

POST-SECONDARY

# New courses must pass under status quo microscope

**W**hen I first started working in post-secondary education one of the things that interested me the most was how colleges and universities determine their course and program offerings.

How do they decide what new programs to run, what new courses to offer and how do they take into account current trends and student demand?

I quickly found out that this process begins at the department level where faculty propose which new programs and courses they want to develop.

They often rely on input from industry, employers, indications of student demand, and knowledge of continuing changes to help drive those decisions.

The decision-making process progresses to the university's senate, or a college's education council, which approves or sends back a proposal for a new program or course.

These approval bodies exist to make sure programming is structurally and academically sound.

Final decision about whether a program is offered occurs at the budget process, which is overseen by a Board of Gov-

ernors, with input from the senate or education council.

At Okanagan College our Education Council approves all programming, including our Continuing Studies certificates, and recommends it to our Board of Governors.

This is why I found it so interesting this week when the British Columbia Medical Association wasn't happy with Langara College's curriculum—Langara is a community college in Vancouver.

Over the years, Langara has developed a whole host of holistic health courses that are touted as career training. For example they offer a three-year program which qualifies students to practice energy healing.

This program is called Integrative Health Healing. Other programs include Holistic Healing and Skills, Expressive Art Therapy, Shatsu Therapy and Cranial Sacral Therapy.

The B.C. Medical Association isn't happy because a provincially-funded



**SCHOOLS**  
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ed and accredited community college is offering programs where there is no scientific evidence to support these therapies.

Langara College argues that these therapies have been studied for years by the American National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine.

My question is this, how did Langara manage to get these programs approved by their Education Council when they also offer all the science disciplines from biology to physics? Furthermore, how did they get their science faculty who teach disciplines based on the same scientific principles mentioned above by the B.C. Medical Association to agree to approve such programming?

I don't have the answers to these questions but I would have loved to have been a fly on the wall when the dean of the continuing studies department placed those programs on the table for approval.

If I know anything about the Okanagan Col-

lege Education Council I can guarantee you that this type of programming would be hotly debated. It would be viewed under a microscope not just by the science faculty but also by health practitioners who teach programs such as nursing.

It is this discourse, which takes place at education councils and senates, where new ideas are born, tolerated and scrutinized all at the same time.

Education councils and senates must uphold academic integrity and also be the vanguard of change.

This is the responsibility they hold and it should never be taken lightly.

What Langara is facing is not about right or wrong. It is about challenging preconceived notions

of what constitutes a body of knowledge, which has an impact on our society well beyond the confines of the campus.

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