

# Indigenization of Post-Secondary Education

*“Much of the current state of troubled relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians is attributable to education institutions and what they have taught, or failed to teach, over many generations. Despite this history—or, perhaps more correctly, because of its potential—the Truth and Reconciliation Commission believes that education is also the key to reconciliation.”<sup>1</sup>*

Indigenization of post-secondary education is the practice of acknowledging and redressing the ways in which Indigenous Peoples, their scholarship, history, culture, and ways of knowing have been excluded from or made invisible within post-secondary institutions and post-secondary education.

Indigenization recognizes that post-secondary institutions, workers, and students all have a significant role to play in reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples.

While Indigenization needs to take place across the post-secondary sector, this work is also highly local. Indigenization practices at a specific university or college should embrace local Indigenous nations and communities, as well as the nations represented among the staff and student body.

## What does Indigenization look like in practice?

The work of Indigenization must be holistic and address all parts of the institution and community. This includes hiring, recruitment and admissions, curriculum development, teaching and learning, research, support services, leadership and administration, and the physical space of campus.

- Hiring, promotions and tenure:
  - Ensuring that Indigenous Peoples are hired as faculty and staff throughout the institution and not just in Indigenous Studies departments or in Indigenous student services;
  - Hiring Indigenous faculty and staff in cohorts or groups so that they are not the sole Indigenous representative and have supportive peers;
  - Providing training, mentorship and support in order to retain Indigenous staff and faculty and help them to succeed;
  - Equal access to tenure and promotion with explicit recognition of community contributions, lived experience, knowledge of Indigenous languages, and Indigenous scholarship.

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<sup>1</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*. July 2015.

- Recruitment and admissions:
  - Identifying and eliminating barriers to recruitment of Indigenous students;
  - Providing targeted scholarships and financial aid to Indigenous students;
  - Providing culturally appropriate supports to new Indigenous students to help them succeed.
- Curriculum development, teaching, and learning:
  - Requiring all students to learn about Indigenous rights; Canada's history of colonization, genocide, and systemic racism against First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples; and the cultural, political, and economic contributions of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples through mandatory course requirements taught by qualified instructors such as the course requirements at Lakehead University and the University of Winnipeg;
  - Integrating Indigenous scholarship and knowledge into traditional curriculum;
  - Working directly with Indigenous scholars and knowledge keepers to understand, protect, and integrate Indigenous knowledge into teaching and learning.
- Research:
  - Providing scholarships for Indigenous graduate students and post-docs;
  - Funding Indigenous researchers in their chosen areas of scholarship;
  - Respecting Indigenous forms of knowledge sharing and gathering as a valid form of scholarship;
  - Investing in research into Indigenous history, culture, and ways of knowing;
  - Setting a high ethical standard for research involving Indigenous participants.
- Support services:
  - Ensuring that Indigenous students have access to services that support them academically, emotionally, spiritually, and culturally throughout their post-secondary education;
  - Creating bridging programs to help Indigenous students transition to post-secondary education, including alternative pathways to enrollment;
  - Providing training to staff to ensure they know how to support students who are receiving funding from band councils;
  - Ensuring that Indigenous students have access to culturally appropriate, affordable housing and emergency travel funds where required;
  - Offering culturally appropriate services such as child care and family housing that allow Indigenous students to care for their families and pursue post-secondary education;
  - Providing time and space for traditional Indigenous practices and Indigenous events on campus, including ceremonial spaces;
  - Where appropriate, incorporating traditional Indigenous practices or ceremonies into institutional gatherings or events.
- Leadership and administration:
  - Ensuring that Indigenous Peoples are represented at senior leadership levels within the Institution including senior administrators and on the Board of Governors;
  - Constantly evaluating, reporting on, and seeking to improve the practice of Indigenization with representation from Indigenous communities included in the committee or working group tasked with this responsibility.

- Campus and community spaces:
  - Providing safe spaces for Indigenous students, staff, and faculty to gather;
  - Ensuring that First Nations, Inuit, and Métis art and symbols are represented on campus;
  - Recognizing the land the campus is on in signage, on the website, and on institutional documents and literature;
  - Including First Nations, Inuit, and Métis names for buildings and streets on campus and signage in local Indigenous languages where appropriate.

## What can CUPE Locals do to support Indigenization?

While much of the work that CUPE members can do to support Indigenization will come through their roles as students, faculty, or staff, there are particular ways in which CUPE Locals can ensure they are supporting the work of Indigenization at their institution:

- Collective agreements:
  - Collective agreements should acknowledge efforts to hire, train, promote, and retrain Indigenous faculty and staff.
  - Existing collective agreements should also be reviewed to identify any language which might represent a barrier to hiring, retaining, or promoting Indigenous workers.
  - Locals should also consider bargaining leaves for cultural needs and practices, including leaves for ceremonial practices and recognition of expansive kinship circles for bereavement and care leaves.
  - “Nothing about us without us” – ensure that you are consulting Indigenous members of your local to identify their priorities for bargaining.
  - Locals need to do the work of educating their own members as to why addressing Indigenization and the priorities of Indigenous workers through collective bargaining is important.
  - For more ideas on bargaining collective agreement language related to the needs of Indigenous members, check out CUPE National’s [online guide to Collective Agreement Language Responding to the Needs of Aboriginal Members](#).
- Union practices:
  - Encourage Indigenous members of your local union to run for leadership positions and support them as candidates and as elected representatives.
  - Create an Indigenous caucus for your local union and/or an Indigenous representative position on your local Executive.
  - Begin union meetings with a land acknowledgement or a ceremony by a local Indigenous elder or knowledge keeper.
  - Encourage and sponsor members to participate in one of the workshops on Indigenous Peoples offered by CUPE Union Education.
  - Make solidarity actions in support of Indigenous rights a priority in your local.
  - For more ideas on steps your local can take to Walk the Talk, check out CUPE’s [Practical Guide to Reconciliation for CUPE Locals](#).

## Resources for further reading

For more in-depth information on what Indigenization looks like in practice, check out the following resources:

- [Indigenizing Academia](#) – Stryker Calvez
- [Indigenization as inclusion, reconciliation, and decolonization: navigating the different visions for indigenizing the Canadian Academy](#) – Adam Gaudry and Danielle Lorenz
- [100 ways to Indigenize and decolonize academic programs and courses](#) – Dr. Shauneen Pete
- [Resources for Indignizing Higher Education](#) (a collection of links to books, chapters, journal articles and more on initiatives, organization, and research methodology) – Thompson Rivers University Faculty of Education and Social Work

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