

LIBRARY AND LEARNING CENTRE OPENS AT THOMPSON RIVERS UNIVERSITY  
Brown Family House of Learning a showcase of sustainable design

TORONTO – Thompson Rivers University inaugurated the Brown Family House of Learning today in Kamloops, British Columbia. Designed by Diamond and Schmitt Architects with David Nairne + Associates, the four-storey mixed-use building at the heart of the campus creates a dynamic new centre for students and faculty.

Design elements inspired by First Nations dwellings and crafts blend with sustainable features to put the Brown Family House of Learning on track for LEED Gold certification. By maximizing sightlines through double storey volumes and extensive glazing, the building presents stunning views of the Thompson River Valley in central British Columbia and provides abundant natural light throughout.

“The design reflects not only a contemporary approach to an interactive and collaborative learning experience but also reflects the local culture, landscape and connection to First Nations people”, said Donald Schmitt, principal with Diamond and Schmitt Architects.

The building uses the circular form of the Campus Common as a foil for the north façade, a sweeping glazed arc opening onto the main public space of the campus. This forms a luminous lantern shaped to the curves of the landscape that is transparent, welcoming and accessible. The north exposure allows a significant amount of glass to be employed, in this case in a weave-like manner reflective of the First Nations traditional patterning. Intermittent fritted glass panels create a vertical rhythm with areas of transparent glass. By contrast, the south façade has solid vertical brick elements alternating with strips of glazing. Depth is provided with the addition of horizontal fixed sunshade louvers that serve to decrease solar gain on that façade.

The 7,153-square-metre (77,000-square-foot) facility includes a research library with a large central hearth, a learning commons, classrooms and instructional labs, 58 faculty offices, flexible meeting rooms, a gallery and café. These elements are unified by a central four-storey atrium with a sky lit biofilter ‘living wall’ comprised of tropical plants that purify the air and reduce energy costs to heat and cool the building.

Adjacent to and linked to the main building is an assembly hall, the largest in-the-round lecture theatre in British Columbia that features state-of-the-art technology to support lectures, meetings and conferences in a setting inspired by the tradition of Aboriginal culture. The Irving K. Barber British Columbia Centre references the traditional Kekuli or ‘pithouse’ constructed as the winter home of the nomadic Secwepemc people. This was a round habitat dug-down into the ground several feet with a log superstructure added at ground level and a roof consisting of sod, peat and soil. The contemporary expression of this traditional dwelling simulates the structure of a Kekuli through the use of a subterranean circular concrete foundation with a roof designed of massive Douglas Fir glu-lam beams. Recycled Pine Beetle damaged logs are used to infill the beams and a green roof surrounds a large central skylight.

“The Brown Family House of Learning is a spectacular example of how Thompson Rivers University puts its learner-centered culture into practice to create a stunning space that is welcoming and inclusive for students from all nations and is also an advanced, sustainable building design. It is sure to become a hub of intellectual and social activity on campus,” said Dr. Alan Shaver, President and Vice-Chancellor of TRU.

Perched on a corner of the roof of the new building is a sculpture by artist John McEwen. Coyote Watch is made of Coreten steel and fashioned from various shapes and sizes of star patterns. The animal is positioned in a loping stride towards the rising sun.

The Brown Family House of Learning is the first LEED target building on the fast-growing campus of TRU, British Columbia’s newest university. Originally founded as Caribou College, the university became a degree-granting institution in 1995 and was named Thompson Rivers University in 2005. It has over 13,000 students on campus and an additional 8,000 in distance learning programs. Diamond and Schmitt Architects is currently designing the Faculty of Law for TRU, the first new law school in Canada in 30 years.

Diamond and Schmitt Architects ([www.dsai.ca](http://www.dsai.ca)) is a leading Canadian full-service architectural practice and is the recipient of more than 200 awards, including six Governor General’s Awards for Architecture. The firm is recognized for sustainable design expertise in academic and research buildings, the performing arts, healthcare facilities, residential and recreational properties. Current projects include redevelopment of Medicine Hat Regional Hospital in Alberta, the Papadakis Integrated Sciences Building at Drexel University in Philadelphia and The New Mariinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg, Russia.

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## **Building Fact Sheet**

Brown Family House of Learning Thompson Rivers University

Total size: 7,153 square metres (77,000 square feet)

### **Program Components**

#### **Library Commons**

- Concourse and Library Café
- Learning Commons
- Centre for Teaching and Learning
- Collections
- Seating and Study areas
- Support
- Project Rooms

#### **House of Learning**

- Assembly Hall
- Offices – 58 in total
- First Nations Offices
- General Faculty Offices
- Classrooms
- Instructional Labs

### **Materials**

- Douglas Fir glu-lam beams and vertical bracing for exterior glazing.
- Triple Glazed Curtain-wall with fritted glass
- Masonry Veneer Cavity wall
- Exposed Architectural Concrete - board formed pattern
- Ceilings of suspended open slat Western Hemlock to allow radiant ceilings to heat and cool the public spaces
- Green roof on both the Library Commons and the Assembly Hall

### **Sustainability**

- LEED Gold
- Green Roof
- Living Wall
- Radiant Slab Heating and Cooling
- Diffuser Ventilation
- Recycled content in building materials

### **Biofilter Living Wall**

Diamond and Schmitt Architects pioneered the commercial application of the biofilter living wall working with its developer, NEDLAW Living Walls, at the University of Guelph-Humber campus in Toronto in 2004. This Canadian technology uses biofiltration to purify indoor air by removing volatile organic compounds, odours and dust spores.

Plants are bedded in a synthetic rooting media. They are nourished hydroponically by water that is pumped to the top of the wall and flows down. Contaminated room air is drawn through the beneficial microorganisms growing in the root zone of the plants that utilize airborne pollutants as food and break them down into their benign components – water and carbon dioxide. Biofilters can eliminate 80 percent of airborne chemicals emitted from building materials and furnishings, combustion pollutants like carbon monoxide and toxic particles and biological contaminants such as moulds and bacteria.

Rather than draw air from the outside, which has to be heated or cooled depending on the season, recycled biofilter air reduces the need and cost for modifying outdoor air. Most living walls are fully integrated into a building's air handling system. They draw air through the biofilter and send the clean air into the building through the supply airshafts.

The biofilter was developed at the University of Guelph's Controlled Environment System Research Facility and resulted from an investigation done for the International Space Agency to purify the air at a proposed lunar base. This early research was funded by The Ontario Centres for Excellence and the Canadian and European Space Agencies. The living wall biofilter is a significant and symbolic addition to the advancement of sustainable design initiatives applied by Diamond and Schmitt Architects.



Diamond and Schmitt Architects / Cicada Design



Jeff Hanning, Diamond and Schmitt Architects

