

Strategic Plan 2022-2027

*Office of General
Counsel and
Secretariat*



Territorial Acknowledgment

Thompson Rivers University (TRU) acknowledges the location of its campuses in the traditional and unceded territories of Indigenous peoples of the Secwépemc Nation. Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc hosts the TRU Kamloops campus; and T'exel hosts the TRU Williams Lake Campus. The region TRU serves also extends into the traditional territories of the St'át'imc, Nlaka'pamux, T'silhqot'in, Nuxalk, and Dakelh people.



BACKGROUND

The Office of General Counsel (“OGC”) and Secretariat continues to follow the Mission Statement it first adopted in 2010 as follows:

MISSION

The mission of this office is to promote good governance as the university's corporate secretariat, and to deliver practical and timely legal advice based on effective communication.

We strive for a deep understanding of the university's operations and initiatives through strong relationships within the TRU community so we can provide practical legal and secretariat services tailored to the objectives of TRU. We work to enrich our people, culture, and work environment.

We are committed to working collaboratively with the university community to facilitate creative problem solving and governing processes, enabling our clients in making informed decisions in support of TRU's goals and initiatives.



It remains essential to this mission that our office and our people have the deep understanding of the university's operation and initiatives that allows us to provide informed advice that adds value to the university. This deep understanding is a key benefit of having a highly skilled in-house legal team and in-house secretariat professionals.

SERVING THE UNIVERSITY'S STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

In serving the university's strategic objectives, our office engages primarily in five distinct forms of activities:

(i) Dealing with Ongoing Legal and Secretariat Needs of the University

In the Office of the General Counsel, this activity includes seeking to review and keep current legal template documents, board policies and administrative policies, procurement documents etc; this activity also entails our lawyers staying current with developments in many areas of law including copyright law, labour law, construction law, privacy law (both in B.C. and overseas), harassment and discrimination law and in recent years, increasingly, international trade law. Within the Secretariat, this activity includes much of the ongoing work of the Secretariat in organizing and facilitating meetings of the university's governance bodies.

(ii) Responding to Requests for One-Time Services

This type of activity includes responding to requests from members of the university community to e.g., review a proposed contract. This allows the university, and the signatories to contracts, to have the comfort that the proposed contract has been subject to legal review before it is signed.

(iii) Managing External Experts who have Special Knowledge. While our team has, over the years, developed expertise in several specialized areas, there remain areas where, from time to time, we require the advice of external experts to provide specialized advice. Frequently our team manages these external experts.

WE NOW INTERPRET OUR MISSION IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE UNIVERSITY'S 2020 VISION STATEMENT CONSISTING OF ITS VISION, MISSION, VALUES AND STRATEGIC CHANGE GOALS. AS THE UNIVERSITY IMPLEMENTS THE INTEGRATED STRATEGIC PLAN 'REALIZING ENVISION TRU' OUR OFFICE WILL PROVIDE ADVICE AND SERVICES IN ACCORDANCE WITH THAT PLAN.

(iv) Responding to Legal Proceedings brought Against TRU

This activity includes responding to lawsuits or complaints to the Human Rights Tribunal brought against the university.

(v) "Issue Spotting"

This is a common function of in-house legal departments at universities. It involves our office understanding what is occurring at the university and providing advice with regard to e.g., privacy law concerns that may arise with regard to actions being taken at the university.



GOING FORWARD

1. ACHIEVING DEEP UNDERSTANDING

Part of the deep understanding we seek is achieved by our people carrying out the types of activities described above. That said, carrying out those activities only provides a constricted view into all that goes on at the university. In order to optimize the deep understanding we seek, our people need to engage broadly and regularly with members of the university community in areas that lie beyond the scope of the day to day work that we perform. This broad engagement with the university community can be achieved by participating in committees and other groups across the campus, by delivering training in areas where our people have expertise and by making ourselves available to meet with members of the university community. Such broad engagement with the university community brings two corollary benefits: (i) it will assist our people in issue-spotting; and (ii) it should allow the members of the university community to better get to know our people and thereby hopefully engender trust in our office by members of the community so that they may more readily approach us when appropriate. During the term of this Strategic Plan, we will carefully consider how each of our people can most productively engage with the university community and we will draft guidelines reflecting our conclusions.

2. MANAGING INCREASED DEMAND

Over the past few years, the demand for legal services across the university has grown steadily and substantially. This growth stems from a number of causes including: (i) members of the university community taking fuller advantage of the processes available to deal with their concerns and the concomitant need for legal services associated with those matters; and (ii) the increased frequency of the university undertaking significant capital projects which can involve real estate development (either directly or through the university's property trust), or construction projects and the need for legal services associated with those initiatives. The Office of the General Counsel welcomes this increased growth in demand and is pleased to be able to continue to assist in facilitating all matters where its services can add value.

When, at times, as has occurred recently, demand outstrips our peoples' ability to provide the services the university requires, the conventional approach to address this is to retain external counsel or consultants to provide temporary assistance with overflow work. Such an approach can often be effective during temporary peak periods when overflow assistance is needed. However, when demand exceeds internal capacity for any protracted period, the approach can break down inasmuch as it takes our internal people very significant time to supervise the external counsel/consultants, and this can become unsustainable for the internal people. During the term of this Strategic Plan, we will explore further options for keeping demand and supply in balance; on the demand-side, this may involve working with our internal clients to consider planning the timing of major projects that will require significant services from our people. On the supply-side, this may involve augmenting resources available on an ongoing basis in a cost-effective manner and also in a manner to assist with succession planning discussed below.

3. SUCCESSION PLANNING

The Office of the General Counsel is a small unit at the university, staffed by two lawyers (General Counsel and Legal Counsel). These lawyers directly perform many of the legal services required by the university and oversee the balance of all other legal services provided to the university by external counsel. The small size of the unit leaves the university vulnerable in the event that one or both of the two current lawyers should become unavailable. While careful records are retained of our activities and files, the absence (especially an unanticipated absence) of the lawyer with personal knowledge of a significant file, could lead to material difficulties. During the term of this Strategic Plan, we will develop a full succession plan for the Office of the General Counsel.

Similarly, the Secretariat is staffed solely by two governance professionals, the Manager of University Governance and the University Governance Coordinator. As with the Office of General Counsel, the small size of this unit, requires that careful succession planning be undertaken. In recent years we had a situation where one of these two people left their position, and this created problems that we should seek to avoid in the future. During the term of this Strategic Plan, we will develop a full succession plan for the Secretariat.



2022