

March 9, 2016

Aurelea and Michael –

Thank you for writing about your concerns. I'm sorry we weren't able to find time to talk after the board meeting, but such is the reality of coordinating busy schedules and significant workloads. I'll try to respond to your letter and will continue to look for a way to keep the dialogue moving along whether in person or by email.

I appreciate your thoughts on the 2016/17 budget and its allocation of resources directly related to program offerings. Although there are clearly some discrepancies with regard to the data you have been accessing, the results I presented to the board last month are indeed accurate. Based on internal AVED data, not publically available but accessible by our Office of Institutional Research, Cap's declining enrolments are consistent with the sector and our peer institutions. You are correct about our FTE losses and as I said at the February Board meeting (and previous meetings), while the largest losses have been in Arts and Sciences, all areas have been affected.

Of course, enrolment drops for a variety of reasons, and there is no way to demonstrate a causal connection when it comes to individual variables (unlike enrolment skips which can usually be linked to specific interventions). It's possible that fewer students are coming to Cap because they have more options elsewhere, or because we don't have dorms, or because we have had more bad press than good, or because we had to cancel key recruiting events, or because we offer so little programming in the evenings and on weekends, or because we do not have traditional degree exit points. Any or all of these might be part of the picture. What we know for sure is that student enrolment, conversion, and persistence is highest in a handful of programs, and lowest in others. Looking at those data, we are working to maintain and improve these metrics, sometimes with resources but also with structural change.

As for new degree development: generating new degrees will not necessarily solve our problems, nor are their development a quick and easy process. During the last three years, Cap has gone through a massive cultural change. The prevailing feeling on campus in 2013 was that we needed to remain a transfer institution, despite clear indications that such an identity was not likely to be sustainable. Through the development of the academic and strategic plans, the direction has shifted in many programs and Faculties, and there now seems to be greater recognition that degrees are a more stable and sustainable way to a successful future. This is a terrific change, but it is not something that happens overnight.

Cap has successfully launched a new degree in Visual Communication and revamped our degree in Jazz Studies. We have also resourced development of degrees in global stewardship, allied health, and adventure tourism, not to mention several new post-bacs. But remember the time frame. Visual Communications passed DQAB review in October 2013 and was approved by the ministry in February 2014, but only after much intense lobbying. Jazz Studies is still on the minister's desk, along with hundreds of other proposals from across the province, waiting for approval. Both of these degrees were years in development, and both built on successful programs that could demonstrate demand, capacity, and market potential.

Although I have only been at Cap a short time, I have worked under three ministers, each with a new mandate and different expectations. The messages being sent from AVED had stressed a necessary focus on LNG and the building of capacity in the trades, especially in the areas of BC's top sixty job opportunities, but in recent months that has changed to a focus on technology and more attention being given to the creative industries. This should put our pending Jazz degree in a good position for approval, but no encouragement or authorization has been forthcoming. Finally, DQAB has released a new process for degree development, but to the best of my knowledge no institution has put forth programming under this new structure and the ministry has not answered questions about whether degrees currently on the minister's desk will need to be resubmitted. I am in touch with the ministry, generally, on a weekly basis and there is still little clarity about the new process and its implications. Given such a climate, it is unlikely that any new degree development is going to meet with a positive response in the short term. This is not to say we should stop, but rather that we must be realistic about putting resources towards such an uncertain goal ... at this time.

But there is another issue that is much more pressing: the absence of sufficient student support structures and policies. In the areas of accessibility services, counselling, learning support, student affairs, and other areas of basic student services we are decades behind where we should be. In the last year we have begun to address some of the most serious policy gaps, but we have yet to meet our university expectations and responsibilities. In the area of student affairs, we are only now reaching the beginnings of stability with a permanent manager. Another hire in that area will bring us to where we should have been before becoming a university. When we chose student success as the focus of our strategic plan, it was not only with an eye to academic growth, but with the intention of building infrastructure that has been absent or eroded over the past few years. This is by far the most pressing need on campus, and this is what we have been trying to build as thoughtfully as possible.

You ask if the preliminary budget provides sufficient resources to execute development initiatives "central to a substantive expansion in program diversity at the University" and of course the answer is no. In part because the academic and strategic plans lay out a multi-year process for thoughtful development and in part because there are infrastructure concerns that must be addressed before we even consider significant program expansion. The Cap Year Experience and Gen Ed initiatives have received resources during the last two years, and each has resources devoted to it in the current budget, but absent a coherent way forward it would be irresponsible to request anything more for those areas. There is also a good deal of groundwork that needs to be done prior to the expansion of programming, and this is being done in a number of areas by faculty in concert with the Deans.

With regard to the teaching and learning centre, I completely agree. We need one desperately, and in the last budget we identified funding for a manager's position, someone who can assess the needs and plan for growth. This is what we have done in student affairs and what we are doing in teaching and learning. The job description has been developed and is in final review by HR. I hope to see it posted shortly. The greatest hurdle for us is salary. A similar position is being filled by Kwantlen after a failed search last year; they were advertising for a director of teaching and learning but could not attract anyone at the salary being offered, so now they are hoping to hire at the AVP level with a salary of almost twice what we have on offer. This is a real problem for us and has been in our other searches as well. Also, please realize how much ground we need to make up in this regard. The strategic plan calls for faculty mentors and increases in staffing, peer tutors and a Centre for Integrative Learning, not to mention the learning commons. Those will come in subsequent budgets once we know what we need and have demonstrated the capacity to use resources wisely.

To be frank, the single greatest barrier to growth at this point is the issue that opened this letter: time and personnel. We are short staffed in every area (largely because of salary scale), and the result has been an untenable workload for all academic administrators and support areas. So is the Office of the VP Academic resourced appropriately? No. But the resources needed to insure structural integrity are not curricular. More degrees require more staff and administrative support in the Registrar's office, in IT, in IR, in student affairs, in the Library, in learning services, in accessibility services, in the writing and math centres, in policy support, and in CIE. And these things need to be in place to attract and retain students.

Yet none of that matters if we cannot keep the physical plant running, conduct our financial business, and protect our employees' health and wellness. Academic programming is why we are here, but we are only one piece of a much greater whole. Budgets are a balancing act, a weighing of costs and benefits. I have supported the resourcing of those things I thought were of primary importance, and will continue to do so. With the budget constraints continually in play, making strategic decisions is a complex and difficult proposition. You mentioned in a recent email that the allocations for the academic side of the house seemed "modest." Truth be told the entire budget is modest, but that is where we find ourselves at this point in time.

Cordially,



Rick Gale,
Vice President, Academic and Provost