

Office of the
PRESIDENT AND VICE-CHANCELLOR

May 27, 2020

Dear community supporters,

I last wrote to all of you on April 9, 2020. At a time when we are unable to travel and meet face-to-face, I want to keep you updated on happenings at Thompson Rivers University.

While our physical campuses and regional centres were necessarily shuttered two months ago due to COVID-19, we remain active and available for students in a virtual way – whether the delivery of courses, library services, or access to academic advising or counselling. Our spring and summer terms are being delivered virtually, and with student enrolment strong for these sessions, it shows that students and faculty alike are adjusting and finding ways to move forward in our ‘new normal.’

TRU has a 42-year history in delivering courses in ways that go beyond normal. We are B.C.’s designated university for Open Learning. Our distinctive mandate and experience mean we can offer services, support students, and build learning communities online in ways few other universities can match. Come this fall, these strengths will be in evidence as I am confident TRU will offer superior teaching and services as we continue in a primarily virtual format. Some classes will be in person, but only where program requirements necessitate hands-on, practical learning. Related to this, there has been positive movement and discussion with other post-secondary institutions and relevant provincial partners on the safe resumption of trades programming, which we know is vital in meeting the current and future needs of our local economies, particularly when we think about preparing for life after a pandemic.

As we consider the way forward with our partner institutions and our Ministry, we are also doing the same in our communities. TRU is a member of #YKA Strong, an initiative to bolster the community of Kamloops and support local businesses during and after COVID-19. As president, I was recently invited to join the Mayor’s Task Force in Economic Recovery and Renewal. I am humbled and gratified as it speaks to the importance of TRU in our communities; we employ community members, we educate students, and our faculty have knowledge and conduct research that help society. We engage in communities throughout our region, and wherever TRU alumni are located, our graduates will be supporting people through the pandemic and driving the recovery forward.

If anything, one of the lessons we are learning through this pandemic is the timeless value of community. We’ve seen this exemplified in recent months, particularly in support for students. I am thankful for the financial help offered through governments such as the new federal Canada Emergency Student Benefit and the provincial Indigenous Emergency Assistance Fund. Beyond financial, many students are understandably having difficulty managing with the significant change around them.

Hence, I was pleased to see the launch in April of Here2Talk, the province's new mental-health counselling and referral service specifically for post-secondary students. This will be an important resource and augment the work of our staff who are proactively connecting with students, including our international students who have their own unique circumstances and concerns. As you may know, TRU has been enriched by the presence of international students on our campus; they have increasingly become an important part of our university life and we are doing what we can to support them in this time of uncertainty. Many of those currently in Kamloops are continuing their studies with TRU through virtual delivery, but it is unclear how many new students will enrol for the fall due to travel restrictions and the lack of face-to-face opportunities. There is, however, some cause for optimism. The federal government recently announced a relaxation to some of its international student study and post-graduate work permit requirements, allowing our future international students to complete a portion of their studies with TRU virtually, in their home country.

We will have a better sense of students' individual plans and the impact on our fall semester in a few months' time. While we hope for the best, we also know it's important to plan for less and as such, are paying close attention to the university's financial situation. Conversations are occurring with our employees as we consider what we may need to do in the future to ensure sustainability. Such conversations are never easy but our employee groups are understanding of the current climate.

As you can see, much has transpired in the last while at TRU, and much more is anticipated in the months to come as we plan for and around uncertainty. If you should have any questions about the information I've shared or wish to connect, please don't hesitate to reach out. I'm always interested in hearing from you.

I'd like to close with this one thought – while the world is changing around us, the need for an education, and the hope it brings, has not. On June 22, we will mark that hope with our graduating class of 2020. This year, we will celebrate virtually, and look forward to a time when we can meet again and celebrate in person.

Sincerely,



BRETT FAIRBAIRN
President and Vice-Chancellor

Thompson Rivers University campuses are on the unceded lands of the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc (Kamloops campus) and the T'exelc (Williams Lake campus) within Secwépemc'ulucw, the traditional territory of the Secwépemc. TRU also serves the peoples of surrounding territories including the Stat'imc, Nlaka'pamux, Tsilh'qotin, Nuxalk, and Dakelh, and Métis communities within these territories.