

Canadian University Survey Consortium – 2012 Survey
of Graduating Students

Summary Report – October 2012

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is the 18th cooperative study undertaken by the Canadian University Survey Consortium (CUSC). Since 1996, the survey has run in a three-year cycle, with different student populations targeted each year. This year's study presents the results for graduating students, the last of which was conducted in 2009. This is Thompson Rivers University's first year of participation in the CUSC survey.

Thirty-seven universities took part in the 2012 survey. The overall response rate was 36.5% and produced a sample of 15,109 students. At Thompson Rivers University (TRU), 195 students out of the 631 invited completed the survey for a response rate of 30.9%.

In this summary report, TRU's results are presented and compared¹ to the results of the Comparable Universities group². The Comparable Universities group (n=3,404), which is made up of 11 universities, consists of institutions that offer primarily undergraduate studies and have medium-sized student populations.

Profile of graduating students

Examining the profile of students participating in the survey shows the following:

- ▶ The majority of responding graduating students are female, 22 and younger, single, and living independently. 17% of TRU students self-identify as belonging to an ethnic or cultural group compared to 25% of students from the Comparable Universities group.
- ▶ TRU students (9%) have the highest proportion of self-identified Aboriginal people compared to the Comparable Universities group (4%) and all students (3%) who took this survey. TRU reports higher international students (10%) compared to the Comparable University group (4%).
- ▶ Academically, the majority are attending full-time, are in a program that takes four or more years to complete, and are graduating with an average grade of B+ or higher. Students attending TRU (18%) are more likely to be taking programs that require two years to complete than the Comparable Universities group (3%). Just over half of TRU students (62%) report being in a work experience program compared to 51% of students from the Comparable Universities group.
- ▶ Less than half of TRU students (37%) report receiving an academic scholarship from their university at some point during their studies compared to 48% of students from the Comparable Universities group.

Experiences at Thompson Rivers University

Among 16 activities tested, several stand out as contributing most to students' growth and development. Most notably, *practicums* and *internships related to their program* tend to contribute the most, with *classroom instruction* and *personal interactions with faculty in class* following slightly behind. *Online*

¹ While comparisons are presented for reference, no tests of significance were conducted.

² Comparable Universities group: Lakehead Univ., Simon Fraser Univ., Trent Univ., Trinity Western Univ., Univ. of Lethbridge, Univ. of Northern British Columbia, Univ. of Ontario Institute of Technology, Univ. of Regina, Univ. of the Fraser Valley, Univ. of Winnipeg, Wilfrid Laurier Univ.

instruction, interaction with teaching assistants and recommended readings are viewed by students as contributing least to their growth and development.

► **Class-based experiences**

Only 52% of TRU students report experience with *interacting with teaching assistants* compared to 89% of students from the Comparable Universities group and TRU students are about 10% less likely compared to the Comparable Universities group to rate *interaction with teaching assistants* as having contributed very much to their growth and development.

► **Academic experiences**

Almost all TRU students report experience with *written assignments and essays, required readings, examinations, use of library resources, and recommended readings*. About 6 in 10 students have experience in *writing an undergraduate thesis or taking a self-directed study course* and have experience in a *co-op, internship, or practical experience program related to their program of studies*. This is consistent with what students from the Comparable Universities group report.

► **Experiences with faculty**

Almost all TRU students indicate that they had experience with university faculty, although much fewer report experience with *faculty research activities* (65%). According to TRU students, their experiences with faculty contribute more to their growth and development compared to what students in the Comparable Universities group report.

Extracurricular activities

Among 17 extracurricular activities tested to show the impact they had on students' growth and development, students are most likely to say that *interacting with other students* had the most impact on their growth and development. *Being a teaching assistant* is the second highest rated aspect contributing to students' development; however, just 8% of TRU students had experience with this aspect. The aspect that students think contributed the least was *attending campus cultural events*.

► **Student services and supports**

TRU students (26%) are more likely to have experience *participating in international study or exchanges* than students from the Comparable Universities group (12%). However only 54% of those TRU students report that *participating in international study or exchanges* contributed very much to their growth, compared to 71% of students from the Comparable Universities group.

► **Non-academic campus activities**

TRU students are more likely than the Comparable Universities students to report having experience *attending campus social events, attending campus lectures and attending campus cultural events*. Both groups are least likely to report that *attending campus social events, attending campus cultural events, and attending home games of university athletic teams* contributed very much to their growth and development.

► Interaction with others

Almost all TRU students report having *interactions with other students* and *exposure to students from different cultures*. Slightly less than half report being involved in either *on- or off-campus community service or volunteer activities*.

Use of and satisfaction with facilities and services

Among 19 different facilities and services at TRU, the vast majority of students are most satisfied with *campus medical services, international student services, online course management systems* and *services for students with disabilities* and are least satisfied with *services for First Nations students*.

- Students reported the most use of the university's *campus bookstore* (98%) and rated their satisfaction with this service at 77% very satisfied or satisfied.

Skill growth and development

Students rated TRU's contribution to their development in 33 specific skills. These skills were further segmented into academic, communication, analytical and learning, working and knowledge, and personal and relationship skills.

► Academic skills

Among academic skills, only TRU's contribution to *broad knowledge of my major field of study* (81%) has more than one third of students who say their university contributed much or very much to their development. The fewest number of students rate TRU as contributing much or very much to *mathematical skills* (33%) among the academic skills tested.

► Communication skills

Among four communication skills tested, students are most likely to say that TRU contributed much or very much to their *written communication* (79%) skills. They are least likely to rate TRU's contribution to *second or third language skills* (16%) as much or very much.

► Analytical and learning skills

Among seven analytical and learning skills, students are most likely to rate their university as contributing much or very much to their ability to *think logically and analytically* (77%). Students are least likely to say that their university contributed much or very much to *skills for planning and completing projects* (66%). TRU students are more likely than Comparable University students to say their university contributed much or very much to their analytical and learning skills.

► Working and knowledge skills

Students are much more likely to rate positively TRU's contribution to *working independently* (70%). Students are least likely to say their university contributed much or very much to their *entrepreneurial skills* (17%).

► Personal and relationship skills

Among the nine areas classified as personal and relationship skills, *self-confidence* (68%) received the highest ratings. Students are least likely to say TRU contributed much or very much to their *spiritual development* (17%).

Among the 33 areas, students were asked to rate twenty of them in order to identify the three most important areas for a student's development. When compared to how TRU is doing with students' development, *broad knowledge of their major field of study* was the area students thought TRU contributed most to, and it was the third highest rated in terms of importance. This is consistent with students from the Comparable Universities group. Conversely, development of *second or third language skills* and *spirituality* were areas students thought TRU contributed least to, and students also rate them as less important factors for TRU to concentrate on.

Student satisfaction

Examining aspects of students' satisfaction show the following key results:

- Students are very positive about their interactions with faculty. The only exception is satisfaction with *their experience with teaching assistants*, as 39% are satisfied (compared to 78% to 98% who are satisfied with other areas). Sixty-six percent of students from the Comparable Universities group are satisfied with *their experience with teaching assistants*.
- Many students appear to be less satisfied with TRU in terms of the concern shown by the institution for students as individuals. Fewer than 7 in 10 report being satisfied — including just 15% who are very satisfied — with the *concern their university showed for them as individuals*.
- Students are also positive about their education, as 9 students in 10 agree that *generally, they are satisfied with the quality of teaching they have received*, are satisfied with the *overall quality of education they received*, are satisfied with *their decision to attend their university*, and are satisfied with *their personal safety on campus*.
- 93% of students say that TRU *exceeded or met their expectations*. Students attending TRU are more likely than those attending the Comparable Universities to say TRU exceeded or met their expectations.
- 91% of TRU students would *recommend their university to others* and their most common reason is because of *the professors* (76%). Out of those students who would not recommend their university to others, 41% would not recommend their university because of the *quality of student/campus life*.

Education financing and debt

Overall, about 6 in 10 students report having some debt from financing their education, with the typical student reporting \$18,334 in debt with 66% of this being accounted for by government student loans. Students from the Comparable Universities group report an average debt of \$14,932, a difference of about \$3,400 dollars.

Among 11 sources students may use to finance their education, the most commonly used sources of funding are earnings from summer work (51%) and personal savings (48%). Students from the Comparable Universities

group report parents, family, or spouse being the most commonly used sources of funding. On average, TRU students required \$11,473 to finance their current year.

Among the 5 in 10 TRU students who are currently employed, students spend about 18.5 hours a week working on average. Students' work appears to have some negative impact on their academic performance, as about 4 in 10 say it does.

Future education and employment

In their first year after graduating, 46% plan on continuing their education. Students' decisions about whether to take further education after graduating are somewhat influenced by debt they have incurred, as 66% say their debt load has an impact on their decision about whether or not to take further education.

Just over 1 in 3 TRU students have a job arranged once they graduate. These students report the following:

- ▶ Most say their job is permanent, a continuation of previous employment, does not require a degree, and is related to the knowledge and skills they acquired in their program.
- ▶ 89% are satisfied with the job they have secured.
- ▶ The average annual income TRU students will receive is estimated to be \$27,037. Students from the Comparable Universities group report an average annual income of \$31,456, a difference of about \$4,400 dollars.

Sixty-two percent of TRU students believe that there are at least some jobs available in their field of study, while 33% think there are few jobs in their field of study.

Among steps TRU students have taken to prepare for employment after graduation, the most common is *creating a resume or curriculum vitae*, as 78% have taken this step. This is followed by 73% of students who have *talked with professors about employment/career*. Only 58% of students from the Comparable Universities group report *talking with professors about employment/career*.