

Joint Submission to the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia
Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services
SUPPORTS FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

October 9, 2018

INTRODUCTION

For the past two years, the Presidents of British Columbia's 25 public post-secondary institutions, represented by RUCBC, BCAIU and BC Colleges, have come together to present to the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services a proposal to respond to issues that are central to student success at our institutions.

Providing post-secondary education is significantly more complex than even just a few years ago, and the pace of change is increasing. Today's educators are faced with growing student need for services related to mental health and sexual violence issues. As well, students and prospective employers are voicing an increasing desire for programs to incorporate work integrated learning, providing relevant experience for transitioning into the labour market. High quality post-secondary education requires these supports so that students can pursue their goals of personal and career success, and contribute to the future economic and social prosperity of the province. Consistent with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, BC's post-secondary institutions remain committed to recognizing the knowledge of Indigenous Peoples and promoting dialogue through which respectful long-term relationships can be further developed.

STUDENT SUCCESS

Supports for Indigenous Students

The presidents of the 25 public post-secondary institutions recognize the importance of the Government of BC's commitment to implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's *Calls to Action*. The institutions have taken very seriously their responsibility to continue working with Indigenous partners to ensure the post-secondary system is relevant and effective. This commitment requires significant ongoing resources for programs and initiatives developed with Indigenous partners, continuing to increase the number of Indigenous faculty and staff, and indigenizing student supports across the system. New initiatives have been introduced and outcomes have improved, but Indigenous learners continue to be underrepresented in post-secondary education, particularly in undergraduate and graduate degree programs.

Institutional Examples

of Innovative Supports for Indigenous Students

Thirty-one grade 11 and 12 Indigenous students were hosted in campus housing and immersed in campus life, spending time in science and engineering labs doing hands-on research. In addition to being mentored by professors and graduate-level students, they met Indigenous role models and learned about supports that are available on campus.

Current and prospective Indigenous and Metis students connect with Indigenous Alumni, sharing stories, providing support, and creating new opportunities for research.

Marine fire and rescue techniques are taught through in-community training at Bella Bella, allowing community members to meet Transport Canada's federal licensing requirements through a locally-delivered training program.

An Indigenous Graduate Student Coordinator is available to support Indigenous students transitioning into graduate studies and enhancing current Indigenous graduate students holistic academic path through mentorship, workshops and as a resource mediator.

A co-op program has been providing dedicated support to Indigenous students for five years, matching them with culturally relevant jobs at the student's request.

A suite of employee development opportunities enables faculty to better support Indigenous students through active listening and reflecting on their own classroom pedagogy.

Additional support for Indigenous students could include a greater number of courses and programs that highlight Indigenous issues, the enhancement of Elders programs that provide a crucial connection to culture and community, Indigenous counsellors for students struggling with mental health issues, and promoting increased dialogue between Indigenous communities and post-secondary institutions.

Other initiatives would provide access to Indigenous student advisors familiar with Indigenous funding options and policies, who could advocate for and advise these students on programs and education plans, or on the provision of emergency funds to support Indigenous students in the event of an unforeseen emergency or circumstance, which could include assistance to return to their home community.

Mental Health Supports for Students

Academic support is essential to providing environments that are conducive to student learning and development, but insufficient on its own. Students today need appropriate supports for mental health, personal safety and overall well-being has never been more urgent or complex. Offering support and promoting greater awareness of its availability is increasingly resource intensive due to growing demand. The standard minimum ratio of the BC Post-Secondary Counsellors' Association's is one counsellor for every 550 students, but one medium-sized institution has only one counsellor for every 3,600 students.

The most recent data available suggests that in 2016, more than one in four Canadian post-secondary students reported having been diagnosed with, or treated for, a mental health condition such as anxiety, depression, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder or an eating disorder. Suicide accounts for 24 percent of all deaths among 15-24 year olds in Canada, the third-highest rate in the industrialized world.

As mental health awareness increases in the youth population, the stigma around mental illness has declined, encouraging more young people than ever before to seek help. This year, first-year students at the University of Waterloo will receive a PASS (panic, anxiety and stress support) kit. Besides being a useful self-help tool, this mental health first aid kit will be highly visible on campus, further reducing the stigma around mental health challenges and making at-risk students more likely to reach out for help.

Other long term strategies to reduce the impact of mental illness on student success could include implementing 'resiliency' teaching programs in K-12 to better prepare students for the transition to post-secondary education, as well as creating closer working relationships between institutions and local health-care and community agencies. Early intervention is crucial for recovery, but there is a large gap in BC between resources available and resources required. The size of the shortfall—along with the increase in need—varies by institution.

Institutional Examples

of Innovative Mental Health Supports for Students

A 24/7 multi-platform mental health and support service will provide additional mental health resources for all students, at no additional cost, to help address the growing demand for mental health services. Students now have immediate, confidential 24-hour access to counsellors through a phone or mobile app.

An innovative "Response Guide for Faculty and Staff" is available so that staff can intervene without being approached by a student in distress if it seems warranted.

New training opportunities on student mental health are being offered for faculty, sessional instructors, teaching assistants, and staff. The program provides dedicated training on key areas in support of student mental health.

Partnership with the Student Association creates a Peer Support Program offering students one-on-one peer support, and referrals to various institutional and community resources. The primary goal of the Peer Support Program is to enhance the social, emotional, and academic experiences of students, aiming to improve the range and diversity of options available to students struggling with mental health issues as well as those who may be overwhelmed or distressed.

Three-quarters of mental health disorders first appear between the ages of 18 and 24. For the young people in crisis now, new initiatives in mental health services are urgently needed. For example, employing additional counsellors with specific experience in trauma, disability and humanistic approaches to supporting students could reduce wait times for meeting with a counsellor or other institutional health professional. A triage model could be introduced to eliminate unacceptably long wait times, ensuring immediate care for students who show significant signs of distress. On-site psychiatric nurses could support broader health promotion and extend early intervention initiatives to help students who present performance and attendance issues. Best practices from public health models could be integrated into institutional services.

Also, peer-to-peer counselling and support has been shown to build resiliency by providing students with support from those who have grappled with similar challenges. Funding could be made available to train students to provide peer counselling, as some students with mental health challenges may find it easier to open up to their peers than to professional health care providers.

Supports for Students for Issues of Sexual Violence

Our institutions are committed to providing respectful environments for all students and staff and have zero tolerance for sexual assault or any other acts of sexual violence or aggression. Crucial to all students' success is assurance of personal safety and security. As mandated by law, all BC post-secondary institutions now have policies on Sexual Violence and Misconduct.

Ontario dedicated \$41 million over three years to address sexual violence and harassment, including at universities. Quebec recently committed \$23 million to fight sexual violence on campus. In BC no targeted funding was attached to the directive to establish policies. Without dedicated funding, it has been a challenge for institutions to raise awareness of the supports they have made available and supports vary widely by institution. Demand for services continues to increase, along with staff shortages in health, counselling and legal affairs. Adding to the challenge, cases are becoming ever more complex, with increasing requirements for third party investigations. The needs of the victim/survivor must be addressed while the rights of the accused must be protected. Jurisdictional issues are also a significant problem.

Institutional Examples

of Sexual Violence Supports Adopted by Institutions

The Sexual Violence Policy is woven into the Student Code of Conduct, Standards of Employee Conduct as well as other policies that set standards and give direction how members of the institutional community will interact with each other.

All faculty and staff members are explicitly made aware that they are responsible for informing students what supports are available to them if someone discloses sexual violence or misconduct.

A widely available hand guide providing contact information for support services at the institution and in the community and offering steps to support someone who opens up about experiences with sexual violence.

To address these matters comprehensively, institutions are expected to duplicate all community services on campus. Providing adequate support for students requires counsellors who are specifically trained to work with sexual assault survivors. Coordination of programs and strategies around sexual assault and harassment have led to improvements in supports, along with a focus on educating campus communities on the prevention of sexual assault. However, more is required. As sexual violence education and prevention initiatives evolve, institutions continually strive to increase and improve safety and security, better facilitate the reporting of incidents, and educate the community on the meaning of consent and how to best support survivors of sexual assault.

Work-Integrated Learning

By merging theory and practice, work-integrated learning opportunities benefit both students and prospective employers. Students get invaluable exposure to the workplace, gaining relevant skills, and employers can identify and develop new talent. The number of post-secondary student placements in co-op, internships, apprenticeships, practicums and clinical placements, community service, mentorship programs, research assistantships and work study has increased steadily in BC. There were approximately 10,000 co-op placements in 2010/11; in 2016/17, there were over 15,000.

Post-secondary institutions commit resources to developing and securing relationships with industry partners, non-profit organizations and public-sector employers. This summer, the Province announced \$10 million in funding to support internship programs pairing researchers with industry partners to solve real-world problems. The internships will be funded through Mitacs, a national not-for-profit with a focus on technology, engineering, business and health programs. This is a welcome investment in our province's future, but more is required to support the increasing demand from students and employers.

Institutional Examples of Innovative Work-Integrated Learning Initiatives for Students

One co-op program has adopted a unique competency-based framework that fosters co-op students' reflective learning, developed a consistent professional practice course for all co-op students, woven intercultural competency development into the co-op experience, and developed international and Indigenous exchange partnerships with institutions and employers around the world.

A Work Learn Program supports and subsidizes meaningful work experiences on campus that offer the opportunity for all students to develop their professional skills and learn in a work environment.

A President's Excellence Fund for Student Mobility supports travel funding for co-op students undertaking co-op work terms or internships in the Asia Pacific region, in other provinces of Canada or with Indigenous business, communities or community groups.

Fourth-year First Nations and Indigenous Studies students complete a 6-credit research practicum in partnership with an Aboriginal organization, providing valuable experience in designing, negotiating, and implementing research projects that respond to community needs.

The BCBC Champions Table aligns Indigenous graduates from all BC institutions with internship opportunities with the province's largest corporations.

All BC public post-secondary institutions offer some type of experiential learning, although formal co-op programs can be challenging for institutions in smaller communities that may lack sufficient resources, or access to potential local employers. Even at larger institutions, the demand for placements is outstripping the supply. Placements across all disciplines are required, and expanding outreach to employers could increase the number of opportunities. However, simply adding spaces is only part of the solution. More could be done to address the needs of potential employers who often find that meeting the requirements of the educational institutions is time-consuming and expensive.

Finally, introducing a comprehensive strategy for evaluating the outcomes of various work-integrated learning initiatives would enable allocation of funding to programs where it would be most effective. Such an initiative would require participation of all stakeholders: students, institutions, government, and industry.

GOING FORWARD

Post-secondary education benefits all British Columbians and public investment in BC's post-secondary education system delivers a wide range of benefits for students and for the province as a whole. In an increasingly competitive global economy, an educated population is vital to BC's prosperity. Successfully preparing our students to transition into the labour force requires that post-secondary institutions include responsive, comprehensive support services.

In previous submissions to the Select Standing Committee, the province's 25 public post-secondary institutions identified the \$50 million reduction in funding to the system that occurred over the years 2013/14 to 2015/16 and requested that funding be re-invested, specifically in areas of greatest student need. This year we again ask the Committee to consider recommending investment in BC's students as part of their report to the Legislative Assembly. BC's public post-secondary institutions are committed to working together with the provincial government to offer high quality post-secondary education to British Columbians.