

For immediate release

Selkirk College Hard At Work Balancing Budget

Selkirk College is currently engaged in the annual work of preparing a balanced budget for the next academic year to be presented to the Board of Governors and the provincial government later this spring.

The recent provincial budget confirmed that the funding received from government for college operations for the coming year will remain unchanged and then will be reduced over the successive two years. "If one takes into account the combined effect of receiving fewer dollars, and at the same time having to deal with inflationary increases in the costs of operation, it is easy to understand the significant challenges," says Neil Coburn, Selkirk's VP Education and Students.

Every year Selkirk College has to find savings in order to present a balanced budget and this year will be no different. However, the job has been made more difficult due to new government directions that require the finding of even greater savings than we had anticipated. According to Coburn, the current shortfall amounts to over one million dollars.

He goes on to say that the college first looks at savings that will have little or no impact on students, whether that impact is in programs or services. Savings to date have been identified in areas such as capital refinancing, reduced travel costs, improved operational efficiencies and the elimination of certain management positions.

"However, after years of trimming to cover budget shortfalls there are no longer any easy solutions," continues Coburn. Given the size of the shortfall and the fact that approximately 75% of the college budget applies directly to the delivery of student programs and services, the necessity to find savings in that area is unavoidable. To this point the college has been able to find two thirds of the overall savings in the operational and administrative areas of the college. However, some programming will be affected.

"Any proposed program or course reductions are based on such factors as enrolment trends, competition from other colleges and universities, student demand, cost of delivery, employment opportunities or community needs," says Coburn. "Courses that have had very low enrolments over a lengthy period are simply not sustainable. In these instances, resources are better allocated to programs with student demand and waitlists, and new program opportunities."

Budget related decisions will also focus on the need to maintain quality of instruction, quality of support services for learners, and a wide range of program offerings. While certain course

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offerings with low enrolments may be suspended, savings found may also allow new programs to be mounted where demand is high.

One particular area that will see changes is second year university sciences. “It is interesting to keep in mind that when Selkirk College was opened in 1966, BC had three degree granting universities,” says Coburn. “Today there are 12 public universities and several private universities to compete with. Our experience, and that of other colleges, is that while we offer lower tuition, smaller classes, dedicated and highly qualified instructors, and an engaging learning environment, it continues to be a challenge to keep science students at Selkirk for a second year before they move to degree granting universities to complete their degree studies.”

He noted that Selkirk is committed to maintaining a high quality program of first year arts and humanities and science courses and second year arts and humanities courses since these areas have enrolments that are continuing at a healthy level. At the same time, the college will take this opportunity to rethink how additional science related course offerings could be mounted to meet student demand and community need.

Golf Club Operations Online or “GCOOL” is a unique online golf management program that will now only be offered if enrolments are sufficient to cover all costs. As well, programming changes that maintain access, quality and reduce costs will be made at Kootenay School of the Arts by offering one-year certificates in clay, fibre, jewelry and metal.

Coburn went on to say that the mix of courses offered at Selkirk, as with all post-secondary institutions, is continually changing to meet demand. “It isn’t just a matter of suspending courses or programs to balance budgets,” he says. “Selkirk continually introduces new programming to meet the needs of learners.” He pointed out that in the last year alone, courses such as carpentry, metal fabrication, health care assistant, pharmacy technician bridging, early childhood care assistant, administrative skills training and renewable energy have been successfully developed and delivered or are soon to be delivered.”

Coburn admits that in tight fiscal times the process of developing a balanced budget is made particularly difficult because it sometimes impacts people, our colleagues and neighbours. But he reminds us that our first responsibility is to students and the communities which depend on Selkirk College.

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