

# Fanshawe's plan to invest in Saudi Arabia a concern: union

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A commitment by three Ontario colleges, including Fanshawe, to invest millions of dollars in a college in Medina, Saudi Arabia, is being questioned by OPSEU.

According to a report, Fanshawe College, Mohawk College and Seneca College are planning an investment of \$2.5 million each in a five-year deal.

Fanshawe's Board of Governors apparently approved the venture in April and the goal is set to open the school in September 2015.

But Scott Porter, vice president of Fanshawe College says it isn't a done deal, "We haven't yet committed ourselves to the project...There's all kinds of risks with the project."

Risks could include questionable enrollment numbers, under-prepared students, difficulties in finding the right staff, cost and the financial implications for a taxpayer-funded school.

In a statement, Warren 'Smokey' Thomas, president of the Ontario Public Service Employees Union said "This is a questionable and risky international venture, and we want to know why it is being pushed through in such a hurry...It is about taking money out of the Ontario colleges system, and placing bets on profiting from our colleges' good reputations."

OPSEU is calling for more careful consideration before a decision is made and says there are concerns about the impact the decision could have on the reputation of Ontario's colleges.

Darryl Bedford of OPSEU Local 110 says "The thing about an Ontario college diploma is the value in it has been the interaction with the faculty and the support staff. It's not just a piece of paper with a logo on it."

He would like to see the school reinvest at home, but Porter says that has always been what Fanshawe does, "We are constantly investing in our students on this campus. That's not changing at all."

Fanshawe says in the current climate of government cost cutting, it is trying to find new revenue sources and a foreign campus is one of the areas it is exploring.

It would be the first time an Ontario college has actually operated in the Middle East, although Fanshawe curriculum is being taught in several countries through affiliated schools.

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