

GRAD STUDIES NEWSLETTER

THOMPSON
RIVERS
UNIVERSITY

FALL 2026

WWW.TRU.CA/RESEARCH/GRADUATE-STUDIES



A record-breaking 80 students gathered for the January grad lunch.

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A Note from your Graduate Student Leaders

As the 2025-2026 academic year comes to a close, we wanted to take a moment to reflect on the incredible work and community spirit shown by our graduate students. For many, the year was filled with academic milestones and opportunities to engage with others within and beyond our programs!

From grad lunches and game days to coworking sessions, we've loved seeing students come together and build community across various programs. These events help us remember that graduate school is not only about research and coursework, but about the experiences we can share with each other.

Congratulations to everyone for another year well done and **we can't wait to see what the 2026 - 27 year brings!**

— The Grad Leaders Team

YOUR 2025-26 GRADUATE STUDENT LEADERS

Building community across TRU's graduate programs, all year long.



Tegan Heshka

Master of Science in Environmental
Science



Lucky Uzebu

Master of Education



Olurotimi Abiodun

Master of Science in Environmental
Economics and Management



Arpitha Thippeswamy

Master of Science in Data Science



Zipporah Hudegbeke

Master of Arts in Human Rights and
Social Justice



Jesal Thakkar

Master of Business Administration

COMMUNITY & EVENTS RECAP

This year, graduate students had several opportunities to connect, unwind, and build community.

Grad Lunches

The Grad Leaders hosted three graduate student lunches over the 2025-2026 academic year, with a record-breaking 80 students who attended the January lunch! We had students across various programs come together for a fun afternoon eating food from local restaurant Afrofusion and meeting new friends.



3MT® — Three Minute Thesis Competition

Ten graduate students representing four programs participated in TRU's Three Minute Thesis Competition (3MT®) in February. They presented their research to a lay audience in three minutes, with just one slide! Our three community judges — Kamloops City Councilor Katie Neustaeter, member of Pattison Media Team Rich Woods, and Chair of the Board of Education of SD73 Heather Grieve — were impressed with the breadth of current research at TRU and the students' ability to communicate complex topics.

Congratulations to the top-ranked presentations:



TRU's 2026 3MT® participants celebrate on stage.

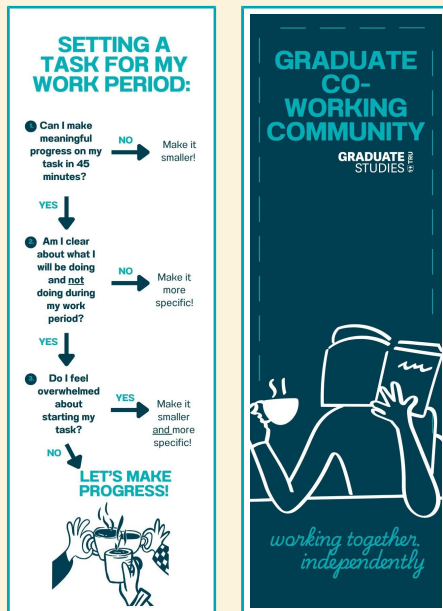
- 1** **Chloe MacLean** (MScENVS), supervised by Dr. Eric Bottos — *Microbial Community Response to Permafrost Thaw in the Canadian High Arctic*
Awarded \$1,000 and a spot at the Western Regional 3MT® Competition in Regina, SK, May 2026
 - 2** **Arpitha Thippeswamy** (MScDS), supervised by Dr. Piper Jackson — *Predicting Hospital Stay in Older Adults*
Awarded \$500 and an Audience Choice Award
 - 3** **Feng Gu** (MScDS), supervised by Dr. Javed Tomal — *Read out Pollution Level from Creature Community in Rivers and Lakes*
Awarded \$250
- HM** **Lorena Munoz** (MScENVS), supervised by Dr. Matt Reudink — *Winter Flock Movements of Mountain Chickadees Across an Urban-Rural Habitat Gradient*
Honourable mention, also awarded an Audience Choice Award

Game Day

To wrap up the winter semester, students gathered for an afternoon of snacks and games! They tried their hand at Jenga, Just One, and a variety of other activities while meeting new friends. We look forward to more friendly competition in the upcoming school year!

Graduate Co-working Community

The Student Research and Graduate Studies Team and student partners piloted two co-working sessions during the winter semester — an opportunity for students to make progress on their independent graduate work while in the support of community. The team created a bookmark to support students with time management and task prioritization.



Working together, independently

The co-working bookmark walks students through setting a focused, achievable task for each work period — make it smaller, make it more specific, and let's make progress!

Would you like to see more opportunities to work in community next academic year? Let us know by sending us a direct message on Instagram [@trugradstudies](https://www.instagram.com/trugradstudies).

Students Published in *Future Earth* Special Issue

Congratulations to the students whose research has been published in a special issue of *Future Earth: A Student Journal on Sustainability and the Environment*, titled *Ambition vs. Action: Growth, Emissions, and Climate Targets in the Paris Agreement Era*. This special issue features student-led research examining how countries around the world are progressing toward greenhouse gas emissions targets in the post-Paris Agreement period.

The articles explore national emissions trends using real-world datasets, including World Bank data, and apply analytical frameworks such as IPAT and Kaya decomposition to examine the relationship between economic growth, emissions intensity, population change, and climate policy. Topics include absolute decoupling in the European Union, emissions pathways in Canada, China, India, the United States, the United Kingdom, Brazil, Japan, South Africa, and several other countries.

[Read the Special Issue →](#)

Future Earth welcomes student research exploring sustainability and environmental issues from a range of disciplinary perspectives. Submissions are accepted on a rolling basis year round, so consider Future Earth when you're ready to share your work!

Learn more about the journal and submission opportunities.

5th Annual Environment & Sustainability Research Workshop

Thompson Rivers University hosted the 5th Annual Environment & Sustainability Research Workshop on Monday, May 4, bringing together faculty, graduate students, and researchers for a full day of presentations, networking, and discussion. The event opened with a Spirit Plate led by Elder Colleen Seymour, followed by a welcome, land honouring, and workshop overview.

Throughout the day, presenters shared research on a wide range of environmental and sustainability topics, including food waste reduction, Indigenous reserve community income convergence, bike-sharing adoption, carbon pricing and firm innovation, environmental valuation, wildfire mitigation, and mineral exploration under regulatory uncertainty. The workshop also included a graduate student poster session, offering students an opportunity to showcase their research, receive feedback, and connect with others working in related fields.

A highlight of the afternoon was the keynote presentation by Dr. Felix Pretis, Associate Professor of Economics at the University of Victoria and Co-Director of the Climate Econometrics project at Nuffield College, University of Oxford. His talk, *Reverse-Engineering Success: Evaluating Policy Impacts Without Prior Knowledge*, offered valuable insights into policy evaluation and climate econometrics.

Overall, the workshop created an engaging space for interdisciplinary learning, collaboration, and community-building among students and researchers interested in environment, sustainability, and policy.



Grad Mentors

This year, your 2025–26 cohort of Graduate Student Research Mentors from across TRU's master's programs worked together to build on the foundation laid by the 2024–25 cohort.

"We refined and completed a Graduate Mentor Survey to capture program-specific student experiences, and through a collaborative thematic analysis process, reflected on emerging patterns, shared challenges, and common gaps across programs. This was particularly valuable for understanding the early stages of the graduate journey."

We worked alongside the Graduate Student Leaders to document specific communication gaps experienced by students from pre-registration to admission, with the goal of supporting more transparent and student-centered communication practices at TRU. Our cohort also contributed to the development of the Graduate Student Lifecycle, a visual tool designed to map key milestones, transition points, and support needs across graduate programs at TRU."

Beyond these projects, we had a lot of fun helping host the annual 3MT® Competition in February, connecting with students across campus and representing graduate research at TRU events throughout the year. It has been a meaningful and rewarding experience, and we are proud to pass this work forward to the next cohort."

RECOGNITION OF AWARD RECIPIENTS

Each year, we celebrate graduate students whose exceptional accomplishments have made a meaningful impact through research, scholarship, leadership, and service. Congratulations to this year's award recipients on their well-deserved recognition!

Dr. Sherman Jen Graduate Entrance Award 2025

- Lacey Banman (MEd)
- Kimberley Barnes (MEd)
- Asmita Bashyal (MScDS)
- Jose Eloy Mendez Campos (MEd)
- Nazmul Karim (MScDS)
- Diksha Narang (MScDS)
- Mirian Chiamaka Nobis (MEd)
- Irole-Eze Ozioma Prisca (MEd)
- Katie Schellenberg (MScENVS)
- Kaitlyn Van der Zwan (MScENVS)

Ken Lepin Graduate Student Award 2025

- Jose Eloy Mendez Campos (MEd)
- Anna Dokshina (MAHRSJ)
- Alexis Edwards (MAHRSJ)
- Fiona Finnegan (MN)
- Tegan Heshka (MScENVS)
- Brendan Oldegbers (MScENVS)
- Robyn Stack (MScENVS)
- Carly Van Solkema (MN)

Canada Graduate Research Scholarship – Masters (CGRS-M) 2025–2026

Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council

- Sarah Cousins (MAHRSJ)
- Alexis Edwards (MAHRSJ)
- Kathryn Monahan (MAHRSJ)
- Mikayla Stocks (MAHRSJ)

Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council

- Mary Ellen Abberger (MScENVS)
- Tegan Heshka (MScENVS)

Canadian Institutes of Health Research

- Solstice Toews (MN)

BC Graduate Scholarship 2026

- Lacey Banman (MEd)
- Jose Eloy Mendez Campos (MEd)
- Seela Lapp (MAHRSJ)
- Megan Lowe (MN-NP)
- Helena Marken (MScENVS)
- Lorena Munoz (MScENVS)
- Kennedy Pederson (MN-NP)
- Natalie Ross (MScENVS)
- Radhika Tabrez (MAHRSJ)
- Kaitlyn Van der Zwan (MScENVS)
- Tyler de Zeeuw (MScDS)

Environmental Science Fellowship Award 2025

- Chloe MacLean (MScENVS)

MARK YOUR CALENDAR – UPCOMING AWARD DEADLINES

Inspired by this year's award recipients? We encourage all eligible graduate students to consider applying for upcoming award opportunities! Check the link below for eligibility requirements and application packages.

Aug 15, 2026	Ken Lepin Graduate Student Award
Sep 30, 2026	TRU Graduate Student Leaders
Nov 15, 2026	Environmental Science and Natural Resource Science Fellowship Award
Dec 1, 2026	Canada Graduate Research Scholarship – Masters (CGRS-M)
Feb 20, 2027	British Columbia Graduate Scholarship
Mar 18, 2027	TRU Graduate Student Research Mentor Fellowship
Jun 1, 2027	Dr. Sherman Jen Graduate Entrance Award

Eligibility & application packages: tru.ca/research/graduate-studies → Awards and Funding → Research Funding Opportunities

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT



Meet Omowumi Agboola (MBA)

Omowumi's research explores how companies communicate sustainability and how those messages align with broader environmental performance. Her work sits at the intersection of marketing and corporate responsibility, offering insights for ethical brand strategy.

Grad Leaders Arpitha Thippeswamy and Olurotimi Abiodun interviewed Master of Science in Data Science alum Robin Teotia in January 2026.

Arpitha: Can you briefly walk us through your journey from graduating to where you are now in the industry?

Robin: I started the Data Science program with a lot of hope and expectations. I was fortunate to receive the Sherman Graduate Award worth \$6,000, which gave me a great start. This was during COVID, so I initially spent about three months in India. During that time, I connected with Professor Piper Jackson, went through an interview, and secured a Research Assistant position. That gave me something solid to hold on to even before landing in Canada.

I was part of the first cohort of the MSc in Data Science at TRU, so everything was new for the university and for us as students. Overall, it was a really good program with strong faculty support. Early on, I spoke with Tawhid to understand how to approach the course structure.

Working with Professor Piper was especially exciting. I gained real industry exposure through a project with Interior Health, where I worked for about 12 months. During this period, I also completed two internships through Mitacs. In my second internship, I was officially given the title of Data Scientist by Shawn Mark, which was a big milestone for me.

After that, I joined a company in Ontario called 407 ETR as a Data Scientist. Over time, I was promoted to Senior Data Scientist. TRU played a huge role in preparing me both academically and professionally. It gave me confidence, industry exposure, and hands-on experience. My first real experience with machine learning came through the project with Piper. Combined with my two years of prior experience in India, everything came together well.

Financially too, things worked out, as my tuition was fully covered through scholarships, RA work, and internships.

Arpitha: How long did your job search take after graduation, and what did that process look like?

Robin: My thesis got delayed by about a month, so that pushed things slightly. After finishing the program, I started an internship, and during that internship, I landed a full-time job. Overall, it took me around three and a half months.

I had several discussions with professors about how to approach the data science job market in Canada, and the faculty support was really helpful during that phase.

Arpitha: What do you think helped you land your first role? Was it skills, projects, networking, or something else?

Robin: Projects and internships played the biggest role. They gave me strong exposure to machine learning and data science in real-world settings. Working with Interior Health helped me understand how the industry actually operates.

One course that really stood out was Business Analytics with Trent Tucker. I'm still in touch with him, and the concepts I learned there, especially optimization techniques, helped me a lot in my job. In fact, those skills helped my current company save around \$30–40 million.

Honestly, I didn't do much networking. I mostly focused on meeting the job requirements. The combination of strong fundamentals, project work, and guidance from professors is what really helped me succeed.

Arpitha: For students in programs without co-op, when is the right time to start applying for internships and jobs?

Robin: Start now, especially with Mitacs Accelerate internships. The process itself can take around three months just to submit the application. Before that, you need to find a company that has a project and is looking for students.

Mitacs works as a collaboration between the company, the university, and the student. Students are paid by Mitacs. So first, focus on finding companies or projects listed on the Mitacs website, and then worry about the application process.

Some companies are even willing to wait if you're just two to three months away from graduating. Also, job searching isn't linear, you might apply to over 100 jobs to land one. Interviews often come in waves. You don't need every offer, you just need one.

Timi: Based on your experience, what skills does the industry really expect from new data science graduates today?

Robin: That's a broad question, but the basics are clear — strong Python and SQL skills, a good understanding of data, solid statistics, and the ability to tell a story with data.

It also helps to think about the domain you want to work in, like banking, healthcare, optimization, and so on. But at the same time, stay open to opportunities across domains.

Timi: What's your take on AI engineering as a career path, and what should students focus on?

Robin: I'd say about 50–60% is technical skills, and the remaining 40% is how well you can explain and communicate your work. Storytelling, especially to non-technical audiences, is extremely important.

For AI engineering, areas like large language models, tools like ChatGPT, and even robotics are becoming important. The market keeps changing, so staying updated is key. To move into AI engineering, students should build strong foundations in both computer science and data science.

Timi: Finally, what advice would you give to current graduate students preparing for the job market?

Robin: Focus on building strong foundations through your coursework. Maintain a clean, well-structured resume, keep your LinkedIn profile updated, and continuously learn new skills that the industry is demanding. Staying current really makes a difference.

STAY CONNECTED

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