

Pride Centre Proposal

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Introduction

This document is to help inform of the needs of the Kamloops LGBTQ+ community on campus. Due to a variety of factors which we will outline we, the TRUSU Pride Club, believe that a Pride Center is needed on campus. From this meeting we expect to come to an agreement that there is a need on campus with the university, that the University, TRUSU, and students will work together on a solution to the need and that the need fulfills the objectives of the center outlined in this proposal.

Relevance and Need

For many years, Kamloops has been welcoming the rapid development of a bustling and energetic pride community. The groups and individuals dedicated to building this community have made significant strides in the past few years, in particular, at Thompson Rivers University. The strength and enthusiasm of Thompson Rivers University's students, staff, and faculty has allowed TRU to promote itself as a site of diversity and inclusion.

Many agree that the most prominent and highly publicized Kamloops LGBTQ+ milestones have occurred within the last six years. This includes Kamloops' first Pride Parade, which was hosted in 2012 by the Thompson Rivers University Student Union (TRUSU) Pride Club across campus grounds. The following year, in 2013, TRU once again received public praise as the TRUSU Pride Club campaigned and established an official LGBTQ+ representative position on the student union board, allowing LGBTQ+ students, staff, and faculty to have a prominent student voice dedicated to the cause of diversity and inclusion. Then, in 2014, the equity committee, which the LGBTQ+ representative participates in, organized the painting of our first rainbow crosswalk. This was a visible and public declaration that Thompson Rivers University was, and still is, a place for all people of all identities.

Ever since, the TRUSU Pride Club and the LGBTQ+ representative have continued to build up what is, in fact, still a very young Kamloops pride community. They are joined by dozens of other organizations working towards this same goal, including

Kamloops Pride (formerly GALA), the Trans Support Group, and the youth-focused Safe Spaces Kamloops. Every year, these organizations continue to bring social events, community initiatives, vital LGBTQ+ resources, and many other diverse and inclusive possibilities to Kamloops and, in most cases, to Thompson Rivers University. It is a great time to be queer and be here.

However, despite the growing number of openly LGBTQ+ students, faculty, and staff here at Thompson Rivers University and across Kamloops in general, many LGBTQ+ people and their allies still seek a sense of belonging among all these community groups. Unfortunately, some LGBTQ+ students have begun to seek that community elsewhere, leaving Kamloops for larger metropolitan centres like Vancouver. Without welcoming this community and providing them with a space to call home, we are failing at building the bright future we have envisioned for this blooming city.

Kamloops currently lacks the infrastructure necessary to facilitate this bright future, but there is an opportunity to develop it. The solution, for the LGBTQ+ community comes in the form of our very own Thompson Rivers University Pride Centre. A pride centre is simply a community centre dedicated to supporting LGBTQ+ students and their allies. Pride centres can provide numerous things for local LGBTQ+ communities, but the primary roles that this proposed centre will fulfill in particular include offering a consistent gathering space for LGBTQ+ students and their allies and connecting these students with local health, social, and community resources.

Thompson Rivers University now has an opportunity to cement themselves as *'the'* LGBTQ+ friendly place in the city. Establishing this centre is necessary for the development of Kamloops' LGBTQ+ community and Kamloops needs it now more than ever.

Our research indicates to us that centers like this can function in a variety of ways and look very different from university to university. We are requesting an open and inviting space where students, faculty and administration can feel safe coming to for information, advocacy, and an open and accepting community. The university experience is a crucial step in many successful lives and usually is one of the first times

where students can experiment; it is a time for self discovery. Providing a place where students can feel free to learn and experiment in a safe environment is vital to the well-being of TRU's many budding workers and academics. Providing such a memorable student experience will not only give space for students to form lasting positive memories of TRU but will also help retain graduates as they become professionals in Kamloops by forming stronger ties among the community. From personal experience I have seen Pride organizations and centers benefit more than just the LGBTQ+ community. Pride centers benefit the municipality as a whole. Having more inclusive cities and neighbourhoods have shown to have great benefits to their local economies and its citizens as well as help limit tragic and discriminatory events in the future.

On June 12th, 2016, the world witnessed the largest mass shooting in modern history, a shooting that specifically targeted the LGBTQ+ Pulse Nightclub in Orlando. The execution of 49 members of our community was devastating, even to people here at Thompson Rivers University. In response, LGBTQ+ people from across the city came together to mourn the loss and stand in solidarity. The emotional damage still has yet to heal.

The Pulse Shooting was just the beginning of the hard times for LGBTQ+ people, however. With the inauguration of President Donald Trump and the stripping of human rights in the United states, Canada has seen a substantial increase in verbal abuse, sexual violence, and hate crimes across the country. Even in Kamloops, reports of this behaviour have begun to surface. Without a dedicated LGBTQ+ space to turn to, these students, faculty, and staff may never access the support that they need to cope with these experiences.

Furthermore, as a school that prides itself on its remarkable international student enrolment rates, Thompson Rivers University has an obligation to welcome and protect its students that come from less welcoming environments across the globe. To put this in perspective, homosexual acts are illegal in seven of TRU's twenty most popular countries of origin for international students, and in two of these countries homosexual

acts are punishable by death. As LGBTQ+ students come to Thompson Rivers University from these countries, it is vital that they see a space that welcomes people like them. The TRU Pride Centre can be a space where they can find community, and a place they can call home.

Finally, the pride centre will enable Thompson Rivers University to remain relevant in the competitive university atmosphere. As it stands today, Thompson Rivers University is the **only university in British Columbia** that does not have a pride centre on campus or within the surrounding community. This includes Trinity Western University, which is notorious for its obligatory enrolment contract that forces all attending students, faculty, and staff to abstain from “sexual intimacy that violates the sacredness of marriage between a man and a woman.” It is important that, from here forward, Thompson Rivers University distinguish itself from universities like Trinity Western University, which actively attempt to prevent LGBTQ+ students, faculty, and staff from developing community and accessing relevant resources. Thompson Rivers University, instead, should become the site for these resources, allowing the surrounding pride community to blossom under its protection.

The development of a Thompson Rivers University Pride Centre is important to establish for the wellbeing of students, staff, and faculty that identify as or ally with LGBTQ+ people here, in Kamloops, and across the globe. Furthermore, it contributes to Thompson Rivers University’s own goals of growing and nurturing a campus community worthy of respect. This, in turn, will improve student enrolment and graduation rates, and distinguish Thompson Rivers University among other institutions. The time for the TRU Pride Centre is now; let’s build this community together.

Objectives

The key performance indicators (KPIs) of the pride centre outlined in this proposal should be measured with reference to the following three objectives.

- 1. The pride centre will offer a consistent gathering space for queer people and their allies.**

KPIs: attendance

- 2. The pride centre will provide easy and confidential access to medical, community, and personal health resources.**

KPIs: distributable material quantity (brochures, contact cards, etc.), annually updated emergency contact list,

- 3. The pride centre will respond to the needs of the Kamloops queer community with annual initiatives organized by students, administration staff and volunteers**

KPIs: annual assessment of initiatives undertaken