

Media Release – March 6, 2025

Faculty Association votes non-confidence in VIU's President

Vancouver Island University Faculty Association has voted non-confidence in VIU President Deborah Saucier.

“VIU faculty voted overwhelmingly to say they do not have confidence in President Saucier. Of the votes cast, 86% voted non-confidence,” said VIUFA president Gara Pruesse.

VIU has been experiencing budget challenges. On the heels of COVID, changes in federal policies regarding International students have resulted in diminished tuition revenues. Mitigation of the deficit budgets has resulted in layoffs and program cuts. But these circumstances, shared by many other post secondary institutions in Canada, come on top of particular challenges at VIU.

“Our lack of confidence in university leadership is not simply the result of challenging times. The administrative culture here was already showing signs that it had decided on its own direction, with priorities that are out of step with our mandate. Recent and ongoing budget challenges have brought scrutiny on their decision-making, and revealed bad decisions and a lamentable indifference to evidence and data.”

Last year, VIU wrote off \$8M in sunk costs for projects it was abandoning – a new childcare centre which now exists as a large hole in the ground, and business software that did not meet expectations.

“At this time, more than ever, we need an administration, and a president, who understands and supports VIU's strengths and our unique purpose and roles in and for this region while making necessary hard decisions in an evidence based way. VIU is a fantastic place to teach and to learn, and in this economic climate we need to focus on our core mandate.”

In the last decade, tuition revenue was strong, partly due to increased enrolment of International students. However, unlike other post-secondary institutions in the sector, VIU spent the money rather than accumulating surpluses. Revenue was disproportionately spent on administrative salaries and positions: the total spend on administrator salary increased by 67% in the years from 2014 to 2024, compared to total salary spend on VIUFA faculty, which increased by 43%.

“Instead of trying to understand where the money is going, VIU leadership makes cuts to programs like Music and Masters of GIS that students want and that the community values, and to services such as counselling that students need.”

As part of deficit management to date, VIUFA faculty positions have been cut by 6%, and support workers in CUPE have been cut by 10%. Administration has been cut by 7%. “But they were already experiencing administrative bloat,” said Pruesse. “Administration needs to become leaner. We would save \$2.5M per year if Administration had grown only at the same rate as faculty for the last 10 years.”

“Faculty are worried when VIU Administrators make decisions based on bogus data. Our careers are in their hands, but in meetings they tell us that International applications are down 142%, which is

impossible. They have told us that our courses are too expensive because our average class size is 14, when it is actually in line with provincial norms at 21. And they have told us that domestic enrolment was decreasing when it was clearly increasing, as was demonstrated by their own data.”

“Faculty want a president who knows what is happening, and makes decisions based on good evidence, to advance the priorities that are articulated in the mandate of a BC special purpose teaching university.”

For next steps, Pruesse said that she invited President Saucier and Board Chair James Cassels to meet with her to discuss faculty concerns. “I have had no response from the President. The Board acknowledged my email, and said they may get back to me next month.”

The VIU Students’ Union has also voted non-confidence in President Saucier, and has called for her resignation. “Faculty, students, and the mid-Island community have a shared interest in the success of our University. We all want to keep it strong so it can continue to serve and represent the community.”

- 30 -

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