

Forging our Own Path

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Gordon Lee, VP, Strategic Services

Kwantlen University College

In his Welcome Letter to this Symposium, Kwantlen President Skip Triplett wrote:

Unlike other forms of scholarship, that are discipline focused, the scholarship of teaching and learning can bring together faculty from all parts of Kwantlen in collaborations leading to enhanced learning for our students, our graduates, and ourselves. If we do, this well, the scholarship of teaching and learning can make us a closer and more effective learning community.

Can this happen and will it happen? Do we want it to happen? Why would we want it to happen? These are some of the questions that I hope we can explore today in our dialogue.

This symposium is called *Forging our Own Path* - a name chosen by Alice Macpherson, who organized it. As you may know, Alice is faculty member who started at Kwantlen teaching one of our trades programs. She is now the coordinator of Kwantlen's Centre of Academic Growth and a PhD student at SFU. Her individual career path perhaps reflects, in microcosm, the institutional transition in which we are now engaged.

About 18 months ago, Skip established a new strategic planning initiative that evolved into *Creating Our Future*. There were a number of reasons he commissioned this initiative.

First, Kwantlen had submitted a proposal to the Ministry of Advanced Education to become a regional university and based on internal consultations, many people did not know what the implications of this might be. As well, the Ministry of Advanced Education (AVED) had stated on a number of occasions that it has concerns about the university colleges becoming universities. AVED believed that if the university colleges, including Kwantlen, were granted university status, they would eliminate trades, vocational and developmental programs - they would succumb to 'academic drift' (Morphew and Huisman, 2002, p. 492).

Second, the Government of BC had announced a system review - Campus 2020 (Ministry of Advanced Education, 2006). It was possible that this review could impose changes on the institution. So there was uncertainty both internally and externally.

Finally, Skip's tenure as President was coming to an end - he will retire by July 2008. So, this added to the uncertainty.

Creating our Future provided the Kwantlen community with time to reflect on where we want to go and how we are going to get there. Now after 20 months of community consultations in which over 400 members of the Kwantlen community - faculty, staff,

students and administrators participated, our report has been submitted to the President for his consideration. In it, we describe our institution as follows:

Kwantlen is poised to become a leading example of a distinctive type of university: a teaching-intensive, dual-sector, post-secondary institution with a regional focus. As it has both vocational/technical and academic programs, a dual-sector institution has potential for innovative, integrated, and cross-sectoral programs that provide flexible entry and re-entry points. It also has the ability to provide easy pathways among vocational/technical education, academic, and professional (Strategic Planning & Implementation Committee, 2007, p. 5).

The Strategic Planning & Implementation Committee has described a future for Kwantlen that is **not** driven by 'academic drift'; a future that is **not** defined externally; and a future that is **not** dependent on a new president. It is a future in which we 'forge our own path'. Incidentally, it is a path that is congruent with the recommendations in the Campus 2020 report that would see Kwantlen become a regional university (Plant, 2007).

I believe that Kwantlen's future is ours to choose.

I conclude with these questions. Will Kwantlen succumb to academic drift or will we forge our own path? Will Kwantlen value the scholarship of teaching and learning along side other forms of scholarship? What will it mean if we don't do so? What will it mean if we do so? And finally, how can we move towards forging our own path?

I hope that we can explore these questions today.

References

Ministry of Advanced Education. (2006), *Campus 2020: Thinking Ahead*. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.campus2020.bc.ca/>.

Morphew, C. C. and Huisman, J. (2002), 'Using Institutional Theory to Reframe Research on Academic Drift'. *Higher Education in Europe*, XXVII (4).

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