

TRU Environmental Sustainability Advisory Committee Chair Report to Senate

November 18, 2019

INTRODUCTION

It has been a banner year for Thomson Rivers University since the last Report to Senate. TRU continues to go from strength to strength, celebrating one milestone achievement after another in Sustainability:

AASHE Platinum STARS

TRU is currently the highest-rated university in the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education's (AASHE) global Sustainability Tracking, Assessment and Rating System ([STARS](#)). TRU joins Colorado State University, Stanford University, the University of New Hampshire, and the University of California, Irvine, as other institutions to receive the [Platinum rating](#).

NWCCU Accreditation

Thompson Rivers University has been granted [accreditation](#) by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU) two years ahead of schedule. TRU is the first institution in BC to achieve accreditation from the commission in less than three years (the candidacy period is usually five years). Simon Fraser University and Capilano University also have NWCCU accreditation in British Columbia. Accreditation is an evaluation of TRU's Mission Fulfillment in each of its four Core Themes: Student Success, Sustainability, Intercultural Understanding, and Research. The Environmental Sustainability Advisory Committee is responsible for reporting annually on Sustainability to the Accreditation Steering Committee.

David Suzuki at iDays

Katie Shouldice and Christian Andrews were presented the TRU Environmental Sustainability Student Achievement Award during iDays in this year. Making the award even more special was a special guest: world-renowned scientist, climate activist, and Canadian icon David Suzuki, at TRU March 8th as part of the [Beyond Climate film tour](#). Pictured below with Suzuki are the award winners, with Sustainability Office staff, and Alycia Ashcroft in attendance:



Left to Right: Alycia Ashcroft, Katie Shouldice, Aaron Weibe, Jim Gudjonson, Melina Smith, Robert Wisla, Canyon Sinclair, David Suzuki, Natalie Yao, Christian Andrews, James Gordon
Photo courtesy Thompson Rivers University and David Suzuki

Sierra Club Ranks TRU “Coolest School” 2019

The world famous [Sierra Club awarded TRU its coveted “Coolest School” ranking](#) in 2019, ahead of many prestigious schools such as the Universities of California (Irvine), Connecticut, and New Hampshire. Sierra Club summarized our work very well in its announcement:

“The first Canadian school to top our ranking deserves kudos for diverting more than 70 percent of its waste stream away from landfills and avoiding fossil fuels for heating—no easy feat in chilly British Columbia. Thompson Rivers heats some buildings using a biomass system that burns waste wood and others with electricity produced from hydropower, wind, and solar. The 28,000-student university is also in the process of transitioning its entire vehicle fleet to electric or hybrid vehicles. At convocation, students with a Leadership in Environmental Sustainability certificate—earned through environmental engagement in and out of class, in tandem with any undergraduate or graduate program—receive special recognition. TRU rewards Sustainability Ambassadors, students who spearhead zero-waste initiatives and educate their peers on smarter consumption, with partial-tuition vouchers. How cool is that?”

Presentations at AASHE Conference 2019, Spokane, WA

TRU co-hosted the AASHE Conference held in Spokane, WA, USA on Oct 27-30, 2019 with Gonzaga University, Spokane, and authored four presentations. One of them was [“Recycling Communications and Behavior Change”](#), formerly “Moving Towards Zero Waste Using Community-based Social Marketing at Thompson Rivers University”, and was co-presented by Karl Fultz and James Gordon with Nathan Jandl, Ally Berg, and

Brett Shaw from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. TRU and UW-Madison shared two initiatives designed to influence consumer recycling behavior by using Community Based Social Marketing (CBSM), to develop strategies around behavior change and removing barriers to adopt a Zero Waste Culture on campus. Interestingly, pilot projects at both institutions were able to achieve a 50% reduction in recycling contamination using similar approaches, while both projects were completely independent of each other. CBSM proved to be a powerful tool for Sustainability engagement, education, and positive change and will be deployed with this and other projects in the coming year.

FUTURE PLANS

Accreditation Steering Committee Work

This excerpt is taken from the Annual Core Theme Mission Fulfillment

Evaluation and Planning report submitted by ESAC Chair Karl Fultz to the TRU

Accreditation Steering Committee, October 24, 2019:

TRU made a significant increase in 3 or 4 core themes and achieved [Mission Fulfillment](#) as defined as:

Mission fulfillment occurs when 70% of the indicators for each of the four Core Themes are in the Achieved or Minimally Achieved threshold ranges.

- a) Identify the successes of the Core Theme and the areas in need of improvement

Table 3: Summary of Core Theme (Sustainability)

How successful was TRU in achieving mission fulfillment for this Core Theme?	Overall TRU achieved mission fulfillment for the core them "Sustainability"
Identify successes	STARS Platinum rating – highest global rank
List areas in need of improvement	Water conservation, reduced single-use plastics and other waste, Procurement policy, mandatory open

access research portal, living wage for contractor employees
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Table 7: Emerging Indicators

Emerging Indicator	Rationale	Data Source
<i>SDG goals</i>	The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals are a robust and complete framework on which to build upon and expand the successes we have achieved using AASHE STARS.	<p>“The Sustainable Development Goals are the blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. They address the global challenges we face, including those related to poverty, inequality, climate, environmental degradation, prosperity, and peace and justice. The Goals interconnect and in order to leave no one behind, it is important that we achieve each Goal and target by 2030.”</p> <p>https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/</p>

Table 11: Planning for Improvement

Indicator #	Plans at institutional level for improvement	Plans at unit level for improvement	Consultations required	Budgetary and resource limitations impact
1.1	Water conservation, purchasing, food	Water meters, low flow, irrigation management, shorter radius re food sourcing, purchasing guidelines (no single-use items), ESAC Zero Waste Subcommittee (working group)	Ancillary, facilities, Purchasing	TBD
1.2	Volunteer program	Increase civic engagement: Student Sustainability Ambassador Program	Student experience	TBD
1.3	Database of sustainability courses – learning outcomes	Classify courses and programs _sustainability learning outcome for all graduates, ESAC Sustainability in the Curriculum Subcommittee (working group)	CELT	TBD
1.4	Investment committee	TRU will begin including environmental, social, and governance factors in its investment decisions through membership in the United Nations-supported initiative	Matt Milovick Thompson Rivers University VP	TBD

		called Principles for Responsible Investment (PRI). https://inside.tru.ca/2016/04/11/sustainability-to-extend-to-investment-strategy/	Administration and Finance	
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ESAC Sub-Committees

ESAC is a working Committee of Senate, and it carries out this part of its mandate through the following sub-committees, which draw their membership from across campus, [like ESAC itself](#):

- TRU Sustainability Education in the Curriculum
- Environmental Sustainability Achievement Award
- Zero Waste
- Sustainable Procurement Framework

Student Sustainability Ambassador Program

The TRU [Student Sustainability Ambassador Program](#) (SSAP) helps spread the spirit of sustainability at TRU and is a key source of volunteer effort to move ESAC projects like Zero Waste forward. Students vastly outnumber staff, and Zero Waste cannot succeed without their engagement. This Program must be reconstituted every year with every new class of students as a part of Sustainability routine operations, and two students are voting members of ESAC.

Sustainable Procurement Guidelines

TRU is working on sustainable procurement guidelines through the Sustainability Office, in consultation with an ESAC sub-committee struck for that purpose. To date, it has developed these commodity-specific sustainability criteria:

[Chemically intensive products and services](#)

[Information technology](#)

[Garments and linens](#)

[Transportation and fuels](#)

[Paper and wood](#)

Responsible Investing

TRU will begin including environmental, social, and governance factors in its investment decisions through membership in the United Nations-supported initiative called [Principles for Responsible Investment](#) (PRI). Responsible Investing is one of the factors measured for STARS, and an area we can use to strengthen our rating for the future.

New Campus Strategic Sustainability Draft Plan 2020-2025 includes UN SDG's

The Environment & Sustainability Advisory Committee (ESAC) was engaged at the outset to review the process and timeline, and the committee provided input on the draft of the new [Campus Strategic Sustainability Plan for 2020-2025](#), which includes mapping ASSHE STARS categories to the [United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs).

AASHE STARS 2.2

The Sustainability, Tracking, Assessment, and Rating System (STARS), is a North American transparent, self-reporting framework designed specifically for post-secondary institutions. The TRU Campus Strategic Sustainability Plan aligns closely with the STARS framework, making the STARS rating an ideal indicator of TRU's success towards achieving its sustainability objectives. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals are a robust and complete framework on which to build upon and

expand the successes we have achieved using AASHE STARS. AASHE has revised its rating program with [STARS 2.2](#): “The newest version of STARS features greater international relevance and integration with the U.N. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Within the Technical Manual, institutions can see how each of the 17 STARS subcategories, such as Curriculum, Public Engagement, Food & Dining, or Water, map to the SDGs.” These are all areas of focus for ESAC and the Sustainability Office as we seek to both maintain our Platinum Rating and achieve 100% (from the current 75%) of our Mission Fulfillment for Accreditation by the NWCCU by the [next evaluation](#).

UN Climate Emergency Declaration

I draw your attention to the press release from the [UN Environment Programme](#) and its [Call to Action](#):

“Higher and Further Education Institutions across the globe declare Climate Emergency

New York, 10 July 2019 - Today, networks representing more than 7,000 higher and further education institutions from 6 continents announced that they are declaring a Climate Emergency, and agreed to undertake a three-point plan to address the crisis through their work with students.

The three-point plan includes:

1. Committing to going carbon neutral by 2030 or 2050 at the very latest;
2. Mobilizing more resources for action-oriented climate change research and skills creation;
3. Increasing the delivery of environmental and sustainability education across curricula, campus and community outreach programmes.

The letter, organised by The Alliance for Sustainability Leadership in Education, known as EAUC, the US-based higher education climate action organization, Second Nature, and UN Environment's Youth and Education Alliance, marks the first time further and higher education establishments have come together to make a collective commitment to address the climate emergency."

The work of ESAC will support TRU's work with students in its Mission Fulfillment for Sustainability as it encapsulates in large measure the three-point Plan outlined above. This Plan would be carried out through the new Campus Strategic Sustainability Draft Plan 2020-2025.

CONCLUSION

ESAC will continue to work closely with the Sustainability Office to further TRU's Strategic Goal of Sustainability. Achieving the highest Platinum STARS rating in the world and leveraging this for NWCCU accreditation in record time is a sure measure that we are fulfilling this Mission for the TRU stakeholders and Community we serve. ESAC will continue to strive towards 100% Mission Fulfillment as a part of the continuing Accreditation process, and an even higher Platinum STARS rating integrated with the UN SDG's addressed through the Campus Strategic Sustainability Plan. The Global Climate Emergency we face demands no less, and I am certain TRU, with the assistance of ESAC, is up to the challenge.

Karl Fultz

Chair, Environmental Sustainability Advisory Committee

Thompson Rivers University, November 18, 2019



Photo courtesy Thompson Rivers University