

Office of the
PRESIDENT AND VICE-CHANCELLOR

April 9, 2020

Dear alumni and community supporters,

I hope my message finds you safe and well in these unsettled times. I know you may well have concerns for friends, families and colleagues near and far, as I do. It is strange to be physically distant and not see people for weeks on end. In this unfamiliar context, I am sending this message as one way to stay connected with you.

I write because I'd like you to know some of the things TRU and its people are doing right now, to address our current context of COVID-19, the economic and social impacts, and an uncertain future. The things we stand for as a university — like education, knowledge, business and professional impact, personal and social transformation — have never been more important than they are today.

First, I want you to know TRU remains open for business. COVID-19 and physical distancing have led to closure of many of our buildings, but we continue to perform our mission of learning, teaching and research. Over the last three weeks, most of our faculty and staff have moved to working remotely, from home. And our students have mostly moved to learning at a distance. This is an unprecedented change in the history of our university — a hard, abrupt and, in the short term, largely successful pivot in our business model.

You might ask why our university stays open at all, when so many other services are shut down. The short answer is, to support students and communities. Our students are concerned for their futures, and we can help them with education. Our communities need to be ready for the recovery after COVID-19, and we can help by ensuring the human and social capital are available, including through opportunities for reskilling and upskilling. By remaining operational, we keep our staff and faculty employed, keeping TRU as an anchor of relative stability in a turbulent regional economy. And not least, our research, our teaching and our service are helping communities address COVID-19 and pressing needs.

This brings me to my second point: TRU is here for communities, in a myriad of ways, as an outflow of our educational mission.

I want to share a few examples with you.

TRU, through our Faculty of Science, lent a million dollars' worth of ventilators to the health region, as well as donating gloves and face masks. We had these supplies because we train health-care professionals including nurses, respiratory therapists and health-care assistants. Respiratory therapists are critical in the current fight against COVID-19 because they manage patients on ventilators.

Additionally, our Culinary Arts program donated food to the local food bank and hospice when in-person teaching was suspended, making good use of food that would have been wasted.

Closer to our mandate of teaching and learning, students will, over time, have opportunities to study the pandemic that is affecting their lives. One such course, proposed for the upcoming summer session at TRU, would consider the health, economic and societal impacts of the pandemic.

With research being a big part of who we are at TRU, I am aware that a number of faculty members are involved in COVID-19-related research. Areas of examination include the strengthening of public-health surveillance systems, responding to stigma, fear, discrimination and misinformation related to the pandemic, and involvement in a clinical trial of specialized medical filtering masks. These are just a few of the many research projects underway of which I'm grateful for, knowing they will contribute to the management of the pandemic and the recovery from the disruption it has caused.

To sum up, TRU is not going away. We are as strong as ever. We are operational and engaged in meeting community needs. Adapting under unforeseen circumstances, continuing to serve communities: that is who we are at TRU.

We are not done with COVID-19 and the challenges it will pose to our university and to others in our communities. Truly, no one knows what the near future holds. But we know how we need to move forward and that is, quite simply: together. When we look back on this time, in days to come, I am sure this sense of togetherness is what we will remember, if somewhat paradoxically, from this time of physical distancing.

Please remember that TRU is your university. Take care and be kind.

Sincerely,



BRETT FAIRBAIRN
President and Vice-Chancellor

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