



Yukon University

Academic Plan | 2023–2028



Cover Photo: Crystal Schick

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(Front left to right) Elders Mr. George Dawson (Hereditary Chief of the Ta'an Kwach'an Council) and Nthenat / Mrs. Annie Ned (standing) at the opening ceremony of the Ayamdigut Campus.



Message from the Provost

In 1988 Tagish Elder Angela Sidney shared an ancient Tlingit story at the official opening of the Ayamdigut Campus in Whitehorse. The story chronicles the journey of a great hunter, Kaax'achgóok¹, and his nephews, who are blown off course on the ocean during a hunting expedition and separated from their people for a long time. Kaax'achgóok's knowledge, determination, and resilience helped them survive and return home². Mrs. Sidney described how Kaax'achgóok used the sun to navigate the way home³ and said that the Yukon Campus was like the sun for students because they would not have to leave the North to pursue education, and parents would no longer lose their children to the South.

Today this wisdom and guidance are vital to Yukon University's academic mission. We strive to provide a broader array of programming for students to access in the Yukon, encouraging them to remain here in the place that is home and inviting students to join us in the territory and make Yukon their home.

The story of Kaax'achgóok also speaks about the disruption and chaos Kaax'achgóok and his nephews experienced when separated from their people.

Today disruptive forces, including climate change, technological advances, and geo-political uncertainty, will change jobs and threaten the economy, the environment, and society. In response, the Academic Plan urges us to increase our capacity to work together, innovate and use technologies intentionally to find our way amidst the complex challenges facing the North. The Plan deepens our commitment to offering programs and research in the North that contribute to a prosperous, inclusive, and sustainable future for northern communities.

In 2019 Yukon College became Yukon University. As Yukon University's first Academic Plan, this document advances the bold and aspirational vision of Yukon University's 2022–2027 Strategic Plan: to become a thriving learning and research community leading Canada's North.

Yukon University's Academic Plan draws upon rich contributions from over 200 Yukoners through community, student, faculty, and staff input and feedback sessions. These conversations strengthened our commitment to developing new degree programs and increasing northern-specific research. They also reinforced the importance of trades training, access programs, lifelong learning, and community programming in Yukon University's journey to expand research and learning opportunities in the North, by the North, for the North.

Thank you to all who contributed to the development of this Plan, especially Bronwyn Hancock, Fiona Schmiegelow, the Academic Plan Working Group and all who participated in our sessions. Your wisdom and insight have created a path for us to collaborate and find our way towards a prosperous, inclusive and sustainable future.

¹ The story of Kaax'achgóok is Tlingit (Kiks'adi clan) oral history with many tellers and versions that differ from place to place, including the story shared with Mrs. Sidney's Deisheetaan clan by the Kiks'adi clan many years ago. Published versions of this story are attributed to Andrew P. Johnson (1971; Kiks'adi clan) and Angela Sidney (1988,1995; Deisheetaan clan).

² Both Johnson and Sidney's versions of the story describe how Kaax'achgóok's knowledge, ingenuity, determination, and resilience help him find his way home.

³ AP Johnson's story details Kaax'achgóok using the stars to find his way home.

Message from the Academic Plan Working Group

Following months of engaging conversation, we are thrilled to share Yukon University's first Academic Plan with our YukonU family and the communities we serve. We're inspired by its balance of bold aspirations and concrete actions in pursuit of academic excellence and research advancement in the North.

This plan remains true to YukonU's sense of itself and where it has come from. It draws strength from the community input we started with and embodies the University's commitment to holistic, relevant, and accessible education and trail-breaking research initiatives.

The plan is also a promise to future students of YukonU, and the Working Group would like to acknowledge the remarkable contributions of its student members. Their perspectives and insights enriched the dialogue throughout, and they should feel pride in their contributions.

It has been an honour to have had the opportunity to contribute to this milestone in YukonU's journey. We are proud to have been part of the development of this plan and we look forward to meeting the challenges of realizing its objectives in the years to come.

Sincerely,

The members of the Academic Plan Working Group:

Ayesha Ahmad, YukonU student

Sarah Newton, YukonU student

Pearl Carpina, YukonU student

Christy Huey, YukonU student

Alison Perrin, Senior Research Professional, YukonU Research Centre

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Sara McPhee-Knowles, Instructor, Bachelor of Business Administration

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Fiona Schmiegelow, Senior Advisor, Planning

Bronwyn Hancock, Vice-Provost, Academic and Research



Our journey of learning and transformation

Connecting communities of learners in the North to meet the challenges of today and the opportunities of tomorrow.

We recognize that there are many places of learning and many pathways to learning. As such, we commit to meeting students where they are on their learning journey – in terms of their aspirations and needs. We also recognize that we are on our own learning journey, realizing our place in contributing to a prosperous and sustainable future for all Northerners. In this, we continue to grow as a unique community of learners that thrives together, embodying the spirit and promise of Yukon University as a transformational force in the North.

Our first Academic Plan as a university draws on a strong foundation of programming in the North spanning 60 years and provides direction and clarity to help us drive toward achieving the commitments of the Strategic Plan.

- **Build our identity and nurture our culture as a university**
- **Take our place in advancing reconciliation**
- **Continue to develop our northern expertise**
- **Develop bold thinkers and confident change leaders**
- **Be leaders for the common good**



An institutional Indigenization Strategy and an Equity, Diversity and Inclusivity Strategy will also shape the implementation of the Academic Plan. Yukon University is committed to periodically reviewing the strategies and actions in this Academic Plan to align with the Indigenization Strategy.

The Plan also responds to feedback received during input and feedback sessions carried out across the territory over the past academic year. These conversations emphasized the importance of powerful student experiences, accessibility regardless of entry pathway or chosen academic path, and excellence in delivering relevant programs. A strong imperative to advance reconciliation emerged as an overarching theme. There was also a clear acknowledgement that while northern needs were the priority, many of the challenges we face are driven by a rapidly changing world. These concerns compel us to think globally and act locally, placing considerations around the sustainability of our social, environmental and economic systems at the forefront of all our planning.

The Academic Plan includes five goals, each with strategies and potential actions.

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| 1. Ensure relevance to the North | 3. Enable interdisciplinary learning |
| 2. Amplify Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing | 4. Advance access and inclusion |
| | 5. Embed experiential learning |

Three goals include curriculum review as key strategies. The reviews will build on program review and program development processes to enhance northern relevance and Indigenous-informed content, enable interdisciplinary approaches, and optimize synergies that may emerge.



Goals of the 2023–28 Academic Plan

Ensure relevance to the North

Yukon University is Canada's first University North of 60. We have a responsibility to advance opportunities for research and programming that contribute to a prosperous, inclusive, and sustainable future in the North, and we prioritize the uniqueness, values and needs of the North in all that we do. Our foundation of reciprocal relationships with Yukon First Nations, government, community and private sector partners and students helped us become Yukon University. We will continue to nurture and grow these relationships to ensure we remain responsive to evolving needs. Further, we will work with our partners to understand emerging opportunities and facilitate avenues for students to participate in and benefit from these relationships.

The following strategies and actions to achieve this will include:

- a. Evaluate curricula for northern relevance through program review and development processes.**
 - i.** Align academic and research program priorities to enhance collaboration and strengthen impact.
 - ii.** Identify limitations to northern relevance imposed by accreditation or other external requirements.
 - iii.** Address limitations to northern relevance and enhance relevance where possible.

b. Grow our capacity to contribute high-impact teaching and research and strengthen the impact on specific northern challenges.

- i.** Strengthen and promote Yukon University's Indigenous Governance and Business Administration degrees as flagship programs.
- ii.** Transition our partnered degrees in Education, Social Work and Environmental and Conservation Sciences into Yukon University degrees.
- iii.** Develop new degree programs to meet the emerging needs of the territory.
- iv.** Lead northern-specific research that informs curricula in Yukon University's programs.
- v.** Develop new apprenticeship models or credentials to support northern governments, industry, communities, and citizens, including lifelong learners, to adapt to emerging needs.
- vi.** Enhance access to trades training and sector-specific programming in Yukon communities.
- vii.** Develop continuing education credits for professionals working in the North to maintain currency in changing work environments.
- viii.** Increase our exposure to disruptive technologies and build our capacity to innovate.
- ix.** Provide opportunities for students to learn about disruptive technologies and to explore how to apply or modify the technologies for northern-specific purposes.

c. Develop pathways to support students to progress to professional and graduate study programs.

- i.** Ensure access to research and other experiences to help students become strong candidates for professional degree programs and graduate studies.
- ii.** Explore partnered models to deliver professional and advanced degree programs in Yukon.

d. Seek regular input into educational and research needs from Yukon First Nations, government, community, private sector partners and students in developing program and research priorities.

e. Establish the university library as a place that inspires intellectual curiosity and exploration, supporting users to find, evaluate, and share information efficiently and effectively.

- i.** Provide access to the teaching and expertise to help students navigate the information environment, including building skills to identify misinformation, discern evidence, and share knowledge appropriately.
- ii.** Build a collection of resources and supports for students and faculty to enhance teaching, learning and research.
- iii.** Collaborate with regional and national networks to implement, advocate and educate about open and ethical information practices.

f. Provide spaces for critical dialogue and respectful conversations on issues of northern relevance.

- i.** Establish a regular public seminar series and host forums on topical issues.
- ii.** Embed sustainability concepts in curricula and campus culture, challenging students to approach sustainability through the lens of complete systems, not individual parts.
- iii.** Encourage and support student-led initiatives that address regional sustainability challenges.



Amplify Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing

We honour the cultures, heritage, and rights of Yukon First Nations in the implementation of self-governance and the revitalization of Indigenous knowledge systems, and we celebrate the opportunity for all students to thrive amidst a confluence of worldviews. We recognize that conventional academic learning and assessment methods present barriers to embracing Indigenous worldviews and that the Indigenization of the academy requires the transformative stages of inclusion and decolonization to advance reconciliation and Indigenous resurgence⁴.

The following strategies and actions to achieve this will include:

a. Incorporate Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing in developing and delivering program and course offerings.

- i.** Through program review and development processes, assess the current state of Indigenous-informed curricula and adjust as required.
- ii.** Expand the Elders on Campus program by increasing the presence of Elders to provide services to programs and students.
- iii.** Incorporate land-based learning opportunities wherever possible, building on the potential of our community campuses as destinations to organize and host land-based experiential opportunities.
- iv.** Provide support to faculty to assist with incorporating new content and pedagogies and to introduce culturally inclusive forms of assessment.

⁴ Gaudry, A. and D. Lorenz. 2018. Indigenization as inclusion, reconciliation, and decolonization: navigating the different visions for indigenizing the Canadian Academy. *AlterNative* Vol. 14: 218–227



Photo: archbould.com

b. Increase Yukon First Nation cultural competency among students.

- i. Build on Yukon First Nation core competency requirements.
- ii. Increase access to Yukon First Nation language instruction and practice.

c. Support recruitment and retention of Indigenous students, faculty, and knowledge holders across YukonU.

- i. Create programs to support the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge holders across YukonU campuses.
- ii. Offer wrap-around support for Indigenous students.

d. Collaborate with the Yukon First Nation Education Directorate, First Nation School Board, and Yukon First Nations to develop transition programming between secondary and post-secondary systems.

- i. Learn from and share the innovations in pedagogy being developed for Yukon's Kindergarten to Grade 12 schools.
- ii. Increase dual credit opportunities for high school students.



Photo: GBP Creative

Enable interdisciplinary learning

Complex and dynamic social, environmental, and economic challenges in the North require problem-solving strategies that cultivate bold thinking and collaboration. Innovative, interdisciplinary programming that bridges disciplines and knowledge systems encourages holistic thinking through inquiry-based learning, research-informed teaching, collaboration with a broad range of partners in program development and delivery, and the co-production of knowledge.

While it may not be possible to incorporate interdisciplinary approaches into every program, all students will benefit from exposure to approaches that promote an understanding of how disciplines may be interconnected.

Strategies and actions to achieve this will include:

a. Assess the current state of interdisciplinary approaches to teaching and research at YukonU.

- i.** Showcase examples where successful integration is happening.
- ii.** Identify programs or programmatic areas where greater integration could be achieved.
- iii.** Reduce barriers to students accessing curricula across programs and disciplines.



b. Explore the potential for new courses, degree minors or new degrees that leverage existing resources to create interdisciplinary curricula.

- i.** Re-imagine programming that bridges disciplinary areas and knowledge systems to create new learning opportunities.
- ii.** Pursue opportunities to align courses and programs with external initiatives that embrace holistic thinking.

c. Develop experiences that expose students to interdisciplinary approaches to problem-solving.

- i.** Introduce a cornerstone seminar series that exposes students to speakers from different disciplines and worldviews addressing a common theme or challenge.
- ii.** Integrate related thematic content into curricula where possible.
- iii.** Offer community-based learning opportunities tied to the thematic area.
- iv.** Work with Yukon First Nations, government, community and private sector partners in identifying challenges that require interdisciplinary approaches to programs and research and can be implemented through thematic programming across YukonU campuses.



Photo: Josh Schroeder

Advance access and inclusion

Student health and well-being are fundamental to student success. Yukon University commits to meeting students where they are at in their learning journey. Fostering well-being involves expanding programming in communities, increasing life-long learning opportunities and reducing barriers to learning. Additionally, we recognize that increasing accessibility to the university's programs and services to diverse groups will provide opportunities for students from diverse backgrounds and abilities to thrive. Opportunities to celebrate and promote inclusion will help build relationships, enhance student life and foster a sense of belonging among all students.

Strategies and activities to achieve this will include:

a. Centre student needs and reduce barriers to learning.

- i.** Enhance academic supports and services for students with barriers to learning.
- ii.** Promote financial aid opportunities for students.
- iii.** Offer opportunities that nourish student physical, mental, emotional and spiritual well-being.

b. Advance approaches that embrace different learning pathways.

- i.** Incorporate blended and flexible learning options that improve student success.
- ii.** Pilot alternative assessment techniques that include competency-based measures.
- iii.** Explore micro-credentials that can ladder into formal programs.



Photo: GBP Creative

c. Enhance opportunities for community campuses to support varied programming and lifelong learning opportunities.

- i.** Streamline student recruitment and onboarding process across the university by integrating community campus and student life processes for recruitment, advising, testing, and registering students.
- ii.** Continue to offer innovative programming at community campuses.
- iii.** Explore opportunities to coordinate the delivery of community programming for initiatives with shared priorities.
- iv.** Explore the potential to transform the Tr'odëk Hätr'runohtän Zho (Dawson City) campus into a regional campus offering credit and non-credit programming that serves social, economic, health, cultural and infrastructure development needs.

d. Promote diversity and respectful relationships.

- i.** Organize events to increase awareness of and celebrate cultural diversity.

e. Foster inclusion by promoting and delivering LGBTQ2S+ pride activities across campuses.

f. Increase opportunities for international students at Yukon University.

- i.** Develop an international plan.
- ii.** Ensure international students have access to student support that enhances their experience at the university and increases retention.

g. Enhance access and success of diverse student groups, including newcomers to the Yukon.

- i.** Explore opportunities to advance foreign credential recognition.



Embed experiential learning in programs

Experiential learning, in the classroom and on the land, with faculty experts, First Nation knowledge holders, and through hands-on research involvement and land-based learning creates a unique academic experience for YukonU students. Recognizing and advancing community learning opportunities and work-integrated learning brings together a broader community of partners and mentors to further enhance opportunities. Exchange and study abroad programs across the North create valuable experiences for students and faculty.

All YukonU students should have experiential opportunities during their studies to ensure they have a unique academic experience grounded in the context of the North. Strategies and activities to achieve this will include:

- a. Through community learning opportunities, increase the potential of community campuses as destinations for experiential learning, relationship building and land-based learning that amplifies Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing.**
- b. Increase experiential learning opportunities for students studying at Ayamdigut Campus in Whitehorse to take advantage of local learning environments.**



Photo: Benoit Turcotte

c. Establish work-integrated learning opportunities that reflect priority needs of the North.

- i. Develop a framework for work-integrated learning.**

d. Create enhanced opportunities and supports for student involvement in research.

e. Increase circumpolar connections by promoting faculty and student opportunities for exchange and study abroad programs across the circumpolar North.

Next steps

We are excited to realize the full potential of our first Academic Plan as Yukon University and its essential role in nurturing a prosperous, inclusive and sustainable future in the North. Progress on the goals of this plan will be reported to the Academic and Research Planning and Priorities Committee, which will in turn report progress to the Senate. Milestone achievements will be shared with the YukonU community through the YukonU update and the Office of the President and Vice-Chancellor.





Yukon
University