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## From the Executive

For those of you about to take your vacations, enjoy—you've earned it. And for those who keep the college going during the summer months, thanks. The Confluence will be back in September.

## Stuff I Learned

Kelly Pitman, CCFA President



Every role teaches us something, if only about ourselves. Here, in no particular order, are some of the things I have learned while serving as CCFA president.

1. Communicate, consult, collaborate.
2. Committees will function better if you make a little time for socializing at the beginning of a meeting. People like to establish, or re-establish, their relationships when they come together. Just let it happen. Don't think of it as starting late; think of it as cutting the business part of the meeting by ten minutes. The resulting fellow feeling is worth it.
3. I should have learned to take better notes when I was a student.
4. Just because we teach critical thinking doesn't mean we always practice it. Critical thinking is kind of like working out. You have to make an effort. And it can be painful. But it's good for you.
5. There are hundreds of people working at the college, and the majority don't know what many, even most, of the others do. It's better to find out than to make assumptions. You know, critical thinking.
6. While writing a long, angry, accusatory email message might be satisfying, receiving one never is. If it is copied to others, the receiver is doubly mortified and doubly resistant. Thus, it's the worst way to try to solve a problem.
7. Teachers miss deadlines, ask for last-minute extensions, don't get the reading done, and come late to meetings for legitimate reasons. It follows that students probably do too.
8. That said, repeated lateness or lack of preparation frustrates people and should be avoided.
9. A day is always better if it's got Erin and Peg in it.

## CCFA Executive

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[Darryl Ainsley](#)

### CCFA Office:

[Erin Waugh](#), Admin Assistant  
[Peg Ford](#), Clerical Assistant  
[www.camosunfaculty.ca](http://www.camosunfaculty.ca)

10. Sometimes, the union and the administration have different priorities and values, and sometimes they don't. It's important to be able to tell the difference between these situations.
11. At a certain point, every negotiating committee meeting will dissolve into hilarity.
12. If you don't have to be right about everything, you'll have more credibility when it is time to fight for what really matters.
13. Nobody likes a sore winner.
14. Any meeting longer than two hours ought to include refreshments.
15. Use your head, but also use your heart.
16. Doing a job because it makes you feel important or appreciated does not necessarily result in the best performance. I believe it was Charles Montague who said, "There is no limit to what a man can do so long as he does not care a straw who gets the credit for it."
17. I am just never going to be able to navigate the Tech Building easily.
18. Respect—if you give it, you get it.
19. Straightforward language works better than vague clichés.
20. Double-check the address line before you send an email.
21. I don't like to sound paranoiac, but I believe that the provincial government may actually be trying to destroy public education. We should all get involved in doing something about that. Now.
22. Preaching to the converted doesn't change much, but it's underrated. Sometimes it feels good to talk with people who share your ideals.
23. A "round robin" approach can be the fairest and most productive way to discuss an issue, especially if your group has shy members in it. Alternatively, pay attention to who is not speaking, and ask those people what they think.
24. Nothing has benefitted workers more than unions, and this is true even for non-unionized workers.
25. It's wise to block off times in your calendar to do non-meeting work.
26. Conflict is not only inevitable, but valuable. Nastiness, however, is not. A spiteful tone or a dismissive gesture will move you away from, rather than toward, resolving differences.
27. By the way, some differences you just have to accept.
28. You can do a radio interview in your pajamas, but you will feel more knowledgeable and articulate if you get dressed.
29. If you engage in activism, you will often be outraged. That said, over the long haul, the best motivation for engaging in activism is not anger, but love.

## *Camosun People Plan*

*Blair Fisher, Criminal Justice*

I just wanted to take a minute to comment on Camosun's People Plan initiative. As a faculty who was not part of the planning of this project, I have found it ill-advised. This initiative has been contracted out to an independent organization called ReWerx. The idea of the plan is to inform Camosun on how we attract, develop, support and retain employees. I am unsure of the cost associated with this venture but I do know that the timing is really unfortunate.

Many departments are feeling the impact of the most recent round of cuts. In many departments people are retiring earlier than planned, some term employees have had their positions eliminated through reduced course offerings and the overall stress on both faculty and students is increasing. I have found the most recent cuts to be most disturbing. The continuous underfunding of education in this province at all levels is having a clear impact on students. I am already concerned about the high waitlists for classes that we will be facing this Fall. For many students, their education will be compromised by either taking classes that they do not really want but they are able to get into or taking longer to complete their studies at Camosun. Term employees who are critical to most programs will need to look elsewhere due to many courses being cut.

Another concern is that this initiative has been contracted out when we have talented people who already work here and are specialists in their fields. In my opinion,

## *Passion in a Chilly Climate*

*Debbie Gascoyne, CMC Chair*

People ask me if my job gets me down sometimes. After all, I spend my time with a lot of unhappy people, and there seem to be more and more unhappy people here all the time. When I attended one of the "People Plan" face-to-face sessions, I was struck by how depressed people were about the way things appear to be going at the college.

But you know what? My job also puts me in touch with some pretty passionate people. People want things to get better at the college, because they love it. They care about their subject and they care about students. Yes, the bad stuff gets in the way sometimes, but underneath it all the work is still there, and it can be wonderful. I don't just sit in my office all day – meetings take me all over, back and forth, and everywhere I go I notice the work going on.

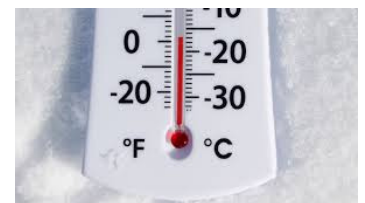
Let's start in my office in the Young building. Down the hall, a popular Philosophy instructor is giving a lecture. He has a pretty loud voice, so I get to hear snippets: he uses examples from Harry Potter and Arrested Development. He plays YouTube clips. The students roar with laughter. I peek through the open door: their attention is rapt.

End of class: there's a rumble of feet. I hear an ELD instructor talking to a group of Chinese students who are eager to know what to do to improve. He tells them the same thing that I'm sure he's told hundreds of students, but he sounds engaged, enthusiastic, caring. They walk out together, the students hanging on his every word.

administration is growing increasingly bold about contracting out work in many areas that could be met within our existing structure. Contracting out this work (whatever the cost) seems like a waste of money that could have been used to mitigate the cuts by government. This contracting out of work is a trend throughout the province and is extremely problematic. The funding formula in the last few years seems unbalanced. The College seems to be nickel and diming departments while not significantly decreasing administrative density.

Lastly, the content of the People Plan sessions seems inaccurate. Infosilem was raised as a primary concern in both the meetings that I participated in and at least one other meeting but nothing regarding this was included in the follow-up survey. Infosilem is having a direct effect on all of the primary goals the People Plan is trying to explore. Colleagues around the province are incredibly frustrated with Infosilem and say that it is negatively impacting their workplaces, both for faculty and students.

The hypocritical nature of this project, I feel, has been exemplified by the lack of staff participation in the project. I was surprised that such a large college had so few employees attending the sessions. But who can blame us, after the stress of the previous few months of trying to assist in funding cuts and many people struggling to figure out Infosilem, many of us were too busy and frustrated to even attend an initiative that seems harmful at this time.



On my way to a meeting in the Fisher building, I pass the English Help center. There's an instructor bent over papers with a student. Another one talks quietly in the corner. I pass an open door where a Math teacher, massive equation on the blackboard, patiently explains something that is to me incomprehensible. The students listen earnestly and take notes. I go across the flyway and into the Fisher building, 2nd floor. There's another roar of laughter coming from one of the classrooms, and I see a group of

students huddled over a table, obviously studying for a test or doing a group project.

And everywhere I go, whether it's at Lansdowne or Inter-urban, no matter the time of year or hour of the day, that's what I see. That's what it's all about, and that's why my job doesn't get me down. The real stuff outweighs the bad stuff; the passion is there, and you can see and hear it everywhere, even in a chilly climate.

## *A Teaching Moment for Life*

*Dianne Perry, RN BSN MED*

As a faculty member for many years, I have often wondered about the impact we really make as teachers. Do the students actually learn what we intend? Do we influence their lives in some small and hopefully meaningful way?

Recently, I had an experience with a graduate that shook me to my core and touched the depth of my soul.

I walked on to a work place setting and standing there, was a graduate that I had not seen for several years. The grad looked happily surprised to see me but then approached with some emotion and said; "I need to talk with you later; do you have a moment before you leave?"

I was trying to imagine what the issue might be after so much time. Like most faculty, I see many former students in multiple professional and social settings. Unfortunately, I rarely remember their names, often remember their faces but am always interested to know what course their lives have taken.

Later in the day, when we had time together, the graduate closed the door, sat down and began; "Do you remember the time you were working late in the evening and I knocked on your office door?"

I have to admit that I had only a faint recollection as this is common occurrence in the life of a teacher. What I do know was that I was likely tired, wanted to get home and quite possibly a little miffed at being disturbed yet again. The graduate continued; "I told you about some personal issues I was experiencing and how I was really struggling. You listened and gave me support, some information and a resource to contact but most of all you gave me hope."

Again, I had only a distant and foggy memory of the incident. So many students have dropped by my office and this encounter did not stand out as something unusual but I was relieved that at least whatever had occurred between us seemed to have been a positive experience.

The graduate continued; "What I did not tell you that night, was that I had just finished cleaning out my locker, was leaving the college and was on my way to commit suicide. The note was written, the preparations were ready and I had finished tying up what were intended to be the last few moments of my life. When I saw your light, I thought I would try just one last time. I knocked and you welcomed me in." The graduate went on to tell me how wonderful life was now, a new love, a family and a satisfying career.

The grad thanked me for the life line that I did not even realize I had thrown.

I remained professional; we talked, embraced and parted.

I walked slowly to my car, quietly closed the door and wept.



For the past six years the School of Access, in partnership with Our Place Society, has been offering fundamental and intermediate level computer studies courses on location at Our Place. Our Place Society (<http://ourplacesociety.com/>) is a non-profit society that was formed by an alliance of the Open Door and Upper Room and opened their new facility on Pandora Avenue in 2008. Their mission is to assist those in need, especially Victoria's inner city community, the homeless and the working poor. All are welcomed at Our Place and are called family. Our Place offers a wide range of services including transitional housing, meals, a drop-in centre providing support and advocacy, a computer lab/library, and a health and wellness centre which houses showers and foot care facilities.

In our computer dominated society and with the incursion of social media into so many aspects of our lives, it is easy to forget that a significant portion of our population is still computer illiterate or lacking some of the computer skills necessary to communicate online or navigate through myriad government websites and online forms. The bright, spacious 12 station computer lab at Our Place is heavily used by family members, and given the interest from the community, it was a natural fit for the Community Learning Partnerships department to start offering computer studies there. The courses combine class and online learning and are self-paced. Many of the students have learning disabilities or are dealing with other issues that impact their learning. At the fundamental level students learn about computer basics including terminology, the internet, email, keyboarding and word processing. Students are assisted in obtaining email addresses if they don't have one, or in learning how to retrieve email addresses that they have not used for a long time.



For many students, taking the fundamental level course has been life changing as it has enabled them to connect with their family or home community again and has provided them with the knowledge and confidence that they are still able to learn and be successful. Others have progressed from taking the computer courses at Our Place to taking further academic upgrading courses or programs on-campus. Working at Our Place has been life altering for me as well: getting to know the students and their stories, witnessing the incredible level of support and dedication of staff and volunteers and the atmosphere of hope and belonging that pervades and transcends the life circumstances of so many who walk through their doors.

## What Plans?

Mark Kunen, Vice President

When I was 21, I had a little trouble getting into the UK because I didn't have a plan, "Young man, you've got to have a plan in life," the immigration agent told me. Well, I didn't have one then, and I don't have one now, so I'm not the person to pass judgments on plans.

As with any piece of fiction, I'll wait to see how the People Plan comes out and what is done with it before deciding on its value.

I do think that such plans have more in common with short stories or novels than with, say Google Maps, and that's not necessarily a bad thing.

The People Plan is front and centre right now. As far as I can tell, the idea is to figure out how to attract good people to work at Camosun and to keep them here doing good work. I have had some involvement with the forming of the

plan. I responded to the initial survey and took part in one of the discussion groups that were organized around the responses to that survey. Also, during my recent short time as Acting CCFA president, I participated in one meeting of the People Plan Steering Committee. The guiding assumption of the process seems to be that the understanding of what is needed resides with the people who work at the college now. I like that idea.

The first survey garnered over 520 questions, comments, and recommendations. All but three are posted on the HR site on the Intranet. (Click on Planning and Development.) The responses are well worth reading. All but three comments are posted. Those three were deemed too disrespectful to publish. (By the way, that .57 of 1% rate of disrespectful activity pretty much matches my experience at Camosun. Respectful work place trainers take note.)

From all the comments six questions were distilled to form

the basis for discussion at group sessions. Just over 100 employees took part in a session. We had about four minutes to discuss each question, and from the transcription of recommendations that arose from these discussions, the second People Plan survey was developed and distributed to all employees.

I hope this process will be effective, but I worry that the messages that were clear and strong in the original 520+ responses may have become faint and distorted through the process of clustering and distillation. I recall the “telephone game” we played as kids. An original message passed from mouth to ear to mouth to hear along a line of children came out hardly recognizable at the end. “Lizzy likes sauerkraut better than cauliflower,” could end up as, “Dizzie cakes left butter on the collie’s collar,” leaving a lot of children wondering what dizzy cakes were and where they could get one.

For that reason, I recommend careful reading of the original responses. They reveal a lot about the anxieties and aspirations of the people who work here. For the benefit of those who choose not to go to the original source, I offer my synthesis below. However, a finger pointing at the moon is not the moon. Much is lost in my encapsulation.

The strongest message I hear from the responses is that people want to work in an atmosphere of cohesion and collaboration. They --okay, we-- want to be trusted and want to be able to trust each other. Many want the opportunity to develop skills and knowledge that would qualify them for promotion or for assignments that better fit their interests. The idea of more promotion from within gained a lot of support as did the desire for better early training and orientation for new employees and new chairs. Also, many term faculty members and CUPE staff feel themselves to be sometimes treated as second-class employees. Some term faculty members feel they’re on thin ice in relation to job security and desirable assignments, not only with the administration but also with their faculty colleagues. Of course, many respondents took on the government and to an extent the administration for shaky financial support. The expenditure for the People Plan took some hits.

Ironically, at this time of multifarious points and modes of communication, a significant number of responses arise from an experience of isolation. People feel cut off from currents at the college that do not flow through their own department or work site. I sense that many of us feel we’re missing a lot that we could gain from each other. Possibly in this spirit, one person seeks to revive “the Camosun Way.”

“The Camosun Way” used to be a common expression. Like any way of being or culture --like aspects of Indigenous ways (acknowledge and honour all connections?); like “the system” that enabled the San Antonio Spurs to become NBA champions (share responsibility and trust each other);-- it is difficult to define but not to recognize, the Camosun Way was characterized by open doors and open minds, by permeable boundaries, patience, and optimism, and by a determination to not allow roles to obscure persons. Maybe reviving the Camosun Way would help meet some of the yearnings expressed in the 520 survey responses.

If my synthesis touches on the truth, it strikes me how much of what we are seeking, we can do with and for each other even though we may not be able to breach the government’s fortress for a while.

Like children searching for dandy shells all over the beach (I am writing from Cape Cod), we can be on the lookout for good ideas from all sources. We can seek out the voices of term faculty members and support staff (and of course, students) and ensure that the weight these ideas carry is tied to their merit, not their source. We can make sure that faculty assignments are based on expertise, not on seniority, and we can reach out to new employees at all levels and ask what we can do to help them develop a sense of belonging at the college. Whoever wishes can form cohorts of employees from various parts of the college and arrange meetings or social events as opportunities to learn from each other.

Let the planners plan. They may come up with something good.

In the meantime, if there is something you think is worth doing, try to do it and to find others to do it with you.