Diversity, equity, & inclusion ranked highest among ways of making TRU more accessible to non-traditional students

Thompson Rivers University has recently been conducting consultations, through *Envision TRU*, in an effort to inform a new vision for the institution. This process—which aims to be as transparent, inclusive, and authentic as possible—is based on the idea of shared learning and will continue to run until the end of March 2020. In this issue of the *Consultation Report*, responses from the second of these exchanges will be summarized and presented along with information regarding participation, top thoughts and key topics.

Figure 1. Participants

108 Loaded the page

96 Answered demogr. Q's

74 Explored thoughts

69 Rated thoughts

51 Shared thoughts
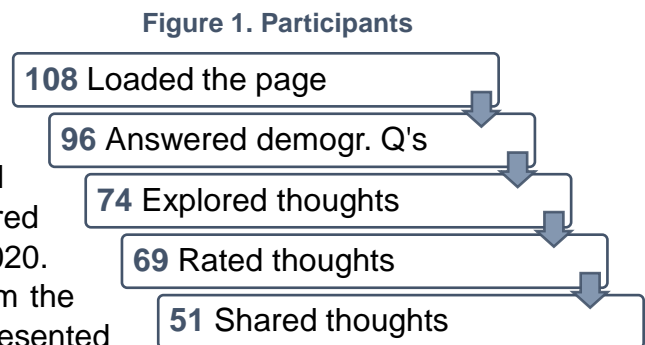
Thoughtexchange is an online platform that brings people together to anonymously share and communicate thoughts about a given subject and rank those that have already been submitted by others. This exchange (Apr 29 to May 10) asked participants:

> **How can we make TRU most accessible to non-traditional students – what barriers can we remove to ensure everyone has access to a TRU education?**

In total, 108 students, faculty, and staff participated in this event (Figure 1). Ninety-six thoughts were shared and contributed to the discussion, while 2,364 rankings provided insight into community agreement regarding those issues and ultimately formed the basis for the key topics from this exchange. The largest group of participants was staff/admin (46), followed by on-campus faculty members (25).

Top Thoughts

The Top 2 thoughts from this exchange were:

"We need to train TRU people in TRU (students, faculty and staff) about equity, implicit or unconscious bias and emotion awareness and regulation. We are not aware of most of our biases and the more privilege we have had in life, the more blind-spots we have."

"Non-traditional students need to see and hear the stories of other non-traditional students to see their challenges & struggles and their [successes]. This will help potential (…) students envision themselves as students, plan for challenges, and feel that they belong in post-secondary."

Diversity & Equity Focused

A frequency analysis (Figure 2) of terms, within the 96 thoughts that were shared, revealed that diversity and equity were a central focus of this discussion, which was also reflected in the Top 2 Thoughts.

Figure 2. Word Cloud

Diverse Perspectives

While participants generally seemed to agree that diversity and equity were the top priorities, what this looked like in practice varied by stakeholder groups. For example, top thoughts for OLFMs emphasized equity in offering transfer options and academic supports, while on-campus faculty members ranked indigenization and orientation as being higher. Top thoughts for students tended to be more specific to academic supports, marketing, and relationships with faculty, staff, and administration.

To read all of the top thoughts and explore each of the key topics from this exchange, please visit the online report, provided by Thoughtexchange.

Key Topics

Diversity & Equity

Participants generally seemed to agree that an inclusive culture, that both celebrates diverse perspectives and attracts students/employees from various backgrounds, is a priority.

"We need comprehensive programming for everyone in what inclusion is. Not just a slogan but a committment [sic]"

"We need an office of equity and inclusion, similar to those at other institutions, to help address the needs of non-traditional students"

Indigenization

TRU's commitment to increasing intercultural understanding was appreciated, and was related to each of the other key topics. Emphasis was also placed on the importance of building and/or maintaining relationships and incorporating Secwépemc language into faculty instruction.

"importance of Indigenous faculty, relationships with Indigenous supports on campus and opportunities to build relationships"

"Ensure that Secwepemc language is part of every faculty's instruction as part of Indigenizing the university. Secwepemcstin should be a foundational part of TRU"

Open Learning

Comments around TRU's Open Learning tended to focus on integration and collaboration. On-campus and OL staff working more seamlessly together to offer more blended programs that challenge the traditional 'us' and 'them' mentality.

"Why don't campus and OL staff work together more seamlessly for the benefit of non-traditional students? (…) OL already has some effective non-traditional programming in place (…)"

"Shift the culture so that OL education is not considered to be inferior to F2F courses. Our learners don't distinguish between the two (…), so why should we?"

Faculty & Staff

Employees (faculty, staff, and administrators) were all recognized as being key to institutional success. Supporting them in their support of students, as well as having flexibility in their schedules was emphasized.

"Only by providing the necessary tools and resources, will they be able to assist students who face challenges beyond what might normally be the case."

"having more flexible schedules, hiring/ supporting out of the box thinkers (…) because they move us forward & [meet] student needs"

Key Topics (cont.)

Course Scheduling	Financial Support

Course scheduling could potentially be related to financial support. Participants observed that TRU offers a great diversity of courses, but trying to schedule conflicting priorities of work and family around these classes could be a challenge.

"When a class is one hour three times a week, it is harder for non-traditional students to schedule jobs, children, etc. around these classes"

"TRU should experiment with developing mini, modularized courses that might break a regular course into 2, 3, or 4 sections or standalone courses. Jumping into a full 4-month course can be a struggle."

Financial support was discussed primarily in relation to the opportunities that TRU can provide for students (domestic and international). While there was a majority in agreement about TRU's mandate to the entire region, some participants also voiced opinions of removing confusion.

"Many students with the academic ability do not have adequate financial support. This is likely the number one barrier to access."

"A bursary and funding are just MONEY. Everyone understands that word."