

Welcome to Webinar

Duane:

Okay, I don't see anybody else waiting to get in. We have 38 people participating at this point. Hi, I'm Duane. I'm one of the facilitators. Tracy, are you going to turn your camera on?

Tracy:

I think it is on.

Duane:

Oh, there you are. So Tracy is the other facilitator of today's session. Just to give you a bit of information before we get started, we've automatically muted all of your mics and your cameras at the beginning as you entered the room. We'll ask you to keep these off at this point. Later on during question and answer, you'll have the ability to put up your hand and ask questions. This will preserve some bandwidth and make things work a little bit better for us. I'd like to welcome you to Desk Webinar. It's the first in a series that's being put on by BCcampus to focus on students during COVID-19 and some of the challenges you're facing. We've been hearing through different student associations and student unions some of the challenges you're hearing from students. That's helping inform the list of possible webinars that'll be coming up. We anticipate that there'll be a couple each week and information will be shared.

Duane:

If you haven't been using a Zoom meeting, and I can't imagine anybody here that hasn't been in one in the last few weeks, you may find a time, because we have a lot of people in the room, that things get chirpy and it's just the system trying to catch trying to catch up. We'll ask you to use the chat box to put any questions out that may come up. We'll talk a bit about the format and what we're doing. There's also the ability to put up your hand. This is at the bottom of the participant window, if you click on that at the bottom of your screen. Then we'll know that you have a question. During our PowerPoint, and there's only four slides, we won't be taking questions. The majority of the time will be spent in Q and A.

Duane:

We have moderators as well that will be using the chat box to put up links to different websites and resources that we may talk about. This is a recorded session. We want you to be aware of that and that if you're bringing any issues forward that you're experiencing or students at your institution are exploring or experiencing, I see that there's a lot of people from student unions and associations on the line today, please refrain from using the names of individuals at the institution. So those are the beginning pieces.

Introductions

Duane:

I'd like to start by acknowledging that I am in Kamloops, so I'm situated in the unceded traditional territory of the Tk'emlups te and the Secwepemec people. I've worked in the BC post-secondary system since 1990. That sounds better than saying how many years. The last 15 years have been in role as assisting students through processes, dealing with processes, human rights complaints, and so on as well as managing student services. My last job was director of student affairs and services at Douglas

College and before that, director of student and judicial affairs at Thompson Rivers University. But since January, I've been moved into a full-time consulting job working with post-secondaries with Tracy.

Tracy:

Hi, everyone. So I'm currently located on the traditional territories of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh Nations. My work supporting students does take place on the traditional territories of the Qayqayt and Kwikwetlem First Nations respectfully as well. I'm currently the organizer of advocacy and ombudsperson at the Douglas Students' Union. I am an alumni of Vancouver Community College and the University of Victoria and was involved in the student movement during that time. In the last decade, I have worked for the students' union of Vancouver Community College and the Douglas Students' Union. Great.

Duane:

Thanks, Tracy. We also have a lot of people in the background that are helping us today from BCcampus, including Robynne the project manager with all this series of webinars. We have Declan, Kelsey, Arianna, and Paula that are assisting and moderating and providing technical support. We have also invited Andrew from the Tenant Resource and Advisory Center. He is in the background in case we need to rely on him for some support. So again, we'd like you to communicate and ask questions using the chat box. Our moderators can unmute you, so if you want to ask a question, you can put your hand up and we'll allow that to occur as well. This session is recorded and you'll be able to have access to it afterwards and there'll be information at the end about how you do that.

Duane:

This session, like all BCcampus events has a code of conduct to provide a safe, harassment-free learning environment. We can provide the link to that policy as well. For some of you, you might feel uncomfortable asking questions, but we really encourage you to do that. If you have a question, it's very likely that other students also have that question. We'll do our best to answer the questions. We may not have all the answers. I'm not a lawyer, nor do I play one on television. So we'll do our best to get the information to you now if we know or to follow up with individuals afterwards. I think that's all I have to cover in the beginning and we're ready to go over things. So we'll start with the PowerPoint.

Agenda

Tracy:

Great. So we have put together a bit of an agenda and here are some of the items that we will be going over today. Like Duane said, we'll have a few things that we wanted to talk about, but we really wanted to create a space for those questions that participants might have and hopefully Duane and I will be able to help guide you through some of the situations or help you figure out the best path or help find you the right person at your institution to support you in that way.

Tracy:

So what we wanted to start with today is identify some COVID-19 specific challenges. We'd like to identify some immediate issues that the move from face-to-face to remote delivery of courses and services have presented. We have had some direct conversations with students, administrators, faculty members, and the other support people across the province. We've found some themes from those conversations. We will talk a bit about students' rights based upon the urgent issues that are presented

from the winter 2020 semester and during this time, the in-between time heading into the summer semester as well. We'll talk a little bit about the overview of the post-secondary institutions' responsibilities to students and have a bit of a discussion of who can support you and where to find them. Then we'll move into that time where we will hopefully be able to answer your questions. So that's what our agenda is for today. Great. Next slide.

COVID Specific Challenges

Duane:

Okay. This won't be a surprise for any of you. Some of the primary challenges we looked at are initially just the shift from classroom instruction to all distance learning really rapidly with little notice, the fact that many faculty maybe ill-prepared and possibly lack skills and knowledge of virtual teaching and learning tools, and creating new challenges around assessment. So course outlines were established in January and handed out, and all of a sudden in the last few weeks of classes, faculty are determining if they have a final exam how they're going to do that or if they have to shift assessment for their course. Students' concerns about the loss of classroom time, instructional time, and the impact on their own learning. Examinations from a distance and all of the issues that may arise from that, including accusations of breaches of academic integrity during exams. For many students that were receiving academic supports or academic accommodations, how they're provided or if they were provided appropriately during that period after classes went from on-campus to off-campus. Next slide.

Student Rights

Tracy:

Okay. So based upon some of the issues that we have identified, we picked a few key things that we want to share in terms of students' rights. This is not an exhaustive list of all rights that students have, but based upon the situation where we're in and the timely situation and issues that we're facing or students are facing, these are some key ones that really wanted to highlight and talk about today, especially around fairness. Of course, if there's issues that come up in our discussion and identified there's an interest and need, I'm sure BCcampus would be open to holding further sessions and Duane and I can come back and answer further questions beyond what we're just talking about and presenting to you today.

Tracy:

So rights that students have, the first one, the right to access education. The move from face-to-face teaching to distance learning, we're concerned and a lot of students are concerned of possible adverse impact to their grades. Like Duane said, it was a sudden shift. It was a point in a time in the semester where it was the last third, last quarter of the semester. So a lot of assignments and projects and exams were really quite heavily weighted in that time. So that is one of the things that we have heard as a concern. The right to due process. So even during this time where services are provided remotely and we can't see individuals face-to-face, it's really important that there's continued access to the different various appeal processes, that the supports that students can have access to are transparent, timely, and based upon the published policies and procedures. But because given the situation-

Tracy:

that we're in, there is a need for institutions and decisions makers to take a look at timelines and possibly extend the appeals process because of the disruption that COVID-19 has presented us. Students have the right to express legitimate complaints and especially during this time, the big disruption has brought up a lot of frustration. The transition may not have been as smooth as what we would have wished and wanted it to be and there have been some challenges that we have encountered. This is a situation that we were not expecting or was prepared for. So the quick shift may have presented additional challenges that weren't present before and that we did not anticipate. But students should still have the right to express those legitimate complaints.

Tracy:

Then also the right to options regarding course completion. So this is something that has come up at the end of the semester. Online and distance learning may not be accessible to some students based around logistics. It may not be accessible to them because of the environment that they're in. They may not have access to certain things that are required for them to be successful and to be able to complete. So those have to be taken into consideration when those concerns are brought up and looking at what options there are that is within the ability of an institution to support a student to complete their courses and their semester and the winter semester.

Tracy:

Also, each individual situation is contextual. While we are speaking in general about fairness and equity, individual students' cases may require a different way to navigate a situation and the procedures at individual institutions. Also depending on the people that are involved, timelines, and the complexity. This may require varying approaches. So I know that there is another webinar being planned coming up for how to prepare and approach your institution and instructor that my colleagues from the BC Federation of Students and the BIU Students' Union will be facilitating at a later date. So I hope that that is something that you'll be able to participate in as well. Okay. So next slide.

Post-Secondary Institution Responsibilities

Tracy:

So there is a few things that we wanted to cover and just provide an overview in regards to what post-secondary institutions are responsible for. So institutions have the responsibility to deliver high quality and accessible education. They are also responsible for providing services that support academic success. These services could include counseling, advising, accessibility services. Those are things that the institutions would be providing. Just to make a note too that course outlines that students receive at the beginning of each semester, they're an agreement between the student and the institution. If there's concerns around the grading, the delivery, learning objectives, evaluation, that's a good place to start and take a look to go, "Okay, based upon the course outline and this change, are there things in here that could be a good starting point to have a conversation? Or at least a good starting point to try to figure out the best way to navigate the concerns the student has?"

Tracy:

In general, institutions will have similar policies and principles, but each of the 25 institutions in BC will have their own detailed processes and variations. There are different avenues, both informal or formal to address a student's concern. There are also different decision makers depending on your institution

and people that are involved in the processes. If there is an issue that has impacted education adversely, there will be a way to address it. It means that we need to find a support person at your institution to help you navigate the systems that are there. The support people will have an understanding of how things work and will have the best advice based upon their experience and knowledge of those specific policies.

Duane:

Okay. As far as decision makers, with the 25 different post-secondary institutions in the province, and I hope they got the number correct, everyone has different structures with different players and different titles. So it's not possible to say exactly who you go to in this session at your institution. But acknowledging that there is often upfront informal processes that involve you reaching out to your faculty member first and moving up through the process based on policy. And to note to everyone, don't send an email to the president as your first step. That's way down the road and unlikely to get you what you need immediately going through the appropriate process.

Duane:

So identifying the supports at your institution. We know that many student unions, student associations, or student societies provide ombuds service or advocacy services. Sometimes this is a shared role with the institution or an institutional role. But looking for advocacy or ombuds persons at the different institutions would be one of your first steps in accessing support from somebody who can speak to you about your rights and the appropriate process. Institutional counselors often deal with a whole range of issues. Everything from personal counseling, but certainly an understanding how to navigate through the institution if you have an appeal or a complaint. So reaching out. We know that most institutions have moved from face-to-face delivery of counseling moving to your ability to contact counselors via Skype or over the phone. There are provincial services, but the provincial service is unlikely to provide you the information that you need to know for your institution because again, each of the institutions deals with complaints in a slightly different way and would have a different path.

Duane:

Student affairs and services departments, and this will include areas like indigenous student services, accessibility services, any of the professionals you come into contact through areas such as those, may also be able to guide you and provide support through that. Or other support areas within your college or university or institute, reaching out through advisors and so on. Hopefully, I believe most institutions are moving to the place of wanting to help students and not bounce them around the system at a time when everybody's moved from campus or many moved from campus to work from home and not wanting you to have to navigate a whole bunch of different pathways to get one simple answer. Okay, next slide.

Question and Answer Period

Duane:

Okay. So we were able to do the beginning part in 20 minutes and we've got another 40 minutes to answer questions. So let's launch into those. I'll remind you, you can put your hand up or you can type your question into the chat box on the side. We did notice there are a lot of individuals that are representing a student union or a student society. So even general questions that are coming up for you

at your institutions that are a primary concern, to bring that to the table so the rest can learn from that as well. Sarah Webber, thank you.

Question One

Sarah Webber:

Hi. I do the advocacy work at my student's union. Just a question around academic misconduct challenges in this new online learning environment. Sometimes students are facing concerns from faculty members that they may have been using online resources during their exams. So they're doing their exams online, but there's a concern that there is an easier ability to commit misconduct and so speculation and suspicion arises. It's really hard for students to defend against something that they claim they didn't do when they don't have evidence of not doing it per se. So thoughts around how to manage misconduct and the very fine line around also the privacy of working from home, studying from home, assessments at home, so exam invigilation happens differently. I'm hearing more and more concern both from faculty wondering about integrity of assessment and from students worrying about privacy and/or how to defend themselves when an allegation arises.

Duane:

I'll start and Tracy, you can follow up. I'm hearing the same issue from faculty or institutions that are challenged with being put in a situation where there was a final exam, they want to provide that as part of the evaluation. The expectation that it would be invigilated and how do you have that occur with students from home and ensure academic integrity? I think for the winter semester, this is going to be incredibly challenging as we muddle through this because did their best in a very short period of time to try to find a work around. I believe over the summer or by fall if we're still in this situation, there will be better guidelines for faculty and institutions about how they carry on. We've certainly heard concerns where faculty abused students to write their exam with Zoom on so they could be watched during the exam. I know that there's been a number of reactions to that.

Duane:

The reality is if this were to happen on campus, and we certainly had situations over the years where a student has to leave the institution because of a family death for example, go to their home community, want to write their final exam, and we'll find an invigilator in the other community. So we've always had the ability to have somebody watch somebody write the exam or if you're going into a testing center know that that will be videotaped in many situations to ensure exam integrity and also to ensure that you're supporting the student, that there is evidence that the student hasn't done something. So in the short-term, people have tried that. Whether that's something moving forward an institution that's going to support or we continue to support, I don't know. But certainly BCcampus is doing a lot of webinars for faculty around how to use different technologies for assessment, including exams.

Duane:

So this semester's going to be difficult. I think institutions are going to have to, where possible, give the benefit of the doubt for the student. We've been placed in a situation that's unprecedented and I mentioned this in a meeting yesterday. I'd heard that word more times in the last eight weeks that I have in the previous 50 years all told. So we'll work through this, but in this situation, we got through

this semester. We were fortunate that it happened towards the end of the semester. Hopefully we're reacting appropriately for the summer semester. Tracy?

Tracy:

Yeah, thanks, Duane. I think from the perspective of supporting students through something like that where that maybe a student might be... there might be a situation where a student might be accused of academic integrity or violations of academic integrity and that sort of thing, I think it's important that institutions do make the benefit of the doubt. But if we go back to supporting students through a process like that, an instructor may have a concern. But I know that almost every process of an investigation, it goes beyond just the instructor. There is either an associate dean or a director or a chair or a dean that would be involved in a process like that.

Tracy:

A reminder, when we're supporting students around fair process and for student fairness around what is this based on? Is there relevant information? Is there documentation? Is there evidence of this? And really going back to the process of saying given the extenuating circumstances that we're in, there might be concerns. But is there anything beyond an inkling or anything beyond just an assumption? Because that is really important in the processes. I know that institutions are very concerned and must follow procedural fairness. So if something happens and a student does end up getting a penalty, there might be the opportunity to look at is an appeals process based around fairness and procedure? I know that does take time. But I always come back to what is fair and giving the circumstances that we're in, how complex it is. COVID-19 is extreme. So highlighting that and really just coming back to what is procedural fairness, what is fair, what is the documentation, what is the evidence, and using that along with the policy I think will help those that are supporting students be able to support them through that.

Sarah Webber:

Yeah, thank you. It's such a complex time in terms of fair assessment both for students and for faculty, right? I appreciate the comments about how unprecedented the situation is in terms of the tight timeline to turn around from whatever the method of assessment was in place prior to shifting to online learning to now. So everybody has had to adapt and of course, there's some hiccups. For sure, my focus has been around the difference between suspicion and evidence, right? So suspicion prompts the initial exploring of what may have occurred and then looking at whether or not there's actual evidence. I'm heartened to know there is a lot of support for faculty in terms of how they're developing assessments because I can't imagine the weight that that takes as you're trying to ensure that your assessment is fair and rigorous still, but upholds the academic integrity despite the challenges of online delivery, right? Thank you.

Duane:

It would be really interesting to see how many courses were being delivered face-to-face versus distance. Because the vast majority of faculty never wanted to, never intended to deliver course content via distance learning and they're thrown into it with basically four days notice.

Sarah Webber:

Yeah, yeah. Exactly.

Question Two

Arianna:

We have a question in chat. Well, we have a couple. We have one from John O'Brien. It says our school gives students a choice of pass/fail grades or letter grades, but the deadline was April 8th and I've seen others with much later deadlines. Do other schools have similar options in deadlines?

Duane:

It's my feeling deadlines are out there, but again, we're dealing with a really difficult situation and there's going to have to be flexibility on some of these deadlines. So if people know at their institution, they can type it into the box. Every institution is dealing with things slightly differently. Yes, some institutions have determined you can go pass/fail, that you can move to audit, that you don't have to complete final assignments. Some institutions have a grading system where you can average over the previous assignments and not have to deal with the final evaluative event. So again, if you're supporting students or you're a student and there's a reason that you weren't able to make a decision by that point, because a lot of us were dealing with personal issues at home, dealing with and managing our family lives, our children, aging parents, whatever it is, if you require additional time, again, record that and work with your advocate to get that information to the institution.

Duane:

We do feel as well that there will be normal timelines as far as appealing decisions or putting a complaint in. Those again, there's always the ability to give some leeway and in a situation like this, if you missed the deadline, again, acknowledging why this is... there's extenuating circumstances because of COVID that institutions should take that into consideration. Okay. Here, another question.

Question Two

Arianna:

We have one about the myth, or perhaps myth, of the devaluing of degrees at this time. Do you see that there, Duane?

Duane:

I haven't heard anything about that. I think transcripts are going to look different. There's going to be a blip during COVID and grades and pass/fails in courses that have typically had a letter grade attached to it. This isn't a BC issue, it's a world issue. So that's a lot of institutions, a lot of degrees to devalue at this point. So we're getting through this together. I can't imagine long-term it's going to have an impact on how people value or view degrees.

Tracy:

In our province in BC, we have had a lot of communication from the Ministry and from the minister about post-secondary education in the province. I think that the Ministry does give direction to institutions and give guidance to institutions of how to handle certain things. So I think that the devaluing of degrees is conversation that's being had in the public. It is a worry and it's a concern and it's a fear and an anxiety for students, for their family, and that sort of thing. But like Duane said, we're all dealing with this. Every institution right now around the world is dealing with what's happening. So I anticipate actually something coming from the Ministry, if not direction, then recommendations and

institutions may be going to the Ministry for advice as well. But it's a worldwide thing. I can't imagine institutions devaluing transcripts or credits or anything like that during this time because those institutions would also be accrediting courses and students and be providing transcripts as well.

Tracy:

It's interesting. I'm curious to know where that kind of conversation is happening. I haven't heard it as well. So I'm curious to see who's having those conversations, who's bringing up that concern.

Duane:

Okay. Laurie, did you want to ask your question?

Question Four

Laurie:

Sure. I got bumped out and then I kind of hopped back in here. So I don't know if it's clear there in the writing, but based on the rights, you put in the slide the rights to access education, rights to due process. I've been doing this work for 10 years and never really had anything formal to lean on, similar to what you presented. I'm wondering what have I missed along the way and are these consistent rights that are published somewhere that students can continue to refer back to when they have concerns?

Tracy:

So in preparation for this presentation, did some research actually. You're right, there isn't one place that states what students' rights are in BC or in Canada. It actually was something that took a bit of research and looking into different institutions, looking at different organizations to compile this. But a lot of the rights that were identified were based around fairness and procedural fairness. So the right to due process and that sort of thing. The right to access education is that students should be able to access it regardless of who you are and your identity. So as a student, when you're in the institution, you should be able to access that, whether it's institution providing accommodations.

Tracy:

So this is something actually in preparation for this presentation that has actually been something that's like, "Hey, we actually don't have a place where students can go and go, 'What are my defined rights? What are things that I have rights to?'" Certain, I think, students' unions and institutions might have certain information on their websites that they provide, but there doesn't seem to be one place that exists that tells you in a very clear, concise list. That could be something that is an opportunity for us to do some work and to put some work into for us that are at students' unions, for those of us who provide support for students. I know that BCcampus has been working on compiling a website to provide resources.

Tracy:

In the research as well, in preparation for this session, we were hoping that we could find a place where it lists every institution and then every support person or support area that a student could find. It didn't exist, but I know that work is being done right now by BCcampus to create that. So this is something that I think is an opportunity for us to see that there's a gap in terms of that information that's readily

accessible for students and maybe we could do some work to create that and have one place where students can go and find these.

Laurie:

I'll maybe just jump in while I'm still unmuted. Thank you and I really appreciate you finding that gap and appreciate that this has been an impetus to recognize that there's a need for consistent information for students. Thank you.

Question Five

Duane:

Okay. Milica? Would you like to ask your question or have us read it? We'll leave out the name of your college. Okay, Milica is asking a question about writing exams, tests, and quizzes and accessibility services. Where she usually writes where it's easier for her to do that, but even with the online, it has been so challenging with waiting for my instructors to respond back to me on time and not giving extra time or forgetting about that I need extra time. On top of that, one my instructors did not respond until March 27th when they started with this on March 16th. I wish there was better communication between accessibility services and instructors.

Duane:

I would agree at this point that this has to have hit every accessibility service hard. Faculty members, again, I'm not on the side of faculty or institutions. I truly am student-focused in this. But I think like students are struggling, faculty are struggling as well. Not having the resources, the equipment necessary from home or the ability to pivot and decide how they provide the academic accommodations that have been identified. This summer, it may still be bumpy, Milica, where in some courses it's going to be challenging. By the fall, again, if we continue to do this, I am certain that there's going to be a lot of work done at each institution in determining how they support students with disabilities in accessing their learning and ensuring they're not being disadvantaged. It's their right by the human rights code and we need to ensure that you have the same access and ability.

Duane:

So the three or four week challenge in trying to determine how to accommodate people from a distance, it's understandable that that was done poorly. This summer, they're going to have to have things in step. So do talk to your accessibility advisor and even consider courses you might be taking this summer, if there might be challenges in fully accommodating you because there isn't time or a way of doing that. By the fall, I would trust most things should be sorted out.

Tracy:

And Milica, not saying which institution that you're from, but please reach out to your students' union if there are ongoing issues. Your students' union will be able to help you if you were adversely impacted by these challenges and instructors not responding to you in a timely manner. That is something that your students' union, your advocate, or your ombudsperson will be able to help you walk through step by step of how to address these concerns. Because it is concerning and we talked right at the beginning that the change and the shift adversely impacts your education and it sounds like it did. Please reach out and we will be happy to help.

Question Six

Duane:

Do document the impact on you at the end of the semester. Okay. Moderators, do we have any other questions sitting out there? Would anybody else like to ask a question? If there aren't any other questions out there, this is also an opportunity for us... Okay, Tanysha's put something up. It might be good for one or either of you to talk about a specific, potentially hypothetical scenario on what avenues someone might take. Okay.

Tracy:

Okay.

Duane:

So Tracy, you want to come up with a, I like this, potentially hypothetical scenario. Can you give us an area? Are we talking academic integrity? Are we talking about... Give us something. Grade appeal.

Tracy:

Okay. So each institution would have their own policies and procedures, deadlines, requirements for students if they wish to appeal a final grade. My knowledge of policies, and for Douglas College, it does state in there it's recommended for the students to consult with someone that can support them through the process as it is quite long. I know that it can be a very stressful time. So students are not used to reading policies. For those of us that do read the policies, even I go, "Wait, I need to read this a couple of times to actually really understand what it's saying. So a student finds a policy, they go, "Oh my goodness. How do I even understand what's being said here?"

Tracy:

Finding the identified folks or people that can help you understand the policy in words and ways that you can understand. They'll break it down for you and go, "This is step one, step two, step three." Then you can talk about your situation with them. What happened in your case? Like we said before, it's contextual. Circumstances could be different. It could be a very simple and straightforward or it could be complex. So finding those people to talk through the scenario through. They can give you an assessment and provide you with different or a few options for pathways to navigate through that system.

Tracy:

So with a grade appeal, typically the policies will define what are the grounds that a student can appeal their grade. There are some very clear things and thresholds and criteria where you can appeal a grade. Then there are some things that if a student is dissatisfied but doesn't meet those thresholds, then may not be able to proceed or their appeal may be denied. So having someone to talk to who's experienced with that policy and knowledge of that policy will really help you as a student figure out if you are even able to move forward.

Tracy:

At Douglas College, we do have a suggested and formal way to... pathway, which is to have that conversation with the instructor first to ask how was this calculated, which part of the rubric, explain what those things are. Often, a lot of the situations are actually resolved in that way. There might be a calculation error or there was a misunderstanding. Or sometimes it's an Excel sheet problem. A lot of

times having those informal conversations actually finds a resolution. If that doesn't find the resolution, then there are some clear steps after that that students can go through and having that support person walking them through will help them figure out what the next steps are, the requirements for submitting an appeal, documentation, making sure that nothing is missed if there's a requirement. Then you'll go from there.

Tracy:

So it's hard to give specifics because what happens at Douglas is different than at Langara, at UBC, at TRU. But that's what I would say is just start with that. Once you find someone who can guide you through, then all of your questions, they can hopefully be able to answer. But they will be able then to walk step by step the student through the process.

Duane:

I think that's great advice, Tracy. Just the acknowledgement, I agree. At the informal level, it's where most things are sorted out if there was a clear situation where somebody was disadvantaged because of something. Tanisha and Sarah will be doing a workshop on learning how to advocate for yourself on May 5th. That's up on the BCcampus website, which will assist you in being professional in moving into that situation. Acknowledging that in a situation where you feel that you have been treated unfairly, you may be emotional and come out of the argument with a faculty member in a way that doesn't get you what you need out of that interaction. So slowing things down and understanding what it is, what the issue is, how you've been disadvantaged, and a remedy, a solution that you think is possible and working with an advocate or somebody who can move you through that process. Aria, did you want to ask a question?

Question Seven

Aria:

I guess mine's kind of a little bit of three questions into one, but I'm mostly interested in... We were thinking of the course outline as a contract, a outline of expectations for a student when going into a class. Is this maybe a space to talk about how students can be a part of that? We're seeing sometimes that in this time, it's not always possible to get all the information about a course at the front of the class before the student takes that class. There's a whole bunch of things that could make that a different expectation. Usually we have the expectation of going into a room, sitting down, looking at a PowerPoint. There's an inherent expectation of being a student and now we're in this time where that's all thrown out the window. So could we take this opportunity... is it within a student's right to have input into how a course is delivered and that course outline kind of like a negotiation before that class begins?

Duane:

Neither of us are jumping at that question. I think where students could have had voice, if there was room to make that their ability, was at the end of the semester when everything changed. So typically because a course outline exists, maybe you've identified all the evaluative events. If you were going to shift things at the end of the semester, you'd have to come back to the entire class and talk about that and pretty much have a unanimous agreement that you would make the change and that students wouldn't be disadvantaged by that change. I'm hoping faculty that had the ability to do that did that. I'm not sure that happened. Moving forward, it's a great concept. Tracy?

Tracy:

Yeah, I think that that is an interesting concept to have a conversation about and I think that it would be interesting to continue that conversation. Given the situation that we're in right now, it is difficult to change a course outline near the end or near the beginning unless there was a discussion with everyone that would be impacted by it. That would include the students, the instructor, possibly even the department through the dean because it's... To me, I see it as an agreement between the student and the instructor as an agent of the institution. So that would be, I think, challenging to do when the things changed due to the COVID-19 situation. But I think there are some... Students do self... or not self-guided, but guided studies where they're working specifically one-on-one with a faculty member. I think in those situations, that might be something if the instructor is open to having that negotiation to talk about that. Certainly a very interesting idea and concept that I would love to have more of a conversation with.

Tracy:

But I do know that most institutions have a very clear defined policy of what a course outline must have and must entail. There's a whole number of bodies that make approval on programming, on course outlines, on course requirements and that sort of thing in terms of the academic level and learning outcomes and learning objectives. So it would be very interesting to see if that is something, this idea and this concept, that we could talk through. But I know that at this moment, it will require a lot of different bodies of approval to change how course outlines are created and how to include students in the process at the beginning. This is a really interesting conversation.

Duane:

I think there's going to be incredible lessons coming out of COVID-19. Okay. There was another question. Jill? You have a question?

Question Eight

Jill:

Hi. Yes. Thank you. I think I'm still trying to think through this question. But I'm speaking from a Master's in Fine Art and graduate studies perspective. There's been a lot of concern around tuition costs, especially for the upcoming summer semester and potentially the fall semester as our degree program is very much based on using shops in our school and being in our studios. This concern has been brought up with our grad studies team, but basically it was said that there's no push on tuition or decreasing tuition because that's more of the Ministry's, I guess, place to make those decisions. So from here, where would we go in terms of getting more information or, yeah, I guess getting more questions answered about why are we still expected to pay the same amount of tuition when we, as a collective class, think that the quality of our education is definitely being impacted by what's going on right now? Especially speaking from an arts perspective.

Duane:

Yeah. Tuition overall, it's pretty much a set thing. But if you're talking about lab fees and so on, that is, if you're not using labs, not using the materials, I'm thinking that's something as a group through your graduate students' society and bringing that forward to the institution. Again, identifying the true costs of that why you believe that it's disadvantaging students. You're willing to pay tuition, but to pay

additional fees or something that was built in to the tuition around supporting lab or a materials costs, I'd encourage you reach out to your student society.

Jill:

Okay. Thank you.

Duane:

Okay, we probably have time for one more question and then to wind things down. Is there one more question? Okay. Phoebe, did you want to ask your question?

Question Nine

Phoebe:

Hi. So one of the most common things we saw in the beginning of COVID was that there were so many things changing, which is fair with the institution, that things are changing, but they still needed to wait for instructions from the Ministry. But with that, there were so many course plans that was also changing on a day by day basis. What we've noticed in a lot of questions or issues that students were facing was that there was a failure of communication internally within the departments and faculty. So one tangible example of that stressor, the cost that made it as an issue to the student, is that they miss a deadline for the withdrawal or did not know, had to make a decision whether to audit it or not.

Phoebe:

My question then is how do you balance between advocating for students or... As a student advocating for myself, that I needed to know this way ahead of time, but then also being thrown back answers from the institution saying, "We didn't know this then, but we know... Things changed," essentially. So that's where a lot of students are falling through and they're not... The issue is that they don't have things at their fingertips to empower them to argue for... like it's not our fault that there's a communication failure within the department. So there's that. So that's my question. If you folks experienced that?

Duane:

My experience in the past, having done this for a long time, is we dealt with individual situations. It wasn't tons, but they were significant where you could be dealing with, for a large institution, 70 students at the end of the semester that have had extenuating circumstances asking for special consideration. That's manageable in a large institution. We're now looking at, well, UBC at 66000 students that have been impacted by COVID-19 and many of them may be requiring special consideration. The scope is huge. I would just encourage everybody that has experienced a challenge at this point to document it really well. It's going to be hard to remember this a week out, a few weeks out as we go through this traumatic situation. But institutions will be revisiting decisions, will acknowledge that there was communication failures and breakdowns within different departments because large institutions, and every college and university is, there can be bottlenecks. There can be challenges in getting information out in a timely fashion, especially in a situation like this.

Duane:

So hang on to that. Keep that information. Things do change daily. But there will be time to breathe soon and to revisit some of those things. The best thing that you can have is documentation about the decision, the timeline, and the impact on you.

Tracy:

To add to that too is get screenshots of your messages back and forth if you're using a platform like Blackboard. When you sent the message. Keeping track of those timelines. Not just documenting, but being clear about timelines. When you sent that email requesting for information or communication and then when the response was coming back. Email is official things in writing. So that would be really helpful to keep those, to make copies of those. Hang onto that along with your account of what had happened. Write it all down. Hang onto it because that will be helpful in future processes if it's necessary to address an issue such as a student not getting the information that they needed or communication was delayed and that adversely impacted, say, a student's ability to fully participate in a final exam or a final project or assignments.

Tracy:

So having that documentation, having a timeline, having all of that and documenting it will really help when trying to address an issue after the fact, right? If there's an appeal, if there is a complaint, all of that will be very helpful because then you can go back and provide that as evidence as well.

Duane:

Okay. Well, thanks everybody. I'll invite Robin to come into the room and close us up.

Webinar Wrap Up

Robynne:

Awesome. Thanks, Duane and Tracy for facilitating today's first session. I know there's a lot of nerves when we're doing the first one, so I really appreciate you both stepping up to do this first one. I wanted to thank everybody for coming with great questions. I know it's a really challenging time and really we hope that this helps with relieving some of the stress. There's a lot going on for everyone in the sector. So hopefully today's session helps with some of that. I know that we're not going to have all of the answers and I always encourage everybody to email me if there's anything that really resonated with you today that you feel like we should follow up on. We're always happy to look at that as we're considering new sessions going forward. Really, the goal is to try to make, as we think about the fall semester, to try to make this as... We can't take all the stress away, but we'll do the best we can.

Robynne:

So we are going to follow up. As Tracy mentioned, we have a website that we've got a list of resources related to today's topic. So we'll follow up with an email and that way, you have my email as well to reach back to me if you have any information that you want to get back to me. So we will share that out shortly and stay safe out there. Thanks, everybody.

Duane:

Okay, thanks, everybody.

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Tracy:

Thanks, everyone.