

# THE OPEN LINE

*Your TRUOLFA Newsletter*

February 2026 | Volume 2, Issue 2

## **Hello, fellow OLFMs!**

Welcome to our February edition. This month we bring you an important bargaining update from FPSE, celebrate our bursary recipients, honour Black History Month, explore strategies for student engagement, and look ahead to International Women's Day. We hope you enjoy this issue.

*We acknowledge that Thompson Rivers University is situated within the unceded lands of Tk'emlups te Secwepemc within Secwepemculecw. TRU's Open Learning Division serves students across British Columbia and beyond on the traditional territories of many Indigenous nations.*

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President's Message:

TRUOLFA is presently fully engaged with TRU in bargaining the new collective agreement. Non-monetary issues have been presented and discussed over several separate sessions, but unfortunately the employer resists our proposals for clarity on right to work, definition of new courses vs revised courses, workload, etc. As of this newsletter we have not presented our monetary package and are awaiting a response from the employer on the remaining non-monetary issues before non-monetary issues are dealt with. The employer has presented its monetary package, and not unsurprisingly it echoes the monetary proposals made to the other public sector unions. While we have little leeway in terms of obtaining anything more than is being offered, our intent is to gain concessions on reallocation of monies to increase the Marked Assignment Fee (MAF) to address increasing workload deriving from course revisions, student interaction and general course management.

Faculty are invited to an open cafe Zoom session 26 February 2026, 3-4 pm for an opportunity to meet with your colleagues and to bring forward ideas and issues affecting open learning. To attend click on the following:

TRUOLFA Faculty Association is inviting you to a scheduled Zoom meeting.

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81974486303?pwd=yqzPKZwgAPUCUSaEN6tPkuQj2fpCx.D.1>

Meeting ID: 819 7448 6303

Passcode: 328161

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One tap mobile

+16475580588,,81974486303#,,,,\*328161# Canada

+17789072071,,81974486303#,,,,\*328161# Canada

Join instructions

[https://us02web.zoom.us/join/81974486303/invitations?signature=Cs4e-jsqG1x3ojDI\\_CZzzhXuNeHu1BqgA21KO-Y2GgU](https://us02web.zoom.us/join/81974486303/invitations?signature=Cs4e-jsqG1x3ojDI_CZzzhXuNeHu1BqgA21KO-Y2GgU)

## BARGAINING UPDATE

*FPSE Winter 2026 Bulletin*

### Understanding the Current Bargaining Context

The Federation of Post-Secondary Educators (FPSE) has released its first Bargaining Bulletin for Winter 2026, and TRUOLFA members should be aware of the challenging landscape facing our sector. As we enter what may become a second year of bargaining following the expiry of agreements in March 2025, the post-secondary system faces significant pressures from declining international student enrolments and broader provincial fiscal constraints.

### The International Student Context

Federal government decisions have dramatically reduced international student visa quotas, from 360,000 nationally in 2024 to just 150,000 projected for 2027. British Columbia's current allocation stands at 32,596 seats. According to a BC government study, this decline has resulted in an 18 per cent revenue reduction across the sector, with some institutions potentially losing a third of their operating revenue. The province has ordered all institutions to cap international student enrolment at 30 per cent of total enrolment. More than 80 programs have been cancelled across the province, and layoffs of contract, sessional, and continuing faculty have begun at several institutions.

### The Provincial Mandate

The provincial government has proposed a "Balanced Measures" bargaining mandate offering three per cent wage increases per year over a four-year term, plus a flex fund initially set at 0.2 per cent. The Hospital Employees Union and BC Government Employees Union successfully negotiated this flex fund up to 0.5 per cent — the so-called "enhanced mandate" — following significant job action. All other public sector unions, including those in post-secondary education, are seeking this enhanced mandate.

### Where TRUOLFA Fits

TRUOLFA (Local 17) bargains alongside TRUFA (Local 2) in the university context, within the broader public sector mandate framework. Unlike the fifteen FPSE locals that bargain with the Post-Secondary Employers' Association at separate local tables, university faculty associations continue to bargain directly with their immediate employer, though compensation remains subject to the provincial mandate.

### Provincial Framework Issues

At the provincial level, FPSE's Bargaining Committee has identified four system-wide issues for discussion with employers: a Health Benefits Trust, Artificial Intelligence in the workplace, Micro-Credentials, and Casual Faculty concerns. The employers' association has indicated interest in discussing the Benefits Trust proposal.

### The Path Forward

The BC Federation of Labour is encouraging all public sector groups to avoid concluding bargaining prematurely while efforts continue to extend the enhanced mandate to all unions. FPSE characterises this as a "consolidation round" — the goal is to defend existing provisions and advance where possible in a demanding environment. For more information, visit [fpse.ca](http://fpse.ca) or speak with your TRUOLFA Executive. The full FPSE Winter Bargaining Bulletin is available on the FPSE website.

# BLACK HISTORY MONTH

February 2026 — Celebrating 30 Years in Canada

This year marks a significant milestone: **30 years of Black History Month in Canada.**

The 2026 theme is "**Honouring Black Brilliance Across Generations — From Nation Builders to Tomorrow's Visionaries.**"

Black History Month was officially recognised in Canada in 1995, thanks to the pioneering efforts of the Honourable Jean Augustine, the first Black woman elected to the Canadian Parliament. This anniversary invites us to celebrate Black excellence and recognise that Black history is Canadian history.

As educators, we have a special opportunity to amplify Black voices in our teaching and to reflect on how our courses and materials represent diverse perspectives. Consider how you might:

Incorporate works by Black scholars and authors in your course materials

Highlight contributions of Black Canadians in your field of study

Create space for meaningful discussions about equity and inclusion

Learn about Black history in British Columbia and Canada

## Resources to Explore

BC Black History Awareness Society: [bcblackhistory.ca](http://bcblackhistory.ca)

Government of Canada Black History Month: [canada.ca/black-history-month](http://canada.ca/black-history-month)

Hogan's Alley Society (Vancouver's historic Black community): [hogansalleysociety.org](http://hogansalleysociety.org)

## Congratulations to Our Bursary Recipients

We are delighted to announce the recipients of the Thompson Rivers University Open Learning Faculty Association Awards for January 2026. Your generosity as TRUOLFA members makes these awards possible, and we are proud to support these outstanding students.

### 2025 TRUOLFA Award Recipients

**Stephen Banda**

*Bachelor of Technology*

**Hailey Critch**

*Bachelor of Health Science*

**Jillian Wondga**

*Bachelor of Arts, General Studies*

**Kimberley Barnes**

*Master of Education*

**Kaitlyn Hampel**

*Bachelor of Arts, Psychology*

These students represent the best of TRU Open Learning — dedicated learners who balance studies with work, family, and life's many demands. Congratulations to all recipients. Your dedication to your studies inspires our entire community.

## Teaching Excellence Awards

**Nominations Due: Friday, February 7, 2026 at 4:00 PM**

Know an exceptional OLFM who deserves recognition? Now is the time to nominate them.

Every year, Thompson Rivers University recognises up to two Open Learning Faculty Members who represent the best qualities of our community. It is a wonderful way to celebrate colleagues who make a real difference in students' lives.

### **What recipients receive:**

An engraved plaque

Up to \$2,000 for professional development activities or materials

Recognition at the President's Merit and Service Award Reception in April 2026

### **Eligibility:**

Must be a current OLFM at TRU

Minimum five continuous years as an OLFM

Nominations may be submitted by Open Learning administrators, staff members, faculty members, or students. Each nomination must include a written statement of 200 words or less explaining why you are nominating this OLFM.

## Connection Corner: Encouraging Learner Persistence in Open Learning

### ***Practical Strategies for Keeping Students Engaged and on Track***

One of the enduring challenges in distance education is supporting students through to course completion. Open learning students often juggle employment, family responsibilities, and geographic isolation alongside their studies. As Open Learning Faculty Members, we occupy a unique position: we may be the only human connection a student has to Thompson Rivers University. That relationship matters more than we sometimes realise.

Research consistently demonstrates that instructor presence is among the strongest predictors of student persistence in online courses. Garrison and colleagues' Community of Inquiry framework identifies teaching presence — the design, facilitation, and direction of learning experiences — as essential to meaningful educational experiences (Garrison et al., 2000). Students who feel their instructor is accessible, responsive, and genuinely invested in their progress are significantly more likely to complete their courses.

### **Timely and Personalised Feedback**

Feedback serves multiple purposes beyond assessment. It signals to students that their work matters and that someone is paying attention. Hattie's (2009) synthesis of educational research found that feedback ranks among the most powerful influences on student achievement, but only when it is specific, timely, and actionable. A brief comment acknowledging a student's improvement or pointing toward a helpful resource can be the encouragement that keeps them going through a difficult week.

### **Early Intervention**

Students who fall behind in the first few weeks of a course are at highest risk of withdrawal. Reaching out early — before a student has missed multiple assignments — communicates care and opens a

conversation about barriers they may be facing. A simple email asking "How are things going?" can prompt a student to disclose challenges and seek support before it is too late.

### Flexibility Within Structure

Open learning students choose distance education precisely because they need flexibility. Where possible, offering reasonable accommodations for deadline extensions or alternative submission formats demonstrates respect for the complex lives our students lead. This does not mean abandoning standards; rather, it means recognising that rigid policies sometimes work against the very students we are mandated to serve.

### Building Connection

Small gestures create connection. Addressing students by name in correspondence. Sharing a brief encouraging note when a student submits strong work. Acknowledging that a concept is challenging and that struggling with it is normal. These moments humanise the learning experience and remind students that there is a real person on the other end of their course.

### Pointing to Resources

Many students do not know about the support services available to them. Mentioning TRU's Student Services, the Writing Centre, accessibility supports, or counselling services in course communications normalises help-seeking and may provide students with the tools they need to persist.

Our institutional history reminds us that open learning has always been about removing barriers. The founders of the Open Learning Institute in 1978 understood that access means more than simply offering courses — it means actively supporting learners through to success. Nearly five decades later, that commitment remains at the heart of what we do.

## Get Involved: Building Our OLFM Community

### *Creating Shared Purpose Beyond Individual Courses*

As Open Learning Faculty Members, we often work independently — connected to our students but sometimes isolated from one another. Yet research on professional communities tells us that collaborative projects give people reasons to connect in ways that social events alone cannot. Working together on something meaningful builds bonds and strengthens our collective identity.

We would like to hear from you. Are you interested in contributing to any of the following collaborative initiatives?

#### Shared OER Resource Bank

Open Educational Resources benefit everyone — students, faculty, and the broader educational community. We are exploring the creation of a shared repository where OLFMs can contribute and access teaching materials, assessment tools, and learning resources. If you have resources you would be willing to share or expertise in OER development, we would love to hear from you.

#### Collective Conference Submission

Teaching and learning conferences offer opportunities to share our expertise with colleagues across institutions. We are interested in coordinating a group submission to a regional or national conference — perhaps exploring what makes open learning distinctive or sharing innovations in online pedagogy. Presenting together raises our profile and lets us learn from one another in the process.

#### Community Research Project

What do we know about our students? What challenges do they face, and what helps them succeed? A collaborative research project — even something as straightforward as a shared survey or interview study — could generate insights that benefit all of us and contribute to the broader scholarship of open

and distance learning.

### **Newsletter Contributions**

This newsletter is for you — and it could be by you as well. We welcome contributions: a reflection on your teaching practice, a tip that has worked well for you, a book or resource recommendation, or a story from your experience as an OLFM. Short pieces of 200 to 500 words are ideal.

Interested in any of these initiatives? Have another idea for collaboration? Get in touch at [newsletter@truolfa.ca](mailto:newsletter@truolfa.ca) or raise it at our next Virtual Coffee House. Building community takes all of us.

## From the Archives: Our Institutional Roots

### *A Piece of History in Your Morning Coffee*



*A vintage Open Learning Agency mug, circa 1988-2005, featuring the Agency's distinctive tree logo — a symbol of growth, knowledge, and deep roots in British Columbia's educational landscape.*

The mug you see here represents a remarkable chapter in British Columbia's commitment to accessible education. The Open Learning Institute (OLI) was established on June 1, 1978, when the provincial government made a bold decision: rather than constructing another brick-and-mortar university in BC's vast interior, they would create Canada's first dedicated distance education institution, inspired by the United Kingdom's Open University model (Ellis, 1992). From its founding, OLI embraced truly "open" admission — implementing continuous entry, self-paced courses, a credit bank system, and Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) — innovations that removed traditional barriers and welcomed learners who might otherwise have been excluded from post-secondary education.

In 1988, OLI merged with the Knowledge Network to form the Open Learning Agency (OLA), which housed the Open School, the Open College, and the British Columbia Open University. Throughout the 1990s, OLA employed approximately 270 full-time staff and 180 part-time tutors, serving learners across the province with an annual budget of approximately \$25 million (Bates, 2024). On April 1, 2005, the BC Open University amalgamated with the newly designated Thompson Rivers University, and TRU Open Learning was born — carrying forward nearly five decades of commitment to meeting learners where they are.

## Did You Know?

### *Fun Facts About TRU Open Learning and Our Heritage*

**The tree logo** on the Open Learning Agency mug symbolised growth, knowledge, and the deep roots of accessible education in BC — values that continue to guide TRU Open Learning today.

**We are older than you might think.** TRU Open Learning traces its origins to 1978 — that is 48 years of distance education in British Columbia.

**Open learning is enshrined in law.** The Thompson Rivers University Act specifically mandates that TRU "promote teaching excellence and the use of open learning methods" — we are the only university in Canada with this legislated responsibility.

**550 courses and counting.** TRU Open Learning is BC's largest provider of online courses and programs, offering more than 60 credential programs.

**PLAR is in our DNA.** Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition — awarding academic credit for knowledge gained through work and life experience — has been part of our practice since the very first days of the Open Learning Institute in 1978.

**Consortium partners since 1984.** The Open University Consortium of British Columbia allowed students to take courses from UBC, SFU, and UVic through our institution — a collaborative tradition that continues today.

**Global pioneers.** TRU is a founding member of both the Canadian Virtual University and the Open Educational Resource University (OERu), positioning us at the forefront of open education worldwide.

**Got OLA memorabilia?** If you have course materials, mugs, photos, or stories from the OLI or OLA era, we would love to hear from you. Share your memories at [newsletter@truolfa.ca](mailto:newsletter@truolfa.ca).

### References

Bates, T. (2024, March 8). A personal history: 12. My first couple of years at the Open Learning Agency.

<https://www.tonybates.ca/2024/03/08/a-personal-history-12-my-first-couple-of-years-at-the-open-learning-agency/>

Ellis, J. F. (1992). Genesis of the Open Learning Institute of British Columbia. *International Journal of E-Learning & Distance Education*, 7(1), 43-58.

## Looking Ahead: International Women's Day

Sunday, March 8, 2026

Mark your calendars. International Women's Day is just around the corner.

The United Nations theme for 2026 is **"Rights. Justice. Action. For ALL Women and Girls."**

This theme calls for action to dismantle structural barriers to equal justice, including discriminatory laws, weak legal protections, and harmful practices that erode the rights of women and girls worldwide.

### Some sobering facts:

Women currently have only 64 per cent of the legal rights that men hold worldwide

Women earn 23 per cent less than men globally

At current progress rates, it will take 286 years to close legal protection gaps

As educators committed to open learning and accessible education, we have a role to play in advancing gender equity. Consider how you might recognise the women in your life — colleagues, students, family, and friends — who inspire you.

The 2026 IWD campaign theme is **"Give to Gain"** — emphasising the power of reciprocity, collaboration, and mutual support in advancing gender equality.

### CONTEST: Show Us Your Workspace!

Where does the magic happen? We want to see where you work!

As Open Learning Faculty Members, we work from home offices, kitchen tables, coffee shops, cabins, and everywhere in between. Your workspace tells a story — and we would love to see it.

Send a photo of your workstation with a short caption to [atucker@tru.ca](mailto:atucker@tru.ca) to be entered to win a prize!

*Selected photos will be featured in an upcoming edition of The Open Line.*

## Virtual Coffee House

Missing the water cooler chat? Join us for our monthly Virtual Coffee House.

**When:** Third Thursday of each month, 3:00 to 4:00 PM Pacific

**Where:** Zoom (link sent via email and Slack)

**Next Session:** Thursday, February 20, 2026

No agenda, no formalities — just a chance to connect with fellow OLFMs across British Columbia and beyond. Pop in for five minutes or stay for the full hour. Bring your favourite beverage and say hello.

## Important Dates

<b>2026-02-26</b>	Virtual Coffee House (3:00 to 4:00 PM Pacific)
<b>March 8, 2026</b>	International Women's Day
<b>March 19, 2026</b>	Virtual Coffee House (3:00 to 4:00 PM Pacific)
<b>April 2026</b>	President's Merit and Service Award Reception

## Payroll Lottery



### How the payroll lottery works

50% of the pool goes to the lucky person whose name is drawn each payday, and 50% goes to TRU students through the TRU Foundation. This is a gaming event, regulated and monitored by the BC Gaming Commission. Students receive every penny.

It is \$5 minimum per paycheque to participate. Payroll automatically deducts your chosen amount. We notify the winner on payday Thursday, get a photo and share here the following Thursday. The winner's cheque or deposit is processed by the following draw.

### [Fill out the payroll lottery form to play!](#)

Can't remember how much you donate? Want to make sure you're still playing? Check your Pay Stub in TRUemployee under Benefits, Deductions and Taxes. Questions? Email [foundation@tru.ca](mailto:foundation@tru.ca).

**Actual odds depend on number of tickets sold. Payroll Lottery gaming license #158542. Know your limit, play within it — 19+. Problem Gambling Help Line: 1-888-795-6111.**

## Stay Connected

**Website:** [truolfa.ca](http://truolfa.ca)

**VOIP:** 604-283-7303

**Slack:** Join the TRUOLFA Slack Channel

**Newsletter:** [newsletter@truolfa.ca](mailto:newsletter@truolfa.ca)

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TRUOLFA is proud to be a member of the  
**Federation of Post-Secondary Educators of BC (FPSE)**

*Thank you for reading. See you in April 2026*