



President's Update to the College Community

March 1, 2004

Rural Chairs & Presidents meeting

February 2nd marked the first meeting of the rural college chairs and presidents. Meetings of this group were initiated to discuss issues specific to rural colleges. Issues discussed included the heartland strategy, bandwidth needs, collaborative communications and marketing initiatives, sharing of research resources, and finances. Meetings will occur quarterly or as needed to address specific rural concerns. The next meeting is planned for May and will focus on the heartland strategy.

Notes of the above meeting are attached to this email.

Totem Pole Planning Feast

After many years of talking about this moment, the totem pole planning feast took place on February 16th at the Terrace campus. The seven First Nations of the northwest all took part in this historic occasion, coming together for the purpose of education. Education is a universal need and unites people of all nations and cultures. The totem pole, when complete, will stand as a testament to this unity and the dedication of First Nations communities to ensuring that educational opportunities are there for their people and future generations. The totem pole will be raised in this fall in mid September.

Meeting with Students on Financing their College Education

On February 02, 2004 Holly-Anne and I met with twenty-five students from various programs at the College in Terrace. I had asked to meet with students of various ages and from various programs to discuss the financial realities of attending NWCC. Of the students in attendance, twenty-three students were receiving funding of some kind to come to school, fourteen were on student loans, one was paying her own way, and one was not able to find funding to attend college. Fifteen of the twenty-five people were single parents.

It was evident from this meeting, that many students require funding and are met with many challenges in accessing sponsorship or obtaining student loans. The level of frustration with the inadequacies of the student loan program, and the bureaucracy of accessing HRDC was very evident. It was also apparent that changes in MHR policies are limiting education funding to MHR clients.

The following presents some of the student comments from this meeting:

MHR Issues:

- Welfare does not support education costs and efforts. If a welfare recipient wants to pursue educational opportunities their benefits are terminated.

Student Loan Issues:

- Student loan guidelines and criteria do not take into account the needs of mature students who have mortgages, children with day care needs, and other living expenses. The current criteria is geared to younger population, typically high school students.
- People need skills to know how to handle and navigate within the systems.
- Student loans cap the amount students can earn while receiving funding. This amount does not allow students to balance their living expenses and leaves them with more debt.
- Loan criteria does not reflect needs of mature students
- Will funding amounts increase in proportion to rising educational costs?

HRDC Issues:

- Personnel in HRDC are not helpful and are perceived to be condescending.
- "They treat students like they are thieves".
- Their loan criteria does not allow students to change their educational path. Once in the educational system students are better able to determine what interests them and what they would like to focus on but they cannot make a change to their loans to reflect that and compensate for new educational path and financial need.
- EI benefits do not allow students to work while going to school.
- There is a 3 year reach back funding program making people who have been on EI in the past three years eligible for funding. It was felt many people did not have this information.
- Reasons expressed for students not being able to move to areas that have job availability were: expenses (rent, transportation, etc) in other areas are more and could not be met; homes here are not selling; do not want to move from area where they grew up and have a family base in; very disruptive to family; many costs associated with moving, especially when families have to move.
- To get any real action a person needs to deal directly with Andy Burton.
- People given conflicting information from staff.
- An individual must stand up for their rights with staff to get treated fairly and appropriately.
- Will only provide funding support for training that leads to available jobs. The student must prove that there are jobs available in the field they are studying.

Band funding:

- Bands are not getting additional money from the government to keep up with increasing costs of education. Therefore, band members are not able to acquire sufficient funding to cover their costs and must seek additional funding through other loans.

- Bands are capping their funding levels which can cause a member to miss out on educational opportunities.

Premiers Meeting

The Premier requested a meeting with all the Presidents within the post-secondary system on February 19th. The meeting focussed on tuition fee increases and the need for College Presidents to take the lead in justifying to the public the need for tuition increases. In this hour and a half meeting, we also had an opportunity to discuss many issues important to the post-secondary system.

This is the first time that a Premier has personally met with all post-secondary Presidents and it proved to be a very effective meeting.

BC Progress Report meeting in Terrace

The Chair and Executive Direction of the BC Progress Board were in Terrace on February 23rd to meet with community leaders from Kitimat, Prince Rupert and Terrace. As they only had an hour and a half to spend with us, the opportunity to speak to our perspective on the issues in the northwest was limited. I have requested a follow-up meeting in Vancouver with the Executive Director.

Premiers Roundtable on Technology

On February 24th, Beth Davies, Terrie McAloney, Todd Taylor and I met with the Premiers Roundtable on Technology in Terrace. This was an opportunity for the College to discuss the need and the challenges of expanding broad band service in the northwest. We had a good meeting with this group and over an hour of one-on-one time with them.

BCCP Meeting

The College Presidents met on February 26th in Vancouver. Jim Soles, the assistant deputy minister of Advanced Education was there and confirmed that the College budgets would not be cut this year. He also stated that budget letters would not be sent until March 10th or 14th. The Ministry's request for a Three Year Service Plan and a 6 year Multi-year plan were also discussed. Both are due on May 14th.

On the issue of tuition, it was noted that Colleges are looking at 2.1% to 10% increases, college-universities are considering 12% - 19% and universities up to 30%. It was also noted that many colleges are establishing a reserve of capital development funds. This is being done with the realization that the government expects colleges to contribute to capital projects.

ACCC/CIDA project

We have received funding approval for a proposal development phase of our proposed community development project in Bolivia. Pouyan Mahboubi will accompany International Education Special Advisor Ed Wong to Bolivia in March to plan the project with our Bolivians counterparts.

Market Research – Bulkley Valley

On January 13th, individuals from Ipsos-Reid came to the campus to discuss the survey that they are facilitating in the Smithers community. Enrollments have declined in this geographical area, and this study is designed to help us “gain insights into how we can be more successful in responding to the needs of students and the labour market of the

future.” Questionnaires have been designed and distributed to capture data from general members of the community, our current students, and the high school students in town. The survey is underway now and should be complete by the end of March.

Minerals North Conference – Smithers, April 14-16th

This conference brings together the minerals industry with a broad spectrum of people in northern BC communities: municipal and aboriginal representatives, business people and contractors, students and environmentalists. The objective is to

- Establish contacts and build working relationships
- Inform communities about mining and exploration issues
- Hold a dialogue on the impacts and benefits of mining

The conference is sponsored by a different community in northern BC each year and attracts 100-150 people. This year, the College is a sponsor and will not only have a booth, but also will speak on the Mining School proposal.