



**THOMPSON
RIVERS
UNIVERSITY**



Unlocking the Future
by Opening the Doors
to a University Education

*A submission to the
Select Standing Committee on
Finance and Government Services*

SEPTEMBER 2018



On behalf of the Thompson Rivers University (TRU) Board of Governors, welcome to Kamloops and to our beautiful campus, situated on the traditional and unceded lands of the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc within Secwepemcúlcw, the traditional territory of the Secwépemc people. We thank you for the opportunity to participate in this public consultation on the next provincial budget.

Education is one of the best long-term investments society can make. The profound impact of post-secondary education in particular, cannot be underestimated—in the lives of students, in its value in building and shaping the economies of our communities, and in the innovation we see around us that improves our world.

Acknowledgement

TRU acknowledges and thanks the BC Government for the investments made for current and future students of TRU. This includes significant capital contributions for our newly-completed Industrial Training and Technology Centre (ITTC) and a future Nursing and Population Health Building (NPH). These facilities will ensure our students receive the best education, in the best surroundings, positioning them for success in their chosen professions.

The Province has also provided us with a loan to increase affordable student housing through the purchase of Upper College Heights. We've been able to increase access to education thanks to provincial initiatives such as the elimination of adult basic education fees, and the introduction of a new graduate student scholarship fund. Additionally, former youth in care now have the benefit of accessing an education at TRU through the provincial tuition waiver program.

Lastly, TRU would like to acknowledge the government's support for a new degree in software engineering. It allows our students to finish their education here, in Kamloops. It was a great way to start 2018!

A Future in Trades and Technology

Engineering Local Talent

Government support for the degree in software engineering is part of a broader engineering package envisioned for TRU—one that provides our students with specializations in either software, electrical or computer engineering. Given retirements and growth in the sector, the demand for engineers across the country is significant.

At TRU, we have been offering an engineering transfer program for many years, but it saw our local students, our local talent leave the community to complete their degrees. The degree in software engineering, and others to follow in the future,

will mean that we can keep this talent, leading to tremendous spinoff to communities within the BC Interior. We have enthusiastic tech industry partners who have supported our software degree program through their participation in the required co-op term for students.

These partners stand with us as we work towards securing provincial funding for further degrees, in electrical and computer engineering.

Increasing Skilled Workers, Reducing Shortages

TRU has been offering trades programming at our main Kamloops campus since our inception nearly 50 years ago, and today boasts 20 trades backed by the Industry Training Authority of BC (ITA), offered in degree, diploma and certificate formats. Our regional communities are highly supportive of our programs as they provide stable and well-paying jobs for graduates, often in their home communities.

Today, with the newly-built ITTC, TRU is positioned more than ever to continue to meet the needs of our region and the province by increasing the number of skilled workers and, at the same time, addressing critical shortages in trades. The ITTC

affords us the opportunity to expand trades and technology programming by up to 33 percent (approximately 500 new domestic seats) and train students in new and in-demand careers such as power engineering, instrumentation technology, HVAC technology, and refrigeration. In order for these programs to reach their fullest potential, ongoing funding is required.

Technology is changing and shaping our world at an unprecedented pace. As such, government investment in new and evolving programs such as these is key, to keep up with the future. These programs ensure our students have the best education and opportunities possible upon graduation.

Funding for trades training programs through the ITA has been foundational for post-secondary institutions offering trades. Looking forward, however, a review of ITA funding is required to ensure funding levels are meeting current and future student needs.

Additionally, a change to a multi-year funding framework to replace the current annualized funding cycle would provide more certainty and stability for colleges and universities as we plan out new or evolving programs.





Training Our Future Healthcare Providers

As with trades, healthcare is also facing critical shortages for skilled workers, shortages that TRU is helping to address through training of future nurses, health care assistants and respiratory therapists.

The university looks forward to the completion of our new Nursing and Population Health Building in January 2020, as our healthcare programs outgrew the current space within the Ken Lepin Science and Health Sciences Building many years ago. This space challenge has hampered our ability to develop new programs and accept more students in existing programs.

As an example, our Bachelor of Science in Nursing is in high demand, and unfortunately, we turn away approximately 75 to 80 percent of new applicants each year. In real numbers, this is over 400 qualified students who are not accepted, who are not able to pursue their chosen career. Many of these are students from within our region, including our smaller communities, who with a degree in nursing, could help fill a critical gap in healthcare at home.

While the new building will increase TRU's physical capacity to take on more students, provincial investment is required to increase nursing seats.

In addition to our current programs, TRU looks forward to government support for a future nurse practitioner program. Nurse practitioners are in place throughout the province and have proven to be a tremendous benefit in fulfilling health care shortages in communities.

Research for Community Resiliency

After the new Community Resiliency Investment Program was announced at the Union of BC Municipalities annual conference on Sept. 10, Premier Horgan spoke on Sept. 13, publicly supporting TRU's joint proposal with the University of British Columbia - Okanagan, the University of Northern BC and our respective cities of Kamloops, Kelowna and Prince George, for the establishment of three complementary provincial research chairs to understand and address local and regional natural disaster risks and recovery.

As a BC Interior tri-city, tri-university collaboration, aligned with the Province's new Community Resiliency Investment Program and responsive to local governments' need for research capacity with a regional lens, these three chairs (one each at TRU, UBCO and UNBC) would examine all facets of natural disaster management.

These include flood/fire/drought prediction and response, interface fuel management, evacuation management, snowpack monitoring, high-value assets/critical infrastructure protection, community health and ecosystem impacts.

TRU views government investment in establishing such research chairs as not only beneficial for our Interior communities, but the province as a whole as research is knowledge creation and transfer.

Making Education Affordable through Open Textbooks

TRU applauds the Province's investment in making education more affordable to students. We encourage the government to do more as we know that making life affordable for all British Columbians is a priority.

The cost of textbooks can be prohibitive for students and even prevent some from taking a course. At TRU, we are doing our part by investing in grants for faculty to create open education

resources that will ultimately be available on BCcampus, the repository of academic resource materials that are free to use through the Open Textbook Project. These resources created by TRU faculty will be available not only TRU students, but for the benefit of students across BC.

TRU wholeheartedly supports the British Columbia Federation of Students' (BCFS) request for the BC government to invest an additional \$5 million in the government agency BCcampus for the Open Textbook Project.

A New Approach Needed for Funding Universities

The funding approach for BC's post-secondary institutions uses a formula for block grant funding that is more than 15 years old, yet much has changed at BC's universities. This has led to funding allocations that are not meeting the changing needs of post-secondary institutions and their students, nor the diversity of university mandates.





Student Support Has Changed

New kinds of student supports and services are expected today compared to 15 years ago, including digital admission and registration, career services, co-ops, internships, mentorship programs, work study, service learning, volunteer learning, summer programs (to reduce time to graduation), web-based learning management systems, social media support, entrepreneurship, innovation and accessibility services.

TRU has developed a Sexual Violence and Misconduct Policy in accordance with BC's act and we are committed to making our campus a safe and respectful environment for everyone through education, prevention and specialized counsellors.

Our students report high rates of mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, schizophrenia and other illnesses. Our ability to provide increased services is being highly taxed by these needs.

And, of great importance, BC's universities and colleges are committed to the recommendations to universities in the Truth and Reconciliation

Commission report. Reconciliation is Canada's issue of our time, and while TRU has begun work in response to the TRC calls to action, much more will be required.

TRU's Unique Mandate

Universities are not all the same, and that is the beauty of a post-secondary education—that students have choices and can attend a university that best suits their academic pursuits and personal situations.

At TRU, our mandate includes meeting the education and training needs of individuals within our region and meeting the open learning needs of BC through our distance learning arm—Open Learning. TRU offers adult basic education, certificate, diploma, bachelor's and master's degree programs, academics and trades, and on-campus and online learning. We have two primary campuses in Kamloops and Williams Lake and five satellite centres in our smaller, rural communities. We are also a research university.



The pillar upon which all of this rests is that TRU is an open access university. That means that we believe a post-secondary education should be accessible to anyone who wants one.

And this is evident in our diverse student population. We have young and mature students, students from urban and rural communities, Indigenous students, working students, students with disabilities, students who are caregivers, and geographically-isolated students.

It is generally acknowledged that students who attend an open access university often require more attention. An access university must spend more per FTE to recruit students, more on retention, transitions (high school to university and university to employment), orientation, advising, remedial learning centers, counselling, etc. But BC's funding allocation to TRU predates the university's creation in 2005 by about five years, and does not take into account our unique mandate.

Barbara Berger
Board Vice-Chair

Conclusion

TRU is proud of the university we have become since 2005. We have a variety of programs to support the aspirations and needs of a variety of students. Along with that, we provide numerous supports to help students succeed.

We have outlined opportunities—in training that addresses skills shortages; in training that leads to innovation and job creation; in research that addresses regional and community needs; and in creative ways to make education a bit more affordable for students.

We have also outlined challenges—in funding models that require review to keep pace with post-secondary education, and in needed investment to improve the lives of students.

We thank you for the opportunity to provide our viewpoint, that an investment in our students is a lasting investment in our province.

Christine Bovis-Cnossen
President and Vice-Chancellor (Interim)

