

President's Report to the Board

For the period from **March 18 to June 6, 2021**

Submitted to the TRU Board of Governors
By Brett Fairbairn, President and Vice-Chancellor

Pandemic recovery:

A fall return-to-campus—Since the March update to the board, there have been important signals from the province making it much more likely that we will return to campus without all of the current restrictions. BC's four-step Restart Plan as unveiled May 25 indicates that we could be back to a near-normal as early as Sept. 7, the start of our fall term. This is, though, contingent on solid vaccination rates along with low COVID-19 case counts and hospitalizations. Still, it is promising news and as a result, we are actively engaging with students—through our Registrar's Office, Faculty of Student Development, TRU World and Marketing and Communications efforts—encouraging students to solidify their plans for the fall.

TRU's Risk Management Office has developed a university-specific four-step [Restart Plan](#) that parallels the provincial plan, whereby the university will increase workplace density and loosens restrictions based on the BC Restart Plan. The safe return of students, faculty and staff on campus remains the foundation of our planning.

Matt Milovick, Vice-President Finance and Administration, continues to lead discussion on the revisions of the provincial *Go-Forward Guidelines* for the post-secondary sector. Anticipated to be released at the end of June, these will provide more detailed guidance for TRU as we return to campus. Additionally, Christine Bovis-Crossen has been leading a TRU Return to Campus Implementation Working Group.

To support return to campus discussions for our sector, TRU hosted two provincial town halls involving Provincial Health Officer Dr. Bonnie Henry. The first was on May 10 for senior leaders representing colleges and universities; the second was on May 28 with student leaders from throughout BC's post-secondary institutions. While attendance for these virtual events was limited, the town halls were recorded, posted on TRU's YouTube channel and shared widely.

At this time, enrolment looks promising for the fall return. As of early June, applications and admissions (excluding Nursing, Trades, and Law) are up from last year's numbers at this time. Domestic applications are up four percent and international applications are up 14 percent (nine percent overall). Domestic admissions are currently up nine percent relative to this time last year, while international admissions are up 19% and have surpassed last year's total admissions. These numbers still come with uncertainty, particularly for international students who may face barriers to travel. Where able, TRU is planning for alternate delivery for students facing extraordinary circumstances in coming to campus.

Improve student recruitment, conversion and retention—May 31 saw the launch of a primarily digital marketing campaign to encourage students to return to TRU this fall, offering them a choice of an on-campus experience or online learning through Open Learning. Added is a combined proactive marketing and communications effort that will build excitement through the summer months about being back on campus this fall.

TRU hosted two separate virtual open houses for students in late March. This included TRU's annual Spring Open House, as well as a first-ever virtual open house for international students hosted by TRU World. The latter attracted more than 700 students who engaged in presentations from TRU faculty and staff, focused in areas most important to students.

Recognizing the financial hardships incurred by students during the pandemic, TRU has established a new bursary—the [TRU Assurance Bursary](#)—which provides up to \$20,000 per student enrolled in campus-based degree programs. This year, at least 25 bursaries are available, and the eligibility is for returning domestic students. In fall 2022, the bursary eligibility will expand to new and transferring students.

Additionally, starting next spring, TRU will make available financial awards for as many as 16 students from Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc as a result of a recently-created \$1 million [endowment](#) established to specifically support Indigenous students. Each award is worth \$2,500.

Strategic Change Goals:

Honour Truth, Reconciliation and Rights—there are two updates in this regard. Firstly, we were gratified to recently sign a renewed partnership agreement with Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc (TteS). As noted in our [media release](#), this is more than a public declaration, it is about meaningful action we can take to support the success of students from Tk'emlúps. This includes working together to improve retention and graduation rates for Indigenous students and incorporate TteS ways of knowing, values and philosophy into programs.

The relationship with Tk'emlúps is a deepening one and members of our university community were deeply shaken and saddened by the truth—the proof—shared by Tk'emlúps of this country's abuse and neglect of hundreds of children through the residential school system. Led by Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc, Indigenous communities have focused on honouring and respecting these lost children. It is important that Indigenous people lead the conversation at this time. TRU has expressed its support for our partners at TteS (through a message to the chief, lowering flags, lighting buildings and wearing orange shirts) and supporting members of our TRU community who have been affected (president's message, virtual healing circle, counselling resources). Institutions including TRU have responsibilities to act in light of these events.

As we draw conclusions from this still very raw experience, those conclusions will have to include redoubling our efforts to implement the calls to action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, as well as other reports such as the Turpel-Lafond report on Indigenous people and health care. Our commitments in areas such as these are anchored in our vision statement, values, and strategic change goals, which will inform our integrated strategic planning process in the coming year.

Enabling Strategies:

EDI and Anti-Racism Task Force—As TRU seeks to fulfil our vision of being a university that boldly redefines the university as a place of belonging, the executive is pleased to report progress in the area of equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI). The Provost's Anti-Racism Task Force completed its work in the spring, submitting a [final report](#) and recommendations to the provost on March 31. This important work will guide some of our priorities in the coming years, including for the 2021/22 year. The task force report and other initiatives will be discussed at an EDI town hall on June 24 that is open to all faculty, staff and students. Thanks to a \$400,000 capacity building grant secured through the federal Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council, we are able to bolster and better coordinate our EDI efforts through the establishment of an EDI office at TRU. In March, we hired an EDI consultant to lead this work, and are in process of hiring for two additional positions—an EDI specialist and EDI coordinator.

Integrated Strategic Planning (ISP)—The ISP Project Team continues its work, moving forward to the next stage with the launch of the ISP Steering Committee. With representation across the institution, the steering committee will serve in an advisory role and be an important contributor to the success of the planning process. The first meeting of the committee takes place June 16. The project team is also supported by the Society for College and University Planning (SCUP) to ensure the use of best practices. The team is working to have an integrated plan for submission to TRU's governing bodies by March 2022.

Other Updates:

Leadership Updates—Provost and Vice-President Academic and Research Christine Bovis-Crossen will be stepping down at the end of the month. Christine joined TRU in September 2015 and anyone who has worked closely with her the past six years knows of her passion for student success. This weaves through her many accomplishments at TRU, including our accreditation through the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities, the completion of TRU's first Strategic Enrolment Management Plan, the work of the Anti-Racism Task Force, as well as TRU's growing focus on EDI. Along with this has been her deep commitment to Indigenization and Truth and Reconciliation, and our research mandate. We anticipate to have an interim provost in place by August and from there, begin the search for a new provost.

Tania Gottschalk takes on the position of Interim University Librarian from June 19, 2021 to June 18, 2022 with the pending departure of Kathy Gaynor as University Librarian. Tania joined TRU as associate university librarian in May 2020, sharing accountability for the library's academic mission, strategic direction and vision, and leading operational planning. She has over 30 years' experience working in academic research libraries in Canada and the United States, most recently as head of the Sciences and Technology Libraries at the University of Manitoba from 2018 to 2020. She has a Master of Business Administration from Athabasca University, a Master of Science in Library and Information Science from the University of Illinois, and a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Alberta.

On May 10, Darshan Lindsay was appointed AVP for Marketing and Communications. Previously, Darshan held the position of interim AVP since October 2020, leading the department in a time of enormous change and pressure through the pandemic. Since joining TRU in January 2018, her service to the university has changed as our needs have evolved. In that time, she has been an executive communications officer, director of executive communications, and director of executive and government relations. Darshan holds a Graduate Certificate in Professional Communications Management from Royal Roads and has 15 years of professional communications experience, the majority at Interior Health where she progressed into senior leadership roles. In addition to communications, Darshan was a journalist in both print and broadcast media for nearly 15 years in Kelowna and Kamloops.

University Highlights

Universities are places of knowledge creation and transfer and achievement. We have much to celebrate. Below represents a short listing of some of our recent activities and achievements. Much more can be found on [TRU's Newsroom](#).

- Researcher joins Indigenous health-care task force—Faculty of Nursing researcher Dr. Sheila Blackstock has been appointed to the BC government's *In Plain Sight* task force. The main purpose of this task force is to work toward the implementation of the recommendations in the [In Plain Sight: Addressing Indigenous-specific Racism in BC Health Care report](#). Blackstock said the most important part of this task force is ensuring access to health care in BC will be safe, respectful and culturally-relevant for Indigenous peoples. [Read the full story](#)
- Math prof celebrated for zero-cost textbook efforts—Izabela Mazur has been recognized with the [BCcampus Award for Excellence in Open Education](#) for her hard work in Open Educational Resources (OER), and efforts on a zero-cost textbook project. Mazur says she acutely aware of the cost of textbooks and how crucial they are—especially for the success of mathematics students.

- Pledge to raise \$1 million nursing bursaries—Kamloops philanthropist Al Patel and the ICCHA Wish Foundation have partnered with TRU to establish the [ICCHA Wish Community Ambassador Fund](#), an endowment that will fully fund four years of nursing school for bursary recipients in financial need. Patel and a group of community donors have already contributed an inaugural donation of \$100,000 toward the \$1-million goal.
- First in offering free hygiene products—By September, all washrooms at TRU’s Kamloops and Williams Lake campuses will have free menstrual products, making TRU the [first post-secondary institution](#) in BC to make this commitment.