

Dear Academic Plan Committee,

Please allow me to express my sincere appreciation for the work accomplished to date on a very complex task, and your commitment to a consultative process.

It is my privilege here at VIU to be an instructor/advisor and Program Chair for Access Programs at the Nanaimo Campus. We offer a two year certificate program for students with a disability which enables them to acquire essential skills in the areas of basic academics, interpersonal skills and job training. We are unique in that no one else offers access to post-secondary courses for this population in our region. As a result this program is highly regarded and valued within the disability community. We help these individuals transition into employment and healthy self-sufficiency which in turn benefits and impacts our local community in many positive ways. Without this type of programming most of these people would be on provincial assistance and living below the poverty line.

My comments with respect to the Academic Plan stem from a serious concern about the exclusionary nature of the wording on page 56.

“ The goal of a comprehensive program array is to promote laddering into university level programs. Entry levels are valuable in direct proportion to the numbers of students that they bring into higher education.”

VIU has enjoyed a long tradition of serving its region with a comprehensive variety of course offerings, and never have I heard that we would only choose to do so if it fed the university stream. This is to say that learning for the sake of learning, is not valued here. That our unique identity and rich heritage are no longer serve us and our only goal is to model ourselves along the lines of traditional universities. This would be such a tremendous loss in the eyes of so many in our community, but most strongly felt by the few who do not have the rich array of choices so immediately available to others.

The final statement on this page requires examination.

“ It is VIU’s policy that students proceeding from all access programs meet or exceed university level admission standards.”

It’s primary purpose appears to be one of limiting the educational opportunities for all those not specifically on the university track. VIU offers many courses through CCS , ABE, Trades, and ESL among others that serve to further ones education and acquisition of knowledge and skills. They may not necessarily however be a rung on the ladder to further university courses. Are we wanting to say therefore that they have no value? This would be in direct contradiction to our values and mission statements as I understand and interpret them.

Finally, I would like to say that not all decisions before you will be easy but neither in my view should they all be financially driven. It is often those most marginalized who pay the price in that kind of scenario. All students regardless of learning style, or barriers to traditional methods of teaching should be of equal value and in my view have a right to equal and open access to post-secondary education.

In my observation and participation in the process of integrated planning I have heard it often said “ Do we want to be all things to all people?” I am not able to answer the tough questions that lie before this

committee but would encourage you to maintain what has served us so well, and which endears us to our region and our community. [In the process of adding](#) some additional heads, let's not lose the heart!

A wise man once said every society is judged by how it treats it's least fortunate amongst them.

Again many thanks to all of you for all you do on behalf of all of us.

Sincerely,
Wendy Nixon
Program Chair, Access Programs.
Nanaimo Campus