

I regret that I will not be in attendance at the January Senate, as I will be away on an international student recruitment and partnership-building initiative. The provost will be happy to answer questions about executive priorities.

ENROLMENT AND ADMISSIONS UPDATE (based on IPE data and analysis) — As TRU moves into 2025, it is clear that we continue to navigate a challenging enrolment environment, almost entirely caused by the negative impacts of federal government changes to immigration targets and policies.

As I have said other times in recent months, TRU is not alone in this regard. Many universities face enrolment challenges and budget constraints because of the changing post-secondary landscape in international education. The post-secondary sector can expect further declines in international enrolment for a few more years before proactive responses, such as new programs and enhanced recruitment, can have a substantial impact.

It should be noted, however, that even though international enrolment has declined, we continue to attract significant numbers of international students to study here, largely due to our excellent reputation and well-recognized service delivery model. It must also be noted that there are encouraging signs of growth and opportunity in domestic enrolment as efforts to improve domestic growth begin to have an effect.

Overall, for 2025, TRU anticipates serving approximately 29,000 students across all locations and delivery modes, which includes students enrolled in traditional on-campus programs in Kamloops and Williams Lake, as well as those participating in Open Learning and blended delivery models.

At this point (as of Dec. 31), institutional enrolment for the 2024-25 fiscal year is up 2%, and the number of learners is up 7% compared to last year. This includes a 16% increase in Open Learning enrolments, offset by a 3% decline in on-campus activity. Total applications across all program areas for Fall 2025 (combining domestic and international figures) are down 4 per cent, and total admissions are down 13 per cent. On-campus course registrations for Winter 2025 (Kamloops and Williams Lake) are 7 per cent lower than last year because of international declines.

The following provide more specific insights:

DOMESTIC ENROLMENT — For Winter 2025, domestic enrolments increased by 3 per cent in headcount and 4 per cent in course registrations, indicating resilience in local demand for TRU programs.

To date, domestic applications for Fall 2025 have increased by 34 per cent, and admissions have also surged by 51 per cent. This growth reflects the success of strategic recruitment efforts, such as removing application fees for domestic students and simplifying application processes. Although these data are positive, converting applicants to registrants will require close monitoring when course registration opens in June 2025.

INTERNATIONAL ENROLMENT — As expected, international enrolments and applications have faced significant declines, driven by policy changes from Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) and shifting perceptions of Canada as a study destination. For Winter 2025, international course registrations are down 18 per cent, reflecting a 12 per cent drop in continuing international students and a 59 per cent decline in new registrants.

Similarly, Fall 2025 international applications and admissions have both decreased by approximately 64 per cent. First-time applications are a lead indicator. As this 64 per cent decline works its way through program years, TRU's total international enrolment (all years) could be expected to decline by a similar percentage over the next four years, absent initiatives that generate new enrolments.

STRATEGIES FOR GROWTH/STABILITY — TRU is taking action to address enrolment challenges and support growth. We are developing new programs in high-demand fields such as STEM, early childhood education, and healthcare to attract a broader range of students.

Recruitment efforts are being intensified domestically and internationally, supported by new strategies and strengthened partnerships. Additionally, TRU is enhancing student support services to assist students' academic and personal successes to improve retention and long-term enrolment stability.

NEW WILDFIRE PROGRAMS — Six programs in wildfire science and communication — five certificates and a diploma — have been approved by TRU's Senate and the Board of Governors and completed a 30-day public feedback process. It's another key milestone for TRU and the BC Wildfire Service (BCWS) in our shared vision for increased educational opportunities in wildfire studies.

Three of these certificates, each a semester in length and equal to nine credits, are expected to start at TRU in September 2025:

- the Wildfire Science Certificate (Faculty of Science)
- the Sociocultural Dynamics of Wildfire Certificate (Faculty of Adventure, Culinary Arts and Tourism)
- the Wildfire Communications and Media Certificate (Faculty of Arts)

The Wildfire Science and Sociocultural Dynamics of Wildfire certificates also form part of the first year of a Wildfire Studies Diploma within the Faculty of Arts. The interdisciplinary certificate

programs were developed in consultation with community partners and include courses in the sciences and arts.

Two other approved certificates — Wildfire Leadership and Emergency Communications — are anticipated to start in 2026, along with the diploma in wildfire studies. These programs mark the university's first steps toward an independent and distinct wildfire studies discipline, which will be a first in Canada.

SCHOOL OF NURSING LAB ACHIEVES CONDITIONAL ENDORSEMENT — The School of Nursing has received conditional endorsement for its simulation program from the International Nursing Association for Clinical Simulation and Learning (INACSL). This recognition highlights TRU's commitment to excellence in simulation-based nursing education.

The endorsement confirms that our program meets INACSL's rigorous Healthcare Simulation Standards of Best Practice, which include pre-briefing, debriefing, facilitation, and professional integrity. It reflects our focus on preparing students to tackle real-world healthcare challenges through transformative learning experiences.

Key to this achievement is our Simulation-Based Learning Centre (SBLC), which replicates real healthcare environments, such as hospital wards and home-care settings. Resources like the Dr. Sherman Jen High-Fidelity Simulation Centre, the Stollery Foundation Innovation Lab, and the Home Visit Lab offer immersive scenarios and advanced video technology for evaluation and debriefing.

This endorsement offers several benefits:

- Ensures consistent application of best practices in simulation education
- Recognizes a range of simulation experiences, including low- to high-fidelity, virtual reality, and distance learning
- Promotes positive change through evidence-based practices and research
- Encourages ongoing evaluation and improvement of simulation programs
- Enhances health-care education and patient safety through high-quality simulation practices

ARTS FACULTY MEMBERS AWARDED SIGNIFICANT GRANTS — Congratulations to Arts political scientists Rob Hanlon and Saira Bano for their work with the [Canada and the Asia Pacific Policy Project](#) that secured them two grants never before awarded at TRU.

Saira and Rob were awarded their first grant of \$49,000 from the Department of National Defence (DND) under the [Mobilizing Insights in Defence and Security](#) (MINDS) initiative. This grant funds a major security and defence conference at TRU in early April of this year.

Saira and Rob received their second grant of \$80,000 from Global Affairs Canada (GAC) through the [Indo-Pacific Regional Connectivity Envelope](#) to establish a three-year partnership between TRU and the [University of Colombo](#) in Sri Lanka.

GIFT SUPPORTS RESEARCH ON CLIMATE RESILIENCE — A \$100,000 donation will fund new research at Thompson Rivers University (TRU) that explores the role of British Columbia’s parks in climate resilience, reconciliation and Indigenous-led conservation.

The anonymous grant was awarded to Dr. Courtney Mason, TRU professor and Canada Research Chair in Rural Livelihoods and Sustainable Communities. Mason’s two-year research project, *Parks as Climate Resilience, Reconciliation and Indigenous-led Conservation*, will increase understanding of how parks can minimize risks to local ecosystems, foster socio-economic opportunities and manage climate-related environmental change.

Dr. Joel Wood is an associate professor of economics at TRU and co-lead on the project. Joining co-leads Mason and Wood on the project are a team of TRU faculty members from several faculties: Jessica Owen, natural resource science; Patrick Brouder, Kimberly Thomas-Francois and Jason Johnston, tourism; Natalie Clark, social work; and Rod McCormick, education.

An anonymous donor gave \$100,000 to support a research endeavour focused on tackling the challenges of climate change. It is the first time a philanthropic gift has been dedicated to an interdisciplinary research project at TRU.

INAUGURAL PROFESSORIAL LECTURE (IPL)— Dr. Wendy Gardner will give her IPL on Tuesday, Feb. 4. Her lecture, [The Importance of BC Grasslands: Building Our Understanding](#), will offer insights about what makes grasslands environmentally vital. Wendy was promoted to professor in Natural Resource Science in 2024. To attend the event, [RSVP](#) by Friday, Jan. 28.

NEW VICE-PROVOST TO LEAD TRU’S VISION FOR DIGITAL LEARNING AND TEACHING EXCELLENCE — Dr. Liesel Knaack has been appointed as Vice-Provost, Open Learning, Teaching and Innovation at TRU, effective May 1, 2025.

Dr. Knaack brings impressive experience in educational leadership, digital pedagogies, online and open learning innovations, making her ideal to lead TRU’s commitment to excellence in teaching and learning and digital transformation.

Dr. Knaack has an extensive background in higher education. Currently, she serves as the Director of North Island College’s Centre for Teaching and Learning Innovation, where she established a framework to enhance quality student learning through digital pedagogies, program review and quality enhancement activities, and teaching innovations.

Prior to that, she led Vancouver Island University's Centre for Innovation and Excellence in Learning for nearly a decade. She also contributed significantly to Ontario Tech University's founding and growth as Associate Professor and Program Director in the Faculty of Education. She was a co-founder of the BC Teaching and Learning Council supporting leadership of teaching and learning across BC in collaboration with BCcampus, and she is part of the BC AI Working Group which aligns with the BC Digital Learning Strategy.

Throughout her career, Dr. Knaack has demonstrated a deep commitment to academic quality, evidence-informed teaching practices, and innovative uses of educational technology. Her research activities include the design of online learning experiences, metacognitive teaching practices, open pedagogies and digital literacies. She has published and shared her insights widely and worked collaboratively across the province and nationally to enhance student learning experiences.

At a time when TRU is navigating challenges caused by declining international enrolment, making strategic investments in leadership and innovation is critical to ensuring our continued success and sustainability.

UNIVERSITIES CANADA'S SUBMISSION TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION — Universities Canada submitted to the federal Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration in December, emphasizing the critical role of international students in Canada's economic and social prosperity.

The organization expressed concern over recent federal policy changes aimed at limiting international student numbers, warning that such measures could undermine Canada's reputation as a premier destination for global talent.

Key Points in the submission:

- Economic Contributions — International students significantly benefit Canada's economy, contributing \$30.9 billion to the GDP and \$7.4 billion in tax revenue in 2022. They also help address labour shortages by providing a pipeline of young, skilled workers trained in Canadian universities.
- Policy Concerns — Recent federal policy changes intended to manage housing and immigration pressures are viewed as blunt and one-size-fits-all, leading to unintended consequences that damage Canada's global reputation and deter prospective students.
- Institutional Impacts — Universities are experiencing financial strains due to declining international enrolments, resulting in layoffs, reduced program offerings, and diminished student experiences.

Recommendations in the submission:

- Develop a Unified, Sustainable Immigration Strategy — The federal government should create a cohesive immigration strategy that aligns with Canada's economic and social goals, ensuring policies support productivity, address demographic challenges, and attract global talent.
- Modernize Canada's Immigration System — Accelerating the Digital Platform
Modernization at Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) will improve processing times, enhance data-sharing capabilities, and reduce delays, making Canada more competitive in attracting top global talent.
- Implement the Recognized Institutional Framework (RIF) — Adopting an outcomes-based, data-driven approach like the RIF can streamline study permit processing for institutions meeting high standards of support, housing, and recruitment ethics, enhancing accountability and benefiting institutions across regions.

Universities Canada urged the federal government to take decisive action to restore and enhance Canada's position as a global hub for talent, emphasizing that the global competition for skilled individuals is fierce, and Canada cannot afford to fall behind. Read the whole submission here:

[Universities Canada](#)

CONSULTATION / ENGAGEMENT — In December, I was pleased once again to host the President's Annual Holiday Social for TRU faculty and staff, which was well-attended. I was also glad to be able to meet community partners at several of their local holiday social events. In January I represented TRU at the Celebration of Life for Al Raine in Sun Peaks.

Since the last Senate meeting, my meetings with government officials have included a cordial introductory meeting with our new minister of Post-Secondary Education and Future Skills (PSEFS), Anne Kang.

I have had numerous meetings with peer universities, including an Interior Universities Research Consortium executive-team partnership meeting with the University of Northern British Columbia in Prince George, a meeting with Research Universities Council of British Columbia (RUCBC) presidents in Vancouver, and online meetings with Universities Canada including a meeting with its board of directors, of which I am a member this year.

Lastly, the President's Executive has begun meeting with faculty members in faculties or schools for casual conversations over coffee. I look forward to these chats in the coming weeks.