



[Talking Technology](#) [UBC-OUC merger welcomed](#)

By Steve Burns, Capital News contributor

I have been following from a distance the full status university debate for some time and the differing points of view on what should happen with post-secondary education in the Okanagan.

Let me provide you with my perspective on the issue.

I know that the business case for having additional post-secondary education funding in the Okanagan is obvious.

I think we are beyond whether or not there are merits to full university status in the Okanagan. From my perspective, the real debate is which institution should deliver on this mandate – OUC or UBC?

Let me be crystal clear on where I stand on this issue. I have nothing against OUC; I think that given their mandate they have done a great job.

However, I feel the compelling need to get off the fence, stop hiding behind principles and tell you that I am 100 per cent in favour of UBC coming to the Okanagan.

There are four main reasons for my support of having UBC in the Okanagan.

First, from a technology perspective the only way to grow a significant technology community is to have a world-renowned research based university right in your own backyard.

We have seen the reports that state that our post-secondary and research funding is sadly lacking—I think we all agree on that point.

Examine all of the “tech-centers” worldwide and you will see that an internationally recognized research university is a must.

In fact, research studies show that we simply cannot grow a technology community without one.

I feel that UBC has a recognized international reputation. The Okanagan could leverage this reputation to grow our existing technology company's further, to assist in attracting new technology companies and in attracting new venture capital investment here.

UBC's brand recognition will assist the Okanagan in further leveraging the over \$164 million in federal research awards that UBC receives.

This recognition will help us to grow the right type of jobs and the right type of opportunities that the technology community requires.

Second, UBC has proven itself in the area of commercializing technologies, which is another important success ingredient to growing a significant technology economy. Through UBC's very successful University-Industry Liaison Office (www.uilo.ubc.ca), UBC boasts the highest number of spin-off companies of any university in Canada.

Applied research that involves a partnership between the institution, the provincial and federal governments and the private sector is a core competence of UBC. We need to leverage UBC's commercialization competence.

Third, I want to make it easier for technology companies to help attract and retain technology employees.

While the Okanagan lifestyle is second to none, in a globally competitive technology marketplace, we need to be able to offer more to potential technology employees than just sunshine and a balanced life.

Many potential recruits that I talk to are confused by the term university college as British Columbia is the only province with a university college system.

Consider these other concerns they have:

- Do you have a research based university? Will I be able to continue my commitment to ongoing research and education through top quality university courses or through a masters or PhD program?
- If I move my family to the Okanagan, what similar companies are there that I could work at if this job doesn't work out?
- Where can my spouse find employment? What are the private and public educational facilities like for our children? How easy will it be for our family to integrate into the community? Is the Okanagan a "welcoming" place?
- What does it really cost to live in the Okanagan versus where I am moving from? How do I compare this ahead of time?

While having UBC Okanagan will not answer all of their questions, it provides instant credibility in the recruitment effort.

Fourth, having UBC Okanagan will change the landscape of education in the Okanagan forever.

For example, secondary school students will likely now have to compete with other students for admission into UBC.

In my mind, this will only raise the bar for post-secondary education in our valley and keep students motivated to work hard to meet the higher admission standards of UBC.

In addition, UBC students in the Okanagan will likely not have to move away to further their education.

I admit that there are many uncertainties with the UBC model.

For example, has the provincial government already decided to put UBC in place?

If so, what does the detailed implementation model and timeframe look like?

Will we truly have fair local representation and direction with how UBC Okanagan operates?

What will happen to access to post-secondary education in the Okanagan?

What will happen with existing OUC programs, administration, professors and students and will everyone be treated fairly during the transition?

What will happen to the "college" aspect of OUC?

Despite those uncertainties, I still think that it is time that the Okanagan embrace the idea of UBC Okanagan as the benefits are enormous.

Having UBC Okanagan will radically change our community, significantly grow our economy and position us very well in a globally competitive technology marketplace.

From my perspective, the upside is too great for me to sit on the fence any longer—I welcome UBC Okanagan with arms wide open!

Steve Burns, CA, CMC, CFP, is the president and CEO of Burns Innovation Group Inc. (www.burnsinnovation.com) and Steve Burns Inc. Chartered Accountant (www.steveburns.ca), which provide consulting and accounting services to entrepreneurs. You can reach Steve at 763-4716 or via e-mail at:

steve@burnsinnovation.com

steve@steveburns.ca.