

## OPEN LETTER TO BCIT ON STUDENT CONCERNS ABOUT RETURNING TO CAMPUS

Dear BCIT Leadership Team and the Board of Governors,

As the elected President of the BCIT Student Association, I am writing regarding student health, safety, and security concerns around COVID-19 as they relate to the scheduled return to campus on January 10th, 2022. Due to the widespread Omicron variant, we feel that our collective well-being is in jeopardy and would be further compromised should classes return to campus so soon. We are asking that BCIT delay the return until January 24th, 2022, or later.

In the past 24 hours, I have received more communication from students than in the rest of my tenure combined, pleading for a delayed return to in person learning. Additionally, several student-led petitions with thousands of signatures have circulated making the same request. While we have not heard from every student personally and know very well that the range of circumstances and perspectives that represent the BCIT community is vast, the abundance of concern is too immense to ignore.

We are confused by BCIT's announcement Wednesday evening to not delay the return further and are disheartened that BCIT has not followed precautions like those of other post-secondary schools in the province (UBC, SFU, Emily Carr, and UVIC). Our work at the Student Association gives us direct insight into the daily problems students face. Ramifications exist when students fall ill and fall behind, or when multiple members of our cohorts are missing due to self-isolation, all the while being concerned with the increased and unnecessary risk of exposure for vulnerable family members and ourselves.

One student's appeal was that they are frustrated and disappointed that they will now be the "weak link" in the chain of protection that their family has built due to the raging pandemic and rise of the Omicron variant. Others have shared they are exploring alternative options due to the in person learning demand and are contemplating leaving their programs and enrolling in similar courses at other institutions offering online study. Still more are considering deferring the semester.

Many of us are feeling anxious about going back to in person learning next week. We feel it is much too soon given the current number of cases (39,337 in BC as of January 6th) and the delay in the roll-out of booster shots which are now seen as essential to fighting this virus. These feelings go beyond the aspect of in person learning, as many of us also require using public transit to attend courses in person.

While we understand that many BCIT programs involve hands-on learning, many do not require this level of in person interaction. BCIT has already proven its ability to successfully deliver online learning and is surely capable of continuing to do so. We also recognize that the Provincial Health Office and the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Training have not restricted BCIT from inviting students to return to campus, but we believe that the reasoning is ample for BCIT to do more.

BCIT students are looking to their Institute's leadership to go beyond the bare minimum. This is an opportunity to show us that we are important to the community.

Sincerely,



Kevin Adlparvar  
President, BCIT Student Association

cc:

Jennifer Figner, Chair, BCIT Education Council  
Honourable Anne Kang, Minister of Advanced Education and Skills Training  
Colin Jones, President, BCIT Faculty and Staff Association