

REPORT TO THE ACADEMIC PLANNING STEERING COMMITTEE ON THE INCLUSION OF ABORIGINAL CONTENT IN THE TRU ACADEMIC PLAN

Prepared by: Dr. Jack Miller (in collaboration with Nathan Matthew)
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1. Introduction

Over the past three months, through planned consultation sessions, information has been gathered regarding Aboriginal content in the TRU Academic Plan. Working in collaboration with Nathan Matthew, Executive Director of First Nations/Aboriginal Education, a number of consultation sessions were held both on-campus at TRU and at various off-campus locations, mostly in or near First Nations communities. In late January/early February 2011, letters and memoranda were sent to all local and neighbouring First Nations organizations and communities as well as senior administration at TRU inviting interested parties to consult with TRU representatives about what they would like to see incorporated in the TRU Academic Plan, with particular emphasis on the Aboriginal perspective.

2. Process

The process of gathering information consisted of the following activities:

- a. reviewing academic plans from other BC institutions, with a focus on Aboriginal content;
- b. seeking input from small focus groups of First Nations/Aboriginal people representing local organizations and communities; and
- c. seeking input from known individuals regarding their personal perspective about what the TRU Academic Plan should contain.

3. Results

To date, the following information has been obtained and reviewed:

Documents:

- a. Vancouver Island University Academic Plan (Nov. 2010)
- b. Simon Fraser University Academic Plan (Feb. 2010)
- c. University of Northern BC University Plan (2010)
- d. UBC Okanagan School of Arts and Sciences Academic Plan (Jan. 2006)
- e. TRU Library Draft Strategic Plan 2011-2014
- f. "Why Do Aboriginal Students Stay or Leave TRU?" (Walton, et al, Feb. 2010)
- g. TRU School of Nursing Document: "Promote and Support Aboriginal Peoples' Health and Education" (undated)
- h. TRUSU "Submission to the Academic Plan" (2011)

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- i. Association of Canadian Deans of Education Accord on Indigenous Education (June, 2010)
- j. Faculty of Human, Social, and Educational Development: “TRU Academic Plan: Setting the Vision for the Future” (DRAFT, 2011)
- k. TRU Aboriginal Service Plan

Consultation Notes:

- a. Faculty of Human, Social, and Educational Development, Education Department Comments (Jan. 28, 2011)
- b. Aboriginal Student Consultation session at the Gathering Place (2011)
- c. Williams Lake Campus (February 24, 2011)
- d. Open Consultation Session (March 14, 2011)
- e. Open Consultation Session (March 16, 2011)
- f. Opens Consultation Session (March 17, 2011)
- g. Secwepemc Cultural Education Society (March 18, 2011)

4. Discussion

In all of the documents reviewed and all of the information gathered from individuals and small groups, there were many common themes. The following items represent a collation of “raw data” collected during consultation sessions conducted over the past 3 months.

- frequent reference to Indigenous knowledge and Aboriginal ways of knowing (i.e. Indigenous science, architecture, etc.)
- the establishment of unique and “niche” programs that have significant Aboriginal content and have built-in flexibility to adapt to and be relevant to local needs, i.e. the development and implementation of a Bachelor’s Degree in Aboriginal Leadership
- summer institutes that would include ethnobotany, Indigenous science and archaeology
- courses and programs that embody an Aboriginal World-view of knowledge, i.e. viewing education from a wholistic perspective
- the provision of more Aboriginal content and programs, e.g. First Nations language courses, and Aboriginal faculty to teach courses from an Aboriginal perspective
- emphasis on ensuring that all TRU courses with Aboriginal content are transferable to other institutions in BC and Canada
- seamless and transparent transfer of credit for Aboriginal content courses and programs from other BC and Canadian institutions
- greater numbers of outreach programs and courses and programs delivered in local First Nations communities

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- requirement for all TRU students to take a course in First Nations history and culture – it could have a writing focus and could be a collaborative effort with EML/Sociology, and Anthropology
- additional OL courses with a First Nations/Aboriginal focus on history, geography, language, culture, and social structures
- increased numbers of First Nations-based programs that reflect the realities of First Nations community life
- increased communication by having an event calendar display board in the Gathering Place as well as on the website; an Aboriginal website
- promotion of TRU as *the University of Choice for First Nations/Aboriginal students* by equalizing events, groups, resource funding such as Aboriginal Awareness to the same extent that International Days are funded
- Aboriginal Orientation should be set on a different, less overwhelming day than the TRU orientation day and include orientation to Secwepemc territory and resources both on and off campus
- increased emphasis on Aboriginal content in the library
- development and implementation of an Aboriginal mentorship program for and by Aboriginal students
- additional special events and speakers that represent the place the campus occupies in Secwepemc culture as well as the broader Aboriginal culture
- construction of single, married, and family accommodation on campus for First Nations students
- greater availability of daycares spaces for Aboriginal students
- construction of a “stand alone” Aboriginal Centre on campus
- establishment of a full-time position for an Aboriginal person in the Counseling Department
- increased linkage with International programs – but not an over-emphasis on international programs at the expense of programs, support, and services for Aboriginal students. There should also be more opportunities for Aboriginal student exchanges with other universities with an emphasis on Indigenous education
- emphasis on strong support from all sectors of TRU for more evidence that TRU sits on the traditional territory of the Secwepemc people (and the Interior Salish territories in general) – this fact should be evident on campus, at the main entrances to campus, and included on all publicity and marketing for the general public (the new figure of Coyote on the House of Learning should become a campus “icon” and be represented in many ways and be included in most aspects of campus life)
- generally the services for Aboriginal students is getting better, but more effort is needed
- emphasis on a balance (fiscal) between the provision of academic courses and programs and the provision of services for Aboriginal students

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- construction of facilities, placement of artefacts, adding services, etc., should not be done in a “piecemeal” manner, or in a “shotgun” approach; pick a significant project or projects and “do them right” and then move on to the next project
- promotion of an accommodation option to Band Education Coordinators to relieve the worry about housing from first year First Nations students
- virtual campus tours should be available on-line for those students who are unable to come to campus
- additional tutoring options for Aboriginal students – this can be a cost-sharing arrangement with First Nations communities who are sponsoring students
- all aspects of Aboriginal content in the Academic Plan should be integrated into the plan, not simply added on
- concerted effort to ensure that the Academic Plan, the Aboriginal Service Plan, and the Strategic Plan must come together in an integrated manner with specific references to each other if TRU is to truly be the *University of Choice for First Nations/Aboriginal students*
- although there have been many attempts to provide orientation sessions for faculty and staff around the importance of providing appropriate levels of service for Aboriginal students and for the inclusion of Aboriginal content in programs and courses, and to provide a greater sense of understanding of First Nations culture and how Aboriginal learners are affected, more needs to be done and it needs to be done on an annual basis for the orientation of new faculty, staff, and administrators (the LeNonet Project, carried out by the University of Victoria, resulted in the development of an online curriculum that all faculty has to take – this might be a model we could use.)

5. Recommendations

It is imperative that the TRU Academic Planning Steering Committee include in its final recommendations to the TRU Senate (through the Provost and VP Academic and the Academic Planning and Priorities Committee), the following points/issues related to Aboriginal content in the TRU Academic Plan:

Recommendation 1:

That the first page (inside the cover) of the Academic Plan (when it is written) include a photograph of the TRU Coyote sculpture along with the acknowledgement that TRU is located on the traditional territory of the Secwepemc and Interior Salish First Nations peoples. (See the VIU Academic Plan as an example).

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Recommendation 2:

That all aspects of the TRU Academic Plan reflect the significant First Nations/Aboriginal student presence on campus and that the inclusion of specific mention of Aboriginal programs be integrated seamlessly into the Academic Plan so that such content is not seen as an “add –on”.

Recommendation 3:

That unique and “niche market” programs specifically related to First Nations/Aboriginal education be given priority for development and supported by all faculties and departments. The first priorities should be Aboriginal language and culture programs and a Bachelor of Aboriginal Leadership Degree program.

Recommendation 4:

That steps are taken to ensure that where appropriate, Aboriginal ways of knowing are included in program and course development and that accurate Aboriginal content is included in all program areas, and in particular, in all new programs and courses approved by APPC, EPC, and Senate.

Recommendation 5:

That significant effort is made to be more inclusive of First Nations/Aboriginal students in all aspects of campus life. Since research has shown that one of the most significant factors affecting the retention of students at university is effective student engagement, it is important to ensure that opportunities for First Nations student to be engaged in campus life and student activities are a priority at TRU. There are significant numbers of specific examples of ways to enhance campus life for First Nations students contained in section 4 of this report, and could also include support for Aboriginal student engagement and mentorship within research as well as including spaces outside of the Gathering Place for students to get together.

Recommendation 6:

All future construction, additions, and renovations undertaken on campus should be subject to appropriate consultation with students, faculty, and staff of Aboriginal ancestry, as well as our Elders on campus, in order to ensure that design and fit with the rest of campus is taken into consideration and that the needs of First Nations/Aboriginal students has been addressed.

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Recommendation 7:

Building on the current Aboriginal Education Centre, long-term campus planning should include a “stand alone” centre for Aboriginal education that would also be the centre for Aboriginal activities on campus and the centre for Aboriginal/First Nations students on campus. The UBC and UVic models are ones that serve as excellent examples.

Recommendation 8:

There is urgent need for additional student accommodation and daycare at TRU. The needs of Aboriginal students must be considered in the expansion of existing programs and facilities. Additionally, specific services for Aboriginal students such as Counselling, tutoring and mentorship are urgently needed and must be supported.

Recommendation 9:

Greater/more frequent involvement of Band Education Coordinators in campus life activities. These are key contacts between TRU and the home communities of most of our Aboriginal students and they need to be consulted more frequently and generally more involved in the decisions made that affect Aboriginal students.