

NEWS

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Outpouring of ideas at Futures Conference

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The only shortage at VCC's Futures Conference was enough wall space to tape up the outpouring of ideas which flowed from the 125 participants.

The values, visions, mission and goals for a new VCC--well over a thousand at a quick count--covered sheet after sheet of poster paper, which in turn covered every spare spot of space at the front and back of the KEC Auditorium.

"There were times when I was afraid that we might fall flat," said Nina Kozakiewicz, a member of the VCC Planning Team which organized the two day conference. "But I was amazed at how well it went. People were enthusiastic and they really took it seriously."

Another Planning Team member, Lorraine McKillop, put it this way: "There were times when making the arrangements for the conference were torturous, but the end result was well worth it."

The conference ran Thursday night and all day Friday. The participants periodically met as a whole, but it was in the small group discussions that they produced the concepts of what they hope VCC will look like for years to come.

Concepts that took the form of values, such as quality, co-operation, mutual respect, opportunity and diversity for both students and staff. Or goals, like articulation of programs, better funding, openness to entrepreneurial ventures, full involvement in decision making, a harassment free environment. And vision statements depicting VCC as a place "where people give of themselves, each recognizing that we need to teach and be taught, nurture and be nurtured..."

Wayne Penney, the conference facilitator from Pacific Leadership Inc., told the group at

the closing plenary session that "you've hung in through a very intense process and we're quite impressed with the kind of input you have come up with."

"I think a good start has been made on moving the process toward the steps that will make it real. You have set some very exciting and interesting targets which I hope will be integrated into the total package."

Added Board member Bob Matthews: "I was impressed by how well people understood the issues and the similarities in the ideas that they expressed."

From poster to poster it took little interpretation to spot one common thread: people want to bury the divisiveness of VCC's past.

"I was impressed by the level of cooperative spirit which was expressed," said Syd Hartley, who served as one of the small group facilitators. "Whether it was faculty or staff, people seemed less entrenched. The demand for collaboration and participatory decision making seemed very strong."

The next steps in the process will see a synthesis of the conference results by the Planning Team, followed by the issuance of a "green" consultation paper directed to everyone in the VCC community, both internal and external. This will result in confirmation of values, vision, mission and goals, all of which will eventually underpin a strategic plan.

One participant raised concerns that the College's best-laid plans may again be obstructed by funding problems.

Answered President John Cruickshank: "The response I've seen over the last two days is awfully impressive. What we have produced is a coherent direction, which is exactly what's



needed to overcome those obstacles. I really believe that we have our future in our own hands."

Added Cruickshank: "Every one of the approximately 900 staff in the new VCC will thank you for what you've done at this conference. And I also thank you."

Cruickshank replies to Aird column

The following is the full text of a letter from John Cruickshank which ran in the Vancouver Sun in edited form on January 15:

I'm writing in response to the January 11 Elizabeth Aird column regarding Ron MacDonald, the Vancouver Community College student who mimicked a machine gunner during the December 6 remembrance ceremony for the Montreal Massacre.

I've heard a number of my colleagues remark that the media has blown the incident way out of proportion. But given both the magnitude of the response from people who have been phoning radio talk shows, TV viewer polls and the college switchboard--and given the almost red hot intensity of their opinions--it could be that the media quite correctly identified an issue that's really striking at the core of our emotions. I think that in a few thoughtless seconds back on December 6, Ron MacDonald simply and unwittingly became a symbol of what is obviously a much larger issue in our society.

For the college, it raised a fundamental question: namely, what role can or should an educational institution such as VCC play in such a battle of misinformation, misunderstanding and mistrust? I was particularly disappointed in the Aird column because I spoke with her for almost an hour about these considerations, and she chose to take the easy, one-sided way out.

For example, Aird all but disregarded the educational element of Ron MacDonald's discipline. The reasoning behind our decision not to impose an expulsion was this: A person who tries to make a joke out of the Montreal Massacre is an angry person, particularly angry at women. If we expel that angry person, do we not just make him even angrier? And if so, what might that person then be capable of doing in return? Surely, the only approach for an educational institution is to keep that young person in an environment where he can be educated.

In addition, our vision needs to go beyond just this one incident. How much can our counsellors, who are a little bit new to this kind of situation themselves, learn from their experience in hopefully guiding MacDonald to a different point of view? Is it possible to improve our counselling techniques? I hope so. Is it possible to learn something that might help us avoid even one repeat of this kind of an incident in the future? And if we could, wouldn't that be good justification for the actions which have been taken?

I believe that there are tens of thousands of Ron MacDonalds in B.C. And I think we must find a way to help those people understand that values have changed. Institutions we have long relied on, such as the church and the family, have changed too. Maybe there is now a role for a community college to take up the cause.

It's been easy for people to take sides in this issue. We've heard thousands of people do it over the past two weeks. But a much tougher--and a much more meaningful challenge for us--will be to help bring those sides just a bit closer together. As a College, I think that's one of the most important reasons for our being here.

John Cruickshank
President, Vancouver Community College

If you have any comments or questions, please send them to Chuck Poulsen, Manager of The Exchange, in care of College Administrative Services.