

There is an excellent article in the October 3 Macleans about “How TRU draws 3,500 students from 100 different countries” (<https://www.macleans.ca/education/how-tru-draws-3500-students-from-100-different-countries/>). The key reputation points seem to be well stated by AVP Baihua Chadwick: student advisers, understanding the student makeup of a different group from traditional on-campus students, open doors to help with a wide range of non-academic issues.

On the written submission pages of the Envision project there are letters lauding our great language learning, aboriginal student services and undergraduate research.

TRU has been hiring on-campus advisors and wellness staff to provide on campus students with much-needed support outside the classroom, beyond what faculty members can provide.

Unfortunately, none of these services are available to a growing population of our students – those in Open Learning. There used to be an excellent call-centre based support system for these students, but it has now disappeared into a much-overworked registrar’s office. Looking through the ‘Current Students’ web page – and these *are* current students – Open Learning students get access to almost none of the services, despite paying the same (in some cases, *higher*) tuition.

There is an ongoing problem with online registration (which is, of course, the principal way OL students register). This affects some students and some courses. But the students affected cannot get through by alternative means: they cannot access OL registration via telephone and if they show up on campus, they are directed to the Registrar’s Office in OL – which is behind a locked door. Emails go unanswered. There are no student orientations, mentors, or transition programs. They are not members of the Student Union and they are not ‘alumni’ if they are course-takers instead of program-takers. Course-takers don’t get access to academic advising, indigenous services, or early alert. They don’t get access to counselling or student benefits plans. They are not eligible for co-op, or undergraduate (or graduate) research opportunities. IT Support is limited to logging in and password resets, which is frustrating and baffling to students taking fully online courses.

Open Learning student numbers are growing at more than 10% per year, but the services being offered to them are continually being eroded. The relevant staff numbers in Open Learning have not increased in years. At the very minimum, TRU’s OL students should have access to services equivalent to those available to on-campus students. At the same time, and due to the very different nature of our OL student body compared to campus or international, they have some distinct needs which need distinct solutions. They should get equivalent support – not necessarily the same support. A service that they can only visit on-campus during business hours is not support for OL students who mostly live outside of the region and have other jobs or family responsibilities that send them to OL in the first place. The Writing Centre’s WriteAway and WCOOnline are examples of how this can be done to support OL students,

Please remember that OL students are TRU students too and deserve the same level of service. We need to think more about assessing the services we deliver and how we deliver them, as this article argues quite clearly:

<https://er.educause.edu/articles/2018/10/online-student-services-what-where-who-when-how-and-most-importantly-why>