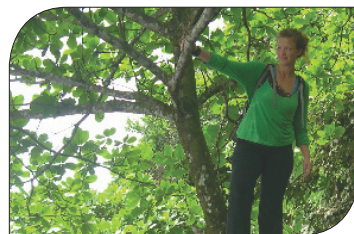


IN THE NAME OF GOOD FOOD

Two student groups petition the college for healthy and ethical foods on campus.

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CAMOSUN TO CAMEROON

An internship in an African community forest gives student an unforgettable experience.

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Camosun president stands her ground after comments about students

RYAN SPEDDING
STAFF WRITER

“The students that come to [Camosun], initially, they’re not the best and not the brightest in terms of their academic standing.”

Words said by Camosun College President Liz Ashton during a speech to faculty and staff on Feb. 15 while students were at home studying during the second day of their two-day reading break.

Words that are now causing quite a stir around campus.

Ashton’s ad-libbed speech was part of the college’s Connections Day and was given to faculty and staff as a celebration of their work. During this portion of the speech Ashton was trying to convey her appreciation to college staff, because last year 32 out of 85 Irving K. Barber scholarships went to Camosun students. The scholarships are awarded to students planning to transfer to university that excel at the college level.

“Camosun students are not coming out of high school as the highest qualified academic students. That’s a reality; it’s not me in any way putting students down.”

LIZ ASHTON
CAMOSUN PRESIDENT

“I was talking with passion and commitment, I wasn’t talking from notes,” says Ashton. “I mean, it wasn’t a prepared speech, it’s not supposed to be a prepared speech, it’s me talking from the heart to people that I believe need to be very proud.”

Although the speech was not intended to be derogatory towards students, some faculty and staff were concerned over Ashton’s comments.

Associate Director of Enrollment Services Nicole Greengoe was in attendance and confirms she heard these concerns from her colleagues after the speech, but she also says she heard positive reaction.

“It’s important to realize that

no matter what Liz said, or how she said it, there will be those who were very happy, somewhat happy, or somewhat displeased or offended. That can’t be helped,” says Greengoe.

President of Camosun CUPE local 2081, Jerry Oetting, wasn’t at Connection’s Day, but faculty and CUPE support staff have approached him to convey their concerns over Ashton’s comments.

“From what I’ve heard, there needs to be an explanation brought forward of what president Ashton was trying to say,” says Oetting. “[Students] are the customers [of Camosun]. This is the store of education. To use these words to describe our customers just isn’t done.”

Ashton, who later went on to say a big reason why students get these scholarships is because of the work of college staff, hasn’t heard of any of these concerns directly from faculty, staff, or students and stands by her comments.

“It’s reality, let’s face it, most students coming out of high school that are in the top two or three percent of high school students academically go to UBC, Stanford, MIT, Queen’s, the University of Toronto. . .” says Ashton. “Camosun students are not coming out of high school as the highest qualified academic students. That’s a reality; it’s not me in any way putting students down.”

Susan Johnston, president of the Camosun College Faculty Association, believes many factors determine which postsecondary education institute students attend.

“Many middle-class families ensure that their children are academically prepared through choice of schooling, tutoring, and a culture of academic learning that starts at birth. This training means that, although those students are no brighter than any other student, they tend to choose university over college,” says Johnston. “Camosun does attract bright students and they may well feel that the president did not accurately portray them in her speech to faculty and staff.”

Students who were shown by Nexus the portion of Ashton’s speech in question have had a negative reaction.

Michelle Curry, one of the 32 recipients of an Irving K. Barber scholarship and current UVic stu-

“Camosun does attract bright students and they may well feel that the president did not accurately portray them in her speech to faculty and staff.”

SUSAN JOHNSTON
CAMOSUN FACULTY ASSOCIATION

dent, was blown away.

“I have been a straight A student since pretty much the day I started getting letter grades,” says Curry. “I would think that the smarter students would go to Camosun, because it’s half the price of any university and you actually get an education . . . from people that can teach, and don’t just have a PhD.”

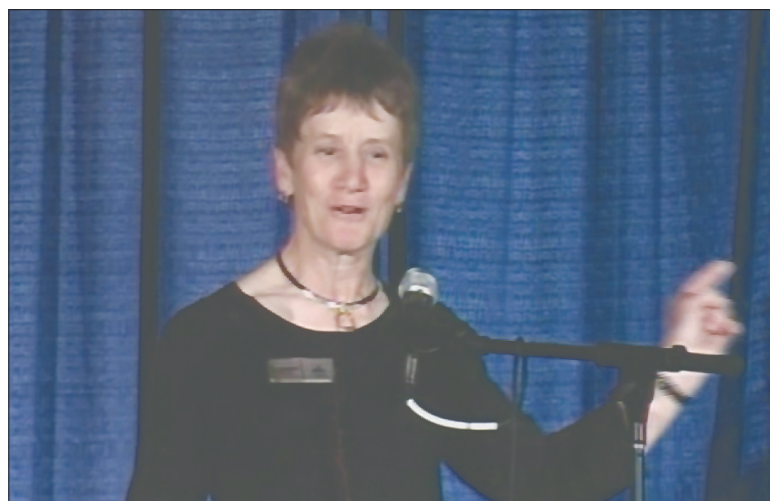
Melissa Munger, another Irving K. Barber scholarship recipient last year, says Ashton’s comments are disrespectful towards the scholarship.

“This award requires that students have a high academic standing,” says Munger, “and that they demonstrate service to their school or community. By stating Camosun College students are second rate, Liz Ashton has said that Dr. Barber is rewarding incompetent students that couldn’t make it to university in their first attempt.”

Matthew de Groot, external executive of the Camosun College Student Society, admits Ashton’s comments were a poor choice of words, but says it’s important to understand the context of the statements.

“I don’t believe Liz Ashton was trying to highlight the intelligence, or lack of, of Camosun students,” says de Groot. “Rather, I believe that Liz was addressing her audience, the faculty and staff, to spotlight their hard work and dedication to Camosun students.”

In response to negative reaction from former and current Camosun students, Ashton says, “I don’t believe it’s justified at all. It was never meant in that context and if students have chosen to take that from it, as I say, it was not a speech to students and they weren’t present there. All they got is a transcription of something I said.”



Here’s what Ashton said What do you think?

Camosun College President Dr. Liz Ashton winged a passionate speech at this year’s Connections Day event held on Feb. 15. The speech outlined the hard work of college faculty and staff, but included comments about Camosun students that have raised some concern. Connections Day is a staff function and students do not attend, but soon after the meeting Nexus started hearing a groundswell of reaction to Ashton’s speech from faculty and staff. Below is a reprint of the portion of Ashton’s speech in question.

“ I know there’s been a fair amount of publicity around the fact that 32 out of the 85 Irving K. Barber Scholarships that are awarded to students across the province that transfer from colleges to universities went to Camosun College students. So that’s close to 40 percent of the scholarships available, and yet there are 17 institutions in the province whose students can apply for those. And I think it’s symbolic in two ways. First of all, I think it’s symbolic of the quality of the teaching that goes on at Camosun College and the fact that the students that come to us, initially, they’re not the best and not the brightest in terms of their academic standing. But I think what we believe in as a college is the fact that we can truly make a difference, and we can help these students develop their true potential, and they come here and they flourish. And part of it, as I say, or a large part of it, is the quality of our teaching faculty and the work that they do, but also the support staff and the care and the nurturing that they provide in order to help our students get where they need to go. And I think the I.K. Barber Scholarships are particularly noteworthy in that the fact that our financial aid people literally go through records of students to find out any student that’s eligible in the institution to apply for these scholarships—they contact them, they get them in, they get them to submit the forms, and they hound them until they do it. And that’s part of the reason; I mean, we’d like to say it’s only because we have the brightest students in the world that we receive so many of those scholarships, but a lot of it is the incredible work of our student services staff that just go after these scholarships because they believe in what it is we do here. [Applause]

Nexus would like to know how you feel about Ashton’s comments. Please e-mail us at nexus@nexusnewspaper.com