

TRU's Role in BC's Recovery

SEPTEMBER 2020

TRU exists for the benefit of our communities. It's fair to ask:

What can TRU do to support BC's economic and social recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic?

TRU's 50-year history includes being a hub for local, regional and international quality education for its diverse student population. Our reputation is also built on having over 40 years of leadership in open and distance education. Throughout this time, TRU has grown, become stronger and more connected with our region.

This document is designed to bring our region together with a shared mission to emerge from COVID-19 even stronger than before. Our teaching and research will drive the recovery in the Interior of BC and beyond. We are committed to high-priority actions, and there is more that we can do with your help.

Our new university vision inspires us to achieve a recovery that is equitable, inclusive and sustainable. Guided by the concept of *Kw'selktnéws* (we are all related and interconnected with nature, each other, and all things), this means working with others to strengthen our communities and ensuring a post-secondary education remains accessible to all who seek it.

Should you have any questions about TRU, please don't hesitate to be in touch.

Brett Fairbairn
President and Vice-Chancellor
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The plan for current and future programs

Our biggest social and economic impact comes from our students. They are the future health-care workers, engineers, social workers, teachers, tradespeople, social justice advocates, and business and tourism professionals. Through our graduates, TRU will supply the intelligence and skills to rebuild the economy and society in the Interior of BC and beyond.

We are committed to do the following using our existing resources:

- Offer a full range of courses and programs, along with continuing studies and workforce development
- Support all learners to succeed no matter their location or stage in life: flexible programs, distance delivery, and recognition of the knowledge students bring from prior learning
- Achieve parity in participation and success for Indigenous students; this includes program delivery in Indigenous communities where possible
- Provide students with continued engagement with faculty and fellow students through an enriched virtual environment
- Offer safe environments for in-class learning where required
- Launch new master's programs: Data Science – supporting data analysis and evidence informed decision making; and a Master of Social Justice
- Prepare leaders in virtual teaching through Canada's only Graduate Certificate in Online Teaching and Learning

In addition to the commitments above, we are ready to:

- Launch new bachelor's programs in electrical and computer engineering
- Launch the Bachelor of Education: Trades and Technology to prepare the teachers who will elevate career paths in trades and technology
- Develop a Master of Nursing – Nurse Practitioner and a Master of Social Work
- Adapt the focus of certificate, diploma, and degree programs to respond to short-term regional recovery needs (such as expanded seats in Respiratory Therapy and Health Care Assistant)
- Find new opportunities for students to provide community service such as mental-health outreach or business advising, as part of their programs or as co-curricular experience
- Meet the added reskilling, upskilling, and certification needs of individuals displaced by COVID-19 wherever they may live—from our large cities to our most rural and remote. We will expand existing programs and develop new ones to meet needs, for example certification in alternate and green energies
- Research to build the knowledge needed for a strong recovery

We are looking for partners in government and industry to help us deliver these possibilities

Support and flexibility for students

The pandemic has created unprecedented challenges for students—in finances, in health and wellbeing, and in adapting to a new way of learning. Even when more people return physically to campus, how we teach and learn will have changed. Investment in new technology, new modes of education delivery and new skills is critical.

TRU is committed to:

- Continue providing the vast majority of student support services, now by alternate means
- Increase virtual contact with students, as well as some in-person contact in safe environments
- Direct additional TRU and donor funds to student financial needs
- Recognize and support the unique needs and challenges of international students by providing enhanced cultural and language support
- Dedicate on-campus study spaces that meet safety guidelines

- Maintain research continuity virtually and, where permitted, in person for graduate student project and thesis work, and for undergraduate research assistants

Where partners can help:

- Provide resources to support equity of access to virtual learning technologies, and to ensure strong student wellbeing
- Support local talent—regional businesses and not-for-profits can partner with TRU to open up and hire more students for co-op, apprenticeship and work-integrated learning opportunities
- Support the unique needs of international students—for an increase to visa-processing capacity to address application backlogs, cost-share in safe arrival and quarantine measures, and offset losses from declining enrolment





TRU's place in the region

Stability in a pandemic

TRU creates stability and growth for our wider region. Through the activity of our university operations and the activities of students and alumni, we contribute \$705.3 million annually to the regional economy and \$1.5 billion annually to the provincial economy.

To keep doing this, we have to remain strong. As with other sectors and organizations, we are facing operational and fiscal challenges from COVID-19.

Our response continues to be both realistic and proactive, and we are doing all that we can to support our students, faculty, and staff. Our goal is that TRU be academically and fiscally strong as we play our part in building a better future.



\$169.7 million
Operations Spending Impact



\$45.9 million
Student Spending Impact



\$489.7 million
Alumni Impact



\$705.3 million
TOTAL IMPACT

- OR -

9,670
JOBS SUPPORTED

TRU'S REGIONAL IMPACT IN
FISCAL YEAR 2018-19



For every \$1...



Students gain \$1.50 in lifetime earnings



Taxpayers gain \$3.10 in added tax revenue and public sector savings



Society gains \$4.30 in added provincial revenue and social savings

Physical and digital infrastructure

The pandemic has accelerated digital change and called on our leading-edge skills in online learning and teaching. TRU has invested in additional digital infrastructure and used the wealth of our experience in virtual learning, our Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching, and our Open Learning division to move to a mostly virtual teaching and learning environment. This is an investment in today's needs and tomorrow's innovations in learning and teaching.

Needs for the future:

- Robust and integrated technology for a continuously improving student experience
- Expanded specialist online learning coordinator/advisor services
- Investment for course redesign for online delivery and new program development that responds to the new post-COVID realities and technological enhancements
- Improved broadband services in rural and remote communities to increase access to education
- Capital investments to improve and modernize on-campus teaching and research spaces

In support of regional economic recovery, TRU is ready to participate in future government infrastructure programs, enter into partnerships, and accept donor support for capital priorities.

These include:

- Cloud-based educational and IT systems for enhanced virtual presence and breadth of teaching and learning online, in innovative formats that blend the on-campus and virtual learning experiences
- Campus modernization including IT, classroom and building renovations at all our sites including Williams Lake and regional centres
- An Indigenous research and development building, serving as the lead space for Indigenous curriculum, research, and reconciliation
- A STEM building to support the current and future demand for STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) disciplines
- A Business and Economics building to support entrepreneurship, business skills, and professional development



The role of research in recovery

COVID-19 has highlighted why we conduct research. Through research we have hope for a vaccine, we inform public health decisions that keep us safe, and we can measure the socio-economic effects of the virus. As part of the *Thompson Rivers University Act*, the pursuit of research and scholarly activities is central to our core mission. Research offers solutions and strategies for personal and community wellness.

Research has continued through the pandemic and we are committed to do more.

We will:

- Support faculty to do research that helps the region manage the pandemic and engage in the recovery
- Launch new research into issues important to the Interior
- Increase community-partnered research that provides a mutual benefit for participating organizations, faculty and students
- Research new ways to teach, learn, and recognize prior learning, drawing lessons from the pandemic
- Invest in leading-edge Indigenous research and researcher development

Partners can help shape our research capacity and provide direction to help us as we engage communities in recovery.

Ways to assist:

- Fund student researchers at both the graduate and undergraduate level
- Expand our community-based research by and with Indigenous communities
- Invest in the creation of an Interior Region Research Development Fund
- Offer equipment, in-kind resources, shared expertise, or use of sites for research and teaching
- Support a shift to green technological innovation through partnership with municipal and regional governments and development of a provincial research fund dedicated to addressing climate change
- Work with TRU to develop an Interior innovation centre for fire science, emergency management, and tech innovation
- Support establishment of a BC Tourism Research Centre at TRU



Harnessing the research power of three Interior universities

Since 2017, TRU along with the University of Northern BC and UBC Okanagan have worked in partnership as the Interior University Research Coalition to accelerate research for the benefit of the Interior through sharing of resources, ideas and opportunities.

The result:

- A research cluster in disaster prevention, response, recovery and resilience
- A research cluster in regional, rural and remote communities
- \$5 million in provincial funding to establish a BC Research Chair in Predictive Services, Emergency Management and Fire Science (based at TRU, the chair will improve forecasting, prevention and response to wildfires emergencies)
- \$170,000 in provincial funding to address health research questions specific to the BC Interior region



Forests Minister Doug Donaldson announces a new research chair position at Thompson Rivers University.

Photo: Government of British Columbia



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