

The following sections report on work underway and progress being made in relation to executive priorities for the current year against our [four 10-year strategic change goals](#), which are based on TRU's vision and values. There are also sections on Enabling Strategies and Operations, and International Development/Community.

Enabling Strategies / Operations

NEW RESPECTFUL WORKPLACE AND WHISTLE BLOW POLICIES — TRU is revising and updating our [Respectful Workplace and Harassment Prevention Policy](#) (BRD 17-0) to address concerns around bullying and harassment more effectively, with an emphasis on Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI).

Specifically, we intend to improve the clarity of TRU's reporting processes for faculty, staff, administrators, and students, and reflect current best practices for addressing bullying, harassment, and discrimination.

A draft of the revised policy has been developed by TRU's legal department, People and Culture, and the Faculty of Student Development. It has received preliminary feedback from TRUFA, and is now with the Provost for further review, including input by the Executive Director EDI & AR. Broader TRU community consultations will be scheduled for the fall.

The final policy is expected to be presented to the Board and Senate in February. Upon approval, comprehensive training will be rolled out to faculty, staff, and students, and will be included in new employee and student orientations.

Through the same time, TRU will begin the process of examining the provincial [Public Interest Disclosure Act](#) (PIDA), which all post-secondary institutions in B.C. will be required to adopt by December 2024. This act, which is B.C.'s whistle blow legislation for the public sector, requires public bodies to support employees who come forward to report serious concerns by providing information to employees about how to report wrongdoing, appointing one or more senior officials as a Designated Officer to receive and investigate reports of wrongdoing, and establishing procedures to:

- Fairly and effectively manage and investigate reports of wrongdoing,
- Protect the confidentiality of information for those involved,
- Report on the outcomes of investigations and any recommendations made, and
- Provide information to employees about their rights and responsibilities under the Act and under TRU's policies and regulations.

Developing and implementing these policies is important work designed to safeguard people from harm while protecting individuals' rights to privacy regarding personal information and workplace employment matters.

FEDERAL GOV'T CONSIDERS CHANGES TO INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ADMISSION PROCESSES — In the midst of a housing crisis in Canada, there has been media attention regarding the number of international students studying in Canada and their impact on housing availability and affordability, including blaming them for the problem.

Recent media attention (August 2023) has included comments from two federal ministers — Sean Fraser (Housing, Infrastructure and Communities) who suggested a cap on international students, and Marc Miller (Immigration), who suggested the integrity of the immigration system was at risk with increasing international students but did not support a hard cap being the only solution. It has since been suggested that the federal government is looking at a system that shows preference for "[trusted institutions.](#)"

TRU recognizes the importance of quality housing for our students and its role in their overall well-being and academic success. Since 2018, TRU has increased the number of on-campus residence beds and there will be a total of 1,646 on-campus beds once the new East Village residence opens later this year.

Details on on-campus housing increases:

- Before 2018: 876 beds
- Current: 1,498 beds as a result of recent increases:
 - 509 beds from the 2018 purchase of Upper College Heights (now East Village), later renovated through a 2019 investment of \$5M
 - 113 temporary beds at West Gate Dormitories (January 2022 to April 2025)
- 148 beds will be added to East Village (Fall 2023)
- After opening: 1,646 beds

The international diversity present at TRU is one of our institution's greatest strengths. The mixing of ethnicity and international perspectives in such an environment helps our students and our community broaden their knowledge and understanding of different worldviews.

Universities Canada issued a statement of concern regarding the federal government's proposed student cap, which can be found here: <https://www.univcan.ca/media-room/media-releases/response-to-international-student-caps/>.

As well, I wrote an opinion piece related to this topic, which published in Kamloops This Week on September 30, and can be found here: <https://www.kamloopsthisweek.com/opinion/view-from-tru-dont-blame-international-students-7477329>

LEADERSHIP UPDATES — TRU has several new individuals serving in senior administrative or management positions, including:

- [Dr. Oren Shtayermman](#) — The Faculty of Education and Social Work is pleased to welcome its new associate dean, Dr. Oren Shtayermman. For the past two decades, Oren has served in numerous teaching and leadership roles at private and public academic institutions and universities in the United States.
- [Pauline Streete](#) — Joined TRU on July 1 as our new executive director of equity, diversity, inclusion (EDI) and anti-racism (AR). Pauline comes to us from the University of Regina, where she was senior advisor to the president on EDI and anti-oppression. She has held formal roles in EDI for over a decade, bringing expertise in anti-racism, anti-oppression and EDI principles and practices in post-secondary education.
- Dr. Faheem Ahmed — Associate Vice-President Academic (Interim), as of July 1.
- [Dr. Shannon Wagner](#) — Officially started as TRU's VP of Research on July 1.
- Scott Blackford — Acting General Counsel, pending John Sparks' return.
- Ted Gottfriedson Jr. — The TRU Office of Indigenous Education is pleased to welcome Ted as the new TRU Secwepemc Cultural Advisor. Ted started this position on September 5.
- [Kylie Thomas](#) — TRU's new Academic Director for the Williams Lake campus.

KAMLOOPS INNOVATION FINDS NEW HOME AT TRU CAMPUS — The Kamloops Innovation Centre (KIC) has moved from its North Shore location since 2012 to TRU's Kamloops campus. Office space has been secured on the top floor of the Clock Tower and is a close distance to the already existing TRU Generator, an on-campus accelerator jointly operated by TRU and Kamloops Innovation to support students, faculty, staff and alumni with mentorship, workshops and events.

KIC support includes entrepreneurial-minded students and faculty members who want to help and mentor students. The centre also connects faculty members with emerging technologies and innovations to support their research. KIC is one of 11 accelerators as part of Innovate BC's Venture Acceleration program.

TRU AMONG TOP PERFORMERS IN 2023 SUSTAINABLE CAMPUS INDEX — TRU has been recognized as a top performer in the [2023 Sustainable Campus Index](#), securing the highest position in the areas of Energy and Master's Institutions, and landing in the top 10 in the Buildings, Waste and Public Engagement categories.

The Sustainable Campus Index is a publication from the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE) that recognizes top-performing sustainable colleges and universities overall and in 17 impact areas, as measured through the Sustainability Tracking, Assessment and Rating System (STARS). The top performer recognition follows TRU's STARS Platinum rating, which the university achieved for the second time in 2022.

TRU has earned its top performer status by focusing ongoing efforts toward global challenges — one example is using energy wisely with how the university heats its buildings and uses electricity. These initiatives support TRU’s commitment to achieve carbon neutrality by 2030 by reducing more than 90 per cent of emissions on campus.

MESSAGE REGARDING MY REAPPOINTMENT AS PRESIDENT — Following my reappointment in late June, I sent the following message to our community:

I want to take a moment to express my gratitude and appreciation for [being reappointed as President and Vice-Chancellor of TRU](#), as well to share with you what I hope the next two years will bring.

I was humbled five years ago when I was given the opportunity to be TRU’s president, and I am just as humbled today as well. It is a profound honour to hold this position, and I am extremely cognizant of its significant demands and responsibilities.

When I was announced as incoming president in 2018, I mentioned that the only sufficient motivation for a person to become a university president is a love of universities. This means loving the things that are essential to academic life: the students, the faculty, learning, research, scholarship, openness to new ideas, civility of discourse in pursuit of truth.

I have heard other presidents describe the process of moving to a new university as falling in love, and I see considerable truth in this observation. I have found much to love at TRU. This is a unique and vibrant institution that lives its values of EDI, community-mindedness, curiosity, sustainability and — overarching these — respect for all people. It is hard to imagine a more meaningful career in education.

Of course, the last five years did not pass without challenges. Unforeseen and unexpected events, including a global pandemic, tested all of us and our ability to thrive. We have faced events that none have wanted. We’ve lived through tough times.

Despite that, we managed to achieve a great deal, and I am confident that we will continue on that path. I am especially proud of the work we did through Envision TRU, and more recently, through Integrated Strategic Planning. It is my commitment to all who serve TRU and our students that I will do all that I can to keep TRU moving in the right direction, guided by our values.

To that end, in the next two years, I hope to:

- Provide leadership that continues to pursue our vision and strategic change goals and that fosters good governance;

- Support students by developing closer relations with alumni, community supporters, and partner institutions;
- Honour Truth and Rights through wider and deeper partnership with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities;
- Strengthen TRU's workplace culture including with respect to EDI and anti-racism;
- Support the development of TRU's academic and integrated resource planning;
- Advance research and graduate learning;
- Support the revitalisation of TRU's online programming, credit bank, and continuing education; and
- Ensure learners and communities hear about what TRU can do for them.

I can achieve none of the above by myself. I ask you to join with me in the spirit of collaboration and co-operation and continue to perform your invaluable roles. Your collective skills, wisdom, and dedication have shaped this institution in countless ways, and I am relying on your continued engagement and support.

I also look forward to hearing your ideas and feedback about how we can make TRU even better. Let's continue to talk, listen to one another, learn from our differences, and work together for the greater good of our community.

Our students are the reason we exist as an institution. Let's continue to create the best possible learning environment for them, and ensure that TRU remains a place where all feel valued, supported, and equipped to achieve their full potential.

CONSULTATION / ENGAGEMENT — Here is a quick list of recent (or upcoming) events and meetings that have allowed me to connect with stakeholders:

- June 12 — Presentation to the B.C. Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services
- June 13 — Hosted a reception for employees who received Merit Awards and Tenure and/or Promotion
- June 14 – FACT Faculty Council Meeting
- June 15 — Board dinner with Williams Lake community leaders
- June 16 — Breakfast with Williams Lake MLA
- June 19 — Meeting with MLA Cariboo North, Shadow Minister Post-Secondary Education
- June 20-26 China — TUT Convocation and visit partner institutions
- June 29 — RUCBC/BCAIU Reception in Victoria
- June 29/30 — RUCBC Planning Session
- July 13/14 — Visiting delegation from Kazakhstan
- July 27 — Alum Event in Calgary
- August 29 — Presentation to Kamloops West Rotary Club
- September 8 – Back to Class Barbeque
- September 9-17 – Germany, EMES Research Conference and visits with partner institutions

- September 26 — Indigeneity in Universities – Indigenous Chancellors’ Virtual Talking Circle
- September 27 — TRU Campus Pride Parade

Eliminating Achievement Gaps

STRATEGIC ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT — Fall 2023 has seen an increase in course registrations and student headcounts at the Kamloops and Williams Lake campuses, with an 8% and 9% rise respectively compared to last year. International registrations rose 23%, while domestic numbers slightly decreased by 1%.

Compared to pre-pandemic Fall 2019, overall registrations and headcount are up by 2% and 5% respectively, largely driven by international students. Although there's growth in most course divisions, the School of Nursing has experienced an 8% decline in course registrations.

In student demographics, 94% of domestic and 48% of international students are enrolled in undergraduate programs. Notably, 44% of international students come from India. As for Fall 2023 admissions, while domestic applications and admissions are down, international registrant numbers have increased despite a decrease in applications and admissions. To manage the influx, certain high-demand international programs closed applications early.

In summary, Fall 2023 sees a positive trend in registrations, especially from international students. While domestic registrations have slightly decreased, the international student demographic, particularly from India, continues to grow.

IPE plans to release its Fall 2023 Enrolment reports by October 4, and will begin reporting on Winter 2024 Course Registrations/Applications and Admissions in October.

Course Registrations — Fall 2023 courses began two weeks ago, and today is the final day for students to add or drop courses. As of yesterday, on-campus (Kamloops and Williams Lake) course registrations and student headcount for Fall 2023 are higher than last year at the same point in time (+8% and +9%, respectively). Domestic registrants (headcount) are down 1% from last year (4,773 last year vs. 4,714 this year), and international registrants are up 23% (3,801 last year vs. 4,663 this year).

Relative to pre-pandemic Fall 2019 at the same point in time, course registrations and student headcount are up 2% and 5%, respectively. This growth is being driven by international activity, with international course registrations up 24% (13,749 in Fall 2019 vs. 17,067 this year) and registrants up 27% (3,663 in Fall 2019 vs. 4,663 this year). Domestic course registrations are down 11% (21,795 in Fall 2019 vs. 19,346 this year) and registrants are down 11% (5,268 in Fall 2019 vs. 4,714 this year).

Fall 2023 Course Registrations and Registrants Kamloops and Williams Lake (excludes Trades)



Data as of **September 17, 2023** with comparisons to data from the same week last year.
(Latest Registration on September 17, 2023)

Course Registrations Summary					Registrants Summary				
	Last Year to date	Last Year total	This Year to date	% of Fall 2022 Total		Last Year to date	Last Year total	This Year to date	% of Fall 2022 Total
Domestic	19,617	19,672	19,346	98%	Domestic	4,773	4,769	4,714	99%
International	14,223	14,313	17,067	119%	International	3,801	3,814	4,663	122%
Total	33,840	33,985	36,413	107%	Total	8,574	8,583	9,377	109%

Course registration reports are a preliminary indication of Fall 2023 enrolment.

Compared to last year at the same time, there are:

- More course registrations in all course divisions except the School of Nursing (down 8% from 2,059 last year to 1,884 this year).
- More international registrants in all program divisions except the Faculty of Law.
- More domestic registrants in all program divisions except for EDSW, Science, and Nursing.
- 6% more new students on campus (2,059 last year vs. 2,174 this year), with new domestic students down 1% and new international students up 14%.

For Fall 2023 (excludes Trades):

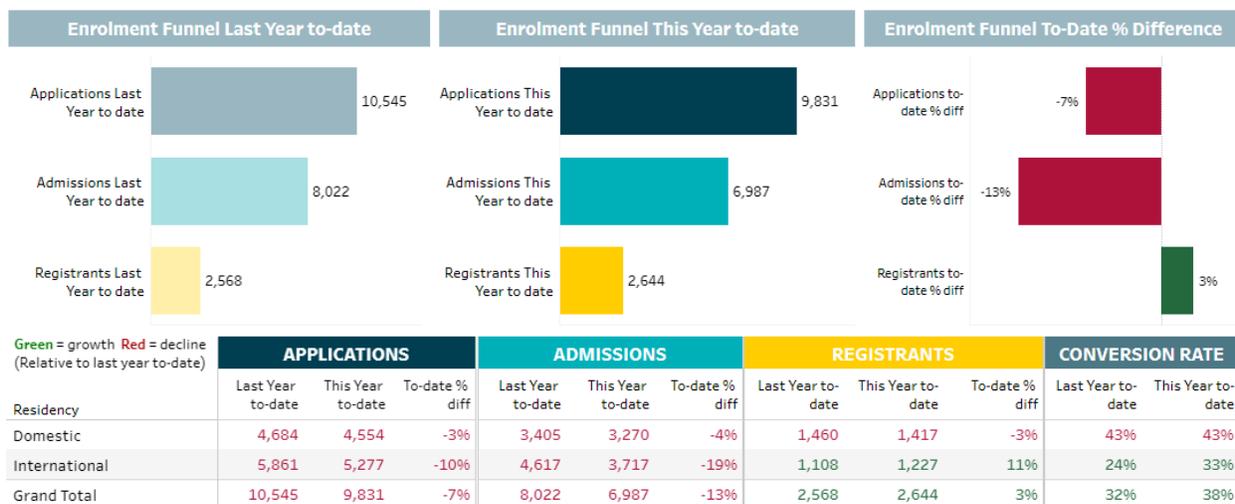
- 94% of domestic students are in an undergraduate program, followed by 4% in graduate-level programs (similar to last year at this time).
- 48% of international students are in an undergraduate program, followed by 36% in a post-baccalaureate program, and 16% in a graduate-level program (similar to last year at this time).
- 44% of international students are from India (2,062 of 4,663), followed by 11% from Nigeria (497 students, up 58% from 315 last year).
- Students are taking the same number of courses on average compared to last year (3.9).

Applications and Admissions — Total applications, admissions, and registrations (excluding Nursing, Trades, and Law) are currently tracking lower than last year's numbers at this time. Domestic applications and admissions are down 3% and 4%, respectively, from last year at the same time, with registrations down 3% from last year. The conversion rate to-date is 43%, the same as last year at this time. Initiatives aimed at engaging applicants and encouraging admitted students to register appear to have contributed to an early boost in registrants, but the lead over last year's activity has disappeared over the past 8 weeks. In the past week, we have recorded a drop of 28 *fewer* registrants compared to a drop of 3 registrants in the same period last year.

The SEM plan starting point for new domestic students in open baccalaureate programs for Fall 2023 is 666 students. As of today, we are at 90% (602 headcount, down 8 from last week) of the target. The

SEM plan assumes conversion rates (accepted applicant to enrolled) this fall return to an average of the last three years for new domestic students in these programs at the Kamloops campus.

International applications are currently down 10% from last year and admissions are down 19% while registrants are up 11%. To manage international student numbers, Fall 2023 applications from certain high-volume regions were closed early for some programs (TRU Gaglardi post-baccalaureate programs, the Bach. Computing Science and Computing Science Diploma, and the Graduate Certificate in Educational Studies). Faster processing of study permits by the IRCC contributed to early growth in registrants despite the decline in admissions.



TRU CONVOCATION FALL 2023 — TRU will host Fall Convocation on October 13. This fall, we have awarded 654 credentials, which include students completing programs offered through Open Learning. The following is a breakdown of credentials:

- 58 in the Faculty of Arts
- 194 in the Gaglardi School of Business and Economics
- 115 in the Faculty of Education and Social Work
- 1 in the Faculty of Law
- 54 in the School of Nursing
- 114 in the Faculty of Science
- 4 in the Faculty of Student Development
- 35 in the Faculty of Adventure, Culinary Arts and Tourism
- 79 in the School of Trades and Technology
- 34 of the 654 credentials have been awarded to students who have self-declared indigenous ancestry.

The convocation ceremony will get underway at 10:30 a.m.

Honouring Truth, Reconciliation, and Rights

KNOWLEDGE MAKERS SHARES INDIGENOUS APPROACH TO RESEARCH WORLDWIDE — The Knowledge Makers program has expanded its reach from Kamloops to around the globe, since it first inspired Indigenous students to participate in and publish research. Based at Thompson Rivers University (TRU), the program, launched in 2016, brings together Indigenous researchers, beginning at the undergraduate level. It's a collaborative teaching initiative where Indigenous students learn how to research and publish research as Indigenous researchers.

Focused on engaging Indigenous students across borders, TRU partnered with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations in 2022, inviting Indigenous women from seven socio-cultural regions — with countries such as Burkina Faso, Tanzania, Bangladesh, Russia, Hawaii and New Zealand represented — to apply for a special edition of the Knowledge Makers program. The new partnership provided an opportunity for Indigenous women from around the world to advance their research and have it published in the Knowledge Makers Journal (Volume 9).

WILDFIRE EVACUATIONS DELAY TRU WILLIAMS LAKE INDIGENOUS EXHIBIT — The Witness Blanket exhibit, originally slated to open on Monday, Aug. 21 at the Thompson Rivers University (TRU) Williams Lake campus, has been postponed until further notice.

Delivery of the travelling art piece has been affected by wildfires in the community of Fort Smith in Northwest Territories. TRU will send a notification out when a new opening date is confirmed.

TULO CENTRE, UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY AND TRU SIGN MOUS TO COLLABORATE ON INNOVATIVE INDIGENOUS-LED PROGRAMMING AND RESEARCH — The Tulo Centre of Indigenous Economics (Tulo Centre), the University of Canterbury and Thompson Rivers University (TRU) commit to further collaboration and exploration of opportunities to deliver unique Indigenous-led programming through the signing of two memorandums of understanding in Kamloops on July 31, 2023.

The MOU signed by all parties creates a formal pathway for the institutions to cooperate and collaborate to research, support and build capacity for Indigenous public administration, governance, leadership and economic development.

The Tulo Centre and TRU renewed their existing MOU to strengthen the relationship between the two institutions who have worked together since 2008 to deliver accredited certificate programs in First Nation tax administration, applied economics and lands governance.

Leading in Community Research and Scholarship

TRU EXPERT PROVIDES EXTENSIVE MEDIA COMMENTARY AS WILDFIRE SEASON CONTINUES — Wildfires burning across Canada through the summer drew significant public attention as media focussed on the impact of wildfire as well as the causes. As a result, one of TRU's experts in this field was widely sought by local, national, and international media for comment.

Dr. Michael Flannigan, the British Columbia Research Chair in Predictive Services, Emergency Management and Fire Science at TRU, provided countless media interviews across a wide range of publications and channels, from [Kamloops Castanet](#) to [Al Jazeera](#) and [Rolling Stone Magazine](#).

The intense interest in Dr. Flannigan's research underscores the growing concern and recognition of the increasing threat that wildfires pose to our ecosystems, economies, and societies. Dr. Flannigan's work emphasizes the importance of understanding the effects of climate change and its complex interaction with wildfires. All of this corresponds with TRU's continuing efforts to establish a leading research institute focusing on wildland fire science and emergency management.

As well, in relation to wildfires, the Vancouver Sun published an op-ed from TRU on September 13. In it, I wrote that in the wake of Canada's most severe wildfire season, traditional wildfire prediction and response methods have become outdated and unreliable. As witnessed this summer, unpredictable fire behaviours challenged conventional firefighting techniques. I also highlighted the need for a comprehensive overhaul in wildfire response, emphasizing five key areas:

- Collaboration among all levels of government and sectors,
- Investment in wildfire research and innovation to adapt to the changing environment,
- Development of highly trained firefighting personnel,
- Consideration for a national firefighting force to support local efforts, and
- Incorporating Indigenous land management techniques and knowledge.

The op-ed can be seen online at: <https://vancouversun.com/opinion/op-ed/brett-fairbairn-new-firefighting-strategies-needed-in-era-of-climate-fuelled-wildfires>

As well, a digital page from the print edition is attached as an appendix at the end of my report.

EQUITY LEADERS SHARE EXPERIENCES AT TRU SERIES — TRU will host an evening of personal and professional stories from two women who are leading equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) initiatives in Canadian educational institutions.

Educator Rohene Bouajram and researcher Dr. Nicole Kaniki sit down with TRU researcher Dr. Evelyn Asiedu for a compelling conversation about their experiences as leaders doing complex equity work. They will touch on the encouraging changes they have seen at Canadian universities, the challenges they have navigated as racialized women and successes worth sharing.

Ubuntu – Leading Now for the Next “Her” continues the Women in Leadership series presented by TRU Provost and Vice-President Academic Dr. Gillian Balfour, as a free event open to everyone. On Wednesday, Oct. 4, attendees are invited to pull up a chair and enjoy the candour that can only be experienced in a fireside chat.

DISCOVERY GRANTS BOOST STUDENT ASSISTANCE FOR TRU RESEARCHERS — From programmable robots and machine learning to old-growth forests and ecosystem reclamation, six Thompson Rivers

University (TRU) researchers have received a total of \$912,500 through the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC) Discovery Grants Program for students to do more field and lab work.

Dr. Geoff Fink, an assistant professor in the Department of Engineering, has been awarded \$155,000 and a \$12,500 Discovery Launch supplement to improve the autonomy of quadruped robots using visual-inertial simultaneous localization and mapping. This is a technique used in robotics and computer vision to help a robot understand its surroundings and navigate in an unknown environment. The research is performed by a team of flying and ground-based robots, contributes to new theories and bridges the gap between theory and actual implementation.

Dr. Jill Harvey, Canada Research Chair in Fire Ecology and assistant professor in the Department of Natural Resource Science, received \$190,000 to study forest-grassland ecotones, areas of steep transition between diverse biomes. She uses information from tree-ring data and historical and contemporary perspectives to characterize the resilience of these ecosystems to wildfire and drought. Harvey was also awarded a \$12,500 Discovery Launch supplement for her research.

Dr. Emad Mohammed, an assistant professor in the Department of Engineering, was awarded \$160,000 and a \$12,500 Discovery Launch supplement to develop methods to address machine-learning challenges. Mohammed uses these methods as configurable data to build robust machine-learning frameworks for critical applications across industries, including health care.

Dr. Rick Brewster, a professor in the Department of Mathematics and Statistics, received \$162,500 to study ways to design efficient algorithms to solve complex problems such as scheduling and routing transit vehicles. The design of the algorithms is completed using mathematical structures intrinsic to the problem.

Dr. Lauch Fraser, an NSERC Industrial Research Chair in Ecosystem Reclamation and professor in the Department of Natural Resource Science, has been awarded a \$40,000 Discovery Development Grant to test the effects of climate change and disturbance on grassland plant communities.

Dr. Yasin Mamatjan, an assistant professor of Software Engineering in the Department of Engineering, received \$155,000 plus a Discovery Launch Supplement of \$12,500 to develop techniques using artificial intelligence to guide cancer clinicians in making decisions about patient prognosis, diagnosis and treatment options.

International Development / Building Our Community

TRU WORLD OFFERS SUPPORT AS DIPLOMATIC CRISIS WITH INDIA CONTINUES — TRU World is closely monitoring the evolving diplomatic crisis between India and Canada, as 44 per cent of our international students come from India. During this difficult time, we are communicating with our students, reassuring them that Canada is a safe and welcoming place, and reminding them of the strong support

services and mental health services TRU provides. A message was sent to students from India by email on September 22, urging them to reach out to student advisors as needed.

CHINA'S AMBASSADOR TO CANADA VISITS KAMLOOPS — Chinese Ambassador to Canada, Cong Peiwu, visited Kamloops on September 7. Part of the Ambassador's stay included a visit to the university. The Ambassador met informally with TRU faculty and students, toured our campus, and attended a luncheon, which I hosted. This visit follows my and VP International Baihua Chadwick's visit to China for graduation ceremonies at Tianjin University of Technology and the Shanghai Institute of Technology in June.

ESTABLISHED 1912

HAROLD MUNRO EDITOR

PAUL CHAPMAN DEPUTY EDITOR

Published by Pacific Newspaper Group, a division of Postmedia Network Inc., #400 - 2985 Virtual Way, Vancouver, B.C., V5M 4X7

Editorials are arrived at through discussion by the newspaper's editorial board, which operates independently from the news department of the paper. Members of the editorial board are Editor Harold Munro, Deputy Editor Paul Chapman and Editorial Pages Editor Hardip Johal.

OPINION

18

The culture war path to victory



TASHA KHEIRIDDIN

The Conservative policy convention has come and gone amid a hail of plaudits, photo ops and favourable polls. Leader Pierre Poilievre has managed to unite the party faithful and win over Canadian voters, by tapping into their economic angst and fatigue with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, who is increasingly seen as out of touch and out of time.

But the convention also opened a new political fault line: the culture wars. Delegates voted that children should be prohibited from gender-related "life-altering medicinal or surgical interventions," upheld women's rights to single-sex spaces and sports, and rejected mandatory diversity, equity, and inclusion training and race-based hiring practices. A majority also supported allowing Canadians to refuse vaccines on the grounds of "bodily autonomy."

Pushback was swift. A former Conservative candidate who is trans said a vote against gender-affirming care could cause some children to die by suicide. A local riding president warned against reopening the vaccine debate. But most of the criticism came from the media and analysts who say the culture wars are a distraction that will hurt the Tories at the polls, like the "barbaric practices" tip line did in the 2015 election. Poilievre has a huge lead, based mostly on economic issues: why blow it? People only care about the rent and the grocery bill; these other concerns will not inform their political choices.

For some voters, however, these issues are highly motivating. Research firm Angus Reid Institute recently asked Canadians what they think about the culture wars, and identified two groups of voters who strongly engage on them: "zealous activists" who favour "progressive" policies such as pronoun use and represent 17 per cent of voters, and "defiant objectors" who reject such changes and constitute 20 per cent of the electorate. Broken down by party affiliation, a clear pattern emerges: 47 per cent of Canadians who voted Conservative in 2021 are defiant objectors, while only three per cent of Liberal and NDP voters are.

But while 44 per cent of NDP voters are zealous activists, only 22 per cent of Liberal voters are, suggesting there is much less dogmatism in this group.

For the parties, this means picking their battles and carefully choosing their bedfellows. The culture wars are not intersectional. Parents who object to the medical transitioning of children do not necessarily support restrictions on abortion. Advocates for women's only spaces don't necessarily believe people should be able to refuse vaccines. They may also be uncomfortable lining up with people who do.

Angus Reid will be publishing more data in the weeks to come on specific issues, but their findings on gender identity align with the results of the Conservative convention



Since March, more than 5,700 wildfires have burned in five provinces and the Northwest Territories. DARREN HULL/AFP/GETTY IMAGE

CROSS-CANADA COLLABORATION NEEDED TO TEMPER WILDFIRES

Old measures are no longer enough as world warms, says **Brett Fairbairn**.

If this summer has shown us anything, it's that much of what we knew about wildfire prediction and response is now inherently unreliable.

Canada has just experienced its worst wildfire season on record, and a warming world suggests an increasingly greater threat. Our assumptions and methods of response must adapt.

The past months are both a warning and a call to action. Plume-dominated fire, fire tornadoes and rapid, unpredictable fire behaviour have changed the game. Since March, more than 5,700 wildfires have displaced families and destroyed properties in B.C., Alberta, the Northwest Territories, Nova Scotia, Ontario and Quebec. Many of those fires continue to burn out of control. For the parts of Canada that didn't experience fires directly, many still suffered the health effects of damaging and dangerous wildfire smoke.

Events in B.C.'s Interior showed that the strength and ferocity of this year's wildfires created unpredictable fire behaviour undeterred by conventional firefighting techniques. Relying on what we once did will no longer be enough. Responding effectively to future wildfire threats will require more

than incremental adjustment. Significant investment needs to be made to advance research and innovation and create new knowledge in at least five areas.

First, all sectors and all levels of government need to come together in new ways. Historic response to wildfires has relied mainly on provincial resources outside urban boundaries, and municipal resources inside city limits, with these agencies usually working independently. This summer, we watched as the paradigm began to shift. Canada saw community, municipal, regional, provincial and federal resources working together in unprecedented ways as wildfires became too big for any agency to face individually. Such layered and reciprocal responses will become more critical.

Second, investment in wildfire research and innovation is paramount. As it becomes clear that previous assumptions no longer hold, we need to investigate new approaches. There is an urgent need to increase knowledge about fire science, response, behaviour, technology and cultural burning to respond to wildfire using knowledge and resources fitting with the requirements of a changing world.

Thirdly, access to highly trained, skilled and experienced personnel is no less important. This year's fire season was devastating, underscored by the heart-breaking loss of four wildland firefighters who were killed while protecting communities. Firefighter training and education, informed by timely research, will be crucial to prepare firefighting pros for extraordinary wildfire intensities and behaviours.

There has been much discussion recently about the need for a national firefighting force to support local and provincial wildfire responses. Military backup was provided this summer, but could assist with only evacuations and staging. Having additional wildfire-trained federal resources available for times of disaster is a fourth strategy that merits close consideration.

Finally, as we do all these things, we must take more seriously our responsibility to learn from Indigenous land management approaches. Cultural burning and prescribed fire have long served to reduce the risk of fire, improve ecological restoration and assist silviculture. Indigenous knowledge about wildfires has existed for thousands of years.

Wildfire is currently top of mind as the human and financial costs are felt across the country. However, once the season has ended and

this attention abates, we will need to have a responsibility to our communities and country to remember this season as an example of future threats. The end of the fire season is the time to adjust current emergency response strategies for the future.

The federal government will need to open discussions about firefighting resources and new approaches to fire management. This summer's warning means governments, Indigenous and local communities, scientists, policy specialists, and the private, public and post-secondary sectors must come together. We need to develop novel solutions informed by the best and most timely research and innovation, as well as traditional knowledge, to protect our valued firefighter force and communities.

The aftermath of this fire season can't be just about recovery. We need new collaborations between governments, Indigenous communities, researchers, and the public and private sectors. Our responsibility now lies in devising new strategies to ensure a safer, more resilient future for all Canadians.

Dr. Brett Fairbairn is president and vice-chancellor of Thompson Rivers University, a research centre in Kamloops working to develop new capacity in the fields of wildfire science and emergency management.