



Kwantlen Faculty Association

Your KFA – Knowledgeable, Fair, Approachable

**Presentation by Terri Van Steinburg, President
Kwantlen Faculty Association**

**To the
Select Standing Committee on Finance
and Government Services
October 11, 2007**

Good afternoon and thank you for the invitation to speak to your Committee today. I'm here speaking for the Kwantlen Faculty Association, a union representing over 700 faculty members who work at Kwantlen University College. Kwantlen is a diverse post-secondary institution. Close to 17,000 students are enrolled annually in programs delivered at our campuses in Surrey, Richmond, Langley and Cloverdale, making Kwantlen Canada's largest university college. Kwantlen's catchment area is one of the most culturally, ethnically and economically diverse in the country. That diversity contributes to the challenges we face in serving our communities.

Kwantlen grants a variety of post-secondary credentials including: citations, certificates, diplomas and degrees. We also offer a wide range of educational opportunities through our technical, trades and Developmental Education programs.

Our faculty members are proud of the reputation that Kwantlen has been able to establish over the years. We are strong supporters of the comprehensive mandate that our institution has in the communities we serve. We believe that our approach has enabled Kwantlen to offer many entry points for students interested in advancing their education at the post-secondary level. In creating those multiple-entry points we also believe that we are encouraging a process of life-long learning that we know will play an increasingly critical role in BC's knowledge-intensive future.

Our members are also part of the Federation of Post-Secondary Educators, and, through FPSE, are affiliated to the BC Federation of Labour, the Canadian Association of University Teachers, the National Union of University Teachers and the Canadian Labour Congress. A common objective across all those organizations is our concern about the chronic under-funding of public post-secondary education and the impact that this has had on access and affordability for thousands of students.

I know other post-secondary groups have mentioned the problems facing adult learners and we were encouraged by the recent announcement from the Ministry of Advanced Education that Adult Basic Education programs would become tuition-free. If the announcement signals a change in thinking by the provincial government on important access and affordability issues, we would find that encouraging. However, the proposed changes raise a number of questions. For instance, it still isn't clear whether the tuition-free directive includes funding to off-set the cost of making ABE tuition-free at every public post-secondary institution in the province.

The funding changes in ABE need to be linked to a larger commitment by the provincial government to make post-secondary education more accessible and affordable.

Our faculty members maintain that a re-thinking of the government's entire approach to post-secondary education funding is long overdue. The centerpiece of the current funding policy is the 2002 decision to de-regulate tuition fees. We didn't support that policy change at the time and we believe that it prevented BC from being able to effectively address the growing educational needs in our increasingly knowledge based economy. We have known for a long time that there is a gap between what we have in terms of existing skills and what we will need in terms of new skills: 73% of all new jobs will require some form of post-secondary education but only 60% of the current workforce has that level of training. Add in the changing demographic conditions of an aging workforce and it's clear that we need to do a much better job of encouraging and supporting people to enter and complete their post-secondary education.

That encouragement and support simply aren't there under existing policies. Let me give you some specific examples of what is missing. De-regulating tuition fees has priced post-secondary education out of the reach for thousands of potential students. As those fees skyrocketed over the last five years, students were forced to drop out all together, drop back from full-time to part-time or take on enormous levels of debt. I hear from our faculty members the difficulties their students are facing in trying to make ends meet. Many of them have part time jobs, part time studies and full time home responsibilities.

The average tuition fees in BC for an undergraduate degree have doubled since 2001. Average student debt is now close to \$30,000 according to the Canadian Federation of Students.

Under the current tuition fee policy, we are forcing today's students to pay a far higher portion of the cost of post-secondary education than in previous generations. Back then, tuition fees accounted for about 15-18% of the total cost. Today it's almost double that.

The barriers that have been placed in front of our public post-secondary education system aren't confined to tuition fees. The entire public system is suffering because operating grants are falling far short of meeting basic needs. A recent internal publication at Kwantlen, "Creating Our Futures, Kwantlen University College Action Plan 2007, stated the "The proportion of post-secondary institution's revenues coming from the provincial government has dropped from 58.1% in 1993-94 to 45.6% in 2003-04... In addition, the Ministry of Advanced Education's share of the provincial budget has dropped from 8.1% in 1995-96 to 7.3% in 2005-06."

Because grants fall short of institutional needs access is reduced and cost are shifted on to students, a move that makes affordability just that much tougher.

For instance, at Kwantlen not only do students have to pay \$114.75 per credit in tuition, they also face a 7% surcharge fee for libraries, technology, and student life.

Imagine you are a single parent living in Newton or Whalley trying to make a better life for your family by getting a post-secondary education. The challenges you will face are almost insurmountable. There was a time when resources were available for you. Resources like Institutional Based Training that would support low income students in accessing post-secondary education, help with retention strategies throughout and assist with exist employment transitions. These initiatives are gone.

Kwantlen is not unique in the funding problems it faces. Other post-secondary institutions are experiencing the same problem. In a report prepared by Perrin Thoreau Consulting for the Ministry of Advanced Education, the researchers noted that for the entire public post-secondary system cost increases, both capital and operational, were not matched by compensating increases from the provincial government. The consultants recommended a minimum funding increase of \$50 million over and above what had been already committed by the provincial government. That additional funding has not been found. This year's budget should mark the starting point for addressing this under-funding problem.

Adequate funding is also critical to maintaining the comprehensive mandate that Kwantlen is supposed to provide to our communities.

I talked at the outset about multiple entry points for our students. Many of those students are adult learners for whom the path back to post-secondary education is not an easy one. Yet, these are the very same students that we need to encourage and support if we hope to close the skills gap I mentioned earlier, or solve the skills shortage that is proving to be so critical. Again quoting the Creating Our Futures report, "In 2006, there were 977,400 immigrants in Greater Vancouver, 43% of the population. In 2011 immigrants will make up 46% of the region's population. Predictions for 2017 are that 49% of the region's projected population of 2,879,000 will be immigrants. Immigrants accounted for over 90% of net labour force growth in the 1990s; this proportion is expected to increase.

In planning for this, government needs to ensure institutions like Kwantlen, who serve communities with a significant immigrant population, have the funding required to provide programs like English Language Training in order to meet skills and labour shortages.

As your Committee knows, BC has the fiscal capacity to address the funding problems in our post-secondary education system. The only things lacking at this point are the fiscal priorities needed to make it happen.

With that objective in mind, I would like to conclude by giving the Committee members some specific suggestions for what those priorities should be in the 2008 provincial budget:

- 1) Make affordable public post-secondary education a major priority in the February 2008 provincial budget. We know there is a skills gap that we need to close. We also know that our skills shortage can only be solved by investing more in post-secondary skills. That investment needs to work on many fronts including a much stronger and more effective working relationship between our public post-secondary institutions and the Industry Training Authority (ITA). Our public institutions, including Kwantlen, currently deliver close to 90 % of trades training, but have little input into ITA's planning process.
- 2) Give public post-secondary institutions the funding necessary so that operating budgets of institutions like Kwantlen University College can provide more access to educational opportunities that our students need to begin and complete their post-secondary education.
- 3) As a specific target for better funding, the 2008 provincial budget should allocate an additional \$200 million for public post-secondary education. That would represent a 10% lift in the Ministry of Advanced Education's budget and would put it in a position to bring real per-student funding back to the level it was in 2001.

- 4) Endorse the call for tuition fee relief. Student groups have, in previous budget consultations, asked for a 10% reduction in tuition fees. We support that call and believe that such a move would send a strong signal to existing and potential post-secondary students that BC is serious about supporting those interested in post-secondary education.

- 5) Bring back the student grant program. It was eliminated in 2001-02 and has simply added to the growing debt burden that is discouraging students from either entering or completing their post-secondary education.

Thank you for the opportunity to make this presentation and I would be glad to answer any of your questions.