

A Different Kind of University

A New Beginning

Welcome

[Message from the President and the Board Chair.]

Inspiration

Vancouver Island University is deeply proud of our community roots and our commitment to building personal connections with learners. That reputation – personal, place-based, passionate – has meant that learners from across our region and around the world are making important differences in their own lives and in their communities. Moving forward, we think we can do even more to support those journeys.

Our institution has served the needs of mid-Island and coastal communities in BC since 1936 and since 2008 we have continued that service-orientation as a university – serving more than 100,000 who have made their communities more vibrant today. Throughout, we have sought to bring post-secondary education to under-represented populations; to build a supportive learning environment for diverse learners; and to strengthen connections with community members in shaping VIU's teaching and research. In that work, VIU continues to be inspired by its relationships with Indigenous learners and their home communities, and we maintain our longstanding and sincere commitment to reconciliation.

Today, the commitment to meet these goals continues. Trying times bring challenges, but they also open doors to new ideas about learning, pedagogy, equality, access, diversity, and resilience. Our plan draws from our ability to explore new opportunities for building transformational learning experiences, boosting connection and well-being, strengthening community partnerships, and embedding a Seven Generations perspective to sustain us. Over the next five years, we are imagining what a different kind of university can do.

A New Direction

Our new direction is encapsulated in a revised vision for VIU, a statement of our daily ambition, and the values that drive our actions in **all** that we do – in learning and work spaces, on our campuses and in the community, and in our programming and planning decisions.

Vision

Learning Co-created. VIU imagines a different kind of post-secondary education. Building on our strengths, VIU envisions a unique educational experience that is more accessible, more inclusive, more collaborative, and more deeply rooted in community. As learners, employees,¹ and community partners, together we are reimagining the learning experience.

Ambition

Together, we build possibilities. All of us at VIU -- learners, employees, and community members – are committed to co-creating possibilities. Within our learning spaces, on our campuses and in our communities, we build pathways to the ideas, skills, and relationships that empower our learners to realize their potential.

Values

People. VIU values people. We recognize the knowledge, creativity, experience, and cultural wealth that all learners and employees bring with them. We are deeply grateful to our community partners in helping create meaningful learning and research opportunities for our learners and employees. In all our relationships, we seek to have respect and kindness at the core.

Place. VIU is rooted in place. We seek to ground our learning and research work in the region's rich diversity of culture, ecology, economy, and society. We embrace Indigenous practices of multi-generational land-based learning, and we take that place-based and Seven Generations lens to enhance the sustainability and impact of VIU's efforts. We are grateful to the communities that our learners and employees call home.

Passion. VIU is passionate about education and its capacity to transform lives. We are purpose-driven and values-focused. We are all here to make a difference, and to carry that difference into the wider world.

¹ The term “employees” encompasses all four employee groups at VIU.

VIU's Commitments

In conversations over the spring of 2020, members of VIU's community of learners, alumni, employees, and community partners spoke about VIU's strengths and their vision for its future. The [What We Heard](#) report captured some of the ideas and testimonials of more than 1,000 of VIU's stakeholders.

As a result of that process, four overarching goals emerged. These goals, and our commitments to meet them, form the backbone of this plan to move forward.

Build Transformational Learning Experiences for All

VIU has created amazing learning experiences for many, but we know that we can do more. We are putting in place meaningful initiatives to expand access, support learner success, and honour Indigeneity.

1. Expand Enrolment and Access

VIU is pleased that so many learners in the regions we serve choose to study at VIU, and we are proud of our reputation of welcoming under-represented populations.

But more can be done. There are many in our region who wish to continue their studies but may be unable to because they live in rural and remote communities, because they are working, because they are managing competing demands on their time, or because they face systemic barriers preventing them from accessing post-secondary education.

- **New ways of learning.** To address this access challenge, we are experimenting with changes to course delivery modes, moving from primarily face-to-face learning to technology-mediated learning (both synchronous and asynchronous). We know that options such as hybrid courses and community-based/place-based learning can make a big difference to those who feel that post-secondary education is not an option for them. We will continue to invest in pedagogy and in our employees to ensure that they have the best tools to engage with our learners.
- **Expanded outreach.** We need to address other barriers that stop people from believing that they can attend VIU. Working together, we can reach potential learners in our community, to let them know that VIU – and the opportunities created through the experiences provided by post-secondary education -- is open and accessible to them. We aim to reach the full range of potential learners: elementary students beginning to think about their future, recent high school graduates, those looking to upskill and reskill mid-career; and populations that are traditionally under-represented in post-secondary due to a variety of

barriers. In helping learners of all ages and backgrounds access post-secondary education, we further the vibrancy and sustainability of the regions we serve.

- **More future-focused programming.** We will evaluate our programming to ensure that our offerings are aligned both with the careers of today and the careers of the future, responding to changing needs of our communities and our world. We know that our learners are committed to making a difference, and our programs will adapt to prepare them to address the myriad challenges of our time.

2. Support Learner Success

VIU knows that access is only one part of the story; we also need to support learners' success after they start their journey here. We offer a web of services that help learners transition to post-secondary and persist in their studies, including scholarships, awards and bursaries that help with the affordability of post-secondary education. We also offer specific resources that help manage financial demands, navigate university life, and maintain physical and mental health alongside dedicated services to meet the specific needs of international and Indigenous students.

Yet, we can do more. Many of our learners (particularly part-time and first-generation students) may not use or be aware of the services in place, and for those who do, there are sometimes difficulties accessing the help they need when they need it. Many of these learners leave VIU without their desired credential. We are committed to changing that outcome in a number of ways.

- **Streamlined supports.** To meet this ambition, we will evaluate our processes, policies and supports to ensure that they are nimble, efficient and learner-centered.
- **Greater financial help.** We will invest in our learners, creating awards that reward perseverance and acknowledge those who – despite all odds – are determined to persist in their studies.
- **Enhanced support for transition to work.** Our commitment to the learner does not end upon graduation; we will continue to enhance our programming to help our learners and alumni transition to work.

3. Honour Indigeneity

The Indigenous communities and First Nations of the region have supported VIU in our joint efforts to meet the needs of learners. We are proud of the partnership that has forged the 25-year history of Indigenous/Xwulmuxw Studies at VIU, a powerful example of co-creation between the university and Elders, and we are proud of our shared work to integrate Indigenous perspectives and approaches across many programs. With the support of

government and others, we have jointly created meaningful land-based learning programs that address community priorities, such as training in eco-tourism and stewardship. Through VIU's commitment to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), we continue to recognize the historical and present-day context of the Indigenous territories of this region.

More can be done, however, to build on our commitment to honour Indigeneity. We know that much work is still needed to tell the truth about the Indigenous experiences in Canada, to advance reconciliation, and to learn from Indigenous knowledge holders – goals that benefit all who work and learn at VIU.

- **New Honouring Indigeneity Action Plan.** We commit to building an Honouring Indigeneity Action Plan at VIU. In that plan, we will seek to raise awareness of Indigenous realities with all learners and employees and to educate our communities about the colonial history of Canada and its effects on Indigenous peoples. We will also commit to do more to incorporate cultural healing and wellness approaches, including restorative justice, in our learning spaces and workplaces. We will do more to welcome Indigenous learners and employees on our campuses, and to expand the programs that best serve Indigenous learners and communities.

Boost Inclusion and Well-being

VIU's strength in building personal connection is a point of pride. We will maintain the high-value we place on that connection – in our learning spaces, on our campuses, and in our communities – and we will explore how we might do more. That personal touch is at the centrepiece of our aspiration for learner and employee well-being, and we will strengthen our efforts to make sure all know they are welcome at VIU.

4. Deepen Inclusion and Celebrate Diversity

VIU celebrates diversity in thought, culture, race, gender, sexuality, and ability. Inclusion is a deeply held part of the VIU culture and our commitment includes addressing systemic barriers such as poverty, ableism, sexism, and racism. We also celebrate VIU's international community: we welcome thousands of students from around the world, and indeed our campuses are hubs of activity that enrich the economic, social, and cultural life of our region.

More must be done, however. We know that discrimination or exclusion can be a part of the daily life for too many at VIU. That has to change. We believe that celebrating and learning from our diversity will both deepen inclusion and help our learners become global citizens.

- **New Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Action Plan.** We commit to continue our work to develop and launch an evidence-based Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Action Plan. This plan

will build on the work we have done to ensure we welcome and celebrate and build a diverse student body and workforce.

- **Enhanced Global Citizenship.** We also recognize that VIU exists in a global reality and that solving the grand challenges of our time requires global citizens. To that end, we will enhance opportunities for international and domestic students to engage in meaningful interactions on our campuses. We also commit to deepen global partnerships and exchange opportunities for our learners.

5. Promote Well-Being

VIU believes that well-being comes from a holistic approach to educating mind, body, and spirit. Yet we also recognize that the stresses of university life have intensified. The roots of these stressors – changes in learning environments, relationships, expectations, and world events – are part of the experience for everyone, but for some, the weights are even heavier. VIU thinks we can do better to lighten that load.

- **Increased mental health skills-building.** We commit to building incentives for all learners and employees to develop skills and behaviours that promote mental health and well-being.
- **Healthier pedagogy.** We commit to innovating and developing pedagogy that reduces unnecessary stressors in our learning spaces, including new ways to assign work and assess progress, and build learners' confidence in their ability to realize their goals.
- **Better work/life balance.** VIU will adopt best workplace practices to support mental health and resilience among our employees.
- **Greater space for connection.** We commit to providing more opportunities for our employees and learners to build the personal ties that are VIU's hallmark. We will examine our campus spaces to find ways to set aside physical space to promote meaningful opportunities for students and employees to gather.

Strengthen Community Partnerships

In our consultations, we heard that VIU's relationships with the region's communities count. We were told stories of learners' experiences in and with communities that were key transformational moments, and we heard from community members that they deeply value the opportunities to participate in community-relevant research. Going forward, VIU will intensify its partnerships with the communities it seeks to serve.

6. Focus on Community-Engaged Research

VIU has earned a respected niche in undertaking community-engaged research. We are leaders in engaging undergraduates (as well as graduates) in real-life research, publication opportunities, and conference experiences – opportunities that are rare elsewhere. Over the next five years we will deepen that commitment.

- **Enhanced support for researchers.** We will enhance supports for VIU learners and employees who are – or wish to be – engaged in research. We recognize that knowledge creation is at the heart of university life. We commit to investing in this effort and, in doing so, enhance our ability to create knowledge.
- **Increased focus on community-engaged research.** Initiatives that centre on community-identified issues are at the heart of who we are at VIU. We will increase our focus on research that addresses the needs of our communities and provides outlets for learners, employees, and the community to co-create solutions with tangible outcomes.

7. Enhance Community-Based Learning

We are leaders in building opportunities for our learners to engage with community members in real-world settings. For learners and their mentors, these opportunities are deeply meaningful. Going forward, we will also strengthen our commitment to community-based learning.

- **Greater community-based learning.** We will look for opportunities across our programs and courses to integrate more opportunities for learners to learn from and in community settings. We will support employees as they develop these opportunities.

Plan for Seven Generations

In all our initiatives, we are also planning with an eye to the future. We are inspired by the Haudenosaunee principle of Seven Generations that calls on our responsibility to each other and the land. Our obligations to future generations urges us to adopt a long-term vision and calls us to examine how we might better prepare our organization for the next seven generations. VIU has long invested in building social sustainability, but we will do more to build a multi-dimensional vision for sustainability.

8. Adopt Sustainability Perspectives

- **New operational sustainability plan.** We will adopt a long-term organizational sustainability plan to allocate financial resources to our new priorities; simplify processes and find efficiencies; sustain our buildings, IT, and physical assets; and most of all, build our human resource strengths to better prepare us for the future.

- **New Seven Generations plan.** We will evergreen the ways we teach, what we teach, and where we teach so that VIU, and our graduates, walk more lightly on the earth. We will adopt a plan that will bring a sustainability lens to our decisions on transportation, our campus master plan, purchasing, food services, and more.

Measuring Progress

We will measure progress toward meeting our goals and will report back regularly to our communities. As detailed action plans are developed, we will develop indicators that will help us track our success and change course when needed. Those measures may include:

- **Learner demand.** We will track applications and enrolments overall and by community, including demand from local, Canadian, international, Indigenous, first-generation, and under-served learners.
- **Learner success.** We will monitor learners' achievements in earning the credentials they are seeking, whether they are at the beginning of their working career or are seeking to reskill or upskill mid-career. We will measure persistence and resilience in learning, and we will monitor learners' assessments of their experiences at VIU. We will track progress in fostering global and inclusive mindsets.
- **Learner support and well-being.** We will monitor the success of our initiatives in supporting learner well-being, academic skills development, and access, and we will disaggregate our findings by learner community, including local, Canadian, international, Indigenous, first-generation, and under-served learners.
- **Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion.** We will develop indicators to monitor progress toward a more inclusive and welcoming community for all learners and employees.
- **Community connection.** We will track progress in strengthening relationships with regional communities, including Indigenous and non-Indigenous learning partners. We will monitor progress in our commitment to community-based learning and research.
- **Indigenous commitment.** Our new Honouring Indigeneity plan will propose measures to track our commitments to action on truth and reconciliation and UNDRIP.
- **Seven Generations Plan.** We will monitor our progress in meeting the goals set out by our Seven Generations Plan.

- **Operational sustainability.** We will develop metrics to track our efforts toward greater operational alignment to our new priorities on building a sustainable future.

We commit to developing a scorecard that will allow learners, employees, and the community to examine our progress in achieving this plan. Further, this plan is just a start: we commit to developing foundational plans that support these goals.

Before and After

Strategic Planning Process

The strategic planning process was launched in March 2020 with the Future We Want to See campaign. From March to July, VIU’s learners, alumni, employees, and community and Indigenous partners shared what they valued about VIU and what visions they held for its future. The tone of the conversations was guided by an Appreciative Inquiry approach, and reflections were gathered in person (through meetings, presentations, and World Café sessions) and online in meetings and surveys. That input generated the themes and ideas presented in the [What We Heard](#) report, which in turn formed the backbone of this draft plan.

The initiative was launched by the President with the approval of VIU’s Board of Governors in the spring of 2020. Facilitated by the President’s Senior Advisor for Strategic Planning and Institutional Initiatives, the process has been supported by a nine-member Advisory Group, initial interviews were conducted by a core group of eight VIU graduate students, and input along the way has come from the Board of Governors, Senate, President’s Council, and the Senior Management Team. Approval of the final plan is the responsibility of the Board of Governors.

Implementation

Once approved, implementation of VIU’s Strategic Plan will be embedded in VIU’s suite of foundation plans. Existing plans – the Academic Plan, the People Plan, the Student Affairs Plan,

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Graduate Student Facilitation Team

- Maria Luz Arias Borja
- Hayley Burns
- Cliff Feng
- Celina Fletcher
- Trina Forrest
- Colin Pybus
- Patricia Verhage
- Liz Whittaker

Strategic Plan Advisory Group

- James Bowen, Executive Director, VIU Student Union
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- Janina Stajic, Director, Communications and Public Engagement
- Nicole Vaugeois, Associate Vice-President, Scholarship, Research, and Creative Activity
- Bryan Webber, Acting Dean, Faculty of Management

the Scholarship, Research, and Creative Activity Plan, among others – will be aligned to reflect the priorities of the Strategic Plan and will be used to put these initiatives into action. A Design Thinking and Appreciative Inquiry approach, used in the development of options for the overall Plan, will continue to guide the more detailed work to follow.

Discussion Draft