



University
of Victoria

President Jamie Cassels' update on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report
30 October 2015

As President of the University of Victoria, I am pleased and proud to reiterate our university's longstanding commitment to and unique relationship with the First Peoples of Canada. In each of our successive strategic plans since 1996, we have affirmed our commitment to contributing to reconciliation with Canada's Indigenous Peoples and working towards the goal of closing the educational achievement gap. We now draw inspiration from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's report published earlier this year to renew our commitment and redouble our efforts.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was instituted with a mandate to inform all Canadians about the Indian Residential School system, which is part of Canada's shared history, but is not always well understood. The TRC prepared a comprehensive historical record on the policies and operations of the schools and produced a report that included recommendations to the Government of Canada and to the people, aimed at a process of reconciliation and renewed relationships based on mutual understanding and respect. A number of these recommendations speak directly to the mission of universities.

The call to action was heeded by universities across the country. Universities Canada convened a working group and together we formulated thirteen Principles on Indigenous Education. On October 27 we met again with former Grand Chief Ovide Mercredi to reflect on the broader project of reconciliation between Canada's Indigenous People and those of us who have settled in this country more recently and to reaffirm our commitment and share best practices across the country. UVic is known for, and looked to for, leadership in this regard. We recognize our responsibility to promote awareness of the history of abuse and racism with respect to the Indigenous peoples of Canada, and the enduring and negative impacts of our shared colonial history. We also reaffirm our commitment to act on the specific TRC recommendations to enhance educational opportunities for Indigenous students and to further develop initiatives and programs of education, research, outreach and engagement with an Indigenous focus.

UVic is very pleased to be a university of choice for an increasing number of Indigenous students who find a welcoming home away from home in our First Peoples House, which opened in 2009, and where they can access a wide range of supports through the Office of Indigenous Affairs. The LE'NONET program offers a suite of programs designed to welcome and support First Nations, Inuit and Métis students throughout their educational journeys.

Our academic programs include a broad array of courses across the disciplines that address Indigenous issues, and a minor in Indigenous studies. Additionally, we have undergraduate and graduate specializations and credentials in the areas of Indigenous education, child and youth

care, social work, public health, community and leadership development, Indigenous communities counselling, Indigenous governance, language revitalization, economic development and entrepreneurship, and law. For example, the School of Social Work has graduated over 150 students from its programs and the Faculty of Law recently graduated its 150th Indigenous student. Our goal is to support Indigenous students to achieve personal success and also to become leaders in their communities and in our country.

The inspiration of the TRC recommendations is timely and welcome as we have begun developing our first Indigenous Academic Plan. Sponsored by the Provost, and led by the Director of Indigenous Academic and Community Engagement and the Associate Vice-President Academic Planning the planning committee will be consulting with students, faculty and staff, members of the Indigenous Academic Advisory Council, academic leaders, Indigenous community members and leaders, and institutional and provincial partners. Likewise, our Strategic Research Plan, which is currently in near-final draft form, highlights UVic's research strengths that are grounded in the knowledge and traditions of diverse Indigenous peoples. Our growing number of Indigenous researchers and scholars apply culturally and methodologically appropriate approaches to answering questions and addressing issues most relevant to Indigenous peoples at local, regional, national and international levels.

UVic is known for its commitment to civic and community engagement. Our programs of education and research are enriched by active partnerships among students, faculty and staff, and Indigenous community members and leaders. We take our responsibility seriously to provide opportunities and venues to foster intercultural understanding and connection and to be a catalyst for reconciliation. We are grateful for the support, friendship, collaboration and encouragement we receive from the First Peoples in our region and beyond, and acknowledge and respect the peoples on whose traditional territory our university resides.