

President's Report to the Board

For the period from June 7 to September 24, 2021
Submitted to the TRU Board of Governors
By Brett Fairbairn, President and Vice-Chancellor

PRIORITIES

COVID Pandemic — Return To Campus

A safe return—TRU's efforts to bring staff and students back to campus this fall have largely been successful, despite the unexpected rise of a fourth wave of COVID disease linked to the Delta variant. Our four-step Restart Plan, which parallels the provincial restart plan, emphasizes student, staff and faculty safety.

The sight of students on campus again is solid indication that these efforts provide measures of comfort and assurance as this pandemic continues. Mask mandates in public spaces, strict cleaning protocols and enhanced ventilation are among the measures in place, but the greatest tool we have is vaccination. Along with the PHO, TRU is strongly encouraging those who have not yet been vaccinated to do so, as they are able.

Vaccine self-declaration—as part of efforts to protect the TRU community, we created a vaccine self-declaration portal to track vaccination rates and encourage those who are not vaccinated to take this important step. The web-based form asks individuals to choose from four options. We expect those who say they have not been vaccinated, only partially vaccinated or who choose not to say will seek regular rapid testing, which is now offered on campus.

We were happy to see early results from the survey, which indicated that 96% of our faculty and staff are fully vaccinated and 86% of our students are fully vaccinated. More than 80% of the TRU community has responded to the survey.

RUCBC collective approach—the Research Universities' Council of British Columbia (RUCBC) represents the interests of BC's research universities. RUCBC's mandate is to identify issues facing the universities, provide system wide leadership in the development of relevant public policy and communicate on behalf of the university system.

RUCBC issued a statement on behalf of the six member institutions on Aug. 26, indicating all the schools' intentions to pursue similar protocols and practices around COVID vaccine self-declaration and rapid testing. This statement informed TRU's decision-making, and we are confident the approaches identified above are being adopted across the RUCBC schools.

Student Enrolment Fall 2021

TRU's preliminary enrolment and course registration numbers indicate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic continue to be felt. This preliminary data indicates 8,293 students enrolled at TRU this fall, compared to 8,423 last year. The number of international students choosing to enrol at TRU is up from 3,171 students to 3,292, but still lower than in 2019.

Open Learning enrollment is 9,703 students. There are 213 students enrolled on the Williams Lake campus.

Applications and admissions—applications and admissions continue to track above both last year and two years ago. Admissions are up 2% overall compared to 2020, consisting of a 6% increase in international admissions and a 1% decrease in domestic admissions.

Registrations—course registrations are a key indicator of teaching and learning activity. As of Sept. 10, the number of new registrants (which includes both new students and those who applied for a program change) for fall 2021 was higher than last year though not as high as fall 2019 at the same time.

The increase in new registrants over last year is offset, however, by 6% fewer returning (previously enrolled) registrants at the Kamloops campus (a decrease of 401 registrants). There are 23% more registrants overall at Williams Lake (an increase of 31).

Overall, the total number of registrants (8,293) was two per cent lower than last year at the same point in time (8,423) and down 8% compared to two years ago (8,930).

While the number of enrolled international students at TRU has increased this year, some of those students continue to study online, meaning there are fewer international students on campus than two years ago.

Increases in international enrolment are largely due to the collective effort from all academic units to offer flexible delivery modes as well as TRU World's creative student engagement strategy.

Student Housing Dilemma

Numerous factors have combined this year to create an unexpected shortage of rental options in Kamloops and a short-term housing dilemma for some of our students.

The shortage is not due to an influx of international students, as was initially suggested by some media reports. In fact, the continuing impact of the pandemic means that today there are approximately 650 fewer students enrolled in the fall semester compared to 2019, the majority being international students.

The general shortage of rental units in Kamloops appears to be due to a variety of factors, including the presence of out-of-town pipeline workers and the continuing presence of wildfire evacuees. As well, three motels that once rented to students have now converted to social housing, while two others closed.

TRU identified in late August the need for housing for approximately 200 international and domestic students. TRU has taken this challenge seriously, because if we are not successful in finding accommodations, international students who are still planning to come to Kamloops may not be able to do so.

TRU has boosted student housing in recent years to a total of 1,366 beds today. We currently have no spaces available in on-campus housing. To address the shortfall, TRU proposed installing modular housing in parking lot NT located near Hillside Drive North; however, the City of Kamloops has recently indicated it is not able to support the proposal.

This has been a complex issue and we acknowledge the City's efforts in the many conversations we've had to address concerns. The health and safety of our students will remain our highest priority as we continue to search for viable housing options to assist them.

Community Outreach

Summer wildfires—this past summer saw the Interior of BC ravaged by wildfires, with many communities suffering evacuations and loss of property. The entire region endured extremely poor air quality that prevailed for weeks. Many TRU staff and students were among those affected by evacuation orders or alerts. TRU contacted provincial authorities to offer our facilities to assist and our residences were used to house firefighting staff and some evacuees. It was a stressful summer for us all, and we are grateful the autumn weather is bringing the fires to an end.

TRU senior leaders visit Williams Lake campus—I and members of TRU's senior executive team made a two-day visit to our campus in Williams Lake on Sept. 15 and 16 to meet with community stakeholders and campus staff. This was our first opportunity to meet face-to-face in many months. We connected with faculty, staff and leadership of TRU Williams Lake, and held a lengthy series of meetings with regional community leaders. The trip proved extremely educational and worthwhile. I am excited to see this campus continue to offer important service to the Central Interior.

Supporting Indigenous Communities in Healing

Residential school graves—profoundly sad news emerged this past summer around the confirmation of 215 unmarked graves near the former residential school on Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc grounds. All are believed to be graves of children who died while being forced to attend the school. The news dominated media coverage across Canada.

The revelation shocked many in our city and reverberated especially heavily in the TRU community, which has close ties to the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc. TRU responded with compassion and empathetic support for our Indigenous partner including an offer of assistance to Tk'emlúps leaders.

On campus, we contemplated the impact and meaning of this event in different ways. Campus flags were flown at half-mast for 215 hours to commemorate the 215 children. Orange lights lit up the TRU Housing North Tower to show our support, and many TRU employees wore orange shirts in June to show their support for Indigenous communities.

Online events were hosted for TRU employees and students to acknowledge and support all families in dealing with their grief. Counselling and community supports were widely shared across all social media and emailed to all TRU employees and students. These horrific events were acknowledged by TRU, and safe sharing spaces and talking/healing circles were available for everyone at the university.

It was clear to me that our campus was profoundly affected by the news. We will continue to share our thoughts and prayers with the Tk'emlúps people and offer our support as they deal with this painful reminder of a tragic and undeserved history.

National Day for Truth and Reconciliation—on Sept. 29, TRU held events to mark the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, which was observed across Canada on Sept. 30. Members of the TRU community gathered at the CAC to honour and show respect for Indigenous peoples victimized by the residential school system.

Leadership/People

Search for new provost—TRU has struck a committee to lead the search for a new provost. The process has just begun and will likely conclude in early 2022, when the committee is expected to make a recommendation to me. Recently, the committee hosted a series of four events open to the TRU community to solicit feedback about the search for a provost. Two of those meetings happened virtually. Feedback received will help the committee define and narrow its search for best candidates.

VP research—a recent review of TRU's research office recommended that TRU move to appoint a vice-president research in place of the current associate vice-president role. A vice-president research would concentrate on developing new research opportunities for TRU faculty and staff and lead the research office that provides support to researchers. I have been considering this recommendation, am seeking advice, and I expect to reach a decision soon.

TRU Statement On Academic Freedom

In early 2019, I asked Lauchlan Fraser from the Faculty of Science to chair a faculty committee and develop a TRU-specific statement on academic freedom. We now have a statement that reflects what academic freedom means at our institution. It was released to TRU's faculty and staff as well as to the public in mid-September.

The committee exceeded my expectations. I intended this to be a faculty-driven process with no input or representation from administrative staff. I believe TRU has developed a statement unlike any other, with particular focus and prominence given to Indigenous perspectives on academic freedom. This is extremely fitting and representative of our *Vision Statement*, which centres on respectful relations as well as our strategic change goal of honouring truth, reconciliation and rights.

I would like to thank the members of the committee for taking on this assignment and engaging with faculty. They are:

- Lauchlan Fraser, Chair (Faculty of Science)
- Charis Kamphuis (Faculty of Law)
- Bruce Baugh (Faculty of Arts)
- Kellee Caton (Faculty of Adventure, Culinary Arts & Tourism)
- Penny Haggarty (Library)
- Rod McCormick (Faculty of Education & Social Work)
- Jeffrey Meyers (Faculty of Law)
- Ann Pollock (Open Learning),
- Gloria Ramirez (Faculty of Education & Social Work)
- Peter Tsigaris (School of Business and Economics)

TRU faculty were encouraged to consider the statement and continue the dialogue around what it means. A Teams Chat facilitated this discussion. This statement is intended to be a living document and I look forward to continuing the discussion with the TRU community about this critically important topic.

The TRU Statement of Academic Freedom can be found [here](#).

UNIVERSITY HIGHLIGHTS

TRU is a place where knowledge is created and shared, and we have many achievements to celebrate. Here are a few noteworthy items recently highlighted by [TRU's Newsroom](#):

- **Provincial funds double support for genomics lab**—matching federal funding announced in spring, the [Province of British Columbia contributed almost \\$850,000](#) toward research at TRU that will enhance our understanding of microbial ecology and climate change. Minister of Jobs, Economic Recovery and Innovation Ravi Kahlon said that \$848,500 from the BC Knowledge Development Fund has been allocated to microbiologist Dr. Jonathan Van Hamme for the TRU bi/O Network, which supports genomic and molecular biology innovation.
- **Discovery Grants support innovative TRU researchers**—TRU researchers received \$675,000 through the federal [Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council \(NSERC\) Discovery Grants](#) program, announced on June 15 by the Government of Canada. The Discovery Grants program funds innovations in chemistry, physics, life sciences, mathematics, computer science, geoscience and the many branches of engineering.
- **TRU ranked one of the “Coolest Schools” by Sierra Club**—for a third year in a row, TRU has been ranked in the [top three schools](#) through the Sierra Club’s sustainability ranking. We won first place in 2019. Since 2006, the Sierra Club has ranked institutions based on their environmental record. [Read more](#)