

October 4, 2019

An Open Letter to the VCC Community regarding proposed Adult Basic Education Cuts

Dear colleagues,

On Monday, September 29th, the VCCFA was informed that the college intends to make cuts in Adult Basic Education programming areas. If they occur, these cuts will impact at least 10 regular and term faculty across three different departments. Advance Notices of lay off could go out as early as next week.

The VCCFA calls on VCC Administration to pause their plans now, before Advance Notices go out. There are substantive questions that need to be answered around the rationale on which the college is basing its plans. Additionally, there are potentially mitigating actions that need to be fully explored before such drastic actions are taken.

VCC has endured more unnecessary cuts to successful programs and more job losses than any other institution its size in Canada. The most recent were extensive cuts in 2015. The last thing VCC needs is yet another round of trauma. Rather than building on our reputation and successes, once again we may have another brutal layoff battle to endure. Let's look at our options; let's seek solutions; let's do everything possible to avoid these layoffs.

The College says:

Enrollment is declining. It declined with the introduction of tuition in 2014, and the argument is that it has not rebounded sufficiently since the current government made ABE tuition free in 2017.

We say:

ABE departments report and VCC Institutional Research documents substantiate that in fact enrollment is rebounding. However, VCC has not made any substantial investment in advertising for ABE since the 2017 government announcement that ABE was to be returned to its free status. In addition, the college has brought in policies that restrict student access to ABE. Finally, the input of the ABE Working Group, formed two years ago to articulate a faculty vision for ABE at the college, has been ignored. For the past few years, ABE programming has been quietly flying under the radar, trying to grow without the support of this institution. We call on VCC to seek ways to support ABE programs in order that they continue to flourish and grow.

The College says:

Government funding is inadequate.

We say:

Everyone in the system knows that in the current century the sweet funding spot for a post-secondary program in BC is a combination of high domestic tuition, high class sizes, and the ability to insert a significant number of very high tuition-paying international students. On all three counts, ABE programming can't compete, and its students are denied access. We need our College Board to champion this programming. We must convey to government that it cannot and should not make adult basic education the target of cuts. Rather, ABE should be the focus of immediate and continued investments. Adult Basic Education and the value it has for our communities and our citizens should be lauded, championed, and celebrated. We call on the VCC Board to intervene with government and to work with VCC administration to avert this current crisis.

The College says:

We can't afford ABE.

We say:

Why does the college find it necessary to make these cuts? The last two fiscal years have ended in surplus. The last surplus as of May this year, at \$1.6 million was twice that of the previous year. In addition, we know that the college gets about 43 million dollars in block funding from the government. Further, the government provides *additional* funds in the form of both tuition replacement and the Adult Upgrading Grant. We ask, exactly how much of block funding goes to ABE? Budgeting is all about making choices, and the college appears to be choosing not to support ABE. Yes, it is not "profit-making" programming, but it is vital programming that the college is mandated to provide. The college is not making a clear argument that it is doing all it can to support ABE with the resources it has.

Adult Basic Education programs are part of the character of VCC, part of what VCC is and always has been. We call on VCC administration and the VCC Board of Governors to stop these cuts.