

Student Orientation Session

24 August 2004

**Held at the Offices of the
Council on Post-Secondary Education
Boardroom 1
410-330 Portage Avenue
Winnipeg**

1:00 pm – 4:30 pm

(Agenda Attached)

Students in Attendance:

CSB : Solange Buissé, Renard Lafond
BU: Meeghan Gavin & 2 others
UM: Amanda Aziz, Cathy Vande Kerckum, Rob Marriott
UW: Sarah Amyot, Caitlin Brown, Roselyn Nkhata, Joey Jakob
RRC: Ryan Mariani, Becky Turner, Craig Loewen
ACC: None attending
UCN: None attending

Staff in Attendance:

Louise Gordon, Executive Director
Susan Deane, Program Coordinator
Tammy Harper, Statistician
Kim Browning, Policy Analyst
Dan Smith, Senior Policy Analyst

Introductions

Introductions were made and participants were welcomed to the meeting.

Orientation Session: What is the Council?

Information about the Council, its role, mandate, and goals was presented and a general discussion occurred.

A student questioned the necessity of the Council and asked for more information about the Council's role as an intermediary. The following discussion indicated that COPSE makes the detailed decisions while the government sets the broad policy and funding framework.

A student indicated that it has been hard to meet with Council or with the Minister, and stated a belief that it might be better if the post-secondary system was managed directly through the Ministers office. The theoretical aspects of an

intermediary agency such as COPSE were discussed, focusing on the need to ensure that the autonomy of universities and colleges is adequately protected, and the importance of there being an independent process outside of the government process.

A student asked if there were current faculty serving on the Council, and it was indicated that there are no current COPSE members who are faculty members.

A student inquired about the relationship between government and the Council and the consultation process. General consultation processes were discussed, indicating that Council consults extensively with the institutions, with government and with some specific sectors on specific issues (such as healthcare). There was a discussion about the frequency of consultation with institutions, and students expressed a belief that students should meet at least at the same frequency as institutional administrations. Government and the Council worked together on all issues raised through the 2002 Review of the Manitoba Council on Post-Secondary Education (the Mallea report). The tuition reduction and Colleges Expansion Initiative were election commitments and not subject to the same kinds of review that was seen to be required for other issues.

A student indicated that it was hard to get meetings with the Council, and asked for solutions for the future to ensure student consultation. Staff responded that at no time has a request for a meeting with a student association or group been denied by the Council. Students and COPSE need to work out a process for consultation to ensure more regular discussions with students. Students were advised that in fall 2004, Council would be meeting with student associations during the estimates meetings with institutions.

There was a discussion regarding whether or not student associations should participate in the staff-level meetings and working groups. COPSE Staff indicated that the issues-based meetings would be more appropriate for the student associations to be involved in, and committed to include student associations in policy issues such as the current work surrounding the development of a policy on accountability for the post-secondary system (**follow-up note:** the accountability discussion paper was mailed to student associations the week of 30 August 2004).

A discussion about Council meetings ensued. Staff indicated that the Council meets 10-12 times per year, and that agenda materials are prepared for each meeting by staff. Students asked if student association representatives could attend the meetings, but were advised that the Council meetings are not public.

Student Representation on the Council

While this issue has come up in the past, staff indicated that a particular difficulty with this item is related to the numbers of students given a possible desire for

representation from each institution. Staff stated that government would rather not have representation from stakeholders on the Council to ensure both an outside perspective on post-secondary issues, as well as to keep the size of the Council manageable. The Council has had, and currently has, recently graduated students as members. A student suggested that it is different being paid by the school vs. being enrolled and attending classes. Students expressed frustration that students were the largest stakeholder group yet it seems that no one is listening to them, which is why the Council wants to develop a process to include student associations in consultations on important issues. It was acknowledged that student associations want to be able to influence decision-making in Manitoba's post-secondary sector.

COPSE staff committed to meeting with student associations to develop a process for ongoing consultations. Staff would liaise with the student association presidents to find a suitable date for a meeting.

A student asked that meetings also take place outside of Winnipeg. This was acknowledged as an important point, and that the barrier to more meetings outside of Winnipeg is cost and not willingness. It was noted that the Council members themselves have been frustrated by the fact that they rarely meet outside of Winnipeg, but they acknowledge that the costs are higher.

A student suggested that Council and/or staff meet with student associations once a month to discuss policy issues. Staff suggested that once every two months might be more realistic, but that this should be discussed by the student associations when they meet with Council staff to discuss consultation processes. In the interim, staff committed to providing a time slot in the 10 September 2004 Council meeting to allow the students to discuss items that the students find important.

Fall Consultations with Institutions

Staff outlined the annual Estimates consultation process with institutions held in the fall of each year, and committed that the Council will also arrange to meet with student associations at that time to discuss funding and priorities.

There was a general discussion about whether or not the institutional estimates documents are public, and students were referred to their institutions as some of the documents are public, while other documents are not. It was noted that the analysis and advice generated by the Council to the government is always confidential and final decisions are announced only with the provincial budget.

Capital & Operating Funding

Staff outlined the capital funding process for colleges and universities, indicating that the two sectors are treated differently and emphasized that there is an effort to ensure that each institution has the opportunity to do some type of construction or deferred maintenance in each year.

Student associations expressed a desire to have input into the capital planning process. Staff indicated that the right time to address this issue is during the annual Estimates process.

The policy that governed the capital allocation procedure was reviewed, including the service agreement with Manitoba Transportation and Government Services to analyze and prioritize university capital projects. It was noted that this policy is outlined each year in the Council's annual report.

There was a discussion about how capital issues are predicted, along with tuition and operating funding. While tuition and operating grants are very predictable, capital is harder to predict as priorities are often placed on health and safety issues, preventative maintenance, etc. based on the expert advice provided by Transportation and Government Services. It is not always possible to predict with any certainty what capital priorities will be from one year to the next.

CSB Audit

Student associations wanted to discuss the CSB audit as an example of how the Council interrelates with the post-secondary system. Staff indicated that the Council has responsibility for system accountability, and the Council acted immediately once concerns were raised and ensured that the problems were addressed. Many of the issues raised in the audit had been addressed, and that the Council is developing an accountability framework. The fundamental issue raised by the audit was that policies at CSB needed to be tightened up, and they have been.

A student asked what the Council has done to ensure that there is more accountability at institutions. Staff spoke about current accountability structures, as well as the opportunities being raised in an ongoing regular value-for-money audit currently underway at the Council. Colleges and universities provide a great deal of data to the Council, and that an accountability framework is being created to better profile this data for the public. The commitment to share a policy discussion paper on accountability with student associations was reiterated.

CSB Legislation (an addition to the agenda)

Student associations wanted information about potential legislative changes for CSB. Staff outlined the issues raised by the Auditor General respecting CSB's

legislation, and the fact that the Minister has committed to addressing those issues through the legislative process. Student associations noted that they want to have input into the legislative process should major legislative changes be undertaken for a post-secondary institution.

Tuition Fee Policy

Opening the discussion on tuition fee policy, staff indicated that government is pleased with the results of the policy, and indicated that the Premier had committed government to maintaining the reduction/freeze until at least the end of 2004/05. Staff also acknowledged that institutions have been advocating for tuition increases based on their funding needs. The input and perspectives of the student associations are required.

One student association representative stated that there is such a thing as “reasonable increase” in tuition, suggesting that there is a funding crisis at the institutions and students cannot keep paying more and more. Significant increases in non-tuition and ancillary fees have also occurred, making the tuition freeze meaningless in that these other increases have eaten into the benefit provided by the tuition fee policy. Acknowledging that the Federal government unilaterally cut transfer payments, students asked how the Council interacts with the Federal government on funding matters.

Staff indicated that all relationships with the Federal government are managed by the Premier and the Minister of Finance. The Council has been involved in providing information regarding federal funding issues, but the Council has no direct dealings with the Federal government.

A student association representative spoke about international students and Law students at the U of M, and indicated that it is hard to feel positive about the Council and government and their commitment to accessibility when there appears to be loopholes in the tuition fee policy. Students feel like the burden is on them to fight changes to the fee policy.

Another student association representative stated that the tuition fee freeze needs to include ancillary fees as these costs create additional difficulties for students struggling to make ends meet. The increases in private donors and corporate sponsors were noted, and the impact of these at universities and colleges was briefly discussed.

Staff outlined the legal and legislative issues related to tuition fees, and that despite the difficulties that government currently faces in terms of revenues, over the past 5 years support for post-secondary education has increased by more than 30%. Government has to consider its spending with other funding pressures, notably health.

A student association representative indicated that the legislative jurisdiction concerns that the Council staff raised re ancillary fees is a 'cop out,' indicating that students strongly support the tuition freeze, but also that students are clear that institutions need more public funding. Council staff acknowledged that it was clear that students believe that the institution needs more public funding.

It was indicated Manitoba has among the best funding for post-secondary education in Canada, and the supports available to students through bursaries and the tuition reduction are helping to ensure that students have lower debt. Acknowledging that some students still face significant financial barriers, the discussion focused on the fact that university and college students in Manitoba are in an enviable position when compared to most other provinces.

Student association representatives indicated that they opposes tax cuts and believes that there is the need for greater public funding. Some student associations have already taken this message to government.

Student associations acknowledged the work that the province has done to address institutional funding and student access, but there is more that can be done, indicating that the priorities of the province must include post-secondary education. Noting the correlation of post-secondary education and benefits to the economy and society, students discussed increases in fees, arguing that fee increases do not lead to increases in quality – and they do not always lead to increases in funding because the provincial government may claw back grants if fees increase. Students strongly believe that the government should maintain the freeze and provide additional funding to colleges and universities.

Students advocated for a continuation of the freeze, eliminating the "loop holes" in the policy that allow faculties to increase fees, and to increase funding to colleges and universities. Students support a legislated tuition fee freeze to ensure that changes to the policy become an issue of public debate. Staff indicated that a legislated policy does not provide significant security as another government can always repeal legislation.

A discussion occurred about students with significant debt that will impact on their future lives. Part of that discussion included the fact that any universal program of tuition assistance is not needs based.

A student representative noted that considering the exceptions to the tuition fee policy, Manitoba's cannot be considered an accessible post-secondary system. There was a general discussion about whether or not 30% of the Law school tuition fee increase went back to students.

Students acknowledged that accessibility to post-secondary education cannot be realized in the short term, but right now students are taking out public and private loans to cover their costs, using student food banks, etc. Students argued that

government needs to have a longer-term strategy and that the process for developing policy and accessing decision-makers in government is too cumbersome. Students suggested that the Council be eliminated to facilitate communications. Staff noted that there would still be an office dedicated to post-secondary education, and that the structure may not be the impediment that student associations believe it to be; the ability for government to act in some areas is limited by legislation that protects the autonomy of colleges and universities.

Student associations expressed the belief that they are unable to meet with the decision-makers. Staff indicated that neither the Minister nor the Council has ever refused a meeting with a student group or student association.

There was a discussion regarding the advice the Council gives to government regarding the budget. This advice includes the perspectives and needs of institutions regarding funding, priorities and other policy areas. There was a general discussion about the data the Council collects from institutions, and the analysis that COPSE conducts using that and other data. In total, Council staff noted, the analysis and research submitted to government for the budget process is significant.

Concluding Remarks:

As a closing remark on this subject, student associations wanted to ensure that the Council and government knew that tuition is the number one barrier for students in terms of getting a post-secondary education. Scholarship and bursary programs are helpful, but tuition must remain front and centre in terms of accessibility. Further, government must provide additional funding to colleges and universities.

Participants were thanked, and staff committed to sharing the proceedings of the meeting as soon as they were available.

ATTACHMENT

The Council on Post-Secondary Education: An Orientation for Student Councils

Tuesday, August 24, 2004

1:00 pm to 4:30 pm

at

COPSE Offices, Boardroom 1

410-330 Portage Avenue

Winnipeg MB

Agenda:

Introductions

The Council's Role and Mandate and Relationship to Provincial Government –
via a powerpoint presentation

Student Representation on the Council

Fall consultation with student groups at each institution

Funding - Operating and Capital grants

Consultation with Students on Funding Matters

Audit of Collège St Boniface

Tuition Fees

Attending:

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UM: Amanda Aziz, Cathy Vande Kerckum, Rob Marriott

UW: Sarah Amyot, Caitlin Brown, Roselyn Nkhata, Joey Jakob

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