

The following sections report on work underway and progress made regarding executive priorities for the current year based on TRU's vision and 10-year strategic change goals. There are also sections on Enabling Strategies and Operations and International Development/Community.

Enabling Strategies / Operations

SIGNIFICANT CHANGES TO INTERNATIONAL STUDENT EDUCATION — On January 22, the federal government announced sweeping changes to rules governing international education in Canada, including the number of study visas that will be issued to international students, as well as how those visas will be administered and distributed.

Since the federal government's announcement, TRU has continued to monitor the situation and is engaged in regular conversations with universities and the government to understand what this may mean for us.

At this time, there remains considerable uncertainty. While TRU has a strong history in international education, a stellar reputation, and attracts many international students each year, we don't yet know how the federal changes will affect students' choices about their studies.

We also don't know what our provincial allotment — the maximum number of new international students we will be able to take — will be. The province is working through this allocation, and we are patiently awaiting these results.

Given the current context, the executive and leaders across TRU are discussing what we need to do to adapt and prepare for potential changes in international programming and student demographics, including ways to sustain and grow future enrolments under these altered circumstances. Solutions will require collaborative efforts across campus, including innovations and new approaches.

It is prudent that we move ahead with caution, balancing the need to address strategic priorities while protecting the university. With this in mind, the provost and the vice-president of Administration and Finance have briefed TRU leaders about interim measures for financial planning, including pausing some capital projects and deferring some vacancy hires.

It is important to note TRU will end this current fiscal year with a significant budgetary surplus, which is the result of unfilled vacancies and strong enrollment. Bearing in mind that much is still

unknown about the impact of international student changes on future budgets (including the possibility in the short-term for deficit budgets), the senior executive team has recommended the surplus be left untouched until the future is better understood.

This chapter is the latest example of uncertainty in our operating environment, alongside several others, including pressures on public finances, changing student behaviours and demographics, stresses and mental health challenges for students, employee recruitment and retention, impacts of artificial intelligence and remote/hybrid work, and generally adverse media coverage of higher education in North America.

These are reasons for us to keep up the development of robust planning processes for TRU. A changeable environment means TRU must be ready for adaptation and innovation in our programs and services.

THE FUTURE OF THE KAMLOOPS CAMPUS — [TRU's 2013 Campus Master Plan](#) articulates the vision for the Kamloops campus and guides future investment. The plan is undergoing an update, including seeking input from the TRU community.

The reason for an update rather than an entirely new plan is that the plan's purpose and drivers (listed below) remain the same, but some changes affect the campus's future that are ideally captured in the plan.

Planned revisions include adding potential developments related to active transportation (overpass/pedestrian bridge being explored with the City of Kamloops, consideration of new location for bus loop), adding new real estate acquisitions, specifying which parcels of land have been allocated to the TRU Trust (and therefore potential locations for future Trust developments) and correcting assumptions that were made in 2013 that are no longer accurate.

Before finalizing the updates, the TRU community will be invited to provide feedback via a questionnaire and attend small focus groups. Both are expected to take place in the first half of 2024. Faculty, staff and student feedback will be incorporated into the plan and presented to the Board of Governors later this year.

TRU's Campus Master Plan's purpose and drivers:

- create a destination campus and a prominent identity
- densify the academic core
- support TRU's academic research growth
- create a University Village

MEETING WITH TRUSU REGARDING INSTITUTIONAL MESSAGES — TRU’s senior executive team recently met with TRUSU to discuss how and when TRU makes public statements regarding global events. The meeting was sought by TRUSU and proved to be informative and collegial.

The issue of when and why universities make public statements has gained more attention on campuses over the past few months. Public debate across Canada has focussed on what organizations, including universities, should say when global events dominate the news.

Since October 7, TRU has sent two messages to our community regarding the ongoing and profoundly troubling conflict in Israel and Gaza, urging people to show empathy and compassion for those who may be directly or indirectly affected and pointing people toward the support services we offer.

While some universities have developed formal policies regarding issuing public statements ([most recently, Laurentian University in Ontario](#)), TRU’s senior executive has taken the position that these issues are best decided on a case-by-case basis.

However, the senior executive team generally believes it is not TRU’s role to issue statements about external events or take related positions. Instead, we must focus on people and supporting those who need care and attention. We feel there is more value and need for compassion, empathy, and inclusion over political rhetoric when significant global crises occur.

PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE – ENSURING A VALUES-BASED WORKPLACE CULTURE — In early January, I shared the following message with the TRU community via TRU Connect:

As we settle into a new year and new school term, I’m pleased to provide a fresh update on TRU’s initiative, *Ensuring a Values-Based Workplace Culture*, primarily that we are soon ready to enter the next and most active phase of this important process — a Listening Phase in which everyone who works at TRU will have significant opportunities to participate.

The preparatory phases of the work have been successfully concluded. Mid-2023 saw targeted consultations to design key features of the process. This past fall, TRU piloted and refined the approaches that had been developed and identified so far. With this work complete, it is time to start the broader university-wide conversation on culture.

We’ve linked this process to *values* intentionally. Our desire is that our workplace culture reflects our TRU values of inclusion and diversity, community-mindedness, curiosity, and sustainability. The foundation of these is respectful relations. Culture is expressed in the interactions all of us have with one another, including words, practices, behaviours, policies, and structures. Every employee at TRU has relevant experience and something to contribute to one aspect or another of workplace culture.

Now, for some details.

With the support of external consultant Raj Dhasi, and as mentioned above, a pilot of the Listening phase is now complete. Involving a smaller group of faculty and staff in the second half of 2023, the pilot allowed us to ensure we were on the right track before taking this conversation much more broadly.

The pilot included the Bob Gaglardi School of Business and Economics, Faculty of Science, Advancement, TRU World, and some faculty from Open Learning. Of the 175 potential participants, 46 percent responded to an online survey about TRU's culture. Participants also had the opportunity to provide verbal feedback on culture in addition to providing feedback on the Listening process itself. A key learning from the pilot was the important role leaders at various levels have in this conversation – in their active involvement and communication about the initiative to their respective faculty and staff.

Our university-wide conversation will kick off with an online survey later this month, with our provost, Gillian Balfour, as executive lead for the listening phase. You'll hear more from Gillian in the coming days about the survey, other ways to participate, and timelines. I'd like to thank Gillian for taking on this important role during the most critical part of this process, gathering your voices in a respectful and safe way. I'd also like to thank vice presidents Baihua Chadwick and Brian Daly, who have worked with Raj Dhasi since spring 2022.

I'd also like to thank the faculty and staff for your patience. It has taken longer than expected to get to this stage. I'm glad to have this update for you.

Further to this message, I also recently announced that Yasmin Dean, Dean of the Faculty of Education of Social Work, will co-lead the Listening phase of this initiative. Yasmin will be an excellent addition to this important phase of the conversation. Surveys and facilitated sessions will be announced soon.

BC'S LARGEST POST-SECONDARY JOB FAIR AT TRU — Kudos to TRU's Career and Experiential Learning team following the success of the 2024 TRU Job Fair. On Thursday, Feb. 1, our post-secondary job fair saw a historic turnout of 110 employers nationwide.

Previous years have seen between 70 and 90 employers coming to make connections and talk with about 2,000 students and graduates. Year after year, TRU's annual Job Fair has created opportunities and advanced job security for employers and students.

The Career and Experiential Learning Department, faculty and staff, and 30 student volunteers made this year's unprecedented success possible. The event's main sponsors were the Chartered Professional Accountants of Canada and Cooper Equipment Rentals from Ontario.

CONSULTATION / ENGAGEMENT — TRU’s Government Relations program has been active through the past several weeks, with visits to Ottawa and Victoria arranged for VP University Relations Brian Daly and/or I to meet with senior leaders from both provincial and federal governments.

We have also been working closely with RUCBC, CiCAN, and Universities Canada as these groups lobby governments on behalf of PSIs, especially regarding the changes to international student policies and potential impacts.

I was also pleased to attend an announcement at TRU on January 25, when Teck Highland Valley Copper announced significant support for TRU research. Details of the announcement are provided further in this report.

Lastly, I would like to highlight the following opinion piece, which was published on February 14, regarding the potential impacts of federal changes to international education:

<https://www.castanet.net/news/Opinion/472205/Stigma-from-bad-actors-in-international-education-could-have-lasting-impact>

AGPI REPORT ON ANTI-SEMITISM FOR 2024 — The recently released 2024 Canadian Universities Antisemitism Report, prepared by the Abraham Global Peace Initiative, indicates there were no significant reports of campus antisemitism at TRU, leading to an overall grade of ‘A’ for our institution. According to the report, this reflects “a positive environment, showcasing a commitment to fostering a safe and inclusive learning environment for all students.”

The report reveals that across Canada, five institutions received a failing grade for their handling of antisemitism. This underscores the varying degrees of responsiveness and commitment among universities to addressing such issues. The report serves as a call to action for all institutions to ensure their policies and practices provide a safe and inclusive environment for all students.

Eliminating Achievement Gaps

STRATEGIC ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT — Overall applications and admissions to TRU are lower than last year, with domestic figures up slightly and international numbers down, data from IPE reveal.

As of February 12, total applications to TRU are lower than the previous year's figures. Specifically, domestic applications have increased by 2% (from 2,503 to 2,544), and domestic admissions have risen by 1% (from 1,263 to 1,279). In contrast, international applications have dropped by 40% (from 3,812 to 2,276), and international admissions have decreased by 36% (from 2,464 to 1,572).

This decline in international figures is attributed to deliberate institutional measures to reduce international student numbers and recent adjustments in study permit processing by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC).

China is now the leading source of international applications, with a 3% increase over last year, surpassing India, which has experienced a 76% decrease in applications and fallen to fourth place, behind Iran and Nigeria.

International admissions have decreased across nearly all major source countries except for Nepal and Ghana, which have seen increases of 145% and 8%, respectively. The top three countries for admissions — Iran, Nigeria, and India — each contribute around 15% to the total international admissions, showing a shift towards a more diversified international student body compared to last year when India dominated the admissions statistics.

ANNUAL REPORT FROM STUDENT DEVELOPMENT ON SERVICES — TRU demonstrates a strong commitment to student support through a comprehensive and holistic approach that contributes to the well-being and success of students.

The [2022-2023 annual report from the Faculty of Student Development \(FSD\)](#) underlines a range of initiatives that cater to various aspects of student life, from academic advising and counselling to diversity and equity, health and wellness, and career and experiential learning.

TRU's strategy is noteworthy for its emphasis on inclusivity, accessibility, and mental health. Programs like Consent Café and the Berry Walk showcase innovative methods to educate and engage students in critical conversations about consent, sexualized violence prevention, and Indigenous land stewardship. The report also highlights the Back to School BBQ and the Spring Convocation, which foster community and celebrate student achievements.

The academic support services, including the Writing Centre and Supplemental Learning, are tailored to enhance students' learning experiences, ensuring they have the tools to succeed academically. Additionally, TRU's Health & Wellness initiatives, such as the keep.meSAFE program demonstrates an understanding of the importance of mental health support in academic environments.

This comprehensive support system nurtures a conducive learning environment. It recognizes the diverse needs of the student body, providing tailored support that spans academic, emotional, and professional development.

Honouring Truth, Reconciliation, and Rights

SECWEPemCTSÍN LANGUAGE SERIES AVAILABLE TO HELP PEOPLE LEARN — TRU’s Secwepemc Cultural Advisor, Ted Gottfriedson, has been recording audio clips of Secwépemc community names and other resources to help people boost their language skills.

Those wanting to practice saying Secwépemc community names aloud can visit TRU’s [Secwépemc Communities Pronunciations page](#) to listen to audio clips of 18 communities.

Ted also provides instruction on more general aspects of the language. Listen to Ted Gottfriedson as he breaks down the [Secwepemctsín alphabet](#) in this YouTube video, one of many resources on our [Learning Secwepemctsín page](#).

Lastly, people can join Ted in person for a monthly workshop on basic greetings and phrases in Secwepemctsín. The workshops are posted on the TRU Connect events listing on Teams or OneTRU.

Leading in Community Research and Scholarship

NEW OUTDOOR THERAPY COURSE UNITES ADVENTURE AND HUMAN SERVICE — Using nature as a teaching or learning tool isn’t new. Research has shown that a therapeutic application of nature and outdoor activities helps improve mental health, quality of life and developmental outcomes in children and youth. Seeing the benefits of using outdoor therapies as a tool, two Thompson Rivers University (TRU) faculty members have joined forces to create a class that teaches those benefits.

Jay Goddard, an associate teaching professor in the School of Social Work and Human Service and a therapist and counsellor, understands the wellness benefits of the outdoors. He says research into increased anxiety in youth and young adults increasingly points to the loss of unstructured play in nature as an essential factor in what have become epidemic levels of youth anxiety and depression.

The summer offering, open to all students, will be the first iteration of an outdoor therapies course at TRU. Students will be required to register in both [HUMS 3500](#) and [ADVG 4240](#), providing an interdisciplinary approach for those interested in the theory and practice of nature-based therapies. The courses will be offered in a condensed format. Summer registration opens in March 2024.

IPL EXAMINES “AG GAG” LAWS IN CANADA — TRU Law faculty member Katie Sykes, who was appointed tripartite professor in 2023, recently highlighted the problems with “ag-gag” laws in her [Inaugural Professorial Lecture \(IPL\)](#).

Her February 13 lecture, *Ag-gag in Canada: Animal farms and the right to know*, looked at the legal gaps in the regulation of factory farming, why it's hard for us to get information about what happens on farms and whether ag-gag legislation violates Charter expression rights.

IPLs provide an opportunity for the community to meet newly appointed professors and gain an understanding of their scholarship, research and teaching.

TECK HIGHLAND VALLEY COPPER DONATES \$575K TOWARD RESEARCH ON ECOSYSTEM RECLAMATION — Teck Highland Valley Copper has given \$575,000 to support industry-leading research on ecosystem reclamation headed by Lauchlan Fraser at TRU.

Fraser is an NSERC Industrial Research Chair and expert in grassland and wetland ecology whose research focuses on understanding BC Interior ecosystems so they can be quickly restored after natural environmental disturbances and resource extraction.

Restoring complex ecosystems requires coordination between government, academia, industry and Indigenous groups. Fraser and his team of researchers from TRU's Centre for Ecosystem Reclamation, a leader in restoration management that informs industry strategies for planning, implementing, and managing ecosystem reclamation projects.

Fraser is working with post-graduate scholars Ghassen Chaieb and Jay Singh on Teck Highland Valley Copper restoration projects. Chaieb is studying using different soil amendments to accelerate and enhance restoration success. Singh recently completed a historical study of the development of soil microbial communities on reclaimed mine sites at Highland Valley Copper.

TRU ANNOUNCES NEW COMPUTER ENGINEERING PROGRAM — With the financial support of the B.C. government, TRU is launching a five-year Computer Engineering program to meet the growing industry demand for engineers across technology sectors.

Set to begin in the fall of 2024; the program gives students a broad background in the theory and application of hardware and software technologies. The program includes a mandatory one-year co-op placement, where students gain valuable experience and are provided with networking opportunities before graduation.

Employment opportunities for computer engineers are diverse and include positions in health care, telecommunications and the automotive industry, to name a few. TRU already offers a [Bachelor of Engineering in Software Engineering](#), which provides the technical knowledge and skills needed to be an expert in software engineering. TRU is the only post-secondary institution in the B.C. Interior offering both programs.

The 2021 BC Labour Market Outlook revealed that while BC’s computer systems design and related services industry grew before the pandemic, the sector grew more rapidly during the pandemic because of increasing digitalization, automation and work from home.

International Development / Building Our Community

2024 IDAYS TO LAUNCH KNOWLEDGE MAKERS JOURNAL — iDays at TRU kicks off on March 11 this year and will feature a wide range of activities designed to celebrate and honour the diversity of our international student cohort.

This year’s event also includes the launch of a unique collaborative edition of the Knowledge Makers journal that showcases the research of young Indigenous women from 19 countries — in partnership with the United Nations Food and Agricultural Association (UNFAO) — highlighting their work in food sovereignty and climate change issues.

The capstone event of IDays is a colourful, exciting and highly anticipated Showcase featuring a fashion show, food festival, educational booths, singing, dancing and performances by members of the TRU and Kamloops communities. iDays concludes on March 15.

UPDATE ON STRATEGIC INTERNATIONALIZATION PLANNING — TRU launched its Strategic Internationalization Planning initiative in December 2023, assembling a 23-member committee to lead the effort.

This committee meets monthly and hosts workshops to delve into key themes shaping internationalization planning, including Indigenization, reconciliation, decolonization, sustainability, diversity, and climate change. Emphasizing a holistic approach, the initiative aims to embed global perspectives into the core functions of the university, extending beyond mere recruitment of international students.

The steering committee has proposed an initial phase of campus engagement, scheduled to commence in early March. This engagement strategy encompasses various methods, such as in-person sessions, virtual platforms, open surveys, and one-on-one interviews, ensuring broad participation and input from the TRU community.