

# Vancouver Island University: Submission to the Global Teaching Excellence Award: 2018 Finalist

*This document represents VIU's 2018 submission to the Global Teaching Excellence Award – the only global award recognizing and celebrating an institution-wide commitment to the pursuit of teaching excellence. The submission provides a summary of VIU's strengths in operationalizing its values in three key teaching and learning domains. VIU was awarded the designation of Finalist at an awards ceremony on July 18 in Edinburgh, Scotland. Graham Pike, Dean of International Education, Heather Pastro, Vice-Chair, Senate and faculty member in the Faculty of Education and Stephanie Pastro, 4<sup>th</sup> year student from the Faculty of Social Sciences attended the event and brought home the award and certificate.*

*There were 400 submissions from post-secondary institutions (private and public) based in 41 countries located in 6 continents. The four-stage review process resulted in 17 finalists from 6 countries and 1 winner. VIU was one of those 17 finalists. McMaster University (Ontario, Canada) was the overall winner.*

## Context Statement

Known as a centre of excellence for teaching, applied research and learning, Vancouver Island University (VIU), is a public post-secondary institution, producing high quality graduates that are in demand by employers across the country and around the world. As a teaching-focused institution, VIU offers over 120 programs including university preparation, English language learning, vocational programs, trades, undergraduate and graduate degrees, while providing access to education for all.

VIU operates a main campus in Nanaimo, British Columbia, Canada and two campuses and experiential learning hubs throughout central Vancouver Island and the Sunshine Coast. VIU is situated adjacent to the rugged coastline of the Salish Sea and within the traditional territories of the Coast Salish People. We have research centres that engage undergraduate students with study in the local environment with local/global issues unique to coastal communities such as fisheries, shellfish and aquaculture, applied environmental research, ecotourism, and a local biosphere protected through UNESCO.

With roots that date back to 1936 when Nanaimo's first vocational training school opened its doors, VIU shares a rich history and connectedness with its communities. VIU became a university in 2008 as one of British Columbia's 'special-purpose' universities focused on teaching and applied research. As a regional university, 85% of our students are from the immediate region.

VIU is a dynamic, internationally known university supporting a population of approximately 15,000 full-time and part-time students, including almost 2,000 international students from over 90 countries (14%), 1,800 Indigenous students (12%), and employing over 2000 faculty and staff. We have more Indigenous students than any of the research universities in the province. The student to faculty ratio is 16:1. VIU has small class sizes and personalized learning opportunities for students.

VIU also has its own high school which is uniquely situated on, and has access to all the resources of the university campus. Small class sizes, individual attention and opportunities for intercultural understanding are a few of the hallmarks of this school.

VIU is proud of its unique history and culture as a teaching university that welcomes learners, from local, regional and international communities, and non-traditional students. VIU supports and celebrates student success, provides innovative teaching, and affordable high-quality programs. VIU supports Indigenous students through its commitment to reconciliation and social justice, and through dialogue with Indigenous communities, along with fostering a global awareness within the campus and external communities. Through small classes and partnerships with local business, health and social services, VIU offers rich learning opportunities for social and technical innovation that influences government policy.

## Excellence in Leadership of Teaching and Learning

**Vancouver Island University (VIU) has a strong educational leadership strategy and a passionate teaching culture which values and promotes excellence in teaching and learning.**

VIU's Academic Plan (2017), Promoting and Celebrating Access to Excellence, contains 35 action items ensuring education is an agent of social change during this important time in Canada. Key objectives: maintain teaching as our priority in support of student learning and institutional identity; promote student leadership; enhance experiential education opportunities; deliver high quality programs; foster awareness of global cultures and ensure a culture of accountability, respect, safety and well-being. VIU demonstrates strong leadership to activate the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and realize the outcomes of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. VIU recognizes passion and innovation in teaching through the 10 Provost's Teaching Design and Practice Awards directly connected to key areas of the Plan.

As an open-access university, VIU responds to regional needs including those of students who are disadvantaged, Indigenous, international, dual-credit high schoolers, or those pursuing a trade. VIU's Senate-approved set of institutional graduate attributes answer the question: "What do we expect our students to acquire from an education at our University?" These attributes are integrated into curriculum, work placements, and co-curricular activities to enable students to become valued contributors.

The recent National Survey of Student Engagement saw 92% of students positively evaluate their experience at VIU, compared with Canada's national average of 85%. Students report having "reflective and integrative learning, learning strategies and effective teaching practices" more often than the national average. Students rated their interactions with faculty the highest, surpassing all three comparison groups by 15%.

The teaching and learning centre supports faculty and students in learning, teaching innovation, technology-enabled learning and pedagogy. Since 2010, the Centre has seen a ten-fold increase in participation in pedagogical best practice seminars, curriculum redesign projects, and use of digital learning tools. The Centre has helped enhance programs leading to significantly improved learning experiences, and facilitates a unique leadership group of faculty members undertaking institutional teaching projects. The Recognition of Achievements in Teaching and Learning Program celebrates faculty who are engaged in improving practice. The Centre facilitates a unique collaboration with ten K-12 school boards to build pathways for a more seamless transition from high school to university. The One Heart, One Mind program engages the campus in learning about Indigenous ways of knowing to strengthen reconciliation and integration of Indigenous perspectives into courses.

**VIU demonstrates a global outlook to enhance and support quality teaching and learning.**

For more than thirty years, VIU has been a leader in international education, preparing Canadian and international students to contribute to a changing world. Faculty and students engage in overseas exchanges, field schools, summer intensive programs, co-ops, internships, graduate research and project work. Students receive scholarships to support study at one of 20 exchange partner institutions on 5 continents. Students earn credits and gain international experience while developing intercultural skills. VIU Global Engagement Grants support faculty in gaining an international experience. Curriculum grants support the internationalization of curriculum. In one project, engineering students from VIU and Tra Vinh University in Vietnam collaborated on a bridge-building competition.

VIU's commitment to social responsibility addresses global issues through international development projects, including formal partnerships with post-secondary institutions abroad, faculty consulting, student volunteering and support for civil society organizations. Current projects focus on tourism management in Tanzania, education for employment in Kenya, and GIS skills training in Ukraine. VIU's participation in the Queen Elizabeth (QE) Scholars Program has brought Belizean graduate students to VIU on full scholarships to undertake their Masters in Community Planning, Sustainable

Leisure Management and Educational Leadership. Canadian QE Scholars have gone to Belize, India, South Africa, Ghana, Grenada and New Zealand to support community development initiatives.

The High School @ VIU offers a caring and personalized learning experience to international and Canadian students. The School is one of two in Canada that is connected to a university, providing opportunities for Grade 10-12 students to participate in university life and have access to facilities. Graduates have direct entry into VIU.

## **Excellence in Teaching**

**VIU engages in teaching that stimulates, challenges and stretches students to develop as independent learners and critical thinkers.**

VIU has an explicit teaching mandate with an emphasis on open access to education and a commitment to student success. Small class-sizes allow students to interact directly with faculty while developing independence and critical thinking. Open-access is a defining feature of faculty-student engagement at VIU because it contributes to the diverse nature of students. This diversity has defined a commitment to teaching and learning that prioritizes interpersonal connections and innovation, that bridges theory and practice, integrates research and learning, and encourages student-centered approaches.

Faculty who are engaged in research contribute knowledge to their discipline, enhance their teaching practice, mentor students in deep learning experiences and engage with community partners. VIU's research institutes provide opportunities for undergraduate and graduate learning experiences. Undergraduate research is incorporated as a teaching/learning activity in classes. The Mount Arrowsmith Biosphere Region Research Institute (MABRRI) is connected to the UNESCO-designated Mount Arrowsmith Biosphere Region co-managed by VIU. MABRRI is dedicated to community engagement, relationship building and knowledge sharing. More than 70 students in the past 3 years have undertaken community-based research that advances environmental, economic and social sustainability. The annual student research conference showcases research and projects by students through posters, displays, performances and presentations. The conference sparks research curiosity by enabling networking and exchanges of ideas and serves as the pillar event in a full research week of activities engaging students.

Across VIU, faculty are engaged in innovation, experimentation and risk taking in their teaching practice. The "Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program" offers prison-based university courses at the local prison to university students (outside learners) and incarcerated students (inside learners). The program places a human face on justice issues and provides a powerful academic and experiential learning opportunity, grounded in a philosophy that each human being has innate worth and a story to tell. The course employs circle pedagogy and collaborative dialogue. VIU is among the first five universities in Canada to offer Inside-Out. The program has made an indelible impact – two inside students are planning to pursue post-secondary opportunities; two more are considering following in their footsteps. Another former inside student wants to support youth involved in gangs; and one is planning to write his own memoir inspired by the books he read in the program.

**VIU has teaching experiences that promote active student engagement.**

The Bachelor of Science in Nursing hosts a unique partnership for curriculum change. Students and faculty have built a developmental framework outlining the learning journey to help inform faculty in the redesign of courses. They have also created a collection of best practices for group work experiences. This is a unique partnership at VIU and for nurse educators in the province.

VIU's recent National Teaching Award winner, Pam Shaw engages urban planning students to go into communities to work with local citizens. Students have assisted several Vancouver Island First Nations, and local municipalities and

community groups. Pam credits her pragmatic pedagogical approach to 20 years as a professional planner. "I'm always looking for ways to engage students, share and gain knowledge and apply it in practical ways."

VIU's Faculty of Trades and Applied Technology is exploring how to engage students in theory classes through transformative teaching strategies that increase the rigor and agency of student learning. Early successes have indicated higher engagement by students, greater retention and high achieving student performances on provincial skills competitions.

VIU participates bi-annually in the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). The NSSE collects information from 700 four-year colleges and universities and over half a million first year and senior student across North America. VIU's commitment to teaching and learning demonstrates the priority faculty place on practices that bridge theory and practice, integrate research and learning, and encourage student-centered approaches to learning.

## **Excellence in Student Support and Success**

**VIU students are supported to achieve their educational and professional goals progressing to employment and/or further study.**

As an open access university, student support is paramount to building confidence and self-directed learning habits for success. VIU is dedicated to raising retention rates. VIU's Early Alert System identifies and refers students in difficulty to advisors, counsellors, or disability support services. Drawing on evidence, VIU has instituted high impact practices such as implementing a co-curricular record providing students with supports to learn about learning. As a result, there has been a 10-15% increase in retention from first to second year in the last 4 years.

In the spirit of reconciliation, a new learning partnership for Indigenous youth supported with \$50M by two philanthropic foundations (Mastercard and Rideau Hall), has enhanced opportunities for Indigenous learners. This will double the number of First Nations and Metis students who pursue an education at VIU. VIU already offers a range of initiatives and wrap-around supports for Indigenous students, including outreach workers, student mentors, campus Elders and tuition supplements. New supports include Education Navigators to help Indigenous youth access pathways to learning, improve retention and graduation rates and ultimately support the social and economic development of their communities. Relationships are built by providing in-community services to guide Indigenous learners along their pathways. The vision is that students will no longer need support to navigate the "system"; rather, the system will offer supports to fit the student. 'Community Cousins', Aboriginal students studying at VIU, offer campus peer support. The program builds capacity for mentors to gain valuable employability skills and career related experience through mentoring activities. Many students enter through VIU's Aboriginal University Bridging Certificate. The coaching and mentoring provide learners with access to upgrading for entry into natural resource management, science, health, education and trades programs in demand for local Indigenous communities and employers.

VIU has met the challenges of studying in a foreign country with International student advisors who provide international students with the support necessary to achieve their educational goals. Undergraduate, ESL and graduate students receive personal advising and counseling on educational goals, medical insurance, scholarships and awards, study skills, and living in Canada.

VIU is a leader in supporting access to education for all youth. As the first post-secondary institution in British Columbia to launch a Youth in Care Tuition Waiver program, we have influenced government policy in this area and removed financial barriers that make it difficult for youth aging out of foster care to access higher education. Since 2013 VIU has supported over 140 students. VIU supports families of future students to access the Canada Learning Bond program and start savings for a child's education after high school. VIU is a member of the Champion's Network; a support network of

organizations across Canada that promotes the Canada Learning Bond. VIU is about investing in people to move an impoverished population into full participation of social and economic prosperity.

**VIU students have extra-curricular opportunities to help them make the most of their education.**

Taking advantage of VIU's island location, VIU students have a wide choice of extra-curricular activities. Join One is a campus-wide initiative to keep students active. Outdoor recreation and leadership training activities such as sea kayaking, rock climbing, cross-country skiing, stand up paddle boarding, hiking, surfing or rafting are available. International and Canadian students come together in day trips and activities called "Cultural Connections" to discover Vancouver Island's vibrant communities, local cultural events and attractions.

VIU is committed to student engagement and learning outside of classroom experiences. The Co-Curricular Record (CCR) encourages holistic academic and career development for students. The CCR provides a centralized database of activities that students can search for opportunities to apply or enhance their leadership opportunities. Students receive an official Co-Curricular Record authenticated by the institution.

VIU's MBA students participate in the provincial and national MBA games annually. VIU hosted the national games in 2017 and surpassed 19 other universities to win the Queen's Cup, raising in the process a record amount of \$300,000 for the Moose Hide campaign, a charity established to end violence against Indigenous and non-Indigenous women and children.

VIU undergraduate students regularly compete in Model United Nations conferences, where students role-play international delegates to the United Nations and simulate UN committees. Students develop strong leadership skills in critical thinking, cooperation and public speaking.