

The following sections report on work underway, and progress made regarding executive priorities for the current year based on TRU's vision and 10-year strategic change goals.

Enabling Strategies/Operations

BUDGET SUSTAINABILITY — In recent months a major priority for the executive has been working to develop a balanced budget for 2025-26 as well as strategies to begin addressing projected potential deficits for the following years.

Since last fall, TRU has begun to see declines in international student enrolment that, in some programs, cannot be recovered for several years, or possibly at all. Given global events, this is not the only risk or pressure on our finances. The current situation is new for TRU, which has always had budget surpluses, including through COVID.

Our revenues will swing by tens of millions of dollars, requiring expenditure reductions larger than any TRU has ever seen. At the same time, it is important to push hard to develop new programs and recruitment streams as these strategic opportunities may take several years to materialise.

Over the last few months, TRU has sent several updates to faculty and staff about the budget process and provided regular reports to other internal groups, including the Senate. Some of these updates have resulted in media coverage, which has often focused on the negative aspects of the budget shortfalls. The stories presented in the media do not fully set out the extent of the work being done to face the challenges.

TRU is not alone in facing financial difficulties. Institutions across Canada are dealing with similar pressures, particularly due to declining international student enrolments caused by changes in federal policy. Some institutions are in far more difficult positions.

Despite these challenges, TRU remains committed to protecting our core mission of providing high-quality education and research. As we work towards a balanced budget for 2025-26, we are finding ways to reduce costs and expenditures in ways that impact our core mission to the least extent possible. We will reduce our unfilled vacancies list by as much as 75 positions to save \$7 million, for example.

In addition to managing costs, TRU is pursuing new revenue. Strategic enrolment planning is a key focus, with increased efforts in domestic recruitment and retention. TRU is also enhancing its reputation for research, which attracts external funding and supports student learning.

Budgeting is about setting priorities, and TRU's priority remains clear — ensuring students receive the best possible education while maintaining the university's financial health. By taking a measured approach, I expect that TRU will navigate these financial challenges and continue to serve students and the broader community effectively.

Considerably more detail is provided in other reports on the board's agenda.

ENROLMENT SUMMARY WINTER 2025 — IPE recently released a summary of TRU enrolment for Winter 2025. Overall, TRU remains an institution of approximately 29,000 students, approximately one-half of whom study online. Within this total, there are key shifts in student numbers across TRU's campuses and Open Learning programs.

The most significant change is a sharp decline in new international enrolments, down 59% compared to last year. This drop is a direct result of federal policy changes affecting study and post-graduate work permits, leading to an overall 19% decline in total international student numbers on the Kamloops campus.

In contrast, domestic enrolment is stable or growing after several years of slight declines. Kamloops campus has seen a 4% increase in domestic students, while Williams Lake campus enrolment is up 23%. Open Learning continues to expand, with domestic enrolment increasing by 7%, demonstrating resilience in TRU's core student base.

Program demand has also shifted. The Bob Gaglardi School of Business and Economics, which previously saw high enrolment from international students, has experienced a significant decline, particularly at the post-baccalaureate level. Meanwhile, Science, Nursing, and Trades programs have shown growth, reflecting changing student interests and workforce needs.

Open Learning remains a large component of TRU's enrolment strategy, with a 45% increase in international students and a 7% increase in domestic enrolment. TRUly Flexible will expand our ability to meet the needs of our Open Learning students, and also of students seeking other forms of flexibility in learning options.

Indigenous student representation continues to strengthen, particularly in Williams Lake, where 37% of domestic students identify as Indigenous. This increase reflects TRU's commitment to accessibility and support for Indigenous learners in the region. The following sections provide a detailed breakdown of enrolment figures across campuses and programs:

Overall Enrolment Trends

- Total On-Campus Students: 9,226 (Kamloops: 9,014; Williams Lake: 193; Regional Centres: 19).
- Total Open Learning Students (FYTD): 15,899 (Domestic: 12,236; International: 3,669).

- Significant Decline in International Students: Down 19% in Kamloops due to federal study and work permit policy changes.
- Domestic Student Growth: Up 4% in Kamloops and 7% in Open Learning.

Kamloops Campus

- Total Students: 9,014, a 7% decrease from Winter 2024.
- Domestic Students: 5,247 (up 4% from 2024).
- International Students: 3,767 (down 19% from 2024).
- New International Students: Down 59% due to federal policy changes.
- Largest Decline by Country: India (-29%), Nigeria (-16%), Bangladesh (-13%).
- Largest Top 5 Recruitment Countries: [ask TRU World or IPE]
- Countries where TRU is Investigating Possibilities for Expanded Recruitment: Mexico, Colombia, Malaysia... [ask TRU World]
- Indigenous Student Representation: 13% of domestic students.
- Graduate and Post-Baccalaureate Students: Post-baccalaureate enrolments down 33%, graduate down 18%.

Williams Lake & Regional Centres

- Total Students: 212 (up 23% from 2024).
- Indigenous Students: 37% of domestic enrolment, an increase from 23% in 2024.
- International Students: Small increase to 14 students (from 8).
- Growth in Faculty of Arts & Education and Social Work: Significant rise in enrolments.

Course Enrolments

- Kamloops Campus: Down 6% overall (Domestic +4%, International -18%).
- Business and Economics: Largest drop (-1,892 course enrolments).
- Science, Nursing, Trades: Moderate growth.
- Williams Lake & Regional Centres: Up 9%, driven by Science and Education.

APPOINTMENT OF NEW DEAN, FACULTY OF ARTS — Dr. Mark Wallin has been appointed Dean of the Faculty of Arts, effective February 13, 2025.

Mark steps into this role at a pivotal time. His focus will be on stabilizing enrolment, strengthening career pathways, and deepening connections between the Faculty of Arts and the broader community to show the real-world impact of an arts education.

A longstanding member of the TRU community, Mark has held key leadership roles, including Interim Dean, Associate Dean (Curriculum Development and Flexible Learning), and Chair of the Department of Communication and Visual Arts. His leadership helped rejuvenate the Bachelor of Arts program, launch new interdisciplinary initiatives, and expand Indigenous language programming in collaboration with Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc.

Mark holds a Doctor of Philosophy in English Language and Literature (2008) and a Master of Arts in English: Language and Professional Writing (1997), both from the University of Waterloo, as well as a Bachelor of Arts in English Literature from Trinity Western University (1995). His academic training in literature, communication, and media studies has shaped his interdisciplinary approach to education, research, and leadership.

As a researcher in media studies, adaptation, and event studies, he examines how narratives shape public understanding — an approach that informs his work as an educator and administrator. His efforts have also supported Indigenization at TRU, including securing for-credit pathways for land-based learning and expanding Indigenous language offerings.

AVP GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH APPOINTED — Dr. Brian Roy has been named as TRU's new Associate Vice-President, Graduate Studies and Research.

Brian comes to TRU from Brock University, where he was associate dean of the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs for the past four years. He joined Brock's kinesiology department in 2002 and was department chair from 2015 to 2018. His leadership roles at the university include senator, chair of the Bioscience Research Ethics Board, and director of the Centre for Bone and Muscle Health.

As the recipient of multiple grants and awards as a sports and clinical scientist, Brian's research focuses on the regulation of integrated physiological responses and muscle metabolism during physical activity and dietary manipulations. In 2023 he was co-investigator on a CHIR Project Grant valued at \$573,752, "The Can-IIHSS: A Canadian integrated platform for injury and concussion prevention." He won the CCIP Award for Collaborative Excellence in 2022 for "Concussion Awareness Training Tool (CATT) for High-Performance Athletes." He is the author of more than 80 peer-reviewed articles and chapters in six books.

Brian holds a Bachelor of Physical Education and an MSc in Kinesiology from McMaster and a PhD in Work Physiology from the University of Waterloo. He returned to McMaster as a CIHR Research Fellow in the Department of Medicine.

NEW VICE-PROVOST TO LEAD TRU'S VISION FOR DIGITAL LEARNING AND TEACHING EXCELLENCE — Dr. Liesel Knaack has been appointed as Vice-Provost, Open Learning, Teaching and Innovation at TRU, effective May 1, 2025.

Dr. Knaack brings impressive experience in educational leadership, digital pedagogies, online and open learning innovations, making her ideal to lead TRU's commitment to excellence in teaching and learning and digital transformation.

Dr. Knaack has an extensive background in higher education. Currently, she serves as the Director of North Island College's Centre for Teaching and Learning Innovation, where she established a framework to enhance quality student learning through digital pedagogies, program review and quality enhancement activities, and teaching innovations.

Prior to that, she led Vancouver Island University’s Centre for Innovation and Excellence in Learning for nearly a decade. She also contributed significantly to Ontario Tech University’s founding and growth as Associate Professor and Program Director in the Faculty of Education. She was a co-founder of the BC Teaching and Learning Council supporting leadership of teaching and learning across BC in collaboration with BCcampus, and she is part of the BC AI Working Group which aligns with the BC Digital Learning Strategy.

Throughout her career, Dr. Knaack has demonstrated a deep commitment to academic quality, evidence-informed teaching practices, and innovative uses of educational technology. Her research activities include the design of online learning experiences, metacognitive teaching practices, open pedagogies and digital literacies. She has published and shared her insights widely and worked collaboratively across the province and nationally to enhance student learning experiences.

At a time when TRU is navigating challenges caused by declining international enrolment, making strategic investments in leadership and innovation is critical to ensuring our continued success and sustainability.

NEW ACADEMIC INITIATIVES, PROGRAMS — Further to Board approvals last year, TRU continues to work to advance key academic and institutional priorities that support student success, community engagement, and research excellence. Here is a short overview of work underway on some of these key initiatives:

Honours College: TRU’s Honours College, set to launch in 2025, is designed to enhance academic excellence by fostering interdisciplinary research and collaboration. This initiative aligns with TRU’s long-standing commitment to student success and academic innovation. Work is underway to develop marketing and communications materials that will attract students and faculty.

Wildfire Certificate Programs: TRU has worked closely with the BC Wildfire Service and other stakeholders to create six wildfire-related programs, including five certificates and a diploma. Three certificates — the Wildfire Science Certificate, Sociocultural Dynamics of Wildfire Certificate, and Wildfire Communication and Media Certificate — are set to begin in September 2025. These programs will address workforce needs and align with TRU’s broader mandate to serve rural and Indigenous communities, particularly those disproportionately impacted by climate change. Bachelor’s degree programs related to wildfire studies are also being planned, but these will require further consultation with Indigenous communities and approvals by the BC government.

TRUly Flexible: As part of TRU’s evolution in Open Learning, TRUly Flexible integrates on-campus and online education, giving students more control over their learning paths. Phase 1 has focused on redeveloping asynchronous courses with universal design principles and zero-cost textbooks.

Internally, this initiative represents a cultural shift in course delivery, requiring careful communication to faculty and students to ensure adoption.

It also ties into TRU's 20th anniversary messaging, reinforcing TRU's leadership in accessible learning. Phase 2, a pilot project designed to assess what is needed to implement flexible learning across campus, will begin this spring.

TRU Bold: Emerging from TRU's Envision strategic plan, TRU Bold, our new academic plan, will position TRU as a leader in health and healing, eco-justice, and technology for social and economic development. A draft of the plan is expected at the Senate and Board levels soon.

Honouring Truth and Reconciliation

NEW CEREMONIAL MACE TO DEBUT AT SPRING CONVOCATION — Tk'emlúps artist Ed Jensen has designed and carved a new ceremonial mace for the university featuring Coyote and stories of the Secwépemc people. The new mace replaces our old mace, which was damaged in transit in 2024.

The new mace prominently features Coyote, carved from a piece of jade. He sits atop a juniper staff carved with pictographs that represent the stories of the Secwépemc people as they live on the land. The staff is carved with pictographs depicting stories of the Secwépemc people. To emphasize their importance, Jensen painted them with red ochre.

Ed, who is a respected hunter, hunting guide and knowledge keeper among Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc, says he is looking forward to seeing his art used in future convocation ceremonies. The mace was presented to TRU at a special ceremony on February 13. [Read the full story of Ed and his work here.](#)

CONVEYING THE STORY OF INDIGENIZATION AT TRU — TRU has a long history and a strong commitment to honouring the process of Truth and Reconciliation through the Indigenization of campus spaces, programs, and support services. Recently, TRU has produced an informational overview of Indigenization efforts at TRU, in the form of a booklet, which has been provided to the Board for this meeting. I look forward to the further development of other channels and content in the coming weeks.

Leading in Community Research / Scholarship

INAUGURAL PROFESSORIAL LECTURE (IPL) — Dr. Wendy Gardner gave her IPL on Tuesday, Feb. 4. Her lecture, [The Importance of BC Grasslands: Building Our Understanding](#), offered insights about what makes grasslands environmentally vital. Wendy was promoted to professor in Natural Resource Science in 2024.

GIFT SUPPORTS RESEARCH ON CLIMATE RESILIENCE — A \$100,000 donation will fund new research at Thompson Rivers University (TRU) that explores the role of British Columbia’s parks in climate resilience, reconciliation and Indigenous-led conservation.

The anonymous grant was awarded to Dr. Courtney Mason, TRU professor and Canada Research Chair in Rural Livelihoods and Sustainable Communities. Mason’s two-year research project, *Parks as Climate Resilience, Reconciliation and Indigenous-led Conservation*, will increase understanding of how parks can minimize risks to local ecosystems, foster socio-economic opportunities and manage climate-related environmental change.

Dr. Joel Wood is an associate professor of economics at TRU and co-lead on the project. Joining co-leads Mason and Wood on the project are a team of TRU faculty members from several faculties: Jessica Owen, natural resource science; Patrick Brouder, Kimberly Thomas-Francois and Jason Johnston, tourism; Natalie Clark, social work; and Rod McCormick, education.

An anonymous donor gave \$100,000 to support a research endeavour focused on tackling the challenges of climate change. It is the first time a philanthropic gift has been dedicated to an interdisciplinary research project at TRU.

SCHOOL OF NURSING LAB ACHIEVES CONDITIONAL ENDORSEMENT — The School of Nursing has received conditional endorsement for its simulation program from the International Nursing Association for Clinical Simulation and Learning (INACSL). This recognition highlights TRU’s commitment to excellence in simulation-based nursing education.

The endorsement confirms that our program meets INACSL’s rigorous Healthcare Simulation Standards of Best Practice, which include pre-briefing, debriefing, facilitation, and professional integrity. It reflects our focus on preparing students to tackle real-world healthcare challenges through transformative learning experiences.

Key to this achievement is our Simulation-Based Learning Centre (SBLC), which replicates real healthcare environments, such as hospital wards and home-care settings. Resources like the Dr. Sherman Jen High-Fidelity Simulation Centre, the Stollery Foundation Innovation Lab, and the Home Visit Lab offer immersive scenarios and advanced video technology for evaluation and debriefing.

This endorsement offers several benefits:

- Ensures consistent application of best practices in simulation education
- Recognizes a range of simulation experiences, including low- to high-fidelity, virtual reality, and distance learning
- Promotes positive change through evidence-based practices and research
- Encourages ongoing evaluation and improvement of simulation programs

- Enhances health-care education and patient safety through high-quality simulation practices

Eliminating Achievement Gaps

TRU OPEN LEARNING RECEIVES FUNDS TO IMPROVE MICRO-CREDENTIAL ASSESSMENT —

TRU has received \$321,359 for the third phase of its work creating a process to assess micro-credentials for additional credit options.

A micro-credential is a short, stand-alone, competency-based learning program that fits with labour market or community needs. It is assessed and recognized for employment or further learning.

As part of phase 3, TRU is assessing up to 50 micro-credentials for possible academic credit. This includes provincially funded and independently developed micro-credentials.

TRU is also working with the B.C. Council on Admissions & Transfer (BCCAT) to house and share the assessment results through the online Transfer Credit System. Sharing assessment results allows institutions across B.C. to identify potential credit paths within their own institution.

Phase 3 builds on the success of phases 1 and 2, which created a repeatable micro-credential assessment process.

TRU continues to engage with a committee of senior post-secondary institution representatives to refine, scale and apply the assessment process. This committee will report on findings with recommendations for repeatable and sustainable processes that expand current skill validation in post-secondary institutions.

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT REPORT — IPE recently completed an extensive analysis of data examining regional attainment. The report uses Statistics Canada census data and the BC Student Transitions Project (STP) to assess attainment in our region. It provides insights into credential levels, demographic trends, and student mobility, and highlights areas for continued attention in access, mobility, and completion rates.

The following sets out some key findings from the report:

Overall Educational Attainment

- **Post-secondary Credentials:** In 2021, 51 per cent of TRU region residents had a post-secondary credential, below the provincial average of 55–57 per cent.

- Bachelor's Degrees or Higher: The proportion of TRU region residents with a four-year degree or higher has increased to 40 per cent, up from 37 per cent in 2011, aligning with provincial trends.
- Trades Credentials: TRU region has a higher proportion of residents with trades credentials (11 to 12 per cent) compared to the BC average (8 per cent), though this proportion has declined over the past decade.

Demographic Differences

- Gender: Women in the TRU region are more likely to hold post-secondary credentials (54 per cent in Kamloops, 44 per cent in Williams Lake) than men. The gap is most pronounced in four-year degrees or higher.
- Indigenous Attainment: 40 per cent of Indigenous individuals in the TRU region hold a post-secondary credential, in line with the provincial average. The proportion of Indigenous residents with a four-year degree or higher has increased from 26 per cent in 2011 to 30 per cent in 2021.
- Achievement Gaps: Indigenous students in the TRU region face a 12 per cent gap in overall post-secondary attainment compared to non-Indigenous residents, which is lower than the provincial gap of 16 to 18 per cent.

Student Transitions / Mobility

- Immediate Post-secondary Entry: 40 per cent of TRU region high school graduates transition immediately to post-secondary, below the provincial average of 50 to 53 per cent.
- Delayed Entry: An additional 10 to 15 per cent enter post-secondary within three years, bringing the total transition rate to 50 to 55 per cent (BC: 63 to 68 per cent).
- Student Transfers: 10 per cent of TRU's student body comprises inbound transfers from other BC institutions, while 5 per cent transfer out.

Community Engagement / Partnerships

PROVINCIAL MANDATE LETTER TO MINISTER — The mandate letter from Premier David Eby to Minister Anne Kang, dated January 25, 2025, outlines several priorities that will directly impact post-secondary institutions, including TRU.

A primary focus is financial sustainability and ensuring that all post-secondary programs remain relevant, efficient, and cost-effective. Given the province's current budget constraints, institutions are expected to explore new revenue streams and cost reductions while ensuring that programming aligns with labour market needs and job opportunities for British Columbians.

Workforce development and skills training are central to the government's plans, with an emphasis on creating fast and efficient pathways to address shortages in key professions. This includes

improving credential recognition, expanding career laddering opportunities, and adopting new training models to support economic growth. Post-secondary institutions will be expected to collaborate closely with government initiatives aimed at bridging workforce gaps.

The recent federal changes to international student policies have created financial challenges for many institutions, including TRU. The province acknowledges these difficulties and is committed to working with post-secondary institutions to explore structural solutions that ensure financial stability. At the same time, institutions are encouraged to reduce reliance on international student enrolments and advocate for sustainable funding models.

Indigenous education and reconciliation remain high priorities. The government expects institutions to provide opportunities for Indigenous learners in ways that reflect a diversity of Indigenous cultures and values. TRU's ongoing efforts to strengthen Indigenous enrolment and support services align well with this direction, reinforcing the institution's role in fostering educational opportunities for Indigenous students.

Expanding access to education also includes addressing student housing needs. The province will support post-secondary institutions in developing housing as part of broader economic development strategies. This includes exploring partnerships with private developers to increase student housing supply under special provisions in the Residential Tenancy Act.

There is also a strong commitment to enhancing employment services and skills training for people facing systemic barriers to help them transition out of poverty. Institutions will play a role in offering inclusive education and workforce development programs that support individuals with complex needs.

International credential recognition is another key priority. The province is implementing the International Credentials Recognition Act to ensure that professionals trained abroad can transition into the workforce more efficiently. TRU may have a role in credential assessment, bridging programs, or supporting government efforts in this area.

These priorities will have significant implications for TRU's planning and operations. Budget scrutiny will require the university to explore sustainable funding sources. The expected decline in international student enrolment will necessitate a stronger focus on domestic student recruitment and retention. Aligning academic programs with provincial workforce needs will be essential to maintaining funding and relevance.

TRU's existing commitment to Indigenous education is well positioned within the government's mandate and may provide opportunities for additional funding or collaboration. The focus on student housing development could create new partnership opportunities for TRU to address housing challenges.

These themes provide a critical context for the university's response to enrolment challenges and strategic planning efforts. [The full mandate letter can be found here.](#)

VP INTERNATIONAL NOMINATED TO CBIE BOARD — Congratulations to Baihua Chadwick, Vice-President International, who has been nominated to the board of directors for the Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE).

CBIE is the national voice advancing international education in Canada, bringing together leaders from institutions nationwide to shape policies, share expertise and support student success. Baihua's nomination recognizes her leadership in international education, her commitment to fostering inclusion and diversity and her ability to navigate complex policy landscapes.

CONSULTATION / ENGAGEMENT — I have had the opportunity to take part in several meetings with government officials, both federally and provincially, in recent weeks as we work to advance and promote TRU's mission, especially regarding TRU Wildfire. I also had a cordial introductory meeting with our new minister of Post-Secondary Education and Future Skills (PSEFS), Anne Kang. Through efforts guided by the VP of University Relations and his team, we will endeavour to ensure that our government relations efforts continue to grow and have an impact.

I have had numerous meetings with peer universities, including an Interior Universities Research Consortium executive-team partnership meeting with the University of Northern British Columbia in Prince George, a meeting with Research Universities Council of British Columbia (RUCBC) presidents in Vancouver, and online meetings with Universities Canada including a meeting with its board of directors, of which I am a member this year.

Most recently, I had the opportunity to meet with Externado University Rector Hernando Parra Nieto in Colombia to discuss potential academic partnerships, including student exchanges and double-degree programs.

The discussion highlighted shared priorities such as faculty development and Indigenous inclusion. I also expressed interest in facilitating visits for TRU students and faculty to Externado and noted TRU's focus on in-person and virtual education.

The meeting was made possible through Juan Felipe Mejia, who is an Externado graduate and now Manager, Transnational Education, TRU World. Also representing TRU in Colombia were TRU World's ZiPing Feng, Chief International Enrolment Officer, and Aldo Mendizabal, Senior International Recruitment Consultant.