

***APPLICATION FOR THE
2015 CIRPA Best Practice Awards***

Information Page

1. Descriptive Title of Proposal: **Enrolment and Headcount Projections - Forecasting at TRU**

2. Date of Implementation (preference will be given to projects with implementation dates within the last 2 years): **2014 to present**

3. Name of Institution: **Thompson Rivers University**

4. Name and Title of Person(s) Responsible for the Idea (if more than one, underline the one to contact for information):
Matthew Kennedy
Manager, Institutional Planning & Analysis

Office Address: **CT416 - 900 McGill Road**
Kamloops, BC V2C 0C8

Telephone/Fax Number: **250-828-5493**

E-mail Address: **mkennedy@tru.ca**

5. If the project has been submitted for other awards, please indicate the organization, the name of the award and if the project was successful in obtaining the award.

6. I hereby certify that to the best of my knowledge the information contained in this submission accurately reflects the circumstances reported. I further authorize CIRPA to publicize this information for use by other institutions of higher education in whatever way CIRPA may consider appropriate.



Signature of Senior Institutional Research/Planning Officer of the Institution

Name and Title: **Dorys Crespin-Mueller**
Director, Institutional Planning & Analysis
Office Address: **CT416 - 900 McGill Road**
Kamloops, BC V2C 0C8
Telephone/Fax Numbers: **250-828-5493**

E-mail Address: **dcrespin@tru.ca**

ABSTRACT

Institutional Planning and Analysis at Thompson Rivers University has developed an enrolment projection model which incorporates many of the normally reported student rates, such as retention and application conversions, to project head counts and enrolments at the institution. The calculation framework that was developed through this project allows all of the rates to be variable. Yearly improvement factors are also incorporated, which allows us to create scenarios to see the impact of changes on head counts and enrolments. This allows for 'what-if' case testing and quantifying the potential impact of different strategies.

CRITERIA

Please submit one paragraph on how the proposal fulfills each of the evaluation criteria

1. **TRANSFERABILITY** Can the project or aspects thereof be applied easily at other institutions? What are the features of the project that make it transferable? What steps would you take to facilitate its transferability?

The Thompson Rivers University ("TRU") enrolment projection model incorporates common measures such as application trends, applicant acceptance rates, and retention rates. The forecasting model does not assume a pattern of student behaviour; rather, it incorporates the observed behaviours of particular students in particular programs in predicting future enrolment patterns. Because the model naturally adapts to changes in, for example, student mobility between programs, the model is appropriate for use at institutions that experience a wide variety of application conversions, retention rates, exit points, and so on. Most institutions already gather similar tracking data and would be able to build the same framework of the model for their own needs. Institutions could modify the calculations as needed to include true regressed projections, rolling averages, or manual estimates provided from leadership at their institutions.

2. **INNOVATION** What makes this project particularly innovative in the context of institutional research and planning in higher education? How does it differ from previous/current practice at other institutions?

This enrolment projection model follows the students throughout their time at TRU. We start with the actual student cohort, then use trended values from the historical retention rates to project student movement through the next 5 years. For each projected year new students are added through historically trended application and conversion rates. Projected enrolments from the students are calculated based on average number of courses, and split between the different Faculties and Schools based on current distribution patterns. Retention, application and conversion rates can all

have year over year improvement factors applied to them. Using this method allows each of the factors to change with the ability to easily produce scenarios, and find the impact of incremental changes to several different factors. Adding in average tuition rates per course gives the ability to see the monetary impact of changes. This allows for hypothetical testing (if conversion or retention rates changed, new cohorts opened up, etc.). Hypothetical testing allows stakeholders to “query the model” and make informed decisions about strategic investments. The full benefit of this aspect of the model will be realized after some years have passed, and we are able to look back and determine whether the interventions had the predicted effect on enrolments. Many institutions, like TRU, may find that a linear projection is not an appropriate or accurate way to predict future enrolment.

3. **QUALITY IMPACT** What were the expected qualitative outcomes? What are the results? How and over what period were the results assessed?

This project was the first course enrolment model that was created at this institution. Although historical trends were reported every year, changes in pre-enrolment metrics (such as application rates) are not reflected in current course enrolment rates. Projections, on the other hand, allow Deans and Directors to see how today’s changes in policy and procedure may impact tomorrow’s course enrolments. After initial testing appears that the projections for the next year are quite close for domestic enrolment with the differences being less than 3%. The differences are larger for international enrolments because of the many additional factors which can affect their enrolment. To increase buy in from the stakeholders additional information will be produced from the calculations driving the model, such as trends, to provide context around the projection. This will help to increase transparency, and possibly lead to further refinements, or additional considerations.

4. **TRANSFORMATIVE VALUE** Did the project have a transformative effect on institutional research, planning or the institution as a whole? Describe its impact.

This project changed the way that some key stakeholders viewed the role of institutional research. Where IR reports are often consulted as a means of understanding what happened, the forecasting model is consulted as a means of understanding what may, or could, happen. TRU recently moved to a modified zero-based budget model. The projections are meant to inform the decision making process of where resources should be placed. Prior to the new budget model, a rolling three year average of course enrolments was used as part of the funding formula. This did not look at the trends of how the enrolments in a particular Faculty or School are headed. This project also “upped the ante” when it comes to interventions. Any claims that investments or policy changes will result in increased enrolment can now be put to

the test. Were these increases already projected? How has the intervention changed the previously – was this the projected outcome?