC colleges.

## Previous significance of services

*... community colleges may be described as having grown old quickly.*

**Dennison (1995)**

Since their inception, BC colleges have focused primarily on being teaching institutions, geared to developing environments where a variety of students could be successful. The MacDonald<sup>3</sup> report of 1962 outlined a bold plan for creating a new type of post-secondary

institution. At the heart of this vision was a desire to ensure the economic prosperity of the province through promoting diversification of educational opportunity for its population, a vision which *Charting a New Course* reinvents.

For their part, educational services primarily played the role of improving access and participation. Service resources provided front-end assistance to students, mostly to new ones. They helped students to apply for programs of financial aid, and to obtain academic assessments, advice or counselling on career or course choices, including the often complicated process of ensuring appropriate transferability between institutions. Indeed, many colleges turn over their student populations relatively quickly and find themselves in a state of what sometimes feels like continually preparing for and processing intakes of new students.

The ratio of these support professionals per student at colleges is much higher than for universities, reflecting different levels of student need.<sup>4</sup> Being largely commuter institutions, colleges have de-emphasized their role in providing housing assistance or organizing student life outside the classroom.

Not surprisingly, given their limited resources and role, student services have tended to be isolated administratively from the instructional areas, often centralized into administrative divisions. In such locations, as Dennison and Gallagher<sup>5</sup> observed, they have become viewed as having a separate purpose:

*For far too long educational institutions have seen student services as peripheral or subordinate to the direct instructional or learning process, with the result that such services have commonly been viewed as dealing with 'student as person' while instruction has been viewed as dealing with 'student as learner'.*

**Dennison and Gallagher (1986)**

As a result, these general support services have often suffered — across budget decision tables — from being viewed as secondary to the main instructional enterprise of the college, as expensive extras or unfortunate overheads which more elite institutions are spared. Behind this view are sometimes latent attitudes about the intrinsically lower value of services to the institutional mission.

## Advent of learning colleges

*... it is a safe prediction that in the next 50 years schools and universities will change more and more drastically than they have since they assumed their present form 300 years ago ....*<sup>6</sup>

**Drucker (1992)**

The strategic plan for the BC college system articulated in *Charting a New Course* is contextualized by increased cries for accountability and links to future prosperity:



*The pressure for British Columbia to have a world-class labour force is continually increasing. Global competitiveness has become a reality. In order for British Columbia to keep pace in the new competitive economy, human resource development must increase in importance. Education and training (i.e. learning) provided by the system is a critical component of the province's success and well-being.<sup>7</sup>*

In response, *Charting a New Course* calls for the college system to embrace a vision characterized by re-invention and innovation:

*The education and training system of the future must move even further than it has to date in embracing a new vision, new methods and new ideas.<sup>8</sup>*

At the centre of this vision (see Vision diagram) is a focus on the learner whereby colleges deliberately meet the needs of diverse groups of learners. They do this by providing a learning environment that is outcome-oriented, integrated to facilitate smooth transitions, flexible in its delivery, and innovative by incorporating new technologies and partnerships.

This renewed focus on the learner as the organizing principle shaping priorities and efforts amounts to no less than a paradigm shift in higher education. It represents a move away from the current institution-centred approach which is time-bound, place-bound and teacher-focused, towards a more learner-friendly environment that empowers rather than constrains students:

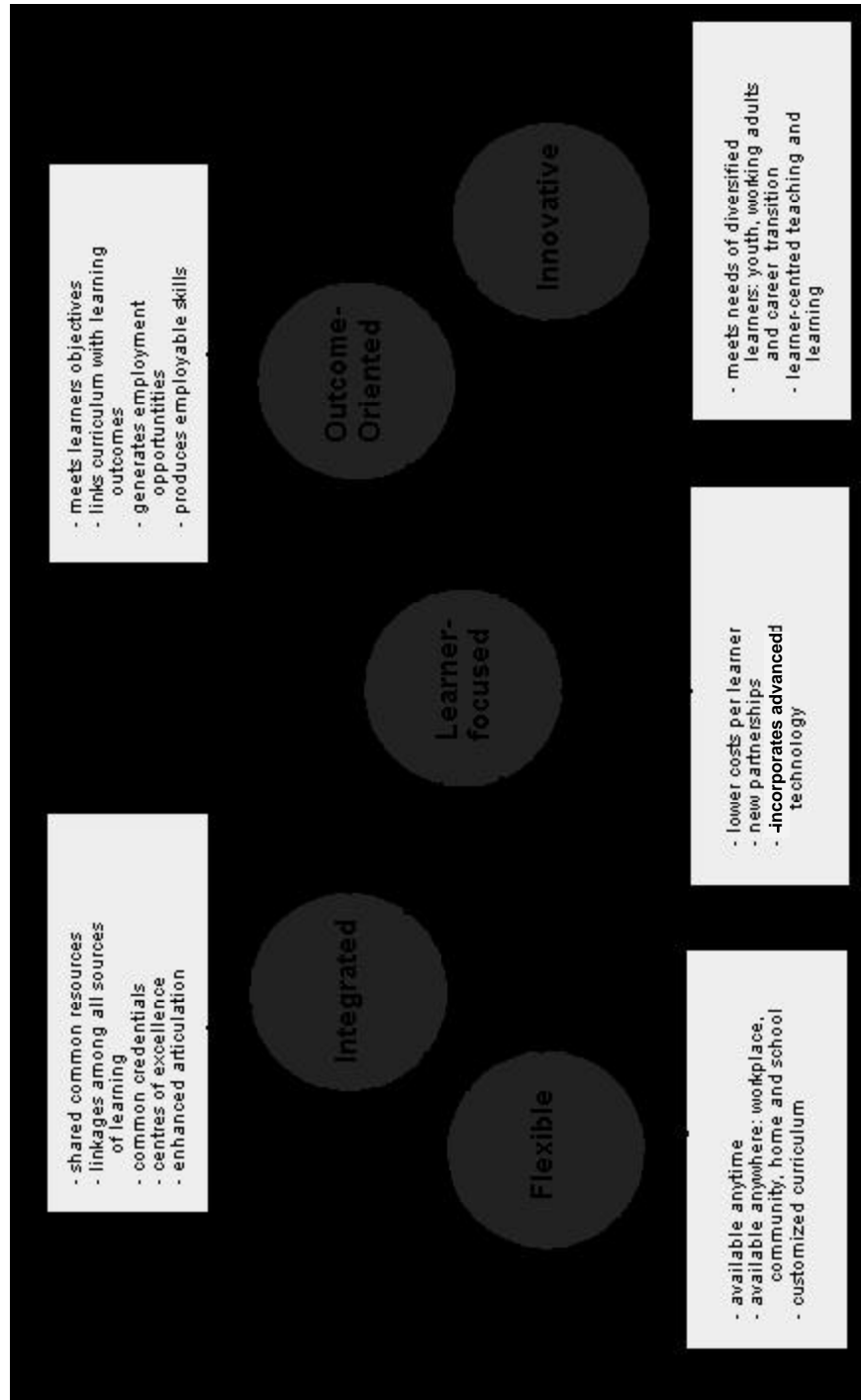
*In its briefest form, the paradigm that has governed our colleges is this: A college is an institution that exists to produce instruction. Subtly but profoundly we are shifting to a new paradigm: A college is an institution that exists to produce learning. This shift changes everything.* **Barr and Tagg (1995)<sup>9</sup>**

The new vision sees institutions becoming "Learning Colleges" through the adoption of a more learning-focused paradigm. In the process, facilitating learning, not the provision of teaching, becomes their mission. Terry O' Banion in *A Learning College for the 21st Century* (1997)<sup>10</sup> explains how community colleges are successfully implementing this paradigm shift by embracing six key principles (see insert) that place learning at the centre of the enterprise:

*...the purpose of a "learning college" is to place learning first in every policy, program and practice in higher education. Not research, not politics, but learning. In this transformation, everyone .... becomes focused on improving learning. Not grades, not grants, not publications, but learning .... The time-bound, place-bound, efficiency-bound, and role-bound institution is not sufficient to the tasks facing us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.*

In some ways, the shift towards a more learning-focused educational enterprise mirrors the quality-assurance movement. This movement has transformed how many firms and corporations see their business, and how they have re-invented and re-engineered their operations to become more customer-focused, assisted by tools such as Total Quality

## Vision of the Future Learning System



Source: Charting a New Course (1996)

Management, in a more consumer-conscious society. The concept of a learning college shares many similarities with the concept of a learning organization as described by Peter Senge (1990), which he defines as an organization where:

*People continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together.<sup>11</sup>*

## Future role of learner services

*Increasing access is no longer a sufficient objective. It is now necessary for our community colleges to pay considerably more attention to student success as well as to student access.* **Gallagher (1995)<sup>12</sup>**

If the vision of *Charting a New Course* is to be achieved, the purpose of educational services in BC colleges will need to shift in step with the move towards a more learning-centred focus.

In fact, as the demands of learners widen and competition to serve them intensifies, the future success of colleges will rely crucially upon their past strength as providers of learning support services, carving this as their niche in the higher education market. Far from turning their backs on the past, colleges can draw upon their many years of experience supporting students:

*Community colleges should acknowledge what they do well, perhaps better than most other institutions. These colleges have a longstanding commitment to and know how to support learners .... Rather than competing with Microsoft and Disney, community colleges will prosper if they do what they do best: provide learning support services to help students learn, regardless of where they get their information .... They should draw upon years of experience in student development, student support services and developmental education to become the best learning support organizations in the world. Disney and Microsoft cannot compete in the provision of these services in support of student learning. In their local communities, this appears a winning strategic market niche for community colleges.*

**Doucette (1998)<sup>13</sup>**

Such learning colleges should become providers of learning support services and learning expertise. Their principal function will be to inventory learning options and experiences and to guide and support students accessing them, whether as brokers or deliverers of programming. In so doing, colleges will evolve into formal learning support

### Key Principles of a Learning College (Terry O'Banion, 1997)

1. The learning college creates substantive change in individual learners.
2. The learning college engages learners as full partners in the learning process, with learners assuming primary responsibility for their own choices.
3. The learning college creates and offers as many options for learning as possible.
4. The learning college assists learners to form and participate in collaborative learning activities.
5. The learning college defines the roles of learning facilitators by the needs of the learners.
6. The learning college and its learning facilitators succeed only when improved and expanded learning can be documented for its learners.

centres:

*In some cases, community colleges may become brokers of content supplied by for-profit providers or other colleges and universities, wrapping a learning support environment around the content that students receive in their homes or businesses. Or community colleges may simply become learning support centres, institutions which are skilled in supporting learners who get information from a variety of sources, including those from the community college itself.*

**Doucette (1998)<sup>14</sup>**

### Guiding Principles for Student Services from CACUSS (1999)

Guiding principles and responsibilities of student services professionals in Canada. These principles are interrelated and not prioritized.

- The mission of the educational institution is paramount.
- Quality of life in a teaching and learning community is crucial to the educational mission.
- Each individual has worth and dignity, and should be treated with respect.
- Post-secondary education should be aimed at an individual's total growth.
- Learning is contextual and is influenced by a wide range of individual and environmental factors.
- Student services professionals are educators.
- The educational goals of post-secondary institutions are best realized through a partnership of student services personnel with students, staff, administrators, and faculty.

*Produced by the Canadian Association of College and University Student Services (CACUSS).*

This vision will have key implications for changing faculty and staff roles — such as the changing role of librarians assisting learners to make sense of information available on the Internet — but it will also move many student support services into mainstream importance in the educational institution:

*How student affairs practitioners help their institutions identify and meet the challenges posed by each new wave [of learners] may very well determine whether community colleges succeed or fail in the next century.*

**Martens et al (1995)<sup>15</sup>**

Also, as the learning environment becomes more technologically complex, the need to provide appropriate and timely support to learners rises.

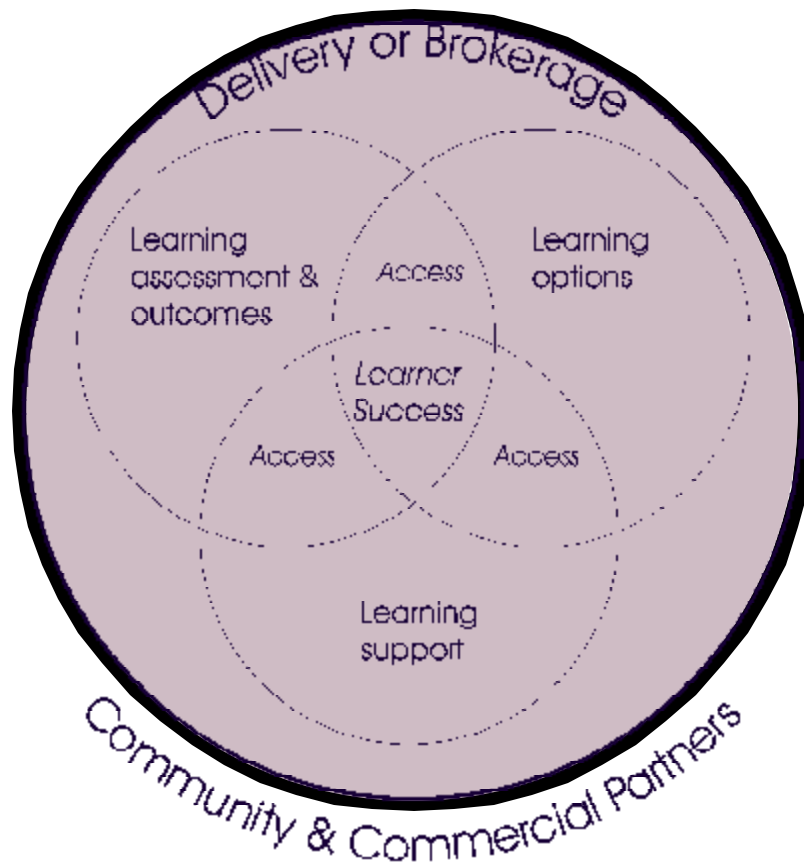
Distributed learning is by definition learner-centred, where much more focus is placed on enabling learners to access and choose what they learn and when.<sup>16</sup> This places more emphasis on the institution to facilitate and support that learning — roles which educational service providers have inherently played:

*I think the college system is going to be turned upside down in the sense that our concept of where stuff is sourced from and where it's being supported is going to be absolutely critical .... The really powerful model is going to be ... we'll bring [learning] to your community and you can study in a supported environment. I think that's a place where the BC education and college institute system has a huge advantage and we have to build on that.*

**Distributed Learning Administrator**

The introduction of technological innovation tends to require higher levels of institutional care and attention before the new becomes mainstream. Support for learners who are the pioneers in such environments is just as social institutions, a change of mind as well

## The Integrated role of Learner Support Services within a Learning College



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important as support for the faculty or the technology itself. As a recent needs assessment conducted by the University College of the Cariboo stated:

*Even a cursory review of the best practices (and worst-practices) worldwide in distributed learning reveals that much of the promise of distributed learning goes unrealized if the learners do not have access to appropriate support resources.<sup>17</sup>*

Distributed learning occurs within a heightened competitive market. Learners are becoming more demanding of the types of technological choices they expect a college course to include and of the availability of academic or technical assistance when they need it. This puts more pressure on service providers as well as others involved to respond with high quality service levels.

In response, colleges will need to re-examine many aspects of how they presently plan and deliver their learning support services to meet changing needs and changing delivery options,<sup>18</sup> guided by the principles and responsibilities of the profession (see insert from CACUSS).<sup>19</sup>

To foster change, college leaders should avoid accepting current practices as sufficient for the future<sup>20</sup> and should initiate ways to promote and reward transformational change — that which re-frames how professionals see what they do — to effect a more deliberate and proactive move to identifying learner success, not simply access, as the goal.

Of course, this transformation will occur gradually rather than overnight, although the pace of change may quicken if the costs and availability of technological options improve rapidly.

Experimentation with innovation will be a superior strategy to wholesale change, not least because the college culture requires consensus-building and the financial resources available are likely to remain constrained.

But a transformation it will be nonetheless. The forces of change are of a magnitude that — whether we want them or not, whether we are ready or not — they will inevitably transform BC colleges over the coming decades, including the role of educational service providers. As Copa and Ammentorp<sup>21</sup> suggest in *New Designs for the Two-Year Institution of Higher Education* (1997):

### **Recommendation 1**

**That colleges review the role and purpose of their educational support services with the intention of realigning them with a more learning-centred paradigm, one that:**

- a) Builds upon the traditional focus of increasing access and participation for learners, especially those previously disadvantaged.**
- b) Incorporates a greater institutional responsibility for ensuring that learners are successful in their endeavours.**
- c) Assists the institution to become learning support centres that supply learning options, learning experiences and learning expertise.**

Change is not an option — it is an inevitability... [colleges] cannot continue to do business as usual.... Transformation requires a break with old paradigms and their associated academic and social institutions, a change of mind as well as a change of practice.

Emerging from such transformation will be a re-newed role for both the purpose and the practice of learner support services:

*As technology affects our lives, our jobs, and our society, as the very definition of what we call community changes, we will become more than just community colleges. We will become the learning centers of our communities.*

**Flynn (1999)<sup>22</sup>**

Deborah L. Floyd, past president of Prestonsburg Community College in Kentucky refers to this new role for a college as becoming a 'communiversity'.<sup>23</sup>

In this process, colleges will need to transform how their campus locations function as models of effective communities:

*... to re-create learning environments that will be tomorrow's models of how the sense of place and community can grace our lives. The essence of the academic environment ... is to meld the aspiration of its individuals with a lively and coherent culture. Our institutions should be places that help us transcend alienation, sameness and bewildering complexity.<sup>24</sup>*

The next section of this report explores how the actions and strategies taken by educational services providers can better meet changing needs and expectations of learners to fulfill this vision.

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# Re-considering How to Provide Services

*Higher education in the 21st century will provide a spectrum of choices for learners, ranging from the truly traditional to the totally transformed .... But organizational actions and strategies can either facilitate or limit the choices available for learners.*

**Dolance and Norris (1995)<sup>1</sup>**

**T**o meet the changing needs and expectations of learners, colleges need to explore how the delivery of services can be improved — adopting a more holistic approach, adjusting attitudes to improve quality, shifting to self-service formats, expanding the range of services available, making effective use of new applications of technology, centralizing the provision of some services, and utilizing more opportunities for learners to help each other. Access to services for learners will become considerably transformed in the process.

## Providing services holistically

*Partly there is a rift between the faculty, the instructional side of the house, and the service side of the house. And we have to find a way to bridge that gap to enable both parties to become part of the student's educational learning process.*

**Financial Aid Officer**

Service divisions and instructional divisions need to become more integrated, rather than planning and operating as separate silos. Perhaps, even the distinction between instruction and service could merge considerably into a single joint enterprise supporting learners:

*Administrators, faculty and student affairs practitioners must change how they work together, understanding that everyone is a student development educator and everyone is responsible for helping students succeed.*

**Martens et al (1995)<sup>2</sup>**

New forms of learning are turning instructors into learning facilitators and service personnel into instructors:

*One of the things that I've noticed over the last couple of years is the interest on the part of the library faculty in the pedagogical process and really thinking about styles of learning and types of learners and then applying that knowledge. And that's a real change and it reflects the emphasis on instruction [for service providers] that has really increased so dramatically.*

**Librarian**

This shifting of focus — often assisted by improvements in technology handling straightforward access to information — applies to a wide variety of services, including for instance:

- Academic advisors leading educational planning workshops.
- Financial aid officers showing students how to budget loans and manage debts.
- Librarians developing information literacy courses.
- Counsellors teaching career exploration and student success courses.
- Athletics personnel organizing health and wellness workshops and events.
- Student placement officers offering job search and resume preparation sessions.

## Example

### Changing Senior Management Roles

Cascadia is the newest community college in Washington State. Slated to open with 800 FTEs in Fall 2000, it has organized its senior management to include two vice-presidents that are both responsible for instruction and services, not divided down the middle as traditionally.

Instead, the Vice President for Student Learning and the Vice President for Student Success together share responsibility for both learning and support services.

Newly arrived as the latter, John Bautsch explains, “Each position has a little different focus, of course. Among my responsibilities are assessment of student learning outcomes and of all aspects of the institution which support the learning outcomes. It’s a very exciting opportunity.”

In response to change, the whole institution needs to focus on collectively meeting learner needs by forging linkages and reducing fragmentation of services:

*I had a guy come and see me in late September and he wanted to do a program here. He needed to do a bit of upgrading. Then he went to see someone else who gave him another option of doing things, then he went to his training consultant who gave him something else, and then he went to EI who gave him something else because he’s eligible for ‘reachback’. December rolls around and he’s not registered in anything and he’s absolutely confused about everything because everyone has their own take on things, and finally I said to him (he was absolutely panicked), ‘Work with me if you want to be in this program and don’t work with anybody else’. He said fine, so anytime he made a move he phoned me and told me what he did, and I phoned him back and told him whatever he needed to do next .... We had a timeline and now he’s in, everything’s in place, he’s quite happy. It’s hard because people are getting too much information that they can’t sort through and they don’t know what’s important about the information that they’re getting.*

**IBT Coordinator**

The IBT projects at colleges have tried to provide services to learners in a coordinated and holistic manner. In many colleges, these projects have been successful agents of change, exploring ways to bridge gaps in service:

*What we have tried to do ... is to provide integrated services without actually picking and sorting through our clients and saying, ‘You belong to our group and you do not.’... We try to have contact with all of the educational support areas of the institution ... for our specific client group .... I think that the interdisciplinary, and*

*hopefully integrated, approach to support services has worked well for us.* **Counsellor**

Indeed, student success must be a college-wide responsibility, not simply one for educational services alone, since faculty spend much more time with students than support staff ever will be able to. Ultimately, student success is won or lost as an enterprise inside the classroom:

*If it's not an instructor's goal to see everyone pass — and there are many instructors who don't have that goal, who feel it's their duty to fail a certain number of students, provide a certain number of B's and a certain number of C's — then all the support services in the world aren't going to prevent that ....* **Student**

## Adjusting attitudes

*Administrative functions such as admissions, financial aid and registration are [too often] designed for the convenience of the institution, with minimal regard for the needs of the consumer.* **Oblinger (1998)<sup>3</sup>**

A corollary of approaching learners' needs holistically is reframing the reason for doing so.

Wider competition and tighter accountability are reducing the monopoly and latitude previously enjoyed by public colleges. In response, colleges cannot afford to be stymied by the debate over whether students are customers or not.

Clearly, students are not in a simple buying position where having the money ensures a purchase. Their purchase is regulated. A college credential needs to be earned by satisfying certain standards through appropriate performance. It is not the same as purchasing a product from a grocery store or a service from a dry-cleaner.

But colleges cannot afford to ignore that they do serve *consumers* — people who increasingly have choices and whose relative purchasing power is increasing. As a result, attitudes need to shift toward offering service — especially student services — at the convenience of the learner not the institution.

## Example

### Changing Role of Librarians

The following are excerpts from the focus group discussion with college librarians:

#### *Douglas College*

"We're trying to make the rest of the instructional faculty aware of the need for information literacy skills and build that into each of the disciplines. This can be accomplished either through more extended orientation programs like we have now or through partial credit. For instance our OADM and Print Futures programs now have 1.5 credits in each program dealing with research skills so that it becomes a common skill. [This is] a very collaborative, integrative approach."

#### *North Island College*

"We have students doing the human service program from Alert Bay. They did not have the Internet connection to the EPSCO databases. So they made a day trip coming in on the first ferry and I met them and spent the day with them in Port Hardy. They were delighted. Although this was not traditional research — nobody in their right mind would sit in front of a computer searching databases for 7 hours — they said it was worth it.... There are always going to be the 'haves' and the 'have nots.' One of our biggest challenges is going to be to try and reduce that gap."

#### *Langara College*

"We've recently mounted a program called *Finding Out*, it's our first module of a survival skills course and the instructors are actually making this a requirement for some of their courses. But it's only successful when the instructor and the librarian work together so that it's geared very directly towards specific assignments. That partnership is really required to make it effective for the students...Yes, we end up spending a huge amount of time with each [student].... We find that the more instruction we do, the more we attempt to develop these skills, the more questions they keep coming back with, so in a sense we feed the demand. At some point they are eventually going to grasp the new skills and they will be able to transfer that and work independently. But during that climb up the learning curve, there is a lot of demand."

*For additional examples and information see Lynch (1995), Butler (1997) Whiteley (1998) and the Canadian Library Association (1999).*

## Recommendation 2

That colleges explore ways to serve their learners' needs in a more holistic manner by:

- a) *Organizationally integrating service and instructional functions into a single enterprise with common objectives, rather than operating as separate entities with different values.*
- b) *Operationally finding ways to offer joint programming and delivery of learning and learner services.*
- c) *Logistically providing the fullest array of services through a variety of means for remote learners so as to reduce service fragmentation.*

In the process, calling them *learners* rather than *students* is a minor change indicating a major shift in focus — approaching people as individuals rather than as objects and serving them personally rather than en masse, irrespective of circumstance and actual need.

Along the way, creating more learning-centered colleges will challenge everyone's assumptions, particularly those with a sink-or-swim attitude to student failure and those insensitive to cultural diversity issues.

Ensuring high standards of service quality in each department should be the goal, along with ensuring equitable service for non-traditional groups and distance learners, both of whom currently suffer in the 'one size should fit all' philosophy exhibited by too many service providers. Colleges, along with other public sector organizations, still have a lot to learn in serving those whom we actually exist to serve. As the saying goes, "the learner is our work, not an interruption to our work."

Most importantly, many administrators of educational support services will need to change their attitudes and practices, not only to set examples but because they largely control the prevailing systems:

*Perhaps the most important role of most administrators is to make it possible for those who report to them to do their work efficiently and effectively. Administrators control many of the plans, policies, procedures, and resources that either support or impede [the] goal. Administrators who believe that their role is to control people, rather than systems, need to change if customer focus is the goal of the institution. Instead, they need to arrange the working environment in such a way that people know what is important and are properly equipped with training, tools and systems that permit them to successfully pursue what is important.*

**Chaffee (1998)<sup>4</sup>**

Chaffee suggests administrators can start by walking around their service units and asking their employees:

- How well are you meeting the needs of the people you serve?
- How do you know?
- Are you improving on that?
- How can I help?

Chaffee also points out that those who follow this path will frequently find themselves without a map. Although some suggest the Total Quality Management (TQM) movement offers a blueprint, service quality improvement need not be so structured. Freed and Klugman (1997) agree, quoting one administrator saying:

*I think it is a way of thinking. People will call me and ask me how I have time to practice quality. They do not feel they have time to have team meetings. I ask them if they have meetings, and the answer is always yes. Then I tell them that quality principles are a new way to manage the work that is done. It is more efficient, it is going to save time in the long run, and it is probably going to save money. I do not think it has to be called anything.<sup>5</sup>*

### Recommendation 3

**That colleges deliberately re-examine the operating assumptions behind the delivery of their educational support services by:**

- a) **Codifying those assumptions into codes of practice based on a learning-centered (consumer-focused) philosophy of service delivery.**
- b) **Establishing service standards for each aspect of a department's service delivery.**
- c) **Ensuring that equitable service delivery is available for all students.**

## Shifting to self-service formats

*... in Canada there has been an overwhelming reliance on the “medical model” of service delivery. Benevolent, expert professionals making decisions in the best interests of their needy, dependent clientele ... thereby fostering the very helplessness and dependency which are used to justify the model in the first place.*

**Fichten (1995)<sup>6</sup>**

Learners can help themselves — as well as help colleges cope with increased demands — by having access to program or service information from kiosks or web-based sources. Computer labs with user-friendly manuals or electronic libraries with tutorials can also reduce help-desk pressures:

*... moving from service to self-service... means teaching students how to use databases, putting more emphasis on skill development as opposed to direct service where we can — having people doing self renewals, place their own holds, place their own interlibrary loans, [so we] stop being an intermediary in services.*

**Librarian**

Technological innovations also create self-service possibilities in registration, fee payment, advising and assessment services, although some learners will be slower to become self-reliant than others:

*I spent one day on our telephone and I would have said that probably 60% to 70% of the questions I was asked could be gained if the person had actually read the instructions that we send them. But they call me — and it's difficult to get through, because our service on our phones is not terrific because we don't have enough people answering the phone — but they all spend a lot of their time hitting the brick wall .... I'm trying to get them into the concept of self-help ... to help themselves, because it's better, it's faster, it's easier.*

**Registrar**

## New Self-Service Ratio

Financial institutions and others are moving toward the 90—8—2 service rule. The goal is to have 90% of services available to customers on a self-service basis, so they can access these services anytime and anywhere using informational technology and other sources. The 8% may need some value-added service that requires human contact or assistance. Only 2% of customers under this model should need to receive a personalized and specialized level of expertise involving an appointment.

Institutions can help learners make the transition to more self-help by providing comprehensive service delivery:

*The one frustration that they're going to have is if you only have partial service available. If they have to go to the web ... to do one thing, and then they have to go to speak to a real person for something else, then your automation is useless, because then they're going to be more frustrated, and they're always going to go to the human being rather than try to play around ....*  
**Registrar**

Clearly, the ability to move to such comprehensive systems will take time and require additional resources:

## Example

### Interactive Internet

Visit the following sites to appreciate the expanding range of support services that learners can already access by themselves at some institutions:

Miami-Dade Community College, Florida  
<http://www.mdcc.edu>

University of Minnesota, Twin Cities  
<http://onestop.umn.edu>

LaSalle College, Quebec  
<http://www.clasalle.qc.ca>

Oregon State University, Corvallis  
<http://www.orst.edu>

Mohawk College, Ontario  
<http://www.mohawkc.on.ca>

British Columbia Institute of Technology  
<http://www.bcit.bc.ca>

College of the Rockies, BC  
<http://www.cotr.bc.ca>

*... most of us are trying to move to the Web so that we remove the time and location issue from most of what we're providing ... how quickly we get there and how efficiently we deliver is to some degree within our control, but much of it is to do with budgeting and support within your institution and the support services that your institution can provide you. But I think we all have recognized this need to move away from making students go hither-thither-and-yon.*  
**Registrar**

However, the technological improvements taking place should increase dramatically the ability for those able to access them:

*Within the next ten years, technologies are going to converge, and we are going to have personal communications devices that amalgamate it all into one which will make it much easier to contact people... [so] when a person registers, you could e-mail them, plus attach the curriculum. Graphic images, videos — I mean everything could be electronically attached and mailed upon payment of fees.*  
**Registrar**

This capability to deliver fully comprehensive services in self-service formats via the Internet is already available at some colleges in the USA and abroad, and the number of such colleges is growing quickly.

## Expanding the range of support

*Having admitted students, albeit in the high risk category, a college has an obligation to provide the instructional support necessary to enable them to accomplish their goals.*  
**Dennison (1995)<sup>7</sup>**

As the learner population becomes more diverse, a wider variety of services will be required to address a wider range of needs and to assist types of students who require more assistance to be successful:

*The more that colleges go after providing access to previously disadvantaged people, those people require a lot more help to get up to speed than your average kid whose parents went to university. So the more we attract, deliberately, this previously disadvantaged group, the more time it is going to take to work with them, to provide them with the necessary skills.*

**IBT Coordinator**

In many colleges, for example, the role of counselling faculty has broadened considerably to include a variety of educational, personal, and career counselling functions, as the recent provincial report on professional counselling found (Beales, 1998). Often viewed as incidental services, counselling in fact plays a key role in facilitating the success of many students, either through workshops, credit courses or individual appointments:

*Our services are really across the institution. We deal with students at the recruitment stages, making career decisions, and getting prepared for coming to school ... [and] we also assist with the transition out into the community.*

**Counsellor**

Furthermore, to meet the needs of some learners, new service units may be needed, such as new student welcome centres or offices for mature students.

For example, the University of Waterloo has provided a Mature Student Centre since 1983 for those returning to school after a long absence, sometimes with families and jobs, aging parents, and other constraints on their time.

Isobel McKay, coordinator of the centre, emphasizes:

*Many [mature students] come back to school with very rusty study skills, and very little self-esteem. I have created an orientation program for them which does help somewhat. Those that take it seem to be more successful than others, or perhaps they are just more highly motivated.<sup>8</sup>*

Other support services, such as providing information literacy skills or debt management skills, may need new courses or workshop modules to be developed, with

## Recommendation 4

That colleges explore ways of providing more access to self-service formats where learners can help themselves to:

- a) Obtain general information as well as information about their status.
- b) Make transactions to apply for services, order materials, and pay bills.

## Example

### On-line Mentoring Services

University of Victoria's Online Mentoring Program, operating since late 1988, allows current students to register via the Web and then search the mentoring database for a UVic graduate who matches their career interests. Answers to frequently asked questions and general career questions are found at the site. Mentors can be contacted by e-mail and only reveal their identity upon reply.

Developed by student Dana Chamberlain, the goal of the service is to link UVic students with alumni from all over the world. Seeking out mentors is a daunting task for students, says Chamberlain, but the online database "gives them the opportunity to look without bothering the mentor."

While the technology doesn't currently allow video-conferencing, participants still find psychosocial benefits in e-mailing with someone, "who knows where you're coming from", says Chamberlain.

Source: Career News, Spring 1999:1-9

different approaches for different sectors of the student population:

*... the younger learners who are coming from the schools are so adept at the new technology and computers; they almost dismiss library orientation because 'I already know how to use computers' and 'How hard can it be to search a library catalogue?' The mature learner gets it immediately, they're in there following up the instruction that you've given them. First of all, they take any opportunity to be trained, shown how to use it, then they're in there doing the exercises, they're doing follow-up because they want to retain it.*

**Librarian**

## Example

### Comprehensive Financial Planning

On behalf of the province, the University College of the Fraser Valley has developed a curriculum "designed to raise awareness for students about the importance of financial management and planning," says course designer Coby Romaniuk.

Called *Comprehensive Financial Planning for Your Education* the course aims to provide any student with "a realistic picture of the monetary and lifestyle costs of getting an education, stressing the unique situation faced by each student," explains Romaniuk.

Participants complete exercises, including a monthly budget and loan repayment calculations.

"The course could be offered at the college or in the CAPP courses in secondary schools," suggests Romaniuk, "or accessed on the Internet."

Deliberate interventions may be needed to avoid having students flounder around and waste time. Transfer students are a good example. Andres (1998) found that students wishing to negotiate the transfer process from one institution to another "appeared to employ a very unfocused, unsystematic approach" which often relied upon word of mouth information received from other students or family members. The unavailability of salient information was a major difficulty reported by these students who also expressed the preference to receive some human contact from college personnel to provide assistance rather than being required to rely on written documentation alone.

Andres recommended:

*Every effort — in the form of written documentation, advising and counselling services, 'transfer information campaigns' — should be made by the BCCAT, sending and receiving institutions, secondary and post-secondary advisors and counsellors, post-secondary faculty, and Faculty of Education teacher education programs to ensure that students can gain access to and understand the information they need.<sup>9</sup>*

In response, BCCAT recently published a 32 page booklet called *British Columbia Transfer TIPS* and is examining the feasibility of creating a network of Transfer Liaison Officers from each institution to work with it to improve services to students regarding admissions and transfer.

Another area where deliberate intervention may be needed is with debt counselling. Mandatory in the USA, institutions are required to ensure students are aware of the financial liabilities they are taking on. Similarly, HRDC has pursued a policy of requiring clients to do up-front research on the viability of a career path before releasing training funds. Structural problems in colleges can prevent such good planning and so need to be changed:



*At my institution, if a student comes in and asks 'How much does your tuition cost?' [We reply] 'You have to register first before we can tell you because the formula is so complex to calculate.'*

**Financial Aid Officer**

Other approaches involve extending existing services — such as student employment services or wellness centres:

*Aside from posting job opportunities, we've been developing job search and resume writing workshops to help students make the transition to employment.*

**Student Employment Officer**

The goal behind all of these support services should be not simply to provide help but to educate learners in how to do things for themselves:

*There's a whole different mentality between the college student and the university student. Our students need a lot of hand holding. They need somebody to say, "Have you thought about this? Where do you want to go from here? What is your plan? Do you have a plan? Or you need to talk to somebody?" [Often] we do the wrong kind of hand-holding, it's the kind "give me the form and I'll fill it out for you and I'll send it in for you". They don't need that.*

**Financial Aid Officer**

Furthermore, colleges can assist learners not simply to achieve their potential but to transform that potential through the pursuit of excellence:

*... if you compete against yourself, you will do your best, at whatever it is you're doing. Whether it's a calculus exam or a new job you've taken, or being a parent, or whatever. If we can teach more people to do that, to do their best and to compete against themselves, that's when you have a really functional citizen, in my opinion.*

**Athletics Director**

In doing so, colleges should resist the temptation to make programs or services compulsory for students, especially student success ones. Rather than “pushing” students to participate, colleges can use the strategy of “pulling” students by offering incentives:

*If you say it's a push thing and you have to go through these orientation steps or take this class, then the student gives it lip service, does the minimum to get through .... [In contrast] we had a parking problem at [college]. We went through all sorts of different options, some very expensive options to get more parking. It's not cheap. The final solution was to offer a coupon for a coffee and a muffin — a total of \$1.50 — for anyone who parked on the street. It was offered to people who arrived at 6am ... and that reduced our parking lot problem by 30-45 cars.*

**Financial Aid Officer**

## Recommendation 5

That colleges explore where gaps exist in providing educational support services for a wider diversity of students, such as:

- a) **Orientation and support services for mature learners, especially those displaced in the labour market.**
- b) **Information literacy skills to permit access to new forms of information technology by those lacking these skills.**
- c) **Debt management skills for students with loans.**
- d) **Student employment services for employment assistance both while studying and upon completion.**
- e) **Improved policies and practices that facilitate student transfer between post-secondary institutions and prepare students for success upon transfer.**

## Making effective use of technology

*Understanding and using technology and information systems is a critical part of the daily work of the student affairs practitioner, and it will become even more important in future.*  
*Benedict (1996)<sup>10</sup>*

As information technology advances, almost all educational support functions are beginning to utilize these innovations. Use of technology within service units can serve several purposes:

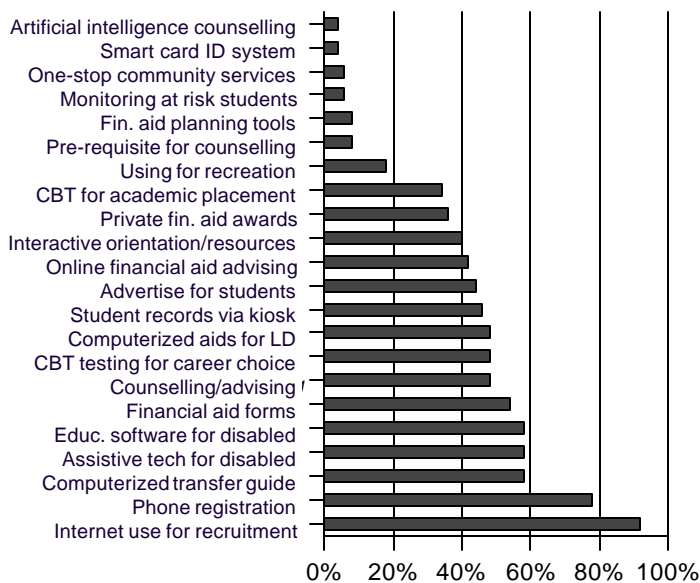
- To provide widespread student/user access independent of location.
- To reduce administrative costs per student.
- To increase institutional competitiveness.
- To increase student satisfaction, retention and success.
- To extend access to higher education programs.<sup>11</sup>

The variety of different uses for technology within educational services is extensive and grows with each new technological development (see Figure 22). Many colleges in BC have moved their registration processes, for example, from in-person to by-telephone and a number of colleges are exploring how to make the next move to web-based on-line

registration services, as is already available at many colleges in the USA.

**Figure 22: Growing use of technology in colleges**

Results of USA national survey



Source: Edelman (1998)

Technology offers significant benefits to service providers for switching the transmission of information via paper-based documents — forms, flyers, brochures, and handbooks — into electronic formats — telephone answering trees, automatic fax back, and Internet download, for example.

Information that used to require printing, warehousing, replenishing, and mailing can now be readily available when the student wants to receive it, scanning through everything that is available and taking only what is needed. As the volume of information being produced by colleges continues to increase annually, electronic storage and retrieval offers a major coping strategy for the provider and the user.

Changes in the Financial Aid Office are a good example. Applications for BCSAP student loans are now centrally processed in Victoria with student enquiries handled by a toll-free phone line. As a result, financial aid officers (FAO) and their staff devote more time to handling student problems — with filling out forms, understanding concepts, making appeals, and student financial planning and budgeting. The introduction of high-tech has freed staff to be more high-touch.

An FAO technical committee is exploring the feasibility of allowing students to submit applications electronically from source, via the Internet, extending previous technological advantages gained for FAOs:

*If we hadn't had the technological innovations over the last 5 years that we've had, I don't know what we would do today because we couldn't have survived .... It helped us to keep treading water. Every time things got to the point that they're going to break, a technological improvement drains off some of the pressure.*

**Financial Aid Officer**

## Example

### Switching to Electronic Student Services: A Step-By-Step Guide

#### Step 1: Organize for managing the student service change

- *Examine the student involvement process (not just automate existing functions).*
- *Develop consensus on strategic customer service change.*

#### Step 2: Identify and assess range of electronic student and customer services

- *Examine staff-provide versus self-help tools for students and other customers.*
- *Identify the added value provided by the technology-based student and customer services to departmental mission and function.*
- *Pursue cross-functionality as goal to penetrate job-description silos.*

#### Step 3: Phase in technology compatible with responsive integrated process change

- *Acquire technical partner for achieving phase-in strategy.*
- *Base technical decisions on key student services processes and procedures.*

#### Step 4: Adopt continuous improvement approach responsive to policy and strategic issues

- *Ensure leadership support and involvement for ongoing needs.*
- *Maintain internal and external partnering to meet customer service goal.*
- *Collect data on impact of service on target audience.*

Source: adapted from experience of Cuyahoga Community College changing to a technology-based student service for its call center.

## Example

### Distributed Advising, Counselling and Study Skills

Athabasca University in Alberta provides free support services to its distance education students in a combination of print materials, online Webpage access, telephone dial-up, as well as in-person contact and in-house resources at its three regional learning centres in Edmonton, Calgary, and Fort McMurray. A Webpage also provides answers to frequently asked questions that learners can browse.

#### *Advising Services*

Help students who are in a program or who know which one they want to enter. Advisors help students select courses appropriate to their programs, acquire information about the university's requirements and procedures, apply for financial assistance, and identify other resources elsewhere. Advisors can assist learners in person at each learning centre or via e-mail. Phone access is available toll free from anywhere in Canada or the United States, dialing an advisor by name.

#### *Counselling Services*

Help students define their educational and career goals and overcome barriers to their learning. Counsellors assist students using printed materials, individual counselling sessions in person and on the phone or via e-mail.

#### *Study Skills*

Counsellors help learners budget their time, stay motivated and complete their assignments. An annotated bibliography of materials is available online. In addition to individual assistance, counsellors direct students to a variety of support materials available by mail:

- *Improve Your Study Skills* — a series of 7 study skills modules.
- *Study Smart* — an interactive PC study skills program disk.
- *Overcoming Exam Anxiety* — handbook.

Further switching to electronic format for current services offered by financial aid office staff can be envisioned by FAOs, such as moving workshops from face-to-face presentation to on-line and offering round the clock access:

*... We could give group sessions about the pitfalls you can get into, debt management, etc. These could be delivered in the same way as a Psychology 100 course or Sociology 100 course through the Internet.*

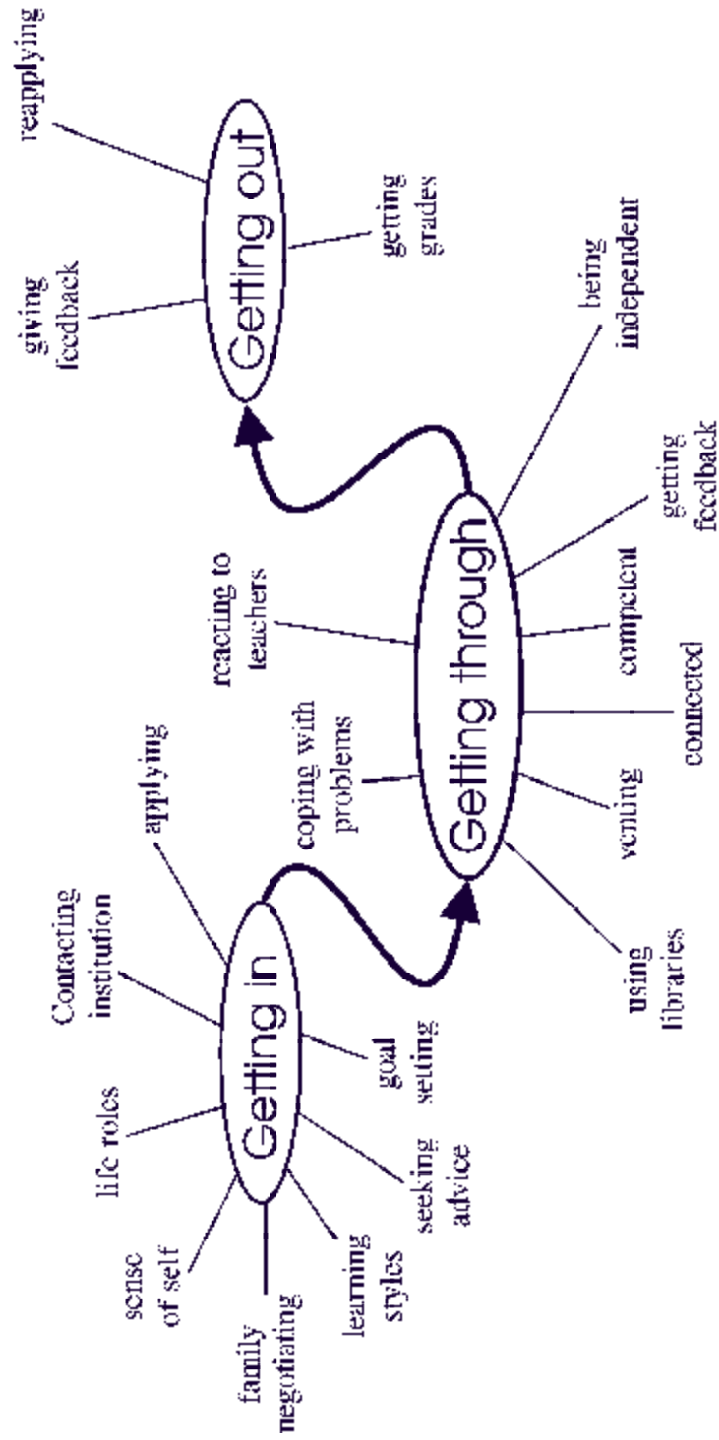
**Financial Aid Officer**

Indeed, switching to an electronic format involves a series of stages or steps (see boxed example). These begin with examining how students can better be served by involving them more in the process of accessing information. In so doing, colleges try to develop consensus on the customer service model that lies behind the transformation to electronic delivery in the first place. Usually, this evaluation reveals the need for changes in job function among student service personnel. These changes permit greater cross-functionality among positions, so that different people can move to support different service functions as needed.

Another example of effective use of technology in student services is the call centre. This provides a one-stop shopping approach to information dispersal and handling. It becomes a kind of student care centre, where operators are networked to the college's sources of information and transaction in order to serve a caller. Many colleges in the USA have full-service centres which typically:

- Receive all electronic contact and inquiries for the college, and deal with all enrollment-related issues immediately.
- Service enrolled students by ensuring they are informed of changes in their class schedules caused by class cancellations or other factors.
- Inform students of registration and payment deadlines.

## Concept Map of the Learner Services Process



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- Link students to academic and student support offices as needed.
- Conduct exit interviews of students leaving.<sup>12</sup>

These functions overlap with other areas and require cross-training of operators so they can function across a wide spectrum of support systems.

Technology is also being used to support learners who are taking courses electronically. Supporting such distributed learning<sup>13</sup> will require colleges to provide a variety of different services. The Senior Officers Working Group on Distributed Learning recently outlined a checklist of support functions that will be needed.<sup>14</sup> These include:

- *Instructional supports* such as tutorial services, study guides, library borrowing privileges, science lab access, exam supervision, and articulation agreements.
- *General supports* such as access to counselling and advising, financial aid, co-op education, orientation, remedial courses, social and recreational programs, and technical support.
- *Administrative supports* such as remote registration, transcript evaluation, prior learning assessment, tax credit receipts, FTE sharing among colleges, and instructor workload calculations.

Some of these supports will need to be provided electronically for remote access; others will still involve face-to-face interaction. In the transition period, colleges will need to maintain and handle multiple formats — such as paper applications as well as on-line applications — which will increase the need for resources in the short term until economies of scale and full electronic access is available and reliable. This will create challenges:

*You have to have people who are available to answer inquiries by e-mail or by phone or by whatever other communication device you think distance learners might need. And you have to have them over a much broader range of times .... When someone is searching a database at midnight, are you going to be able to have some sort of support for them if they are stuck ...? Or if they are learning in another time zone, do you have support and how do you structure that ...?*  
*The commercial equivalent is a 1-800 number.* **Librarian**

Of course, evolution in the use of distributed learning systems varies among institutions and between disciplines.<sup>15</sup> How well a college is able to support emerging distributed learning systems is an important question. Much depends on how the use of distributed learning has so far evolved; for example, what use is being made of different technologies and in which courses, what applications can be technically supported and at which locations, what resources — financial, technical and human — are being made available, how readily learners can access multi-media connections in the region, and so on. These

issues all need to be addressed in the college's Educational Technology Plan. The provincial policy framework document being produced by the Educational Technology Working Group explores strategies for doing so.<sup>16</sup>

Use of technology can also offer better service to particular populations of learners. For example, statistics reveal high proportions of working women or women with family responsibilities taking distance education telecourses in BC.<sup>17</sup>

In addition, a decade of technological advancements has changed the scene drastically for people with disabilities. As Judith Heuman (1998) says: "For people without disabilities technology makes things convenient, whereas for people with disabilities, it makes things possible."<sup>18</sup>

First, access to services through the more obvious new technologies has generally improved the communicative ability of people with physical disabilities. E-mail and modems or fax machines allow learners to receive course or service information or communicate with instructors and staff from home or elsewhere, reducing the need to come on campus, freeing up considerable time previously spent arranging and making such journeys.

Next, assistive technologies continue to be developed to help people with disabilities to access information available from telephone, computer or video transmission via aids such as:

- Screen readers and enlargers
- Speech recognition and synthesizers
- Keyboard modifications
- Optical pattern recognition scanning
- Braille production software and printers

Increasingly, libraries are providing computer banks with assistive technologies built-in or added-on at some stations allowing people with disabilities to participate in workshops or to share assignments with peers. Assistive technologies are also being installed in mini-labs or offices in disability resource centres on campus. In other cases, learners can borrow equipment or applications software and use this at home.

## Example

### On the Virtual Frontier

In Baffin Island, part of the Eastern Arctic, where there are small communities under 1000 people, and extreme geographical isolation, computer-mediated communication (CMC) is a powerful force to support cost-effective interactive education and interaction within existing secondary schools. Macintosh Computers are preferred because they easily support syllabic orthography, used in the written form of the area's Aboriginal languages. A weekly newsletter called TGIF as well as involvement in the Writers in Electronic Residence program enable students to strengthen their writing skills while communicating with their peers in other communities. Challenges center around teachers, often from mainstream Canadian culture, who "do not see CMC as a viable or integral part of classroom instruction."

Despite their success, assistive technologies are intrusive. Therefore, many software development companies or research labs are expending considerable effort to achieve “universal design” so that “future products and environments can be used by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design.”<sup>20</sup> Microsoft Accessibility, for instance, seeks to be a leader in raising awareness and providing solutions.

Sometimes improvements can be achieved simply through better design principles, such as using high contrast between text and background colours. At other times, providing alternate formats is useful, such as a descriptive narration accompanying digital movies, or including a text version of the navigation bar somewhere on a Webpage to allow screen readers to scan icons, or providing a text-only option for blind readers to download. In many cases these make improvements that the non-disabled population can also use.

In fact, trying to raise the standard so that better forms of support are available *to all students* may be the single most effective strategy for helping students with disabilities:

*I think that some of the stuff we do for students with disabilities, such as learning how they best take tests and how they best learn and how they best study ... we need to do for all students .... Otherwise we're just going around in circles and each student is going to cost us an extra \$20,000 or \$30,000 a year trying to find the technology to adapt ....*

**Disability Services Coordinator**

First Nations students are another example of a group for whom technology may be especially liberating. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) recognized that “emerging telecommunications technologies offer an unprecedented opportunity for Aboriginal Institutions.” But the Commission also acknowledged the disparity between the infrastructure of support that exists in many remote areas compared to urban ones, including lack of access to technology, lack of basic skills to use the technology and lack of culturally-specific applications of technology.<sup>21</sup>

However, such disparities can be reduced through initiatives which involve partnerships to provide meaningful distance education and programming, particularly educational institutions in cases where aboriginal institutions do not exist or lack the expertise (see *On the Virtual Frontier* boxed insert). In many remote areas, especially in the North, there is already fertile ground in which this development could prosper:

*Isolated First Nation communities ... are ideal locations for using communication available through computer mediated conferencing (CMC) and the Internet. The need is greater here, both for increased communication, and for the skill upgrading required to parallel the norm in urban centres .... First Nation communities have always taken new technology and found unique uses for it. For example, due to limited mail services, fax machines were embraced by the north far more quickly than in the south. As communities prepare for the twenty-first century, disparities in services will be minimized as technological skills and services bridge that gap.*

**Beaton (1998)<sup>22</sup>**



However, increased use of technology raises several issues for students concerning accessibility and cost. Michael Gardiner of the Canadian Federation of Students, who was a student representative on the provincial committee that produced *Charting a New Course*, notes:

*Our experience at the colleges is that the problem is even more significant in terms of the age of the technology and the availability of it. There's a lot of room to be done just to provide the basic services.*

Similar concerns are expressed by some student service professionals. During focus group research, many voiced concerns about how ready the college system was to support distributed learning:

- They felt frustrated by the unreliability of much currently available infrastructure and systems support for the learner. They worried about the amount of structure needed by many students to facilitate self-sufficiency.
- They wondered how educational services could support a more technologically complex learning environment when some service providers still experience difficulties supporting more traditional approaches.
- They worried about the cost of supporting high levels of educational technology in the future and where that money would come from.

Educational service providers wondered especially about how universal the benefits would be and how this might disenfranchise many of the disadvantaged or at-risk learners that colleges are increasingly serving:

*I can visualize [distributed learning] but I think for a huge number of our students, they are so far from that. There is a widening gap between people not having any kinds of skills, not only not knowing how to turn on a computer, not knowing how to work a keyboard, to those people who are doing their research on the Internet all the time. So, we've got these really huge gaps ... and I think it's got a lot to do with money .... There's not the money there if you're a single parent or coming off welfare to be able to put up a few thousand dollars. I know that technology is becoming cheaper and will be cheaper still, so I think it really has a lot to do with poverty issues and the people we particularly work with. Not a lot of my students [have access to] computers I must say.*

## Decision Model for Use of Technology

### Five Filters

- 1. Content**  
Identify the learning requirements for person-to person interaction and the requirements for visual or graphic aids. The key issue here is what kinds of interactions with the material are required for effective service delivery.
- 2. Learners**  
Identify how similar is the previous level of knowledge the learners have and how similar their motivation is. Identify constraints on their ability to access the information.
- 3. Delivery Formats**  
Identify which forms of technology can deliver services appropriate with the given specified content and learners.
- 4. Resources**  
Identify whether the level of resources is available and when to support the specified technological solutions.
- 5. Cost Analysis**  
Select the solution that will deliver effective and affordable service to the identified learners.

Adapted from: *Effectiveness of Learning Technologies: The costs and effectiveness of technology-based approaches to teaching and learning*. Office of Learning Technologies. Ottawa: HRDC, April, 1998

## Example

### College of the Rockies provides local support

Access Technologies is a flexible distance delivery project designed to provide students with the equivalent of one year of study towards a two-year engineering technology diploma. Coordinated by Southern Alberta Institute of Technology, host institutions in Alberta and BC act as local support centres.

College of the Rockies is one of them pioneering innovative student support networks which include on-line registration, on-line request forms for programs and courses, on-line conferencing with instructors and tutors, program mentors, Internet support, and an assessment of present skills to ensure that the appropriate learning path is chosen.

“Students can communicate via audio or through the computer, using chat or bulletin board,” reports Jim Duncan, acting program coordinator at College of the Rockies. “In addition, they can use e-mail, direct telephone, or fax. Depending on demand, live lectures are broadcast via LearnLinc. Students may receive these broadcasts at home or on our computers dedicated to the program here at the college.”

## Recommendation 6

That colleges consider how they can make effective use of emerging information technologies to provide educational support services to learners, particularly:

- a) *To deliver traditional support services to a more diverse variety of learners.*
- b) *To support the needs of learners studying in distributed learning environments, including the provision of support services at local learning support centres.*
- c) *To improve the access to education and subsequent successful outcomes for learners with disabilities and First Nations learners.*

Some concerns may reflect natural reactions both to the imposition of external change in general and to the rapid rate of pace at which such change is occurring, or is perceived to be occurring. No doubt, the adoption curve for new technology is not the same for everyone. Some service providers will be early adopters who pioneer the introduction of electronic services and technological applications. Some will be content to let other institutions take the lead, preferring to wait until the initial problems are solved. Still others will languish behind somewhat, either through choice or through lack of resources or institutional support that prevents them being more proactive anyway.

Handling change is stressful and involves making adjustments. As William Bridges (1991) explains, helping people cope with transition is the key:

*One of our shortcomings as a society is that we have always been ready to make changes with little thought for the transitions that they will cause. We assume that if people understand the change outcome and accept its necessity, they will ‘adjust’ to the change. If they don’t adjust, we talk about how people ‘resist change’. In fact, people resist change far less than we usually think. What they resist is transition .... Anyone who did not have at least misgivings about transition would be very unusual. Those who tell you they thrive on transition, usually mean they thrive on somebody else’s transition.<sup>23</sup>*

Of course, technology is a means not an end. So introducing new technologies and making effective use of them will always involve linking such use to a framework of learner success. The federal Office of Learning Technologies (see boxed insert) has developed a decision model for use with technology which contains five ‘filters’ or factors that practitioners can use as a template for technology implementation.

Colleges should also experiment with what works in their context, rather than assuming that “one size fits all”. This approach has been stressed by the BC Distributed Learning Task Force (1997) in their final report as:

*... the only way a multifaceted, useful and successful system with limited discretionary resources can accommodate a change strategy .... We will discover, in stages, which strategies are effective in which learning situations. The strategies that are not effective, or prove too costly to implement, will be discarded. Those strategies that are most effective will be embraced, disseminated and further developed.*<sup>24</sup>

One very promising strategy for supporting distributed learners as well as solving some of the access issues faced in rural areas of BC is providing local storefront facilities that function as high-service, low-cost support centres for local students to use.

Recognizing that "Distance learning support centres can change what could easily be a lonely struggle for learners into a dynamic, motivating and synergetic learning environment,"<sup>25</sup> the University College of the Cariboo is exploring how best to establish such centres throughout its region in local communities such as 100 Mile House.

Some of the requirements of these centres could be:

- Access to library resources.
- Counselling and educational planning for clients.
- Computer and Internet access.
- Electronic support structures (e-mail, phone, fax, etc.).
- Support using technological tools.
- Study space.
- Peer contact and integration into a wider learning community.
- Exam invigilation.
- Learner progress monitoring.
- Liaison with educational service providers.
- Local access to study skills and technology orientation courses.

## Example

### Some Central Services in BC

#### **BCCAT**

The British Columbia Council on Admissions and Transfer facilitates articulation, transfer and admission arrangements among the colleges and universities. BCCAT Online at [www.bccat.bc.ca](http://www.bccat.bc.ca) provides the B.C. Transfer Guide on-line as well as extensive links to information on other post-secondary systems.

#### **C2T2**

The Centre for Curriculum, Transfer and Technology provides a wide variety of system support functions, including the Directory of Distributed Learning Courses and SEEDS, educational technology website.

#### **ICES**

The International Credential Evaluation Service, operated by the Open Learning Agency, assesses the validity and transferability of educational credentials that students obtained from foreign countries.

#### **PASBC**

The Provincial Application System of British Columbia, scheduled to begin in September 1999, will provide a common registry for learners seeking admission to a college, institute or university and so help reduce multiple applications.

#### **SETBC**

Services for Educational Technology, affiliated with the Vancouver School Board, stores and provides from a central location a wide variety of software, hardware and other technologies to assist students with disabilities to be successful in college programs.

#### **CILS**

The CILS talking books service operated via Langara College provides audiotaped readings of textbooks for blind and visually impaired students.

- Tutoring.
- Champion for students' needs.

Such support centres can provide pods of computers or electronic kiosks where learners can access services for themselves. Colleges can also bring aspects of campus life to the remote student by creating a meeting room where learners can share ideas or receive hands-on demonstrations of equipment or perform physical examinations. Social events or small exhibitions could also be housed. Funding for such centres could occur through partnerships with other education and training providers, such as school districts or employers. In malls, colleges could operate cost-recovery operations such as Internet-cafe centres or partner with financial institutions as their banking, insurance and planning services become electronic.

In addition, since learners may be accessing distance education from other institutions, the local college can offer to broker support services, such as the College of the Rockies is doing (see boxed insert).

## Collaborating to provide services

*Both system-wide and institutional strategies are required to foster a system in which institutions work together to achieve a shared vision that is adaptable, flexible and responsive to the needs of learners and to their communities.*

***Charting a New Course (1996)***<sup>26</sup>

Economies of scale and improved service levels can be achieved by colleges coming together to pool resources or share services centrally. This is already happening in BC and can occur in a number of different ways:

### Recommendation 7

**That provincial agencies, the Ministry, and colleges explore what educational support services could be enhanced via centralization to:**

- Reduce the overall costs and improve the response time of providing these services to the system.*
- Consolidate information and expertise.*

- Co-operation in the sharing of information and expertise on various common topics or issues.
- Collaboration on different projects or ventures, either bilaterally or as a system-wide consortia to purchase or deliver services.
- Consolidation or sharing of services between colleges in metropolitan areas to avoid unnecessary duplication of effort.
- Centralization of a service function to be delivered by a separate agency on behalf of the whole college system.

In practice, these types of centralization often blur. And, through necessity, some service areas already have a long tradition of pooling resources for mutual benefit. For instance:

*Libraries have always had very strong affiliations with resource sharing ... our collections amongst ourselves and with the public libraries. We have undertaken large projects through the Electronic Library network to share resources ... [we have] reciprocal library agreements ... in that a card-carrying student or faculty can walk into another institution and be respected as a library patron... [also] a huge network within the province to buy licences for the use of media ... [we are] collaborating in terms of price as a consortia. That's the only way we could afford [some things].*

**Librarian**

One recent example of successfully centralizing a service — as well as automating it — has been to shift the review of BCSAP student loan applications to the Student Services Branch in Victoria.

Consideration should be given to centralizing other services. Potential candidates could be:

- Legal advice and representation for colleges to respond to litigation from students, advocates and agencies, including centralized expertise on responding to human rights legislation and developing harassment and conduct policies.
- Sign language interpreting services for the hearing impaired offered from a central location, especially for Lower Mainland institutions, to provide interpreter registration, scheduling, dispatching and payment services.
- Assessment and recognition of prior learning for students wishing to make laddered entry into college programs or to receive credentials for workplace-based and other learning experiences.
- On-line services that could be accessed remotely anywhere in the province.

Another type of collaboration — one with enormous potential for positioning the college system to meet the needs of learners in the future — is linking colleges province-wide into a network of brokers of local support for learners taking courses via distributed

## Example

### Noteworthy Peer Services in the USA

The following were judged noteworthy programs in 1998 by the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA).

#### *Methods of Inquiry Course*

The University of Buffalo provides a semester-long course to help students become more effective learners by improving their critical and strategic thinking. Instructors provide two fifty minute lectures per week and student leaders, who have previously taken the course, provide a thirty minute seminar to help students apply techniques to their own situations. Course participants report higher GPAs and higher graduation rates than non-participants.

#### *Peer Mentor Program*

At Winthrop University in South Carolina, trained peer mentors lead twelve weekly meetings for new students in their first semester and provide at least two individual appointments to help students develop academic, personal and social skills for success. Topics include: time management, multiculturalism, alcohol and drug issues, and study skills.

#### *Big Buddies for local youths*

The Big Buddies program at Central Washington University is modeled after “Big Brothers and Big Sisters” but tailored for implementation on a university campus. The program serves a mentoring function for local youth in Grades K-8. Supported, funded and staffed by the student government, Big Buddies are carefully selected, trained and matched with Little Buddies and participate in supervised programs that provide on-going support, encouragement, guidance and recreational opportunities.

learning:

*Technology is one way of taking advantage of the existing college system we have — and we have something in the order of 120 recognized teaching centres or campuses in our college system ... technology doesn't supplant that [system], it enhances it.*  
**Senior Administrator**

To the south of us, the State of Washington has already pointed the way forward by forming a consortium of its colleges, sharing the development of some on-line courses and agreeing to support each other's learners locally.

## Example

### Peer Support Aiding Successful Transitions

#### *Capilano College*

In liaison with college advisors, high school counsellors identify students enrolled in the school's Career and Personal Planning Program who plan to attend the college. The students are then paired with advising, counselling, and peer support students at the college and given individual and/or group in-depth orientation to Capilano College.

#### *North Island College*

A "connecting" student success strategy ensures every high school student in the region who applies to the college is personally contacted and welcomed by a current college student. The student funded under the project will help produce materials for orientation, advise contacted students about the orientation process, and provide liaison for the resolution of the high school student's concerns or questions.

#### *Northwest Community College*

"Moving Ahead" addresses problems that aboriginal students face when moving from the closeness of a small community to attend a post-secondary institution. Specifically, it focuses on Grade 10 and 11 students in the Hazelton area and will provide them an opportunity to spend two days on the Terrace campus participating in a variety of activities organized by peer helpers designed to familiarize the prospective students with college life and to assist them in making career and educational choices.

## Learners helping learners

*... depending upon your institutional culture, some will need only to be sanctioned, some will need encouraging, while some will require outright promotion and strong institutional leadership.*

**ACCC Task Group (1997)<sup>27</sup>**

A variety of services can be delivered by learners themselves for other learners. Generally, these assist students to become more integrated academically or socially into the life of the college. They also facilitate greater student involvement and are strategies promoted to increase student retention.<sup>28</sup> Such peer support or peer helper programs go by a variety of names including buddy systems and student ambassador programs. The most common examples are:

- Peer tutoring where senior students help junior ones with homework, lab, or other assignments, often located in a learning assistance centre and run by staff or faculty members.
- Peer mentoring services which provide group workshops and other formats to assist new students with orientation to make successful transitions into the college; or provide outreach services for students exiting into employment, where the mentors may be alumni.
- Peer counselling/advising services which utilize students providing advice, referral and assistance with personal problems. Students are usually trained and working under the guidance of a professional counsellor.

Aside from improving access to services that need not be provided by college personnel, using peer support helps bridge the emerging generational gap as the average age of college personnel becomes much older. Many college employees did not attend a community college themselves, and many issues faced by today's learners are qualitatively different from before. Current students are often better placed to help a fellow student 'learn the ropes' or 'stay the distance'.

Appropriate training and supervision of peer workers is needed to ensure social, ethical and academic boundaries are maintained as well as to mitigate college liability.

Appropriate evaluation of effectiveness is also needed. The Peer Helping Program at the University of Victoria, started in 1986, is a sound model of these best practices.<sup>29</sup>

Although many peer helpers are volunteers — perhaps earning community service hours as program pre-requisites or gaining experience to augment personal resumes — others are paid as student assistants or via the provincial work-study grant. One drawback is the high turnover of peer helpers due to the shorter program lengths in colleges.

The same is also true when trying to foster relationships with Student Society Associations where executive membership can lack continuity. Nonetheless, this is an area where new relationships and partnerships needs to be explored as another form of students helping students:

*There's a huge opportunity we're missing for improving student life ... not only for students in athletics and campus recreation but students who are interested in all sorts of different things .... There's an opportunity to learn from them and to teach them something. It has to be included as part of our job in student life to be involved with them.*

**Athletics Director**

University College of the Cariboo, for instance, provides a good example of such a partnership in their student leadership training program provided by student services personnel each summer to train the incoming student executive members.

## Recommendation 8

**That colleges examine ways to increase or improve the educational services they provide by making appropriate use of opportunities for learners to assist other learners, such as by:**

- a) Establishing formal programs of trained peer tutoring services, peer supporting services, and peer mentoring services.**
- b) Forging new relationships and service delivery partnerships with local student society associations.**

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# Re-thinking the Funding of Services

*Chronic underfunding of student services needs to be reversed. We've long hit the ceiling on 'doing more with less' and while it is true that new technologies can improve service efficiency and effectiveness, in the final analysis it is people who make the difference.* **Dietsche (1999)**

**F**iscal responsibility needs to be exercised by government and institutions, exploring ways to make funds available and to ensure they are used effectively. Revisions to current allocation formulas as well as the use of special purpose funds are essential. Creative responses to charging user fees, earning contact revenue, and funding partnerships are also needed. Funding should address strategic goals.

## Revisions to formula funding mechanism

*I'd like to see us funded for what we're actually doing, not tied to how many FTEs a program has.* **Registrar**

Colleges in BC are funded annually by several mechanisms but chief among them is the general operating grant. The actual dollar amount allocated for each college under this grant is calculated using a standard formula for each program area, such as office administration, university transfer-arts, psychiatric nursing and so on. The basic driver in the formula is the total hours of instructional contact that students experience in each program, aggregated annually into a measure called a full-time equivalent student (FTE).

The formula includes different weightings to compensate for different institutional sizes and locations as well as for different program equipment and staffing costs. The resulting allocation is divided into three categories, representing types of costs:

- Direct instruction costs (60%)
- Instructional support (10%)
- General support (30%)

The last category provides a single source of funds for the vast majority of educational service areas. These must compete for funding attention in their own institutions with other services such as buildings and grounds, cafeteria and bookstore, accounting and personnel offices, as well as administrative costs.

Since the funds arrive at the college unseparated, the college is free to vary the actual proportion it disperses in each category.

Therefore, aside from special purpose funding (see below), there is no direct flow-through of funding to any service area.

Focus group participants frequently explained how current provincial funding mechanisms are outdated and simplistic. The mechanisms do not reflect the range of different variables that colleges face today. They are insufficient as dynamic levers to support changing circumstances or promote responsiveness, as the *Task Force Report on Critical Issues in Financing Colleges and Institutes*<sup>2</sup> and other documents have also outlined.

The main limitations of the current formula for funding *services* can be summarized as follows:

- Disparities exist between how much each college spends on each service area. This leads to a lack of service standards across the system.
- Colleges provide services to many people — such as prospective students and community users — who are not reflected in the FTE profile, thereby devaluing them as legitimate service costs.
- Although active recruitment, assessment and advising of student intakes reduces program attrition, these costs are not reflected in the program weighting.
- Providers serve whole people not aggregated FTEs. As the number of part-time students increases, more people are served, but the FTE count remains the same.
- Costs associated with serving more distance education and distributed learning students are not reflected in the formula since program delivery type is ignored.
- As institutions move to serve learners 24 hours per day, 12 months of the year, overtime and other collective agreement costs increase but are not reflected in the formula.

Proposed Revisions to Formula Funding		
Basic Operating Envelope Blocks		
Core Funding	Operations Support	Instructional Delivery
Uniform set of base operations	Semi-fixed costs	Funding mechanism for all types
Physical plant	Varying size	Alternate delivery
Regardless of size or location	Library, counselling, admissions, equipment	Inputs/ outputs
	Multiple centres	Performance Objectives

- Increasing numbers of mature students, including those using PLA, as well as other non-traditional students, place added strain on service units but are not reflected in the formula.

In addition, the current formula actually has a steering effect that makes budget reductions to services not simply easier to justify but also easier to make:

*There's a disincentive for institutions to allocate money to the services part. There is very much an incentive, if not coercion, for as many dollars as possible to go into the instructional side to get more bodies in and so to achieve productivity gains.*

**Registrar**

Similarly, services do not have at their disposal the same application methods for new funding that instructional programs do:

*Let's say I want to provide a whole new transitions program to take students from wherever they are before they come to my institution. I have to argue for that within my own institution. I can't go to the government as a support service ... There's nothing on the support side that will allow you to bring a program in. You have to carve it out of the existing budget.*

**Registrar**

## Recommendation 9

**That the Ministry, in consultation with the college system, should revise the current Basic Operating Grant to ensure it reflects and is responsive to multiple variables affecting the costs associated with the delivery of educational support services, including:**

- Headcounts of learners served by different services.***
- Semi-fixed costs of delivery, including supporting distributed learning.***
- Demand-driven services, especially ones legally-required.***
- Actual use by learners rather than capped amounts.***

Furthermore, doing more with less has been the prevailing credo for much of the current decade. Built-in inequities within the formula have strained the funding available for support services, leading to short-term cutbacks, such as reductions in counselling services, that can have long-term negative consequences:

*After a number of years experience without counselling [services] what happens is that your retention rates start to drop because people are finding that without those intervention strategies and support networks in place, it starts to have a very definite negative impact on your progress. So we are now rethinking that; we've been without those skills for about 8 or 9 years, referring to community agencies and other networks ... and those kind of support networks become even more important if you're going to help students succeed.*

**Registrar**

Some of the problems associated with the existing funding mechanisms are glaringly apparent to students within the college system:

*As the system grows, it's grown to some extent on the instructional delivery side but not on the service side to keep up with that. It's a growing problem ... Without that component, we're not going to meet the needs of the kinds of new students that we're trying to get into the system through the expansion of spaces.*

**Student**

In response, *Charting a New Course* envisions a new funding framework which will refine and expand the Basic Operating Grant of formula funding to address these issues by including additional variables and recognizing the specific funding needs of support areas:

*The Framework will also provide the necessary support to those individuals and structures, within institutions, responsible for creating a quality learning environment.*<sup>3</sup>

To devise this new framework a provincial Joint Committee on Funding is currently exploring options and implications through the guidance of a Basic Operating Envelope Steering Committee which includes broad representation from the college system and a working committee for each envelope block. These blocks are being revised to address different aspects of funding (see boxed insert) where funds to support core costs such as physical plant are separated from costs which vary from institution based on size and types of programming offered. Funding for most educational support services would be more directly tied to learner needs than at present, although the nature of the relationship and the factors involved have yet to be determined. Current timelines have the project providing interim reports during the 1999/2000 year with implementation planned to begin for the following fiscal year.<sup>4</sup>

Focus group participants emphasized that specific funding for support operations in BC colleges is needed. This funding should reflect multiple variables including:

- Semi-fixed costs, such as for processing applications, or the provision of library resources, dispersed learning, and PLA, or supporting distance learners.
- Demand-driven services, especially ones for equity groups, such as the provision of sign-language interpreting services.

In addition, any changes in the funding formula should address the extent to which service delivery varies considerably depending on individual student need:

*The student will come in and talk to you for 10-15 minutes and when they leave you've got three hours worth of work that you have to do ... one of our learning specialists could have 8 people [on their caseload] and the next person could have 25 and they are equal workloads because the 8 are real tough ones.*

**Disability Services Coordinator**

Nonetheless, simply rearranging under a new funding formula existing financial resources will prove inadequate if it does not permit colleges to address the need to provide additional person-power. Otherwise, the goals of improving learner success will not be realized:

*Simply being able to provide adequate time to someone to fully analyze the situation and give students the best advice isn't going to happen in the absence of enough people. Because if you've got to see 100 people in a day, you don't have 15-20 minutes that may be needed to spend with someone. So long as that's the case, discussion falls short because improvements are permitted by what budgets are ... I mean obviously this process is in part about finding how to do better within the current framework but you always want to make sure that it's understood that doing better within the current funding framework isn't adequate.* **Student**

## Special Purpose Funds

In addition to reforming the Basic Operating Grant, government should re-consider the purpose and the effect of some of the targeted funding that is currently provided for certain services.

Such special purpose funds are provided to colleges to help defray the costs associated with meeting the support needs of particular populations of learners, such as ones belonging to equity groups, or for funding specific additional services that were not recognized within the original base formula approach. Examples of such special purpose funds are:

- *Adult Special Education Grant* — assists colleges to provide mandated support services to learners with disabilities to ensure equal access to education, such as sign language interpreting costs, access tutoring, and braille services.
- *First Nations Services Grant* — funds services offered through the offices of First Nations Coordinators, assisting Aboriginals to access college programs and receive culturally-specific assistance and support.
- *IBT Support Grant* — increases the support services available in colleges to assist persons on income assistance to access college programs, to overcome barriers to successful completion and to make smooth transitions into employment on completion.
- *Work Study Grant* — enables colleges to pay wages to students with unmet financial need on student loans, for non-recurring part-time project work occurring on campus or in the community.
- *Co-operative Education Grant* — enables colleges to fund programs that match eligible students with participating employers, offering alternate semesters of full-time paid work relevant to their studies.

### Recommendation 10

**That the Ministry revise special purpose or targeted funds so that these:**

- Provide for project-based expenses of limited-time duration only and are not used to support ongoing delivery costs.*
- Allocate funds based on institutional size and other appropriate variables, rather than as equal lump sums.*

Colleges receive annual lump sum amounts for these special purpose funds and provide end of year reports on expenditure and use of the funds.

While the mechanism of targetting specific initiatives from time to time as instruments of provincial policy is an important practice that should be continued, the practice of maintaining such funds year after year for what are actually on-going support services is a mixed blessing. On the one hand, these funds ensure that some dollars are protected from internal diversion to other uses. On the other hand, it perpetuates the marginality of these services within institutions:

*First Nations support has to become institutionalized so that it is not linked to a grant that comes from the government.... It's always like Aboriginal education is an add-on.*

**First Nations Coordinator**

In recent years, the provision of special funds for special groups, at a time when other service functions have faced reductions, has increased the steering effect:

*New money for support services seems to be earmarked specifically whether it's for First Nations or it's for social service recipients, or whatever the case may be, but the mainstream students have less and less access.*

**Counsellor**

Furthermore, the allocations for each institution are often based on historical patterns rather than actual need or use. For some grants, unspent amounts are being rolled over from one year to another rather than reallocated to other institutions facing more pressing need. In other cases, the allocations are the same for each institution, regardless of college size or the actual numbers served in the target population.

Rather than increasing the conditions or restrictions for these funds — which would simply consume more of the funds for administrative purposes — this funding mechanism should be reserved for project-based activities that have limited duration. Instead, on-going support services should be funded via the revised basic operating grant.

Rather than providing standard allocations for each institution or annual amounts that may not match actual need, attention needs to be given to exploring the most effective ways to enable colleges to provide services to the number of learners *they actually serve* each year. Possible strategies to consider would be:

- Projected need submitted by colleges at the beginning of each year, with unused amounts returned at year end.
- Billings at the end of each year to reflect actual numbers of learners served, with auditable records of services provided.
- General formulas for each service area developed and linked to Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), such as funds allocated to the library per 1000 students, or hours of counselling provided per size of campus.

Having ways to link funding to actual learner need will improve the ability of service units to plan for fluctuation service demand and to redirect mid-year services to unexpected changes in demand. Such flexibility will help reduce delays in service delivery.

## Direct user fees

*A good example is services for students with disabilities. We're finding our students are accessing our CE programs .... Of course, we are told by the Ministry that they don't fund interpreters or any of those things for CE. We have to build those costs into the delivery of the course. So there's an example — they're telling us: 'Provide the access, but we're not going to provide the support'.*

**Registrar**

While freezing tuition fees and ancillary fees has met public policy objectives and assisted students greatly, colleges have faced tighter restrictions on raising revenue to cover direct costs.

This has happened at a time when other costs have been rising due to inflation or due to the new costs of implementing information technology. For instance, the cost of maintaining library resources has increased considerably as more information is stored in databases rather than being in reference volumes:

*What we're really doing now is leasing information. At least when you bought a book or you bought a journal, you bound that journal and you owned that journal .... Now what you do is buy access to a database for a single year and you get a very broad range of materials. But you pay many thousands of dollars — always in US dollars, so currency fluctuations are a major problem .... The archiving is at the mercy of the publisher or the database supplier, who can rent it again next year for the same or a higher price.*

**Librarian**

Similarly, with frozen student activity fees in many colleges, student support activities that rely on those funds have effectively faced declining purchasing power:

*My job has gone from 10% fundraising to 80% fundraising .... We have vehicles that are poorly maintained, so that becomes a safety issue .... Our weightroom is dangerously overcrowded to the point where we had to shut it down because there are so many students wanting to get in .... The freeze on any fees has had us scrambling for the last couple of years.*

**Athletics Director**

In some institutions, various user fees have been introduced or increased via consultation with the Student Society. One common one has been a new technology fee. However, this is an artifact of the current funding situation rather than a fee that specifically is needed for technology:

*[Without] a tuition fee freeze, technology fees would not be an issue.... We have singled out technology as an area that really does need attention ... but it's kind of a philosophical thing in terms of who pays .... Typically most institutions don't have a library fee that all students pay and which goes toward acquisitions.*

**Distributed Learning Administrator**



As the costs of providing technology become a greater expense for colleges, at least in the short term, college boards will need to debate the responsibility of these costs: is access to technology analogous to library acquisitions or is it analogous to textbooks which are a student responsibility? Perhaps it is a bit of both:

*The nature of technology is such that more and more students are going to be providing it themselves and maybe we should be ... thinking of it in terms of a joint partnership around funding as opposed to just making the student pay for something that we can't afford to put in otherwise ... maybe we've got to open our vision a bit.*

**Distributed Learning Administrator**

The long term implications of the fee freeze will need to be considered if the current policy continues. Clearly, some students can afford to pay more for their education than others and the need for additional financial assistance for those in need will continue to strain the existing student aid framework of programs.

Finding ways to have a fair user-pay method for recouping legitimate expenses on consumables — for example on paper, lab materials, or photocopying — all need further exploration. Introducing some user-pay fees may be needed for learning support services that are currently offered free, especially where there are external agencies that can assist with paying these costs on behalf of students with special needs.

Introducing differential tuition fees to reflect the cost of technology-based or other highly expensive programs may be overdue for colleges, despite the philosophical issues of universal accessibility and other concerns associated with this strategy. Perhaps, some of these policy decisions may require local variations to reflect individual college autonomy.

Nonetheless, any discussion of additional fees or revised fee structures is likely to be politically charged and viewed differently by those who have to pay:

*That's just downloading it off to the Student Society. That's more user pay. We should not be paying for those services through our fees. We already pay through taxes, we pay after graduation, and everything else.*

**Student**

What services or fees that Student Societies are willing to levy, and how they choose to use them, may also need to be re-considered. The connection with student association politics is important here. Take the circumstances surrounding the funding of child care on campus as an example:

*Child care should be a core service, funded through the college, and because it is such a necessary service and one that there's sympathy for, students will vote to*

## Recommendation 11

**That colleges and student society associations explore ways within the Tuition Freeze Act to charge students fees to reflect:**

- a) *Direct costs for materials consumed by the user.*
- b) *Fees-for-services beyond those directly funded by the Ministry.*
- c) *Differential fees to reflect different program costs.*

*fund it. It's not right, it's not the way it should be, but that's what will happen increasingly as budgets get difficult. The pressure is on student services because students aren't going to vote for increases to fund instructional time and those sorts of things that would just go into general budgets. Student*

## Contract fees for services

*Colleges are actively pursuing ways to diversify their revenue bases by pursuing new educational markets ... and by increasing links to business and industry through the provision of contract training and other services .... In this environment, colleges can either choose to continue to downsize and to realign their operations, or they can seek to diversify their resource base and program offerings through participating in new markets. Most colleges are doing both.*

**Knowles (1995)<sup>5</sup>**

As colleges face increasing funding pressures, the potential exists for some educational support services to explore opportunities for entrepreneurial activity which can earn profits to help off-set other pressure points.

Colleges have a variety of expertise and resources already within their service units which could be organized to provide services to external clients in several ways:

- Contract services for specific projects.
- Individual client charges on a fee-for-service basis.
- Retainers to provide services or consultation.

### Recommendation 12

**That colleges consider means by which they can support institutional finances through entrepreneurial activities, such as the provision of:**

- Various assessment, counselling and employment assistance services.*
- Brokerage of services for distance learners enrolled at other institutions.*
- Contract training services.*

In the past few years, such entrepreneurial activity has occurred at many institutions with increasing success. While the essential mission of public colleges is not-for-profit and most colleges have systemic barriers that hinder their performing as highly competitive businesses, they are showing creativity and resourcefulness at seeking outside their institutions to serve a variety of needs not covered under their basic operating grant and for which other sources of funds exist. This applies to service providers as well as instructional expertise.

Examples of such entrepreneurial activities are:

- Educational testing for companies seeking to upgrade the skills of their employees.
- Vocational assessments and career counselling services for displaced workers funded by HRDC and other agencies.

- Rehabilitation and counselling services for clients sponsored by Vocational Rehabilitation Services or through the Workers' Compensation Board or the Insurance Corporation of BC.
- Employment search assistance and job placement services for income assistance recipients and the unemployed.

Sometimes colleges may prefer to act as the broker for such services. Colleges can use their reputation to acquire positions in the market and then hire staff — or external consultants as needed — to provide the service delivery. This reduces the financial risk and allows for timely response. Other times, colleges may find the use of existing employees to be more suitable, preferring to “back-fill” the release of a counsellor or assessor with an auxiliary employee as a more cost-effective approach.

As the range of distance education opportunities increases, support services to local learners taking courses with remote or foreign institutions could be charged for assessments, accommodations, or counselling, for example. Other contract services are possible revenue sources.

## Partnerships

Increasingly, colleges are exploring ways to create and build partnerships with other entities. This provides a way of helping to defray existing equipment, facilities or operation costs for service units through economies of scale. It also provides a way of improving the college's positioning for entrepreneurial activity through partnerships with other providers in a consortia.

Exclusive use agreements with vendors can be a profitable mechanism — although sometimes this can become politically charged. For example, several colleges have collectively signed such deals with soft drink beverage suppliers on campus. Douglas College estimates its \$50,000 annual share of its Coca-Cola exclusivity agreement is paying the outstanding mortgage on its new David Lam campus in Coquitlam.

Joint-use agreements to share space or service delivery with school districts, community agencies, and contractors are another vehicle for saving operating and capital costs.

### Example

#### Setting S@IL for Langara

As the topic of the first annual internal fund raising campaign, Student Access to Internet and Library (S@IL) will improve library services at Langara College for students wanting to access the Internet from workstations via an “Internet nook” environment to be created on the main floor of the library, dedicated to Internet searching.

The campaign is targetted at internal college users — students, employees and board members — with opportunities to make a pledge or one-time gift or place spare change in the collection tins around campus. Tax receipts are available also.

In reply to suggestions that the Langara Foundation should target corporate donors instead, the Foundation emphasized how “the level of internal support is a major factor influencing what these corporations...give to the college.”

### Recommendation 13

That colleges explore further opportunities for establishing commercial partnerships to defray equipment, facilities, or operation costs for service units, by such means as:

- a) *Consortia agreements.*
- b) *Exclusive-use agreements.*
- c) *Joint-use agreements.*

Partnerships with Student Societies for the provision of services to students has generally been less explored in colleges than in universities. Perhaps this is an oversight that more colleges should consider. Some colleges have turned the mutual interest in assisting students into innovative joint funding ventures.

More than simply fund-raising operations, Foundation arms in colleges have found donors are becoming more interested in providing value-added contributions than in giving straight cash donations. Where colleges have specific unfunded service needs, they can explore ways to locate suitable organizations and individuals who may be interested in contributing. These donors tend to be more

interested in capital donations for tangible assets than in assisting with the operating needs of service units.

## Student views on funding

Notwithstanding the need to revise how colleges approach funding issues, many student participants in the focus groups voiced considerable concern about the impact of educational funding arrangements on them.

Naturally, considering the mounting debt loads that some students are experiencing, the continued lack of access they face to post-secondary education — despite increased seat funding over the past decade — and the rising poverty that some students endure, students voice a demand for the college system to recognize their needs:

*Hunger, lack of appropriate clothing, and having no money to purchase personal hygiene items hinders access to and participation in our institutions and certainly has a negative effect upon the grades of those students affected. Government and the institutions need to help fill the gap created by inadequate social service funding. Student Societies, alone, do not have the resources to solve this problem. I would prefer public funding to address this situation, but at a minimum, institutions could take a more active role to help those in need. For example, the charitable foundations that many institutions have could be used to raise money to support student food banks.*

**Student**

And several focus group participants expressed strong opinions regarding the need to address underlying funding issues:

*The answer always, though, [is one] that people don't want to hear. In order to get the public into public institutions, you need public funding, and that's it. We don't want to sit around and think about: let's be more creative and tell institutions that they should sign deals with Coca Cola and bring corporations onto campus.*

*Those aren't options. It's got to be more funding. People turn around and say that's not creative and whatever, but that's what it has to be ultimately.* **Student**

## Endnotes

1. Peter Dietsche. "Student needs and college services: Can we make the match?" *Communique*, February, 1999, p.13.
2. *Critical Issues in Financing Colleges and Institutes*. Task Force Report. Prepared by Reed and Associates, Victoria, 1997.
3. *Charting a New Course: A Strategic Plan for the Future of British Columbia's College, Institute and Agency System*. British Columbia Ministry of Education, Skills and Training. Victoria, 1996, p.44.
4. Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology. *College and Institute: Development of a Basic Operating Grant Envelope*. System consultation meeting for senior administrators held in Victoria, BC on January 25, 1999.
5. Janet Knowles. "A matter of survival: Emerging entrepreneurship in community colleges in Canada. In John Dennison (ed.) *Challenge and Opportunity: Canada's Community Colleges at the Crossroads*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 1995, p.186.

# Supporting Service Providers

*I think a lot of the problem is just human resources and having more front line support, and having people there who are friendly and helpful, and who know answers to questions and can guide people into what they need.* **Student**

**T**he quality of service delivery depends upon the quality of the means of supply. Addressing the availability of technology and technical support, as well as the professional development of human service providers, will be necessary. Collecting information to measure and improve the impact of services for learners is also needed.

## Access to technology and technical support

*The bad news is that it's not going to save [governments] a lot of money in the short term and it might even cost them more .... The worse news is that they are going to have to do it anyway ....* **Bates (1998)<sup>1</sup>**

Providers of educational support services can only capitalize on the strategic improvements that information technology offers if attention is given to greater access to that technology. This inevitably means addressing the costs involved:

*To provide service 24 hours, seven days a week, cost-wise, we can't do it with people [alone] .... The technology looks very good, and is being used now, and there is some good feedback on the use of the Web technology: it's interactive, it's visual. The feedback, especially from students is really good .... It's actually quite cost effective, once you get over the initial hump in terms of getting it up .... I can see us wanting to head that way as quickly as possible. Our biggest problem is the cost of the technology and probably even worse is supporting it in terms of computing services, or whatever group you have, that is going to have to keep the Website current, make sure it runs quickly and is always up.* **Registrar**

Institutions should target particular services incrementally. They should seek to introduce technological solutions where these make sense, allocating adequate capital and operating funds to permit adoption, bearing in mind:

*... technology should not be the driving force for decision and policy making. Instead our educational mission and educational plan should drive our use of technology.* **Foothill-De Anza Technology Plan ( 1996)<sup>2</sup>**

Access to readily-available, on-going, expert support from technicians is essential to keep systems operating and maintain service standards to end users. This will require the

college system to address the current difficulty of attracting technical support due to the attractiveness of higher remuneration often available elsewhere:

*There is competition with private industry for the same [human] resources .... Something has to be done to reconcile the huge disparity between what we, as educational institutions, can pay for these people versus what they can get in the real world.*  
**Senior Administrator**

Access to in-service training for service personnel also needs to be provided where not available currently:

*If you looked at my office 10 years ago, and you looked at it right now, I look like I must be a technician. Equipment in the box and everything. It's a different perspective than I would have had 10 years ago .... If you're not computer literate, you're at a definite disadvantage.*  
**Disability Services Coordinator**

## Training and rejuvenation

*Organizations cannot evolve any farther than the individuals who work in these organizations. If we want our institutions to be more change worthy, individual workers will need to undertake the personal learning necessary to perceive change as it is happening.*  
**Campbell (1995)<sup>3</sup>**

To assist personnel to adjust attitudes, provide culturally-sensitive services and maintain high quality service standards, appropriate training support is needed, especially for serving non-traditional student groups effectively:

*Our research shows that there is a substantial internal dialogue going on when a non-disabled person meets someone with a disability. This relates to curiosity, not knowing what to say or do, anxiety, and faulty assumptions and beliefs about peers with disabilities. Most of these reflect a lack of familiarity with students who are different.*  
**Fichten (1995)<sup>4</sup>**

As the profile of learners becomes more diverse in ethnic and linguistic background, the profile of educational service practitioners will need to be addressed, mostly through training and professional development. As the college human resources study conducted by HRDC found:

There is a major need to enhance workforce diversity, but there is a risk that with low turnover, colleges will become less representative before improving. Employment equity is linked to education equity.<sup>5</sup>

At the same time, recognition is needed of the stressful nature of many jobs in the student services field. Long days

### Team Learning

Effective provision of services in the future will require service providers to function as part of self-learning teams. To be a team player is to be a team learner, placing more value on the team's learning than on personal needs to be right, to be accepted, or to be in control.

Characteristics of team learners:

- Can actively listen to the needs of others.
- Able to acknowledge their mistakes.
- Willing to share their perceptions.
- Participators in raising conflicts to the fore.
- Able to respectfully differ in public.
- Can connect with others in the organization.
- Willing to become partners to help the organization realize its goals.

*Adapted from: Copa and Ammentorp, 1998*

## Example

### Gaining ISO Certification

St Lawrence College in Ontario became a leader in quality-driven education by becoming the first educational institution in North America to be granted ISO 9001 registration for its entire operation in 1996.

ISO registration is granted by the International Organization for Standardization based in Geneva. It promotes the development of standardization to facilitate the international exchange of goods and services and develop intellectual, scientific, technological, and economic co-operation.

The ISO quality system is a series of 20 standards which provide a template for an organization to customize to fit its environment. An ISO applicant writes an 'operating manual' that lays down procedures for providing quality service. Auditors then visit the organization every 6 months and review performance against these standards.

Adopted by over 100 countries, ISO certification is increasingly becoming a requirement to do business around the world.

"It's a philosophy which sets a holistic approach to quality," says college president Dan Corbett. As a result, "...continuous improvement is the focal point of employee endeavours through all phases of work from product design ... to customer service."

Corbett explains that ISO standardization can have a transformative effect. "For employees at St Lawrence College," he explains, "becoming quality-driven has meant understanding the environmental factors affecting our marketplace, and changing our structures, our processes and services, and our operating culture."

The essence of this transformation, Corbett points out, is to say what you do, do what you say, as well as to measure and prove it.

St Lawrence College has also become the first to provide training and consulting services to clients across Canada who want to adopt quality management systems, including Southern Alberta Institute of Technology and the college system of New Brunswick.

of serving needy people can take its toll on even the most dedicated professional:

*The type of work I do is extremely emotionally draining because there's a lot of giving that's involved and you're always dealing with problems. I think there needs to be some renewal for us .... We need in order to look at those of us in the field and what we need in order to continue to provide good service. We need some attention to ourselves....* **Disability Services Coordinator**

As the colleges are asked to serve more disadvantaged and non-traditional students, the number of service providers has not grown to compensate for the increased workload.

*I think there's a need for more core services outside of the classroom as more students who are returning are older, and more students are coming out of ABE, ESL and other [developmental] programs. The needs of those students in terms of learning support services are often much higher .... The strain on people providing those services has grown in the last few years.* **Student**

Programs of mentoring or training buddy systems can help support new service providers. Enlisting the support of local union bargaining units is also crucial to the success of any employee development program. However, leadership from senior management is a first step to pulling together people from across the institution to support a common vision:

*Maximizing student success often depends on the combined efforts of many college stakeholders working toward common goals.* **Dietsche (1999)<sup>6</sup>**

## Measuring the impact of services

*It will no longer be enough to know what happened, but how it happened so that it may happen again.*

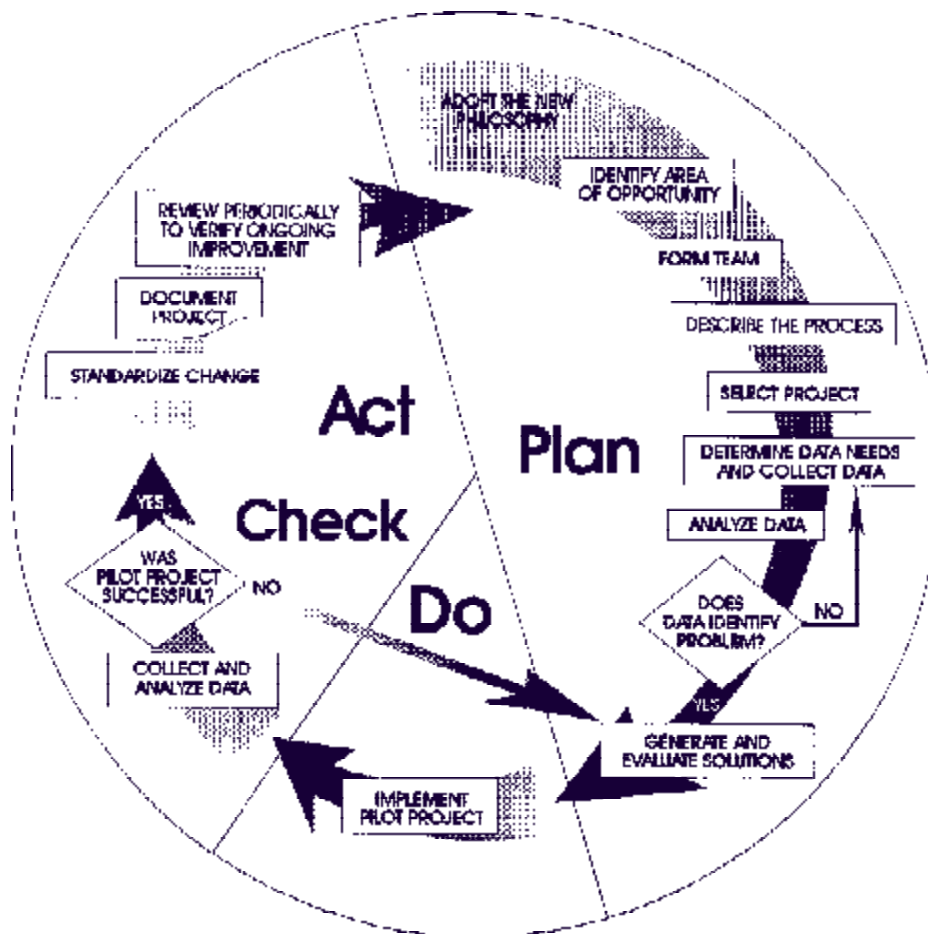
**Nora (1999)<sup>7</sup>**

Services have tended to be provided in a vacuum without information about their actual impact on students' progress and success.<sup>8</sup> This limits their potential effectiveness, even if the services are successful, because empirical data on utility and outcomes is missing.

*It is ... imperative that we have a means of documenting the volume, variety and impact of our work ...*



## Providing Quality Service: The Process Used at St. Lawrence College



## Service Impact

A proactive approach to measuring the impact of educational services provides accountability and reduces complacency:

- Document the what, where, when, why and who is using the services in an information database.
- Evaluate the impact and efficacy of those services to demonstrate their relevance to the institutional mission.
- Communicate this information to others, either informally through active involvement in campus life or more formally via presentations and reports.

Source: Robinson (1999)

... Our programs must be viable and be seen to be so by our community and especially by those making budgetary decisions. **Robinson (1999)<sup>9</sup>**

Through the provincial Key Performance Indicator (KPI) process, indicators are being established, data collected, and impact documented. Decisions based on this data should be used for review and adjustment rather than control (see boxed insert on *Gaining ISO Certification*). Reviews can assist service providers to determine what the current situation requires:

*We review everything we do on an annual basis .... We close down for three days to do that to ensure that we're doing it in the most effective and efficient manner ... [we] look at what we currently do and see if we can do it in a different way.*

**Financial Aid Officer**

Increasingly, knowing how to be flexible and make adjustments will be more important than being right or knowing the right thing to do. Increasingly, service providers will form service delivery teams, having cross-functional responsibilities. These will be able to solve problems at the point of service with the learner, rather than requiring permission from someone within a hierarchy of command (see boxed insert on *Team Learning*). Flatter organizational structures will call for more cross-institutional collaboration:

## Example

### Sports Information Director

The BC Colleges Athletic Association has a Sports Information Director who acts as a statistical clearinghouse for the province's college athletic programs. "It's my responsibility," says Andre Tee, the current director, "to update and maintain the electronic scoreboard and to keep athletes in the college system up-to-date on their competition's performance." Developing and maintaining the support of the local media is another part of his position. He accomplishes this by distributing game statistics and other relevant statistical information via e-mail to an established distribution list.

*Student affairs staff are positioned in the connective junctures of campus life — serving students, faculty, and the broader community. Our process skills will be essential in forming new leadership structures, work teams, and other flexible systems .... Connecting people should be a priority for all student affairs officers, through funding, programming, and personal commitments.<sup>10</sup>*

At the same time greater attention will need to be directed at involving learners and student associations in the process of designing effective services and making ongoing improvements in performance.<sup>11</sup> Use of local feedback mechanisms, such as customer satisfaction surveys or suggestion boxes, can provide valuable information to drive such service quality improvements.

*With increasingly limited resources and increasing demand for more diverse services, areas of poor quality or inefficiency must be identified in order that funds may be allocated where they are most needed and useful.*  
**Lane (1999)<sup>12</sup>**

Celebrating successes is also important to communicate impact and reward initiative — even if intangibly, through good service or unsung hero awards.

Finally, supporting service providers is a responsibility not only of institutions but also of other partners in the college system. Provincial organizations of service providers can play a supportive role, and some have achieved considerable success (see boxed insert on Sports Information Director).

Further coordination and information sharing ought to involve establishing a more prominent internal office of ministerial responsibility for learner services, with a much wider mandate than the current Student Services Branch in Victoria:

*If you look at how student services is defined by the Ministry and what that organization states is student services — it is really financial aid. So I think that we really lack by not having a clear voice at a Ministry level that supports the breadth of student services.*  
**Counsellor**

## Recommendation 14

**That colleges, provincial agencies, employee unions and professional associations jointly explore ways to support and develop the expertise of service providers, through access to:**

- a) High-quality information technology and technical support.**
- b) In-service training and re-training.**
- c) On-going data on the effectiveness of service delivery.**

## Endnotes

1. Tony Bates, Director of Distance Education and Technology in the Faculty of Education at UBC. Quoted in Jennifer Lewington. "Trapped on the upgrade treadmill." *Globe and Mail*, June 22, 1998, p.C1
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10. Susan R. Kornives and Dudley B. Woodard Jr. "Building on the past, shaping the future." In Kornives and Woodard Jr (eds.) *Student Services: A Handbook for the Profession* 3rd ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1996, p. 550.
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# Conclusion

*So today, let's be far-ranging and open-minded. Let's be creative and imaginative. And above all, let's be honest and direct with each other about our experiences and concerns for education in BC .... We've done well under trying circumstances. Now let's talk about how we can do even better ... much better.*

**Ramsey (1997)<sup>1</sup>**

**T**he success of learners in the BC college system — perhaps even the success of that system itself — will increasingly rely on institutions being able to provide a range of high quality and flexible support services to learners into the next decade and beyond.

As outlined earlier, this is because the type of learners whom those colleges are serving is changing and the expectations of most learners is also changing.

Therefore, the college system will need to address what services are provided, how those services are delivered, how those services are funded and paid for, and how the ongoing needs of the service providers themselves are supported.

To do so, colleges must move beyond current assumptions and traditional practices. They need to re-consider how best to provide learner support services and embrace a new paradigm that is learning-focused and is oriented toward ensuring learner success, not simply toward facilitating access.

This necessitates that educational service practitioners proactively seek out better ways of providing service, rather than merely reacting to changing circumstances.

Yet, embracing change does not impute criticism of previous work. Indeed, colleges need to build upon their previous achievements, not eschew them. Moreover, organizational change within educational services should be pursued deliberately not wantonly. The ends are more important than the means. Carter and Alfred (1998) emphasize how colleges need to adopt a multi-faceted approach to exploring better ways of serving learners, rather than pursue a single strategy:

*By simultaneously embarking on different paths of change we can manage the present and reach for the future while stretching our current capacity.<sup>2</sup>*

The key will be to foster an organizational climate within colleges where people feel encouraged to take risks, and to explore new ways of serving learners by experimenting with what works — and having the courage to discard what doesn't work any longer. The

result could be a transformation allowing educational services to play an integral role in BC colleges becoming learning support centres.

However, to support learners successfully, educational service providers will also need support — both in the form of additional resources and, more importantly, in the form of much additional attention.

No transformation will occur unless those in decision-making positions in the college system themselves embrace a vision for the evolution of the purpose and delivery of educational support services in BC. With such leadership, planning locally and provincially to implement this vision is a challenge which can be met:

*Our challenges are no longer technical issues of how to allocate rising revenues, but difficult adaptive problems of how to lead when conditions are constantly changing, resources are tight, expectations are high, and options are limited. We live in an age of transformational ... change. Our leadership, like our institutions, must become transformational as well.<sup>3</sup>*

## Endnotes

1. Paul Ramsey. Keynote address. *Proceedings of the First Annual Forum on Issues and Strategic Priorities for the College, Institute and Agency System in British Columbia*. Richmond, Nov 3-4, 1997.
2. Patricia Carter and Richard Alfred. *Reaching for the Future*. Consortium for Community College Development. Critical issues paper, 1998.
3. Gregory S. Blimling and Elizabeth J. Whitt. *Good Practice in Student Affairs: Principles to Foster Student Learning*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999, p. 74.

# Recommendations

The following is a list of all the recommendations made in the body of the report.

- 1. That colleges review the role and purpose of their educational support services with the intention of realigning them with a more learning-centred paradigm, one that:**
  - a) Builds upon the traditional focus of increasing access and participation for learners, especially those previously disadvantaged.
  - b) Incorporates a greater institutional responsibility for ensuring that learners are successful in their endeavours.
  - c) Assists the institution to become learning support centres that supply learning options, learning experiences and learning expertise.
  
- 2. That colleges explore ways to serve their learners' needs in a more holistic manner by:**
  - a) Organizationally integrating service and instructional functions into a single enterprise with common objectives, rather than operating as separate entities with different values.
  - b) Operationally finding ways to offer joint programming and delivery of learning and learner services.
  - c) Logistically providing the fullest array of services through a variety of means for remote learners so as to reduce service fragmentation.
  
- 3. That colleges deliberately re-examine the operating assumptions behind the delivery of their educational support services by:**
  - a) Codifying those assumptions into codes of practice based on a learning-centered (consumer-focused) philosophy of service delivery.
  - b) Establishing service standards for each aspect of a department's service delivery.
  - c) Ensuring that equitable service delivery is available for all students.
  
- 4. That colleges explore ways of providing more access to self-service formats where learners can help themselves to:**
  - a) Obtain general information as well as information about their status.
  - b) Make transactions to apply for services, order materials, and pay bills.
  
- 5. That colleges explore where gaps exist in providing educational support services for a wider diversity of students, such as:**
  - a) Orientation and support services for mature learners, especially those displaced in the labour market.
  - b) Information literacy skills to permit access to new forms of information technology

by those lacking these skills.

- c) Debt management skills for students with loans.
  - d) Student employment services for employment assistance both while studying and upon completion.
  - e) Improved policies and practices that facilitate student transfer between post-secondary institutions and prepare students for success upon transfer.
- 6. That colleges consider how they can make effective use of emerging information technologies to provide educational support services to learners, particularly:**
- a) To deliver traditional educational support services to a more diverse variety of learners.
  - b) To support the needs of learners studying in distributed learning environments, including the provision of support services at local learning support centres.
  - c) To improve the access to education and subsequent successful outcomes for learners with disabilities and First Nations learners.
- 7. That provincial agencies, the Ministry, and colleges explore what educational support services could be enhanced via centralization to:**
- a) Reduce the overall costs and improve the response time of providing these services to the system.
  - b) Consolidate information and expertise.
- 8. That colleges examine ways to increase or improve the educational support services they provide by making appropriate use of opportunities for learners to assist other learners, such as by:**
- a) Establishing formal programs of trained peer tutoring services, peer supporting services, and peer mentoring services.
  - b) Forging new relationships and service delivery partnerships with local student society associations.
- 9. That the Ministry, in consultation with the college system, revise the current Basic Operating Grant to ensure it reflects and is responsive to multiple variables affecting the costs associated with the delivery of educational services, including:**
- a) Headcounts of learners served by different services.
  - b) Semi-fixed costs of delivery, including supporting distributed learning.
  - c) Demand-driven services, especially ones legally-required.
  - d) Actual use by learners rather than capped amounts.
- 10. That the Ministry revise special purpose or targetted funds so that these:**
- a) Provide for project-based expenses of limited-time duration only and are not used



to support ongoing delivery costs.

- b) Allocate funds based on institutional size and other appropriate variables, rather than as equal lump sums.

**11. That colleges and student society associations explore ways within the Tuition Freeze Act to charge students fees to reflect:**

- a) Direct costs for materials consumed by the user.
- b) Fees-for-services beyond those directly funded by the Ministry.
- c) Differential fees to reflect different program costs.

**12. That colleges consider means by which they can support institutional finances through entrepreneurial activities, such as the provision of:**

- a) Various assessment, counselling and employment assistance services.
- b) Brokerage of services for distance learners enrolled at other institutions.
- c) Contract training services.

**13. That colleges explore further opportunities for establishing commercial partnerships to defray equipment, facilities, or operation costs for service units, by such means as:**

- a) Consortia agreements.
- b) Exclusive-use agreements.
- c) Joint-use agreements.

**14. That colleges, provincial agencies, employee unions and professional associations jointly explore ways to support and develop the expertise of service providers, through access to:**

- a) High-quality information technology and technical support.
- b) In-service training and re-training.
- c) Ongoing data on the effectiveness of service delivery.

# Participants

The following is an alphabetical list of all participants in the series of focus groups which were conducted as part of this project. Their assistance was greatly appreciated.

## **Council of Post-Secondary Library Directors** (November 20, 1998)

Virginia Chisholm, Douglas College  
Mary Anne Guenther, North Island College  
Cathy MacDonald, Kwantlen University College  
David Pepper, Langara College  
Brigitte Peter-Cherneff, British Columbia Institute of Technology

## **Registrars' Association of B.C.** (November 30, 1998)

Trish Angus, Douglas College  
Susan Haglund, Open Learning Agency/Tec BC  
Alan MacMillan, Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design  
Dennis Mayberry, University College of the Cariboo  
Mario Mazziotti, British Columbia Institute of Technology  
Itidal Sadek, Capilano College

## **College and Institute Counsellors Association for B.C.** (November 25, 1998)

Joseph Beales, Camosun College  
Kathy Conroy, College of New Caledonia  
Heather Hyde, British Columbia Institute of Technology  
Mary Ann Mochizuki, University College of the Cariboo  
Mary Wilson, Vancouver Community College

## **Disability Service Providers** (December 16, 1998)

Marna Arnell, Interpreting Services Project, British Columbia Institute of Technology  
Susanne Dadson, Kwantlen University College  
Maria Iaquina, Douglas College  
Bruce Mesman, Open Learning Agency  
Fran Metge, Selkirk College  
Brian Morton, Douglas College  
Lorena Pellii, British Columbia Institute of Technology  
Lawrie Williams, University of British Columbia

## **Association of Student Aid Personnel** (December 17, 1998)

Jim Anderson, British Columbia Institute of Technology  
Gordon Down, Open Learning Agency  
Lynn Grahame, Okanagan University College  
Patty Lewis, Douglas College  
Marty Penninga, Trinity Western University

## **IBT Project Coordinators** (January 15, 1999)

Nona Coles, Vancouver Community College  
Cheryl Farmer, Okanagan University College

Linda Forsythe, Douglas College  
Wendy Lafrance, Vancouver Community College  
Bethan Lloyd, Langara College  
Kathy Mitchell, University College of the Cariboo

**Student Employment Services providers** (January 28, 1999)

Juhli Farrell, Kwantlen University College  
Judith Hall, British Columbia Institute of Technology  
Amanda Hill, British Columbia Institute of Technology  
Dave Sharrock, Capilano College  
Dawn Whitworth, British Columbia Institute of Technology

**B.C. Colleges Athletic Association** (January 29, 1999)

Rick Bevis, Malaspina University College  
Theresa Hanson, Langara College  
Rob Johnson, Okanagan University College  
Rick New, College of the Rockies  
Tina McComb-Tardif, College of New Caledonia  
Richard Williams, Douglas College

**First Nations Coordinators** (February 18, 1999)

Shirley Bear, Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design  
Jennie Blankinship, Institute of Indigenous Government  
Betsy Bruyere, Douglas College  
Brenda Ireland, British Columbia Institute of Technology  
Bob Kiyoshk, Vancouver Community College  
Dave Pearson, Langara College  
Peggy Shannon, Capilano College  
Alannah Young, First Nations House of Learning, University of British Columbia

**BC Educational Technology Users Group** (March 16, 1999)

John Bryant, Open Learning Institute  
Susan Greathouse, Douglas College  
Linda King, Open Learning Institute  
Brian Lopston, Northwest Community College  
Norma Macovi, Open Learning Institute  
John Morrison, Okanagan University College  
Cathy van Soest, Open Learning Institute

**Students at University College of the Cariboo** (December 19, 1998)

Brenda, 2nd year, Education  
Chris, 4th year, History  
Christy, 4th year, Education  
Darren, 3rd year, Geography and Physical Education  
Holly, 2nd year, Theatre  
Jeff, 2nd year, Engineering  
Meg, 2nd year, English

**Students at Northern Lights College** (April 30, 1999)

Shavown Gulka, Office Administration  
Sam Laboucan, Social Services Worker Diploma  
Lisa Mahin, Social Services Worker Diploma  
Doug Morrow, Adult Basic Education  
Jim Taylor, University Transfer  
Liesl Wittkopf, Office Administration

**Canadian Federation of Students Focus Group** (March 19, 1999)

Liz Bader, Capilano College  
Michael Gardiner, University of Victoria  
Angela Hourston, Capilano College  
Jaime McEvoy, Douglas College  
Maura Parte, University of Victoria and Camosun College

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# Acronyms

ACCC	Association of Canadian Community Colleges
ABE	Adult Basic Education
ASE	Adult Special Education
BCIT	British Columbia Institute of Technology
BIA	Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act
BCCAT	British Columbia Council on Admissions and Transfer
BCSAP	British Columbia Student Assistance Program
CACUSS	Canadian Association of College and University Student Services
CAPP	Career and Planning Program
CCPA	Canadian Council on Policy Alternatives
CE	Continuing Education
CEISS	Centre for Education Information Standards and Services
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CFS	Canadian Federation of Students
CILS	College and Institute Library Services
CLSP	Canada Student Loans Program
CMC	Computer-Meditated Communication
C2T2	Centre for Curriculum and Technology Transfer
DIAND	Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development
EI	Employment Insurance
ESL	English as a Second Language
FAO	Financial Aid Officer
FAW	Financial Aid Worker
FTE	Full-Time Equivalent
GAIN	Guaranteed Additional Income
HRDC	Human Resource Development Canada
IA	Income Assistance
IAR	Income Assistance Recipient
IBT	Institution-Based Training (BC Benefits)
ICBC	Insurance Corporation of British Columbia
ICES	International Credential Evaluation Service
ISO	International Organization for Standardization
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
LMMEP	Lower Mainland Multicultural Education Project
MAETT	Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology
PASBC	Provincial Application System of British Columbia
PLA	Prior Learning Assessment
RESP	Registered Education Savings Plan
RRSP	Registered Retirement Savings Plan
SCOET	Standing Committee on Educational Technology
SESOC	Senior Educational Services Officers Committee
SETBC	Services for Educational Technology in British Columbia
SIOC	Senior Instructional Officers Committee
S@il	Student Access to Internet and Library (Langara College)
SFU	Simon Fraser University
TC	Training Consultant
Tech BC	Technical University of British Columbia
TQM	Total Quality Management
UBC	University of British Columbia
UPC	University Presidents Council
UVic	University of Victoria
WCB	Workers Compensation Board

# Appendices

Additional documents were prepared by the Research Team but were too detailed to be included in this report. They are available as appendices upon request:

- Appendix A:** Detailed report on *Changes in the Profile of Learners*. An environmental scan of statistical and other indicators of the changing demographic and social variables, particularly for equity group participation, in the expected composition of the learner population in future. (This is an expanded version of the section in this document).
- Appendix B:** A variety of examples of best practices from BC and elsewhere that are useful for *Re-considering How to Provide Services* in the college system, including contact information.
- Appendix C:** A compilation of themes emerging from each of the focus group discussions.
- Appendix D:** Full transcripts of the focus group discussions.

To obtain copies of any of the above appendices, please send your request to:

**Ted James**  
Douglas College  
P.O. Box 2503  
New Westminster, B.C.  
Canada, V3L 5B2

**Fax:** (604) 527-5095  
**E-mail:** [jamest@douglas.bc.ca](mailto:jamest@douglas.bc.ca)

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