

Question 1: What are the most important contributions your institution makes to the economic, social, and environmental health of British Columbia?

***VIU is key to economic growth in our region***

VIU is preparing learners in our region to meet labour market needs. VIU delivers 120 programs across many fields of study, including construction, business, health care, computer services, and along responding to the numerous other needs identified by the Labour Market Outlook for BC. This range of programming – from basic adult up-skilling and re-skilling to professional education in the trades as well as certificates, diplomas, and bachelor's and master's degrees – is exceptional for a university, allowing students of all skill levels to engage in post-secondary education. As a result, VIU is one of the top five public universities in BC for the total number of credentials awarded (including graduate degrees), and in 2020-21, granted the most credentials of the special purpose teaching universities.

VIU also contributes to the economic sustainability of our part of the province by focusing on local students, encouraging them to stay in the region to study and build their careers. Approximately 90% of our students are from BC, and of those, about 50% were from the mid-Island region and roughly 30% from Nanaimo, the region's largest city and home to our largest campus. What's more, those students stay here: a 2018 study found that 78% of students stayed on Vancouver Island, a significant contribution to our local communities.

***VIU works with communities on pressing socio-economic and environmental problems***

VIU works with communities to address issues that matter to them. We have partnered in practical ways to reduce child poverty, encourage new housing, and improve access to healthcare, among other initiatives. We have also focused our research portfolio on issues of regional importance, including the opioid crisis, reforestation, and climate change, and we have partnered with local communities – including First Nations communities – in undertaking that work.

***VIU advances environmental and climate health***

Guided by our Strategic Plan and the President's Task Force on Climate Action and Sustainability, VIU offers programs of study such as the Zero Emission Vehicle (ZEV) Technician training program, the Climate Policy for Climate Adaptation Professionals certificate, and operates the Mount Arrowsmith Biosphere Region Research Unit, among others. VIU research is also heavily invested in environmental and climate health, and we are increasingly greening our operations (energy use, building design, waste disposal) to reflect our institution-wide commitment.

Question 2: What is your institution doing to promote Reconciliation with Indigenous People and First Nations?

***VIU works with Indigenous leaders to reach community goals***

Strengthening relationships with Indigenous partners is a central commitment of VIU's Strategic Plan. Learning initiatives designed with Indigenous partners have focused on key economic priorities including business skills, fisheries management, ecotourism, community development, and others.

***VIU welcomes many Indigenous students and supports them to succeed***

12% of VIU students identify as Indigenous, representing 16% of the domestic student population – a share that is proportionately higher than any other BC University. Moreover, those students are succeeding: VIU consistently ranks in the top five BC universities for the number of credentials awarded to Indigenous students. We have achieved that success in partnership with communities, 9 Elders who are full members of the faculty, generous donors, meaningful student support systems, and innovative programming.

***VIU calls on all students and employees to be active participants in Truth and Reconciliation***

VIU's commitment includes activities for all learners and employees. The Office of Indigenous Education and Engagement leads activities in partnership with other departments to promote cultural safety and create learning opportunities toward decolonization. VIU's focus is on acknowledging history and traditions, valuing contributions, celebrating success, and building and nurturing relationships.

***VIU integrates Indigenous perspectives in decision-making***

VIU has long sought the guidance of the Hwulmuxw Mustimuxw Siem Indigenous Advisory Council, and in 2021-22, took another step toward integrating Indigenous perspectives in decision-making by implementing its Indigenous Commitments Committee of Senate. This standing Senate Committee advises Senate regarding Indigenous initiatives relevant to academic planning, curriculum, and policies.

***VIU works with other institutions across BC and Canada***

VIU is committed to sharing our learning – about Indigenous partnerships, programming, services, and governance – to the wider post-secondary community. Our president, faculty, and support teams host conversations about best practice, publish our learnings, and participate province-wide and Canada-wide on committees and advisory boards that seek to advance Truth and Reconciliation.

Question 3: What is your institution doing to promote equitable access for people who come from disadvantaged socio-economic circumstances?

***VIU helps learners bridge into post-secondary learning from wherever they start***

By upholding an open access policy (qualified applicants are accepted on a first-come basis), and by offering a suite of university-bridging and dual credit programs, VIU aims to help learners succeed at university from whatever their starting point.

***VIU provides effective student support systems***

Through our Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan, VIU aims to create a welcoming, inclusive environment for work and study for all learners and employees, including removing barriers to learning. Services to promote mental health, academic success, and financial wellbeing (including scholarships, bursaries, tuition waivers, and paid work opportunities), are all part of an integrated student support system.

Question 4: What are your major challenges in enhancing the contribution your institution makes to the economic, social, and environmental health of British Columbia?

***VIU is limited in its capacity to raise revenue***

The majority of VIU's income comes from provincial grants, including the operating grant. A key challenge is that the operating grant does not reflect per-student cost, the main driver for university expenditure,

nor does it adequately consider the academic and other supports that we know are necessary for student success.

Filling most of the gap between provincial grants and the actual cost of delivering services is tuition, another area where we are limited in our capacity to raise revenue. While the 2005 tuition cap has been an effective measure for ensuring affordability for students, it was instituted without an assessment of baseline tuition or mandatory fees. Even today, the costs for a BC undergraduate studying in an arts and humanities program vary widely.

Addressing the shortfall not covered by tuition and grant is also difficult. As a not-for-profit, our ability to increase sales of goods and services is limited to activities related to our enterprise: the sale of food, residence fees, and the like. Further, while we have active community and donor support for several of our programs, we do not have a sustaining endowment.

***Likewise, we have limited options for reducing expenditure***

VIU is at the bottom of the salary rank among all public Canadian universities, generating challenges for recruitment and retention of talent.

Another inescapable expenditure is compliance. VIU, like our colleague institutions, has unfunded but legislated or government-required responsibilities to provide accessibility services; generate annual and special reporting; implement privacy safeguards; offer mental health support; institute pandemic measures; secure and manage privacy and data; reduce sexual violence; provide animal care services, ethical approvals and biosafety provisions; and more. While some of these important initiatives come with one-time funding support, others are to be included in existing provincial funding.

A third unmovable expense is infrastructure. While many projects can be postponed in lean times, others simply must go forward, particularly services and facilities that affect health and safety or core activities such as information technology, finance, payroll, and registration.

Question 5: What are the most significant contributions your institution makes in collaboration with other parts of BC's PSE system?

***VIU works with others to improve the student experience***

VIU is an active partner with others on a range of student-facing initiatives, such as the BCCAT work on student transfers, the international transfer project, and the Indigenous pathways project. In partnership with NIC, VIU also launched the Vancouver Island Work-Integrated (VIWIL) Learning Regional Hub, and with NIC delivers VIU's Bachelor of Science in Nursing at their Comox campus. VIU is also engaged in a host of microcredit initiatives with other institutions across the province.

***VIU works with others to address the climate crisis***

VIU is working with universities across Canada to develop a new *Call to Action on the Climate Emergency* that asks universities to commit to tangible actions to find solutions to the climate emergency and to educate our students for emerging realities. In partnership with Royal Roads and Pearson College, we have developed a new secondary school diploma for the United World College system focused on climate action.

***VIU works with others to advance Truth and Reconciliation***

VIU is also expanding its commitment to work with others across the system to advance Truth and Reconciliation. One example is the Indigenous Intern Leadership Program administered by VIU, which has

expanded to Okanagan College; another partnership initiative is the joint VIU and Camosun Indigenous Trades Training program. Yet another instance is the Aboriginal Ecotourism Training Program designed with the Heiltsuk Tribal Council and North Island College.

***VIU also works across the system to improve the system itself***

We are proud of our collaborations behind the scenes, including leadership at academic and administration tables at the provincial and federal levels. Examples include the BC-wide COVID recovery taskforce, the learning continuity meetings; provincial human resources and labour relations tables; as well as system-wide conversations on governance, copyright, privacy and applied research.

Question 6: What stands in the way of you collaborating more with the rest of BC's PSE system?

***There is a history of competition among institutions***

The ecosystem of post-secondary universities understandably promotes competition for students, faculty, and funding. In many ways, that competition is positive: it helps us hone our services, improve our performance and provide local opportunities to students without needing them to relocate. But competition can also result in duplication of programming or operations.

***Our designation as a teaching university impedes collaboration***

VIU's categorization as a special purpose teaching university has also sometimes limited our ability to collaborate. For example, we were unable to join one research collaboration because our designation disqualifies us from partnership funding – even in an area where we have internationally recognized expertise to contribute.

***Slow approval of joint programming impedes cooperation***

When institutions do work together to provide joint programming, they may face long delays in government approval. The Degree Quality Assurance Board process is burdensome and lengthy, hindering our ability to respond to opportunities and needs of our community.

Question 7: What are the key economic, demographic, social and technological trends that will unfold over the next 30 years that will impact British Columbia's PSE system?

Question 8: How do you think the PSE system needs to evolve in response to those trends?

Question 9: How does your institution need to evolve in response to those trends?

The system of universities and colleges across BC is preparing learners for a much-changed labour force. It is also charged with intensifying progress toward Truth and Reconciliation, responding to a growing mental health crisis, seeking to advance environmental and climate health, adapting to rapid technology-driven change, diversifying our international student populations, and supporting learners and communities who face soaring costs of living. Each trend demands that the post-secondary system, including VIU, thinks differently about its work. For example:

***Meeting labour market demands***

We all need to examine our suite of programming and credentials – including graduate-level credentials – to ensure that our offerings serve our learners and our communities. However, we also need to bring more learners into the system and expand access to those who face barriers to post-secondary opportunities, particularly for those who reside in communities outside of Greater Vancouver and Victoria areas. Further, as the Government implements DRIPA, the needs of the Nations outside of these areas for

access to post-secondary education will need nimble institutions who are well prepared to respond and co-create programming.

### ***Advancing Truth and Reconciliation***

We will need to do the hard work of examining the ways in which our institutions have excluded Indigenous Peoples and their Ways of Knowing, and to be courageous in changing what needs to be changed. We will need to learn from Indigenous leaders and from each other and we will need to integrate those learnings into everything we do.

### ***Addressing mental health***

In addition to strengthening our student support systems, we must collectively be more creative about the ways in which the whole of our programs, services, and courses are designed and offered. As institutions and as governments, we must be prepared to pay what it costs to ensure the mental health of our students.

### ***Promoting environmental and climate health***

We must integrate climate and environmental considerations in what we do and teach. As a system, we must green our operations and do more to work with communities to address the environmental and climate problems that matter most to them. We need to convene conversations, lend research expertise, and co-design and implement initiatives to mitigate the climate emergency, and more.

### ***Adapting to rapid technological change***

Across our system, universities and colleges prepare students for a marketplace and a civic space shaped by rapid technological change. Client service standards, machine operating systems, data collection, research methods, communications, healthcare delivery: all require training in the latest software, hardware, and data-informed practices. We also need to upgrade and fortify our systems to combat the increasing threat of cyberattack. For VIU and others, that means constant renewal of our programs and associated technological infrastructure.

Technological change affects not only what we teach but how we teach. While the COVID shift online increased access for some of our learners (especially those living with neurodiversity), it decreased access for others. The digital divide – lack of access to equipment, broadband, and study space at home – has not gone away.

### ***Diversifying and expanding our international student body***

The pandemic slowed participation of international students in universities and colleges across Canada. We are living in the age of pandemics, and our plans must require universities to work with their provincial and federal counterparts to make contingency plans to carry future students through lockdowns and provide a high-quality educational experience. Further, as many Canadian universities depend on a small number of source countries for international student cohorts, we must all think more about diversification in our recruitment of international students.

### ***Tackling the cost of living***

The system needs to do more to acknowledge the reality of the rising cost of living. Although tuition is an obvious cost for students (and a critical contributor to the sustainability of universities), current regulations have kept tuition for BC students relatively affordable. We need to think creatively about housing options, particularly in regions that we serve that have near-zero levels of rental availability. Expanding financial support and paid work for students is now a core part of the work we do.

Question 10: Considering the above, what modifications to the funding formula would you recommend?

We applaud the government's ambition to create a fair and impartial funding formula that supports BC's ambitions for post-COVID labour market readiness, improved access for underserved populations, and genuine progress toward Truth and Reconciliation. VIU's and the province's priorities are aligned in these key areas, and we feel we have much to share and learn from others.

At the same time, we know that we cannot continue to meet these priorities under current constraints. When VIU entered the university system in 2008 it did so with funding commensurate with college programming. Our programming has significantly expanded since then, but our operating grant has not been adjusted to reflect this reality. The demand to increase our high-quality programming is in response to the needs of our communities and our students, who crave education in the geographic regions where they have their roots. It is part of our commitment to be responsive to their needs. A system that reallocates resources to account for the real cost of learning would allow VIU and other universities to change more lives and build more resilient communities in all areas of the province, not just its urban centres. VIU, therefore, recommends that the province:

- Institute equitable, real cost funding for baseline programming
  - Include per FTE funding for all domestic learners
  - Offer weighted funding for high-resource-intensive programs
  - Include additional allowances for graduate programs meeting regional needs
  - Incorporate considerations for universities with regional mandates
  - Factor in inflation, including in-project escalation of infrastructure projects
  - Factor in institutional capacity for increasing sales and services revenue
- Focus additional resources on priority goals
  - Offer additional resources in support of Truth and Reconciliation
  - Offer additional resources for student support based on local population needs
- Encourage sustainable and affordable tuition levels across the system, including the recalibration of tuition across the system, particularly for equivalent programming.