

## **Institutional Research Plan v2001**

Note: This plan is supplemented with the SSHRC Three Year Development ASU Plan: Creating Capacity

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Institution: Vancouver Island University

President/CEO: Rich Johnston

Affiliated Institutions: This plan covers the main campus of Vancouver Island University (in Nanaimo) as well as satellite campuses in Duncan, Parksville and Powell River.

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Plan Summary (see also the SSHRC Three Year Development ASU Plan: Creating Capacity )

### **Planning**

There are 3 levels of research planning at Vancouver Island University Vancouver Island University 1. Individuals, or teams of faculty, are typically responsible for identifying and developing specific research projects over the short term. This process reflects the interests and expertise of the faculty as well as the physical resources available to support their research. Planning for specific projects over the short to medium-term is augmented by interactions with various external research groups on and off campus including: The National Research Council, the Mid-Island Science and Technology Innovation Council, the SSHRC, the CIHR, the Science Council of British Columbia, and the Nanaimo Economic Development Office. Direct faculty contacts with industry and the community are instrumental in helping identify local and regional research needs.

2. Departmental planning over the medium to long-term is designed to ensure that there are appropriate lines of research and research support available to expose undergraduate students to the specific expertise and techniques relevant to the programs provided by the department. This is reflected in hiring practices, in seeking to achieve national- and international-standards for the research carried out by VIU Faculty, and in the provision of the necessary support and infrastructure.

3. Central administrative planning focuses upon acquiring and maintaining the research infrastructure needed by individuals, departments, and the institution as a whole. The University has now established

a research office, and responsibility for the coordination of plans and priorities now rests with the Vice President, Instruction and Research.

## **Approval**

Faculty enjoy academic freedom with respect to the nature and subject of their research, within the bounds of Vancouver Island University Animal Care, Human Subjects, and Integrity and Conduct in Scholarly Activity Research policies. Vancouver Island University has established protocols to help review and approve research in accordance with these policies. Approval for the use of Vancouver Island University space, equipment, and faculty time is provided by Faculty Deans. Deans may also approve financial obligations for research projects under \$10,000. The Institution's finance office approves financial obligations for all other research, on the recommendation of the Vice President, Instruction and Research. Approval for capital costs to support ongoing research training is provided by Vancouver Island University the President's Executive Council in consultation with the Management Committee.

## **Major Thrust Of Research And Research Training**

- VIU's major research goals are to:
- Support faculty scholarly and professional activity to ensure the credibility of the institution;
- Provide support for the pursuit of non-base activity including applied research contracts and partnerships;
- Encourage and support faculty applications to major external funding agencies;
- Build upon our regional position and academic strengths in order to provide research support to local communities and industries;
- Ensure that our students can participate in research projects, and are able to work within a research atmosphere that will prepare them for later work in their field;
- Develop, where appropriate, international as well as national research links.

## **Student Centred Research - Providing Working Research Skills**

One of the most significant components of research planning and development at Vancouver Island University is that of providing undergraduate students with an appropriate learning atmosphere in which to develop the critical skills and knowledge needed to successfully compete in a knowledge-based job market and graduate training programs.

Significant resources and faculty time are dedicated to supporting student research projects in the forms of library and laboratory facilities in degree and diploma programs and mandatory senior undergraduate research projects for students in programs including Biology, Fisheries and Aquaculture, Psychology, Anthropology, History, Recreation and Tourism, and Sociology. An important goal of research

development at Vancouver Island University is to attract and develop faculty and infrastructure that can provide students with a research atmosphere that will prepare them for highly trained technical positions or graduate schools.

### **Applied Research - Solving Regional Problems**

Vancouver Island University's research also focuses, to a large degree, on solving practical problems encountered by industries and communities in its catchment area. Through strategic partnerships and programs, such as the VIU Technology Transfer Centre and the Centre for Coastal Health, a non-profit organization housed on campus, Vancouver Island University has developed mechanisms that facilitate research interactions between faculty, industry and the community.

Vancouver Island University is also actively involved in delivering technical information to industry and the community through its extension programs, ranging from interactions with secondary and elementary schools to professional training programs. Programs such as the Forestry Extension Office, and the Fisheries and Aquaculture Extension Office are located on campus and actively deliver research and development results to the community.

Research at the regional level often cannot be separated from the larger context, hence the involvement of many Vancouver Island University departments in research at the national and international level.

Solving local and regional problems forms the backbone of Vancouver Island University research, but the resulting infrastructure and expertise has increased Vancouver Island University's capacity to do basic research as well as to work on projects that are national and international in scope. A thrust of research planning at Vancouver Island University is to develop the capacity and reputation to attract national and international partners to its training and teaching programs. This is being done by increasing the research capacity and opportunities at Vancouver Island University through development of its core expertise and infrastructure as well as by developing and housing new research partnerships.

### **Health and the Environment: A Dominant Field for Vancouver Island University Research**

Scholarly activity at Vancouver Island University involves a wide range of disciplines in the humanities and sciences. Examples are a new Alexandro Malaspina Research Centre established with private support; a nationally renowned "Great Books" website; Vancouver Island University's leadership in the use of net technology; a Canadian Letters and Images website now being created, which will provide researchers across Canada and abroad with access to archival materials from both World Wars. However, research has been concentrated primarily on issues involving the environment and health. Health, defined broadly as the biotic, abiotic and socio-economic determinants of the well-being of humans, animal, plants and ecosystems, is an underlying theme of much of Vancouver Island University research. Sustainability of resource-based industries such as forestry and aquaculture, fish and wildlife health, water quality, environmental impact assessment, environmental monitoring, horticulture, and health promotion are key areas for which Vancouver Island University has an established and growing research reputation.

## **Institute for Coastal Studies**

Building on our strengths as a regional university and our history of applied research, Vancouver Island University is developing a major new strategic initiative in the establishment of an Institute for Coastal Studies. This Institute will have an interdisciplinary research mandate focusing on coastal communities of the British Columbia and the Pacific North West. The Institute for Coastal studies seeks to conduct internationally respected, interdisciplinary research involving the natural sciences, the social sciences and the humanities. The focus is on understanding and promoting the resilience of "communities on the edge".

The Institute of Coastal Studies is a research commons, a hub from which many spokes radiate. An existing spoke is the newly established Applied Environmental Research Lab specializing in state-of-the-art water quality and other environmental chemical analysis. A second phase will be a Centre for Shellfish Research, currently under development. The Centre will conduct interdisciplinary research that seeks to answer the question of whether the shellfish industry in B.C. can be helped to expand in such a way that coastal communities benefit by the expansion. The Centre is seen as taking a multi-disciplinary approach to shellfish research, an approach which is based on answering technical and environmental questions but recognizing that the broader questions inherent in addressing the viability and sustainability of a shellfish industry on the West Coast cannot be answered without examining the economic, social, political and cultural ramifications of such an industry and without drawing on aboriginal knowledge and the experience of past practice. It is the goal of the Centre to examine the impacts of the industry before they become divisive and difficult to resolve.

Other initiatives that would attach to the Institute for Coastal Studies are an aboriginal research centre under development by the Department of First Nations Studies, a research centre for examining recreation and tourism issues on the West Coast based in the Department of Recreation and Tourism, and the historical work being undertaken with regard to exploration, contact, and cultural issues.

The Institute will be a physical and virtual meeting place for multidisciplinary collaborations by researchers, community members and other clients who would normally be separated by discipline or geography. VIU is located in a natural laboratory of diverse coastal habitats and their dependent human communities. Its location in Nanaimo within easy reach of major urban centres and dispersed rural communities, as well as many industrial and government research institutions, makes it ideally situated to act as a centre for multidisciplinary research of many kinds. The Institute for Coastal Studies will be housed in a neutral and geographically central location on the Vancouver Island University's Nanaimo Campus, for example the expanded library and learning center building.

As it develops the Institute will be equipped with meeting rooms, offices for visiting researchers and communication equipment allowing for two-way contact with other research institutions as well as with remote communities. The institute is seen as an evolving entity that will grow and change as new VIU research activities develop under its mandate and demonstrate new and explicit requirements.

### **Other Strategic Directions**

As noted above, With the development of degree-granting programs there is an increased expectation and requirement that faculty teaching upper level courses remain current with advances in their field. An important part of Vancouver Island University's research plan is to provide faculty with the support needed to remain actively involved in their areas of specialty so that they can expose students to the most recent advances in research methods, equipment and understanding.

Currently, many Vancouver Island University faculty have cross-appointments or have research partnerships with world-class facilities such as the University of British Columbia, Simon Fraser University, University of Victoria and the Pacific Biological Station. In addition, faculty have established partnerships with a wide variety of private interests including Weyerhaeuser, BC Salmon Farmers Association, PRA Manufacturing and the Aquaculture Association of Canada. These links have allowed Vancouver Island University faculty to participate in a number of innovative and important projects. Maintaining and expanding such partnerships through improved infrastructure and expertise is a part of Vancouver Island University's strategic plan for research.

As new degree programs and research projects are implemented in the future, Vancouver Island University plans to refine policies and procedures to facilitate research within the existing research thrust and to promote new areas of research on campus. This includes developing new mechanisms for establishing and managing financial contributions to research, obtaining new infrastructure, and attracting highly qualified faculty.

### **What Has The Institution Done To Support The Development Of Research In These Areas And Future Strategic Directions?**

#### **Infrastructure**

Vancouver Island University has made major financial commitments towards acquiring and maintaining infrastructure needed for student laboratories and senior student research projects. Vancouver Island University has this year substantially increased capital spending. Vancouver Island University supplements the infrastructure required for teaching the laboratories and facilities that provide important research sites for faculty. Examples include a metabolic/physiologic laboratory, and cold and warm water fish hatcheries. The VIU Foundation (a fund-raising arm of the institution) recognizes and actively supports efforts to attract funds for research.

#### **Attracting High-Calibre Faculty**

To address the need for highly qualified faculty, departments offering degrees have made the completion of the PhD degree a requirement for faculty positions wherever possible. Faculty research interests are supported through release time from teaching, professional development and travel funds to pursue scholarly activity. Vancouver Island University is now a member of the AUCC, and participates in AUCC sponsored research seminars and workshops.

### **Policy, Procedures and Partners**

In recognition of its expanding research role, Vancouver Island University has developed policies and programs to facilitate research on campus. The Technology Transfer Centre actively pursues and supports faculty-private sector interactions for applied research. This Centre, along with the newly established Research Office, the Joint Scholarly Research Committee and the VIU Research Fund provide research services to faculty. New policies and protocols ensure research conducted on campus is ethical and humane and follows tri-council requirements. To accommodate the growing research community on campus, the development and management of research has, for major initiatives, been centralized and located in the office of the Vice President. Vancouver Island University continues to develop new partnerships with local, national and international academic, government and private organizations that can enhance the institution's research capabilities. Incentives such as use of infrastructure, transfer of knowledge and expertise, and mutually agreeable financial arrangements help to attract important research partners.