

To the editor:

At a time of economic downturn, many working British Columbians will return to colleges and universities to upgrade their educational credentials.

Unfortunately, when they get there, they'll too often find fewer instructors and courses than there used to be – or should be.

That's because last March, the BC government suddenly made a surprise cut of \$42 million to the expected operating grants that had been promised to public universities and colleges for 2008/09.

Of BC's major universities, Simon Fraser University has been hit especially hard, as the University has recently expanded capacity to meet expected demand in key areas. Instead of focusing on planning for growth, however, administrators and faculty have spent countless hours adjusting to the budget shortfall. Currently, SFU's administration has informed us that it is eliminating 30 faculty and 50 other staff positions. Inevitably, there will be fewer courses, larger classes, and less professor-student contact.

And funding for graduate students, who are essential to universities' and the province's research capacity, has also taken a hit. In a competitive environment, it will be more difficult to attract talented young potential researchers, scholars and professionals into our graduate programs.

The government says it gives the system more dollars each year. True – on the surface. But when you factor in inflation and increased enrolment, BC universities and colleges are actually receiving \$230 million less than if per-student funding had been maintained at 2001 levels. That's the equivalent of 24,600 unfunded student spaces. The impact is starting to show, but it's not too late to reverse the damage.

British Columbians who recognize that strong public universities reinforce economic and social well-being should ask their MLAs to help restore the promised funding, annually increase per-student support to keep pace with inflation, and fully fund each new student space.

Sincerely,

Robert Hackett
President, Simon Fraser University Faculty Association
8888 University Drive, AQ 2035
Simon Fraser University
Burnaby BC V5A 1S6

Tel.: 778-782-3863

Email: sfufa_president@sfu.ca