



Submission to the Budget Committee of Senate

Thompson Rivers University Students' Union

***Report on the Student
Budget Consultation
2018/19***

Executive Summary

Executive Summary

This report provides students' priorities and perceived service gaps for consideration in the development of the Thompson Rivers University (TRU) Budget 2018/19.

Since 2014, the Thompson Rivers University Students' Union (TRUSU) has worked with TRU to develop a means to ensure proactive and meaningful consideration of students' interests in university budgeting. To that end, a Student Budget Consultation process was established to identify priorities and perceived service gaps for consideration in the development of unit-based service plans and budget requests.

This process has been increasingly successful in engaging students, and more nuanced in registering their opinions. Significant improvement has also been made by the university in providing responses across all priority areas and recommendations. Moving forward, more timely and collaborative responses remain desirable, as well as a more systematic incorporation into unit-plans and budgets. The Students' Union remains committed to this continuous improvement.

This year, budget priorities and service expectations were developed through a survey of opinions on a comprehensive inventory of experiences. Because each of students' priorities in this year have been previously examined in Town Halls and are thereby well understood, qualitative data was drawn from these sources as well as the survey open comments.

The Student Budget Consultation Report 2018/19 identifies and reinforces the previous calls for action on five priorities: parking, food services, Student Awards and Financial Support, academic advising, and course materials.

Students' top priority is a parking system that monitors new efforts to manage demand and to make alternative transportation options more viable. Students are further interested in pricing rates and structures that are more affordable, equitable, and flexible. Finally, they are increasingly concerned that sufficient space remains available to accommodate demand.

Students' second priority is food service, and they are seeking evaluation of ongoing and planned actions related to options and variety, price and value, hours of operation, and lines and wait-times as put forward by TRU Food Services in December 2016. Beyond this, they are seeking an opportunity to participate in rethinking food services for the future.

Students' third priority is a well-resourced, student-centred, and fully integrated system of student awards and financial support that is a central feature of student services.

Students' fourth priority is academic advising that is accurate, consistent, and robust, that they can have confidence in, and that allows them to plan an efficient path to program completion and graduation.

Students' fifth priority is affordable textbooks and course materials, and they want the university to actively pursue and support alternative means to provide these materials at lower costs.

Because each of these priorities has been identified and reported in previous Student Budget Consultations, consideration has been given to any actions taken, in progress, or planned by the university that may address the related concerns.

Students request and look forward to service plans and the allocation of resources that address these priorities and service gaps.

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Prefatory Note

A Prefatory Note on the Budget Development Process

In considering this report, the Students' Union asks that readers keep in mind the following concerns with the budget development process identified in past years.

In the development of unit-level budgets, the Students' Union has become aware that not all of those involved nor all stakeholders have been aware of Student Budget Consultation Reports. It is often unclear whether or how the Reports are considered in unit-level budget development.

Correspondingly, in the central institutional budget review and approval process, the Students' Union has noted that participants in collegial governance have not had means to assess whether priorities and concerns raised in Student Budget Consultation Reports or otherwise would be addressed.

Readers can know that the Students' Union will distribute the Student Budget Consultation Report 2018/19 as widely as possible, communicate directly with budget-holders who have direct responsibility for specific priorities, and regularly inform decision-making bodies of the status of responses to student priorities from the Report.

Methodology

The Student Budget Consultation Report 2018/19 identifies and describes budget priorities and service expectations through a combination of quantitative and qualitative measures. A comprehensive survey served to quantify student opinions of and priorities amongst an inclusive inventory of experiences as well as provide open qualitative comments. Prior year Town Halls on key topics provided further qualitative data.

The online survey of students was administered between February 06 and 17, 2017 and participants were recruited through electronic newsletters, social media, campus advertisement, and hand billing. The profile of the 365 respondents closely resembles the student population across age, faculty of study, gender, Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal identity, and domestic/international status.

QUANTITATIVE MEASURES

The survey utilized three quantitative indicators of students' priorities, allowing for tests of convergent validity.

The first indicator is a direct response. Respondents were asked, "If you were in charge of TRU, what would your top three priorities for improvement be?" by category, and then asked "Is there a specific area that is particularly important to you?" in each prioritized category. A weighted calculation identified the most highly prioritized items. This allows students to report their own priorities with minimal analytic abstraction.

A second indicator is a satisfaction-importance gap analysis. Respondents provided both satisfaction and importance ratings for each of a comprehensive series of items on four-point, forced-choice scales. Items for which the importance assigned is greater than satisfaction are flagged for attention and ranked by the degree of the difference. This provides strategic focus on areas that are not only important to students, but also where efforts to improve have greater potential.

A third indicator, implemented for the first time this year, is a derived-importance measure. Respondents provided a satisfaction rating for their overall TRU experience on the same four-point, forced-choice scale, and these ratings were correlated with satisfaction ratings of individual items. A greater correlation coefficient indicates a greater "derived importance" of an item to overall satisfaction. This provides further strategic focus on areas where potential for improvement is also more likely to improve

Prefatory Note

satisfaction with the university overall.

Comparison of the priority list, the gap analysis, and the derived importance provided for the selection of the top five items.

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

Qualitative data related to the top five priorities were compiled from open-ended comments in the 2017 survey as well as open-ended survey comments and Town Halls from 2015 and 2016.

Town Halls on the five top priorities identified in the current survey have been held in the previous two years. In 2015, a series of Town Halls were conducted across campus over three days, in which a team of interviewers solicited written comments of experiences, opinions, and suggestions for improvements on key issues. In 2016, facilitators led a Town Hall with two groups of students engaged in semi-structured discussions in which a series of questions on each issue were posed to prompt dialogue and probing questions provided clarification or investigated emerging themes. Discussions were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

The current survey provided a number of opportunities for open-ended responses related to the full range of experiences explored. Those recorded for the top five priorities were identified for consideration.

Qualitative data from all sources were analyzed using a grounded theory approach. A process of coding based on a close reading of the data led to the iterative development and focusing of concepts that were then grouped thematically.

Priorities and Service Gaps

The Student Budget Consultation 2018/19 identified five priorities: parking, food services, Student Awards and Financial Support, advising, and course materials. The following presents, for each priority, a background and context outlining previous recommendations, commitments, and actions, as well as external and anticipated changes; the priority's ranking in the survey; a thematic report of qualitative data; and a conclusion summarizing recommendations for service plans.

PRIORITY 1: PARKING

Students' top priority is a parking system that monitors new efforts to manage demand and to make alternative transportation options more viable. Students are further interested in pricing rates and structures that are more affordable, equitable, and flexible. Finally, they are increasingly concerned that sufficient space remains available to accommodate demand.

Background and Context

Parking has been an issue of concern and contention for students, and other campus stakeholders, for some time. In the coming year and beyond, substantial changes to the parking system and parking infrastructure promise to address some challenges and threaten to exacerbate others.

In the Student Budget Consultation Report 2016/17, parking was among students' priorities for improvement. The dominant theme of students' comments addressed dissatisfaction with price, but students also raised six more pointed concerns: affordability, a lack of value, a need for transparent and restricted use of revenue, a need for space and demand management, a lack of rate options, and a lack of viable transportation alternatives.

These concerns and those of other stakeholders were directed to the Parking Appeals and Advisory Committee for deliberation with

Priorities

recommendations for change to be made to senior administration. The committee began discussion of proposals in November 2015, and made its recommendations in May 2016. In February 2017, the administration released the Sustainable Parking Framework with a series of actions to come into effect starting September 2017.

The first two actions may be anticipated to address demand management. First, “‘staff lots’ will be converted into reserved... lots, and permits for these lots will be allocated in a ratio of 70% student spaces to 30% employee spaces.” This is designed to make more efficient and equitable use of space. Second, “the parking rate structure will be revised from three tiers to five: Economy, General, Premium, and Gated Premium, plus individual Reserved Stalls.” This is intended to encourage campus users to choose cheaper lots further from the centre of campus.

The third action may be anticipated to address the lack of viable transportation alternatives: “TRU’s Rideshare program will offer sign-up incentives and implement a reward system, and the new Zipcar car-sharing program will provide a sustainable and convenient option... for round-trip travel from campus...” The Framework also notes that those who live outside the transit service area became eligible for a 20% discount on parking passes starting in September 2015, in response to a Students’ Union recommendation. The extent to which this accommodation has been made known to students and used by them is not clear.

The fourth action may be anticipated to exacerbate a growing concern about the total availability of parking spaces: “surface parking lots in the campus core will be replaced with academic, office, market residential and commercial use buildings to develop a wider variety of land uses on campus, increasing density and walkability.” The Campus Master Plan 2013, which guides this development, recognizes and seeks to shape the impact on parking by stipulating a strategic and long-term approach: “Parking on TRU will be approached with both on street parking as well as underground structures... The number of on campus parking stalls (excluding the residential parcels to the North) will be maintained at 2,481.” However, the number of on campus parking stalls is currently projected to be 200-350 spaces fewer in the next three years and 350-500 fewer in five years. The exact numbers are difficult to determine, because the Sustainable Parking Framework includes the 2011 expansion of Lot N and the 2016 conversion of the existing Lot M from residence to general parking as additions to parking spaces in the three years starting 2017. In particular, the 2011 Lot N expansion would already be accounted for in the 2013 Campus Master Plan total to be maintained.

A final action, not included in the Sustainable Parking Framework nor any campus discussions, but released on the TRU website during the summer of 2017, is a series of parking rate increases for 2018/19 and 2019/20. This may be anticipated to exacerbate concerns about affordability, particularly for those students who cannot make use of alternatives.

Rate	2018/19 Change	2019/18 Change
Economy daily rate	+13%	+11%
General daily rate	+10%	+9%
Economy passes	+8%	+8%
General passes	+7%	+6%
Premium passes	+6%	+6%
Premium gated passes	+5%	+5%
Reserved stall passes	+7%	+6%

There are substantial changes coming to parking. It is in the context of these changes that students’ continued prioritization of parking improvements must be considered.

Parking



Quantitative Results

The quantitative data from the 2017 Student Budget Consultation survey rank parking as students' top priority overall.

In a weighted prioritization, parking ranked second of seventy (2/70) items. In students' own evaluation, parking should be targeted for improvement.

This prioritization is corroborated by the satisfaction-importance gap analysis. Parking received a very poor satisfaction score of 0.88/3.00, by far the lowest of any item in the survey. A large majority (74%) of respondents had negative opinions of parking, and four in ten was 'very dissatisfied' (43%). At the same time, parking received a high importance score of 2.64/3.00 with a significant majority (74%) describing it as 'very important'. This provides for the greatest gap analysis (-1.75) and provides significant opportunity for improvement.

Finally, parking had the highest derived importance (1/70) for improving overall satisfaction with TRU. The correlation of satisfaction with parking and overall satisfaction (0.26) was greater than most items. Combined with the high levels of dissatisfaction (74%), this makes parking a strategic choice for the allocation of improvement efforts and resources.

Qualitative Results

In the 2015 Town Hall and the open survey comments from 2017, students identified five concerns related to parking. These include unaffordability for students, an increasing lack of space, a need for demand management, a lack of rate options, and limited viable alternative transportation options.

Unaffordability for Students

The predominant concern about parking is price, with students describing it as too expensive and requesting relief. For example, these students protested:

“ It's too expensive!!! Reduce the price pleeeaseeee! (2015)

“ Can we not afford to lessen the parking costs, instead of raising them? (2017)

More specifically, it was noted that the price is a particular hardship for the typical student, given limited income and growing educational expenses. These students contextualized the price of parking in terms of income, budgeting, student debt, and tuition fees:

“ Parking should be less expensive. \$500 a year for a parking pass is ridiculous and unaffordable. It's unfair for working students. (2015)

Parking

“ We live on a student budget so raising the price of parking really affects us. Asking \$5/day is way too much. (2015)

“ We pay so much for tuition and school in general and then they have the nerve to charge us exorbitant amounts for parking. (2017)

The price of parking becomes more than an inconvenience for many students because they are already financially stretched thin. Unfortunately, the increases published on the TRU website will demand even more of students' finances, and offer no consideration of affordability or the equity of amongst campus users of differing means.

Lack of Space

There is a growing concern that parking space is lacking, driven by the expectation of the loss of spaces in the coming years. While a minority did not agree that a lack of space was a problem in 2015, this dissenting opinion was not recorded in 2017. The emerging consensus over the past years is illustrated in these examples:

“ I find that there is a lack of spaces for the amount of students that attend TRU. (2015)

“ Parking is getting worse every year. We keep getting more students and then losing more parking spaces. If you're going to charge us for parking, then make sure there are enough spots. (2017)

Increasingly, the solution to parking problems is being found in calls that parking set to be supplanted by buildings be replaced, particularly in the form of a parkade, as these students suggest:

“ More parking spaces are needed. Possibly consider a parkade? Not necessarily a huge one, but maybe two to four levels? To save space, build on top of an existing parking lot – for example, the dirt lot in front of the Clock Tower. (2015)

“ An underground or other type of parkade would solve the issue of no spaces! (2015)

“ Parking is crazy. If you were to put a parkade in, it would be more efficient. (2017)

“ TRU needs to look for alternative parking spaces as spots are decreased with new TRU buildings. (2017)

Echoing the Campus Master Plan 2013, students also have the expectation that the total amount of parking be, at least, maintained in the context of growing enrolment. Unfortunately, the Sustainable Parking Framework projects significant reductions in spaces, made worse by an accounting of changes that makes total amounts uncertain. While the objective to densify and build a walkable and residential community through campus development is worthy, it will take many years and a fair and accommodating transition is required.

Demand Management

Beyond the total amount of space, students have identified a lack of parking availability, or, in other words, a need for demand management. In particular, students have noted this need in relation to peak hours, proximity to buildings, the inefficiency of employee-only lots, and the relationship between the number of passes and spaces.

These students experienced a challenge in finding parking during peak hours and in the most desirable parking locations:

“ During 'peak hours' it is very difficult to find parking near Old Main/the Law Building. (2015)

Parking

“ I am mostly in A&E and if I don't get to school 30 minutes before my 9:20AM class, I do not get a parking spot. (2017)

These comments suggest that students would welcome means to better manage the existing space by distributing demand across time and lots. For example, these students suggest a form of proximity pricing:

“ Different lots should be different prices based on their distance from the centre of campus... (2015)

“ The lots are full of either people who do not pay or are here for far too long to be in such a close spot to the buildings. (2015)

Many other students identified a strategy in reducing or eliminating reserved staff parking.

“ Typically parking is available. However, when it's not, it's painful to see forty plus empty spaces in the teachers' lot behind the Clock Tower. (2015)

“ There should be less staff parking and more student as staff lots are never full, but students are battling for spots. (2015)

There was also a desire for passes to provide some guarantee of parking availability and eliminate circling to find spaces. These students sought such a guarantee by, for example, creating reserved lots or limiting the number of passes sold:

“ I pay for a semester-long parking pass yet still struggle to find a spot. There should be lots reserved for people like me who have already pre-paid. (2015)

“ There are not enough parking spots concurrent with the number of parking passes given. (2017)

“ It is absolutely brutal trying to find a parking space between 8:30AM and 2:00PM during the week. It is stressful and dangerous circling the parking lot with eight other cars that are also trying to find a spot and get to class on time. (2017)

Fortunately, each these concerns may be addressed through demand management measures included in the Sustainable Parking Framework. As noted in the background and context, the Framework takes two actions to better manage demand in alignment with students' suggestions; namely, converting employee-only lots to reserved lots with a proportional ratio of student and employee passes and creating pricing tiers according to proximity. Students will be eager to see if these changes deliver the desired effects.

Lack of Rate Options

A fourth theme in comments on parking was the lack of rate options. Students have expressed a consistent desire for more options to pay in ways that reflect their needs.

This was most frequently expressed in relation to a frustration with the lack of value provided by the day rate. For example:

“ My biggest issue with paying for parking is that there are no options. If I have one fifty-minute class, I pay five dollars. That's not fair (the areas with hour rates are always full). At my previous school, UFV, there were options of how long you wish to stay at school. (2015)

“ Why is there only a day rate available? I come for one class and pay all day. (2015)

Parking

The suggested solution is the introduction or expansion of hourly or other shorter-term rates. These students reasoned that these options would be more convenient and cost-effective:

- “ *I believe there should be more parking lots with hourly rates versus a five-dollar flat rate in every lot. This will allow students more options when only coming to campus for a few hours. (2015)*
- “ *There should be half-day prices as well since many students have one class only and it is not feasible for them to pay five dollars for the whole day. (2015)*
- “ *It would be great to ... increase short term parking for those that have one or two classes. (2017)*

Increased rate options are seen not only as sorely needed to provide flexibility for student users, but also to more appropriately manage space usage, as explained here:

- “ *In the main lots, encourage people to use only for half-day rates – five to six dollars is a lot and encourages people to park and stay... (2015)*
- “ *I believe many students who currently park on campus all day because it's worth it would take advantage of shorter term, less expensive parking and it would end up clearing up spaces by students leaving their cars on campus all day when they don't need to. (2017)*

While students are not pleased with paying high parking fees, they are equally interested that, whatever the amount, rates are flexible and purposeful. Unfortunately, while there is a half-day rate available in the one economy lot, the Sustainable Parking Framework set to come into effect in September 2017 does not provide more flexible rate options. This should be reconsidered in order to improve both affordability and demand management.

Limited Alternative Transportation Options

Finally, parking difficulties are frequently justified in terms of the potential to encourage more sustainable transportation choices. While some students spoke to this effect, many others suggested that it has been undermined by the lack of viable alternatives.

For some, the price of parking is an effective mechanism to encourage more sustainable behaviour. These students, for example, were pushed into other transportation choices:

- “ *Parking is good but expensive. I now take the bus (which is inconvenient) because I can't afford the extra \$270 a semester to park. (2015)*
- “ *I have a car, but because parking is so expensive I still walk to school every day (25 minutes) to avoid paying. (2015)*

However, the limited feasibility or attractiveness of alternatives limits the scale of positive behavioural impacts. The primary alternative, transit, is often not a viable option, particularly for students who are out-of-town commuters or have work and other commitments to travel to in addition to classes. These challenges are illustrated by these comments:

- “ *I only go to classes for two hours, but I still have to pay five dollars. It helps people to use buses, but depending on where you live it can be a problem. By the time my lab is done I've either missed my last bus or have to wait an hour. (2015)*
- “ *I know that the U-Pass is geared towards increasing affordable transportation and reducing traffic in lots; however, the bus routes are not feasible for all students. (2015)*

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- “ *The bus systems offered by the city are not convenient and do not run often enough or late at night. So I have to drive to school, due to working late hours. (2015)*
- “ *Of course parking is always an issue as I work outside the transit routes and need my vehicle to get from school to work. (2017)*
- “ *For a necessary service for people like me who live out of town, I have no other options than to park at TRU... (2017)*
- “ *Busses and carpooling isn't always an option in Kamloops. Having high costs for parking to promote these green practices is not the way to solve the issue and instead I find more students just do not pay at all and instead risk the ticket. (2017)*

Another promoted alternative, carpooling, has not been sufficiently attractive to offset the negatives of parking. In particular, the process has been cumbersome with limited incentives, as these students note:

- “ *There needs to be an incentive for people to carpool. More carpool parking and permits that stay at discount to create an interest in carpooling. (2015)*
- “ *The fact that TRU got rid of their carpooling spots and prices is such a regression... The rideshare program is a good idea but is rather impractical for people who already have a group of peers that they carpool with. In addition, the way the parking passes are set up online makes it very inconvenient for people who carpool as they have to email every day to change their parking pass to a different license plate number. (2017)*

A balance between the disincentives to park and the viability of and incentives to choose other transportation methods is needed to realize the environmental benefit being claimed.

A number of steps have been or will be taken as part of the Sustainable Parking Framework that may address some of these concerns. As noted in the background and context, sign-up incentives and rewards will be added to the Rideshare program and a Zipcar car-sharing program will be available. Students will be eager to see if these changes, and the continuing 20% discount on parking passes for those living outside the transit service area, will have the desired effects. Importantly, absent significant improvements to transit itself, the shift away from parking will remain a limited possibility for many, making price increases ineffective whilst an unfair financial burden.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In sum, students' top priority for improvement in 2018/19 is parking, and they are seeking action or evaluation of ongoing and planned actions related to affordability, space, demand management, rate options, and alternative transportation. The Sustainable Parking Framework and other parking changes provide the context for these expectations.

The price of parking, set to increase, raises concerns of affordability and equity as students face a wide range of growing educational and living costs and do so with differing financial means. While pricing has been framed in relation to encouraging sustainability, this effect has limits based on alternatives as well as disproportionate impact based on income and wealth, creating potential for undue hardship and inequity. These factors need to be considered in pricing as well.

The total amount of parking is set to significantly decline despite growing enrolment and contrary to the Campus Master Plan. The transition away from commuting and parking should proceed from the creation of the enabling conditions followed only then by restrictive measures. Starting with the reduction of parking creates hardship for which benefits are not yet available.

Food Services

Demand management measures set for implementation in September 2017 have the potential to address a key concern. That potential should be measured in practice to determine effectiveness and allow consideration of revisions or additional measures.

Both affordability and demand management could be furthered advanced by flexible rate options, particularly short-term rates, that would connect pricing closer to actual and desired use. Current plans lack this aspect, which should be reconsidered.

Finally, all efforts to shift transportation away from single-occupancy vehicles through pricing parking will be ineffective while imposing hardship if alternatives are not viable. The effectiveness of Rideshare sign-up incentives and rewards, the availability of the Zipcar car-sharing programs, and the continuing 20% discount on parking passes for those living outside the transit service area must be measured to allow consideration of revisions or additional measures.

Students request and look forward to service plans and the allocation of resources that:

- **Monitor and report on the implementation of the Sustainable Parking Framework and pricing rates and structures in terms of the effect on total single-occupancy vehicle use, demand management, and shifts to use of alternative transportation options;**
- **Monitor and report on the use of the 20% discount on passes for those living outside the transit service area;**
- **Reconsider rate increases and investigate pricing rate, structure, and augmentation options that are more flexible to needs and sensitive to affordability and fairness; and**
- **Include structured/underground parking in the 5-Year Capital Plan to maintain 2,481 total parking spaces as per the Campus Master Plan**

PRIORITY 2: FOOD SERVICES

Students' second priority is food service that improves variety and options, accommodation of needs, value for price, hours of operation, and lines and wait times. Beyond these targeted outcomes, and in fact in pursuit of them, students continue to express a strong desire to reconsider the organization of food services at TRU and to explore alternative service provisions options and arrangements.

Background and Context

Food services on campus have changed as the campus has grown, but have not always satisfied the growing and changing demands of the student body. In the recent past and the coming year, changes have begun or been committed to that may address some of students concerns.

In the Student Budget Consultation Report 2017/18, food service was students' top priority for improvement. Above all, students sought the introduction of market competition to food services in order to empower student-consumers. This was seen as the primary means to attain a series of service outcomes including greater variety, accommodation of dietary needs and nutrition, better value for price, extended hours of operation, and reduced lines through prompt service. In addition to competition, students were open to any other efforts towards these ends.

In December 2016, the TRU Food Services department provided a considered and fulsome report on series of actions intended to address each of these concerns.

The first series of actions are intended to introduce market competition or otherwise expand the variety of available options. This includes permitting food trucks on campus starting 2017, exempting independent food service providers in Community Trust properties from exclusivity contracts, and redeveloping the offerings of a number of existing outlets run under the exclusivity contract. Students will be eager for the expansion of food truck operations, thus far popular but limited to one vendor, and for the

Food Services

benefits of independent restaurants, delis, bars, etc. in future campus developments.

The second series of actions are intended to make dietary and nutritional information more readily available. This is done through the TRU Food Services website, the TRU Go mobile app, and signage outside each food outlet. It remains to be seen whether this additional information about current offerings will alleviate concerns of nutrition and accommodation of dietary restrictions, traditions and choices.

The third series of actions have already or may provide additional food service hours of operation and availability. In fall 2016, the hours of The Den and Tim Horton's were extended and The Den became an all-ages venue. These changes have been successful. Extension of hours at other outlets will be considered based on campus activity.

A final series of actions are intended to address line-ups and service wait times. This includes continuing to work with district managers from Tim Horton's and Starbucks to streamline processes and reduce wait times, and installing 'line up' cameras at Tim Horton's and Starbucks that can be viewed on the TRU Go app. Students are interested in seeing the installation go forward and for measurable progress on service times.

It is in the context of these changes that students' continued prioritization of food service improvements must be considered.

Quantitative Results

The quantitative data from the 2017 Student Budget Consultation survey rank food service as students' second priority overall.

In a weighted prioritization, food services ranked sixth of seventy (6/70) items. In students' own evaluation, food services should be targeted for improvement.

This prioritization is corroborated by the satisfaction-importance gap analysis. Food services received a poor satisfaction score of 1.21/3.00, the second lowest of any item in the survey. A majority (59%) of respondents had negative opinions of food services, and one in three (30%) was 'very dissatisfied'. At the same time, food services received a high importance score of 2.66/3.00 with a large majority (70%) describing it as 'very important'. This provides for the second greatest gap analysis (-1.44) and provides significant opportunity for improvement.

Finally, food services had the second highest derived importance (2/70) for improving overall satisfaction with TRU. The correlation of satisfaction with food services and overall satisfaction (0.31) was greater than most items. Combined with the high levels of dissatisfaction (59%), this makes food services a strategic choice for the allocation of improvement efforts and resources.



Food Services

Qualitative Results

In the 2016 Town Hall and the open survey comments from 2016 and 2017, students continue to request increased variety and options to satisfy appetites, nutritional needs, and dietary restrictions, traditions, and choices; better value and food quality for the prices paid; extended hours of operation to support and expand campus activity; and reduced lines and wait times for service.

At the same time, students see a need for systemic change. The current food service arrangement and primary contracted provider continue to suffer from a profound lack of credibility and confidence amongst students. Further, many students are proactively expressing their desired changes and alternatives.

Variety and Options

The most consistent issue students have raised about campus food services is the need for more variety and for options both for the sake of appeal and to meaningfully accommodate dietary needs, cultural diversity, and nutritional requirements.

Students noted an overall lack of differentiated food services options, serving neither variety nor a range of meal types. For example, these students noted that food service outlets on campus have both declined in number and become increasingly limited to café-style or fast food offerings:

- “ *Not enough options for on campus food. Available options are over-priced, and not enough healthy options. Why was the terrace removed from the CAC? That area gave students choice and reasonable options for food. (2016)*
- “ *It would be nice to have more options instead many coffee places. (2016)*
- “ *Most of the food services are comprised of fast food and when they are not fast food they are expensive. (2017)*
- “ *Food choice on campus is pretty bad. OM serves either pastries from Starbucks or refrigerated crap easily bought from Superstore for much cheaper. (2017)*

Many noted the challenges associated with eating consistently on campus without access to variety or, importantly, to nutritious and balanced meals:

- “ *TRU is in need of more healthy food options and more variety. When students are stuck at school eight hours a day, five days a week, we get sick of the food services we have very quickly. A food service with healthy meals, not just snacks, would be a great addition to campus. (2016)*
- “ *The food services, excluding the culinary arts building, lack options and healthy alternatives at an affordable price. (2016)*
- “ *Food is overpriced and Starbucks and Tim Horton's are not healthy solutions. (2016)*
- “ *There's no good coffee on campus or good healthy food choices for reasonable prices. (2017)*
- “ *I think there needs to be more food options on campus. We only have a few options, with very limited healthy eating options, and these food places have very short operating hours. (2017)*
- “ *We need more house-made not expensive food. I'm very tired of sandwiches. We need more healthy choices! (2017)*

Finally, there was significant concern expressed regarding the accommodation of dietary restrictions, dietary choices, and food cultures. A number of students suggested that consideration was lacking overall:

Food Services

- “ Providing more options for students and having food service available more often. The food services available now have very limited menus especially for people with dietary restrictions. (2016)
- “ More allergy friendly foods such as gluten-free, nut-free, and dairy-free. (2016)
- “ ... hopefully more reasonable prices due to increased food options on campus, more ethical options, wider variety for dietary restrictions and healthy/good quality food. (2017)
- “ More halal food options. (2017)

The most common of these complaints was the need to better accommodate vegetarians, which often coincided with cultural requirements, and, to a lesser extent, vegans.

- “ The campus eating joints have limited to no vegetarian options. (2016)
- “ Yeah, because I'm a vegetarian I don't have any good snacks or anything like that. I really have a hard time here, because the only option I have is a bagel at Tim Horton's. (2016)
- “ Food services require a serious overhaul; the options on campus are limited for vegetarians/vegans. the places that are available are high calorie/junk food based and very slow service. (2017)

Students spend long periods of the day on campus and expect food services to meaningfully fulfill their nutritional needs over the course of that time. This includes providing the necessary variety to satisfy interest and balanced diets, and, importantly, to accommodate the allergies and the personal and cultural dietary restrictions and traditions of campus communities.

The introduction of food trucks, and the intention to broaden the variety at a number of outlets, is a good start to increasing the options available to students and others on campus. Thus far, only one truck has operated on campus, and to be a meaningful addition this will need to be expanded considerably.

Price, Value, and Food Quality

The next most consistent theme of students' comments on campus food services has been one of price, value, and food quality, and their relationship to each other. Students are disappointed in not finding affordable foods options or opportunities to save through discounts and deals. However, a greater concern arises from the evaluation that, at the prices paid, the products offered fail to meet a corresponding standard of value and quality.

Many students are looking to campus food services for means to eat on a budget, and are disappointed. For example:

- “ Food services: horrible. \$3.25 for one small slice of pizza is criminal. I never eat on campus because it's so inconvenient and expensive. (2016)
- “ There's no sort of deal if you buy a – they even have – you can by a TRU Aramark card, but it's like, 'Buy \$2,000. Get \$2,000.' Why would I spend \$2,000 to get \$2,000 on a gift card? That's just ridiculous. (2016)
- “ I wished we had more food options; affordable prices to be exact. (2017)
- “ No affordable quality meals for vegetarians and overall for students. (2017)
- “ We also need cheaper eating alternatives on campus that are healthy. (2017)

Food Services

To an even greater extent, however, students expect that the dollars they are willing to spend will purchase food of decent value and quality. These students suggest that campus food services are not delivering on this expectation:

“ *One thing I'm finding as well with some of the cafeteria options is that they put this tiny piece of food on this huge plate, and the food isn't even that fresh and that good. Often times, they'll fill it – if you get a wrap – they'll fill it with mostly rice with no flavouring. I'm buying this for convenience, but this is just nothing. This is nothing. (2016)*

“ *The prices are a little bit more reasonable than they used to be anyway, I think, but the quality of the sandwiches, like those pre-packaged ones from Aramark, are not very good. (2016)*

“ *Tim's food is always poorly constructed and messy and takes sometimes twenty minutes to get food after ordering. (2017)*

“ *The campus food is gross and we need healthier options for a fraction of the cost. (2017)*

When asked for specific improvements they would like to see, food quality was top of students' minds:

“ *The cardboard tasting sandwiches. The vegetables that are totally flavourless / Food quality. / Food quality is definitely a huge one. Fresh options. Vegetarian options that are actually edible. (2016)*

This student's comment summarizes well the frustrations with and expectations for the relationship between food price, value, and quality:

“ *Contracting out to 'food' service companies who bring in frozen and grotesque pre-packaged 'food' products at exorbitant prices, are not food services. In an age where health is such an issue, why not help students out and offer food options that are 1) nutritionally dense (yes, vegetables/whole foods!) 2) appetizing, and 3) affordably priced? Get a Chopped Leaf or equivalent on campus. Get rid of vendors who sell nothing but products with refined flour and excess sugar which is cheap to make and horribly marked up. (2017)*

Students will inevitably rely on campus food services for at least some of their meals. They expect that those food services will not simply take advantage their convenience to charge prices that are not justified by quality food. As noted in comments related to this issue and more broadly later in this document, students are and will avoid patronizing the offending services in favour of those few alternatives on campus, and the growing number in proximity to it.

While the Student Budget Consultation Report 2017/18 did not make a direct recommendation on price, value, and quality, and the TRU Food Services response correspondingly did not directly address it, it may be anticipated that growing competition will drive improvements here.

Hours of Operation

A consistent and particular improvement called for in campus food services has been hours of operation. Students noted that not only have limited hours failed to serve students during a reasonable span of their current activity on campus, but they have precluded any growth of that activity.

Students are on campus for classes, studying, and other activities spanning more than sixteen hours of any given day. A common request, such as those that follow, is for hours of operation that more closely match that activity:

“ *Extending hours. So if I'm here on campus until 12:00AM and I want some food, I don't want to go home and have to come back. (2016)*

Food Services

- “ *The food services need serious improvement. A good healthy, cheap meal late at night is impossible to find as all the food services are closed. (2016)*
- “ *Bean Me Up needs to stay open longer. Tim Horton's needs to be opened on the weekends, and until 10:00PM on weekdays like it was in 2012-2013. (2017)*
- “ *Places need to be open longer for all the profs that work late, students who have labs until 9:30PM, and for residents. (2017)*
- “ *We have cafés and restaurants but have you looked at their operation hours? They are short especially on weekends. (2017)*
- “ *The hours of operation are terrible with almost everything closed on the weekends and evenings. As a student you do not want to go for a ten-minute walk to go get a coffee late at night. (2017)*
- “ *Furthermore, as a student who is on campus until 9:30PM at night many nights (at times in the science building) it seems to me that most of the food services should not close at 2:30PM or 4:30PM. (2017)*
- “ *There is nothing but fast food and most of the food services have terrible hours of operations. (2017)*

Students are not only frustrated by the lack of food service at times when they need to be on campus, but importantly also cite it as a determining factor in remaining on campus for additional activities and contributing to campus life. For example, this student suggested that food service was a precondition of creating a vibrant campus atmosphere at any point of the day:

- “ *Any review site will tell you that TRU campus life is dead. It is so difficult to get anyone out to socialize. I think that a huge cause for this is the inability to stay at school for any extended period of time. Almost all food services are closed by 4:00PM. Really? If people have to leave campus, it's less likely they're going to want to come back, especially since we are all so incredibly busy. (2016)*

The lack of evening hours in the campus pub identified as a glaring social deficit in 2016 was not raised in 2017, suggesting the extension of hours to 10:00PM has been well received.

TRU has begun a fundamental improvement to campus food services in the expansion of hours of operation as noted in the background and context. Students will be looking for the university to continue expanding hours at additional outlets to support, at minimum, their required activity on campus, and, ideally, the creation of the vibrant social atmosphere expected on a university campus. Importantly, it may be that a commitment to making amenities available will need to precede and generate the related activity and demand.

Lines and Wait Times

A second immediate improvement to food services that students called for was the reduction of lines and wait times. This issue is a source of frustration for students, but also a cause of considerable forgone revenue for the provider and the university. Addressing these situations should continue to be an immediate objective.

These students explain that issues of staffing, lines, and waits are common across campus:

- “ *They're understaffed all the time. The line-ups for Tim Horton's. The line-ups for Starbucks. Heroes – they have two people on when there is a rush at like 11:30AM-12:00PM, and it is packed. One wait I had was an hour and a half before I got food. (2016)*

Food Services

“ *Food services have improved (in Old Main specifically) in terms of options, but it would be nice to have staffing match the peak times to prevent long line ups. (2017)*

“ *We have a Tim Horton's and a Starbucks that are constantly swamped. (2017)*

However, the overwhelming focus of student comments on the topic addressed the Tim Horton's outlet in the House of Learning. These discussions and remarks speak for themselves:

“ *I would go to Tim Horton's more, but that line is always huge and there's always one till open. / Yeah, that's a really good point. / You go there, you see the line, and you're like, 'Nope, somewhere else.' / I could walk to the other one faster! At Superstore! / Sometimes at 1:00PM or 2:00PM – lunch even – one guy is working the till. I'm like, 'What's going on here? It's Monday or Friday. What's going on?' / And even after you place an order you have to wait a really long time just to get your order. Even if it is just an iced coffee or something like that, the wait is quite long. / That's crazy. (2016)*

“ *For what there is, the only affordable option is Tim Horton's which is lined up through the building almost constantly. This is a very big issue, and has become increasingly worse over the last five years (2016).*

“ *Because there are limited options for places to eat on campus, lineups get ridiculous and the staff often can't keep up with the demands thrown at them. I frequently get food that isn't what I ordered, which is both frustrating on my part and stressful on their part. Staff need better training, or a greater number of places should be available to disperse demand. (Who wants to stand in line for 20 minutes to get Tim Horton's?!?) (2016)*

Solutions to these scenarios would benefit both students and the food service provider and should be pursued immediately. Reduced lines and waits will improve the student experience and increase sales against sunk overhead costs while only marginally increasing variable costs. As noted in the background and context, TRU Food Services has committed to work with district managers from Tim Horton's and Starbucks to streamline processes and reduce wait times, and install 'line up' cameras at Tim Horton's and Starbucks that can be viewed on the TRU Go app. Students will be eager to see measurable improvements as a result of these efforts.

Rethinking Food Services

Beyond the individual points of contention students raise regarding food services, there remains a strong desire to change the system itself. In equal parts, students have lost trust in the current system and are enthusiastic about sharing possible alternatives.

Even in recognizing the improvements made thus far, these students called for structural changes:

“ *Allowing food trucks on campus a good start but TRU should start to demise the offering of 3rd service food from Aramark and do what UBC has done with their food services. Or offer other popular options. Have other businesses come in. (2017)*

“ *Aramark's continued stranglehold on campus services is unacceptable. There were concessions made to improve food service availability but they haven't gone nearly far enough. (2017)*

A great deal of this is motivated by a profound lack of confidence in the current exclusive contract provider. This deeply entrenched evaluation of Aramark has led to consistent calls for its removal:

“ *Aramark's a joke, and I can't believe you guys keep giving them – the university keeps giving them contracts. They're like... ugh. (2016)*

Food Services

- “ *Aramark is terrible, worse than parking I'd argue. End Aramark (2016).*
- “ *Get rid of Aramark! If it's a representation of what the students want, we all actually – it's a universal thing up here – we're tired of it. (2016)*
- “ *I'm looking forward to other non-Aramark food services showing up on campus. Aramark has done an awful job fulfilling this role. (2017)*
- “ *Aramark's stranglehold needs to end! (2017)*
- “ *Get Aramark outta here. (2017)*

Whether one believes this evaluation to be fair or not, it is widely held and can only be ignored at the cost of continued dissatisfaction with and antagonism toward campus food services. The current arrangement for food services enjoys little support from students. They have identified it as the underlying cause of the factors that lead to deep dissatisfaction with the services provided, namely a lack of variety, a lack of options, and poor value.

One effect of the current structure of food services that students pointed to is its limitation on variety. These students expressed their disappointment with the aspect of the model in this exchange:

- “ *There would definitely be more variety of options if it wasn't completely monopolized by Aramark. Every deli you go to has the same items cooked by the same people. / Same pizza it feels like. Same... yeah. / Because it literally is. It's coming out of the same kitchen. (2016)*

Students are further concerned that having one large, primary provider with a captive market is less inclined to ensure that the pricing and food quality provides good value. These students expressed the problem comprehensively and bluntly, respectively:

- “ *Aramark has a monopoly on the food here and as such provides the same bland, overpriced garbage at each location. The "U&M" store in Old Main has exorbitant prices for mediocre food. The café next door has the exact same selection as the one in IB and the one in CAC. Everything costs way too much for comparable places (grocery, other cafés) and the selection is identical... [Students] are turned off of buying food for the prices as well as the poor variety. (2016)*
- “ *Aramark provides poor quality food. Please consider bringing other contracts onto campus. (2017)*

Others were specifically unimpressed with the event catering:

- “ *Our food service provider is horrific. As an organizer of student-led events on campus, I am of the opinion that the pricing for their poor quality food, and sub-par service should be considered criminal! (2017)*

Perhaps no student summarized the frustrations with the current organization of food service better than did this one:

- “ *Do not renew Aramark's exclusive contract! They provide an illusion of choice on campus while not actually allowing for any real variety or locally owned/sourced options. I cannot state enough how frustrated I am with the lack of real food choice on campus outside of Aramark and allowing Starbucks or Tim Hortons is not a better direction. There are many student groups who want to hold events on campus but catering through Aramark is outrageously expensive and again doesn't allow for any local or sustainable options. Be a leader TRU, there is no reason to give Aramark a campus monopoly. (2017)*

Food Services

Fortunately, students are also eager to move beyond their frustrations to suggest alternatives and improvements.

The first has been greater competition, as students see it as the most effective and efficient means to bring students' food service demands and preferences to bear over the long term:

“ You know, your dollar is your vote and there is no vote if everything is the same. So you can't decide which food is the best out of all of it like that. (2016)

“ I think we just need competition. I think if there's just one place where you have to go to get all your food, there's no – they don't have any incentives. If there was a competitor that was offering better food at a reasonable price, then they would be forced to up their game. That's just not the way it is right now. (2016)

In particular, students are interested in seeing opportunities made available to local providers and local products as expressed here:

“ Allowing food trucks on campus a good start but TRU should start to demise the offering of 3rd service food from Aramark and do what UBC has done with their food services. Or offer other popular options. Have other businesses come in. (2017)

“ Need more options for food that are not controlled by Aramark. Bring in some small mom and pop businesses from the Kamloops community. (2017)

“ The food services available on campus are also very disappointing. The prices are very high and the options are limited. There should be a way for students to purchase local and fresh fruits and vegetables. This would not only improve the health of students but it would also drive the local economy. (2017)

Students also have suggestions for the types of food service provision that they believe are missing. For example, this student highlighted the need for a grocer or convenience store to provide food items that students could prepare for themselves:

“ [Food service] definitely needs to be improved, and a campus convenience store is needed. For students who don't drive groceries are hard to do and with the lack of food facilities on campus it gets harder! Maybe get food for students on rez? (2017)

Many others identified a need to create (or reestablish) a cafeteria, buffet, or dining hall type service: These comments explain this desire:

“ There should be a huge buffet with low prices and they charge you with the [campus card] (as most universities do). (2017)

“ The food services that we had in the CAC in 2012-2013 were the best. Bring that back! (2017)

“ Places need to be open longer (for all the profs that work late, students who have labs till 9:30PM, and for residents), and we need variety of places to eat at. Get rid of that little thing in the CAC and put back in the food court we had in 2012-2013! Also, the prices of the new food services are ridiculously expensive. (2017)

“ Having more social space would be good, like how the CAC used to have a food court and had that big open room with a TV that they now only use for events. It was a good space for a lot of people to get together. Good for studying and for socializing. (2017)

Food Services

The need to actively engage students on these ideas for change is not only great, but also urgent. Students explained that they already avoid campus food services when they can. Of concern for the university's bottom line, students are choosing not only to prepare meals at home, but also to take the what dollars they are prepared to spend elsewhere, including nearby grocery stores, restaurants, and pubs:

- “ *Most of the time, if I'm eating on campus, something I purchased on campus, it's because I failed at planning my day. (2016)* ”
- “ *We'll plan and we'll be like, 'Okay, do you want to get lunch?' and they're like, 'Okay. Where off-campus?' On campus is hardly an option. (2016)* ”
- “ *The food services on campus are limited, expensive, and not appealing. I leave campus during class breaks to find something better. (2016)* ”
- “ *The updated food service is still poor. There is poor variety and it's expensive for what you get. I would rather just spend my money off campus. (2017)* ”
- “ *I pretty much refuse to eat at school with the exception of the Cafeteria and the Den occasionally. Other than these two places, there is nowhere on campus where you can sit down, relax, and actually get a full meal for \$8 - 15. (2017)* ”

In their broadest evaluation of campus eating experiences, students want a say in rethinking the organization of food services itself. They have ideas of how to food service can meet their demands for variety, value, hours of operation, consumer ethics such as local food and sustainability, and more. Alternatively, students will remain antagonistic to the current provider, and will increasingly seek preferred amenities off-campus and, contributing further to a lack of campus activity that the university has committed to improve through its “university village” concept.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In sum, students' second priority for improvement in 2018/19 is food service, and they are seeking evaluation of ongoing and planned actions related to options and variety, price and value, hours of operation, and lines and wait-times as put forward in TRU Food Services' Response to TRUSU. Beyond this, they are seeking an opportunity to participate in rethinking food services for the future.

Greater options may become available to students with the introduction of food trucks, and the intention to broaden the variety at a number of outlets. However, the number food truck vendors will need to grow substantially in the coming year, and the variety at existing outlets will need to be meaningfully distinct. In combination with greater nutritional information, students look forward to seeing better outcomes in this area.

It may also be anticipated that growing competition will drive improvements in price, value, and food quality as the campus itself hosts food trucks and the surrounding neighbourhood offers more and more dining establishments.

Hours of operation have already improved, particularly in the campus pub. Further expansions will be anticipated at other outlets, and it will be important that this be done purposively in order to react to demand, but also to generate demand and related activity on campus.

In terms of lines and wait times, TRU Food Services has committed to work with corporate district managers on service processes, and to install 'line up' cameras at Tim Horton's and Starbucks that can be viewed on the TRU Go app. Students will be eager to see measurable improvements as a result of these efforts.

Financial Support

Finally, and most importantly, students are frustrated with feeling powerless in how they eat on campus. They want first to be empowered consumers, but they also want a say in shaping food as part of the campus community. They have ideas of how to food service can meet their demands, and will remain antagonistic to the current food provider if they are not heard.

Students request and look forward to service plans and the allocation of resources that:

- **Monitor and report on the implementation of the actions identified in the Food Services Response to TRUSU in terms of the effect on the expansion of food options in the form of food trucks and the redevelopment of existing outlets, on the provision of dietary accommodation and nutritional information, on the extension of hours of operation, and on the promptness of food service; and**
- **Conduct a full and meaningful campus consultation to shape any new or renewed campus food service contract(s)**

PRIORITY 3: STUDENT AWARDS AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Students' third priority is a well-resourced, student-centred, and fully integrated system of student awards and financial support that is a central feature of student services.

Background and Context

This is the second year in which Student Awards and Financial Support has been identified for attention. Limited action was taken and committed to since last year, and fundamental change is still needed.

In the Student Budget Consultation Report 2017/18, Student Awards and Financial Support was students' second-highest priority for improvement. Students identified a critical need for proactive promotion of Student Awards and Financial Support in the face of rising fees and other costs. They called for greater resources, and more student-centred, coordinated, and integrated service. Finally, many students expressed the importance of Student Awards and Financial Support, noting financial challenges or calling for more financial support.

Responding to these calls, the Student Awards and Financial Support department agreed with the need to enhance these services, but that action had thus far been limited by increased pressure on the department without a corresponding increase in resources. As a result, the department, through the Office of the Registrar, submitted a Strategic Investment Fund request for a new Awards Coordinator position. The position was expected to provide the time and resources to address awareness, service, and integration issues although specific plans for these issues would be created later. Regrettably, the funding request was denied, leaving the department with fewer staff than ten years ago when enrolment was much lower.

Fortunately, other efforts are going ahead. The Student Awards and Financial Support department is undertaking a project to categorize each of its hundreds of awards based on eligibility requirements. Further, the Office of Advancement has agreed to partner with the Students' Union to undertake a study of financial need amongst potential students in the region that TRU serves. That work is expected to be initiated by the Students' Union in the coming months. This need could be compared to current aid to identify gaps and mismatches and facilitate better management and fundraising.

It is in the context of the continuing lack of resources, and the efforts expended despite that lack, that students' continued prioritization of Student Awards and Financial Support improvements must be considered.

Quantitative Results

The quantitative data from the 2017 Student Budget Consultation survey rank Student Awards and Financial Support as students' third priority overall.

Financial Support



In a weighted prioritization, Student Awards and Financial Support ranked fifth among seventy (5/70) items. In students' own evaluation, Student Awards and Financial Support should be targeted for improvement.

This prioritization is corroborated by the satisfaction-importance gap analysis. Students are marginally satisfied with Student Awards and Financial Support (1.80/3.00), but less so than with their experiences on average (1.85/3.00). However, students placed significant importance on Student Awards and Financial Support (2.81/3.00) with an overwhelming majority (84%) describing it as 'very important'. This provides for a gap analysis of -1.01, and provides significant opportunity for improvement.

Finally, Student Awards and Financial Support had the third highest derived importance (3/70) for improving overall satisfaction with TRU. The correlation of satisfaction with Student Awards and Financial Support and overall satisfaction (0.38) was amongst the highest of all items. Combined with the moderate levels of dissatisfaction (33%), this makes Student Awards and Financial Support a strategic choice for the allocation of improvement efforts and resources.

Qualitative Results

In the 2016 Town Hall and open survey comments from 2016 and 2017, students identified a critical need for proactive promotion of Student Awards and Financial Support. As fees and other costs rise, students are placing increasingly greater importance on financial supports, but are not familiar with what exists and do not see the degree of emphasis they expect to correspond with the critical concern that education financing has become.

Students further note that, where they have interacted with these services, greater resources, more student-centred service, and better coordination and integration with other student services are in need. While staff are largely seen as helpful, responsive, and compassionate, they were also seen as stretched thin and lacking needed information and training. Further, students have been frustrated by run-arounds and disappointed by missed opportunities resulting from a disconnect between these and related services.

Finally, many students expressed the importance of Student Awards and Financial Support, noting financial challenges or calling for more financial support. In particular, a gap was identified in support available to categories of students paying the greatest fees. The extent to which shortfalls of aid are real or perceived may be a function of the need for greater promotion as identified above, but regardless reinforces the prioritization of financial aid in students' eyes.

Awareness and Promotion

The most common issue students have raised about Student Awards and Financial Support was a lack of awareness and understanding due to a lack of promotion and communication. Students called for active and integrated delivery of information.

Financial Support

The lack of awareness about Student Awards and Financial Support is exemplified by these exchanges and comments:

- “ *Where is the office though? / It's on the first floor of Old Main, right in front of the cashier. Is that the right place? (2016)*
- “ *How does it work? Sorry, I'm unfamiliar with it. / You apply through MyTRU don't you? Yeah, it's kind of buried in there mid-page somewhere. (2016)*

What awareness there is of Student Awards and Financial Support is largely developed as a result of an individual student's active inquiry, by referral, or in response to a need. When asked how they learned about the department, students who were aware provided these explanations:

- “ *Honesty, I think I just did a Google search and it happened to pop up. It wasn't really advertised that well, even to find the deadline this year. It wasn't really listed anywhere on the front page. You kind of have to do some digging. (2016)*
- “ *Any grants that I've ever received or heard about have been from other departments. Like the research office has a great website for student opportunities. I don't know why there isn't something from that department that's actually related to what they're supposed to be doing. (2016)*
- “ *It's still kind of a mystery to me. You apply for your student loans and then you're exposed to some of them. (2016)*

At the same time, students noted that there is a lack of the effective promotion and advertising that they would expect:

- “ *We need more communication regarding awards and financial support. Students should be receiving updates for eligible awards so as not to be missed. (2016)*
- “ *I think they do have a bunch of those flyers and booklets right in front of their office, but unfortunately people don't get them. (2016)*
- “ *Students need to be aware of all of their options before committing to a loan. That includes any grants or scholarships that are available that no one knows about or bothers to apply for. This would cut down on student debt after their education is complete. (2017)*
- “ *I would like to know more about it. Maybe they should have information sessions on how/what to apply? (2017)*
- “ *Concerning Awards and Financial Support: TRU students need to be informed of what's out there and applications need to be much more accessible. (2017)*
- “ *All students are not equal in terms of money and we need to make it possible for lower wage students to easily apply for awards and receive needs based grants. Make awards easier to find and navigate through and help students know if they are eligible for certain awards. (2017)*

Students expressed a desire for Student Awards and Financial Support to go beyond reactive service to being actively engaged in disseminating information about services and opportunities. In fact, students believe information about Student Awards and Financial Support to be so integral to their education that they called for its full integration with the admissions and advising processes:

- “ *I think we should send out this information during the admissions procedure itself so that students know that they have that option. (2016)*

Financial Support

“ Maybe some of the academic advisors, when you go to talk to them about your courses, they could tell you that you can still apply for this scholarship or something that you're eligible for because they know what courses you are doing and what you're planning on. They know what you're eligible for. (2016)

When asked directly about the idea that advising or registration be systematically coordinated to promote financial aid and awards students were in clear agreement:

“ Totally! / You would think so! / Yes. / Definitely. (2016)

In short, students want information about financial aid to move from the margins to become a central feature of student communications and service delivery.

Resourced and Student-Centred Service

Where students accessed the services of Student Awards and Financial Support, they found it in need of more resources and orientation to students' needs.

Importantly, students had largely positive things to say about the service provided by Student Awards and Financial Support:

“ Anytime I've gone there, whether for loans or bursaries – I'm not really good at filling out forms and they're always super helpful... (2016)

“ They're nice. They must be – we're going there with problems. I'm in panic mode when I show up. (2016)

“ They're overworked and they're underappreciated, but they are sweet. Every experience I've had, they've been very sweet and accommodating. (2016)

However, it was also evident to students that the office organization and staffing did not provide the environment or resources necessary for consistent, well-informed, and student-centred service.

These students explained that the office is poorly organized and staffed to deliver front-line service to students:

“ They don't have a front desk person at financial aid. There are two people in the cubicles there, and they are supposed to manage the front desk as well. Their jobs aren't secretaries. They have full jobs, and they also have to manage the desk. They should have a set up where there is someone there greeting you when you walk in first, because sometimes you have to ring that bell. / And you feel like such an a**hole because they're doing their work. / It's strange too because we would think there would be a higher volume of people using that, and it's the most poorly laid out space ever. It makes no sense to me. (2016)

Another noted that the staff seemed to have trouble managing the workload:

“ I've been into one their offices several times. Every single time they're sorry for the mess and there's papers everywhere. It looks like they're overwhelmed as well. (2016)

For at least some students, this led to poor customer service experiences such as those described here:

“ The student awards and financial support desks at TRU have been nothing but trouble for me. The people behind them are not helpful and do not do their jobs quickly and efficiently enough considering the amount of aid these people are responsible for assisting people in getting. (2016)

Financial Support

“ TRU Financial aid desk does not seem very friendly, helpful or knowledgeable when I approach them. (2016)

“ There isn't much info or help in regards to this area and I find the staff in that department very rude and cold almost like it's being taken from their own pockets. (2017)

For others, the service was pleasant enough, but fell short of providing confidence or meeting needs:

“ I would just say that they were nice, but 'informed' is where I was like, 'I don't know about this.' They said I couldn't get a bursary because I'm not on a student loan. Again, there's two that anyone can sign up for, and then there's bursaries that you have to be on the scholarship [student loan] for. They said no as well, so I'm like, 'I don't believe you.' (2016)

“ I've had very confusing experiences with this area. For example, I've been told conflicting information by different staff at the same desk, and did not end up being able to take advantage of financial support because I was told incorrect information. (2017)

“ I applied on campus at least three times, and if you don't want to select someone why don't you get back to the person and say, 'Sorry you aren't selected.'? Why do they ask students to keep waiting for a call or email? Like why? I never understand that too. (2017)

“ I've applied for TRU awards and financial support many times and don't think that I am properly considered or informed about options for financial aid. (2017)

“ Finally, a number of students highlighted that the application system itself is not student-centred, as articulated here:

“ More funding for students (bursaries/scholarship) and improve ease of access to applying to them. The current system seems very non-user friendly and outdated. (2017)

Students identify Student Awards and Financial Support as a critical student service, and expect that it be organized and resourced to provide accessible, timely, and fulsome service.

Coordination and Integration in TRU

A particular concern with the services provided by Student Awards and Financial Support was a lack of coordination with other departments in TRU. Without integrated systems or shared information, TRU has subjected some students to run-arounds and risked others falling through the cracks.

These students had troubling experiences attempting to address issues that spanned Student Awards and Financial Support and other departments:

“ I've been sent there to pick up a stipend payment before and they kept me there for like ten minutes trying to look up stuff. Then I got sent across the hall to the cashier, and the cashier didn't know what was going on. I got sent around back into the Finance Department, and it took half an hour for them to sort out the paperwork and actually figure out what was going on... I don't know why that department didn't have access to the files or what was going on, but it was extremely convoluted and frustrating. (2016)

“ I got a scholarship from TRU, but what I didn't like about this offer was that I went there and I was like, 'Did the scholarship actually get recorded on my account?' They were like, 'Well, we don't know. Go there.' They were

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sending me from one office to another one. Then I came back there again and was like, 'Okay, was it recorded?' and she was like, 'Yep! Two weeks ago.' So why did I spend two weeks running from one office to another? It was a frustrating experience. (2016)

Others identified challenges coordinating their financial aid and registration statuses and found systematic solutions lacking:

- “ *In order for me to register in classes I have to have money and to have money I have to show that I'm registered in classes. So it's like a catch twenty-two. (2016)*
- “ *If you're a full-time student on full-time financial assistance and they drop two classes that you don't even know about, then your loan doesn't show up! Then you go to financial aid and say, 'Excuse me, I can't afford to eat now.' 'Well, we don't know what to do.' This must happen to other people. How isn't this problem solved? (2016)*
- “ *Made me pay my tuition up front despite the fact that they were aware I was heavily relying on a scholarship. (2017)*

This need for coordination and integration in service delivery mirrors that called for above in promotion and communication. Here again, students expect that financial support be a seamless aspect of their experience rather than an add-on.

Need for Financial Support

A final theme of students' comments on Student Awards and Financial Support was an expression of its importance and need for more. Need was categorized according to a range of criteria, but particularly highlighted for students who pay the greatest fees, namely international and Law students.

A number of students commented in praise of the impact of Student Awards and Financial Support, underscoring its prioritization in the survey:

- “ *Financial Aid definitely aided my ability to come to university and freed me up to be involved elsewhere. An important service to many students! (2016)*
- “ *Can't say enough about the importance of financial awards! (2016)*

Many more comments phrased that importance in terms of a desire to see more awards across merit-based and need-based categories and for wider eligibility:

- “ *I find there isn't much access to student awards and financial support for high achieving individuals. I maintain a 4.0 GPA and have only got one scholarship. (2016)*
- “ *There needs to be more [awards] made available. Especially to those in need! (2016)*
- “ *They're all so specific (awards) and none for general students who just need some assistance to be comfortable. (2016)*
- “ *Not enough opportunities for the amount of students going here. (2017)*
- “ *I'm an average, white, female that is not in math or sciences so I struggle to pay the high tuition costs without help. (2017)*
- “ *We can make the study offerings more exciting for students by introducing university scholarships or, in-house awards for top performers in specific courses to encourage students for better performance. (2017)*

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“ *Keying in to the needs of those whom are incapable to pay and may need assistance and comfort. They should try to make TRU feel like a home and a family. (2017)* ”

In particular, two constituencies of students, those who pay the greatest fees, aired a consistent concern about a lack of financial supports. International students explained their frustrations as follows:

“ *Financial support and awards for international students are very limited, which is very disappointing. TRU international offices mention there is plenty of scholarships which is a lie... I am pretty disappointed... At TRU there is no opportunity for international students – no coop for post-bacc or MBA, no financial support. (2016)* ”

“ *There is a fairly large international student population on campus, but there are barely any awards or scholarships for them. International students contribute a major chunk of the revenue for the university, so the deserving students should get more opportunities to win some awards or scholarships. (2017)* ”

“ *Student awards, bursaries, and financial support should also be provided to eligible and deserving international students. (2017)* ”

Similarly, Law students experience a disconnect between the high fees of their cost-recovery program and the available financial support:

“ *The Faculty of Law has a lack of financial aid, and unfortunately we also have the second highest tuition in Canada. (2017)* ”

Statements of the importance and concerns about the availability of student awards and financial support underscore the increasingly critical role these services must play in students' experience. Whether gaps in the availability of aid exist is not clear and it is clear that more needs to be done to ensure all students avail the opportunities that do exist. However, the growing importance of financial assistance demands that any gaps be identified and addressed proactively.

Fortunately, this work has begun on a number of fronts. The Student Awards and Financial Support has undertaken an audit of its current financial offerings, eligibility of international students for emergency bursaries is being pursued and/or implemented, and a broader picture of need may be gathered through a study of potential students in the region. Students support continued and further efforts in this direction.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In sum, students' second priority for improvement in 2018/19 is Student Awards and Financial Support, and they are seeking action to improve awareness, student-centred service, and coordination with other departments while expanding available aid. They further support continued work to better understand needs in comparison to available aid. Overall, students want this service to become central to the student experience to reflect the growing challenges of financing an education.

A lack of awareness and understanding of Student Awards and Financial Support has continued due to a lack of promotion and communication. Students want this service to become a central feature of student communications and service delivery. Students want service to be accessible, timely, and coordinated with their other interactions with the university. Confusion and run-arounds need to be replaced with user-friendly applications and dedicated service. None of this will be possible if the Student Awards and Financial Support department continues to be understaffed and under resourced.

Finally, as educational expenses grow, and particularly where they are already highest, students are concerned about whether financial supports are sufficient. Students are supportive of work to audit current financial offerings, increase international student eligibility, and gather a broader picture of need through a study of potential students in the region.

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Students request and look forward to service plans and the allocation of resources that:

- **Increase awareness and use of financial supports through both advertising and integrated communications and administration in related departments and processes;**
- **Reorganize and bolster a student-centred service provision in Student Awards and Financial Support;**
- **Provide for a seamless experience between Student Awards and Financial Support and other departments; and**
- **Continue and report on the audit of financial aid offerings, and maintain a partnership with the Students' Union to undertake a study of financial need amongst potential students in the region that TRU serves**

PRIORITY 4: ACADEMIC ADVISING

Students' fourth priority is academic advising that is accurate, consistent, and robust, that they can have confidence in, and that allows them to plan an efficient path to program completion and graduation.

Background and Context

Academic advising has been one of students' longest standing priorities, having been formally raised repeatedly over the last four years. While improvement has been made over that time, the systematic reform needed has been unacceptably delayed.

Students' concerns about academic advising was first raised in an August 12, 2014 forum jointly hosted by the Students' Union and the University Registrar in response to growing complaints registered with the Students' Union. Concerns raised by students at the forum included a lack of planning tools, that multiple advising points (lower, upper, major, and minor) were not connected, and a lack of capacity to meet demand in a timely manner.

This discussion was quickly followed by the first Student Budget Consultation Report, for the budget year 2015/16, released on August 19, 2014. The Report listed advising as the top priority for improvement, highlighting its importance to the student experience: "Advising is... the central and furthest upstream academic support service, setting the foundations for student success and all subsequent interactions with the university." It went on to enumerate concerns that lower-level advising did not meet demand in a timely and convenient manner, that lower and upper-level advising lacked continuity in student experience and information; that upper-level advising was idiosyncratic and included cumbersome, purposeless processes; and that, throughout advising services, there was a need for higher quality program mapping tools.

In the Student Budget Consultation Report 2016/17, released on May 25, 2015, academic advising was reported as students' second highest priority. The concerns identified were a lack of accessibility and capacity, lack of service continuity, inaccuracy and lack of information, and a poor service relationship. Further, course offerings were recorded as students' highest priority, with a lack of systematic course delivery as the primary concern. This is an issue that both exacerbates advising challenges and can be mitigated through a coordinated approach.

Finally, in the Student Budget Consultation Report 2017/18, released on July 18, 2016, academic advising was recorded in the data as students' third highest priority. Rather than reiterate the priority for the third year in a row, the Report simply noted the lack of formal response or action at that point.

In fact, the responses from TRU to students' prioritization of and concerns with academic advising have been halting and protracted.

It is critically important to note, however, that some improvements in academic advising have been made. Satisfaction with advising in Student Budget Consultation surveys has improved steadily from 2015 to 2017 (1.37/3.00 in 2015; 1.66/3.00 in

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2016; and 1.82/3.00 in 2017), likely due to improved processes and service delivery at the front-lines. The efforts made there are laudable and appreciated.

However, systematic reform to academic advising remains unfinished. A fundamental piece of that systematic reform is the implementation of Degree Works, a “comprehensive academic advising, transfer articulation, and degree audit solution.” (elucian.com/degreeworks) The intent to implement Degree Works was communicated to the Students’ Union as early as 2014. The implementation on campus is now long overdue, despite dedicated efforts by those directly involved, and requires renewed focus.

The formal Degree Works Implementation Project was only officially started March 23, 2016, and is now significantly behind schedule. The project charter set a January 2017 target date for use by advising staff in all programs. To date, only two Faculties/Schools are substantially complete against this measure and many others remain steps behind. Use by students is not foreseeable. The complexity of scribing program data exceeded expectations; there has been a need for substantial revision to out-of-date and complicated program structures, particularly in more open programs and as reflected by students’ concerns about systematic course delivery; and resources have been spread thin between implementation and ongoing maintenance and support. These challenges require more resources, but also further underscore the importance of this project.

In response to these challenges, the University Registrar submitted a Strategic Investment Fund request to support the timely implementation of Degree Works. When the fund awards for 2017/18 were announced to the Budget Committee of Senate at its April 11, 2017 meeting, many criteria listed as used to select projects would be directly addressed by Degree Works including support for Strategic Priorities (Increasing Student Success) and improving student retention. As noted, Student Budget Consultation Reports also consistently reported the importance of improving advising. Despite this, the Degree Works request was not included in the successful projects.

Under current conditions, the date of full implementation of Degree Works is difficult to determine, but will certainly not reflect its importance to the core mission of the university and the student experience.

Quantitative Results

The quantitative data from the 2017 Student Budget Consultation survey rank academic advising as students’ fourth priority overall. With a close relationship, course offerings are ranked as students’ sixth priority overall.

In a weighted prioritization, academic advising ranked third among seventy (3/70) items. In a weighted prioritization, course offerings ranked first among seventy (1/70) items. In students’ own evaluation, academic advising and its relationship to course offerings should be targeted for improvement.

This prioritization is corroborated by the satisfaction-importance gap analysis. Students are nearly as satisfied with academic advising (1.82/3.00) as with their experiences on average (1.85/3.00). However, students placed the utmost importance on



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academic advising (2.80/3.00) with virtually all (98%) assigning it some importance and an overwhelming majority (83%) describing it as 'very important'. This provides for a gap analysis of -0.98, and provides significant opportunity for improvement. At the same time, while students are more satisfied with course offerings (2.00/3.00) than their experiences on average (1.85/3.00), course offerings are also the most important (2.84/3.00) item in the survey. This provides for a gap analysis of -0.84, and also provides opportunity for improvement.

Finally, academic advising had the seventh highest derived importance (7/70) for improving overall satisfaction with TRU. The correlation of satisfaction with academic advising and overall satisfaction (0.29) was greater than most items. Combined with the moderate levels of dissatisfaction (33%), this makes academic advising a strategic choice for the allocation of improvement efforts and resources. Course offerings have the thirteenth highest derived importance (13/70) for improving overall satisfaction with TRU. Unsurprisingly, the correlation of satisfaction with course offerings and overall satisfaction with TRU (0.51) was the highest of any item. While relatively low levels of dissatisfaction (18%) reduce the scale of potential improvement to course offerings, improvements are possible in relation to academic advising, making this an even stronger strategic choice for efforts and resources.

Qualitative Results

In the 2015 Town Hall and open survey comments from 2015 and 2017, students identified four consistent areas of concern with academic advising: a lack of service continuity, inaccuracy and lack of information, a connection with unsystematic course offerings, and a poor service relationship. Happily, a concern with lack of accessibility and capacity raised in 2015 was not identified in 2017, suggesting that changes to front-line advising services have successfully address this aspect.

Lack of Service Continuity

A critical concern with advising is a lack of service continuity. Often the lack of continuity was experienced between units, where delivery of advising services was separated. This included the division between central and upper-level advising, as reported by these students:

“ *Lack of consistency from the first two years to third year. Sometimes the advisors don't have the info needed to answer questions. (2015)*

“ *There needs to be more consistent advice and have earlier advising carry-over to upper level. (2015)*

“ *I have advisors in my RT program to help, but they don't always know what all the degree elective course options are like. On multiple occasions I was getting really overwhelmed and lost trying to figure out my schedule, and every time I went to or emailed Academic Advising, they wouldn't even give me a little guidance, saying I had program-specific advisors I must use. Even my questions on individual course loads and whatnot went unanswered. I was left to try my best to sort it out on my own, and I fear what this may build into next year when my schedule is overstuffed. It is unfortunate that this semester fell apart as a result of their lack of basic help to me. (2017)*

It was also a problem between departments and divisions that may not adequately share information about programs or delivery methods, as noted by this student taking both on-campus and Open Learning courses:

“ *Online and campus advisors currently know very little regarding the operations of the other departments. For an online student who is also attending campus courses this creates difficulty when it comes to coordinating programs. This separation should be identified and advisors from both programs should be knowledgeable in the other's field. (2015)*

While the decentralized system of advising was seen as creating gaps in service, it appears to have also spread advising staff too thin, leading students to also identify a lack of consistency within units:

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“ I used to have BIG issues with academic advising, more specifically [program] advising. It felt like the advisors were constantly changing, my emails/voicemails were never answered, and I wasn't confident what they were 'advising' was correct. Adding a second advisor was a big help this year – more support in this area is needed and proper training, so advisors give accurate information! (2015)

“ Consistency in advising – the [program] advisors change every year and are inconsistent in their advice – this makes graduating even more stressful and confusing. (2015)

Overall, the result of a disjointed system of advising was often a run-around for students:

“ Perhaps some training courses should be put in place. It took me three different people and almost three weeks to correctly figure out the course that I needed to take. (2015)

“ Not all the time, but most of the time when I ask about a course I get sent to one person, who sends me to another, and so on. It can get frustrating going through three to four people to get information. (2015)

“ I am unhappy with the academic advising because it seems as though they are not sure as to what they are doing. I am an [program] student and have dealt with the [Program] Advising lots and I just find that the few times I have been there and asked questions, I have been sent on a goose chase around to other program advisers etc. to find the answers I need and want. I think that an academic adviser should have all the answers students need when they approach them for help. We as students don't necessarily have a ton of time to run around making four different appointments with four different advisers just to be sure we can graduate on time. I also have many peers who have had to extend their time here because they were given false information, therefore they couldn't graduate when they planned. I find that unacceptable. (2017)

“ I have been constantly bounced around with advising. When I was in first and second year I found advisors to be helpful but my experience with them has sadly changed. Upon having appointments, I am often googling things for the advisors to teach them about things that they did not know TRU offered. (2017)

“ There is often NO communication between advisors. You often get sent to several different people before anyone can help you. And I have had advisors that are no help, or give poor advice that doesn't end up helping me in the long run. There should be a way to easily speak to exactly the right advisor without getting passed along to someone else to deal with you. (2017)

Students are frustrated in finding advising services throughout their academic career that can address their aspirations consistently.

Inaccuracy and Lack of Information

The most common of all concerns with advising, often related to the lack of continuity, is the real or perceived inaccuracy of advice. Often students felt that the advisors did not have adequate information to provide the advice they needed:

“ The academic advising team is so welcoming and very helpful once you get an appointment. However, I feel the three times that I have went there, the information provided wasn't completely accurate. It would be easier if they had more student info on file from previous visits. (2015)

“ I found that a majority of the advisors weren't as helpful as they could have been because they did not have the information about the degrees, or they would give out inaccurate information making it confusing to figure out what's right or wrong to do. (2015)

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“ Academic advising should be more streamline and the people running it should be more educated in small fields instead of slightly educated in all fields. (2017)

“ I have found that the [program] advisers are not helpful. They are unable to provide even basic information for the majority of programs. (2017)

A common concern raised regarding advice that was deemed inaccurate or unhelpful was the effect on increasing the time to graduation. For example, these students felt that advising had not directed them on an efficient path to their goal:

“ I was given very bad advice and it put me back two years in my program. Our advisors should be up to date with transfer programs and have their best interest in the students and not just keeping people in university. (2015)

“ I've been in school for five years and the advisors at TRU had me taking courses I didn't even need. Now I have about 30 credits of courses I don't need and in turn my degree is taking me six years instead of four!! (2015)

“ I have had too many fellow students become unable to graduate due to their information, as well as hearing different things from different people about the same thing. There is a lot of misinformation coming from [program] advising. (2017)

“ [Program] Advising needs a serious re-haul. Their services hindered, rather than, helped me. They need to focus on doing everything they can to ensure the best experience possible for their students, this includes knowing what you're doing and admitting when you don't. I would not be on track to graduate had I not caught a mistake on my course selection sheet. (2017)

“ I've had multiple friends who were told that it looked like they had all of their requirements for graduation. My friends even double checked with them before graduation and were told they were good to go. Weeks before grad, they were told they were a couple credits short and had to stay for another semester. (2017)

In a number of cases, students suggested that advising has not only inaccurate but unconnected their educational goals, as these students describe:

“ Very unhelpful. I told them exactly what I was hoping to do (legal/paralegal), and they put me in the BA program. I am now thousands of dollars in debt. Thanks advising. P.S. That legal program is in TRU Open Learning. (2015)

“ Very critical that I know I am not being 'sold' a program and that the advisors are actually looking out for my best interests. I have found that multiple advisors have offered me different viewpoints on the direction I should be heading in and this is confusing. I don't want to take redundant classes or take classes that are not part of the required undertaking for my chosen degree. (2017)

Students have expressed serious doubt in the accuracy of advising services. Whether this is real or perceived, it is raises enormous red flags that need to be addressed.

Connection to Unsystematic Course Delivery

The related area of concern is course delivery. Students identified a series of concerns in accessing courses, including frequency of offerings, reliability of offerings, scheduling conflicts, and course changes and cancellations – each leading to difficulty in course planning and, presumably, difficulty for advising. They further identified common consequence in increased time to graduation.

The most common issue with course delivery was the frequency at which given courses, particularly program requirements, were offered. Many students spoke directly to a desire for greater frequency:

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- “ Stop leapfrogging courses, as in stop offering required courses for degrees only once every two years. (2015)
- “ It is important to ensure that courses mandatory for a program or a major are available either every year or every two years. (2017)
- “ [Program] courses are offered seldomly so it takes forever to finish the program if you miss a course. (2017)
- “ Bi-yearly offerings for upper-level [program] courses are not sufficient nor conducive to a timely graduation. (2017)
- “ It would be nice to have more course offerings more often, especially in the summer and in sciences, where some courses are only offered alternating years. (2017)

However, students also suggested that the uncertainty with which courses are offered is equally challenging. For example:

- “ There are courses listed in the Calendar that have not been offered for several years – can be very frustrating. (2015)
- “ I have noticed a lot of courses listed online on TRU's website as being offered at TRU have not been offered at all in my five years here. It is quite unfortunate to not be able to take them, especially after thinking that they would be available. I think part of this problem stems from a lack of faculty in certain departments. (2017)

Where courses are offered, students reported additional challenges in finding courses that both fit their schedule and could fit them in the available sections:

- “ All of the courses I want to take are offered, but they seem to be offered at the same times so I have tight back-to-back classes and have to wait until the next semester to take other required courses I wanted. (2015)
- “ My program never has enough space in classes for all that are enrolled in the program. We can't graduate on time because there are not enough spaces in core courses. (2015)
- “ Classes in the same programs conflict with each other, so I do not understand how students are expected to choose classes when they are all at the same time. (2017)
- “ Considerate planning that takes into account a program's requirements and ensures those essential courses conflict as little as possible with other courses offered for the same program and of the same year level. (2017)
- “ Usually there isn't much flexibility when making my schedule. There will only be one section for a specific class, and computer science and math courses conflict often for time. (2017)
- “ I had a lot of difficult planning my courses due to when they were offered as the same program courses were offered at the same time, so out of four classes I could only chose one, as they all conflicted together. (2017)

Perhaps the most frustrated comments came from students who, having selected courses that were available for registration, experienced course changes and cancellations, often little before or even after a semester had begun:

- “ It is super annoying when courses are scheduled and then get cancelled. Perhaps we need more profs? Or don't schedule courses that aren't guaranteed to happen. (2015)
- “ I had trouble finding courses to fit my schedule and majors. I actually had a class cancelled at the start of the

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semester and I was not told until I emailed the prof about the classroom. (2015)

“ *Sessions being cancelled at the last minute make it difficult to build a timetable when you are responsible and register your classes early. (2017)*

These students' comments exemplified the many facets of the problem, noting a series of related challenges including frequency itself, communication of frequency, and the effect on course planning and time to graduation:

“ *If a course is offered, it would be good to know how often. For someone only studying for a 3rd and 4th year program – courses that only occur every two years – it is really important to communicate this! Or perhaps offer them more frequently to assist students complete their studies on time. Also, the Calendar is not helpful in planning your studies when there is no guarantee any of those listed will be offered. (2015)*

“ *It's important that TRU offers courses that match program requirements in a way that you can properly plan out your degree. Often students need a specific course but it's only offered every year and a half, but there is no way to know if it will be offered again and when. (2017)*

“ *There are a couple of new courses (like minor in [subject]) which I would like to take, but there is no schedule to look up when they are going to be offered. Also, the general schedule for fall/winter/summer offerings is not visible. It is so crucial to logically build and structure your program, but with TRU you never know. (2017)*

For students, the lack of systematic course delivery creates deeply concerning effects on time to graduation. For the university, it makes the provision of accurate and helpful academic advising that much more difficult. For both, there is nothing more critical than the successful completion of programs. This needs to be the single greatest focus of the university.

Poor Service Relationship

The issues of continuity, accuracy, and difficulties mapping a path to graduation contribute to an encompassing issue of a poor service relationship marked by an absence of personal attention, courtesy, and, ultimately trust or confidence.

The most common complaint about the service relationship is a failure to providing meaningful assistance, and increasingly so at the program level rather than central advising:

“ *I had went in to ask for help on the TRU website and was told to figure it out myself. (2015)*

“ *I am aware that there are new staff amongst academic advising but when they don't have an answer to my questions, please point me to someone who does instead of just saying no, or I don't know. (2015)*

“ *I very rarely have a good experience when I deal with the academic advisors. They told me they were unable to help me because I only planned on doing one year at TRU and then transferring (2017).*

“ *Every step of the way I experienced the student advisor for the ... program gave excuses rather than be helpful. Frustrating. (2017)*

“ *{Program} courses not given promptly or enough time in advance. Follow through from student advisor in [program] extremely poor: basically a waste of time to contact. (2017)*

Others felt that advisors did not have the time to address each student as a unique individual. For example, these students describe feeling quickly processed without truly being addressed:

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“ It hasn't been very informative and seemed extremely rushed. As if they just wanted to get you in and out. I feel that if there were the option of having an open door policy it may be beneficial. (2015)

“ I found that the advisor for the [program] does not spend enough time to help me sort out the courses in order for them to meet my needs. (2015)

“ No consistency in advice or real depth and consideration being put into students' educational aspirations. (2017)

A worrying consequence of poor service experiences is a lack of trust and loss of reputation. These students, for example, see little value in engaging with academic advising:

“ I've had a bad experience with the academic advising. I will not switch programs because I was uninformed. Now, I refuse to go back. (2015)

“ They're so rushed, so I haven't bothered seeing one in such a long time. (2015)

“ It also seems like everyone has an advising horror story of being told they can graduate or something and then being informed that, in fact, they were not properly informed of what courses they need. (2017)

“ Many people have been screwed over by academic advising in terms of course work so I avoid them and go to department heads and any other sources I can. (2017)

It will be critical for academic advising to forge a fundamentally new relationship with students to overcome any animosity, misgivings, and related reputations that have developed.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In sum, students' third priority for improvement in 2018/19 is academic advising, and they are seeking action on service continuity, accuracy, and systematic course delivery to reestablish a relationship of trust with this critical service.

Academic advising has consistently struggled with this set of interrelated challenges. Advising staff are not connected with each other in order to provide seamless service with the same information and advice provided to students. Programs and courses provided in ad hoc ways make advising that much more difficult, and frustrate students' program completion plans.

Fortunately, a powerful tool for addressing this range of problems has already been identified in Degree Works. Unfortunately, its implementation and use is significantly behind schedule and requires additional resources. Students are anxious for all necessary action to be taken to complete this project.

Students request and look forward to service plans and the allocation of resources that:

- **Ensure the full implementation of Degree Works, including use by students, for all programs by the Fall 2018 semester**

PRIORITY 5: COURSE MATERIALS

Students' fifth priority is affordable textbooks and course materials, and they want the university to actively pursue and support alternative means to provide these materials at lower costs.

Course Materials

Background and Context

Textbook affordability is a growing concern for students throughout North America and beyond, and TRU is no different. As course material costs begin to rival the cost of food and transportation, students are increasingly calling for help. Those calls are increasingly being heard at TRU and nascent efforts to create alternatives will need continued support.

In the Student Budget Consultation Report 2017/18, course materials was students' fifth highest priority for improvement. At that time, the issue was investigated only in direct connection with the services of the Bookstore. The Bookstore has provided a response outlining actions against issues in its purview, such as the buy-back program, hours of operation, and the return policy. On course materials themselves, students identified price and affordability as their overwhelming concern. They expressed frustrations with the publishing industry but had some hopes for help within its limitations through an improved buy-back program, a comprehensive Library textbook reserve system, and, to a lesser extent, digital textbook formats.

The Bookstore committed to do what it could to reduce costs by encouraging faculty to use textbooks for longer periods of time, allowing for greater value and savings in used textbooks.

The Library reported that a comprehensive textbook reserve system was not possible because its "budget cannot sustain the buying of textbooks to support all courses and all students on campus... textbooks have little to no lasting value for an academic library. As such, it is the policy of the TRU Library not to buy textbooks." While this is an understandable obstacle, the textbook reserve should be reconsidered by other means.

Importantly, students also touched on a burgeoning opportunity to turn the publishing industry on its head – open educational resources.

The Student Caucus recognized the potential of open educational resources to provide substantial financial and pedagogical benefits if their use could be scaled and mainstreamed. The Open Textbooks campaign was launched in August 2016 to achieve that aim through a foundation of an Open Textbook Grants Program similar to those successfully established at four other British Columbia universities.

Through advocating the creation of this program, the campaign further established a greater understanding of open educational resources amongst students and faculty. Nearly 2,000 students signed a petition in support of the program and greater open educational resource use. A presentation was also made to each of the Faculty Councils with robust and promising discussions at each. This led ultimately to a presentation to the Academic Planning and Priorities Committee (APPC) of Senate.

The APPC provided an endorsement of the Open Textbook Grants Program, and the University Librarian and the Interim Vice President Open Learning committed to work with the Students' Union to develop a 2018/19 Strategic Investment Fund (SIF) request for the program. Further, a SIF request from Open Learning was awarded \$33,000 for a 0.6 one-year position to provide supporting services for the development of open textbooks.

Since that time, the Students' Union, the Library, and Open Learning have begun to establish a partnership, building from the current SIF, to develop a funding request for an Open Textbook Grants Program. Continued support from the university will be important.

Quantitative Results

The quantitative data from the 2017 Student Budget Consultation survey rank course materials as students' fifth priority overall.

In a weighted prioritization, course materials ranked seventh among seventy (7/70) items. In students' own evaluation, course materials should be targeted for improvement.

This prioritization is corroborated by the satisfaction-importance gap analysis. Students are only marginally satisfied with course materials (1.66/3.00), and substantially less so than with their experiences on average (1.87/3.00). Further, students placed

Course Materials

significant importance on course materials (2.55/3.00) with a majority (62%) describing it as 'very important'. This provides for a gap analysis of -0.90, and provides significant opportunity for improvement.



Finally, course materials have the eleventh highest derived importance (11/70) for improving overall satisfaction with TRU. The correlation of satisfaction with academic advising and overall satisfaction (0.23) was greater than most items. Combined with the substantial levels of dissatisfaction (40%), this makes course materials a strategic choice for the allocation of improvement efforts and resources.

Qualitative Results

In the 2016 Town Hall and the open survey comments from 2016 and 2017, students restated the unaffordability of textbooks and other course materials as their primary concern. They continue to call for the university to pursue alternatives; in particular, students want a comprehensive Library reserve system and expanded use of open textbooks.

Price and Affordability

The primary concern that students have about textbooks and course materials is affordability. Textbooks constitute a significant and growing proportion of the rising cost of post-secondary education. Students are increasingly frustrated that, at the same time that they are paying more and more each year in tuition fees, the additional costs of course materials constitute (for domestic students) a nearly 50% premium on those fees. These students express that frustration in these comments:

- “ Textbook prices are horrific, and their buyback prices are insulting. (2016)
- “ The Bookstore is too expensive. It does not cost \$500 to produce a text book. (2016)
- “ If I really need it, I buy it or I try to get it from the Library. The problem is that we can't afford it. (2016)
- “ Textbooks and course packs are way too expensive. (2017)
- “ Textbooks costs a lot with the current suppliers and needs to be reduced for students to afford it. (2017)

The situation, however, goes alarmingly further than frustration to substantially undermine the quality and integrity of students' education. A disturbing theme of students' comments relate their decisions to avoid, delay or not obtain required textbooks and course materials due to cost. The following are only a few of many more examples:

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- “ Those are basic things that we really need, and if that itself is so expensive then I don't even buy them at all. I would rather not have that knowledge because they are so expensive. (2016)
- “ I buy [textbooks] as I go along. If I need to read a book two weeks in advance, I'll get it. (2016)
- “ It depends on the course... Because I don't want to buy them if I don't have to. / Because buying them all at the same time is like, 'Whoa!' / [Facilitator]: To see if you need them, or to manage the price? / Or to see if there are accessible copies in the Library. / Things like that. I'm feeling this semester out. I'm not going to... / It's like so much money. / And you learn as you go. In my first year I bought everything. Then I was like, 'Nope.' / Then you went to sell them back and said, 'I'll never do that again.' (2016)
- “ I rarely buy required textbooks. I avoid buying books at all costs because— / Or if we can get them from the Library or whatever I can do. (2016)
- “ It depends. Sometimes Amazon does have it. Sometimes they don't. So really that's it. I try to illegally download them sometimes, because I'm not paying for a book if it's not needed yet. (2016)

This trend alone should be a rallying point for concerted effort across the university.

Affordability is a growing problem in post-secondary education, but perhaps the challenge is mounting with the least justification and least constraint in terms of textbooks. Students are looking to the university to direct more attention to it in the future.

Alternatives

Students understand that the driving force behind the unaffordability of textbooks and course materials is the publishing industry. However, in addition to their own efforts to find cheaper sources for textbooks such as Amazon or Facebook pages, students are looking to the university to provide affordable alternatives.

An option students identified for saving money on textbooks was to access copies of textbooks on reserve in the University Library. However, this option is not comprehensively available, leading students to make these calls for an expansion and institutionalization of the practice:

- “ Sometimes they have none. / They need an upgrade. / I wouldn't even take a class unless my instructor puts the books on reserve in the Library. I refuse to. We're running into a wall here where our tuition is a lot of money and on top of that I spend \$750 on books per semester. So what I would really like to see is some sort of program where every book offered for a course at TRU is on reserve at some point somewhere. (2016)
- “ Most textbooks are not available in the library. (2017)

Further, where the Library does have a copy in reserve, students suggested that demand for that copy was significantly exceeded. These students explain the challenge:

- “ If someone wants [the copy on reserve], and they request it, then you have to return it. I've had that happen. I've taken the one textbook that the Library has, and someone said, 'Oh, I want it,' and they'll take it and they'll request it. Then it becomes this vicious game of me hitting request and them hitting request, and it's just us hitting request until someone gives up. (2016)

Students continue to see value in a comprehensive textbook reserve system. As noted in the background and context, the Library reported it does not have the financial capacity to support one. The Library did note that it “continues to place textbooks

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on reserve when presented with them from the various departments or faculty/instructors.” This service role of the Library in a textbook reserve system remains desirable. The challenge continues that, in order to make the reserve comprehensive, a funding mechanism is required. Possible mechanisms should be explored, including having each department or Faculty/School fund reserve copies for their own courses. This would both make a comprehensive reserve possible while internalizing the cost of textbooks at the point of textbook choice.

A more fundamental point that students made about reversing the trend of unaffordability in textbooks was the power of instructors and the need for structural change. These two examples show that instructor choices can have enormous impacts:

“ *I try not to get anything. Sometimes you have to. A lot of my professors really go out of their way to find manageable books... (2016)*

“ *Reduce cost of textbooks, and ensure if textbook won't be used in lectures, they are not under the required category. (2017)*

Students are very much appreciative of those instructors who champion affordability in their textbook selections, as demonstrated here:

“ *[Facilitator]: Has anyone here been assigned an open or free textbook as part of their class? / Yeah, it was microeconomics with [professor]. He's all about those online textbooks and not paying for them so that's good. (2016)*

This example also points to one of the most promising alternatives to the publishing industry and its affordability problems. Open textbooks can provide free or low-cost course materials to students while providing instructors with real influence over their curricular choices. A number of students made direct calls for their expanded use:

“ *If more professors used open textbooks, then life would be a lot more affordable. (2017)*

“ *Some textbooks are just too expensive and professors should look into using open source materials. (2017)*

As noted in the background and context, there are growing and converging efforts to make expanded use of open educational resources at TRU a reality. These efforts will need continued support from throughout the university.

Students are grappling with an increasingly problematic textbook industry. They are looking for the university to provide meaningful alternatives. One alternative in the short-term is to revisit is a Library reserve. However, a more fundamental, long-term shift is required and available through open educational resources. While students recognize the key decision makers on this issue are instructors, the cause of affordable and quality course materials needs university leadership and support.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In sum, students' fifth priority for improvement in 2018/19 is affordable access to course materials.

Affordability is a central concern for students today, and the cost of textbooks and course materials are now rising faster than and even nearing parity with major costs of living. Beyond the financial hardship, unaffordable course materials can undermine an education if they are purchased late, shared amongst too many, or are simply out of reach.

The causes of this problem may originate in the larger textbook industry, but there is an important capacity at the university to challenge the broader trends. Students are looking to the university to use that capacity in the immediate and the long-term. A textbook reserve system is an important way the university can support the quality of education for students in the greatest financial difficulties, and can be funded in a way that incentivizes change. Change in the long-term can best be supported through

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an emerging culture of open educational resources for which a programmatic framework is being developed.

Students request and look forward to service plans and the allocation of resources that:

- **Establish a comprehensive system of textbooks on reserve in the Library with sufficient copies to meet demand by investigating alternative funding arrangements such as Faculty or departmental budgets; and**
- **Establish an Open Textbook Grants Program, as in development by a multi-stakeholder group, for instructors to create and adapt open educational resources for use in courses**

Recommendations

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The Thompson Rivers University Students' Union requests that the following priorities and service improvements be considered in the development of relevant administrative and academic unit service plans and requests for the Thompson Rivers University Budget 2018/19:

1. Parking

- a. Monitor and report on the implementation of the Sustainable Parking Framework and pricing rates and structures in terms of the effect on total single-occupancy vehicle use, demand management, and shifts to use of alternative transportation options
- b. Monitor and report on the use of the 20% discount on passes for those living outside the transit service area
- c. Reconsider rate increases and investigate pricing rate, structure, and augmentation options that are more flexible to needs and sensitive to affordability and fairness
- d. Include structured/underground parking in the 5-Year Capital Plan to maintain 2,481 total parking spaces as per the Campus Master Plan

2. Food Services

- a. Monitor and report on the implementation of the actions identified in the Food Services Response to TRUSU in terms of the effect on the expansion of food options in the form of food trucks and the redevelopment of existing outlets, on the provision of dietary accommodation and nutritional information, on the extension of hours of operation, and on the promptness of food service; and
- b. Conduct a full and meaningful campus consultation to shape any new or renewed campus food service contract(s)

3. Student Awards and Financial Aid

- a. Increase awareness and use of financial supports through both advertising and integrated communications and administration in related departments and processes;
- b. Reorganize and bolster a student-centred service provision in Student Awards and Financial Support;
- c. Provide for a seamless experience between Student Awards and Financial Support and other departments; and
- d. Continue and report on the audit of financial aid offerings, and maintain a partnership with the Students' Union to undertake a study of financial need amongst potential students in the region that TRU serves

4. Academic Advising

- a. Ensure the full implementation of Degree Works, including use by students, for all programs by the Fall 2018 semester

5. Course Materials

- a. Establish a comprehensive system of textbooks on reserve in the Library with sufficient copies to meet demand by investigating alternative funding arrangements such as Faculty or departmental budgets;
- b. Establish an Open Textbook Grants Program, in development by a multi-stakeholder group, for instructors to create and adapt open educational resources for use in courses



