Student Services Review

Final Report
December 7, 2016
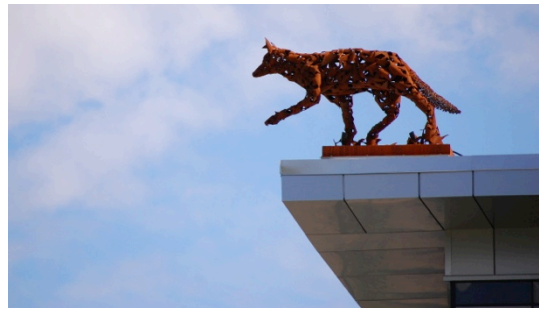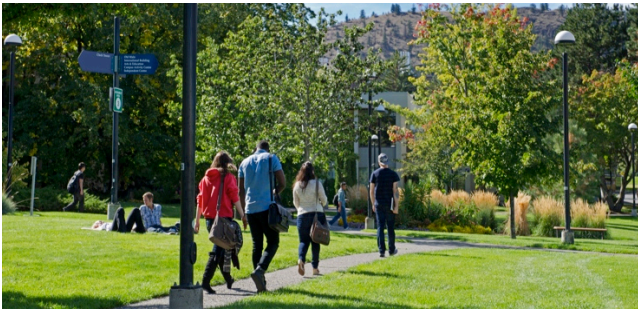
Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION

Thompson Rivers University conducted an extensive review of academic support services and student life programming during the 2015-16 academic year. The primary activities in reviewing these operations were conducted by Keeling & Associates, a U.S.-based consulting firm engaged for this purpose.

Keeling & Associates conducted a student survey, visited the campus, met with key stakeholder groups, and interviewed stakeholders and leaders across campus. They then made a series of 68 recommendations to the Task Force conducting the review.

A Task Force oversaw and facilitated Keeling and Associates' activities, considered recommendations, and prioritized those recommendations for implementation. Where funding was required for prioritized items, responsible budget holders made budget decisions and/or Strategic Initiative (SIF) requests and subsequently acquired appropriate staff and other resources.

The task force did not meet subsequent to prioritizing recommendations in the spring of 2016 and, although a great deal of work has nevertheless been done to implement those recommendations, a final report that summarizes the review project and that outlines appropriate oversight of and accountability for implementation has not yet been provided. This report serves to address that gap.

This report provides:
- o a history of task force activities;
- o a prioritization of recommendations;
- o implementation actions to date; and
- o recommendations for reporting on progress.

TASK FORCE BACKGROUND

As TRU entered its second decade as a university, it was appropriate to stand back and consider how well TRU students' needs are being met through student life programming and academic support services. As the University grew in size and scope from a college to a university college to a university, the model for providing student services had developed in a somewhat ad hoc manner, and there had not been an intentional consideration of how best to ensure student engagement and student success across the diverse group of learner demographics, academic programs, and modes of delivery.

In the summer of 2015, the Dean of Students was asked to form a Task Force to conduct a review of TRU's current student services and student life programming, including a comprehensive analysis and assessment of existing student life programs and academic support services, however they were administered and wherever they were placed within the University's organization. This review also arose in response to the 2014-15 TRU Students' Union (TRUSU) Budget Consultation which made the following requests for consideration in the institution's 2015-16 budget plan:

- "Students request and look forward to service plans and allocation of resources that improve the timeliness, coordination, and quality of academic advising services."
- "Students request and look forward to service plans that integrate and make academic support services more comprehensive and the allocation of necessary resources to establish common service standards and delivery."

It was determined that, in order to best identify areas for improvement and investment, the most appropriate next action was to first establish a Student Services Review Task Force that would address these requests and forward recommendations for action and future funding.

The terms of reference, including membership, for the Task Force are located in Appendix A. In short, the Task Force was asked to:

1. Advise on scope and focus of review, identifying issues, concerns and opportunities;
2. Act as a resource group for the consultant (Keeling and Associates) by providing guidance, data and interview availability as it performed the assessment;

3. Review the consultant's final report and provide appropriate comments on recommendations;
4. Make final recommendations to the TRU Executive with suggested timelines for implementation;
5. Oversee the implementation of recommendations, including relevant budget requests and possible organizational adjustments.

The Task Force engaged the professional services of Keeling and Associates (K&A) to address the first three tasks through an external review that included

a) determining students' awareness of, utilization of, and satisfaction with programs and services being provided for their benefit and well-being;
b) identifying and describing any unmet needs; and
c) discovering opportunities to better communicate about and improve deployment, coordination, and integration of these programs and services through a robust, student-centered approach.

The remaining two tasks in the terms of reference – to make and oversee recommendations - were not addressed in a formal way by the Task Force. This report seeks to remedy this situation by fully addressing #4 and making recommendations for #5.

INFORMATION GATHERING AND REVIEW ACTIVITIES

‣ **August and September 2015**: During this period, K&A reviewed pertinent documents and data provided by the University and conducted telephone interviews with key stakeholders to collect input on important issues and challenges to help frame and explore key questions to be addressed during the project.

‣ **October 2015:** K&A worked together with the Task Force and other colleagues to develop, design, analyze, and report findings from an anonymous online survey of TRU students to assess perceived needs as well as utilization of, perception of, and satisfaction with TRU's student life programs and academic support services.

‣ **October 5-6, 2015:** K&A conducted a two-day campus visit for the purposes of information gathering and discussion of emerging findings and themes. The visit included the following major components:

a) meetings, interviews, and discussions with the Task Force and other administrators or leaders as designated by the University;

b) meetings with groups of selected staff involved in student life programs and academic support services;
c) structured interviews, focus groups, and forums with groups of students; and
d) tours of selected facilities.

K&A conducted follow-up telephone interviews as required to fill in details or answer questions that arose during the on-site meetings.

‣ **November and December 2015:** K&A compiled and analyzed its observations and findings, conclusions and recommendations in a report that included:

a) an assessment of TRU's existing student life programs and academic support services;
b) an assessment of the alignment of those programs and services with generally accepted best practices and quality standards;
c) an identification of new programs and services to address unmet needs among the student population; and
d) opportunities for changes and improvements to organizational structure and collaborative relationships with key stakeholders and partners across campus.

CONSIDERATION AND PRIORITIZATION OF CONSULTANT'S RECOMMENDATIONS

The Task Force held three meetings following the submission of the K&A report (in December 2015, and in January and April 2016) to consider and prioritize recommendations. The K&A recommendations were also presented to the TRUSU Student Caucus in January 2016 for student input on prioritization. The Task Force reviewed all of the K&A recommendations, considered other related actions, identified recommendations that were being addressed already or were not immediate priorities, grouped remaining recommendations thematically, and prioritized those grouped recommendations as outlined below.

While the Task Force was considering prioritization of recommendations, responsible budget holders ensured that resources were identified and/or requested for unfunded or under-funded prioritized items. Budget planning timelines necessitated that Strategic Initiatives Fund (SIF) requests were submitted in February 2016, prior to the completion of the Task Force's deliberations.

TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE TRU EXECUTIVE

The recommendations presented below are those that the Task Force felt would make the most immediate impact in improving support to TRU students and establish a foundation for implementing other recommendations at a later date. These recommendations were presented as developing priorities at meetings of the Budget Committee of Senate (January 2016) and Provost's Council (January 2016). Prior to the writing of this document, they have not been presented in a formal report from the Task Force.

Foundational recommendations:

The Task Force agreed that the following recommendations should be prioritized – that TRU should:

- o make, communicate, and hold itself accountable to an institutional commitment to improving and enhancing the student experience. (K&A recommendation)
- o establish a culture of student-centered work and customer service, including but not limited to the tone of offices, how advising is delivered and discussed, how students are greeted and escorted between services, and how students are represented in communications and online. (K&A recommendation)
- o establish "Communities of Practice" (CoPs) that will a) provide venues for shared expertise on topics such as Housing, Wellness, Advising, Career Success, as well as b) address relevant recommendations in the Advising and Student Services sections below. (Task Force recommendation)

> ACTION: A two-year "culture change" project has been funded that will create the conditions for success by a) working with student-facing support staff across the university to understand and respond to students' academic, personal and other needs; b) establishing baseline measurements for student use of and satisfaction with services and programming; and c) providing close support and monitoring of all prioritized recommendations as outlined below by bringing in relevant expertise, creating CoPs, and implementing an assessment activity.

Advising recommendations:

The Task Force agreed that the following recommendations should be prioritized – that TRU should:

- Implement a single, uniform, shared database for recording information about students that is accessible by all advisors, faculty, and staff who assist students with academic and personal goals. (K&A recommendation)
- Involve advising staff in considering options for and selecting the provider of the student information database. (K&A recommendation)
- Provide program advisors with access to the shared student information database. (K&A recommendation)
- Implement an online chat function to enable students to submit questions about course selection and registration. (K&A recommendation)

ACTION: A project has been funded to select and install an online advising management system. This may be an expansion of an existing tool at TRU or a new vendor product requiring RFP and purchase. It is anticipated that this system will integrate advising management system use with use of Degree Works.

- Perform an audit of courses offered to ensure the accuracy and availability of course offerings, schedules, and instructors. (K&A recommendation)

- Institute deadlines for additions, deletions, or changes to courses to eliminate last-minute cancellations and confusion for students. (K&A recommendation)

- Upload accurate course information to the website and update it regularly.

ACTION: A one-year term staff position has been funded to contribute to the alignment of curriculum resources with a particular focus on ensuring the continued implementation of DegreeWorks is based upon consistent and accurate program requirements for students. This staff member participates in appropriate working groups focused on campus implementation and curriculum review. Program requirements for all campus undergraduate programs within the scope of the DegreeWorks project have been reviewed, and discrepancies noted between website information and CurricUNET documentation.

Student services recommendations:

The Task Force agreed that the following recommendations should be prioritized – that TRU should:

- o Extend hours of access so that students may utilize services in the evenings when they are not in classes. (K&A recommendation)
- o Co-locate student services in the House of Learning—or another facility— that fosters more effective collaboration and makes it easier for students to be referred to the appropriate service. (K&A recommendation)
- o Have a central kiosk to assist students with accessing services. (K&A recommendation)
- o Provide more spaces for students to gather, eat, and/or study individually or in groups. (K&A recommendation)

> ACTION: A proposal is currently being developed to support the move of most student academic supports, services and engagement offices to a shared space. This proposal will also draw on recommendations from the ECS space study conducted at TRU in 2015.

- o Implement an early alert system that helps identify students at risk academically and connects them with services more directly. (K&A recommendation)
- o Provide more intrusive advising and support for students at risk. (K&A recommendation)
- o Develop, communicate, and consistently apply academic integrity and student misconduct policies. (K&A recommendation)

> ACTION: An ongoing Early Alert Learning Strategist position has been created and funding is in place for technology to support an Early Alert program at TRU. An Early Alert program allows faculty and staff to identify students who are presenting patterns that may lead to academic difficulty in their courses. The referring staff or faculty member is able to partner with other campus resources/professionals in order to provide proactive assistance to students so that they are able to succeed in all courses.

- o Provide adequate funding for the Writing Centre to support on-campus and distance students (Task Force recommendation)
- o Strengthen academic transitions through campus-wide academic peer mentor programs (Task Force recommendation)

9

- Develop and deliver a "University 100" course that introduces new students to resources on campus and covers topics that contribute to their success. (K&A recommendation)

> ACTION: Stable and diverse writing supports are now being offered through adequate funding of Writing Centre Coordinator who provides leadership and direction to a cohort of trained tutors. The coordinator also has responsibilities for curricular rejuvenation of the Student Success suite of courses currently offered at TRU. Consideration will be given to how and when to offer these courses to best support new students.

- Commit sustainable funding and permanent staff to support new student orientation. (K&A recommendation)
- Expand orientation offerings provided to all students, especially domestic students, and an option for mature students. (K&A recommendation)
- Create a calendar of programming for the first year experience that provides information and resources over time. (K&A recommendation)
- Engage upper class students as peer orientation leaders. (K&A recommendation)
- Increase resources for Aboriginal student orientation programming. (K&A recommendation)

> ACTION: Stable funding for an Orientation Coordinator along with co-op student funding is in place to develop a New-to-TRU program. This program will use a just-in time approach to introduce students to on-campus resources and support personnel. An Orientation Mentor program is being developed to enhance upper-level students' experience and support new-to-TRU students. A Mentorship Learning Strategist position was created to enliven campus-wide peer mentor programming and broaden student opportunities and credentialing.

- Centralize marketing and communications about student services, including online, so services are described as cohesive and unified. (K&A recommendation)
- Increase formal and informal opportunities for staff in student services and other personnel with whom they engage to meet, develop relationships and better understand roles and responsibilities (K&A recommendations)

- Offer staff development and centralized communications (Task Force recommendation)

> ACTION: An existing position was reallocated to establish a Communications Coordinator position that will develop and support a centralized communication plan for all areas in the Faculty of Student Development. Annual events for members of the Faculty of Student Development have been integrated into the calendar to improve knowledge of key supports and activities for students.

- Increase support and resources for Services for Aboriginal Students, including but not limited to the Gathering Place and the creation of a sweat lodge. (K&A recommendations)
- Provide sustainability for the Aboriginal Mentor and Aboriginal Elders Programs. (Task Force recommendation)

> ACTION: Sustainable funding is being established for positions in Cplul'kw'ten by transitioning from the provincial Aboriginal Service Plan (ASP) to the core budget. Proposals to enhance Services for Aboriginal Students and educational initiatives will be made through ASP funding applications.

Recommendations for specific student groups

Keeling and Associates made other recommendations for specific student groups and purposes including engagement and student life; the Wellness Centre; the Disability Services Office; Law, Graduate, and Trades students; Students Awards and Financial Support; smart card technology; and Open Learning students. These are indicated in Appendix B of this report. In considering these recommendations, the Task Force noted ways in which these recommendations could be, or already were being, addressed through current activities, though not as prioritized individual items. Steps are being made to address these recommendations, such as working with IT Services on scanner systems at Student Services events and adding staffing in Disability Services to meet growing demand.

MONITORING AND REPORTING ON PROGRESS

As noted in the introduction to this report, there has not yet been clear plan communicated to ensure that the investment of time and resources to implement recommendations from the Task Force will make a difference in student use,

perception, and valuing of academic support services and campus life programming. While there are many means by which the University measures some of these items (e.g., the National Survey of Student Engagement, the Canadian University Survey Consortium, the Faculty of Student Development Service Plan, reports on the use of Strategic Investment Funds, and accreditation indicators), there is no central place to record and report them in a way that is meaningful for this particular purpose.

The following recommendations are put forth to address this situation over the next 18 months:

a) That the Provost hold accountable the Dean of Students and the AVP (Strategic Enrolment) and Registrar for the implementation of recommendations from the Task Force through an annual reporting activity.
b) That baseline indicators be identified for each initiative ("ACTION") in the preceding section of this report. Wherever possible, these indicators should come from existing data sources (e.g., service plans or survey reports).
c) That public reporting on progress related to prioritized recommendations be conducted in a report card format on the Provost's website on April 30, 2017 and April 30, 2018.
d) That a summary review of progress in improving student life programming and academic support service be submitted by June 30, 2018. This should include reporting on prioritized recommendations and any other improvements.

THOMPSON RIVERS **UNIVERSITY**

Student Services Review Task Force
Terms of Reference

As we celebrate our 10th year as a university, it is appropriate to stand back and consider how well we are meeting the needs of our students through student life programming and academic support services. A review, and the recommendations that result, should provide us with the foundation upon which we will move into our next decade of quality support to all students.

To support this process, the university has engaged Keeling and Associates (K&A). http://www.keelingassociates.com/

Membership

Chair: Christine Adam, Dean of Students

Members:

Registrar's Office	Michael Bluhm
Student Services	Sara Wolfe
Academic Dean	Jim Gaisford
Ancillary Services	Glenn Read
Student Representative	Ryan Makar
TRUSU Staff	Nathan Lane[1]
Grad Studies	Troy Fuller
TRU World	Adrian Conradi (Craig Engleson – after 2016.01.01)
Trades	Julie Dekowny
Aboriginal Services	Joanne Brown
PVP representative	Matt Milovick

Admin Support: Sandy Devick, Faculty of Student Development

Responsibilities
In order to ensure appropriate student services and programming for all TRU students, the task force will oversee and support a comprehensive review of

---

[1] Nathan Lane ceased his participation from the Task Force in April 2016.

student life programming and academic support services. It will then reconstitute to provide oversight as recommendations from that review are implemented.

The task force will:

1. Advise on scope and focus of review, identifying issues, concerns and opportunities;

2. Act as a resource group for the consultant (Keeling and Associates) by providing guidance, data and interview availability as it performs the assessment;

3. Review the consultant's final report and provide appropriate comments on recommendations;

4. Make final recommendations to the TRU Executive with suggested timelines for implementation;

5. Oversee implementation of recommendations, including relevant budget requests and possible organizational adjustments.

Timelines

- Task Force launch mid-July 2015
- Review of documents and data by reviewer August 2015
- Stakeholder interviews (phone) – August 2015
- Student surveys late September 2015
- Reviewer visit early October 2015
- Draft report late October / early November 2015
- Task force submission of recommendations November 30, 2015
- Budget activities related to recommendations December 2015
- Implementation of recommendations April 2016 forward

APPENDIX B

Keeling & Associates
Change for Learning

Thompson Rivers University
Review: Student Life Programs and Academic Support Services
Recommendations Checklist
December 1, 2015

Keeling & Associates, LLC (K&A) has worked with Thompson Rivers University to conduct a comprehensive external review of its student life programs and academic support services. In a final report on December 1, 2015, K&A provided an analysis and recommendations based on its findings during the entire review process; the table below outlines the full set of recommendations for the purposes of prioritization and ranking by the Student Services Review Task Force.

Recommendation	High	Med	Low	N/A
Foundational Recommendations				
1	TRU should make, communicate, and hold itself accountable to an institutional commitment to improving and enhancing the student experience.				
2	Establish a culture of student-centered work and customer service, including but not limited to the tone of offices, how advising is delivered and discussed, how students are greeted and escorted between services, and how students are represented in communications and online.				
Advising				
1	Implement a single, uniform, shared database for recording information about students that is accessible by all advisors, faculty, and staff who assist students with academic and personal goals.				
2	Perform an audit of courses offered to ensure the accuracy and availability of course offerings, schedules, and instructors.				
3	Institute deadlines for additions, deletions, or changes to courses to eliminate last-minute cancellations and confusion for students.				
4	Upload accurate course information to the website and update it regularly.				
5	Develop, implement, and ensure completion of a consistent process for assessing and improving transfer credits.				
6	Implement online course selection and registration and transition away from the requirement for students to see advisors in-person to register.				
7	Eliminate requirements for students to meet with advisors to drop courses prior to the add/drop deadline.				
8	Implement an online chat function to enable students to submit questions about course selection and registration.				

	Recommendation	High	Med	Low	N/A
9	Continue to implement the advising kiosk during peak advising periods; include digital access.				
10	Allocate sufficient staff time to attend to online queries promptly and accurately.				
11	Adjust the complement of central advisors to match student needs and ensure timely access to information and resources, even at the most pressured times of the year.				
12	Recruit upper class students as part-time staff to assist with basic support in the advising office, such as reception, scheduling appointments, and staffing the kiosk.				
13	Update position descriptions, recruiting practices, and the hiring decision-making process for advising positions.				
14	Provide professional development and training for new and continuing advisors.				
15	Increase formal and informal opportunities for advisors and staff to meet with one another, share information, and develop relationships.				
16	Involve advising staff in considering options for and selecting the provider of the student information database.				
17	Assign advisors as liaisons to specific schools and faculties.				
18	Assign specific advisors to serve undecided students.				
19	Establish a student advisory board to provide feedback on the advising experience.				
20	Survey students annually on their experiences with advising.				
21	Implement a team advising model, comprised of a central advisor, program advisor, and peer advisors.				
22	Optimize the complement of program advisors.				
23	Assign a faculty member to lead advising in each faculty or school.				
24	Establish sustainability plans and transition strategies in each program advising office.				
25	Provide program advisors with access to the shared student information database.				
26	Provide opportunities for program advisors to meet with central advisors; enable central and program advisors to begin conversations among themselves and with the registrar, faculty leadership, and deans about their respective roles and responsibilities in the advising process.				
27	Establish an advising task force comprised of staff, faculty, and students to ensure implementation of recommendations and ongoing assessment.				

Recommendation	High	Med	Low	N/A
28 Develop a mission statement for advising that clarifies the roles, responsibilities, and expectations for advisors, faculty, other staff, and students in the advising process, and the intended outcomes.				
Student Services				
1 Increase formal and informal opportunities for staff in student services—and other personnel with whom they engage—to meet, develop relationships, and better understand roles and responsibilities.				`
2 Provide orientation for new employees and ongoing professional development for all employees.				
3 Provide ongoing training on the use of the shared student information database.				
4 Centralize marketing and communications about student services, including online, so services are described as cohesive and unified.				
5 Provide more part-time work opportunities for students in student services, and more employment opportunities for students on campus in general.				
6 Commit sustainable funding and permanent staff to support new student orientation.				
7 Expand orientation offerings provided to all students, especially domestic students, and an option for mature students.				
8 Create a calendar of programming for the first year experience that provides information and resources over time.				
9 Develop and deliver a "University 100" course that introduces new students to resources on campus and covers topics that contribute to their success.				
10 Engage upper class students as peer orientation leaders.				
11 Implement an early alert system that helps identify students at risk academically and connects them with services more directly.				
12 Provide more intrusive advising and support for students at risk.				
13 Develop, communicate, and consistently apply academic integrity and student misconduct policies.				
14 Increase staffing and resources for the Wellness Centre.				
15 Adequately and respond to students with a full range of disabilities, not only physical but also ones that may be hidden or invisible.				
16 Provide financial literacy training and counseling to students.				
17 Reconsider the name, purpose, and function of the Centre for Student Engagement and Learning Innovation so that it, or a successor centre, supports student learning and success and integrates with other services.				

17

	Recommendation	High	Med	Low	N/A
18	Extend hours of access so that students may utilize services in the evenings when they are not in classes.				
19	Increase the spectrum of special events and campus activities that are provided to students in order to boost campus life and pride, offer healthy alternatives, and create opportunities for learning outside of the classroom.				
20	Implement smart card technology on student IDs so that students can use them to make purchases at the bookstore, buy food, access printing, etc.				
21	Co-locate student services in the House of Learning—or another facility—that fosters more effective collaboration and makes it easier for students to be referred to the appropriate service.				
22	Create an information desk or kiosk to assist students with accessing services.				
23	Provide more spaces for students to gather, eat, and/or study individually or in groups.				
Service to Student Groups					
1	Ensure representation of all schools and faculties, and different student groups, on the TRUSU Executive.				
2	Invest more resources in International Student Activities Programs (ISAP) to sponsors activities and programs that more deliberately strengthen connections between international students and domestic students.				
3	Establish goals and benchmarks for participation in ISAP.				
4	Rename ISAP to reflect an objective of integrating international students with the rest of the TRU population.				
5	Support and engage the Intercultural Council as partners with ISAP to develop more programming and increase participation.				
6	Increase support and resources for Aboriginal Student Services, including but not limited to Cplul'kw'ten and the creation of a sweat lodge.				
7	Increase resources for Aboriginal student orientation programming.				
8	Deliver courses on Aboriginal culture and integrate Aboriginal perspectives in courses on North American history and culture.				
9	Provide professional development opportunities for staff to increase cultural competency in supporting Aboriginal students.				
10	Ensure student information systems and registration are adaptable and flexible to the course schedules and timelines of programs in Trades and Technology.				
11	Ensure events and activities are scheduled in ways that are convenient for Trades students.				

	Recommendation	High	Med	Low	N/A
12	Provide adequate training for staff and advisors to ensure Trades students feel welcome when inquiring about or accessing services, and that they are given appropriate support and resources when they do.				
13	Provide orientation programs that specifically service and address the needs and institutional cultures of graduate and Law students.				
14	Direct more communications to graduate and Law students about events and activities on campus, and develop more programs and activities that are oriented toward their interests.				
15	Begin a conversation about the possibility of increasing awareness, usage, and satisfaction with advising and career services among Open Learning students.				