

Private university earns top grades from students

By Michelle Martin

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Controversy and conflict plagued the opening of Victoria's University Canada West - the private university project headed by former University of Victoria president David Strong. Some questioned the grade entry point of 65 per cent and the relatively high tuition fees, while others questioned the new school's status as a university. But students are singing a song of a more upbeat tune as its first year of classes comes to a close.

"You're not just a number here," said 22-year-old Victoria native Anna Nadolski, from the university's lobby in the building that once housed Blanshard school.

When surveying her options last year, the undergraduate student decided to ditch the public system after stints at Camosun College and Mount Royal University in Calgary.

The sometimes-timid Nadolski was attracted to the UCW's small class sizes - capped at 50 students - and the one-on-one supports.

"We have a lot of resources available," she said, adding she really loved the learning coaches that go above and beyond the call of duty.

She laughed as she recapped the weekend prior, when she was tutored aside the soccer field where her learning coach's son was playing.

To fellow bachelor of commerce student Zack Massingham, UCW's main attraction was its fast-tracked path through post-secondary into the workforce.

He "fell in love with the idea" after some research, despite the additional upfront costs - the flat-rate of \$1,000 a course more than doubles the per-course cost at UVic, for example.

He plans to plow through his BCom program in less than three years than move onto to UCW's masters of business administration program, which he could graduate from after only three-and-a-half years of school if he maintains the pace of five courses a quarter.

"I looked at it that I'm coming out in half the time," said Massingham, who figures more time in the workforce means he'll actually come out ahead of the game financially.

Massingham, like Nadolski, had attended Camosun College before and became frustrated with the public system.

"I never got any of my courses at Camosun," he said. "It really ticked me off."

Massingham and Nadolaski are just two of 200 students who attended the school in its premiere year.

About 65 per cent of UCW's students are from Victoria, explained Gerry La Belle, vice-president of recruitment and student services.

About 20 per cent of all students are in the MBA program and 40 per cent are pursuing their choice of 16 undergraduate degrees in the faculty of arts and science or the faculty of business and management.

The remaining 40 per cent are enrolled in academies of language, design, business, film and animation.

While international students - many in the academy of language - only make up 35 per cent of the student population, this number is expected to increase over the next few years.

La Belle spearheaded an aggressive trade show recruitment campaign overseas this year. In the future, UCW will enrol more students from India, Japan, Korea and China, he said.

"It's a great deal for international students," he said, noting that at UCW they pay the same tuition fees as domestic students. In addition, the public sector is geared toward locals and can only accommodate a small percentage of internationals.

For this reason, he doesn't see UCW competing with local colleges and universities for international students, but rather against schools in Australia, U.S. and the U.K.

One of the main reasons Japanese language student Yuriko Sugawara chose UCW was for the city it's in.

"It's such a nice city," she said. "I met nice people here."

Along with overseas recruitment, partnerships are key to the UCW's business plan, said La Belle, noting that UCW merged with the established Victoria College of Art last month.

"We expect to have rapid growth in the first three years." he said.