

Reviews / Comptes rendus

Transformations: A History of UBC Continuing Studies

By Scott McLean and Eric Damer
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Transformations: A History of UBC Continuing Studies explores not only the financial and political highs and lows of the service unit that has gone by the names of University Extension, Extra-Sessional Studies, and Continuing Education as well as UBC Continuing Studies but also it immerses the reader in the changes sweeping across a field of study called adult education. *Transformations* also nicely combines an exploration of emerging adult education theoretical perspectives with the on-the-ground developments in UBC Continuing Studies.

The purpose of the book is to document the emergence and evolution of the continuing education unit of the university, but the result of the authors' research is that the reader has a better understanding of UBC's engagement with the community and with those whom we call "non-traditional" students.

The book is divided into 10 chapters and four parts. The "parts" cover developments within or affecting the evolution of continuing studies within a specific span of time.

It is easy to be nostalgic about the past. Those of us who have worked in and around continuing education for decades can remember when the university seemed to be a gentler place and when there was money for all departments, even continuing education. *Transformations* shows the reader UBC at its birth in 1908 and the beginnings of the Department of University Extension in 1917–1918 through agricultural extension, a program created to meet the needs of returning veterans from the World War I. In its development of agricultural programs, UBC was following the example of older universities such as the University of Saskatchewan, but the need to "do something" with returning veterans has been a specific and continual motivator of continuing education and adult education in North America.

During the early period of university extension, UBC really held a dual role in the community. Vancouver and the lower mainland were still very much in a pioneer stage in the early twentieth century so there were few amenities for citizens: there was an absence of services and information related to mental health, social justice, parental guidance, arts and culture. UBC extension programs often filled this gap.

The continuing education visionaries at UBC teamed up from time to time with like-minded staff at the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, the Farm Radio Forum, and the

National Film Board to create programs that satisfied people's required and desired knowledge of a wide range of professional skills, cultural knowledge, and resource industry training.

As time moved on and UBC grew into the large, research-driven university it is today, university extension was erased and replaced by the Centre for Continuing Education in 1970. The authors write:

Universities in North America generally used the term "extension" prior to the 1960s, while they have tended to use the term "continuing education" since the 1970s. These terms are not synonymous. Extension connotes teaching, research, and service practices that connect university faculty members with people who are not in attendance on campus as full-time students. Continuing education connotes the delivery of educational programs to people having already obtained a certain level of education. (p. 113)

Transformations traces the fortunes of the Centre for Continuing Education, which rise and fall with each successive president's interest in and understanding of the role of the unit. They also rise and fall with the amount of the provincial grants to higher education. For instance, when times became extremely lean in the 1970s and 1980s, despite the active support for the centre by then-president Douglas Kenny, the operating budget for the centre did not grow and the its mandate became one of self-sufficiency, due to pressure from a decreased provincial grant.

The book ably explores the process of growth, then retrenchment, then growth as the decades wash in waves over a part of the university that is mandated to exist by the provincial government. While very little is mentioned regarding the university's obligation to have a unit such as UBC Continuing Studies, it is a feature of the higher education landscape in British Columbia. How universities support or configure this department is not legislated, but the existence of a continuing studies department is legislated. *Transformations* shows how, over time, the landscape changed for this unit, which the university embraced with a cold hug. This is best captured within the quote of an "observer" who described "the response of the university administration as 'all possible assistance short of actual help'" (p. 118).

As with many universities in Canada, UBC Continuing Studies and all of its past incarnations have tied their programming to the academic faculties of the university. The practice of gaining faculty support for non-credit programs can sometimes be difficult and, as noted in *Transformations*, an external review of the department in 1997 suggested that, "UBC seemed to require excessive amounts of consultation with faculties, which had the power to commandeer successful UBC Continuing Studies programs" (p. 129). On the other hand, the consultation process with faculties and the co-development of some programs reminds faculty that continuing studies exists and plays an important role in the universities' reach within the community.

The authors, determined to be optimistic, finally write about the lives that have been changed by courses and programs offered by UBC Continuing Studies. For those of us who work in the field, that is our refuge when the politics and bureaucracy seem overwhelming. Continuing education is one of the most appreciated departments of the university. Students are, of course, happy to finish degrees that they hope will launch them onto a career path and their future lives; but students who take continuing education courses deeply appreciate the opportunity to learn—sometimes for its own sake and often for career change or advancement. Whatever the reason, the experience affects them profoundly.

Transformations: A History of UBC Continuing Studies is not merely a chronology of events at UBC. The reader is reminded of programing and reasons for the development of certain kinds of programs developed for adults at crucial points in the development of this region of the country. It also reminds us of some of the important figures in the development of adult education in Canada and the role UBC played in that development. It is a "must-read" for anyone who calls him- or herself an adult educator.

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