

Welcoming Remarks: Background Context for the Development of the Douglas College Strategic Plan

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Good afternoon students, community supporters, staff, faculty, and Board Members. Thank you all for coming out this afternoon to be with me at this welcoming. You should know that the good work of Hazel Postma, Yvonne Mostert, Shelagh Donnelly, Laureen Dailey and our colleagues in CEIT, CMO, and Facilities have assisted in putting today's event together.

Let me begin by acknowledging and honouring on whose lands we are. These are the traditional territories of the Coast Salish First Nations.

Last week, we recognized and honoured Douglas College President Susan Witter at her retirement reception and dinner. During her tenure as President, and under her leadership, Douglas College grew substantially both in numbers of students and in the range of programs offered to help to meet the post-secondary educational and training needs of the Province of British Columbia. In a few weeks, we will be honouring members of our Board who will also be stepping down having served their terms in the governance of this institution through what were, occasionally, challenging times. I want publicly and personally to thank Andrew Taylor, Ann Kitching, and Cathie Gibson who are stepping down from the Board this month for their contributions to Douglas College and for their generosity in giving of their time to our institution and for their leadership.

As we all know, the College system in British Columbia is undergoing a period of transition. Leadership changes are not unique to Douglas College. Indeed, most of the lower mainland Colleges and many of the new special purpose Universities have or will have new leadership. Moreover, society and the economy are also undergoing a significant period of change and adjustment to new realities which require an adaptive and willing post-secondary system to be partners in leading not only the economic recovery, but to also be a part of the transformation of society itself.

In contemplating these transitions and what they mean for Douglas College, it is useful to reflect on the origins of the public College system in Canada and the United States. In general terms, the College System in both countries is approximately 40 to 50 years old. Most public Colleges emerged in the late 1950's to the 1960's as instruments of public policy to address what were, at the time, at least two dominant realities. The first was the significant demographic shift that was occurring with the post-war baby boom. More spaces in post-secondary education and training needed to be opened up. The second shift was a rapidly industrializing society which was becoming ever more reliant on international trade. Colleges emerged to provide post-secondary education and training to a quickly expanding population needing the knowledge, skills, and attributes to enable people to fully participate in the economy and in society in a period of rapid change and growth.

In Canada, given provincial jurisdiction over education, several quite different College systems emerged from these changes. In many provinces, such as Ontario, the Colleges were established as separate and distinct from universities

and with a concentrated focus on career based certificates, diplomas, and trades training and education. The choice for students in these provinces was College *or* University and the two educational pathways were designed never to meet. Ontario was not the only example of this.

In other jurisdictions, such as British Columbia, Colleges were seen, at least in part, as access points to higher education and post-secondary education and training was seen as a continuum and not as an irrevocable choice that students would make once and for all. Based, in some respects, on the experiences of the American two year Colleges, the comprehensive College system in British Columbia was formed. A hallmark of this system is articulation and transfer agreements between the Colleges and Universities. This transfer system is now managed centrally in British Columbia through the excellent work of the British Columbia Council on Admissions and Transfers (BCCAT). This system recognizes that post-secondary education and training is not about a choice between College and University, but is about accessibility to education and many different learner pathways. It is about serving the needs of students and society and not about drawing distinctions the effect of which is often to put barriers in the pathways of learners. As the systems have evolved, in Ontario many Colleges are pursuing articulation with the Universities and in BC many Colleges are also offering bachelor's degrees. This is part of the origin and heritage of Douglas College.

So, the College system in general emerged 40 to 50 years ago as an instrument of public policy in response to overarching societal demographic and economic trends. Given this origin and heritage, it is useful to contemplate what the current trends are that will have an impact on the post-secondary education and training

needs of the future. While we can point out other important trends, I point here to five overarching realities:

1. The birthrate in Canada is below population replacement levels. Canada's population growth will be increasingly based on immigration.
2. The high school age population in Canada and in Metro Vancouver/the Lower Mainland of British Columbia is decreasing.
3. China's gross domestic product (GDP) is projected to surpass that of Japan in 2010 in absolute terms¹ and will surpass the United States by 2025 on a purchasing power parity basis.²
4. The US is committing to having the highest proportion of students graduating College in the world by 2020.³
5. There is a general consensus that the next economy will be knowledge based where "knowledge is now recognised as the driver of productivity and economic growth."⁴

These realities are among the factors that are shaping the future of British Columbia. But Douglas College does not face these alone.

In a series of discussion papers, the Business Council of British Columbia has, in fact, started a process of examining the implications of these and other changes on this province. This series, entitled *Outlook 2020: Shaping B.C.'s Economic*

¹ Lee J. Miller and Marco Babic, "BRIC Economic Growth Forces G-8 to Cede Power: Chart of the Day," Bloomberg, http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601109&sid=aJ_NdOuJP9hQ.

² U.S. Energy Information Administration. <http://www.eia.doe.gov>.

³ The White House, "Education: Progress," <http://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/education>.

⁴ OECD, "The Knowledge-Based Economy," <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/51/8/1913021.pdf>.

Future,⁵ is instructive of where our business and community leaders see BC going in the future. In this, BCBC and others are pointing to a number of trends including the demographic shift, the aging baby boom generation, the high future demand for health care due to aging, and the strategic positioning of British Columbia as a transportation and communications gateway. All of this goes to the necessary development of BC as a knowledge-based --as opposed to a resource-based-- economy. The question of wealth creation through knowledge remains a focus in calls for increased innovation and what amounts to knowledge and know-how transfer in society. From my perspective, the knowledge generation capacity from the scholarship in the post-secondary educational system has the ability to figure prominently in the transformation of the BC economy and society. In short, post-secondary education and training is seen as having a vital role not only in leading the economic recovery, but in building and transforming society itself.

Similarly, work is underway by the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC), an intergovernmental body founded in 1967 by Ministers of Education. This group met as recently as three weeks ago to continue work on its priorities of improving student success, Aboriginal education, literacy, post-secondary education, and education data and research.

In 2008, the Council of Ministers of Education published a framework document entitled *Learn Canada 2020* which “recognizes the direct link between a well-

⁵ Business Council of British Columbia, “Outlook 2020: Shaping B.C.’s Economic Future,” http://www.bcbc.com/Events_Descriptions/2020.asp.

educated population and (1) a vibrant knowledge-based economy in the 21st Century, (2) a socially progressive, sustainable society, and (3) enhanced personal growth opportunities for all Canadians.”⁶ The relevance of this document is that it directly recognizes the links between the education of the population, the development of the economy and the social progress and sustainability of Canada. That all Ministers of Education (primary, secondary, and advanced) have signed on to this shows a high level of confidence in the educational sector and a substantial awareness of the role of our sector’s capacity and role in society.

With this as background, *Learn Canada 2020* has as an educational priority of increasing “the number of students pursuing post-secondary education by increasing the quality and accessibility of post-secondary education.” Indeed, accessibility figures prominently here and accessibility does not, to me, mean merely geographic proximity. Rather, we must also look at barriers to entry to post-secondary education based on race, class, gender, disability, age, and delivery mediums. Given the historic role of Colleges as access-based providers of post-secondary education and training, we are well positioned to do exactly that. We know how to provide accessible learning opportunities.

There is also considerable attention given in *Learn Canada 2020* to “adult learning and skills development”. Here, the call is for Canada to “develop an accessible, diversified, and integrated system of adult learning and skills development that

⁶Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, “Learn Canada 2020: Joint Declaration, Provincial and Territorial Ministers of Education, 2008,” <http://www.cmec.ca/Publications/Lists/Publications/Attachments/187/CMEC-2020-DECLARATION.en.pdf>.

delivers training when Canadians need it.” Given the aging labour force, the growth in part-time and self-employed workers, the rapid changes not only in technology, but in processes, in the growth of non-governmental organisations, and in international trade in goods and services, diversified knowledge and training is necessary. We must adapt to the need for individuals to pursue, for example, their second careers and/or to more fully and rewardingly return to the active workforce after a period of unemployment or under-employment brought about by the economic downturn. In *Learn Canada 2020*, it is evident that Canada, like the United States, recognizes that a highly educated and trained population in the knowledge-based economy is a well-advised strategy for continued societal progress.

In the United States, it is also clear that post-secondary education and training has taken on a prominence. The declaration of having the highest proportion of students graduating College in the world by 2020 and the commitment of resources to this end is part of a plan for the restructuring of the US economy. For, while arguably, there may be signs that the recession is in abeyance, the restructuring has, in many ways, yet to begin. Similarly, in British Columbia, the ‘mini-budget’ of September 1, 2009 maintained, with resources, the government’s commitment to the post-secondary system in this province.

The bottom line in all of these reports and analyses is that we need more, not less, post-secondary education and training in our society to continue to not only

maintain our ability to compete internationally, but to fully develop our society to its human potential. Indeed US President Barack Obama put it this way:

“In a global economy, where the most valuable skill you can sell is your knowledge, a good education is no longer just a pathway to opportunity. It is a prerequisite.”⁷

But it goes further than this. Not only does education play a role in transforming societies, it transforms individuals. In talking to students and alumni of Douglas College, I have heard many compelling stories of just what it is that we do here. From the student in the I-Care program who faced literacy challenges but now has written a book, to the student who not only went to Uganda to study and learn but has moved to Uganda and has established a children’s home there, to the Federal Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages whose educational journey included university transfer at Douglas College, it is clear that we are a part of transforming individuals as citizens and as contributors not only in an economic sense, but in a very real and human sense. Here we can reflect on the idea of what it takes to be a human being as opposed to only being humans doing.

From all of this, it is clear that post-secondary education and training is a priority of society. We are being looked to for the provision of knowledge which will assist in the transformation of society itself toward a more socially responsible, ethical, progressive, and sustainable world. We are being looked to to provide

⁷The White House, “Remarks of President Barack Obama – As Prepared for Delivery Address to Joint Session of Congress Tuesday, February 24th, 2009,” http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/remarks-of-president-barack-obama-address-to-joint-session-of-congress.

knowledge transfer not only to the next generation of learners – the so-called millennial generation - but to the previous generations who need new knowledge to continue to be active, compassionate, and productive members of society. We are being looked to to provide access to learning opportunities for under-represented populations, to provide access to post-secondary education and training to those who would otherwise not have that opportunity. We are being asked once again as we were 40 or 50 years ago to respond to the dominant demographic, economic, and social changes and challenges of our time. We not only have the confidence of government and the population who entrust us with their most precious asset – their youth – but we also have the experience as Colleges, of uniquely responding to these needs. We have done it before.

At Douglas College, we are in fact being asked to fulfil our mission of enhancing the skills, knowledge and values of life-long learners in meeting their goals and to respond to diverse community needs in a rapidly changing society.

This has substantial implications for Douglas College given our context. Here, we know that Douglas College is situated in one of the most racially and linguistically diverse areas of Canada. We also know that the lower mainland of BC is among the most liveable locations in the world⁸. We also know that despite low natural population increases in Canada and British Columbia, that our area and in particular the Tri-Cities area, Surrey, and Maple Ridge are growing in population and are destinations for people seeking enhanced quality of life and we are a destination for newcomers to Canada and British Columbia. We have highly

⁸ Business Week, “World’s Top 100 Most Liveable Cities,”
http://bwnt.businessweek.com/interactive_reports/livable_cities_worldwide.

educated, skilled and committed faculty and staff for whom post-secondary education and training is our chosen profession and our passion. We are professional post-secondary educators. We also see that the demand for post-secondary education is increasing. Our open-enrolment courses and programs are experiencing significant growth. We are known for providing accessible high quality learning. We offer learners pathways to fulfill their educational dreams. We are known not only for our transfer of knowledge, but increasingly for the creation of knowledge itself.

Against this background, and in this context, we will be embarking on strategic planning to assist us in continuing to respond to diverse community needs in a rapidly changing society. Strategic planning is a critical task that involves not only a review and revisiting of the overall vision, mission, values, and goals of the institution, but also a review of the external environment and the internal aspirations and capacities of the organization. Given changes in student demographics, the economy, the political and post-secondary environments, it is important to begin the planning process so that we can continue to be responsive to change and to learner needs. A strategic plan will determine the institutional direction over, at minimum, the next 3 to 5 years. While there are many different approaches to strategic planning, among the values that will guide the Douglas College process are:

- i) The strategic plan will be evidence based.
- ii) The strategic planning process will be involving of stakeholders/constituency groups.

iii) The strategic plan will, where possible, be approached from the perspective of appreciative inquiry. I will be asking you to consider what is it that we do well and what we have the capacity to do, and to give me your thoughts.

In the next week to 10 days we will be beginning the process by announcing a series of “town hall” sessions, focus groups and employee surveys to gather input. We will also be developing processes to gather student input into a plan that will ultimately guide how we meet student needs. We will be involving community members in the process through individual meetings and broader stakeholder meetings. We will be consulting with our educational partners in British Columbia and elsewhere. We will be releasing occasional briefs and discussion documents on the President’s home page. We will be seeking input on the College mission and values. Our process will be inclusive. In the final analysis, what we need to know is what is working extraordinarily well at Douglas, what changes have occurred in the post-secondary education and training environment that have implications for Douglas College, and what strategic directions we should be pursuing with vigour?

As we engage in strategic planning for the medium to long run, we must, of course, continue to serve the learner needs at present. In this, the existing Academic Plan (2009-2012) will continue to guide program delivery. Strategic plans must be living, breathing documents and the solid work that has gone into the Academic Plan, the Environmental Scan, and other plans will serve as important elements guiding, where appropriate, the broader strategic plan.

I thank you for your time. I know that September is a busy month and I sincerely want to acknowledge and honour that. I am passionate about post-secondary education and training and its transformative potential. I know each one of you is as well. Indeed, at Douglas College we change the world one student at a time. We generate knowledge and transfer knowledge. We touch the future.