

Plant's report wins praise

Dear Editor,

First, let me point out that I sit on the Okanagan College board of governors. The comments I am making in no way reflect either the view of the board or of the college in any way.

I write this letter because something important is being discussed in the world of post-secondary education. The problem is there is so much information bombarding us all the time that I think many citizens are missing the dialogue taking place.

The government retained Geoff Plant to conduct a report on post-secondary education for the future. The document is called *Campus 2020* (available on the net at www.campus2020.bc.ca). I applaud the government for this initiative. It is a brave and somewhat scary act to look into the future, as you may not like what you see.

The way I see it, there are two overriding pressures on the post-secondary system. The first is the elephant that is health care. Education and health care funding come more or less from the same purse. Unless we can get health care spending under control, future capital expenditures on education may be diminished.

The second is the influence of declining enrolments at the elementary schools and whether this will impact future enrolment in post-secondary institutions.

I think the *Campus 2020* report looks at these and many other issues and comes up with a broad stroke vision for the future. B.C. trails many other provinces significantly in important high school and post-secondary metrics and it is clear the B.C. government has

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decided something must be done. Gordon Campbell's government has set as one of its goals making British Columbia the best educated, most literate of all Canada's provinces. This is a laudable goal.

The report contains suggestions pertaining to improving transferability of accredited course between institutions (good), increasing dialogue between institutions to avoid duplication and waste (not being done now) and increased transparency (uneven playing field exists in the reporting of the province's colleges versus its public universities).

Some commentators have bemoaned the document as a negative for colleges, but I disagree. To be fair, the report did suggest a change to colleges' abilities to grant degrees. My view is this agenda was actively promoted by the university lobby to Mr. Plant.

Immediately after release of the report, the government clearly stated that colleges will continue to grant degrees as before. The reality is the government has invested millions into developing college degrees and the system is working very well. For example, the Okanagan School of Business at Okanagan College has a tremendous reputation with its Bachelor of Business Administration Degree.

So what does *Campus 2020* mean for us in the Okanagan? I think if the government goes even slightly in the direction of *Campus 2020*, it will be a big win.

I see it like this: UBC Okanagan will deliver a world-class academic education and receive research funding used to develop new technologies and products. Its business school will be focused on management and hopefully expanded to an MBA program in the future.

Okanagan College has three strengths:

1) The academic area provides two years of basic arts and science education, fully transferable to universities.

2) It offers a growing array of trades and technical training for a wide variety of commercial applications. As research institutions and industry develop new products, the College will produce the technicians and technologists who will bring those products to market.

3) The Okanagan School of Business provides a two-year diploma program and a four-year Bachelor of Business Administration Degree. Grads are adaptable to many business environments and are very entrepreneurial (in my opinion).

I think this set-up provides the best possible world for prospective students in the Okanagan post-secondary market. The need for students to have the widest variety of options may be key to our economic well being.

There is a strong argument that we are witnessing the decline of globalism and that the next prevailing economic trend will be state (country) focused. Recent moves by Brazil and Thailand to invoke compulsory licensing on several AIDS drugs, the latest Chinese five-year plan that has a greater state focus and a strong move away from globalism and the problems of the Doha World Trade Organization round all suggest free trade and globalization may be on their way out. Issues of climate change could even speed this process of "deglobalization" up dramatically.

If this should be the case, we will need to train a new breed of entrepreneur quickly for Canada to take advantage of this potential trend shift. We might have to learn how to "make stuff" again and this will spark a technological boom. A synergistic relationship between UBC-O and Okanagan College would seem to offer great potential. The Okanagan could easily become a key player in innovative thinking.

So once again, I salute the government for looking to the future and congratulate Mr. Plant on his report. There are some huge economic and climatic challenges looming and the post secondary education system is key to determining whether these will be insurmountable obstacles or fantastic opportunities.

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