
ESAC

Report to Senate

Oct 2020



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NOVEMBER 8

**Environmental Sustainability Advisory
Committee**

**Authored by: Christine Miller, ESAC
Chair**

Introduction

ESAC has had a productive year, here are some of the highlights:

TRU currently holds a [Platinum Stars](#) rating ([STARS](#) = Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating System) through the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education ([ASSHE](#)). TRU has the honour of being one of only 9 institutions in North America to have achieved this rating, placing us in the ranks with Stanford University and Cornell University. This distinction has identified TRU as a global leader in environmental sustainability.



The Sierra Club named TRU as one of North America's top "[Cool Schools](#)" with a rating of bronze. Rankings are based on sustainability courses, campus green initiatives, and environmental engagement. This year 312 institutions participated and TRU is rated 3rd, only behind Stanford and the University of California.

"I'm so glad we opened our rankings to Canadian schools, because TRU has a lot to model for schools everywhere. We at the Sierra Club have been continually impressed with this gold and bronze medal powerhouse's commitment to teaching and embodying excellent environmental stewardship in all areas," said Katie O'Reilly, *Sierra Club Magazine's* adventure and lifestyle editor. "TRU truly stands out in this increasingly important space."

Thompson Rivers University is [accredited](#) by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU) and is the first institution in BC to achieve accreditation from the commission in less than three years. Accreditation is an evaluation of TRU's Mission Fulfillment in each of its four Core Themes: Student Success, Sustainability, Intercultural Understanding, and Research. The Environmental Sustainability Advisory Committee is responsible for reporting annually on Sustainability to the Accreditation Steering Committee.

Starting in fall 2021, all undergraduate baccalaureate degree students will be required to take a course that meets TRU's Citizenship Institutional Learning

Outcome by learning to critically evaluate and apply socially responsible, sustainable, and ethical principles to everyday actions.

TRU is the proud host of the 2020 Hosting of the [ASSHE Global Conference on Sustainability in Higher Education](#). This conference is one of the largest stages on which to exchange effective models, policies, research, collaborations, and transformative actions that advance sustainability in higher education and surrounding communities. This year's theme is "Mobilizing for a Just Transition" and will focus on centering justice within this transformation and ensuring that it leaves no one behind and is guided by the "[Just Transition Principles](#)" articulated by the Climate Justice Alliance.



As per the [Campus Strategic Sustainability Plan \(2020-2025\)](#), the campus is currently in the planning stage of an electrification project. Once completed in the next 5-10 years, campus buildings will be heated almost entirely by electricity, eliminating much of TRUs greenhouse emissions. This is done in part by the installation of solar thermal arrays, electric boilers, and updated electrical systems.

Reports of Subcommittees

Climate Change Emergency Subcommittee

Chair: Christine Miller (outgoing chair Karl Fultz)

This subcommittee was formed in response to the current climate change emergency. In a Special Committee Meeting on November 20th, 2019 a motion was passed that ESAC recommends the TRU Board of Governors and members of the TRU Senate should sign the Climate Emergency letter which can be found here:



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<https://sdgaccord.org/climateletter>.

This committee is per ESAC's Terms of Reference to investigate sustainability issues and make recommendations to TRU.

In signing the Global Climate letter, TRU would be committing to:

- Mobilizing more resources for action-oriented climate change research and skills creation (such as the Wildfire Research Chair Position)
- Pledge to reach net-zero by 2030 or 2050 at the very latest (such as increased electrification of campus)
- Increasing the delivery of environmental and sustainability education across curriculum, campus, and community outreach programs (such as the proposed Environmental Sustainability Course)

TRU has already committed to and achieved some of these recommendations through our core theme planning and resultant mission fulfillments.

A presentation was made about this issue to TRUSU who voted to add their support to the aforementioned motion. Unfortunately, before ESAC was able to gain an audience with either Senate or the Board of Governors, the COVID pandemic fundamentally changed the day-to-day functioning at TRU. Out of respect for the magnitude of these changes, ESAC refrained from bringing the climate change emergency message forward.

Now that TRU operations have stabilized, this subcommittee is dedicated to informing the Senate, Board of Governors, and TRU population in general about the critical issues around the accelerated climate change.

Goal: To petition the TRU Senate and Board of Governors to sign the SDG Global Climate letter on behalf of TRU.

Core Theme Planning Subcommittee

Chair: Alana Hoare

As described in the ESAC terms of reference, one of the responsibilities of this committee is to advise the Accreditation Steering Committee and report on mission fulfillment concerning the core theme of Sustainability. To complete this task in an organized and thoughtful way with input from a wide variety of stakeholders, ESAC saw fit to create the Core Theme Planning Subcommittee.

As this is a new committee, progress to date includes:

- Creation and approval of a Terms of Reference
- Appointment of a chair
- Population of the committee
- Creation of a year-long timeline to accomplish core theme planning in a timely fashion
- Reviewed the Accreditation Process, Metrics, and Interim Report submitted July 27, 2020

Environmental Sustainability Achievement Award Subcommittee

Chair: Michael Mehta (outgoing Chair Scott)

This subcommittee is responsible for the management, promotion, and distribution of the Environmental Sustainability Achievement Awards (2 for students and 1 for faculty/staff) and the Tom Owen Environmental Sustainability Award.



2019 Faculty/Staff Environmental Sustainability Achievement Award Recipient Haley Feller with ESAC Chair Karl Fultz

Throughout the last year, this committee has updated its terms of reference, streamlined the award application and nomination process, and defined the faculty/staff award use and spending time frame.

Unfortunately, due to the COVID pandemic, we were unable to deliver these awards in person but were able to celebrate with the recipients by webconference.

Goal: To have the Environmental Sustainability Achievement Awards adopted into the President's Awards

Sustainability Education in Curriculum Subcommittee

Co-Chairs: Christine Miller and Crystal Huscroft (Outgoing Chair Carolyn Ives)

This committee is dedicated to the creation of a course titled "Indigenous Interdisciplinary Sustainability". This is an important part of TRU's commitment to sustainability in the curriculum.

Since its inception, this subcommittee has created its terms of reference approved by ESAC. Current tasks include recruitment of course development stakeholders to include as many perspectives as possible in developing the course, particularly composing learning outcomes and completion of the Course Sustainability Worksheet. Faculty of Arts is the intended host for this course and

the course proposal will go through the Arts Faculty Council as part of the curriculum approval process.

Goal: To create a team-taught course: Indigenous Interdisciplinary Sustainability

Zero Waste Subcommittee

Chair: James Gordon

This committee has grown over the year and now includes over 10 members dedicated to working towards a zero-waste campus. The primary areas of focus are the elimination of single-use plastic items, reduction in retail food waste (cups, containers), and the reduction of cigarette butt litter on campus.

A Single-Use Item Elimination Task Force has been created to fulfill TRUs commitment to eliminate 10 single-use plastics in the next 5 years. Plastic straws have been eliminated from campus and there has been a huge effort on the part of the Office of Sustainability to promote the correct use of the zero waste stations. The Office ran a video contest for students to create a video showing others how to use the zero-waste stations properly. These activities are in line with the TRU goals towards a 95% diversion from landfills.

The Office of Sustainability investigated different mug share programs over the last year but has not yet chosen one to implement at TRU. In partnership with Aramark, the Eco-Container program began (look for the green clam-shell containers!) This was met with less success than hoped as many of the containers did not re-enter circulation. A plan for increasing awareness about the program is being developed but is on hold until the campus is running normally again.

Data collection was conducted regarding the amount of cigarette butt litter on campus and critical areas were identified. The Zero Waste Committee explored ways in which students may be encouraged to use the butt disposals and subsequently purchased 2 trial Ballot Boxes. After some minor modifications, these will be installed in the two most highly used designated smoking areas, and their effect on cigarette butt litter will be monitored.



Ballot Box Cigarette Disposal Unit

Goal: To eliminate two single-use plastic items from campus in the next year

Goal: To achieve zero-waste (95% landfill diversion) on campus in the next five years

Conclusion

ESAC will continue to work closely with the Sustainability Office to further TRU's Strategic Goal of Sustainability. Renewing TRU's AASHE Platinum STARS rating in the next year is a top priority. ESAC will continue to strive towards 100% Mission Fulfillment as a part of the continuing Accreditation process, guided by TRU's Vision Statement and Campus Strategic Sustainability Plan, which is integrated with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. The Global Climate Emergency we face demands no less, and I am certain TRU, with the assistance of ESAC, is up to the challenge.

Thank you for your time,

Christine Miller
Chair, ESAC

"The natural world inspires us with wonder and reverence. We recognize how the health of our societies, cultures and ecosystems rests upon wellness of people, biodiversity, and wise stewardship of precious and finite resources. As a world leader in sustainability we know that the well-being of generations to come is shaped by what we do today." (TRU Mission, 2020)

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