

**Interim Candidacy Evaluation Report**

**Thompson Rivers University**

**Kamloops, BC**

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A confidential report prepared for the  
Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU)

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## **Introduction**

On behalf of the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities, the evaluators conducted an interim candidacy evaluation of Thompson Rivers University. The evaluation team visited the campus to meet with faculty, administrators and staff on October 10-12, 2017. The evaluation was also informed by the July 21, 2016 letter of the Commission, and the recommendations sustained at that time.

Interim candidacy evaluations are conducted for institutions seeking candidacy under the authority of the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities, a regional accreditor. The intent of an interim candidacy peer evaluation is to assess an institution's performance and preparation for regional accreditation, relative to the Commission's Eligibility Requirements and Standards of Accreditation.

Founded as Cariboo College in 1970, the institution was granted authority to grant baccalaureate degrees in 1991, when it became known as the University College of the Cariboo (UCC). UCC gained authority to grant master's degrees in 2003. In March 2005, the institution became a university following incorporation under the Thompson Rivers University Act, which effectively amalgamated UCC with the British Columbia Open University and other aspects of the Open Learning Agency of British Columbia, to form Thompson Rivers University

True to its origin as a community college, TRU offers adult basic education, vocational training, and open learning and online programs and courses, as well as its undergraduate and master's degrees. The University includes a campus in Williams Lake and regional centres in 100 Mile House, Ashcroft & Cache Creek, Barriere, Clearwater, Lilloet & Lytton, as well as its central facility in Kamloops, BC. The institution enrolls approximately 26,000 students, divided almost perfectly between its face-to-face and online programs. The online programs serve both Canadian and international students. The University also grants joint degrees with institutions in China, India and Iceland.

TRU's application for consideration for Candidacy was approved by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities in January, 2014. NWCCU accepted TRU as a Candidate for Accreditation at the associate, baccalaureate and master's degree levels in 2016, following the University's Initial Candidacy Report and a peer evaluation. In granting Initial Candidacy, the Commission issued 5 recommendations and instructed the University to address each of them in their Fall 2017 Interim Candidacy Self-Evaluation Report.

### **Assessment of the Self-Evaluation Report and Support Materials**

This Interim Candidacy Self-Evaluation followed close on the heels of the previous self-evaluation. TRU reports that the Commission recommended that they handle this by addressing changes and new information in this report while providing links to responses

and content in the previous report where information had not changed. While this made changes and improvements easy to identify, the evaluation team found the experience of repeatedly jumping back and forth between reports via the links cumbersome. In addition, evaluators sometimes found themselves referred to sections of the previous report where links did not work. The evaluation team therefore recommends that the Commission instruct TRU to submit its next report as a single document. While this would require some additional explanations regarding refinements and changes, the reading experience would be improved for evaluators.

However, the issue described above is a relatively small concern in the larger context of a clear, concise, accurate and useful self-evaluation report. The team was especially pleased by the frankness with which the self-study describes the areas in which the institution is not yet in compliance with Commission standards. The very purpose of a self-study is for an institution to self-reflectively assess its progress and performance and we are all served by frankness in this regard

The evaluators were treated throughout their visit with professional respect, honesty and courtesy. Requests for additional documentation and interviews were promptly met. Hospitality was exceptional; the evaluator visiting the distant Williams Lake facility was provided a driver and welcomed on that campus. Faculty, administrators and staff answered questions with poise and patience, consistently approaching their accreditation responsibilities with an eye to how assessment and accreditation can be used to further improve the quality of their services, degrees and programs.

### **Topics Addressed as Addenda to the Institution's Interim Candidacy Report**

TRU addressed five previous recommendations as addenda to the institution's Self-Evaluation Report.

**PREVIOUS RECOMMENDATION 1:** The evaluation committee recommends that TRU improve its definition of mission fulfillment, and guided by that definition, articulate measurable institutional accomplishments or outcomes that represent an acceptable threshold or extent of mission fulfillment (Standard 1.A.2).

The evaluators find that the institution has revised its definition of mission fulfillment and has simplified its core themes. Importantly, TRU has also revised its indicators of core theme fulfillment, reducing the total number from 101 to 23 in order to focus on "those most relevant and meaningful to TRU and mission fulfillment." This improvement was achieved in the short period of time between receipt of the Commission's recommendations and submission of the current self-evaluation report, demonstrating an agile and intentional response to the Commission's recommendation.

**COMPLIMENT:** The evaluation team compliments TRU on the agility and intentionality demonstrated by the manner with which it reduced and narrowed its core theme indicators of achievement to focus on the measures most meaningful and relevant to the TRU community.

In a manner common among NWCCU institutions, TRU structures its core themes as objectives whose fulfillment collectively comprises the goal of mission fulfillment. This approach requires that core theme indicators of achievement be assessable, and that the indicators have threshold targets or goals. This is an important point because the standards do not currently require goals or threshold targets for core theme indicators. However, in order to operationally comprise mission fulfillment, such targets are necessary. Otherwise, progress towards mission fulfillment cannot be evaluated. Fortunately, TRU has developed a useful system inasmuch as the institution evaluates its indicators of core theme fulfillment as “achieved,” “minimally achieved,” or “not achieved.” “If the results show that 70% of the indicators for a core theme are in the Achieved or Minimally Achieved categories, TRU will consider that core theme fulfilled.” Similarly, “Mission fulfillment will occur when each of the core themes reach 70% Achieved or Minimally Achieved targets.” The evaluators find that this structure is suitable for establishing an acceptable threshold or extent of mission fulfillment.

While pleased with this structure and the improvements described above, the evaluation team finds that some of the indicators remain framed as inputs rather than measurable accomplishments or outcomes. Consequently, the evaluators recommend that this recommendation be sustained as revised recommendation 1, below:

**REVISED RECOMMENDATION 1.** While noting a useful reduction in the number of Core Theme objectives and indicators, the evaluators find that several of the indicators remain framed as inputs rather than measurable accomplishments or outcomes. Therefore, the evaluators recommend that the institution continue to improve its definition of mission fulfillment by articulating measurable institutional accomplishments or outcomes that represent an acceptable threshold or extent of mission fulfillment (1.A).

**PREVIOUS RECOMMENDATION 2:** The evaluation committee recommends that the General Education component of the University’s baccalaureate degree programs and transfer associate degree programs have identifiable and assessable learning outcomes that are stated in relation to the institution’s mission and learning outcomes for those programs (Standard 2.C.9 and 2.C.10).

Characteristic of the Canadian system of universities, degrees at TRU are not structured such that a general education component is prerequisite to the major or easily identifiable as a separate component of the degree. Indeed, it can be said that the entire idea of general

education, as a stand-alone component of a college degree separate and distinct from major study, is absent from their system. This is not to say that TRU degrees are narrowly technical or that they do not seek to provide graduates with the knowledge and abilities associated with a liberal arts and sciences education. Individuals we interviewed clearly see their BA and BS degrees as suitable preparation for advanced study and not as terminal, technical preparation. When asked, individuals could also describe the elements of general education embedded in major courses. Similarly, TRU shares in its self-evaluation that audits of its relevant programs show the integration of some components consonant with the NWCCU's expectations for general education. Indeed, the calendar (catalog, in U.S. terminology) description of components "[a]pplicable to most BA Degree Options" (pages 53-54) suggests that many undergraduate students at TRU are likely to approximate an array of breadth and skills roughly similar to the outcomes demonstrated by graduates of US colleges and universities. However, as TRU is aware, the curriculum is not yet designed to ensure that all baccalaureate students achieve such outcomes. Similarly, "a recognizable core of general education," as required of 2.C.9, or identifiable and assessable learning outcomes concerning general education, as required of 2.C.10.2, is not yet identifiable within the curriculum.

The evaluation team does find that TRU has actively initiated the work of developing such a general education program through the implementation of a senate ad hoc General Education Taskforce (GET). Members of this committee are educating themselves in best practice research on general education and are working with schools and programs to explore a general education model that will best suit TRU programs and students.

To meet the NWCCU standard, all TRU baccalaureate degree programs (and transfer associate degree programs, if developed) must integrate instruction in basic knowledge and methodology of the humanities and fine arts, mathematical and natural sciences, and social sciences; all applied undergraduate degree programs (such as TRU's Bachelor of Technology program) and certificate programs must also identify and deliver on outcomes in the areas of communication, computation, and human relations. Consequently, the evaluation committee recommends that TRU continue to improve in this area so that it can demonstrate that the GE component of its undergraduate programs include a recognizable core of general education and assessable learning outcomes that are consonant with Standards 2.C.9 and 2.C.10. To this end, the evaluators recommend that previous recommendation 2 be sustained as revised recommendation 2, below:

**REVISED RECOMMENDATION 2.** The evaluation committee recommends that TRU demonstrate that the GE component of its undergraduate programs include a recognizable core of general education that represents an integration of basic knowledge and methodology of the humanities and fine arts, mathematical and natural sciences, and social sciences, to help students develop the breadth and depth of intellect

necessary to become more effective learners and to prepare them for a productive life of work, citizenship, and personal fulfillment (2.C.9, 2.C.10).

**PREVIOUS RECOMMENDATION 3:** The evaluation committee recommends that data and systems essential to the operations of the institution be backed up in a manner that protects the data and systems from natural or human-caused disaster. In addition, the committee recommends that the University evaluate and implement its options to sustainably replace end-of-life network infrastructure technologies (Standard 2.G.5).

The evaluation team finds that TRU has backed up its data, and the systems essential to the operations of the institution, in a manner that protects the data and systems from natural or human-caused disaster. The evaluators also find that the University has devoted additional funds for the replacement of IT infrastructure. However, the team finds that this was done in an ad-hoc manner and that the institution has not sufficiently evaluated and implemented its options to sustainably replace end-of-life network infrastructure technologies (Standard 2.G.5). Therefore, the team recommends that Recommendation 4 be sustained as Revised Recommendation 3, below:

**REVISED RECOMMENDATION 3:** The evaluators find that funding has been recently dedicated to the replacement and maintenance of technology infrastructure in TRU's most recent budget; however, formalized planning for infrastructure replacement has not been completed. Consequently, the committee recommends that Thompson Rivers University develop a technology infrastructure replacement plan encompassing all its locations to ensure its ability to continue supporting its operations, programs and services. (2.G.8).

**PREVIOUS RECOMMENDATION 4:** The evaluation committee recommends that Thompson Rivers University continue and improve its planning to ensure that it is systematic, integrated, and comprehensive; that the planning process is inclusive and broad-based; and that the plans are informed by the collection and analysis of appropriate data and articulate institution and unit level priorities that guide decisions on resource allocation (Standard 3.A.1, 3.A.2, 3.A.3, and 3.A.4).

The evaluation team finds that TRU has continued to improve its planning in the short window between receipt of the Commission's findings and submission of the current self-evaluation report. Evidence for this finding includes the "Open governance Initiative," which has resulted in increased use of live-streamed town hall forums for discussion of the budget in January 2017, recent live-streamed joint meetings of the Board of Governors, Senate and PCOL, and new consultations by the President and Vice presidents with faculty councils. Student input in planning has also been strengthened by the addition of student members to Senate sub-committees, and new attention to recommendations from the Student Council. The evaluators find these changes have made planning more inclusive and



broad-based. Planning and resource allocation have also become more integrated through the use of zero-based budgeting, which was implemented, in part, to free up resources to support strategic initiatives. This practice, together with a new “Strategic Initiative Fund” of more than a million dollars is used to direct resources toward initiatives that serve the strategic objectives and core themes. This fund has recently been used to fund a new Co-op coordinator for the Engineering program, in support of the core themes on student success and research. Separately, a recommendation from the TRU Student Union (TRUSU) Budget Consultation Report fueled TRU’s priority of adopting Degree Works for course and academic planning. This initiative was also informed by concerns about course enrollment difficulties documented in the previous peer-evaluation report.

The evaluators find that recent changes and continued development of accessible reports and dashboards by the office of Integrated Planning and Effectiveness (IPE) have also permitted strategic planning and resource allocation to be informed by the appropriate collection, analysis and use of data. Committee members of each of the planning bodies interviewed by the evaluation team could specify data they had asked for or used in planning and resource allocation decisions. IPE, which employs more than a dozen analysts, has substantial capacity in this regard and is now working intentionally to make its data more accessible, useful and available to stakeholders. Increasing amounts of data and readable reports concerning enrollment, retention, graduation, and other information—much of it usefully specific to each college—is available via the IPE website and their Factbook. In addition to its formal presentations and services, IPE has also planned brown bag lunches to permit informal discussions regarding the use and application of its data and analytical services. Consequently, the evaluation team recommends that previous Recommendation 4 be considered fulfilled and that it be removed.

**PREVIOUS RECOMMENDATION 5.** The evaluation committee recommends that the University build upon its efforts to document student learning outcomes by developing appropriate measurements of student learning, analyzing assessment results, and implementing action plans in a cycle of continuous improvement (Standard 4.A.3 and 4.B.2).

The evaluation team finds evidence of considerable activity with respect to recommendation 5. The Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT) has substantial expertise in SLO development and assessment. In addition, many of TRU’s programs, such as nursing, have been engaged in SLO documentation and assessment for many years. TRU has drawn from this expertise to establish Faculty Fellows who have release time to assist departments in the establishment of Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) and many more departments now have PLOs than was the case a year ago.

In addition, because the litmus test of quality in academic settings depends upon documentation of what students know and can do, student learning assessment requires that an institution's faculty make the paradigm shift from an emphasis upon teaching, and what a teacher knows and can do, to student achievement, or what the teacher, degree, program or certification has successfully helped the student to know or be able to do. TRU may be advantaged in this regard, due to its longstanding identity as a teaching institution and its hallmark attention to preparing students for technical fields in which classroom tasks are closely modeled on real-world activities. Consequently, while the institution's student-learning assessment procedures and practices are still developing, support and understanding of the value and purpose of such practices provides a useful foundation upon which further refinement and improvement of those procedures and practices can occur. Given this orientation and the work of CELT and its faculty fellows, the evaluators do find that TRU is developing the resources and capacity necessary to eventually fulfill the requirements of this recommendation and of the many standards associated with student learning outcome assessment. However, TRU will need to continue to advance quickly in these matters. In this regard, the evaluators are concerned that TRU may be establishing processes that are more complicated than necessary.

For instance, a comparison of the 2017 "List of Program-level Learning Outcomes" (Appendix D of the 2017 Interim Candidacy Report), with the list of the same in the 2016 Self-Evaluation Report (Appendix 4), demonstrates exponential growth in this regard. A recent restructuring of the Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching is placing this endeavor front and center as a small cadre of Teaching Fellows look to advance PLO development more broadly in the coming months. Additionally, the General Education Taskforce (GET) is working diligently on the development of Institutional Learning Outcomes (ILOs) which map to TRU's evolving set of Graduate Attributes. The following table, included in a recent survey of TRU faculty by the GET, illustrates progress to date:

| TRU Graduate Attributes |   | DRAFT Institutional Learning Outcomes Graduates will:   |
|-------------------------|---|---|
| Knowledge               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Depth and breadth of knowledge</li> <li>• Knowledge acquisition and application</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrate, integrate and apply a depth and breadth of knowledge</li> </ul>   |
| Skills                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creative thinking and expression</li> <li>• Critical thinking, analysis, problem solving and research</li> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Teamwork and leadership</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exhibit the skills necessary to be an effective leader and team member</li> <li>• Apply critical thinking and problem solving within diverse contexts</li> <li>• Demonstrate effective oral and written communication skills in multicultural and diverse contexts</li> </ul>  |
| Values and Commitments  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social responsibility and ethical behaviour</li> <li>• Sustainability and entrepreneurship</li> <li>• Intercultural understanding</li> <li>• Lifelong learning</li> </ul>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reflect on and set goals for learning beyond their university experience</li> <li>• Recognize and respect the value of Indigenous knowledge, traditional ways, and worldviews</li> <li>• Value the importance of multiple cultural worldviews (including one's own)</li> <li>• Critically evaluate and apply socially responsible and ethical behaviours to sustainable practices</li> </ul> |

This table was coupled with the question, “Do the ILOs align with the Graduate Attributes?” followed by a 5-point agreement scale. The evaluators recognize this, along with the effort to generate and crystallize PLOs, as evidence that TRU is collaboratively constructing a serviceable framework for aligning institutional learning outcomes with program-level outcomes; such a framework may usefully support both general education assessment and student learning outcomes assessment.

However, and as is also often the case in the early development and use of student learning outcomes, many of the draft program learning outcomes (PLOs) are not written so as to be assessable. In other instances there are so many PLOs that the evaluators fear that development of sustainable assessment plans, and the actual assessment itself, will prove overwhelming. Consequently, the evaluation team recommends that Previous Recommendation 5 be sustained as previously worded. The evaluators also provide the following compliment and concern regarding Previous Recommendation 5 and Standard 4.A.3.

**COMPLIMENT:** The evaluation team compliments TRU for the intentional steps it has taken to train faculty specialists in the development of program learning outcomes and for providing release time for these faculty to assist departments.

**CONCERN:** The evaluation team is concerned that the Program Learning Outcomes established by some departments are so numerous and broad that development of actionable assessment plans, and program assessment itself, will prove overwhelming.

The team hopes that these PLOs can be considered first drafts and revised with an eye to sustainability and ease of use. More specifically, program-level outcomes should be limited in number and distinguished from course-level outcomes.

### **Eligibility Requirements 2-21**

The evaluation team finds that TRU meets all NWCCU Eligibility Requirements with the exception of Eligibility Requirement 12, concerning General Education.

## **Section One: Mission, Core Themes, and Expectations**

### **(Standard One)**

#### **1.A. Mission and 1.B. Core Themes**

The evaluators find that the TRU mission statement and core themes are clearly defined, appropriately approved and adopted by its governing boards, consistent with its legal authorization, and appropriate to its purpose as a degree-granting institution of higher education. The mission provides sufficient direction for the University's efforts and derives from and is sufficiently understood by its community. Guided by its mission, the University sufficiently articulates an acceptable threshold or extent of mission fulfillment. The University devotes substantially all of its resources to support its educational mission and core themes.

#### **Mission Statement**

Thompson Rivers University is a comprehensive, learner-centered environmentally responsible institution that serves its regional, national, and international learners and their communities through high quality and flexible education, training, research and scholarship.

Other components of the evaluation team's assessment of 1.A. and 1.B, and its recommendation concerning these standards, appears in its evaluation of Previous Recommendation 1.

#### **CORE THEMES**

Thompson Rivers University has identified core themes that individually manifest and collectively encompass its mission. These core themes are discussed in section VIII of this report ("Core Theme Planning, Effectiveness, and Improvement") and are as follows:

- Student Success
- Intercultural Understanding
- Sustainability
- Research

The evaluators heard broad support for the mission, which they found prominently displayed in key areas of the University. The evaluators heard similar support for the core themes and that stakeholders and participants appreciated the process by which the core themes were selected, felt they had sufficient opportunities for input in this and other strategic planning efforts. Consequently, the evaluation team finds the mission meets

Standard 1.A.1 inasmuch as it is widely published, approved and, most importantly, articulates a purpose of the institution that gives direction for the institution. Similarly, the core themes align with this mission statement such that they each manifest essential elements of the mission and collectively encompass the mission. Finally, TRU has done remarkable work in refining its core themes presented in its February 2016 Self-Evaluation Report. Since receiving feedback in April 2016, TRU has effectively truncated its sets of core themes (from five to four) and indicators (from 101 to 23) to present a more incisive, compelling, and functional path toward mission fulfillment. (1.B.1).

TRU has established objectives for each core theme as well as (an) outcome(s) for each objective, followed by sets of indicators, rationales, and “mission fulfillment threshold ranges” for each outcome. Regarding the latter, the 2017 Self-Evaluation Report differs from the 2016 iteration in that it is no longer explicitly drawing from the ministry-defined rubric of “exceeded,” “achieved,” “mostly achieved,” and “not achieved” (with 10% intervals in relation to being above and below targets). Instead, TRU has shifted to a tripartite set of ranges (“achieved,” “minimally achieved,” and “not achieved”), and identifies metrics with greater variation (i.e., not beholden to 10% marks), which is more appropriate for further pursuit of accreditation with the NWCCU (1.B.2).

## **Section Two: Resources and Capacity (Standard Two)**

### **Standard 2.A. Governance**

Reflective of Provincial structures and TRU's origins in the merger of the University College of the Cariboo with BC Open Learning University, and the fact that each of these institutions were absorbed with faculty who continue to be represented by separate unions and CBAs, TRU's system of governance is substantially different from that of most universities accredited by NWCCU. TRU, for instance, has a system of governance comprised of a Board of Governors, Senate, and the planning Council for open Learning (PCOL). The evaluators find that this system, while unique, meets all institutional needs and Standard 2A. The evaluation team finds that TRU has a functioning governing board, appropriately organized and structured, with policies and practices of review and evaluation that fulfill standards 2.A.1-8, and an effective system of leadership, sufficiently staffed and organized for planning and managing the institution and assessing its achievements and effectiveness (2.A.9-11). Academic policies continue to be published to the community on the TRU web site, and all are dated with main contacts named. A policy on policies is being considered to ensure that all policies are regularly updated, as certain policies (e.g., ADM 3-0 Copyright) have been in existence without review for over 20 years. TRU continues to publicize its academic policies through an accessible "Index of all Policies" (2.A.12). (See [Academic Policies](#), and [Shared Assets](#).)

Library policies are documented, published to the community on the "Library Policies" web page, and enforced equitably on both the Kamloops and Williams Lake locations. As over 50% of the student population are in open learning courses and programs, it would be advantageous to develop and disseminate policies that assist this unique population (2.A.13). (See [Library Policies](#).) Transfer of credit is regulated provincially and nationally by the British Columbia Council on Admissions and Transfer and the Pan Canadian Protocol on the Transferability of University Credit. Both are referenced in the transfer policy (ED 2-4.), and followed accordingly. (See [Shared Assessts 1](#).) The manner in which the university builds programs ensures "laddering" of courses systematically toward the attainment of offered credentials (certificates, diplomas, baccalaureate degrees, et cetera).(2.A.13).

The institution's Transferability of University Credits policy and Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) policy are prominently displayed and easily accessible on the University's web site. To facilitate efficiency in mobility from associate-level to baccalaureate-level programs, the transferability policy that "guarantees sixty (60) credits will be awarded to transfer students who hold an Associate Degree awarded by a BC post-

secondary institution that follows the approved BC provincial Associate Degree requirements.” The whole of this policy is necessarily aligned with the “Pan Canadian Protocol on the Transferability of University Credit” (an “action plan to increase accessibility, equity, and mobility for postsecondary students” throughout Canada (2.A.14). Student policies and procedures of the institution are also clearly stated and readily available for students. These policies can be found in the online index of academic policies and are published in the TRU Academic Calendar. These policies include academic integrity, suspension of students, student academic appeals, respectful workplace, harassment prevention, sexual violence and accommodations for persons with disabilities policies. TRU works to fairly and consistently administer all student rights and responsibilities by centralizing student case management in the Office of Student and Judicial Affairs. Appeals are eventually heard by a board convened by the University Registrar (2.A.15).

The admission and placement of students is guided through policies the university has adopted. These policies provide multiple different options for admission opportunity in adherence to the institutions’ legislated mandate for open access to education. The specific standards are published in the academic calendar, in the online policy index and on the websites developed to specifically serve defined populations. TRU has three categories of admission: open, limited and selective. Continuation standards are clearly outlined in the Satisfactory Academic Progress policy. This policy addresses the requirements for students to stay in good academic standing, academic probation parameters and circumstances that require students to withdraw. In addition, presidential expulsion of students for conduct and/or failure to demonstrate adequate effort is available for students to review. Appeal and readmission policies are indexed and accessible to students and other university constituents (2.A.16). Similarly, the “TRU Beyond the Classroom” website clearly outlines the institutions relationship to co-curricular activities and the roles and responsibilities of both the students and the institution for those activities. Student athletes are given a handbook and are required to attend an orientation that outlines their responsibilities as representatives of the university (2.A.17). And the institution publishes its human resources policies and procedures in the policy index. In addition, the human resources website has some direct hyperlinks to policies referred to in the content of that page. Human resources policies are subject to the review and revision standards published in the policy on policy development and standards. The Associate Vice President of Human Resources and Planning and the Director of Human Resources are responsible to make sure that all policies and procedures are consistent, fair and equitably applied (2.A.18).

The TRU Faculty Association (TRUFA), TRU Open Learning Faculty Association (TRUOLFA), and the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Local 4879 are collective bargaining groups that the majority of TRU employees are members of. The university’s human resources website publishes the collective bargaining agreements for each of these



organizations. The Association of Professional Administrators, while not a formal union, also exists at TRU to represent the interest of administrative employees. The human resources division publishes a guide to the working conditions and benefits for administrative employees. Employees are apprised of their conditions of employment, work assignments, rights and responsibilities, criteria and procedures for evaluation, retention, promotion and termination through orientation programs and a required meeting with a human resources officer within the first two weeks of employment. Two review and planning programs, one for administrators and one for all other employees, provides a framework for employees and supervisors to ensure a mutual understanding of performance expectations. The goals of these two programs are to align employee roles responsibilities with TRU's strategic priorities (2.A.19)

Human resources records have a confidentiality rating of 'high' in TRU's classified system; this rating requires those records be treated in accordance with the established in the institutions security and confidentiality of university information policies available on in the index of policies. Additional guidelines that establish the responsibility of users who access employee data are set forth by the Enterprise Resource Planning Project Banner Implementation: Data Standards, Data Integrity and Security Guidelines. Information security awareness training is required for all employees that have access to confidential information. This training is available online or in person. (2.A.20).

The provincial system of educational administration allows for institutions to enter into inter-institutional partnership agreements for education and conferring of degrees from one institution to another institution. When Thompson Rivers University was a university college (known as the University College of the Cariboo), it was unable to confer its own degrees and was required to contract with other institutions (e.g., University of British Columbia) for the students to complete their educations at the Kamloops and Williams Lake locations.

When the university was granted its university status in 2005, it was given the authority to confer its own degrees at each of its locations (and online with the merger of British Columbia Open Learning into University College of the Cariboo) and to confer its degrees at other university colleges in the province. The university has established agreements of this kind with the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology (for the Bachelor of Social Work degree in Merritt & Burnaby, British Columbia), the Shanghai Institute of Technology (for the Bachelor of Business Administration degree in Shanghai, China), and other distant institutions, as noted on its Basic Institutional Data Form.

The university's statements and policies guaranteeing the academic freedom of its faculty appear in its Collective Bargaining Agreements with its campus-based and online faculty. The evaluators could find no mention of "academic freedom" in the collective bargaining

agreements with other university employees. However, faculty and staff interviewed by the evaluators uniformly stated that their academic freedom is respected. Additionally, evidence for institutional support for intellectual and academic freedom is present in other policies and practices at TRU. As noted by the previous evaluation team, this evidence can be found in statements ranging from the “freedom of expression” regulation in the “Responsible Use of Technology Facilities and Services” policy that is intended to facilitate “open inquiry and public discourse” and in the “major objectives” of the Strategic Research Plan 2014-2019 which states a goal of “be[ing] inclusive of individual research programs, recognizing the importance of intellectual freedom for researchers to pursue their interests and passions without undue constraints and interference...” (2.A.27, 28). Consequently, the evaluation team finds evidence that the academic freedom of faculty and staff is respected at TRU. However, the evaluators are concerned that academic freedom is not guaranteed in a published policy for all employees, and that the faculty’s guarantee of academic freedom appears in a bargaining agreement, where it is arguably subject to change. Therefore, the evaluators recommend that TRU articulate a policy governing the academic freedoms and responsibilities of all university employees, as noted in Recommendation 5, below:

**RECOMMENDATION:** The evaluators recommend that TRU articulate a policy governing the academic freedoms and responsibilities of all university employees (2.A.27). Otherwise, such freedom is arguably subject to change or removal in bargaining processes.

The evaluation team finds evidence that individuals with teaching responsibilities present scholarship fairly, accurately and objectively, and that derivative scholarship acknowledges the source of intellectual property. This is evident in TRU’s “Integrity in Research and Scholarship” policy, the Student Academic Integrity policy, and the institution’s collective bargaining agreements (2.A.29).

## **2.B. Human Resources**

The evaluators find that TRU employs a sufficient number of qualified personnel to maintain its support and operations. All employees have defined job descriptions which accurately reflect the duties, responsibilities and authority of the position. Criteria, qualifications and procedures for selection of new personnel are clear, collaborative and public (2.B.1).

TRU has three collective bargaining groups: TRU Faculty Association (TRUFA), TRU Open Learning Faculty Association (TRUOLFA), and the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Local 4879. A fourth group named the Association of Professional Administrators (APA) also exists at TRU to represent the interest of the administrative employees (president and board excluded). Contract parameters for employees in the unions are established in the collective bargaining agreements.

Administrators and staff are evaluated regularly regarding their work performance. Chairs are evaluated in their second year of a three-year contract and deans receive a formative evaluation in the third year and a summative evaluation in the fifth year. Support staff and exempt middle management are scheduled to receive a yearly evaluation. Adoption of the annual evaluation practice is ongoing and currently is inconsistent across campus (2.B.2).

The institution provided faculty, staff and administrators, and other employees with appropriate opportunities and support for professional growth and development. This provides them with ways to enhance their effectiveness in fulfilling their roles, duties and responsibilities. All employees are eligible to participate in monthly workshops provided by the Human Resources Division. The Human Resources Division also provides training the Chairs and appoints committee training for faculty members to ensure they are effective in their assignments. All new faculty members go through a two-day training program designed to introduce them to TRU and orient them to the processes and structures of TRU. All faculty members may utilize resources and pedagogical support provided by the Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching.

Faculty members are provided with funding, dedicated time for professional development and educational loans to support professional growth. Ongoing faculty members receive a professional development allowance of \$1750 annually (with an annual increase of \$50) and continuing sessional faculty receive \$1,000. In addition, they are provided with 20 days of professional development annually and have access to interest-free educational loans to use to obtain further education. Staff and administrators are encouraged to obtain higher education through the use of tuition waivers and professional development funds to upgrade their education (2.B.3)

TRU employs appropriately qualified faculty sufficient in number to achieve its educational objectives, establish and oversee academic policies and ensure the integrity and continuity of its academic programs (2.B.4)

Faculty responsibilities and workloads are commensurate with the institutions expectations for teaching, service, scholarship, research and/or artistic creation. One of TRU's core themes is research; in order to support this core theme a portion of faculty have a 40% teaching, 40% research and 20% service structure and new faculty continue to be hired within this structure. The parameters of faculty responsibility and workload are guided by the collective bargaining agreements (2.B.5).

Information presented to the evaluators show that TRU is in compliance with this standard. All faculty members participate in an annual performance evaluation as outline to the TRUFA and TRUOLFA collective bargaining agreements (2.B.6)

## **2.C. Education Resources**

Program descriptions reflect appropriate content and rigour consistent with TRU's multifaceted educational mission, leading to collegiate-level degrees or certificates consonant with the aims of recognized fields of study. While TRU engages in assessment of student achievement through imbedded course assessments, periodic program reviews, and alumni and employer satisfaction surveys, TRU's historic assessment process has not involved describing program aims in terms of "clearly identified student learning outcomes," so programs for the most part do not yet describe and assess student achievement in those terms. To be clear, TRU's programs may nonetheless be excellently designed and taught; however, the provisions for evidence of achievement do not yet align with NWCCU requirements (2.C.1).

Even as programs do describe their general goals, the institution does not yet identify and publish expected course program and degree learning outcomes in a way consistent with NWCCU expectations (2.C.2). Credit and degrees are based on documented student achievement in relation to TRU's current manner of describing and documenting student achievement (2.C.3). Degree programs demonstrate appropriate design and admission and graduation requirements are clearly defined and published (2.C.4).

Faculty structures for exercising authority over the curriculum and over faculty hiring are appropriate. Curriculum development originates in programs and departments, answers to a program sustainability worksheet, is approved at school levels through Faculty Councils, is approved at the institutional faculty level through the Academic Planning and Priorities Committee (which also considers mission, market, and graduate attributes), and is assessed for support needs through offices such as the registrar; programs are then approved by the faculty-majority (undergraduate) Educational Programs Committee or Graduate Programs Committee of the Senate and then by the Senate as a whole. The evaluation team must note, however, that standard 2.C.5 also references the assessment of "student achievement of clearly identified learning outcomes," which is not yet a broadly implemented approach at TRU. It is understood that, going forward, new programs and programs under external review must provide evidence of clearly articulated learning outcomes and an assessment plan. Faculty hiring is pursued with appropriate faculty involvement and oversight (2.C.5).

Faculty and instructors work closely with librarians to integrate information on effective access and use of library and information resources into the curriculum. TRU Library liaisons provide a wide range of support, including instruction, to academic programs and general instruction is offered under the tutelage of the Instruction and Research Services Librarian who coordinates library instruction. Policy and online instruction request forms

are available on the TRU Library Web site. Instruction content and pedagogy are aligned with the standards articulated by academic library associations (2.C.6).

TRU does allow for credit to be awarded for prior experiential learning. Referred to as “Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR),” information is publicized on the PLAR web site and governed by policy ED 2-0. The evaluators find that TRU is in line with Standard 2.C.7. on all fronts with one possible exception and one potential issue that may need further attention by the NWCCU. While it is clear that PLAR-related activity happens in the undergraduate sphere through TRU, ED 2-0 does not explicitly state that credit for prior learning is limited to the undergraduate level. More significant, in the estimation of the evaluators, is the fact that TRU is required by the TRU Act to not set a percentage threshold for prior learning credits applied toward degrees offered in the Open Learning division. TRU has offered evidence to show that it is exceedingly rare for a TRU student to apply prior learning credit above the 25% threshold established in Standard 2.C.7 but it does indeed happen from time to time (2.C.7).

TRU’s “Transferability of University Credits” policy (ED 2-4), provides guidelines for granting transfer credit generally and specifically with regard to transfer credit earned through associate’s degrees and transfer credit awarded for prior learning. The whole of this policy is necessarily aligned with the “Pan Canadian Protocol on the Transferability of University Credit,” which commits TRU to accept credits from other Canadian universities, as guided by each faculty body responsible for setting policy for their respective programs of study (2.C.8).

As the 2016 evaluation team noted, “the United States concept of ‘general education’ does not translate well into the Canadian System of higher education,” particularly with regard to the baccalaureate having “prescriptive requirements” in broad disciplinary spheres, e.g., humanities, natural sciences, social sciences. TRU baccalaureate degree programs do not require course-taking in this regard across the board, whether through traditional “2+2” distribution models of general education or other models that explicitly integrate humanities, natural sciences, and social sciences coursework across the span of four-year academic plans. While TRU baccalaureate programs do not maintain a *form* that speaks to the standard in ways that are familiar to NWCCU members (which is a matter that does require attention as this review of candidacy continues) TRU baccalaureate programs arguably hold the potential to *function* in a manner that is consistent with Standard 2.C.9. It is clear that the TRU leadership and its Accreditation Steering Committee have accepted the invitation presented by the previous evaluation team to build upon the “Graduate Attributes” TRU had recently developed in such a way that they anchor the development of learning outcomes and assessments that are aligned with the intention of the 2.C.9, namely, to prepare graduates for “a productive life of work, citizenship, and personal fulfillment.” In short, TRU is in a position to make an argument for how its baccalaureate programs function

well toward this end, and the present evaluation team finds that progress has been made. This is discussed further in our consideration of Previous Recommendation 2 (2.C.9, 2.C.10).

With regard to applied undergraduate and certificate programs, the evaluators find that TRU incorporates instruction in the areas of communication, computation, and human relations in ways that support program goals. As with traditional baccalaureate-level programs, TRU is in a position to make an argument that its applied undergraduate and certificate programs do maintain a “recognizable core.” A useful reference point in this regard is the BC Transfer Guide, which outlines requirements for the Associate of Arts and Associate of Science Degrees as provincial credentials in the BC Transfer System. Specific requirements for each include coursework in communication (English), computation (e.g., mathematics), and human relations (e.g., arts) (2.C.11).

All graduate program offerings are consistent with the mission and appropriate to the levels of graduate and professional degrees offered (2.C.12). (See [Program Offerings](#).) Admission policies are compatible with the programs’ requirements. Students who do not have the requisite undergraduate education to enter into a graduate program may apply the techniques under the Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition policy to satisfy admission requirements upon approval by the appropriate chair or designate (2.C.13).

The evaluation team concurs with the spirit of the previous team’s assertion that “the Commission will need to determine whether or not to exempt TRU from Standard 2.C.14,” which prohibits graduate credit for experiential learning that occurs before matriculation, because the awarding of such credit is mandated by the province. However, the university has yet to grant graduate credit in such instances and does not foresee doing so. Consequently, we find TRU effectively in compliance with this standard.

The evaluators find evidence that TRU has established policies and procedures for appropriate thesis preparation and defense, and for professional assessment of the knowledge and ability of students graduating from programs designed to prepare students for professional practice. While program level outcome assessment will improve institutional performance relative to standard 2.C.15, TRU’s use of professional advisory boards, employer surveys, and its close relationship with industry, sufficiently that demonstrate compliance with this standard.

TRU’s continuing education programs are well-aligned with its mission to serve educational needs in its region. Specific evidence of satisfactory alliance with this criterion was observed in Williams Lake where administrators work in concert with local and indigenous persons to create special programs to meet specialized needs for the area served in accordance with the mission as defined in the Thompson Rivers University Act (2.C.16).

**COMPLIMENT:** The evaluators compliment the staff of the Williams Lake Campus of TRU for working in concert so intentionally with its community centers to build courses and programs—both credit and non-credit bearing—to meet the needs of the populations of the Williams Lake area. Specific attention is paid to the unique needs of each indigenous people group to “serve the educational and training needs in the region” [See [TRU Act 3\(3\)\(a\)](#)].

The evaluators concur with the previous evaluators’ finding that TRU demonstrates satisfactory compliance with standards 2.C.17-19.

## **2.D. Student Support Resources**

With the exception of 2.D.10 noted below, the evaluators find that the material presented in the self-study and through on campus interviews, provides evidence that TRU is in compliance with the standards established in 2.D. Student Support Resources.

Academic Advising for first and second year undergraduate students are advised by professional staff that report to the Vice President of Strategic Enrolment and University Registrar. Third and fourth year students are advised by personnel in their program of study. International students are assigned an international advisor but are also welcome to use the advising resources outlined above. While some students communicated advising met their expectations, other students, including TRUSU, have reported inaccuracy in advising, lack of accessibility of advisors and lack of service continuity. Staff members report that students must seek out advising and that a clear system to track program and graduation requirements is not available to students or advisors. The advising tool called Degree Works is projected to be delivered to the students to assist in meeting this need but students feel that this project has not received the attention, prioritization and funding it needs (2.D.10).

**CONCERN:** Academic Advising and the tracking of degree progress has been a communicated concern of the TRUSU for multiple years. While the implementation of Degree Works is expected to improve institutional performance relative to this concern, the evaluators recommend that TRU continue to assess its advising services to ensure they effectively support student development and success (2.D.10).

## **Standard 2.E. Library Resources**

The mission of the Thompson Rivers University (TRU) Library is to “advance inquiry, discovery and engagement by providing the TRU community with quality resources, services, and technologies to support teaching, learning and research.” The TRU Library is user-focused and holds or provides access to library and information resources that support the institution’s mission, core themes, programs and services. The TRU Library

Web site provides online access to most services and resources, facilitating access to library and information resources regardless of location. The TRU Library faculty and staff have well-defined responsibilities and expertise that are commensurate for an institution of this size and mission. The librarian liaison program has strengthened the connection to academic programs and led to increased instruction opportunities and research consultations. New librarian positions covering user engagement and student success, and electronic resources and assessment provide greater capacity and more effective support for the TRU core themes of increasing student success, research and sustainability.

Kamloops library facilities are split between two locations: the Main Library (2446 assignable sq. meters) and the House of Learning (1278 assignable sq. meters). The collections are divided by call number with 197 seats between the two locations. There are additional study areas available in the House of Learning outside the library. The institution acknowledges that seating needs to be increased and there were a significant number of comments from the 2013 LibQUAL+ survey stating the need for more seating, quiet spaces and better access to the House of Learning Library collection. There is now a separate, quiet graduate student space in the Main Library but other seating concerns remain. The Main Library is open to 9:00 p.m. Sunday through Thursday and to 5:00pm Fridays and Saturdays, while the House of Learning library is only open to 5:00 pm and closed on Sunday. While arrangements can be made to retrieve items from the House of Learning library during evenings, access to the science and engineering collection there is limited. The Law Library, also on the Kamloops campus, reports to the Thompson Rivers University Library but is focused on serving the needs of the Law School and is open to those outside of Law only by appointment.

**CONCERN:** As noted in the initial candidacy evaluation, the multiple library locations on the Kamloops campus create service duplication and stretch library staff. It is not optimal service for the TRU community as the split collections and different hours of opening can be confusing and may limit opportunities for research and student engagement (2.E.1).

Open Learning students can access library services and information resources remotely and there is an Open Education Librarian who coordinates open learning services as well as interlibrary loan and Open Educational Resources (OER). The TRU Library maintains a small collection at the Williams Lake Campus which is staffed by one librarian during the academic year. Open hours are limited to weekdays. Students and faculty at Williams Lake have access to the Kamloops libraries resources and there is regular courier service for physical items, although it may take a week from request to delivery.

The TRU Library collection of information resources includes approximately 239,000 volumes, 159,000 e-books, more than 10,000 e-journal titles from publisher sites and a



substantial number of additional titles through aggregators. Participation in several library consortia furthers access to a more extensive body of information resources, especially online ones such as databases, e-journals and e-books. More than 90% of the collection budget is spent on electronic resources, all of which are accessible to the TRU community regardless of their location. However, while institutional enrolment and new degree and graduate programs have grown during the past several years, the library's collection budget has not kept pace with these changes or maintained purchasing power to meet ongoing annual price increases. New graduate degree programs, such as environmental economics and management and nursing, will place additional stress on the collections budget. A new library curriculum consultation form provides an opportunity to specify library resources needed for new programs and is a good initial step at better integrating the library into the program approval process. The process should be tracked to determine whether identified library needs are supported.

**CONCERN:** The TRU Library collections budget remains flat at a time of increased program growth and ongoing price increases on information resources. This impacts the ability of the TRU Library to advance a sustainable research culture and affects the support provided for both continuing and new programs (2.E.1).

The TRU Library plays a lead role in the annual Undergraduate Research and Innovation Conference. A librarian coordinates the conference, poster sessions are held in the HOL Library, and papers are deposited on the TRU Library institutional repository, Digital Commons @ TRU Library, which also contains other works of institutional scholarship and research.

**COMPLIMENT:** The evaluators compliment the TRU Library for taking a lead role in the annual Undergraduate Research and Innovation Conference. This conference features undergraduate research both in posters and presentations, highlighting student success. The student papers deposited in the TRU Library Digital Commons are among the most requested items in this institutional repository.

The TRU Library liaison program provides opportunities for user feedback as well as library outreach and services. Feedback is also provided through the library instruction program from both course instructors and students. The TRU Library ran the LibQUAL+ survey in 2008 and 2013 which collected structured user feedback through a survey and comments, but has decided not to use this instrument again. Additional avenues for input, especially from students would prove beneficial for planning. TRU Library faculty and staff also contribute to library planning and are integral to successful planning both internally and externally.

The TRU Library Strategic Plan (2012-2014) and accompanying Library Services Action Plan are out-of-date. A new strategic plan is under development and the evaluation team

encourages the active solicitation of input from faculty, staff and students. The next iteration of these plans would also benefit from developing metrics that indicate success in achieving stated outcomes (2.E.2).

The Library provides a full range of instruction and support services to the TRU community. These include both in-person and remote reference, consultations, general and course instruction, including the using the course management system, where appropriate, to better integrate library support into the curriculum. In FY17, there were 329 instruction/presentation sessions with nearly 4300 participants. A large number of frequently updated online LibGuides, available to the entire TRU community, complements instructional sessions and research consultations, and are especially useful for library services that support the curriculum (2.E.3).

The TRU Library uses Lib Analytics Insight as well as an Electronic Resource Management (ERM) system to compile data and track services and resource use, using this data to make adjustments and improvements as needed. The collection is evaluated using methods such as cost-per-use, and service transaction data is used to evaluate services as reference provision, desk staffing, and open hours.

There is currently no program for systematically assessing library services. Identifying and implementing an ongoing process for assessment of library services and resources will enable more comprehensive evaluation of the impact and contributions of the library to institutional mission and core themes (2.E.4).

**CONCERN:** A sustainable outcomes-based assessment program is needed to systematically evaluate TRU Library effectiveness and contributions to student, faculty and staff success (2.E.4).

The TRU Library belongs to several consortia, including the Council of Prairie and Pacific University Libraries (COPUL). Through the buying power of these consortia the library provides access to a far more extensive range of resources, particularly online resources, than a library can achieve on its own. The TRU Library evaluates the cost-effectiveness of such purchases in their support of institutional mission and priorities.

## **2.F. Financial Resources**

The institution is required by law to maintain a balanced fiscal year budget, so management devotes considerable attention to the timing of short-term operating results, while also engaging in long-term planning. Long-term capital maintenance needs are documented at the individual building level through a comprehensive Facilities Condition Index which encompasses all properties owned by the institution at all locations. Based on discussions with campus personnel, and on review of budget documentation and other

materials submitted and/or referenced in the interim candidacy report, sufficient procedures appear to be in place to enable realistic financial planning and risk management (2.F.1).

The Integrated Planning and Effectiveness Office projects enrollments (by level) based on prior-year enrollment yields from applications and other relevant data, conforming to standard practices. Budgets for self-supporting and ancillary operations are included in the institution's budget process and must also ensure balanced annual budgets, combined with long-term planning. Budget development is performed at what campus personnel describe as a modified zero-based budget, which is reflected in a Budget Methodology Handbook. The interim candidacy report (including references) provides evidence that resource planning includes realistic and responsible projections of enrollment and tuition revenue, grants, donations, and other non-tuition revenue sources (2.F.2).

Defined policies and processes are in place for budget development, including the Budget Methodology Handbook. The interim candidacy report indicates that the budgeting process involves faculties, schools, and service units, although based on discussions with faculty and staff, the level of participation in the budget process at the faculty and staff level varies by college.

The annual budget is reviewed by the Budget Committee of the Senate and the full Senate and is finally approved by the Board of Governors.

Additional resources may be requested based on teaching needs (extra course sections for additional enrollment, for example) or for strategic initiatives through a Strategic Investment Fund (SIF). Criteria for awarding SIF are clear and transparent, and mapped to the institution's strategic priorities. Reporting on the success of each Strategic Initiative is to be made to the relevant Executive, though no formal assessment of the outcomes is performed to determine whether the Executive will award base funding for the initiative (2.F.3).

TRU uses an appropriate accounting system that follows generally accepted accounting principles, as legislatively required. Annual audited financial statements and audit reports are posted on the Finance Office website, and so are publicly available. Board Manual (Chapter 12 Audit Committee Term of Reference, section 4.3) requires that the audit committee obtain reasonable assurances that TRU has implemented appropriate systems of internal control. While a documented system of internal controls does not exist, TRU management indicates that a major review of internal controls and improvements based on that review is planned within three to five years.

**RECOMMENDATION:** TRU's Board Manual (Chapter 12, Audit Committee Term of Reference, section 4.3) requires that the audit committee obtain reasonable assurances

that TRU has implemented appropriate systems of internal control. Additionally, NWCCU's minimum requirements of Standard 2.F.4 include having a "description of internal financial controls." As such, the evaluation team recommends that TRU document its system of internal financial controls (2.F.4).

TRU adopted a Campus Master Plan in 2013; the plan is long-term in nature, intended to ensure that future capital development at the Thompson Rivers campus aligns with the institution's strategic priorities. Facilities office staff confirmed that master plan is consulted when site selection for new buildings and infrastructure is performed.

Campus input with respect to capital funding decisions is obtained through a Capital Projects Planning Advisory Group (CPPAG), with requests for new space above \$5 million submitted to the CPPAG. A campus presentation explaining the evaluation criteria and application process was held in Spring 2017.

The Province hires outside consultants to perform and document an annual review of facilities conditions relative to academic and administrative buildings, and TRU provides funding to obtain the same service for its ancillary facilities, resulting in a comprehensive and current plan for all owned facilities.

The province does not permit TRU to take on debt; as such, TRU has engaged in Public Private Partnerships to achieve desired capital enhancements for self-supporting activities, and in leasing arrangements to satisfy equipment needs. According to management, the most recent budget also included \$300,000 for academic equipment needs (2.F.5).

TRU's ancillary operations are accounted separately from general operations of the university, and also different business lines within the ancillary operations are separate. Ancillary operations' surplus revenues are used for capital projects, either related to the auxiliary enterprise or to general campus needs, or to augment the general operating budget, according financial management personnel. It does not appear from the interim candidacy report and discussions with management that this relationship has been documented as specified in the standard, e.g., whether policies govern the uses of ancillary funds described, if there is an established set of priorities for use of surpluses, who is authorized to make decisions regarding the use of ancillary operations surpluses, and so on.

**RECOMMENDATION:** The evaluators recommend that TRU document the relationship between its general operations and its ancillary operations funds, including whether general operations funds are permitted to support ancillary enterprises or the use of funds from ancillary enterprises may be used to support general operations (2.F.6).

TRU undergoes an annual external financial audit pursuant to the standards required by the province by an accredited auditing firm under generally accepted auditing standards. All findings are reported to the Board of Governors Audit Committee, and audited financial statements are posted publically on the institution's website (2.F.7).

As described in the interim candidacy report, "TRU's fundraising activities are carried out by the TRU Foundation, a registered charity whose sole purpose is to raise funds for TRU. The TRU Foundation conducts all institutional fundraising activities in a professional and ethical manner, including compliance with the legislated requirements of the Canadian Revenue Agency and the BC Office of the Registrar of Lobbyists. Clear articulation of the relationship between the university and the TRU Foundation appears in the terms of a Memorandum of Understanding, adopted in 2008." The evaluators note that the Memorandum of Understanding indicated that a process review was to be completed with respect to the MOU in 2011; evidence of such review was not included within the interim candidacy report (2.F.8).

## **2.G. Physical and Technological Infrastructure**

Except as indicated under specific standards below, the evidence presented in the interim candidacy report and included references indicates that TRU is compliant with the standards concerning physical and technological infrastructure.

TRU has completed significant new construction in the past 15 years, and also expanded its facilities through the use of Public Private Partnerships. Facilities conditions are regularly assessed by an outside consultant, and a detailed Facilities Condition Index (FCI) is maintained which documents major maintenance needs, and the timing of those needs, at the individual building level.

Annual funding of \$1 million from the Province is matched with \$1 million from the institution to address deferred maintenance. Based on discussions with management, major maintenance projects are prioritized based on life safety needs first, then on physical comfort/learning environment (this reportedly usually involves HVAC improvements to ensure that the environment in the academic buildings is conducive to learning); additionally, self-supporting ancillary enterprises (such as housing) are generally expected to generate funds necessary to satisfy related capital needs.

TRU maintains an active process for physical space planning and input, including a Space Committee and the previously mentioned CPPAG (2.G.1).

The institution recently adopted a hazardous waste policy which includes provisions for the safe use, storage and disposal of hazardous or toxic materials—the "Biosafety and Biosecurity policy ADM 25-0." The policy gives the BioSafety officer the authority to stop

work if necessary to address health and safety issues. The BioSafety manual is referred to in the post-award management site and contains relevant guidance. ([BioSafety](#).) (2.G.2).

The Master Plan addresses the Kamloops Campus; however, the standard on master planning applies to branch campuses such as Williams Lake as well; the evaluation team did not find any evidence that comprehensive planning has been performed for that site.

Both the Master Plan and subsequent Implementation Plan were developed on the basis of a 20- to 60-year timeframe. Shorter-term planning performed by a Space Planning Committee is informed by a Space Utilization Study.

Together, the space planning committee and the CPPAG (established in Fall 2016), provide sufficient avenues to align the institution's capital planning needs with its strategic priorities. Recommendations from the CPPAG are presented to the President, and form the basis for projects to include in the 5-year capital plan submitted annually to the Ministry of Advanced Education, Skills & Training (AEST). Recommendations are based on the institution's strategic priorities related to creating new space for students, teaching and research; reducing deferred maintenance; and improving sustainability. Criteria for evaluating and prioritizing space requests are clearly delineated (2.G.3).

Classroom furnishings and desktop/classroom IT equipment are regularly refreshed, the latter because it is leased rather than purchased. Opinions expressed during faculty and staff forums indicated that equipment is adequate and the leasing arrangement ensures that computer equipment is in good working order.

The interim candidacy report did not mention the condition or resources for the replacement of the wide variety of equipment needed for instructional programs, e.g., equipment for trades such as welding equipment or testing equipment for automotive maintenance, or equipment for academic programs such as scientific instruments for laboratories. It was mentioned that an additional \$300,000 has been allocated in the current year budget for such equipment (2.G.4).

Technological equipment, infrastructure, and supporting services appear adequately developed to be able to serve the needs of the campus in achieving its mission. Personnel overseeing the support functions indicated that sufficient staffing is in place to serve campus needs.

Banner systems are backed up using a separate, reliable physical location (BCNET EduCloud service hosted in Vancouver) and Oracle Data Guard software. The TRU data center includes redundant UPS and generator backup for the air cooling system. The institution indicates that backup and recovery systems are tested annually.

A tabletop exercise of the Information Technology Disaster Recovery Plan was conducted. Procedures regarding recovery points and recovery times are detailed in the IT-DRP, as noted by the evaluation team.

Security awareness training at TRU includes online courses and face to face sessions covering security awareness essentials, privacy and access instruction, hands-on encryption workshops, and other sessions. Over 2000 faculty and staff registrations for these trainings are reported. In addition, ITS offers training solutions from Lynda.com (382 active employees), Banner/ERP systems training, and Sharepoint training.

The evaluators inquired as to systems and security regarding the processing of customer and student credit card data. The institution has established a PCI (Payment Card Industry) Steering Committee, which completed detailed and comprehensive self-assessment questionnaires designed to identify gaps in data security; has implemented changes to address and eliminate identified gaps; and has provided training to staff involved in the collection or processing of credit card data.

**COMPLIMENT:** The institution has demonstrated a commitment to protecting its students' financial data through the work of its PCI Steering Committee. Personnel have completed detailed and comprehensive self-assessments of credit card data security using criteria established by the Payment Card Industry Security Standards Council; has acted upon the assessment through improvements to its network architecture and other procedures; and has provided security training to institutional personnel involved in handling credit card data.

In staff and faculty forums, the evaluation team heard concerns with respect to delivery of technical support specifically to face-to-face faculty and staff (as opposed to Open Learning faculty and staff) on both the Kamloops and Williams Lake campuses.

**CONCERN:** The evaluation team suggests that management evaluate technology support timing and availability for all locations, and ensure that the technology support team appropriately communicates the mechanisms by which faculty and staff may receive help and support in a timely fashion (2.G.6).

Opportunities for input to technology infrastructure planning occur through three committees with broad representation of students, faculty, staff, and administrators from across the university. There is also an established annual planning cycle (2.G.7).

Desktop and classroom IT equipment is leased and as part of the contract equipment is refreshed on a four- year cycle. However, there is not a financial plan for refreshing larger infrastructure. There currently is no specific reserve fund to replace end of life network technologies including switches, routers and wireless. However, management reports that

funding has been allocated to do so when necessary. As a result, ITS must look opportunistically for funding to complete the upgrade of end-of-life wireless access points, controllers and management software or alternative managed services. Though funding may be carried forward in a capital reserve for significant capital projects, certain of the technology infrastructure needs do not rise to the level considered “capital” so must be funded in the annual operating budget.

The evaluators find that technology equipment replacement plans are robust, and additional funding has been dedicated to technology infrastructure replacement in its most recent budget; however, formalized planning for infrastructure replacement has not yet been completed. As such, the committee is concerned that Thompson Rivers University has not yet developed a technology infrastructure replacement plan to ensure that it is able to continue to support its operations, programs and services.

**CONCERN:** The evaluation team is concerned that the institution has not yet developed a technology infrastructure replacement plan to ensure that it is able to continue to support its operations, programs and services (2.G.8).



## **Section 3: Planning and Implementation**

### **(Standard Three)**

#### **Standard 3.A: Institutional Planning**

As noted in this evaluation’s consideration of Previous Recommendation 4, the evaluation team finds that TRU has significantly improved its institutional planning in the short window between receipt of the Commission’s findings and submission of the current self-evaluation report. The “Open Governance Initiative” created opportunities for participation of students, staff and faculty by publicly livestreaming Board of Governors and Senate meetings; and increased consultations by the President and Vice Presidents with faculty councils. The initiative is a well-documented and intentional planning process, and robust institutional research is made available in reader-friendly reports and an online factbook demonstrates that planning is ongoing, purposeful, comprehensive, broad-based, inclusive, and informed by the collection of appropriately defined data used (3.A.1, 2). Assuming further refinement of the core theme indicators of achievement, as recommended in Revised Recommendation 1, we expect that the institution’s comprehensive planning process will be informed by the collection of appropriately defined data that will be analyzed and used to evaluate mission fulfillment (3.A.3). The evaluators find that institution’s Strategic Research Plan, Campus Master Plan, and Strategic Sustainability Plan effectively articulate priorities and guide decisions on resource allocation and application of institutional capacity (3.A.4). TRU’s Emergency Management Plan, its system of emergency alerts, and the activities and preparation of its Incident Management Team, provide evidence of compliance with 3.A.5, concerning emergency preparedness.

### **CORE THEMES**

#### **Core Theme 1: STUDENT SUCCESS**

##### **1B: Core Theme**

##### **3B: Core Theme Planning**

The first Core Theme, labeled “Student Success” and encompassing access, support, and student educational achievement, is a very promising theme for capturing essential elements of TRU’s mission fulfillment. It is clear that the institution worked diligently and collaboratively on the project of defining mission fulfillment, and it is commendable that TRU succeeded in reducing the number of indicators down to a manageable number. A few opportunities for further improvement present themselves: First, in some instances the articulation of the objective and the measures proposed to assess the objective could be more precisely aligned. For instance, objective one mixes two goals of student access and

transparency of requirements and processes, but none of the indicators measures “transparency” of requirements or processes. Similarly, Theme One Outcome 3.1 promises to measure student “action” in relation to skills, knowledge and other attributes, but the indicators aren’t of a type to measure student performance.

A second opportunity for improvement would be to augment measures of student *participation* with evidence of student *attainment*, and otherwise prioritize indicators that demonstrate end results rather than institutional inputs, starting points, and means. For instance, objective two is the objective most concerned with the educational goal of cognitive development, but it is focused solely on student participation rather than performance; mission fulfillment would be more persuasively demonstrated with some direct evidence of student learning and/or of indirect but broadly recognized cumulative outcomes, such as graduation rates and employment/advanced study rates (indicators that were indeed included among TRU’s initial 100+ indicators). While it may seem as if this suggestion of adding some absent indicators contradicts the previous advice to reduce the number of indicators, the intention of this feedback is to suggest that TRU consider whether it has in all cases chosen the most meaningful measures of ultimate achievement. For instance, TRU may want to consider its rationale for prioritizing indicators such as student satisfaction with the registration process and student conversion rates (percent of accepted students who matriculate) above student graduation and employment rates, as the most significant indicators of mission fulfillment.

Because TRU’s Student Success Core Theme objective three, with its focus on enabling students to develop attributes “for citizenship, work and personal fulfillment,” draws from the language of standard 2.C.9 regarding an institution’s general education component, TRU may benefit from feedback about that objective in relation to the Commission’s expectations for meeting that standard. It will be important for TRU to keep in mind that, while any number of educational facets may contribute to students’ “skills, knowledge, confidence and values for citizenship work, and personal fulfillment,” the NWCCU standard for general education will still also require a particular subset of Baccalaureate degree educational components that meet outcomes aligned with breadth representing “basic knowledge and methodology of the humanities and fine arts, mathematical and natural sciences and social sciences.” All baccalaureate (and transfer associate degree programs, if present) will need to demonstrate integration of those general education components, such that an indicator seeking to measure only those students who pursue the OL Bachelor of General Studies program (as is now proposed) will not suffice to demonstrate an institution-wide achievement in this area. Similarly, any applied baccalaureate degrees or certificates of 30 or more semester credits (or the equivalent) must demonstrate integration of outcomes reflecting communication, computation, and human relations.

The description of new committee structures and workflows for developing the Core Themes and for future planning and assessment looks very promising. The Accreditation Steering Committee is a broadly representative leadership team, the General Education Task force is also broadly representative and engaging in thoughtful outreach to all the schools, and the faculty governance arms working on new curriculum development and program review are integrated into the effort to develop a culture of well-defined program and learning outcomes as well as assessment plans for measuring student learning. It will be important for TRU to establish timelines and milestone targets for these efforts, if it is to implement universal program/learning outcomes with assessment processes within the remaining candidacy window.

**COMPLIMENT:** The evaluation team compliments the faculty and staff's commitment to a grass-roots, inclusive and authentic planning process toward designing general education programming appropriate to TRU's mission and context.

#### **4A: Core Theme Assessment**

TRU's report explains active tracking of data collection for the indicators currently proposed or for its plans to institute tracking for selected indicators not currently tracked. As discussed under Core Theme Planning, TRU may still want to include a few indicators not yet listed that will also involve assessments not yet being undertaken.

The evaluation team sees and appreciates extensive activity and progress toward developing clearly identified program goals or intended outcomes which will provide a foundation for an effective system of assessment of its programs and services. The evaluation team also appreciates TRU's commitment to students through its audit of student services and its many initiatives underway to improve the student experience in relation to degree planning, scheduling, and navigating TRU's processes. The team further notes the thoughtful guidance being provided by the Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching and its faculty teaching fellows toward helping programs develop more meaningful program learning outcomes. Guiding documents demonstrate a promising institutional understanding of meaningful, measurable student learning outcomes, and TRU staff and faculty testified to a growing, positive "culture of assessment," itself an encouraging sign of the institution's progress. The evaluation team learned from the various reporting bodies that new program proposals must articulate learning outcomes and assessment plans before they will be approved. The CELT team further reported that, in addition to programs working independently on learning outcomes, ten programs underwent a guided process of developing strong program learning outcomes last year and ten more programs are likely to do so this year. The audit of program learning outcomes provided in TRU's report appendix did not yet reflect the results from those ten guided programs. Among the programs whose outcomes are represented in the appendix are

many strong examples of PLOs, including those developed for programs in the School of Business and Economics. In other cases, the listed PLOs still need refinement, as they sometimes include objectives that are not likely measurable as articulated, such as goals for the style of leadership graduates will exhibit in their professions, which won't (as described) be assessable by faculty.

As complimented above, TRU faculty and staff are demonstrating admirable engagement in this foundational process of defining assessable learning outcomes. It is clear that TRU recognizes the need to follow that process with the development and implementation of annual outcomes assessment plans imbedded in a cycle of continuous improvement (an NWCCU expectation beyond periodic program reviews). TRU has not yet advanced far enough in that process to provide evidence of the kind of learning outcomes-based program assessment expected by NWCCU.

Because TRU has carefully aligned its Core Themes with its Strategic Priorities and has a carefully delineated annual process for assessing its progress on those priorities, in most respects TRU aligns its programs and services with respect to accomplishment of its Core Themes. However, because TRU's historic program review process has not been aligned with the Commission's current expectations for student outcome-oriented assessment in relation to Core Themes, the evaluation team cannot say at this time that TRU "evaluates holistically the alignment, correlation, and integration of assessment with respect to achievement of the goals or intended outcomes of its programs" (4.A.5). That is, it is understood that this remains a work in progress and that there is an inevitable gap in relation to how program assessment is accomplished for Core Theme accomplishment. In the same way, and despite its impressive strategic planning activities and processes, the institution has not yet developed "assessment processes to ensure they appraise authentic achievements and yield meaningful results that lead to improvement" in strict terms of NWCCU expectations.

The evaluation team agrees with TRU in its self-assessment that it has made significant progress in revising its definition of mission fulfillment. It has also made notable strides in drafting ILOs from the previously approved graduate attributes as well as in leading program development of PLOs. Furthermore, its General Education Task force is a broadly representative faculty-majority group highly engaged in the process of exploring general education programming and engaging the broader faculty in discussion toward adopting a model of general education appropriate for TRU. The process is not yet far enough along for the evaluation team to comment on how the developing models align or not with NWCCU standards.

## **4.B: Core Theme Improvement**

While TRU programs currently have varying approaches to reflecting on their success and making improvements, TRU is still developing its framework for NWCCU-compliant outcomes and assessment. Nonetheless, TRU already demonstrates considerable attention to improvement in relation to the component areas of its Student Success core theme. Its growth in programs designed to serve identified constituent needs as well as its ongoing work to improve access through transfer articulation agreements demonstrates improvement in student access. Student representatives (few in numbers but consistent in message) also extolled TRU for student support services in areas of supplemental learning, tutoring, orientation, faculty availability and support, multi-faith and cultural support, and improvements in enrolment services. A fourth-year student in sociology who has stretched her TRU education across nine years remarked that student support is much stronger now than when she started. As another fourth-year student, in psychology, enthusiastically put it, support for students at TRU is “ridiculous!” The evaluators recognize this description as high praise indeed.

## **Core Theme 2: INTERCULTURAL UNDERSTANDING**

### **1B: Core Theme**

### **3B: Core Theme Planning**

The second core theme, “Intercultural Understanding,” persists from 2016, and is given expression through two objectives: (1) “The creation of a culture of inclusion in all aspects of university work and life” and (2) “[Institutional engagement] in Indigenous, regional, national, and global learning through teaching, learning, knowledge, research and creative practice.” This theme and these objectives are consistent with TRU’s strong place-based mission (i.e., serving the people and communities of Kamloops, Williams Lake, their environs, and B.C. more broadly) and the contextualized extension of that mission that recognizes TRU as an institution that is at once characterized by the influences of globalization and by aspirations to be more, in a word, global. The planning for and assessment of this core theme is still under development, which is addressed later.

Planning for the core theme of “Intercultural Understanding” is consistent with TRU’s overall institutional planning and is sufficiently guiding related institutional activities. A sub-committee of a robustly representative Accreditation Steering Committee, which meets monthly, guides the advancement of this core theme.

### **4A/4.B: Core Theme Assessment and Improvement**

Two objective-outcome pairs are presented for the Intercultural Understanding core theme. Given the work TRU is undertaking with regard to general education, the evaluation

team finds it instructive to highlight challenges and opportunities associated with the first pair: “Objective 1: The creation of a culture of inclusion in all aspects of university work and life. ... Outcome 1.1: Enhanced inclusion of intercultural learning within curriculum, teaching, and service.” The key indicator associated with this objective-outcome pair is “Student perceptions of inclusion and opportunities for intercultural learning, as indicated by NSSE scores of 4<sup>th</sup> year students.” An evaluation of this *without* general education in mind yields a generally positive result inasmuch as this objective-outcome-indicator trio can be viewed, generally speaking, through the lens of “climate.” Do students at TRU experience a culture of inclusion as evidenced by what they see as a commitment at TRU to be inclusive? There is clearly value in advancing these constructs together. However, given that there is an intersection emerging with the development of Institutional Learning Outcomes, the mapping of those with Graduate Attributes, etc., the evaluation team sees a problematic scenario on the horizon. Put simply, the aforementioned NSSE scores would not be sufficient measures of, for example, the Institutional Learning Outcome that reads, “Recognize and respect the value of Indigenous knowledge, traditional ways, and worldviews.” To be fair, it is not uncommon for higher education professionals engaged in assessment planning to mistake participation in an activity or general experience of a phenomenon as *learning*. This is often a challenge that emerges and then serves as a starting point for identifying more appropriate measures of learning. The evaluation team recognizes that TRU is in the thick of general education learning outcomes development, implementation, and assessment. Whether that work connects explicitly with the continued refinement of this core theme is an institutional choice. The evaluation team does not recommend that it be connected or not, but rather, that its connection or separateness be explicitly noted in further iterations of accreditation-related documentation.

### **Core Theme 3: SUSTAINABILITY**

#### **1B: Core Theme**

#### **3B: Core Theme Planning**

The university’s theme of sustainability manifests an essential element of the mission and has objectives with meaningful, assessable, and verifiable indicators of achievement. One change made since the last visit was the elimination of a measure of financial sustainability. This was initially a concern of the team (which echoed a concern of the previous team for 3.B.1-3.B.3); however, meetings with the campus helped the team understand that financial sustainability was a requirement of the province. Therefore, any partial measurement would be inappropriate, as the province requires complete compliance with financial sustainability.

The Campus Strategic Sustainability Plan remains in effect with sections that are informed by data within the STARS framework (which is used as the only indicator for each of the

four outcomes). It is concerning that this Core Theme’s plan is devoid of any indication of the Williams Lake or other extension locations in the province. In contrast, “Kamloops” is explicitly mentioned eighteen (18) times throughout the document.

#### **4A/4.B: Core Theme Assessment and Improvement**

The assessments of the Core Theme for Sustainability have been pared down to a single indicator, rationale, and goal for each of the four outcomes of the theme. The indicator for Outcome 1.1 is a single score for the university rather than a segmented score for the Kamloops location and a score for the Williams Lake location. Without separate indicators, it may be difficult to prove that the university is committed to sustainability based on its development, operation, and maintenance of the separate campus and regional centers. Additionally, there are no indications that the locations in China, India, or Iceland have separate ways to be included in the assessment of adherence to this Core Theme (4.A.1 - 4.A.6).

**CONCERN:** If the institution desires to integrate sustainability across its operations and continues to operate in multiple provincial and international locations, it would benefit from reviewing its assessment processes to ensure they appraise authentic achievements and yield meaningful results that lead to improvement (4.A.6).

Since each outcome has a single indicator—and the university does not have a STARS assessment segmented to the separate locations—it is not possible to triangulate the data to ensure improvement is in place. Nonetheless, the institution has moved from gold in 2016 to the cusp of platinum status in the STARS framework in 2017.

### **Core Theme Four: RESEARCH**

#### **1B: Core Theme**

#### **3B: Core Theme Planning**

Planning for the core theme of “Research” is consistent with TRU’s overall institutional planning and is sufficiently guiding related institutional activities. A sub-committee of a robustly representative Accreditation Steering Committee, which meets monthly, guides the advancement of this core theme.

TRU is being responsive to its emerging role as a university under the auspices of the TRU Act, which calls the university “to undertake and maintain research and scholarly activities for the purposes of...” reinforcing its baccalaureate and masters programs as well as its post-secondary and adult basic education and training programs and to “establish facilities for the pursuit of original research in all branches of knowledge” [“so far as and to the full extent that its resources from time to time permit”. To strengthen such programs, TRU has concentrated efforts on hiring faculty under “tripartite” (research+teaching+service) as

well as “bipartite” (teaching+service) terms and conditions of employment, as detailed in the 2014-2019 Collective Agreement. Further evidence of a strengthening nexus between this core theme and institutional planning and activities can be found in the provision for the development of “Outdoor Research Space” in campus master planning, e.g., 2014 Campus Design Guidelines, 2015 Master Plan Summary and Implementation Report. TRU’s “Strategic Research Plan” ([https://www.tru.ca/\\_shared/assets/SRP\\_2014-201934208.pdf](https://www.tru.ca/_shared/assets/SRP_2014-201934208.pdf)) provides further expression of its commitment to interweave teaching, learning, and research to “make a difference” and “build on strong research traditions to promote “education, health, and diversity” through “community and cultural engagement.”

#### **4A/4.B: Core Theme Assessment and Improvement**

The effort to create a sustainable research culture at TRU is clearly parsed into three outcomes focused on securing external funding, creating new knowledge, and dissemination of new knowledge. The indicators, rationales, and goals for external funding are clear. However, the goals in particular may be a bit of a reach considering the historical values presented for 2017 – can the percentage of faculty holding external funding increase by 16% over the next two years and can the total dollar amount of grants and contracts nearly double to \$4.5M? Reductions in the targets may be reasonable.

The remaining two outcomes – “TRU faculty create new knowledge” and “TRU faculty and students disseminate new knowledge impactful to the communities we serve” – are less developed, however. Five year goals and historical values for amount and impact of scholarship are not yet available. Work is underway on two fronts. One, TRU faculty and administration are engaged in deliberations over what constitutes “quality” vis-à-vis peer-reviewed publications. There is recognition that not all peer-reviewed publications are equal. Some faculty bodies have well-established methods for demarcating levels of quality in publication (e.g., economics) and other faculty bodies are reportedly engaged in conversations to reconcile questions concerning quality in publication and other scholarly/creative work. Also a work in progress is a mechanism for systematically documenting reports of faculty productivity. Faculty are required to submit an annual Professional Activity Report (“APAR”) to their respective deans and department chairs. This is currently completed as Word documents or a paper-based process, both which do not lend well to contributing towards an institutional database of all faculty publications and other types of dissemination. Two, the “Number of Community Citations Score” that is central to the dissemination of new knowledge objective remains in “beta” mode, as it were. This tool, which holds promise to produce impact metrics, is being developed by TRU and is in need of refinement and testing before it can be serviceable in an assessment and improvement process.



## **Section Five: Mission Fulfillment, Adaptation, and Sustainability**

### **Standard 5.A Mission Fulfillment**

#### **Standard 5.B: Adaptation and sustainability**

The evaluation team finds evidence that TRU is monitoring and evaluating the adequacy of most aspects of its resources and capacity. This is illustrated by revenue projections, space utilization analysis, enrollment management, monitoring of IT infrastructure needs, and so on. As noted in our discussion of previous recommendation 1, further improvement is recommended to sufficiently assess institutional effectiveness with respect to achievement of its mission. However, the evaluators find that TRU is prepared and able to sustain operations for the time span (five years) most relevant to this assessment (5.B.1).

At the beginning of its five-year pre-accreditation cycle, TRU has documented a time schedule for ongoing planning, which shows progress toward compliance for Standard 5.B.2. In addition, the evaluation team finds that the planning improvements made in relation to previous Recommendation 4, and the increasing use of assessment data provided by its IPE office for ongoing improvement, provide important evidence of evolving compliance with this standard.

The evaluators find that TRU addresses both internal and external factors likely to affect its operations in the annual Institutional Accountability Plan and Report (IAPR) required by the Province. In review of the most recent IAPR, the evaluation team notes consistency between the institution's assertions as contained in the Interim Candidacy Report and the IAPR.

In preparation of the Strategic Enrollment Monitoring plan, the institution reports that a more comprehensive environmental scan was also conducted; this process identified four main themes: 1) connection to the local and regional markets 2) increasing students in the wider national market 3) maintaining international student presence 4) continuing to serve lifelong learners.

As also discussed above, the evaluation team finds that the institution has set aside Strategic Investment funds to provide needed resources to key strategic areas. Formal assessment of the effectiveness of these investments in meeting their intended goals should be considered to provide additional data to inform the budget allocation process (5.B.3).

## **Summary**

The evaluators find Thompson Rivers University to be well-positioned vis-a'-vis its candidacy for accreditation, and to have made considerable progress in a short period of time relative to the 5 recommendations addressed in the addenda section of their self-evaluation report. Importantly, the evaluation team finds the University's faculty, staff and administrative leaders to share a common sense of institutional purpose and a broadly felt dedication to student-centered learning, student service, and community needs. Unified by this sense of purpose and commitment, and informed by attention to best practice research and its own data and analysis, the University demonstrates a proactive orientation and responsiveness to student needs, as was illustrated in the rapid and intentional improvements made to improve the course registration processes and technology. This commitment and responsiveness manifests itself in broad support for the very kind of frank self-assessment and continual improvement activities that regional accreditation requires and supports, establishing a strong foundation and substantial motivation for the institution's accreditation activities.

As noted throughout this document, the evaluation team finds general education and student learning outcome assessment to be the key areas in which TRU must make further improvements in its effort to seek regional accreditation. In summary, we applaud TRU for its rapid progress and urge continued refinement and improvement concerning previous recommendations 1, 2, 3 and 5. To clarify both our praise and the improvements we recommend, we offer the following Commendations and Recommendations.

### **Commendations and Recommendations**

#### **COMMENDATIONS**

1. The evaluation team commends Thompson Rivers University for successful programs that have engaged and supported hundreds of undergraduate students in research, as demonstrated by the annual Undergraduate Research and Innovation Conference, the Undergraduate Research Experience Awards, the Undergraduate Research Ambassadors Program, the Undergraduate Research Apprenticeships, and the Undergraduate Research Assistants program. Institutional commitment to research is also evidenced by recent growth in external funding, core theme 4, and multiple indicators of local, provincial and national support for the institution's growing research agenda.
2. The evaluation team commends TRU's commitment to serving its local communities. Evidence of this commitment includes a consistent message of sensitivity to and appreciation for the indigenous cultures in the region it serves as well as development of education and training programs responsive to community needs, such as the professional

science masters degrees offered on the Kamloops' campus and the one-year certificate programs offered at Williams Lake.

3. The evaluation team commends TRU for the agility and intentionality with which it has enacted service, policy and process improvements, as demonstrated by the institution's response to student complaints and frustrations concerning registration and course access. Recent improvements to streamline the registration process, to provide student-facing degree audit technologies, and to provide more centrally located and accessible enrollment support, represent informed and appropriate responses to the need for documented improvement in this area.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. While noting a useful reduction in the number of Core Theme objectives and indicators, the evaluators find that several of the indicators remain framed as inputs rather than measurable accomplishments or outcomes. Therefore, the evaluators recommend that the institution continue to improve its definition of mission fulfillment by articulating measurable institutional accomplishments or outcomes that represent an acceptable threshold or extent of mission fulfillment (1.A).
2. The evaluation committee recommends that TRU demonstrate that the GE component of its undergraduate programs include a recognizable core of general education that represents an integration of basic knowledge and methodology of the humanities and fine arts, mathematical and natural sciences, and social sciences, to help students develop the breadth and depth of intellect necessary to become more effective learners and to prepare them for a productive life of work, citizenship, and personal fulfillment (2.C.9, 2.C.10).
3. The evaluators find that funding has been recently dedicated to the replacement and maintenance of technology infrastructure in TRU's most recent budget; however, formalized planning for infrastructure replacement has not been completed. Consequently, the committee recommends that Thompson Rivers University develop a technology infrastructure replacement plan encompassing all its locations to ensure its ability to continue supporting its operations, programs and services. (2.G.8).
4. The evaluation team recommends that the University build upon its efforts to document student learning outcomes by developing appropriate measurements of student learning, analyzing assessment results, and implementing action plans in a cycle of continuous improvement (Standard 4.A.3 and 4.B.2).
5. The evaluation team recommends that TRU articulate a policy governing the academic freedoms and responsibilities of all university employees (2.A.27).

6. TRU's Board Manual (Chapter 12, Audit Committee Term of Reference, section 4.3) requires that the audit committee obtain reasonable assurances that TRU has implemented appropriate systems of internal control. Additionally, the NWCCU's minimum requirements of Standard 2.F.4 include having a "description of internal financial controls." As such, the evaluation team recommends that TRU document its system of internal financial controls (2.F.4).
7. The evaluation team recommends that TRU document the relationship between its general operations and its ancillary operations funds, including whether general operations funds are permitted to support ancillary enterprises or the use of funds from ancillary enterprises may be used to support general operations (2.F.6).