

West Prince Post-Secondary Satellite Campus Committee
8105 Rte. 14,
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PE C0B1E0

April 8, 2012

James Randall, PhD.,
VP Academic
550 University Ave.,
Charlottetown, PE C1A 4P3

Dear Dr. Randall:

Allow me to respond to your letter of 23 March regarding our request to meet to discuss the West Prince Post – Secondary Satellite Campus Initiative. I am confident that if we had met, as we requested, virtually all of your reservations regarding the proposal would have been addressed in a positive and forthright manner. However, as that has not yet been the case, I would like to take the opportunity to address the arguments raised in the aforementioned letter.

Your letter raises concerns primarily on matters pertaining to "... an objective assessment of student need, and the secondary concern of affordability." On the former, we naturally sought in your letter some evidence that contradicted our study, a study to which your letter makes no reference whatsoever. Our study showed keen interest from Westisle students in such an opportunity to study at home for their first year, thereby decreasing the first-year drop-out rate caused by youthful students' homesickness, and/or the immense expense of living away from home that Charlottetown residents do not have to incur. We mention briefly here, the concept of climate change, and the contribution that daily commuters such as some of the people who are now travelling from as far as Tignish make to air

pollution. Your letter neglects to address matters of affordability and access to equal educational opportunity and the critical need for that in West Prince.

Later in your letter, you make reference to our proposal addressing first year students “only interested in taking electives in their first year.” I remember that you attended Dr. Randall two of our meetings and, in addition, you had the opportunity to read all of our material. Certainly, I think you have a good understanding of our design, which would include first year introductory requirements, modeled after the California community college system, and many others around Canada and the US. The deans I met with also have a clear understanding of this. In meetings with both Dean of Science Christian Lacroix and Dean of Business Alan Duncan, we discussed clear and specific first year courses that could be conducted in West Prince. We even discussed Westisle High School as a possible lab choice, and commuting to Charlottetown for certain lab time requirements. Dr. Lacroix agreed there are some math courses that could be conducted without massive infrastructure investment. Science teacher Marilyn Hudson at Westisle High School concurs with this assessment. Business courses such as introductory Business English require the same type of facilities used at the main campus – an instructor, a classroom, a text book, perhaps a smartboard. UPEI uses far less infrastructure for many introductory courses than, say, a school such as Holland College requires. Those of us who have first-hand experience of satellite campuses, including several UPEI faculty who taught around the island for years, know that we do not need huge under-utilized bricks and mortar buildings to deliver programs. In fact, UPEI is exploring using online courses which requires none of this infrastructure, and comes with its own set of disadvantages that won’t be discussed here. “The wide array of courses” that you refer to – or do not refer to but only allude to, include: Introductory Sociology, Psychology, English, second languages (hopefully French), Beginning Math, College Algebra, Intro History, Political Science, 3-4 intro business courses, beginning Biology, Chemistry, intro Philosophy, Logic, Public Speaking, even Art Appreciation, and Music, can all be taught by contracted sessional professionals and full-time faculty such as those

that serve on our committee, and others that live in the region. I can name four immediately that are willing and able to fill almost this entire list. Of course some are already PhDs, and the rest are in process. All are experienced with 7-30 years of teaching under their belts, and at an introductory level, are capable of teaching across disciplines. The “narrow range of course offerings” you mention refers to some of the examples mentioned in our original proposal, which we have said from the start is only a skeleton, not a comprehensive plan, designed as a beginning piece. It meant to show the need for those mentioned courses for people who live in the region and work at such places as the GST center in Summerside. So, to clarify, we meant required introductory courses for freshman students and electives for mature students seeking diplomas and certificates related to their employment.

Further in your letter, you mention the decrease or dilution in the number of potential students enrolled in each course. We are more aware of this than UPEI administration has demonstrated that it has been in the past. We live here. We understand that you cannot run a lifelong learning class here at a profit. There are not enough motivated retired senior citizens who from the start can take one course per semester for free, to make this a good plan. However, UPEI has in the past attempted to do so, and now points at its failure as a reason to deny our educational aspirations and expectations. It is an unfair assessment that people from West Prince are not interested in a university education, as one of the senior administrators with lifelong learning stated. It would be more accurate to say that people from West Prince are not interested in a university education that holds no promise of employment. This is the very reason that we see the only solution for the centerpiece of our initiative to bring international students here for a brief time. They would bring with them needs that would be met by small businesses beginning and fulfill the minimum enrollment requirements for class delivery. In turn, they would gain experience living in our rural bilingual communities, experience farming, fishing, and living in families that would take good care of them. While some international students prefer the big city experience of Charlottetown, some have intimated tearfully that they are afraid of living at Brown’s

Court with the alcohol and drugs that are prevalent there. Many of these students are having their first experience away from their own families and are homesick, and very young. They rather like the paternal and maternal treatment they receive from some of our faculty. This is allowed of course, by the small class sizes we have at UPEI main campus, and would have at a satellite campus. In addition, the PEI government has mandated higher learning institutions to service the whole island. Profit may not be a primary concern when equality of opportunity is at the forefront. Please remember that UPEI is not a for-profit institution, but a primarily state-funded institution, receiving more than half its money from the taxpayers of this province. Finally, to address this argument, we are not proposing anyone lose money, but actually for the first time ever, we believe that a satellite campus up west would, in fact, become profitable.

Later in your letter, you contend that the lack of support services in West Prince constitutes an impediment to the implementation of our proposal. Library services, available to all students online, is the preferred delivery mechanism, even on the main campus, and the one we are all training our students to use more and more. I would suggest that the Mill River Complex offers a myriad of sports venues including cross country skiing, golf, indoor swimming pool, waterway for boat racing, Three nearby rinks for hockey, facilities for both conferences and parent visits, all the amenities of our main campus, and more. Advisement can be easily maintained at the main campus. Gone are the days of the pony express, when it takes a day to travel 25 miles. We can have a student in Charlottetown in 90 minutes, if an appointment needs to be met.

Your letter also expresses considerable reservations regarding the exorbitant cost of our program for international students. However, these costs were regarded as inclusive and not for tuition alone. To clarify, I am fully cognizant of the present \$10K tuition costs for international students. However, our calculations estimate that it would cost an additional \$10K for an international student to live in West Prince over the course of an academic year. From our perspective, all in all, international students

would be able to live far more wholesome lives for less money than their city counterparts currently do. One international student, in a quote from a paper which I received permission to use, wrote that, in terms of living in Charlottetown, "I spent \$25K shopping in Charlottetown last year." I am certain that our proposal offers the potential, nay, the promise of a far safer and better post-secondary experience in West Prince.

Your last paragraph speaks to the online and blended delivery courses that UPEI plans to offer in the next 3-5 years. That is at the very least a duplication of services already offered by universities all over the world. And it flies in the face of your own argument that students need the campus experience of intramural sports, academic support services, physical library, and advisement.

Our Committee continues to stand by our commitment to the vital need in West Prince's for revitalization. One way to bring this about mirrors what has happened in Charlottetown and Summerside -- the presence of institutions. Saint Dunstan's University was begun not just with private funds from the Catholic Diocese of Charlottetown, but with the support of the whole island Catholic community. Much of the infrastructure was built then. It made sense then for island students to live there. Now it makes sense to bring international students here to the whole island. Our steady decline in population has made us all suffer. Charlottetown will benefit by West Prince's prosperity, just as Charlottetown is suffering from the rural decline here on PEI now. There are enough international students to go around. Our own students will more likely attend their following three years of schooling at the main campus. They told us so in the professional survey we did. This is an idea that will ultimately serve the Charlottetown campus even more than West Prince, and we are so convinced of that that we will continue to pursue it. I hope that you might take a longer, closer, and more detailed look at the possibilities, and come back with solutions, not problems, creative ideas, not crushing criticisms, optimism, not fearful naysayings. Lastly, we implore that you take a hard look at the concern

you have for these students' futures, both here in PEI, and around the globe, where we are singing the praises of education as part of a better life for all, not just a chosen few in metropolitan centers.

Most sincerely,

Shirlene O'Brien, MAEd.

Committee Member,

West Prince Post-Secondary Education Opportunities