

Executive Summary

Vancouver Island University (VIU), which continues to evolve as a new regional University focused on building capacity for knowledge development and economic prosperity, has identified the following opportunities for post-secondary education innovation and regional economic prosperity:

1. **Aboriginal Education:** VIU is a regional leader in engagement with Aboriginal communities and has over 1,900 Aboriginal students enrolled at its three campuses. VIU urges the Federal Government to engage regional universities in dialogues about successful outcomes for Aboriginal students and recognise the important role of regional universities with their focus on aboriginal student success and achievement. VIU supports the Federal Government's direction to address the historical under funding and increase access for First Nations to post-secondary education as a key capacity building strategy for the local, regional and national economy. But, our experience confirms that inadequate funding continues to hamper the ability for many Aboriginal students (many of whom are older) to attend post secondary institutions. Our University Chancellor Chief Atleo has also discussed the importance of investing in Aboriginal education.
2. **Coastal/Aquatic Blue Revolution Resources:** VIU is recognised as a leader in coastal and aquatic food resource research and management, and for its partnerships with the local aquaculture industry and role in helping build the knowledge based environment necessary for sustainable coastal prosperity in the region. Regional economic diversification is essential as the region transitions from a primarily resource extraction economy to one that has a more diversified economic base. Further funding is essential to build capacity and to develop VIU's key partnerships with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans Nanaimo Research Station and other groups interested in our west coast oceans and their sustainability. Funding required to launch such an **Ocean and Food Systems Institute** would be approximately four million dollars per year for five years.

3. ***Transition Economy:*** Vancouver Island is moving very rapidly from a resource-based economy to a knowledge-based economy. As a central part of what our regional, community-based university does, applied research or scholarship is about working in and with communities, organisations and regional interests to move the theory and thinking of the university from the classroom into the region. Applied research explores how the issues and needs of the region can be examined and addressed through the application of new knowledge, ideas, methods and practices that contribute to the growth of the institution, its students and faculty as well as the communities affected. Federal research funding for applied research needs to continue to increase along with the creation of a Federal Government funding program that supports competitive funding for research centres at regional universities, where the economic and social benefits of the applied research can be clearly demonstrated through the transition to a knowledge-based economy.

Discussion:

1. Aboriginal Education

As a culturally responsive post-secondary institution that reported an Aboriginal headcount of 1933 students for the 20010/11 Academic year, VIU recognises that outreach and community partnerships are integral for access and achievement of our Aboriginal students.

Our recently adopted Academic Plan includes Aboriginal Education as a central element of what we do. VIU has never experienced a higher degree of Aboriginal community partnerships, articulation agreements, outreach programs, and capacity for providing Indigenous knowledge. The evolving dialogue and deepening relationships that are occurring with our Aboriginal stakeholders is creating institutional change as it relates to Aboriginal education at VIU. Our concern is that a lack of funding will hinder our ability to continue to support these programs and services which will ultimately be detrimental to the relationships we have formed with our Aboriginal partners. We are concerned that lack of funding will impact Aboriginal students' opportunity to achieve success in PSE.

The following are examples of some successful programs in jeopardy because of funding challenges.

VIU has two core Aboriginal academic programs: First Nations Studies and First Nation Child and Youth Care. Both of these programs are unique in their use of Elders-in-Residence. Elders are part of our teaching faculty and link programming to cultural imperatives. The success of our Aboriginal academic programs has resulted in many of our graduates becoming leaders in our region.

The presence of Elders on campus is a benefit for all Aboriginal learners. Elders are an integral part of the teaching teams in the First Nations Studies department, and are also spiritual guides, mentors and role models for all Aboriginal students. The First Nations Studies faculty are also

engaged in applied research, especially in the areas of pedagogy and curriculum where two of the faculty have been serving as Teaching Scholars out of our Teaching and Learning Centre. The Aboriginal University Bridging Program (AUBP) is a recently developed program at VIU that is achieving significant success. The AUBP came to be as a result of community consultations spanning across the Province of British Columbia. The program is a supportive adult education Bridging Program incorporating face-to-face classroom learning, ongoing learner support, and coaching and mentoring. But, such programs are expensive to deliver.

Building on these successful programs, a number of other courses and programs are currently in development: Indigenous Science Courses; Indigenous Tourism Experience Course; Aboriginal Management and Leadership and Community Health Representative Training. At present these areas are delayed and in search of funding to support curriculum development and delivery.

Recommendation:

Engage regional universities in dialogues about successful outcomes for Aboriginal students and recognise the important role of regional universities in achieving significant graduation rates due to their focus on regional community engagement and aboriginal student success and achievement. As the federal government works with the Aboriginal communities to address critical under funding of education for First Nations, the Federal Government should engage the regional universities that work closely with the Aboriginal communities they serve.

2. Coastal/Aquatic Blue Revolution

For several years VIU has been building its teaching and research capacities in the general area of coastal resource management including aquaculture, fisheries, First Nations traditional food, coastal community social and economic development and related subjects. We have been looking for ways to integrate our now quite significant resources with those of our close partners, for example DFO (Pacific Biological Station), other universities, several emerging research centres, technology companies and producers. We felt that the broad issue of food production from coastal waters would be a useful way to frame our aspirations and integrate our strengths and activities for several reasons. We believe that an integrated, interdisciplinary approach to BC's fisheries (both wild and enhanced) and aquaculture industries will take us further in economic development than the current "silo" approach that results in divisiveness and acts as a brake to progress. Furthermore we believe that full community involvement and an ecosystem approach to food production are essential components to optimize the opportunities that are so great along our coastline.

VIU has made a series of strategic decisions to emphasize a Coastal Environmental focus in much of its teaching, training and research programming. We have teaching and applied research strengths in aquaculture (Center for Shellfish Research), environmental chemical analysis (Applied Environmental Research Lab), fisheries and aquaculture (International Centre for Sturgeon Studies), marine ecology and in the applied social sciences including resource management, tourism, economics, business, literature and policy (Institute for Coastal Research).

Seafood has sustained BC First Nations for millennia and the seafood industry (capture and farming) has played a key role in the evolution of BC coastal and First Nations communities and economies. Today, world demand for marine protein is growing at an unprecedented rate. There is a recognised ‘blue revolution’ occurring across the globe. Through strategic investments in research and teaching facilities, including our new Deep Bay Field Station, VIU is a leader in that movement. But, additional significant research is needed to examine a number of complex social, ecological, economic and governance issues confronting the future of this sustainable resource in BC.

The creation of an *Ocean and Food Systems Institute* at VIU will respond to the challenges of growing a sustainable marine resource based economy through knowledge generation, dialogue and innovation. As a networked interdisciplinary organization it will seek innovative ways to create vibrant coastal and First Nation economies through sustainable seafood production and associated secondary/tertiary industry opportunities.

Recommendation:

Leverage the historical relationships between DFO and our other federal partners to support the formation of the Oceans and Food Systems Institute as an economic and social initiative on the BC Coast led through VIU. Funding required to launch such an initiative would be approximately four million per year for five years.

3. *Transition Economics*

Like many other parts of rural Canada, Vancouver Island is facing significant social and economic change as it transitions from a resource dependent economy to new forms of economic development. The Island is well positioned to move toward a knowledge-based economy, but such a transition requires nurturing. Regional universities, such as VIU, are equipped through their focus upon applied research and scholarship to examine and identify realistic and workable options. Unlike large research intensive universities where applied research is less valued, community-based universities thrive on practical community-centred research. Applied research or scholarship is about working in and with communities, organisations and regional interests to move the theory and thinking of university’s from the classroom into the region. That type of research explores how the issues and needs of the region can be examined and hopefully addressed through the application of new knowledge, ideas, methods and practices that contribute to the growth of the institution (and the region) , its students and faculty as well as the communities affected. Applied research is at the heart of what VIU does.

Created in 2008, VIU’s Community Based Research Institute is based on similar successful models throughout Canada and is a ‘one stop’ service for organizations, agencies, or community groups that often have specific planning, research and development needs, but lack the expertise and/or resources to conduct research themselves. Community coalitions that are formed for the purposes of the research can have a lasting influence, facilitating future collective action in response to other identified public health or social issues with that community.

Vancouver Island and Nanaimo in particular, is becoming the geographic centre of a marine research cluster that supports the sustainability of First Nations and coastal community

economies based on marine biological resources. The marine cluster embraces the federal economic plan “Advantage Canada” in three key areas (a) *Entrepreneurial Advantage* through science-based public policy formation reducing red tape, (b) *Knowledge Advantage* through enhanced education and training opportunities, and (c) *Infrastructure Advantage* by cohesively and strategically linking federally funded research infrastructures already developed – thereby providing greater leverage on current innovation investments. Cluster development is central to the knowledge economy – recognizing the earliest signs of emerging clusters and providing appropriate levels of support creates conditions for self-sustaining growth.

Nanaimo is developing a reputation as a centre for knowledge workers: what Richard Florida has called the “creative class”. Partly due to geography, proximity to Vancouver and its international airport, partly due to its quality of life and partly due to the presence of VIU, Nanaimo has all of the ingredients to thrive in a knowledge economy. It is already showing strong signs of transitioning away from a dependency upon a resource-based economy. VIU is well-positioned to play a leading role in that transition economy as it continues to build strong links with local businesses, organizations and communities.

Recommendation:

Create a funding program that supports competitive funding for research centres at regional post-secondary institutions, where the economic and social benefits of the applied research can be clearly demonstrated to help transition resource-based economies into knowledge-based futures. Federal research funding for applied research needs to continue to increase. Specifically, continue to invest, as was done in last year’s budget, in the funding for applied research.

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