



POLICY PAPER

Indigenous Students

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ABOUT OUSA

OUSA represents the interests of 160,000 professional and undergraduate, full-time and part-time university students at eight student associations across Ontario. Our vision is for an accessible, affordable, accountable, high-quality, and equitable post-secondary education in Ontario. To achieve this vision we've come together to develop solutions to challenges facing higher education, build broad consensus for our policy options, and lobby the government to implement them.

The member institutions and home office of the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance operate on the ancestral and traditional territories of the Attawandaron (Neutral), Haudenosaunee, Huron-Wendat, Leni-Lunaape, Anishinaabek, and Mississauga Peoples.

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LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is important that we open this policy paper with an acknowledgement of the land on which OUSA and our member schools sit. This is the land we live on, go to school on, and work on. It is the traditional territory of many Indigenous Nations as both Treaty and unceded land. It is the land where our post-secondary institutions are built, rooted in a deep history of settler-colonial violence that continues to this day. It is important that we recognize this colonial and anti-Indigenous foundation on which education and universities were built in order to learn the truth and unlearn the behaviours, processes, and structures that uphold and build on this foundation. This unlearning, however, must be accompanied by an active effort to dismantle these colonial structures. To this end, we begin with our land acknowledgements, contextualizing our recommendations for action.

OUSA's Home Office is situated on the traditional territory of many nations, including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnawbe, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee, and the Wendat Peoples, and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples. The land where OUSA's Home Office is situated is covered by Treaty 13 with the Mississaugas of the Credit.

Brock University is situated on the traditional territory of the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe peoples, many of whom continue to live and work here today. This territory is covered by the Upper Canada Treaties and is within the land protected by the Dish with One Spoon Wampum agreement.

Laurentian University is located on the traditional lands of the Atikameksheng Anishnawbek. The City of Greater Sudbury also includes the traditional lands of Wahnapiatae First Nation. This land is governed by the Robinson-Huron Treaty of 1850.

McMaster University stands on the traditional territory shared between the Haudenosaunee Confederacy and the Anishinaabe nations. This territory is covered by the Upper Canada Treaties, is within the lands protected by the "Dish With One Spoon" wampum agreement and is directly adjacent to Haldimand Treaty territory.

Ontario Tech University acknowledges the lands and people of the Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation which is covered by the Williams Treaties and are the traditional territory of the Mississaugas, a branch of the greater Anishinaabeg Nation, including Algonquin, Ojibway, Odawa and Pottawatomi.

Queen's University is situated on the territory of the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabek. Ne Queen's University e'tho no'we nikanónhsote tsi no'we ne Haudenosaunee tánon Anishinaabek tehatihsnónhsahere ne óhontsa. Gimaakwe Gchi-gkinoomaagegamig atemagad Naadowe miinwaa Anishinaabe aking. This territory is included in the Dish With One Spoon

Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement between the Iroquois Confederacy and the Confederacy of the Ojibwe and Allied Nations to peaceably share and care for the resources around the Great Lakes.

Trent University Durham GTA is located on the Treaty and traditional territory of the Michi Saagiig Anishinaabeg. This land is covered by the Williams Treaties of 1923.

The **University of Waterloo** is located on the traditional territory of the Neutral, Anishinaabeg and Haudenosaunee peoples. The University of Waterloo is situated on the Haldimand Tract, the land promised to the Six Nations that includes six miles on each side of the Grand River.

Western University is located on the traditional lands of the Anishinaabek, Haudenosaunee, Lūnaapéewak and Attawandaron peoples, on lands connected with the London Township and Sombra Treaties of 1796 and the Dish with One Spoon Covenant Wampum. This land continues to be home to diverse Indigenous peoples (First Nations, Métis and Inuit) whom we recognize as contemporary stewards of the land and vital contributors of our society.

Wilfrid Laurier University and its campuses are located on the Haldimand Tract, a traditional territory of the Neutral, Anishnaabe and Haudenosaunee peoples. This land is part of the Dish with One Spoon Treaty between the Haudenosaunee and Anishnaabe peoples and symbolizes the agreement to share, protect our resources and not engage in conflict.

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We would like to thank Emily Dubois Brooks for her guidance and input in the planning and development of this iteration of the paper.

Thank you to the staff across OUSA's member schools who provided feedback, guidance and promotional support in the planning stages of this paper. Specifically, we would like to thank Mel Akiwen, Western University's Indigenous Students Health and Wellness Promoter, Kaitlyn Austin, Brock University's Student Advisor and Recruiter for the First Nations and Metis Student Centre Emma Smith, Emma Smith University of Waterloo's Indigenous Student Experience Manager, Lisa Doxtator Queen's University's Cultural Counsellor, Jocelyne Pelletier Ontario Tech University's Indigenous Cultural Advisor, Mary Laur Laurentian's Indigenous Sharing and Learning Centre Director and, Askuwheateau University of Waterloo's Indigenous Wellness Navigator.

These policies were also deeply informed by the Circle Work Sessions held during the planning stages. Thank you, Lisa Doxator and Mel Akiwen for volunteering your time as Elders to open each session in a good way and support students as they shared their stories. To the students who participated: Melissa Podnar, Katie Pyson, Aiyana Roberts and those who wished to stay anonymous, thank you for your candor and willingness to share your experience for the betterment of Indigenous Students across the province.

Finally, thank you to the Indigenous delegates who attended Fall GA and provided their input for the final draft of the paper.

OUSA is committed to continuing this work moving forward, and it would not have been possible without all of the people involved. We hope to expand and deepen these connections moving forward.

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GLOSSARY

The following definitions and concepts are used to inform this policy paper. Some of the definitions are legal or formally recognized definitions and are used to delineate people, groups, policies, or programs. Others are definitions for words and concepts that have either been misused, misunderstood, or co-opted and our authors have included these definitions as a way to signal the definition that they were working with when writing this policy paper. It is also important to recognize that many of the terms included here have more nuanced and complex definitions that cannot be captured in a glossary entry.

Ally: An Indigenous-minded person who believes in Indigenous voices, sovereignty, traditions, and activism. A true ally is an active participant in decolonization, education, and deconstructing colonial western power.

Anti-Indigenous racism: “Anti-Indigenous racism is the ongoing race-based discrimination, negative stereotyping, and injustice experienced by Indigenous Peoples within Canada. It includes ideas and practices that establish, maintain and perpetuate power imbalances, systemic barriers, and inequitable outcomes that stem from the legacy of colonial policies and practices in Canada.”¹

Band/Indigenous Governments: The governing body of a band set up under the requirements of the federal Indian Act. Each nation is typically represented by a Band Council chaired by an elected chief, and sometimes also a hereditary chief. Chiefs and councils are not the same as traditional governance structures. Councils are elected for two - or three-year terms (under the Indian Act or band custom) to carry out First Nation business, which may include education; water, sewer and fire services; bylaws; community buildings, schools and roads; and other community business services.²

Colonization: Colonization or the colonial mindset refers to the action of settling in Indigenous territories, establishing control, exploiting, and profiting off of that settlement.

Colonialism: The Policies and practices that a person or a group of people engage in to exert control over an Indigenous population, as well as to exploit the Indigenous population and their lands.³

Culturally appropriate: Working to understand and accept [Indigenous] cultures, it also means to ensure your actions, comments, and thoughts do not appropriate the culture for yourself.

¹ Government of Ontario, Data Standards for the Identification and Monitoring of Systemic Racism (Government of Ontario, updated February 27, 2019), “Glossary,”

<https://www.ontario.ca/document/data-standards-identification-and-monitoring-systemic-racism/glossary>.

² “Frequently Asked Questions,” Canadian Geographic: Indigenous Peoples Atlas of Canada, accessed May 26, 2026, <https://indigenouspeoplesatlasofcanada.ca/article/fn-frequently-asked-questions/>

³ “Colonization and Colonialism,” Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health, accessed May 27, 2026, <https://campusmentalhealth.ca/toolkits/anti-oppressive-practice-part-2/colonization-and-colonialism/>

Culturally competent: “The ability to understand, appreciate and interact with people from cultures or belief systems different from one's own.”⁴

Culturally relevant: “A pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes.”⁵

Culturally representative: An accurate, nuanced, and appropriate representation of Indigenous cultures, practices, and ways of knowing.

Culturally sensitive: “People who seamlessly interact with others from different cultures by following the norms of that culture. They feel that they can respect their own values while adapting to the values of other cultures they interact with. They use empathy effectively.”⁶

Decolonization: “Decolonization, once viewed as the formal process of handing over the instruments of government, is now recognized as a long-term process involving the bureaucratic, cultural, linguistic and psychological divesting of colonial power.”⁷

Enfranchisement: A “legal process for terminating a person’s Indian status and conferring full Canadian citizenship. Enfranchisement was a key feature of the Canadian federal government’s assimilation policies regarding [Indigenous] peoples.”⁸ It referred to the removal of status by way of enlistment in the war, voluntary enfranchisement, and various forms of involuntary measures.

Indian Act/Indian Status: The Primary law the Government of Canada uses to define, determine, and administer Indian Status to First Nations peoples throughout Canada. The Indian Act was first introduced in 1876 and was designed for the purpose of assimilating First Nations peoples and cultures into Euro-Canadian society. Indian Status is the legal standing of a person who is registered under the Indian Act. A person with Status must meet the eligibility criteria outlined under the Indian Act to be entitled to the rights and benefits prescribed by the Act.⁹

⁴ Tori DeAngelis, “In Search of Cultural Competence,” *Monitor on Psychology* 46, no. 3 (2015): 64, <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2015/03/cultural-competence>.

⁵ “Cultural Relevance,” *AVID*, accessed January 3, 2022, <https://www.avid.org/cultural-relevance>.

⁶ Abdulmarof Hamidzay, “What is Cultural Sensitivity,” *LinkedIn*, November 17, 2018, <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/what-cultural-sensitivity-abdulmarof-hamidzay/>.

⁷ Linda Tuhiwai Smith, cited in “A brief definition of decolonization and Indigenization,” *Indigenous Corporate Training*, March 29, 2017, <https://www.ictinc.ca/blog/a-brief-definition-of-decolonization-and-indigenization>. See also Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, “Decolonization is not a metaphor,” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012), <https://jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/des/article/view/18630>; “Decolonization and Indigenization” in Ian Cull, Robert L. A. Hancock, Stephanie McKeown, Michelle Pidgeon, and Adrienne Vedan, *Pulling Together: A Guide for Front-Line Staff, Student Services, and Advisors* (OpenTextBC, accessed October 1, 2021), <https://opentextbc.ca/indigenizationfrontlineworkers/chapter/decolonization-and-indigenization/>.

⁸ Karrmen Crey, “Enfranchisement,” *Indigenous Foundations*, accessed January 3, 2022, <https://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/enfranchisement/>.

⁹ “Rights and Benefits for People Registered Under the Indian Act and First Nations Members,” Government of Canada, accessed May 28, 2026, <https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1769110096971/1769110177145>

Indigenization: A “collaborative process of naturalizing Indigenous intent, interactions, and processes and making them evident to transform spaces, places, and hearts. In the context of post-secondary education, this involves including Indigenous perspectives and approaches. Indigenization benefits not only Indigenous students but all students, teachers, staff members, and community members involved or impacted by Indigenization.”¹⁰

Indigenous education institutions: Indigenous governed and operated institutions that provide opportunities for students to start and complete post-secondary education credentials in a flexible, personalized, and culturally sensitive learning environment. There are nine Indigenous education institutions recognized by the Government of Ontario under the *Indigenous Institutes Act, 2017*.¹¹

Indigenous students: First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students.

Indigenous ways of knowing: Knowledge production and dissemination that requires a holistic mindset to create and engage with. Often relies on oral narrative or storytelling with the intention of allowing learners to form a connection to their lands and cultures. Indigenous knowledge celebrates community connection and people coming together over their interpretation of knowledge.¹²

Intergenerational trauma: Trauma that occurs when the effects of trauma experienced by one generation are passed on to the next. Trauma may be passed through storytelling, behaviours, parenting techniques, and biological changes. For Indigenous Peoples, intergenerational trauma exists due to forced assimilation, experiences in the Residential School System, and the continued oppression faced under colonial governance structures.¹³

Intersectionality: Coined in 1989 by Black feminist legal scholar Kimberle Crenshaw, intersectionality describes how systems of oppression overlap to create distinct experiences for people with multiple identity categories; such as race, gender, age, socio-economic status, and sexual orientation.¹⁴

Knowledge Holder/Knowledge Keeper: A holder, keeper, and sharer of Indigenous knowledge. Can refer to an Elder.

¹⁰ “Decolonization and Indigenization” in Ian Cull, Robert L. A. Hancock, Stephanie McKeown, Michelle Pidgeon, and Adrienne Vedan, *Pulling Together: A Guide for Front-Line Staff, Student Services, and Advisors* (OpenTextBC, accessed October 1, 2021),

<https://opentextbc.ca/indigenizationfrontlineworkers/chapter/decolonization-and-indigenization/>.

¹¹ “Indigenous Institutes,” Government of Ontario, accessed May 29, 2026,

<https://www.ontario.ca/page/indigenous-institutes>

¹² Georgina Martin and Jo-Ann Archibald, *Drumming Our Way Home: Intergenerational Learning, Teaching, and Indigenous Ways of Knowing*. (University of British Columbia Press, 2024). 11-16.

¹³ “History,” The Healing of Seven Generations, accessed May 29, 2026,

<https://healingofthesevengenerations.ca/history/>

¹⁴ “Kimberle Crenshaw’s Intersectional Feminism,” JSTOR Daily, August 1, 2020,

<https://daily.jstor.org/kimberle-crenshaws-isintersectional-feminism/>

Reconciliation: The restoration of friendly relations between Indigenous Peoples and the Canadian Government through concrete actions, continuous education, and decolonization of spaces.

Reservation/Reserves: A parcel of land where legal title is held by the Crown (Government of Canada) for the use and benefit of a particular First Nation.¹⁵

Self-Determination: The inherent right of Indigenous peoples to freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social, and cultural development.¹⁶

Sponsored student: A sponsored student is a First Nations or Inuk student who is financially sponsored, through the Government of Canada's Post-Secondary Student Support Program or Inuit Post-Secondary Education Strategy, to attend post-secondary education.¹⁷

Treaties/Treaty Rights: Agreements made between the Government of Canada, Indigenous groups, and sometimes provinces and territories that define the ongoing rights and obligations on all sides. These rights are recognized and affirmed under section 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982*.¹⁸

“Ministry of Indigenous Affairs and First Nations Economic Reconciliation,” hereby referred to as **“MIAFNER”**

“Ministry of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence, and Security,” hereby referred to as **“MCURES”**

“Indigenous Services Canada,” hereby referred to as **“ISC”**

¹⁵ “Additions to Reserve,” Government of Canada, accessed May 29, 2026, <https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1332267668918/1611930372477>

¹⁶ “United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples,” United Nations, September 13, 2007, https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/11/UNDRIP_E_web.pdf

¹⁷ For more information on who is eligible for these programs, visit <https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1100100033682/1531933580211> or <https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1578850688146/1578850715764>.

¹⁸ “About Treaties,” Government of Canada, accessed June 8, 2026, <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1100100028574/1529354437231#chp2>

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The *Indigenous Students* policy paper was developed, researched, and written by Indigenous undergraduate students attending one of the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliances member institutions. The authors of this paper drafted the principles, concerns, and recommendations found below with the recognition and understanding that colonial violence in Canada did not end. It evolved.

Indigenous students throughout the province continue to be underrepresented within spaces of higher education and underserved by both the provincial government and post-secondary institutions. Utilizing evidence that is grounded in the lived experiences of Indigenous students gained through Circle Work sessions, Indigenous legal and governance traditions, and the recognition that performative reconciliation without structural change is insufficient, this paper focuses on the resilience of Indigenous students and communities, while providing recommendations that act as a starting point for meaningful decolonization and reconciliation efforts needed to equitably improve the experiences of Indigenous students within post-secondary institutions.

The lessons learned during the development of the *Indigenous Students* policy paper will continue to inform the policy and advocacy work that the OUSA does moving forward. While the development and writing of this paper is a necessary step in the organization's decolonization journey, OUSA is committed to lobbying on and advocating for the implementation of these recommendations.

Find a full summary of this paper's concerns and recommendations in the [Policy Brief](#).

A NOTE FROM THE AUTHORS

This policy paper is written from the lived experience of Indigenous students occupying space within western colonial governance and education systems in Canada that were designed to and continue to marginalize Indigenous Peoples, despite decades of acknowledgment, apology, and symbolic “reconciliation.” The federal government of Canada spent hundreds of years committing atrocities and genocide against the people who provided aid to them. These effects are still interwoven into every facet of contemporary western society. Until the full story is told and meaningful systemic change is made, no real reconciliation can ever begin.

From a young age, I felt profoundly out of place in western systems that normalized harm toward the land, women, Indigenous Peoples, and anyone who did not conform to the patriarchal and colonial picture of perfection. I struggled to understand how I was expected to find purpose within political, economic, and societal structures built on the dispossession of my ancestors and the silencing of voices like mine. I did not agree with how we as a society treated the land, water, or each other; it felt like I was in the wrong place. The cumulative effect of these systems often produced anger and hopelessness, a sad realization that equality was not something I would see in my lifetime. Therefore, my unwillingness to conform to what this society wanted me to be, quiet, agreeable, complacent, means a lifetime of fighting. However, when I began to discover Indigenous and Traditional ways of thinking, it felt like I was finally home; this was the way I saw the world. I never really realized just how completely out of place I was. I was trying to fit into a mould that was never made to fit me.

Unfortunately, to the rest of the world, I am still an Indigenous woman before anything else. I learned early that knowledge alone was insufficient. No matter how informed, articulate, or confident I was, my contributions were often dismissed or undervalued. I found myself needing to be louder, stronger, and more resilient than my male or white counterparts simply to be taken seriously or acknowledged at all. This was not a matter of individual bias, but a structural reality rooted in patriarchal and colonial systems that continue to privilege certain bodies and voices over others. Colonial policies targeting Indigenous Peoples were explicitly designed to erase us. Residential schools sought to “kill the Indian in the child,” and contemporary policies continue this objective through different mechanisms. The regulation of First Nations status through blood quantum, the historical removal of status from Indigenous women who married non-Indigenous men, and the destruction of familial records disrupted kinship, identity, and cultural continuity. Growing up off reserve, as a mixed Indigenous person, I internalized the belief that I was too removed to reconnect. Having “enough blood” did not erase that wall so many of us can feel when reconnecting, thanks to colonialism. That sense of dislocation is not an unfortunate side effect, it was an intended outcome of assimilationist policy.

Once I realized the government wanted me to feel like this, reconnecting to my culture has become an act of resistance. Wearing my mother's jewelry or a ribbon skirt, listening to Elders, and participating in ceremonies are now not only allowing me to feel more whole and at peace

with myself, but also letting John A. Macdonald know he failed. Those before me would have been beaten and killed for things I can now do freely, I will never stop learning my language, learning my history, and listening to stories of those who could not. Through learning Indigenous worldviews, particularly matriarchal governance structures and land-based relationships, I found a sense of belonging and contentment that western society never offered. For the first time I agreed with the world around me. It was not a constant battle between structures that were not made for me. Teachings that understand land as a living relative rather than a commodity, and that emphasize reciprocity, gratitude, and responsibility, reflect how I have always believed the world should function. Women are respected, cared for and listened to. No one is greater or worse than anyone else, and biggest of all, how important it is to help one another.

My political consciousness was shaped early. One of my first memories of pride in my identity occurred when my grandmother spoke to my elementary school class about Indigenous history and culture. That pride was quickly followed by my first direct experience of racism, when classmates reduced my identity to stereotypes they had learned through governmental and parental narratives and media portrayals. Racism is shaped early. Those 6 year olds may not have known the meaning of what they were saying, but the parents who told them did. Those moments made it clear that ignorance is not accidental or individual, but produced and sustained through institutions and continued stereotyping.

As I grew older, my academic work increasingly centred on Indigenous issues. With greater knowledge came greater anger. I grappled with studying, working, and living on land that was violently stolen, and with attending Catholic institutions implicated in the residential school system. My first major project centered around Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG). Sitting there at 17 looking at the statistics that told me I was three times more likely to be murdered than my friends, I truly realized the Canadian government's mission of assimilation and genocide never stopped, just changed methods. Going through a Catholic highschool and learning what that religion did to my ancestors really made me wonder how a religion founded on "eternal love" could rape and kill children. Following some reflection, I formally rejected Catholicism and refused to stand for the national anthem. In high school or huge baseball games it takes a little courage to do something entirely different than everyone around you, but the worry was quickly outweighed by the pride I felt for doing what I believed in. This country is not worth standing for until they stand up for the original people of Turtle Island. I do not feel pride in a nation that denied my people basic human recognition until 1951 and continues to benefit from unresolved colonial violence.

For a time, I attempted to make my advocacy palatable, hoping that non-Indigenous people would listen. I carefully explained history, cited sources, and softened my language, often avoiding confrontation of microaggressions. You would not want to be the "angry Indian" after all, right? I assumed responsibility for educating others, believing that clarity and patience would

lead to understanding. Over time, it became clear that this approach placed an unfair burden on those already harmed. Education about colonial violence is not the responsibility of Indigenous Peoples. This framing aligns with the core requirement addressed in this paper, which states responsibility for learning, accountability, and change lies with the government and settler society rather than with Indigenous communities. Those who live on and profit from Indigenous lands have a responsibility to understand who had to suffer and why their presence is possible.

Even when Indigenous Peoples do the work of educating others, our voices are routinely minimized or ignored. The failure of reconciliation makes this clear. In 2015, the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation released ninety-four Calls to Action. Over a decade later, only a small fraction have been meaningfully implemented, largely those that were least challenging to existing power structures and least disruptive to state authority; otherwise known as “low hanging fruit.” Indigenous children remain vastly overrepresented in foster care, Indigenous women and girls experience disproportionate rates of violence and disappearance, and many communities continue to lack basic infrastructure such as clean drinking water, schools, internet connection and road access, making barriers even larger. Most reserves have been on boil water advisories for over 30 years, yet instead of giving them running water, the government uses it on new AI data centres. Their bottom line has always been more important than the lives of those they are legislated to protect. Indigenous on reserve youth are amongst those most at risk for self harm and suicide, yet there is little to no mental health support provided. Indigenous communities remain overpoliced and underprotected. Somehow when it comes to throwing us in jail the police are always there, yet when our sisters go missing they are nowhere to be found. Indigenous women in Canada make up 2% of the population, but 16% of missing and murdered cases, this is a current genocide happening all over Turtle Island, and the government is allowing it through complacency and policy failures. As mentioned previously, we are historically a matriarchal society, often with women being the centre of community. This genocide that is taking place does more than steal loved ones, it aims to destabilize the very core of community.

On the topic of how crucial women are, I want to take a minute to say meegwetch to my mother and grandmother, who supported me endlessly through our reconnection, always encouraged me to be loud, and from whom I learned what it means to be a strong woman. I also want to say meegwetch to my father who instilled my tenacious spirit. It is the reason I am able to speak up and I would not be who I am today without his guidance. Meegwetch to my grandparents, who taught me that one's real strength comes from their selflessness. Meegwetch to all the friends and family that have supported me through my academic journey, for all the espresso shots and reading version after version of body text. Meegwetch to my ancestors, cousins, and community of Pikwaknagan for all the knowledge and strength I continue to have bestowed, I am grateful for all I have not learned yet. Chi meegwetch to all our nations on Turtle Island for the continued resilience in the face of adversity, may one day we get to rest.

Lastly I would like to say meegwetch to my cat Parmesan, for spending countless nights with me writing this paper, you deserve all the minnows in the world.

This paper is written from the understanding that colonial violence in Canada did not end. It evolved. Child welfare institutions and carceral apprehensions have replaced systems of residential schooling and forced labour. Calls to simply move on are incredibly ignorant and ignore the fact that harm is ongoing. Meaningful reconciliation requires confronting this reality at the policy level. I contributed to this as a policy intervention and a refusal to remain silent within systems that depend on Indigenous erasure. It advances policy recommendations grounded in lived experience, Indigenous legal and governance traditions, and the recognition that performative reconciliation without structural change is insufficient. When Canada fully acknowledges the present continuity of colonial harm and acts accordingly, the work of genuine reconciliation may finally begin. Always remember we are still here, and you are on Native Land.

Aho.

Chi Meegwetch,

Jessica Rose Rebelo

Pikwakanagan FN, Indigenous Undergraduate Policy Analyst, Trent University, No one is illegal on Stolen Land.

INTRODUCTION

Until the 1950s, the Canadian government had dealt with Indigenous Peoples under the legal assumption that we were not human. Sakej Youngblood Henderson, an internationally recognized authority in Indigenous knowledge, rights, and laws, and a considerable contributor to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, summarizes how Indigenous status in Western culture is defined: “[Before 1951] Indigenous People were not seen as human... and even when they did think us human, they considered us not people. And even when they considered us people, they did not consider us equal to all other humans or people.”

Knowing the context of how governments throughout Canada view Indigenous Peoples is crucial to understanding the following paper. As people living on this land, we must not only acknowledge and learn about the atrocities committed against Indigenous Peoples, but also make active efforts to decolonize and create more inclusive academic spaces welcoming of all, and reflective of the needs of Indigenous students.

Governments and post-secondary institutions have a responsibility to listen to and act upon the recommendations and concerns raised by Indigenous colleagues and students throughout this paper. These recommendations are grounded in Circle Work, lived experiences, and the perspectives of Indigenous students and community members. They advance equity, inclusion, accountability, and harm reduction within post-secondary institutions. As Indigenous Peoples, we have always adapted to changing circumstances, and our needs continue to evolve. It is also worth noting that these recommendations reflect the shared concerns of Indigenous students attending OUSA member schools. As such, these recommendations should be understood as a starting point for meaningful institutional change. If governments and post-secondary institutions are committed to reconciliation and fulfilling their responsibilities to Indigenous Peoples, these promises must also be accompanied by tangible action.

The experiences of Indigenous students within post-secondary institutions are shaped by systemic barriers that continue to limit meaningful inclusion. Despite generations of colonial policies intended to erase our identities, cultures, and ways of knowing, Indigenous students demonstrate incredible resilience while navigating these barriers. While many post-secondary institutions have committed to reconciliation, meaningful change requires action in the form of culturally relevant supports, greater integration and respect of Indigenous ways of knowing throughout curricula and institutional practices, and increased hiring, representation, and retention of Indigenous faculty and leadership. These changes create learning environments that recognize, respect, and value Indigenous knowledge and experiences, benefiting Indigenous students while strengthening post-secondary institutions through more inclusive and equitable approaches to education. In doing so, they improve the experiences of Indigenous students,

staff, and Knowledge Keepers while creating opportunities for honest dialogue that challenges the westernized lens through which we view academia.

Data from seven Ontario universities found that Indigenous Peoples represented between 0.4% and 1.2% of university professors, illustrating the significant underrepresentation of Indigenous scholars throughout the province.¹⁹ This lack of representation is not due to a lack of knowledge, but exists because of colonial structures designed to roadblock Indigenous academic success; as the most dangerous people are those with knowledge. Most faculty positions at Ontario post-secondary institutions require the applicant to hold a doctoral degree, regardless of the traditional knowledge an individual may hold. Consequently, the majority of Indigenous Studies courses offered by post-secondary institutions are taught by a non-Indigenous professor; many of whom lack knowledge of this subject matter, which often results in the perpetuation of incorrect information, a practice which causes further harm to Indigenous Peoples themselves, and decolonization and reconciliation efforts more broadly.

Among Ontario's 133 First Nations, only 26 communities have access to Grades 9–12 education on reserve, and only 11 have a physical space where this learning can take place. Additionally, on reserve schools in Canada receive 30% less funding than off reserve schools.²⁰ An author of this policy paper revealed that:

simply because of where I was born, I had five times the educational choices of someone just as capable living on reserve, with five different highly funded and specialized high schools within ten minutes of my house. In contrast, children as young as 13 must leave their families and communities to pursue education beyond Grade 8, facing new challenges in urban settings.

Although post-secondary institutions cannot eliminate these barriers, they can contribute to equity by recognizing the obstacles that Indigenous Peoples continue to face when trying to gain entry into these academic spaces. Further, post-secondary institutions need to demonstrate their commitments to Indigenous knowledges and worldviews by valuing traditional knowledge when assessing Indigenous applicants for faculty and staff positions. The exclusion of traditional Indigenous knowledges from hiring considerations limits Indigenous Peoples access to post-secondary education as a potential career path, by making it more difficult for prospective Indigenous scholars to meet the requirements for faculty positions.

Ontario's education sector needs to do better by its Indigenous population. We all have our parts to play in order to change the future of Ontario for the better. Let Indigenous Peoples learn without having to leave our families. Let Indigenous Peoples teach our traditional knowledge without requiring another western credential. Implement meaningful cultural

¹⁹ "Lighting the Fire: Experiences of Indigenous Faculty in Ontario Universities," OCAV/RGAE Joint Working Group, December 14, 2020, <https://ontariosuniversities.ca/report/experiences-of-indigenous-faculty/>

²⁰ "Lower Education- #2 of 8 Key Issues for Indigenous Peoples in Canada," Indigenous Corporate Training Inc., last modified, January 31, 2023. <https://www.ictinc.ca/blog/lower-education-2-of-8-key-issues>

competency training in consultation with Indigenous Peoples. And finally, teach those who study at post-secondary institutions the true atrocities and genocide committed by the Canadian government.

As we say in prayer, to all of the things we have forgotten to mention, we remember and honour them now.

INDIGENOUS SELF-DETERMINATION IN POST-SECONDARY INSTITUTIONS

Principle: Indigenous Peoples have an inherent right to self-determination, including free, prior, and informed consent in decisions that impact them.

Principle: The provincial government must uphold its responsibility to openly support and work toward decolonization and Indigenous self-determination.

Concern: Indigenous Peoples are rarely consulted, given authority over, or included in decision-making, regarding policy, resources, and operational decisions that impact Indigenous students at post-secondary institutions.

Concern: The provincial government has not demonstrated a transparent or sustained commitment to decolonization and Indigenous self-determination within post-secondary institutions.

Concern: The absence of dedicated funding and mandatory public reporting limits institutions' ability to support Indigenous governance representation, uphold the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action, and create environments where Indigenous students can thrive.

Recommendation: The provincial government, in partnership with Indigenous sectors and student leaders, must collaboratively create and uphold a framework that ensures Indigenous leadership is consulted, and followed, in all post-secondary work related to Indigenous Peoples.

Recommendation: The provincial government should provide sustained funding to Indigenous student organizations, which are independent of the government, to promote Indigenous engagement in governance and further decolonization solutions in post-secondary spaces.

Recommendation: The provincial government should amend the Ontario Universities and Colleges Act and related Ministry directives to require that post-secondary institutions integrate the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action into institutional policy and reporting structures.

Recommendation: The provincial government should mandate annual public reporting on progress, establishing dedicated funding streams for Indigenous initiatives such as the Indigenous student organizations, and requiring at least one voting governance seat for Indigenous student representatives within institutional decision-making bodies.

The *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP) affirmed that Indigenous Peoples hold an inherent right to self-determination, including free, prior, and informed consent in decisions that affect their communities.²¹ While affirmed at an international level in 2007, this right was only incorporated into Canadian law through *Bill C-15* in 2020. *Bill C-15* requires the federal government to align its laws with UNDRIP and develop an action plan

²¹ United Nations. *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. (September 13, 2007). https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/11/UNDRIP_E_web.pdf

in collaboration with Indigenous peoples.²² In a post-secondary context, this means that Indigenous Peoples must be granted meaningful authority in decisions concerning institutional policy, funding, and governance structures that directly impact Indigenous students and communities. Despite these legal and moral obligations, Indigenous students and leaders are too often excluded, rarely consulted, given authority over, or included in decision-making processes at an institutional and provincial level. This highlights the provincial government's inability to demonstrate a transparent or sustained commitment to decolonization and Indigenous self-determination within post-secondary institutions. Clear expectations must be established to ensure Indigenous recommendations meaningfully shape institutional policy, funding decisions, and governance structures. Therefore, the provincial government, in partnership with Indigenous sectors and student leaders, must collaboratively create and uphold a framework that ensures Indigenous leadership is consulted, and followed, in all post-secondary work related to Indigenous Peoples. Due to the fact that consultation alone is insufficient, a framework grounded in Indigenous self-determination must require that Indigenous direction is implemented and upheld in practice, rather than treated as advisory or symbolic.

The exclusion of Indigenous students from institutional decision-making processes undermines reconciliation and contradicts the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission's* (TRC) Calls to Action, particularly Calls 62 to 66, which emphasize the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge, governance, and pedagogical approaches in education.²³ A 2021 report by *People for Education* found that none of these Calls to Action have been fully implemented within Ontario's education system, highlighting a lack of systemic follow-through on the province's reconciliation commitments.²⁴ The provincial government should therefore amend the Ontario Universities and Colleges Act and related Ministry directives to require that post-secondary institutions integrate the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action into institutional policy and reporting structures. This must include mandatory annual public reporting on reconciliation progress, the establishment of dedicated funding streams for Indigenous initiatives such as Indigenous student organizations, and the requirement of at least one voting governance seat for Indigenous student representatives within institutional decision-making bodies. Together, these measures clarify that responsibility rests with the provincial government to resource, mandate, and enforce Indigenous self-determination in post-secondary education, rather than relying on discretionary or institution-led approaches.

The provincial government has a responsibility to demonstrate leadership by openly supporting and working toward decolonization and Indigenous self-determination. Although Ontario has

²² Government of Canada. (2021). United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (Bill C-15). Department of Justice. <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/declaration/wwl-cna/cl15/index.html>

²³ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. (2015). Calls to Action. https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/british-columbians-our-governments/indigenous-people/aboriginal-peoples-documents/calls_to_action_english2.pdf

²⁴ People for Education. (2021). Still Waiting for Truth and Reconciliation: Calls to Action for Education. <https://peopleforeducation.ca/report/still-waiting-for-truth-and-reconciliation/>

introduced Indigenous curriculum, content, and cultural learning supports within K–12 classrooms, there are no binding legislative, funding, or public reporting mechanisms requiring similar action at the post-secondary level.²⁵ This absence is not the result of institutional inaction alone, but of the provincial government’s failure to establish dedicated funding and mandatory public reporting requirements. Without provincially mandated funding streams or accountability measures, post secondary institutions lack both the authority and resources to support Indigenous governance representation, fully implement the TRC’s Calls to Action, or consistently create environments in which Indigenous students can thrive.²⁶ This policy gap allows responsibility to be shifted away from the provincial government despite its jurisdiction over post secondary education. Therefore, the provincial government should provide sustained funding to Indigenous student organizations which are independent of the government to promote Indigenous engagement in governance and further decolonization solutions in post-secondary spaces. Further, the provincial government should mandate annual public reporting on progress, establishing dedicated funding streams for Indigenous initiatives such as the Indigenous student organizations, and requiring at least one voting governance seat for Indigenous student representatives within institutional decision-making bodies. Funding structures must also recognize that Indigenous students rely on Elders and cultural knowledge keepers, and that barriers to accessing these supports are rooted in the province’s historic and ongoing underfunding of First Nations. This framing ensures financial responsibility remains with the provincial government rather than being placed on individual students or institutions.

SELF-IDENTIFICATION PROCESSES

Principle: Post-secondary institutions have the responsibility to uphold inclusive and respectful approaches to Indigenous identity, ensuring that policies and practices do not retraumatize or isolate any Indigenous students.

Principle: Post-secondary institutions have the responsibility to mitigate the traumatic impacts on Indigenous students by adopting trauma-informed self identification practices.

Principle: Indigenous initiatives must revolve around creating and honouring Indigenous cultural connections, not further displacing or discouraging Indigenous students, faculty, or staff who may be reconnecting with their community and culture while in the post-secondary sector.

Principle: Post-secondary education can be an important way for Indigenous students who do not have cultural or familial ties to connect with their culture and Indigeneity.

Concern: Requiring or asking for proof of Indigenous ancestry or community ties is discriminatory and reinforces colonial definitions of identity.

²⁵ Government of Ontario. (2023). Indigenous Education in Ontario.
<https://www.ontario.ca/page/indigenous-education-ontario>

²⁶“Indigenous Perspectives on Higher Education,” Canadian Commission for UNESCO, 2022,
<https://coilink.org/20.500.12592/68f98w7>

Concern: Unlike students from other marginalized groups, Indigenous students are often unfairly required to verify ancestry to access Indigenous spaces, initiatives or supports, which can lead to feelings of exclusion or discrimination.

Recommendation: The provincial government should issue a formal directive prohibiting Indigenous identity policing in post-secondary institutions. This directive should affirm that identity must not be verified through colonial documentation and require institutions to adopt Indigenous-led, trauma-informed, and community-informed self-identification processes that strengthen Indigenous spaces while ensuring accountability in access to supports and opportunities.

Recommendation: The Provincial government should create “best practices” in consultation with Indigenous education groups and students on the most equitable trauma-informed methods of identity verification or attestation to mitigate continued colonial policing.

Indigenous identity continues to be policed in post secondary spaces. By requiring Indigenous students to submit documentation that proves their status, ancestry, or community connection, post-secondary institutions are participating in a practice that is discriminatory and reinforces colonial definitions of Indigeneity.²⁷ The practice of asking Indigenous Peoples for proof of ancestry or status originated in Canada with the invention of the Indian Act, a piece of Federal Legislation which, among other things, imposed externally defined and exclusionary categories of identity that continue to shape who is legally recognized as Indigenous today.²⁸ Throughout Ontario, the process of post-secondary institutions requiring verification retraumatizes Indigenous students and undermines Indigenous self determination by treating identity as something to be validated by institutions rather than affirmed by Indigenous Peoples themselves. Despite the concerns of Indigenous students and community members, six of OUSA’s member institutions continue to require proof of status or ancestry for Indigenous students, staff, and faculty applying to Indigenous specific programs, jobs, scholarships, or bursaries.²⁹ While all of our member institutions encourage self-identification for Indigenous students accessing support

²⁷ Tamara (Baldhead) Pearl, “A Path Through Difficult Conversations About Indigenous Identity,” *The Canadian Bar Association*, December 12, 2022, <https://nationalmagazine.ca/en-ca/articles/the-practice/legal-education/2022/let-s-find-a-path-through-difficult-conversations-about-indigenous-identity>

²⁸ Government of Canada. (2023). Indian Act. Indigenous Services Canada. <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/i-5/>

²⁹ “Undergraduate Admission and Recruitment: Indigenous Student Admission Pathway,” Queen’s University, accessed May 22, 2026, <https://www.queensu.ca/admission/access/indigenous-students> ; “McMaster University Indigenous Verification Guidelines,” McMaster University, accessed May 22, 2026, https://iec.mcmaster.ca/app/uploads/2024/07/Ancestry-Verification-Guidelines_2024_Final_06_11.pdf ; “Voluntary Aboriginal Self-Identification Release Form,” Brock University, accessed May 22, 2026, <https://brocku.ca/aboriginal-student-services/wp-content/uploads/sites/96/Voluntary-Aboriginal-Self-Identification-Form.pdf> ; “Indigenous Identity,” Wilfred Laurier University, accessed May 22, 2026, <https://www.wlu.ca/about/discover-laurier/indigenization/indigenous-identity-verification-process.html> ; “Indigenous Verification: Guidelines for Indigenous Membership/Citizen Verification,” University of Waterloo, accessed May 22, 2026, <https://uwaterloo.ca/indigenous/indigenous-verification> ; “Policy 1.58- Affirming Declarations of Indigenous Citizenship or Membership at Western University,” Western University, accessed May 22, 2026, https://indigenous.uwo.ca/assets/docs/pdfs/mappl.58-Affirming_declarations_of_Indigenous_citizenship_or_membership_25Jun.pdf

or cultural services, this practice is not universal across post-secondary institutions. For example, of OUSA member institutions, Ontario Tech University, Laurentian University, and Trent University Durham GTA are the only universities that do not require proof of status, ancestry, and/or a written personal statement to prove one's Indigeneity in order to access and qualify for material benefits reserved for Indigenous students.³⁰ This approach disproportionately harms Indigenous students, particularly non-status, Inuit, and urban Indigenous students, whose families may have been displaced from their community as a result of colonial policies. While Wilfred Laurier University does offer Indigenous students who do not possess government issued proof of status documents the opportunity to submit a written personal statement, this institution's Indigenous Identity Verification Process stipulates that “in a situation where the Indigenous identity of an individual cannot be verified to the satisfaction of the University, they will be ineligible for Indigenous designated opportunities at the university.”³¹ The Indigenous Identity Verification process used by Wilfred Laurier University highlights the authority that post-secondary institutions, as colonial spaces, have over Indigenous students to determine who meets their criteria for Indigeneity. In order to avoid retraumatizing Indigenous students the provincial government should create “best practices” in consultation with Indigenous education groups and students on the most equitable trauma-informed methods of identity verification or attestation to mitigate continued colonial policing. This directive should clearly affirm that Indigenous identity must not be verified through colonial documentation and should require institutions to adopt Indigenous led, trauma informed, and community informed self identification processes. Such processes must strengthen Indigenous spaces while ensuring accountability in access to supports and opportunities, without replicating exclusionary or harmful practices.

Unlike students from other marginalized groups, Indigenous students are often required to verify ancestry or community ties in order to access Indigenous specific spaces, initiatives, and/or supports. This differential treatment creates barriers to belonging and can lead to feelings of exclusion, isolation, or discrimination within post secondary environments, potentially alienating the students that these policies claim to protect.³² These practices also risk reproducing lateral violence by placing Indigenous students in a position where they are required to justify and prove their identity to peers, staff, or faculty, a practice which reinforces the nature of post-secondary institutions as places of higher learning that benefit from colonial systems that disrupted Indigenous kinship, governance, and cultural continuity. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples affirms Indigenous Peoples' right to

³⁰ “Indigenous Admissions and Enrollment Supports,” Trent University, accessed May 22, 2026, <https://www.trentu.ca/fphl/recruitment-admissions/indigenous-admissions> ; “Indigenous Student Affairs,” Laurentian University, accessed May 22, 2026, <https://laurentian.ca/academics/indigenous-programs/indigenous-student-affairs> ; “Self-Identification,” Ontario Tech University, accessed May 22, 2026, <https://indigenous.ontariotechu.ca/indigenous-education-and-cultural-services/self-id.php>

³¹ Wilfred Laurier University, “Indigenous Identity.”

³² Debbie Martin, “The Dangerous Rush for Indigenous Identity Policies at Universities,” *Policy Options*, November 21, 2025, <https://policyoptions.irpp.org/2025/11/indigenous-identity-policies-harm/>

determine their own identity and to revitalize, use, and transmit their cultural traditions and identities.³³ Indigenous identity is self determined and relational, not administrative. Post-secondary education can and should be a space where Indigenous students are supported in exploring and strengthening their Indigeneity, rather than being discouraged or displaced through restrictive institutional policies.

Emphasized by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, post secondary institutions have a responsibility to mitigate the traumatic impacts of colonialism by adopting trauma informed approaches to Indigenous self identification. In order for meaningful reconciliation to occur, educational institutions are required to actively support Indigenous cultural revitalization and to address the harms created by colonial education systems.³⁴ For many Indigenous students, post-secondary education represents one of the first opportunities to reconnect with culture, language, and community after generations of disconnection caused by residential schools, the Sixties Scoop, and child welfare systems).³⁵ During a Circle Work session hosted by OUSA, an Indigenous student stated that they “miss being a part of a space that feels like home” while completing their education because their institution lacks a “dedicated safe space” for Indigenous students to “honour [their] culture” and connect with their community. The space available for Indigenous students at their institution has “artifacts that feel decorative and are not in their proper place” making it hard to feel “at peace” in the space designed for Indigenous students to relax. In response to these experiences, another student echoed those sentiments, stating that because “I moved far away from home to attend university, which I know is the case for many Indigenous students... I needed a safe space and a space away from home.” This student also stated that their experience at their institution could be improved by increasing the “focus on getting students together and interacting.” Self identification processes that demand proof or documentation undermine this process of reconnection and risks further alienating those most impacted by colonial violence. Therefore, Indigenous initiatives within post-secondary education must centre the creation and honouring of Indigenous cultural connections.

Post secondary institutions are uniquely positioned to support Indigenous students by providing access to Ceremonies, Indigenous specific spaces, programs, and cultural events that foster belonging and community. For students who are reconnecting or who lack direct access to community based cultural supports, these institutional spaces can play a critical role in identity development and healing.³⁶ During one of OUSA’s Circle Work sessions, an Indigenous student stated that post-secondary institutions have a tendency to host events and workshops on

³³ United Nations. (2007). United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

<https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/declaration-on-the-rights-of-indigenous-peoples.html>

³⁴ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. (2015) . Calls to Action.

https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/british-columbians-our-governments/indigenous-people/aboriginal-peoples-documents/calls_to_action_english2.pdf

³⁵ Sinclair, N. (2021, June 25). Who is Indigenous? The question dividing Canada’s universities. CBC News.

³⁶ Michelle Pidgeon. “More than a Checklist: Meaningful Indigenous Inclusion in Higher Education.” Social Inclusion 4, no. 1 (February 23, 2016): 77–91. <https://doi.org/10.17645/si.v4i1.436> .

campus for the purpose of educating non-Indigenous students. This student argued that they “would rather have community building events rather than education events for others,” demonstrating the need for post-secondary institutions to create more opportunities for Indigenous students to connect with their cultures and communities. Institutions must accept this responsibility by ensuring that access to supports, services, and events is not contingent on colonial verification practices. Therefore, the provincial government should work in consultation with Indigenous education organizations and Indigenous students to develop best practices for equitable and trauma informed approaches to identity attestation. Establishing provincial guidance would reduce inconsistencies across institutions, prevent continued colonial policing, and ensure that Indigenous students are not placed in positions where their identity is questioned or contested. These actions would represent a concrete step toward reconciliation by affirming Indigenous self determination and ensuring post secondary spaces support Indigenous students in ways that are inclusive, respectful, and grounded in Indigenous worldviews.

FINANCIAL AID & ACCESS TO UNIVERSITY

FINANCIAL AID

Principle: All Indigenous students deserve equitable access to financial support, both from the government and post-secondary institutions.

Principle: Outreach programs provided by the provincial government and post-secondary institutions should cater to the specific needs of prospective Indigenous students.

Concern: Indigenous students are more likely to have a lack of adequate financial support and funding for education.

Concern: Indigenous students are frequently assumed to receive a fully paid education by their campus communities, perpetuating negative stereotypes, and skewing the government's ability to fulfill treaty obligations on education through false representations and/or promises.

Concern: Indigenous students are not always made aware of the financial aid available to them because of a lack of meaningful relationships between Indigenous communities and post-secondary institutions, government institutions, and non-governmental organizations.

Concern: Indigenous students face discriminatory legislation by way of colonialist classifications of Indigenous identity, threatening access to Indigenous governments sponsorship funding programs.

Concern: Post-secondary institutions often require documentation of provincial financial aid (ie. OSAP documents) and deny Indigenous government documentation, which discriminates against and creates barriers for Indigenous students who are receiving sponsorship and/or band funded benefits as their sole financial support.

Concern: Students without Indian Status (under the definition of the *Indian Act*) are more frequently classified as ineligible for financial aid.

Concern: Post-secondary administration, staff, and faculty often lack training on Indigenous student funding models and the band sponsorship process, creating barriers to accessing financial support within the post-secondary institution.

Concern: Institutional financial aid funding is often calculated using automated expense calculators which neglect to recognize the economic disparities and oppression that rural, northern, and remote Indigenous students often face, such as higher transportation expenses and daily living expenses.

Concern: There is little transparency and communication between the provincial government and First Nations when students provide documentation to support their Indigenous student OSAP application, which infringes on a nations' rights to define their membership.

Concern: The post-secondary sector lacks best practices for administering Indigenous Student Bursaries as self-identification attestation processes evolve.

Recommendation: The MCURES and MIAFNER should improve financial support opportunities targeted specifically for Indigenous students, including, but not limited to, increasing funding for the Indigenous Student Bursary Program and advocating to the federal government to expand the Post-Secondary Student Support Program.

Recommendation: The MIAFNER in consultation with the Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada, should provide post-secondary institutions including Student Financial Aid offices, faculty, and staff- with a comprehensive document outlining the intricacies of band funding and its relation to Treaty rights, fund distribution, and the choice of First Nations to provide financial support to their students.

Recommendation: The MCURES should work with the ISC to develop guidelines for post-secondary institutions on ensuring access to post-secondary offered financial aids and support for all Indigenous Students.

Recommendation: The MCURES, with assistance of the Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada, should guarantee that communication is established between OSAP and First Nations for the purpose of OSAP attestation verification.

Recommendation: The MIAFNER should work with the federal government to expand eligibility requirements for all financial assistance programs and supports to include all Indigenous students regardless of factors such as status or blood quantum, and strive to improve Indigenous community reconnection through reporting declarations of nations.

Recommendation: The MCURES should amend the eligibility requirements for all provincially funded financial aids and supports to be available to any Indigenous person regardless of their OSAP eligibility or assessment.

Recommendation: The MCURES in collaboration with the MIAFNER should re-evaluate the funding model for the Ontario Indigenous Travel Grant to account for distance travelled, access to public transit, and fluctuating transportation costs.

Recommendation: The MCURES should, in collaboration with delegations of the First Nations Financial Authority (FNFA), Metis Nations of Ontario (MNO), Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC), and Assembly of First Nations (AFN), develop a comprehensive central site for all provincial and federal Indigenous students' financial supports, and implement an Indigenous Communities Communications Plan to disseminate this information.

At both the provincial and institutional level, Indigenous students in Ontario deserve equitable access to financial aid. Despite First Nations gaining the right to funding for post-secondary education in the 1960s, funding is often not available to every Indigenous student who needs it, meaning that “accessing a fully funded university education can feel like winning the lottery”; a reality that contradicts the assumed stereotype that all Indigenous people receive free

education.³⁷ Currently, Indigenous students are more likely to lack adequate financial support and/or savings to invest in their post-secondary education. In a study conducted by researchers from the University of Algoma, survey respondents stated that the most prevalent concern amongst Indigenous students in Ontario is funding. 69% of respondents were receiving funding from a First Nations source, such as the Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP), which is a federal program that provides Indigenous students throughout the country with funding to a maximum of \$53,000 a year to complete their post-secondary education. However, the funding provided under the PSSSP is capped at 25,000 students a year. Since 2016, the number of Indigenous peoples graduating high school has increased to 70%, meaning that as more Indigenous students look to pursue post-secondary education the chance that you receive PSSSP funding decreases.³⁸ In 2019, the federal government placed a 2 percent cap on annual funding increases to the PSSSP – significantly lower than the 6 percent average annual increase in education costs – which has left Bands in a position where they must choose between funding less students or allocating less money per student.³⁹

Between 2012 and 2019, Indigenous families who live off-reserve invested two to three times less money in a Registered Education Savings Plan (RESP) than non-Indigenous families. Statistics Canada hypothesizes that this gap occurs because Indigenous families are more likely to have lower income, wealth, and education than non-Indigenous families.⁴⁰ The financial aid programs and grants currently available to Indigenous students are inadequate to provide the financial support needed to access university.

Many Indigenous students who cannot access or are ineligible to receive PSSSP funding rely on the provincially-funded Indigenous Student Bursary. However, this program does not adequately address the needs of all Indigenous students as the PSSSP still excludes non-status Indigenous and Metis students, and the Indigenous Student Bursary only provides between \$1,000 and \$3,500 per student, which is significantly lower than the cost of post-secondary education.⁴¹ To improve financial equity for Indigenous students and ensure adequate financial support, the provincial government should create better financial support opportunities targeted specifically

³⁷ “Cash Back: A Yellowhead Institute Red Paper,” p. 45, Yellowhead Institute, accessed May 26, 2026, <https://cashback.yellowheadinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Cash-Back-A-Yellowhead-Institute-Red-Paper.pdf>

³⁸ Rose E. Cameron, Meghan J. Bird, and Esme Fuller-Thompson, “Creating a Sense of Belonging for Indigenous Students: Identifying Supports to Improve Access to Post-Secondary Education,” *Alter Native: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples* 20, no. 4(2024): 732-740, <https://doi.org/10.1177/11771801241291242>

³⁹ “Cash Back: A Yellowhead Institute Red Paper,” p. 45, Yellowhead Institute, accessed May 26, 2026, <https://cashback.yellowheadinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Cash-Back-A-Yellowhead-Institute-Red-Paper.pdf>

⁴⁰ Marc Frenette, “Recent Trends in Registered Education Savings Plan Holdings by Income, Immigrant Status, Indigenous Identity and Province,” Government of Canada, May 25, 2022, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/36-28-0001/2022005/article/00003-eng.htm>.

⁴¹ “Indigenous Student Bursary,” OSAP: Ontario Student Assistance Program, n.d., https://osap.gov.on.ca/OSAPortal/en/A-ZListofAid/POCONT1_090874; Government of Canada; Indigenous Services Canada, “Post-Secondary Student Support Program,” April 13, 2026, <https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1100100033682/1531933580211>.

for Indigenous students, including, but not limited to, increasing funding for the Indigenous Student Bursary Program and advocating the federal government to expand the Post-Secondary Student Support Program. Further, the provincial government should also expand the Indigenous Student Bursary to provide students with enough financial support to cover all unmet financial needs, rather than limiting funding to \$1,000-\$3,500 per student.

Provincial and institutional financial aid funding is often calculated using automated expense calculators which fail to recognize the economic disparities and oppression that rural, northern, and remote Indigenous students often face, such as higher transportation expenses and daily living expenses. For example, the Ontario Indigenous Travel Grant, which is intended to support the financial costs of traveling between remote First Nations communities and post-secondary institutions, is currently only accessible to Indigenous students who have enrolled as full-time students at a post-secondary institution, have submitted an OSAP application, and are eligible to receive at least one dollar in financial assistance through OSAP.⁴² Further, the Ontario Indigenous Travel Grant also fails to account for distance and infrastructure barriers, it applies strict limits on the frequency with which a student is able to travel between their home community and their institution, and is granted on a case-by-case basis, meaning that students must continually submit documentation and are not guaranteed to be reimbursed for the costs associated with traveling. Therefore, the MCURES in collaboration with the MIAFNER should re-evaluate the funding model for the Ontario Indigenous Travel Grant to account for distance travelled, access to public transit, and fluctuating transportation costs. Further, The MCURES should amend the eligibility requirements for all provincially funded financial aids and supports to be available to any Indigenous person regardless of their OSAP eligibility or assessment.

Indigenous students face discriminatory legislation by way of colonial classifications of Indigenous identity, threatening access to Indigenous governments sponsorship programs. Requirements for proof of status or ancestry disproportionately impact Indigenous students who do not possess these documents, as they fail to take into account the trauma associated with colonial status requirements and definitions, while also assuming a universal experience of indigeneity for all Indigenous students. These methods assume that all Indigenous students possess formal identification proving their indigeneity, an assumption that risks alienating non-status Indigenous students. Within Canada, 54% of Indigenous Peoples do not have status under the Indian Act.⁴³ Therefore, students without Indian Status (as defined by the *Indian Act*) are more frequently classified as ineligible for financial aid.

⁴² "Ontario Indigenous Travel Grant," Government of Ontario, accessed May 26, 2026,

https://osap.gov.on.ca/prdosapconsum/groups/forms/documents/forms/pocont1_082275.pdf

⁴³ Total of On-Reserve and Off-Reserve, Status and Non-Status, Among First Nations, Metis, and Inuit in Canada, 2021,

<https://abo-peoples.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/On-and-Off-reserve-Aboriginal-Population-stats-census-2021-Prepared-by-CAPs-Research-Department.pdf>.

It is further worth noting that requiring Indigenous students to submit proof of status or ancestry in order to be deemed eligible to receive financial assistance does not just impact the individual student, but their community as a whole. This is because there is little transparency and communication between the provincial government and First Nations when students provide documentation to support their Indigenous student OSAP application, which infringes on a nations' right to define their membership. In Ontario, when an Indigenous student is required to provide proof of status or ancestry when submitting an application for financial assistance, a nations' rights to define their membership is infringed upon because these applications rely on federally defined identification measures.⁴⁴ Further, as self-identification attestation processes evolve for Indigenous student financial aid, it has become increasingly clear that the post-secondary sector lacks a set of best practices for administering Indigenous Student Bursaries. During a Circle Work session one student stated how they "wished there was someone on campus that I could talk to" about the financial aid available to them. In order to improve the accessibility and affordability of post-secondary education for Indigenous students, the MIAFNER should work with the federal government to expand eligibility requirements for all financial assistance programs and supports to include all Indigenous students regardless of factors such as status or blood quantum, and strive to improve Indigenous community reconnection through reporting declarations of nations. MCURES with assistance of the Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada, should also guarantee that communication is established between OSAP and First Nations for the purpose of OSAP attestation verification.

As a way to ensure that the barriers to academic entry for Indigenous students is met prior to enrolment, outreach programs provided by the provincial government and institutions should cater to the specific needs of prospective Indigenous students. For example, Indigenous students are often unaware of the financial aid available to them because of a lack of meaningful relationships between Indigenous communities and post-secondary institutions, government institutions, and non-government organizations. During a Circle Work session, one student stated that a "problem for all ... Indigenous students is the inaccessibility of funding opportunities." Another student added that "not all of us get funding," citing the unique rules and regulations set by individual Bands as a reason for this uncertainty. Therefore, the MCURES should work with the ISC to develop guidelines for post-secondary institutions on ensuring access to post-secondary offered financial aids and support for all Indigenous Students. Further, the MCURES should in collaboration with delegations of the First Nations Financial Authority (FNFA), Metis Nations of Ontario (MNO), Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC), and Assembly of First Nations (AFN) develop a comprehensive central site for all provincial and federal Indigenous students' financial supports, and implement an Indigenous Communities Communications Plan to disseminate this information.

⁴⁴ "Membership (and Status) Myths & Facts," JFK Law LLP, accessed May 26, 2026, <https://jfkllaw.ca/our-resources/membership-and-status-myths-facts/>

Staff, administration, and faculty throughout Ontario's post-secondary institutions often lack proper training on Indigenous student funding models and the band sponsorship process, creating barriers to accessing financial support within the post-secondary institution. While hosting a workshop on Indigenous perspectives in higher education, the Canadian Commission for UNESCO argued that currently a gap exists in post-secondary education as Indigenous students are often uncertain about their value within spaces of higher education due to colonialism and the prioritization of western knowledge. In order to address these feelings, post-secondary institutions must include Indigenous peoples within positions of leadership and ensure that institutions are properly resourced. This can include funding for Indigenous support services and specific staff, but it also includes training for institutional staff to understand the unique circumstances surrounding Indigenous participation in higher education and the unique documentation that Indigenous students are expected to provide.⁴⁵

The ability for staff at post-secondary institutions to help Indigenous students navigate funding opportunities throughout their education is especially important as post-secondary institutions often require documentation of provincial financial aid, such as OSAP, and deny Indigenous government documentation. This discriminates against and creates barriers for Indigenous students who are receiving sponsorship and/or band funded benefits as their sole form of financial support. The disconnect that this creates causes a barrier for Indigenous students to access their financial aid in a timely manner. An Indigenous student who participated in a Circle Work session spoke about how this has caused delays for them in being able to purchase their textbooks and course materials, resulting in microaggressive treatment and uncertainty of if they will accrue interest on their student financial profile with their institution. Therefore, the MIAFNER in consultation with the Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada, should provide post-secondary institutions including Student Financial Aid offices, faculty, and staff- with a comprehensive document outlining the intricacies of band funding and its relation to Treaty rights, fund distribution, and the choice of First Nations to provide financial support to their students. These changes are necessary to ensure that the provincial and federal governments can protect the treaty rights of Indigenous students.

ACCESS TO UNIVERSITY

Principle: Post-secondary and government institutions have a legal responsibility to uphold Indigenous Treaty rights to access education, as the Canadian Charter assures that Indigenous students are entitled to an equitable education.

Principle: All Indigenous students should be able to apply to university without facing financial or geographic barriers.

⁴⁵ "Indigenous Perspectives on Higher Education," Canadian Commission for UNESCO, accessed May 27, 2026, file:///Users/ousarpa/Downloads/IndigenousPerspectivesHigherEducation%20(3).pdf

Principle: All Indigenous students should have equitable access to applying and enrolling into university.

Principle: All Indigenous students should be able to access post-secondary institutions where they feel valued, represented, and heard within their university community to facilitate an inclusive post-secondary experience.

Concern: Many Indigenous communities and/or households face geographic barriers and do not have reliable access to the internet, cell service, and/or necessary technologies in order to apply for and attend university.

Concern: Many remote and northern communities cannot send their students to university due to geographic, transportation, and financial barriers.

Concern: Many Indigenous education institutions on reserves either do not offer or lack the funding to provide planning for post-secondary education supports and the required courses to attend university.

Concern: Post-secondary institutions often fail to produce academic and social environments that recognize Indigenous students' intersectionality and intergenerational trauma; creating a sense of exclusion from the broader post-secondary institution that affects retention and graduation rates.

Concern: Indigenous students pay application fees to post-secondary institutions, creating a discrepancy with Indigenous Peoples' right to education, as declared by Treaty rights with Indigenous Peoples and the Canadian Charter's statement regarding Indigenous Peoples'.

Recommendation: The Ministry of Infrastructure should continue efforts and increase funding through the Improving Connectivity for Ontario Program to provide and fund reliable access to cell and internet service, technology, and infrastructure for First Nations and remote communities, as guaranteed in the Getting Ontario Connected Act, 2022.

Recommendation: The MCURES should bridge the gap between remote Indigenous communities and universities by providing extra support during the application process, advocating to the federal government to re-evaluate the school funding on reserve, and aiding in the funding of specific recruitment.

Recommendation: The MIAFNER should provide support for necessary financial and capital resources at on-reserve, rural, and northern high schools to allow access to higher learning.

Recommendation: The MIAFNER and MCURES should collaborate with the Indigenous Institutes Consortium; to provide a guideline for post-secondary institutions on transfer credits between Indigenous institutes and post-secondary institutions to improve the transferability of Indigenous institutes credits and considerations of Indigenous teaching and learning outcomes.

Recommendation: The MIAFNER should collaborate with delegations of the ISC, First Nations Financial Authority (FNFA), Metis Nations of Ontario (MNO), Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC), and Assembly of First Nations (AFN) to develop a comprehensive guide for

post-secondary institutions to set, implement, and re-evaluate an institutional level Indigenous student retention and enrolment improvement strategy.

Recommendation: The MCURES, with guidance from Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada, should mandate that the Ontario Universities Application Centre (OUAC) and/or other appropriate application portals are to waive all Indigenous students' application and service fees for post-secondary education so that Indigenous students can freely apply without financial barriers.

All Indigenous students should have equitable access to applying and enrolling into university. Within Canada, post-secondary and government institutions have a legal responsibility to uphold the Indigenous treaty right to access education, as the Canadian Charter insures that Indigenous students are entitled to an equitable education.⁴⁶ Ensuring equitable access to post-secondary education can come in many different forms depending on the individual needs of the student. The conditions that need to be met may include access to: transportation, assistance in obtaining course materials or devices required to complete course activities and assignments, food, housing, and/or additional resources needed to participate and succeed within the classroom. Overall, Indigenous students need to be able to participate in core aspects of academic life, have sufficient resources for support and success in learning, and be provided with opportunities for education across varying academic disciplines.

However, post-secondary institutions often fail to produce academic and social environments that recognize Indigenous student's intersectionality and intergenerational trauma; creating a sense of exclusion from the broader post-secondary institution which affects the retention and graduation rates of Indigenous students. During a Circle Work session, a student stated how they would like to see "standardized positions and supports" for Indigenous students across Ontario Universities as each institution provides differing levels and types of support. Across all of our member institutions, Indigenous students noted that specific staff designated to assist Indigenous students were over worked and at capacity, leading a student to argue that post-secondary institutions need to "focus on staff retention" so as to avoid retraumatizing Indigenous students as they need to keep repeating their stories, needs, and circumstances to a continually changing support staff member. A student from Brock University revealed that "teams that are supposed to support Indigenous students are often called upon to do education for non-Indigenous folks," reducing their capacity to assist Indigenous students even further, while prioritizing the needs and education of non-Indigenous students. Therefore, The MIAFNER should collaborate with delegations of the ISC, First Nations Financial Authority (FNFA), Metis Nations of Ontario (MNO), Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC), and Assembly of First Nations (AFN) to develop a comprehensive guide for post-secondary institutions to set,

⁴⁶ "The Constitution Act, 1982, Schedule B to the Canada Act 1982 (UK), 1982, c 11," CanLII, accessed May 12, 2026, <https://www.canlii.org/en/ca/laws/stat/schedule-b-to-the-canada-act-1982-uk-1982-c-11/latest/schedule-b-to-the-canada-act-1982-uk-1982-c-11.html>.

implement, and re-evaluate an institution level Indigenous student retention and enrolment improvement strategy.

All Indigenous students should be able to apply to and access university without facing financial or geographic barriers. However, Indigenous students pay application fees to post-secondary institutions, creating a discrepancy with Indigenous Peoples' right to education. Currently, in order for any prospective post-secondary student to apply to a program or institution, they are responsible for paying a base application fee of \$156 through the Ontario Universities' Application Centre.⁴⁷ This fee is to be paid prior to completing an application and payment does not guarantee an admissions offer. This means that prospective Indigenous students are required to pay this application fee before they are eligible to receive any form of financial assistance, as these are often contingent on enrollment within a post-secondary program. According to data collected from the 2021 Canadian Census, the median income for Indigenous individuals was lower than the median income of \$50,400 for non-Indigenous individuals across all categories; with Status Indians who live on reserve having the largest gap, earning an average of \$32,000, and Metis peoples having the smallest gap earning an average of \$48,800.⁴⁸ The discrepancy in median income for Indigenous Peoples compared to non-Indigenous Peoples highlights the financial disadvantage Indigenous students face, preventing many Indigenous students from pursuing higher education before they have even had the opportunity to apply. This initial barrier to access must be corrected to ensure that the treaty rights and entitlements of Indigenous students are upheld. To rectify this barrier to access and entry the MCURES with guidance from Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada should mandate that Ontario Universities Application Centre (OUAC) and/or appropriate application portals are to waive all Indigenous students' application and service fees for post-secondary education so that Indigenous students can freely apply without financial barriers. Further The MCURES should bridge the gap between remote Indigenous communities and universities by providing extra support during the application process, advocating to the federal government to re-evaluate the school funding on reserve, and aiding in the funding of specific recruitment.

Within Ontario, many northern and rural Indigenous students must attend a post-secondary institution that is very far from their home community. Due to the geographic location of many northern Indigenous reservations in relation to the majority of post-secondary institutions in Ontario, Indigenous students often find themselves in a position where they need to move in order to access higher education; requiring many Indigenous students to leave behind their communities, their culture, and the only homes they have known thus far.

⁴⁷ "Undegraduate Fees," Ontario Universities' Application Centre, accessed May 27, 2026, <https://www.ouac.on.ca/guide/undergrad-fees/>

⁴⁸ "An Update on Socio-economic Gaps between Indigenous Peoples and the Non-Indigenous Population in Canada: Highlights from the 2021 Census," Government of Canada: Indigenous Services Canada, accessed May 27, 2026, <https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1690909773300/1690909797208>

For Indigenous students living in remote communities, it can be difficult to complete the activities necessary to make an informed decision about what institution they would like to attend. These activities may include: touring a university's campus, viewing the programs or degrees available at an institution, accessing information about the resources available, and/or attending presentations or university fairs to speak with campus representatives. In addition to the interpersonal barriers many Indigenous students from a remote community may face, they also tend to face technological barriers as many rural and northern reservations do not have reliable internet access to consult resources found online or to apply to their chosen university through the online application portal.⁴⁹ Despite the provincial government investing \$4 billion dollars in 2021 towards ensuring that every Ontarian has access to high-speed internet by 2028 regardless of geographic location, many northern Indigenous communities continue to be excluded from the benefits of these initiatives.⁵⁰ This investment comes as a result of a 2021 Auditor General's report that found that when looking at Ontario as a whole, 91 percent of households had access to internet, this number dropped to 60 percent when only northern or rural communities were included, and the number dropped even further to 43 percent when looking at households located on an Indigenous reservation.⁵¹ The provincial government's plan has divided Northern Ontario into 12 districts. In the Kenora District, which is the largest, eight out of the 59 communities located within this region have access to the internet with a speed of 50/10 megabytes per second.⁵² Comparatively, someone living in Toronto could expect internet speeds of up to 343.2 megabytes per second.⁵³

Due to the lack of adequate internet connection, northern and rural Indigenous communities often lack technological literacy, a barrier that was highlighted when the world shifted to an increasingly online format following the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Staying connected with family and friends, completing school work, and employment became dependent on electronic devices and access to the internet as the world took on a remote form of connection. During this time public spaces that typically offer access to the internet, laptops, and other tech-objects were closed, which left many students without access to these necessities, hindering their ability to complete their course work and assignments. Therefore, the Ministry of Infrastructure should continue efforts and increase funding through the Improving Connectivity for Ontario Program to provide and fund reliable access to cell, and internet

⁴⁹ Loprespub, "Broadband Internet in Indigenous Communities," HillNotes, December 8, 2021,

<https://hillnotes.ca/2021/12/08/broadband-internet-in-indigenous-communities/>.

⁵⁰ "Accelerated High Speed Internet Program," Government of Ontario: Infrastructure Ontario, accessed May 28, 2026,

<https://www.infrastructureontario.ca/en/what-we-do/projectssearch/accelerated-high-speed-internet-program/>

⁵¹ Samantha Schwientek, "First Nations High-Speed Internet Access Lagging Behind Canadian Average," *CBC News*, April 19, 2023,

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/first-nations-high-speed-internet-access-lagging-behind-canadian-average-1.6815370>

⁵² Clint Fleury, "The Digital Divide is Felt in the North," *NWO News Watch*, January 5, 2024,

<https://www.nwnewswatch.com/local-news/the-digital-divide-is-felt-in-the-north-8062094>

⁵³ "Internet Speed in Toronto," SpeedGeo, accessed May 28, 2026,

<https://www.speedgeo.net/statistics/canada/toronto>

service, technology, and infrastructure for First Nations and remote communities, as guaranteed in the Getting Ontario Connected Act, 2022.⁵⁴

Throughout Ontario, many Indigenous education institutions on reserves either do not offer or lack the funding to provide planning for post-secondary education support and the required courses to attend university. Additionally, students attending these schools are often not made aware of their options for post-secondary education in Canada, the types of career pathways post-secondary education provides, the benefits for students and their community, and the funding support available. Post-secondary recruitment that does travel to these communities is generalized and not tailored to or inclusive of the unique life and cultural experiences of Indigenous students. Therefore, the MIAFNER should provide support for necessary financial and capital resources at on-reserve, rural, and northern high schools to allow access to higher learning. .⁵⁵

Many Indigenous students are coming to university from reservation schools, which can operate very differently from the institutions that they are entering. Often, these schools do not provide university-level high school courses which creates another barrier when applying to post-secondary programs as these credits are needed to be considered for eligibility. During a Circle Work session a student revealed how their family member attended school at a rural Indigenous institute and took Indigenous science and math courses. However, this family member is “now trying to get a teaching degree but [the universities] are not recognizing the credits.” To help make the transition smoother for Indigenous students going from an Indigenous institution to a post-secondary institution, the MIAFNER and MCURES should collaborate with the Indigenous Institutes Consortium to provide a guideline for post-secondary institutions on transfer credits between Indigenous institutes and post-secondary institutions to improve the transferability of Indigenous institutes credits and conditions of Indigenous teaching and learning outcomes.

⁵⁴ Getting Ontario Connected Act, Statutes of Ontario 2022, c. 9, <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/s22009>.

⁵⁵ Assembly of First Nations, Submission to House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance: Pre-Budget Consultations in Advance of Budget 2025, Assembly of First Nations, July 31, 2024, <https://afn.bynder.com/m/67483ba3e6a0d5df/original/AFN-Pre-Budget-Submission-2025.pdf>

DECOLONIZATION & SOVEREIGNTY

UNIVERSITY CULTURE

Principle: Institutional transformation must be oriented toward Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination.

Principle: Indigenous Peoples and cultures must be adopted into all spaces of their post-secondary institutions, not only Indigenous-specific spaces.

Principle: Indigenous students must be able to practice their cultures and Ceremonies safely, without fear of disrespect or interference from the external campus community.

Principle: The inherent Treaty right for Indigenous Peoples to occupy traditional lands for purposes such as meeting, feasting, or partaking in Ceremony or knowledge exchange, must be respected and upheld by post-secondary institutions.

Principle: Post-secondary institutions should have zero-tolerance towards non-Indigenous students who perpetuate oppression, discrimination, and/or prejudice at all within post-secondary environments.

Concern: Post-secondary institutions in Ontario operate on stolen Indigenous land and continue to perpetuate direct and indirect colonial violence against Indigenous Peoples.

Concern: Indigenous art, symbolism, expression and languages are excluded from most campus spaces, perpetuating colonialism, with the exception of Indigenous Student Centres.

Concern: Post-secondary institutions often fail to acknowledge their historical and current participation in colonialism.

Concern: Post-secondary institutions memorialize colonial violence with the presence of colonial names, labels, statues, art, and symbolism across their campuses.

Concern: Indigenous students and allies who challenge colonial and racist symbolism at their institutions often face harm, arrest, or criminal charges from campus security and Special Constables.

Concern: Not all post-secondary campuses provide safe, ventilated, accessible, and respected physical spaces for Indigenous students to practice their cultures and Ceremonies, including smudging.

Concern: Indigenous students face discrimination, oppression, prejudice, and unconscious bias from students, faculty, and staff at their institutions.

Concern: Post-secondary institutions often lack transparency regarding the outcomes of disciplinary hearings for on-campus instances of hate, stemming from the absence of clear consequences for hate speech and racial prejudice leading to student and staff distrust.

Recommendation: The provincial government should provide adequate funding for post-secondary institutions to commission Indigenous students to create art and symbolism to be showcased across their campuses.

Recommendation: The provincial government should earmark funding from the facilities renewal program to upgrade signage and expression on post-secondary campuses to include local Indigenous languages.

Recommendation: The MCURES should develop guidelines to help post-secondary institutions remove colonial and racist symbols and comply with the Ontario Human Rights Commission's proposed policy on discriminatory names, words, and images.

Recommendation: The MCURES should require post-secondary institutions to develop trauma-informed, culturally sensitive racial and religious equity policies, with clear, enforceable codes of conduct that explicitly prohibit racism and hate speech; as well outline clear and enforceable codes of conduct, for campus security and/or constables that are culturally sensitive within its response procedures.

Recommendation: The provincial government should encourage post-secondary institutions to prominently display appropriate and relevant Indigenous flags alongside the Canadian and Ontario flags across all campuses.

Recommendation: The provincial government should mandate that all post-secondary institutions create and implement Indigenous Strategic Plans if they do not already have one, led by Indigenous Peoples, with built-in short-, mid-, and long-term progress assessments.

Recommendation: Whilst upholding the principles of Indigenous sovereignty, the provincial government should mandate that all post-secondary institutions collect data on Indigenous student success, efficacy of programming, and perceptions of Indigenous initiatives on campus to support the creation of the Indigenous Strategic Plans.

Recommendation: The provincial government should mandate that post-secondary institutions include and engage with Indigenous communities prior to designing or establishing any frameworks, spaces, or programs that are intended to be inclusive of Indigenous peoples.

University culture throughout Canada, is inherently colonial as post-secondary education was established during a period that prioritized European systems and furthered colonial assimilation policies.⁵⁶ This historical foundation means that post-secondary institutions often promote and perpetuate colonialism and structurally sustain historical and ongoing relationships rooted in colonialism and oppression.⁵⁷ However, post-secondary institutions often fail to acknowledge their historical and current participation in colonialism. In order to recognize Canada's colonial legacy, Indigenous Peoples and cultures must be adopted into all spaces of their post-secondary institutions, not only Indigenous-specific spaces to ensure the inclusion

⁵⁶ Brock Thorbjorn Pitawanakwat and Celeste Pedri-Spade, *Indigenization in Universities and Its Role in Continuing Settler-Colonialism*, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 2022) <https://doi.org/10.2021/ju.v1i2.237> 7

⁵⁷ Aaryan Chaudhury, Jacob Marinelli, Siobhan Teel, and Sneha Wadhwani, *Policy Paper: Accountability & System Vision*, Toronto: Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, 2022.

and integration of Indigenous students within university campus culture. The consequences of not adequately representing Indigenous Peoples and cultures in post-secondary institutions, and throughout broader society, are severe and varied; often perpetuating harms of colonialism and impacting the academic, social, psychological, and physical well-being of Indigenous students.⁵⁸

Safe spaces for cultural practices are fundamental within post-secondary institutions, it allows Indigenous students to develop or deepen their cultural identity, which is crucial for students to make the most out of their university education while attending colonial institutions.⁵⁹ The right to cultural practice is foundational to the well-being of Indigenous Peoples, as the transmission of languages, cultures, traditions, and ceremonies is integral to cultural continuity.⁶⁰ Fostering this continuity within universities through culturally relevant initiatives and safe spaces creates a sense of belonging that leads to improved educational outcomes and greater student well-being overall.⁶¹ Several post-secondary institutions have begun implementing initiatives that reflect the fundamental right of Indigenous students to practice their culture and ceremonies safely. All of OUSA's member institutions have advertised the efforts that they have made towards indigenization across their campuses.⁶² Common initiatives seen across multiple institutions include: creating Indigenous student centres, having Indigenous working groups, introducing an Indigenous Strategic Plan, hanging Indigenous art or cultural artifacts, and integrating Indigenous ways of knowing into their course curriculums. It is worth noting however that Indigenous art, symbolism, expression and languages are usually excluded from most campus spaces and are typically only displayed within Indigenous Student Centres. Testimonies from Indigenous students at our member institutions also reveal a different reality. One student revealed how they would appreciate having "space to smudge and speak with elders during the school year." Another revealed that even though their institution advertised Indigenous student services "finding out [and locating] resources that were available to Indigenous students was difficult." Another student pointed out that "the Chancellor [of their institution] is an Indigenous person and [the university] points to it as their effort of decolonization, even though it is more of a symbolic position." These student testimonials highlight that there is typically a disconnect

⁵⁸ Pedri-Spade and Pitawanakwat, "Indigenization in Universities," 12.

⁵⁹ Abbott et al., Addressing Racism & Religious Discrimination, 44.

⁶⁰ An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families, Statutes of Canada 2019, c. 24, <https://www.parl.ca/DocumentViewer/en/42-1/bill/C-92/royal-assent>.

⁶¹ Abbott et al., Addressing Racism & Religious Discrimination, 10.

⁶² "Indigenous Strategic Plan," Brock University, accessed June 1, 2026, <https://brocku.ca/indigenous/strategic-plan/>; "Indigenization and Reconciliation at Waterloo," University of Waterloo, accessed June 1, 2026, <https://uwaterloo.ca/faculty-association/faculty-guide/indigenization-and-reconciliation-waterloo>; "Meet the Office of Indigenous Initiatives Team," Wilfred Laurier University, accessed June 1, 2026, <https://www.wlu.ca/about/discover-laurier/indigenization/team.html>; "Indigenous Sharing and Learning Centre," Laurentian University, accessed June 1, 2026, <https://laurentian.ca/academics/indigenous-programs/islc>; "Indigenous Education Advisory Circle," Ontario Tech University, accessed June 1, 2026, <https://indigenous.ontariotechu.ca/indigenization-and-reconciliation-at-ontario-tech/indigenous-education-advisory-circle/index.php>; "Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Indigeneity," McMaster University, accessed June 1, 2026, <https://edii.science.mcmaster.ca/indigenous-at-mac/>; "Indigenous Initiatives," Western University, accessed June 1, 2026, <https://indigenous.uwo.ca/>; "Decolonizing and Indigenizing," Queen's University, accessed June 1, 2026, <https://www.queensu.ca/indigenous/decolonizing-and-indigenizing/definitions>

between reconciliation efforts used by a post-secondary institution, and the services and supports that Indigenous students actually want and need. This reality reflects the failure of institutions to confront the ongoing legacy of colonization, suppressing the success of Indigenization efforts within the post-secondary education system.⁶³ To help lessen the disconnect between the support services offered and the support services needed by Indigenous students, the provincial government should mandate that post-secondary institutions include and engage with Indigenous communities prior to designing or establishing any frameworks, spaces, or programs that are intended to be inclusive of Indigenous Peoples.

In order to begin down the path of reconciliation within places of higher education, the provincial government should mandate that all post-secondary institutions create and implement an Indigenous Strategic Plan, if they do not already have one, led by Indigenous Peoples, with built-in short-, mid-, and long-term progress assessments. This step should be taken after post-secondary institutions have collected data on Indigenous student success, efficacy of programming, and perceptions of Indigenous initiatives on campus to support the creation of an Indigenous Strategic Plan that best meets the needs of Indigenous students.

In order to achieve meaningful institutional transformation, post-secondary institutions must be leading efforts that are oriented towards Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination. Simply “adding Indigenous bodies and their knowledge within existing architectures”, as is a common decolonial tactic utilized by post-secondary institutions, risks perpetuating settler colonialism and contributes to Indigenous erasure.⁶⁴ True inclusion of Indigenous representation involves “making space, opening the circle”, rather than forcing Indigenous ways to “fit into existing structures”, which is comparable to assimilation.⁶⁵ To expand on the inclusion of Indigenous art and symbolism across post-secondary campuses, the provincial government should provide funding for post-secondary institutions to commission Indigenous students and/or artists to create art and symbolism to be showcased across their campuses. Having Indigenous people create the art is essential in meaningful collaboration and acts towards decolonizations. This also supports the representation of Indigenous Peoples and art within colonial institutions. This dedicated funding would directly facilitate commissioning Indigenous students to create art and symbolism, ensuring that these new representations are authentic and reflect Indigenous leadership and perspectives. This initiative is further strengthened by the broader federal commitment outlined in the 2021-2024 budget, which allocated over \$450 million to support the preservation, restoration, and promotion of culture and language, including forms of artistic and symbolic expression.⁶⁶ Adding Indigenous art and symbolism across post-secondary

⁶³ Pedri-Spade and Pitawanakwat, “Indigenization in Universities,” 13.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 12.

⁶⁵ Savannah Sloat, “What Does Indigenization Mean?,” University Affairs, April 3, 2024, <https://universityaffairs.ca/opinion/what-does-indigenization-mean/>.

⁶⁶ Assembly of First Nations, Progress on Breathing Life into the Calls for Justice: A CFJ Progress Report, June 3, 2024, Assembly of First Nations, <https://afn.bynder.com/m/2ea645db802ef4/original/Breathing-Life-into-the-Calls-for-Justice-A-CFJ-Progress-Report.pdf>

institutions, not just in Indigenous-specific areas, would provide varied support to Indigenous students, addressing deep-rooted concerns about colonialism, fostering a sense of belonging, enriching the educational environment, and promoting healing.

It is a fundamental right of Indigenous students to practice their cultures and ceremonies safely, without fear of disrespect or interference from the external campus community. This is unfortunately not the reality, particularly with an uptick of racism in recent years in Canada. Within a post-secondary context, Indigenous students continue to face discrimination, oppression, prejudice, and unconscious bias from students, faculty, and staff at their institutions. A study conducted by researchers from McMaster University found that 93% of the Indigenous students interviewed had experienced some form of racism within a university context. Of these participants, 81% stated they had experienced racism while interacting with institutional administration and staff, while 78% stated that they experienced racism within the classroom.⁶⁷ Further, it is worth noting that post-secondary institutions often lack transparency regarding the outcomes of disciplinary hearings for on-campus instances of hate, stemming from the absence of clear consequences for hate speech and racial prejudice leading to student and staff distrust. Research has demonstrated a strong connection between engagement in cultural practices and healing from trauma, emphasizing the critical role of traditional teachings and ceremonies in fostering intergenerational healing and supporting students' well-being.⁶⁸ Several post-secondary institutions have begun implementing initiatives that reflect the fundamental right of Indigenous students to practice their culture and ceremonies safely. A leading example can be found at the University of Waterloo, where signage has been installed across main campus to identify over seventy rooms that are pre-approved for smudging.⁶⁹ However, this remains unevenly applied across post-secondary institutions. When Indigenous students are denied the opportunity to practice their cultures, or face racism and discrimination when doing so, it contributes to an unsafe learning environment and reinforces the colonial nature of post-secondary institutions. This adds to the systemic and institutional oppression Indigenous learners experience, negatively affecting their educational outcomes, confidence, and career preparedness.⁷⁰ Therefore, the MCURES should require post-secondary institutions develop trauma-informed, culturally sensitive racial and religious equity policies, with clear, enforceable codes of conduct that explicitly prohibit racism and hate speech; as well outline clear and enforceable codes of conduct, for campus security and/or constables that are culturally sensitive within its response procedures.

⁶⁷ Kerry Anne Bailey, "Racism within the Canadian University: Indigenous Students' Experience," (PhD diss, McMaster University, 2020), 89-90.

⁶⁸ Assembly of First Nations, *Progress on Breathing Life into the Calls for Justice*, 13.

⁶⁹ Parmjot Kaur Chahal, "A Sign of Respect: New Smudging Signage Indicates Dedicated Spaces across Waterloo Campus," Office of Indigenous Relations | University of Waterloo, May 12, 2025, <https://uwaterloo.ca/indigenous/news/sign-respect-new-smudging-signage-indicates-dedicated-spaces>.

⁷⁰ Broderick Norwich, Gabrielle Pinto, Michelle Wodchis-Johnson, Maathangi Rudranantha, and Jess Rebelo, *Policy Paper: A Comprehensive Access Strategy*, Toronto: Ontario Undergraduate Student Association, 2025.

Indigenous peoples hold the inherent Treaty right to occupy and use their traditional lands for purposes such as gathering, ceremony, and knowledge exchange. These rights, which include ensuring every First Nations child has access to their traditional land and teachings, are affirmed in principles guiding Canadian legislation and international declarations, including but not limited to, Jordan's Principle⁷¹ and UNDRIP.⁷² As colonial spaces, Post-secondary institutions in Ontario operate on stolen Indigenous land and continue to perpetuate direct and indirect colonial violence against Indigenous Peoples. Institutions therefore have a responsibility to respect and uphold treaty rights in meaningful and visible ways. However, this responsibility is often undermined by the reality that post-secondary institutions continue to perpetuate colonial violence against Indigenous Peoples. Colonial violence is a multifaceted and persistent harm enacted against Indigenous Peoples through the process and structures of colonization.⁷³ The perpetuation of colonial violence is embedded in the very structures and culture of post-secondary institutions across Ontario.⁷⁴ Many institutions memorialize colonial violence through the presence of colonial names, labels, statues and symbolism across campuses. These colonial representations are not merely historical artifacts, they reflect and perpetuate a broader institutional refusal to confront the ongoing legacies of colonialism within their own operations and histories. This reality is also concerning as it emphasizes the failing of post-secondary institutions to acknowledge their direct role in their history of participation in colonial violence and related assimilative practices. Therefore the MCURES should develop guidelines to help post-secondary institutions remove colonial and racist symbols and comply with the Ontario Human Rights Commission's proposed policy on discriminatory names, words, and images. Instead of continuing to allow university campuses to promote harmful colonial figures and events, the provincial government should encourage post-secondary institutions to prominently display appropriate and relevant Indigenous flags alongside the Canadian and Ontario flags across all campuses. Further, the provincial government should earmark funding from the facilities renewal program to upgrade signage and expression on post-secondary campuses to include local Indigenous languages.

NON-INDIGENOUS ALLIES

Principle: Non-Indigenous people are expected to work toward decolonization, honouring the truth and reconciliation commitments outlined by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

⁷¹Government of Canada, "Jordan's Principle: Guidance on the Best Interest of a Child," Government of Canada; Indigenous Services Canada, December 23, 2024, <https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1601663830055/1601663849507>.

⁷² United Nations, United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Resolution 61/295, September 13, 2007.

⁷³ Assembly of First Nations, Progress on Breathing Life into the Calls for Justice, 13.

⁷⁴ Chaudhury et al., Accountability & System Vision, 6.

Principle: Non-Indigenous students should respect, honour, and have access to Indigenous ways of learning as part of their post-secondary education in an effort to decolonize academic curricula.

Principle: It is not the responsibility of Indigenous Peoples to educate non-Indigenous people and foster supportive connections.

Principle: Post-secondary institutions have the responsibility to foster Indigenous education and meaningful allyship opportunities for non-Indigenous students.

Concern: Post-secondary institutions do not provide adequate support and the tools necessary to non-Indigenous allies to foster an environment, and engage with Indigenous allyship

Concern: Non-Indigenous faculty, staff, and students do not foster an environment of understanding, empathy, and respect towards Indigenous Peoples and affairs.

Concern: Post-secondary institutions disproportionately place the responsibility of all Indigenous outcomes and initiatives on Indigenous Peoples without adequate support or compensation.

Recommendation: The MCURES should, in consultation and collaboration with Indigenous leaders, develop an evaluation framework of Indigenous inclusion and safe learning environments for courses outside of Indigenous studies.

Recommendation: The provincial government should, in consultation and collaboration with Indigenous leaders, develop performance management and evaluation guidelines for institutions to conduct comprehensive performance reviews of faculty and instructors regarding the facilitation of a safe learning environment surrounding Indigenous academia.

Recommendation: The provincial government should provide funding to post-secondary institutions to hire Indigenous educators to develop and oversee recurring, mandatory training and ongoing education opportunities for non-Indigenous students, staff, and faculty.

Recommendation: The MCURES should create a new grant dedicated to funding non-Indigenous allyship initiatives facilitated by broader campus student support initiatives and departments.

Allyship is a fundamental step in the journey toward true Indigenization within post-secondary institutions. Genuine allies demonstrate their commitment through humility and active listening, sustained patience and meaningful investment, and by acknowledging the shared responsibility to create systemic change; meaningful change should not be the sole burden of Indigenous peoples.⁷⁵ True Indigenization requires a fundamental shift in how post-secondary institutions operate, and this shift must be led in partnership with, but not solely by, Indigenous

⁷⁵ Sloat, "What Does Indigenization Mean?"

communities. As emphasized by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), reconciliation is not just an Indigenous issue; it is a Canadian one.⁷⁶

Non-Indigenous faculty, students, and administrators have a duty to work towards decolonization and honouring the truth and reconciliation commitments outlined by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. These efforts should include ensuring that all students, regardless of discipline, have meaningful access to Indigenous ways of learning and knowing such as land-based education, oral traditions, and holistic teaching approaches, as part of broader efforts to decolonize academic curricula.⁷⁷ Indigenous ways of knowing must be respected and embedded meaningfully into programs, and taught in ways that honour and respect Indigenous pedagogies. However, Universities Canada found that only 60% of institutions offer land-based or experiential learning in partnership with Indigenous communities, highlighting a significant gap between intention and implementation.⁷⁸ This finding highlights how post-secondary institutions do not provide adequate support and the tools necessary to non-Indigenous allies to foster an environment that allows for engagement with Indigenous allyship.

This is not to say that all institutions are lacking course based opportunities for non-Indigenous students to engage with land-based learning, as the University of Waterloo offers a new field course on Indigenous medicine, which is being taught by Elders and coordinated by Indigenous staff at the university.⁷⁹ Therefore, The MCURES should, in consultation and collaboration with Indigenous leaders, develop an evaluation framework of Indigenous inclusion and safe learning environments for courses outside of Indigenous studies to ensure that Indigenous education and ways of knowing are integrated into all courses and disciplines. Additionally, the provincial government should, in consultation and collaboration with Indigenous leaders, develop performance management and evaluation guidelines for institutions to conduct comprehensive performance reviews of faculty and instructors regarding the facilitation of a safe learning environment surrounding Indigenous academia.

Post-secondary institutions have the responsibility to foster Indigenous education and meaningful allyship opportunities for non-Indigenous students. Despite the efforts of many Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous allies, many classrooms and campus spaces continue to fall short in fostering environments rooted in understanding, empathy, and respect towards Indigenous peoples and issues. This concern highlights the immediate need for institutional accountability. Genuine allyship goes beyond performative gestures; it requires listening without

⁷⁶ The Journey Together: Ontario's Commitment to Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples, Toronto: Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation, 2016.

⁷⁷ Brock Thorbjorn Pitawanakwat, "Indigenization in Universities and its Role in Continuing Settler Colonialism," *Settler Colonialism in Indigenous Communities* 1, no. 2 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.2021/ju.v1i2.2377>

⁷⁸ "Advancing Reconciliation and Indigenization at Canadian Universities," Universities Canada, 2022, <https://univcan.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/UC-2023-Survey-Indigenous-Education-Reconciliation-EN.pdf>.

⁷⁹ Sloat, "What Does Indigenization Mean?"

defensiveness and taking informed, sustained action in pursuit of systemic change.⁸⁰ The MCURES should therefore create a new grant dedicated to funding non-Indigenous allyship initiatives facilitated by broader campus student support initiatives and departments in order to financially support the work of non-Indigenous allies. Without these systemic and government supports, allyship risks remaining symbolic rather than transformative. As scholars have warned, settler-colonialism persists in post-secondary institutions under the guise of promoting Indigeneity, particularly when Indigenization is viewed as merely a commitment to "insert Indigenous bodies and their knowledge within existing architectures that simultaneously contribute to their erasure."⁸¹ To move forward, institutions must not only commit to Indigenization, but also to reshaping the structures that continue to marginalize Indigenous voices.

It is not the responsibility of Indigenous peoples to ensure or facilitate cultural safety training for non-indigenous peoples. Having the burden on Indigenous peoples to facilitate cultural safety training causes retraumatization, because this puts Indigenous Peoples t in the position of having to justify their own humanity or “prove” systemic issues exist. Further it is seen as a source of tokenization. However, despite the problematic nature of these practices, post-secondary institutions continue to disproportionately place the responsibility of all Indigenous outcomes and initiatives on Indigenous Peoples without adequate support or compensation. Therefore, the substantial labor of cultural education and relationship-building must be taken up by non-Indigenous individuals and institutions in both academic and non-academic spaces. In an out-of-class context, this responsibility translates into institutional accountability for providing and sustaining necessary resources, particularly ensuring that Indigenous support centers and equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) offices are not poorly resourced, which leads to the overburdening of racialized staff.⁸² Therefore, the provincial government should provide funding to post-secondary institutions to hire Indigenous educators to develop and oversee recurring, mandatory training and ongoing education opportunities for non-Indigenous students, staff, and faculty.

INDIGENOUS FACULTY & STAFF

Principle: Indigenous ways of knowing, cultural connection, and knowledge should be recognized in accreditation standards for hiring Indigenous faculty and instructors.

Principle: Indigenous faculty and staff must be supported to thrive in colonially rooted institutional environments that are safe, authentic, and inclusive of Indigenous Peoples, cultures, practices, and academic sovereignty.

⁸⁰ Pitawanakwat, “Indiginization in Universities,” 2022.

⁸¹ Pedri-Spade and Pitawanakwat, “Indigenization in Universities,” 12.

⁸² Abbott et al., Addressing Racism & Religious Discrimination, 53.

Principle: Indigenous faculty and staff should have an inclusive and safe environment that respects their methodologies, ways of knowing, and cultural, personal, and spiritual well-being across research, academia, and university life.

Principle: Indigenous faculty and staff should have the ability to practice their culture, engage with other Indigenous faculty/staff, and be made aware of available institutional supports that cater to their needs.

Principle: Indigenous faculty and staff should not be burdened with the responsibility of teaching sensitivity training.

Principle: Indigenous faculty and staff should be hired into supportive, full-time, long-term, reliable positions.

Concern: Indigenous faculty and staff may face bias, discrimination or tokenization from Non-Indigenous faculty and staff.

Concern: Many Indigenous-focused courses are taught by non-Indigenous faculty or instructors.

Concern: Indigenous faculty and staff lack safe, anonymous ways to report and discuss behaviour that compromises the safety and inclusivity in their workplace.

Concern: When Indigenous faculty and staff speak out about harm and inequity, they are often dismissed, and no action is taken to protect them.

Concern: Indigenous faculty and staff have limited access to culturally relevant supports and community-building opportunities on campus, leading to isolation and a reduced sense of belonging.

Concern: Faculty hiring process and requirements systematically exclude Indigenous knowledge by prioritizing Eurocentric standards.

Concern: Indigenous staff bear the responsibility of repeatedly providing cultural sensitivity training to faculty, and delineating racist behaviours and teachings, a process that may cause retraumatization.

Concern: Indigenous faculty and leaders are severely underrepresented in post-secondary institutions and are disproportionately hired into short-term rather than permanent positions.

Recommendation: The provincial government should mandate that post-secondary institutions promote clear policies and procedures when it comes to Indigenous bias, discrimination, and harm perpetrated by faculty and staff.

Recommendation: The provincial government should mandate that university administrations and faculties, in collaboration with local Indigenous Education Councils, develop a recruitment and retention strategy for faculty, instructors, and staff that honours Indigenous ways of knowing.

Recommendation: MCURES should provide post-secondary institutions with funding to commission equity audits, with results publicly disclosed to reveal hiring and retention gaps and inform policies and programs supporting Indigenous faculty and staff.

Recommendation: The provincial government should provide envelope funding to ensure the creation and maintenance of senior-level positions for Indigenous faculty and staff.

Recommendation: The provincial government should provide funding to post-secondary institutions to hire allies to develop and implement recurring, mandatory cultural safety training and ongoing educational opportunities for non-Indigenous staff and faculty.

Indigenous faculty and staff should have an inclusive and safe working environment that respects their methodologies, ways of knowing, and cultural, personal, and spiritual well-being across research, academia, and university life. This principle is rooted in the acknowledgement that post-secondary institutions have deep historical ties to colonialism and they therefore have limited access to culturally relevant supports and community-building opportunities on campus, which can lead to isolation and a reduced sense of belonging. Post-secondary institutions perpetuate colonialism by prioritizing Western knowledge systems and operating within ideologies that reinforce racism and sexism, contributing to the systemic barriers faced by Indigenous peoples.⁸³ It is important to recognize that post-secondary institutions have roots in colonialism as this foundation continues to shape the everyday experiences of Indigenous faculty and staff within post-secondary spaces. Therefore, Indigenous faculty and staff must be supported to thrive in colonially rooted institutional environments that are safe, authentic, and inclusive of Indigenous Peoples, cultures, practices, and academic sovereignty. Further, The provincial government should mandate that post-secondary institutions promote clear policies and procedures when it comes to Indigenous bias, discrimination, and harm perpetrated by non-Indigenous faculty and staff.

Within their institutions, Indigenous faculty and staff may face bias, discrimination, or tokenization from their non-Indigenous peers. What is equally concerning is that when Indigenous faculty and staff do speak out about the harm and inequity they have experienced, they are often dismissed, and no action is taken by university administration or their direct supervisors to protect them. This environment results in institutional practices that create race-based barriers, often making it difficult for Indigenous scholars to attain and retain tenured positions; meaning that Indigenous staff and faculty are severely underrepresented in post-secondary institutions and are disproportionately hired into short-term rather than permanent positions..⁸⁴ Pre-tenured Indigenous faculty revealed, in a 2020 study conducted by Ontario's Universities, that they encountered subtle and overt racism by their peers. This

⁸³ "Colonization and Slavery- a Short History of Colleges and Universities," Center for Innovation in Campus Mental Health, accessed June 2, 2026, <https://campusmentalhealth.ca/toolkits/anti-oppressive-practice-part-2/colonization-and-colonialism/colonization-and-slavery/>

⁸⁴ Ibid., 34

racism took many forms, but was most commonly seen as either: pushback when attempting to integrate Indigenous methodologies or ways of knowing within course curricula; or being required and/or expected to speak on behalf of *all* Indigenous peoples in spaces where efforts towards decolonization or reconciliation were being attempted.⁸⁵ Therefore, the provincial government should mandate that university administrations and faculties, in collaboration with local Indigenous Education Councils, develop a recruitment and retention strategy for faculty, instructors, and staff that honours Indigenous ways of knowing.

While it is important to increase secure and tenured hiring of Indigenous faculty and staff, hiring initiatives alone are insufficient; as the institutional and structural conditions that reproduce and sustain harm for Indigenous staff and faculty remain unaddressed. Genuine progress requires moving beyond superficial inclusion, which risks perpetuating assimilation by requiring Indigenous methodologies to fit within existing colonial structures, and moves towards active decolonization that “opens the circle” to center Indigenous ways of knowing and the inclusion of Indigenous persons within leadership positions.⁸⁶ For example, in 2023, the University of Waterloo came under fire when it was revealed that a staff position for Director of Indigenous relations, which required candidates to have completed a masters degree or higher, had a salary range of \$89,000 - \$112,000, while the position for the Director of Internal and Leadership Communications, which required candidates to have completed a bachelor's degree, had an advertised salary range of \$97,000 - \$122,000.⁸⁷ Indigenous, ways of knowing, cultural connection, and knowledge should be recognized in accreditation standards for hiring Indigenous faculty and instructors. However, faculty hiring processes and requirements systematically exclude Indigenous knowledge by prioritizing Eurocentric standards, as is evidenced by the pay discrepancy outlined above. Therefore, MCURES should provide post-secondary institutions with funding to commission equity audits, with results publicly disclosed to reveal hiring and retention gaps and inform policies and programs supporting Indigenous faculty and staff. Further, the provincial government should provide envelope funding to ensure the creation and maintenance of senior-level positions for Indigenous faculty and staff.

While many post-secondary institutions throughout Ontario are beginning to integrate more Indigenous studies courses and programs, many of these programs are taught by non-Indigenous faculty or instructors. When discussing this at a Circle Work session one Indigenous student likened this phenomena to “decolonization in a colonized way.” Another student reflected on the difference in their experience taking an Indigenous studies course taught by an Indigenous

⁸⁵ “Lighting the Fire: Experiences of Indigenous Faculty in Ontario Universities,” OCAV/RGAE Joint Working Group, 2020,

<https://ontariosuniversities.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Lighting-the-Fire-Experiences-of-Indigenous-Faculty-in-Ontario-Universities-December-14-2020.pdf>

⁸⁶ Sloat, “What Does Indigenization Mean?”

⁸⁷ Abby O’Brien, “Ontario University Under Fire for Salary Offered on Indigenous Director Job Listing,” CTV News, March 8, 2023,

<https://www.ctvnews.ca/toronto/article/ontario-university-under-fire-for-salary-offered-on-indigenous-director-job-listing/>

professor and a non-Indigenous professor stating that the positionality of the professor “changes how the information is delivered... non-Indigenous instructors just read off of the slideshow... butchering land acknowledgments and mispronouncing the names of Nations.” A third student stated that having a non-Indigenous professor teaching an Indigenous studies course put them as an Indigenous student in an awkward and uncomfortable position because “[the professor] usually asks me a lot of follow-up questions and confirmations.”

To achieve meaningful integration and inclusion of Indigenous faculty and staff, institutions need to offer cultural safety training that focuses on dismantling these barriers. Cultural safety is defined as fostering an environment that is physically, socially, emotionally, and spiritually safe, recognizing and respecting cultural identities without change or denial.⁸⁸ It is important to note that Indigenous faculty and staff should not be burdened with the responsibility of teaching cultural sensitivity training to their non-Indigenous peers. However, in order for these trainings to achieve substantive change, institutions must understand that mandatory cultural safety training is not a “cure all for systemic institutional racism”; institutions must concurrently undertake an honest evaluation of their laws, regulations, policies, and practices to uncover and dismantle inherent systemic biases.⁸⁹ Without comprehensive institutional efforts focused on fostering genuine cultural safety and accountability, Indigenous faculty and staff remain vulnerable to the very colonial dynamics that continue to impact their success and well being. The provincial government should therefore provide funding to post-secondary institutions to hire allies to develop and implement recurring, mandatory cultural safety training and ongoing educational opportunities for non-Indigenous staff and faculty to ensure that Indigenous peoples within post-secondary institutions are not continually burdened with needing to justify the importance and value of decolonization to their non-Indigenous peers.

DATA, ARTIFACT, KNOWLEDGE AND TEACHINGS SOVEREIGNTY

Principle: Indigenous Peoples must have sovereignty and informed consent in all stages over the collection, use, sale, and application of their data, artifacts, knowledge and teachings.

Principle: Data on Indigenous student and staff experiences should be applied because it is important to develop effective laws, policies, and programs.

Principle: Indigenous communities should be able to freely repatriate all cultural artifacts and equitably benefit from the value of the artifacts.

Principle: Indigenous Peoples knowledge, teachings, and derived life value should be equitably compensated for.

Concern: There is a history of abuse through the collection of data from Indigenous Peoples.

Concern: Data is routinely collected from Indigenous Peoples without their consent or input, which leads to harmful laws, policies, and programs.

⁸⁸ Abbott et al., Addressing Racism & Religious Discrimination, 12.

⁸⁹ Assembly of First Nations, Progress on Breathing Life into the Calls for Justice, 7.

Concern: Data, knowledge, and artifacts are often sold by non-Indigenous peoples with no compensation or inequitable compensation of value derived to the Indigenous communities and/or proprietors including academic materials or activities, as well artifacts held in museums and galleries.

Concern: Post-secondary institutions and the provincial government lack adequate policies and regulations to facilitate the free and undisturbed repatriation of Indigenous communities artifacts.

Concern: The provincial government lacks guidelines and practices around equitable compensation for Indigenous data collection and use, knowledge and teachings sharing or distribution, and artifacts use.

Recommendation: The MCURES should mandate that post-secondary institutions adhere to the First Nations principles of OCAP®.

Recommendation: The provincial government should responsibly and meaningfully consult with Indigenous Peoples (including students, faculty, staff, educators, and communities) to ensure that the Data Standards for the Identification and Monitoring of Systemic Racism can be appropriately applied to the post-secondary sector.

Recommendation: The provincial government should mandate that any collection of equity-based data should use the Data Standards for the Identification and Monitoring of Systemic Racism as amended through responsible and meaningful consultation with Indigenous students and communities.

Recommendation: The Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming should mandate all successful applicants across funding streams have an approved Indigenous artifacts assessment and if unrepatriated artifacts are identified, a four year repatriation plan must be established.

Recommendation: The MIAFNER should develop in collaboration with the National Aboriginal Capital Corporations Associations, an equitable compensation guide for post-secondary institutions for the use of data, knowledge and teachings, and/or artifacts.

Recommendation: The MCURES in collaboration with MIAFNER should mandate the recognition and equitable compensation of Indigenous Peoples' data, intellectual property, and artifacts when it is being shared, researched, and discussed in academic settings.

Data collection and analysis is important to develop effective laws, policies, and programs. In addition to recognizing the importance and necessity of data collection and analysis, one must also ensure that Indigenous Peoples have sovereignty and informed consent over the collection, use, sale, and application of their data, artifacts, knowledge and teachings. However, there is a history of abuse through the collection of data from or about Indigenous Peoples. Throughout history, colonial policies, such as the reservation pass system, have caused Indigenous communities to experience abuse through surveillance of their families and communities, resulting in displacement for the intention of harming and eradicating Indigenous Peoples and

and their cultures.⁹⁰ Indigenous Peoples' right to privacy and data sovereignty must be respected. However, throughout history, colonial rhetoric has been used to justify discriminating against and harming Indigenous Peoples under the guise of data collection. For example, information taken from Indigenous families has been used as a tool to take children from their homes and place them under the supervision of settler families or authority figures, as was seen under the Residential School system and during the Sixties Scoop. Indigenous Peoples carry trauma from these surveillance tactics, which are used as an excuse to harm, divide, and further displace Indigenous Peoples from their communities, families, and cultures. As of 2021, Indigenous children make up 53.7% of children in foster care. Of these children, 50.6% of First Nations children, 51.6% of Inuit children, and 63.4% of Metis children have been placed in a foster home with caregivers who are not Indigenous.⁹¹ This harmful history and current reality has continued to cause intergenerational trauma for many Indigenous Peoples and solidified a long-standing mistrust of institutional and colonial data collection practices.

Data is routinely collected from Indigenous Peoples without their consent or input. This practice leads to the creation and implementation of harmful laws, policies, and programs. Unfair and unethical data collection is an issue that continues today; it must be addressed from the lens of appreciating the harm inflicted on Indigenous communities through misuse of information and abusive surveillance.⁹² Understanding the rights that Indigenous Peoples have, as enshrined in the Constitution, reinforces how vital it is that institutions respect Indigenous rights to ownership of their stories, knowledge, and data in relation to Indigenous Peoples' sharing, teaching, participating and researching. In addition to being valued, Indigenous knowledges should be equally compensated for by post-secondary institutions utilizing this information. Currently, the provincial government lacks guidelines and practices around equitable compensation for Indigenous data collection and use, knowledge and teachings sharing or distribution, and artifacts use.

Indigenous data sovereignty can be defined as the objective of Indigenous peoples to have control over records collected from and pertaining to Indigenous Peoples. Indigenous data sovereignty is needed in order to achieve self-determination and self-governance for Indigenous Peoples. The Access to Information Review conducted by the federal government in 2020 found that Indigenous Peoples maintained their right to assert decision-making authority over how their data and knowledge is used. A meaningful first step in this process would require governments and post-secondary institutions to transfer records relating to Indigenous Peoples,

⁹⁰ "Study of Passes for Indians to Leave Their Reserves," Government of Canada: Library, accessed June 2, 2026, https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2018/aanc-inac/R5-670-1974-eng.pdf

⁹¹ "Indigenous Foster Children Living in Private Households: Rates and Sociodemographic Characteristics of Foster Children and their Households," Statistics Canada, April 18, 2024, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/41-20-0002/412000022024001-eng.htm>

⁹² "First Nations Data Sovereignty in Canada," Statistical Journal of the IAOS 35, no. 1 (March 19, 2019): 47–69, <https://doi.org/10.3233/sji-180478>.

back to the communities this information came from.⁹³ These sentiments are echoed in the First Nations Principles of Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession (OCAP) which states that First Nations have control over data collection processes and that they own and control how this information can be used.⁹⁴ Therefore, The MIAFNER should develop in collaboration with the National Aboriginal Capital Corporations Associations, an equitable compensation guide for post-secondary institutions for the use of data, knowledge and teachings, and/or artifacts. Further, the MCURES in collaboration with MIAFNER should mandate the recognition and equitable compensation of Indigenous Peoples' data, intellectual property, and artifacts when it is being shared, researched, and discussed in academic settings. Finally, the MCURES should mandate that post-secondary institutions adhere to the First Nations principles of OCAP®.

It is vital that all action taken to remedy the Indigenous data sovereignty issues prevalent in academia be informed and led by Indigenous Peoples. This means ensuring that existing standards for data collection be vetted by Indigenous Peoples to ensure that they are designed to protect Indigenous Peoples in academic spaces. Any person conducting surveys, consultations, or any other form of data collection, must be aware of the current issues and risk of abuse present within these spaces when Indigenous Peoples are being studied or consulted, and these researchers must actively work towards engaging with practices that are culturally aware, inclusive, safe and appropriate. Colonial methods of information gathering may be stressful for and discriminatory towards Indigenous Peoples. Therefore, the type of approach used to understand the lived experiences of Indigenous Peoples must be altered. In order to begin decolonizing data collection, the provincial government should mandate that any collection of equity-based data should use the Data Standards for the Identification and Monitoring of Systemic Racism, as amended through responsible and meaningful consultation with Indigenous students and communities. Further, The provincial government should responsibly and meaningfully consult with Indigenous Peoples (students, faculty, staff, educators, and communities) to ensure that the Data Standards for the Identification and Monitoring of Systemic Racism can be appropriately applied to the post-secondary sector.

Indigenous data, knowledge, and artifacts are often sold by non-Indigenous peoples with varying circumstances including no compensation or inequitable compensation of value derived from Indigenous communities and/or proprietors. These materials may include academic materials or activities and artifacts held in museums and galleries. Indigenous Peoples knowledge and teachings derived life value should be equitably compensated for. However, post-secondary institutions and the provincial government lack adequate policies and regulations to facilitate the

⁹³ "Access to Information Review Indigenous-Specific What We Heard Report," Government of Canada, accessed June 3, 2026,

<https://www.canada.ca/en/treasury-board-secretariat/services/access-information-privacy/modernizing-access-information/the-review-process/indigenous-specific.html>

⁹⁴ "The First Nations Principles of OCAP," First Nations Information Governance Centre, accessed June 3, 2026, <https://fnigc.ca/ocap-training/>

free and undisturbed repatriation of Indigenous community's artifacts. This is a concerning reality as Indigenous Peoples have experienced harm caused by non-Indigenous peoples selling, consuming, and stewarding the cultural or sacred property of Indigenous Peoples without their consent. Indigenous communities should be able to freely repatriate all cultural artifacts and equitably benefit from the value of the artifacts. Therefore, the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming should mandate for all future funding streams, all successfully funded applicants shall have an approved Indigenous artifacts assessment; if unrepatriated artifacts are identified, then also develop an established four year repatriation plan for Indigenous artifacts.

INDIGENOUS STUDENT CENTRES, SUPPORTS, & SERVICES

PROMOTION OF STUDENT SUPPORTS

Principle: Every Indigenous student deserves equitable access to safe and culturally appropriate experiences with student support services on their post-secondary campus.

Principle: Access to supports and services for Indigenous students should follow a “no wrong door” policy.

Principle: Institutions should ensure that Indigenous students have access to and awareness of services, supports, and events offered for them.

Principle: All Indigenous students should feel welcome to engage in their campus’ Indigenous initiatives.

Principle: Indigenous students should be able to access supports and services in their preferred languages.

Concern: Inadequate promotion and outreach by institutions often prevents Indigenous students from fully accessing resources, programming, and information, resulting in barriers to participation.

Concern: There is a lack of essential student services available in French and local Indigenous languages, rendering them inaccessible to students who prefer to communicate in these languages.

Concern: Not all Indigenous students feel welcome to access supports, services, or exist in Indigenous spaces due to the colonial construct of measuring Indigeneity.

Recommendation: The provincial government should provide funding for post-secondary institutions to implement accessible signage displaying information about how to find and contact the Indigenous Student Centre, as well as what events, supports, and services are offered, in English, French, and local Indigenous languages.

Recommendation: The MCURES should issue a statement emphasizing the importance of integrated student supports and ensuring all student support services and offices are up-to-date and able to inform students about the resources offered through the Indigenous Student Centre.

Recommendation: The provincial government should provide funding to institutions to provide services in French and local Indigenous languages.

Recommendation: The MCURES should require and support post-secondary institutions in ensuring that Indigenous Student Centres and Indigenous student initiatives consistently communicate that all Indigenous students are welcome and belong in these spaces.

Recommendation: The provincial government should provide funding to post-secondary institutions to hire Indigenous educators to develop and implement recurring, mandatory training and ongoing education opportunities for non-Indigenous staff working in student support services.

Indigenous students deserve safe, respectful, and culturally appropriate experiences when accessing support services at their post-secondary institutions. However, Indigenous students often face unique barriers when seeking support, including experiences of racism, discrimination, and cultural misunderstanding. The majority of support service personnel who work for post-secondary institutions are not Indigenous Peoples. Speaking about their experience accessing mental health supports during a Circle Work session, a participant stated that “when you go to a white psychologist, they’re going to look at [your mental health concerns] differently. [Indigenous Peoples] think about counselling differently. It is seen from a perspective of higher learning... and it is also about honouring traditional teaching.” Therefore, in order to ensure that Indigenous students are receiving the support that they need from institutional services, the provincial government should provide funding to post-secondary institutions to hire Indigenous educators to develop and implement recurring, mandatory training and ongoing education opportunities for non-Indigenous staff working in student support services. It is important that these trainings are mandatory, and that they go beyond education regarding basic awareness to properly equip staff with the knowledge and skills necessary to provide culturally safe and trauma-informed care.

While ensuring that support services are culturally competent is an essential first step, this must also be accompanied by a shift in institutional culture, to help fully affirm the commitment of educational institutions to value Indigenous students. For Indigenous students to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally, it is essential that they feel a strong sense of belonging on campus. This includes feeling welcomed, represented, and supported in all Indigenous-led spaces and initiatives, particularly in Indigenous Student Centres, which often serve as cultural, community, and support hubs. Institutions must actively foster inclusive and affirming environments where all Indigenous students, regardless of background or identity feel that they have a rightful place and are encouraged to participate fully in these spaces. However, not all Indigenous students feel welcome to access supports, services, or exist in Indigenous spaces due to the colonial construct of measuring Indigeneity. In addition to dealing with the stresses of post-secondary education that non-Indigenous students face, Indigenous students must also navigate an institution that is rooted in colonial and assimilatory policies as post-secondary education is an institution that was originally designed to exclude Indigenous Peoples.⁹⁵ Therefore, the MCURES should require and support post-secondary institutions in ensuring

⁹⁵ “Colonialism’s Impact on Students,” Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health, accessed June 5, 2026, <https://campusmentalhealth.ca/toolkits/anti-oppressive-practice-part-2/colonization-and-colonialism/impact-on-students/>

that Indigenous Student Centres and Indigenous student initiatives consistently communicate that all Indigenous students are welcome and belong in these spaces.

In addition to ensuring that campus supports are welcoming, inclusive, and reflective for Indigenous students, access to these supports and services for Indigenous students should follow a “no wrong door” policy. The “no wrong door” approach ensures that when a student seeks support from any staff member, regardless of their specific role or expertise, they will not be dismissed or redirected without help. An Indigenous student revealed during a Circle Work session that the support services available to students at their institution are intended to be used only as short-term crisis supports and are designed to be used as a “stepping stone to find your own therapist or counsellor.” The lack of consistency in the design of these services puts Indigenous students in a difficult position as this system forces them to continually tell their story to an ever-changing cast of support-service personnel, risking re-traumatization. In order to ensure that Indigenous students can receive support from any service that they access, the MCURES should issue a statement emphasizing the importance of integrated student supports and ensuring all student support services and offices are up-to-date and able to inform students about the resources offered through the Indigenous Student Centre.

It is also worth noting that in order for the “no wrong door” model to be effective, institutions must also ensure that the resources themselves are visible, well-communicated, and easy to navigate. Feedback from students who participated in a Circle Work session revealed that many resources, programs, and services intended to support Indigenous students were difficult to access or even find. One Indigenous student stated how a “lot of the social improvement work [on campus] was hindered by communication. How do we get the information out to students?” Despite support services being available for Indigenous students, many participants noted that they were not well-advertised or centralized and they required students to search through multiple platforms or rely on word-of-mouth to find what they needed. This lack of visibility made it challenging for students to access culturally relevant programs, scholarships, community events, or academic supports. As a result, students frequently missed out on opportunities simply because they were unaware they existed. The absence of a clear, streamlined way to find information contributes to feelings of exclusion and creates unnecessary barriers to full participation and success within the institution. Therefore, the provincial government should provide funding for post-secondary institutions to implement accessible signage displaying information about how to find and contact the Indigenous Student Centre, as well as what events, supports, and services are offered, in English, French, and local Indigenous languages. Further, the MCURES should issue a statement emphasizing the importance of integrated student supports and ensuring all student support services and offices are up-to-date and able to inform students about the resources offered through the Indigenous Student Centre.

Post-secondary student support services are predominately available in English, making it less accessible for Francophone Indigenous students and Indigenous students who speak an Indigenous language to access support in their preferred language. Indigenous students should be able to access support services in their preferred language because language is essential for effective communication between the student and the service provider as it is used to facilitate assessment, examinations, informed-consent, and patient-centred care. Minority language users throughout Canada have an increased risk of feeling a lower risk of satisfaction and support from the support services they are seeking assistance from.⁹⁶ For Indigenous Peoples, language, especially traditional languages, are crucial to identity formation, health, and spiritual and cultural connection.⁹⁷ Further, studies have shown that access to Indigenous languages for Indigenous Peoples does have a positive effect on the health and wellness of Indigenous Peoples.⁹⁸ The provincial government should therefore provide funding to institutions to provide support services in French and local Indigenous languages.

INDIGENOUS STUDENT CENTRES

Principle: Indigenous Student Centres on post-secondary campuses are essential for providing culturally relevant supports for Indigenous students and fostering community.

Principle: Indigenous Student Centres should be able to provide compensation to Indigenous Peoples for their involvement in providing ongoing support and cultural services for Indigenous students and staff.

Principle: Indigenous students and staff deserve to feel safe and respected when accessing or working in Indigenous Student Centres.

Principle: Indigenous students deserve safe, accessible, centralized, and respected physical spaces on campus to practice their cultures and Ceremonies.

Concern: On many post-secondary campuses, Indigenous Student Centres and their spaces lack a centralized, visible, and accessible location, which limits Indigenous students' ability to gather, access supports, and practice their cultures and Ceremonies.

Concern: Funding for Indigenous Student Centres on post-secondary campuses is inadequate and inconsistent, leaving staff under-resourced and overburdened, undermining their ability to fully support Indigenous students.

⁹⁶ Michelle Leung, "The Importance of Speaking the Language of your Patients to Ensure Safe Care," *CN Content*, September 27, 2021,

<https://community.cna-aiic.ca/blogs/cn-content/2021/09/27/the-importance-of-speaking-the-language-of-your-pa>

⁹⁷ Lori Davis Hill, "Indigenous Languages, Health, and Well Being," *Healthcare Excellence Canada: Blogs*, June 15, 2023, <https://www.healthcareexcellence.ca/updates/indigenous-languages-health-and-wellbeing/>

⁹⁸ Onowa Mclvor, Art Napoleon, & Kerissa M. Dickie, "Language and Culture as Protective Factors for At-Risk Communities," *International Journal for Indigenous Health* 5, no. 1 (2013).
<https://doi.org/10.18357/ijih51200912327>

Concern: Indigenous Student Centres do not receive adequate funding to maintain the consistent involvement of Elders, Knowledge Keepers, Healers, and other Indigenous Peoples on campuses to support cultural events and Ceremonies, necessary for Indigenous students well-being and mental health.

Concern: Indigenous Student Centres and their spaces are often stigmatized, disrespected, and targeted by racism and vandalization, reflecting a broader lack of respect from the non-Indigenous campus community.

Concern: Indigenous Student Centres significantly lack funding to support the implementation and continuance of long-term, full-time positions to service Indigenous students.

Recommendation: The provincial government should provide sufficient long-term funding to post-secondary institutions dedicated to establishing and maintaining a safe, visible, and accessible physical space for Indigenous students to practice their cultures and Ceremonies on campus, with a requirement that decisions be made by Indigenous students, faculty, and support staff.

Recommendation: The provincial government should provide increased and ongoing funding for Indigenous Student Centres through the Indigenous Student Success Fund, without the need for recurring grant applications.

Recommendation: The provincial government should allocate funding to post-secondary institutions to expand staffing within Indigenous Student Centres by hiring Indigenous counsellors, Indigenous Student Support Coordinators, and other appropriate positions in long-term, full-time contracts.

Recommendation: The MCURES should collaborate with Indigenous Student Centres on post-secondary campuses to provide support related to financial, resource, and policy needed to host Ceremonies or cultural events.

Recommendation: The provincial government should mandate that post-secondary institutions develop a policy that outlines reporting mechanisms and accountability measures in place to respond to instances of disrespect, vandalization, or targeting of Indigenous Student Centres and their associated spaces on campus.

Indigenous Student Centres on post-secondary campuses are essential for providing culturally relevant supports for Indigenous students and fostering community. The Government of Ontario's Indigenous Student Success Fund provides \$18.2 million in annual funding to support the development and delivery of programming at 21 universities and 24 colleges throughout the province.⁹⁹ These supports are typically offered to students through Indigenous Student Centres and other campus-based initiatives. While this funding is essential, it is inadequate and inconsistent, leaving staff under-resourced and overburdened, and undermining their ability to

⁹⁹ Government of Ontario, "Supporting Children and Youth: Annual Progress Report 2024: Ontario's Anti-Racism Strategic Plan," Government of Ontario, August 30, 2024, <https://www.ontario.ca/document/annual-progress-report-2024-ontarios-anti-racism-strategic-plan/supporting-children-and-youth>.

fully support Indigenous students. Under this current funding model Indigenous Student Centres are therefore unable to meet the growing needs of Indigenous learners. During a Circle Work session, student participants expressed concerns about the lack of sustained and adequate support given to Indigenous Student Centres in Ontario. They shared that underfunding limits the ability of Indigenous Student Centres to hire enough staff, offer consistent programming, and create culturally safe environments for their students. As a result, Indigenous students face reduced access to meaningful support, limited opportunities for representation and leadership, and fewer culturally relevant spaces for engagement. Therefore, the provincial government should provide increased and ongoing funding for Indigenous Student Centres through the Indigenous Student Success Fund, without the need for recurring grant applications.

Indigenous Student Centres should be able to provide compensation to Indigenous Peoples for their involvement in providing ongoing support and cultural services for Indigenous students and staff. Since the release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's *94 Calls to Action* in 2015, the mandates and expectations of Indigenous Student Centres have expanded, without an increase in funding to support this expansion. A study conducted by faculty from three major Canadian universities found that because staff working in Indigenous Student Centres have been tasked with a continuously increasing work load, "they are placed in a limbo of politics of distraction," which is a concept defined as "the colonizing process of being kept busy by the colonizer, of always being on the backfoot, responding, engaging, accounting, following, and explaining."¹⁰⁰ It is also worth noting that due to the uncertainty surrounding the amount of funding that Indigenous Student Centres receive each year, many are unable to support the implementation and continuance of long-term, full-time positions to service Indigenous students. During a Circle Work session, a student noted that their institution had a problem with retaining staff to work within its Indigenous Student Centre because of "pay parity, short-term contracts, and part-time" employment opportunities. Therefore, the provincial government should allocate funding to post-secondary institutions to expand staffing within Indigenous Student Centres by hiring Indigenous counsellors, Indigenous Student Support Coordinators, and other appropriate positions in long-term, full-time contracts.

This funding shortfall not only affects service delivery but also has serious implications for staff well-being and institutional culture. Indigenous staff and faculty are often expected to carry out a disproportionate amount of emotional, cultural, and administrative labour, leading to burnout, overwork, and a sense of being tokenized within their institutions.¹⁰¹ In turn, this contributes to noticeable gaps in student services and further entrenches systemic barriers to Indigenous student success. During the Circle Work sessions, a common theme expressed by participants was a desire to have more opportunities to interact with elders and to perform cultural

¹⁰⁰ Stephanie J. Waterman, Shawna M. Cunningham, & Michelle Pidgeon, "Understanding the Heartwork of Indigenous Student Services During the Challenging Times of Reconciliation, Decolonization, and Indigenization," *Canadian Journal of Higher Education* 55, no. 3 (2025): p. 92, <https://doi.org/10.47678/cjhe.v55i3.190639>

¹⁰¹ Waterman, Cunningham, Pidgeon, "Understanding the Heartwork," 92.

ceremonies with their peers on campus. One student stated that this desire to form connections with elders in institutional spaces is “about honoring traditional teaching” and seeking guidance in a culturally relevant manner. However, Indigenous Student Centres do not receive adequate funding to maintain the consistent involvement of Elders, Knowledge Keepers, Healers, and other Indigenous Peoples on campuses to support cultural events and Ceremonies, necessary for Indigenous students' well-being and mental health. Without the necessary financial and logistical support to ensure their ongoing and meaningful presence, many students are denied access to the cultural supports that are essential to their wellness and sense of belonging. Studies show that 42% of Indigenous students experience mental health challenges, but that access to cultural supports improves Indigenous student well being and provides them with resiliency.¹⁰² In order to rectify this disconnect, the MCURES should collaborate with Indigenous Student Centres on post-secondary campuses to provide support related to financial, resource, and policy needed to host Ceremonies or cultural events.

In addition to gaps in staffing and programming, students also raised concerns about the physical location and accessibility of Indigenous Student Centres. Indigenous students deserve safe, accessible, centralized, and respected physical spaces on campus to practice their cultures and Ceremonies. On many campuses, the spaces used for Indigenous Student Centres are hidden away, poorly marked, or not centrally located, making it difficult for students to find them, gather, or participate in community activities. This lack of visibility sends a message, whether intentional or not, that Indigenous students and cultures are not valued by their broader campus community. It also makes it harder for students to access critical support or feel at home within their institution. A study which surveyed Indigenous students from two universities in Canada found that 73% of respondents wished that there were more cultural events and workshops hosted by their institution and that access to cultural events, where students would have the opportunity to meet and form community with other students, staff, faculty, or elders, had a positive correlation to persistence and completion of their education.¹⁰³ Furthermore, students emphasized during a Circle Work session that all Indigenous Student Centres and their associated spaces must be designed to accommodate smudging and other Ceremonial practices. Smudging is not only a sacred tradition but a vital part of many students' wellness routines and spiritual expression. Yet, due to building codes, ventilation issues, or lack of institutional understanding, some students are either restricted from smudging or must go through burdensome approval processes to do so. This creates unnecessary barriers to cultural expression and contributes to a sense of exclusion within their own support spaces. The provincial government should therefore provide sufficient long-term funding to post-secondary institutions dedicated to establishing and maintaining a safe, visible, and accessible physical space

¹⁰² “Barriers and Facilitators for Accessing Indigenous Supports: Literature Review,” Nicholas St. Germaine, Indspire, accessed June 8, 2025.
<https://indspire.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Barriers-and-Facilitators-for-Accessing-Indigenous-Supports-Literature-Review-FINAL.pdf>

¹⁰³ Patrick Walton, Kristen Hamilton, Natalie Clark, Michelle Pidgeon, & Mike Arnouse, “Indigenous University Student Persistence: Supports, Obstacles, and Recommendations,” *Canadian Journal of Education* 43, no. 2 (2020).

for Indigenous students to practice their cultures and Ceremonies on campus, with a requirement that decisions be made by Indigenous students, faculty, and support staff.

Indigenous students and staff deserve to feel safe and respected when accessing or working in Indigenous Student Centres. Unfortunately, Indigenous Student Centres and their spaces are often stigmatized, disrespected, and targeted by racism and vandalization, reflecting a broader lack of respect from the non-Indigenous campus community. From 2019 until 2021, Queen's University experienced three major hate motivated attacks that threatened Indigenous students and their cultural practices. In 2019 at Chwon Hall Residence, Indigenous and Pride flags were stolen from the common room and a threatening note was left telling residents to "lock your doors and hide your keys. We'll scalp you all, we'll make you bleed"; following a three year investigation, no charges were laid. Then in 2020, the teepee at the Four Directions Indigenous student centre was vandalized. Finally, in 2021 during a virtual gathering honouring the 215 students whose bodies were recovered from Kamloops Indian Residential School, the meeting hosted by the Indigenous Student Centre was hacked.¹⁰⁴ In order to prevent future hate-motivated attacks on Indigenous Student Centres, the provincial government should mandate that post-secondary institutions develop a policy that outlines reporting mechanisms and accountability measures in place to respond to instances of disrespect, vandalization, or targeting of Indigenous Student Centres and their associated spaces on campus.

Indigenous Student Centres are far more than just resource hubs, they are places of cultural affirmation, emotional safety, and community. When they are well-supported, properly resourced, and respected on campus, they become essential spaces where Indigenous students and staff feel valued, and empowered to succeed. Ensuring the sustainability, accessibility, and cultural integrity of these Centres must be a priority for institutions committed to reconciliation and equity.

HEALTH & WELLNESS SUPPORTS

Principle: Indigenous students deserve to have mental health support available that is culturally representative and provided in a safe and inclusive manner, and have the option to have services provided to them by Indigenous staff, counsellors, Elders, Knowledge Keepers, Healers, etc.

Principle: Indigenous students deserve equitable access to health services, including clear and consistent coverage through the Non-Insured Health Benefits (NIHB) program and private insurance.

¹⁰⁴ Robert Cribb & Charlie Buckley, "The Hidden Hate on Campus: We Tracked Incidents at Colleges and Universities and Found a Growing Problem," *University of Toronto: Dalla Lana School of Public Health*, March 10, 2023, <https://ijb.utoronto.ca/news/the-hidden-hate-on-campus-we-tracked-incidents-at-colleges-and-universities-and-found-a-growing-problem/>

Principle: Supporting and respecting sober culture on post-secondary campuses is necessary for the health and wellbeing of all students, particularly Indigenous students.

Concern: Indigenous students lack consistent access to Indigenous counsellors or mental health services provided by Indigenous Student Centres, on campus health and wellness, or local community.

Concern: Indigenous health services that reflect holistic and traditional medicine practices are often not available, supported, or recognized by post-secondary institutions.

Concern: Coverage through the Non-Insured Health Benefits (NIHB) program and private insurance is limited, inconsistent, and difficult for students to navigate, creating barriers to accessing care.

Concern: Medical professionals frequently lack cultural competency and, in many cases, exhibit bias or discrimination toward Indigenous patients, which harms students and discourages them from seeking care.

Concern: Post-secondary institutions do not have widely accessible mental health and well-being supports to dealing with intergenerational trauma, addiction, etc.

Concern: Indigenous students who come from First Nations Reserves, or rural and northern communities, may experience “culture shock” as they transition into post-secondary education, particularly if they have no access to their cultures or land.

Concern: The normalization of binge drinking, heavy drinking culture, and stigmatization of sober culture at post-secondary institutions can be especially harmful to Indigenous students.

Recommendation: The provincial government should provide long-term funding earmarked for post-secondary mental health care to hire and retain Indigenous staff who can better understand and support the needs of Indigenous students.

Recommendation: The provincial government should mandate that all student support staff undergo mandatory, recurrent training and ongoing education opportunities covering cultural sensitivity; Indigenous cultures, affairs, and trauma responses; and culturally appropriate crisis intervention and responses.

Recommendation: The provincial government should provide or increase funding to Indigenous-specific crisis resources, including, but not limited to Talk 4 Healing and the Hope for Wellness Help Line, to support awareness and access to services for Indigenous post-secondary students.

Recommendation: The provincial government should provide envelope funding to community-based Indigenous health and wellness supports to expand their capacity to support Indigenous post-secondary students whose needs are not met by on-campus resources.

Recommendation: The provincial government should provide grant funding for student groups on post-secondary campuses to host sober events on campuses and to facilitate safe consumption education for students.

Recommendation: The MCURES should work with the Office of Mental Health and Addictions to develop guidelines for hosting sober events on post-secondary campuses.

Recommendation: The provincial government should mandate that post-secondary institutions provide information about, and access to, culturally appropriate resources to support sobriety on campus.

Recommendation: The provincial government should provide institutions with a reliable, regularly updated list of external Indigenous health supports and practitioners, and require institutions to disseminate this information to Indigenous students.

Recommendation: The provincial government should work with the federal government and insurance providers to improve communication and transparency around NIHB and other health coverage, and require post-secondary institutions to provide clear guidance and navigation support to Indigenous students accessing these benefits.

Recommendation: The provincial government should advocate to the federal government to mandate that all insurance providers allow Indigenous students with NIHB coverage to opt out of post-secondary insurance plans.

Indigenous students deserve to have mental health support available that is culturally representative and provided in a safe and inclusive manner, and have the option to have services provided to them by Indigenous staff, counsellors, Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and Healers. In alignment with Article 24 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), Indigenous students have the right to access their traditional medicines and uphold their health practices, including the protection and use of important medicinal plants, animals, and minerals.¹⁰⁵ Unfortunately, Indigenous health services that reflect holistic and traditional medicine practices are often not available, supported, or recognized by post-secondary institutions. Action 22 of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) calls on those with the power to influence the Canadian healthcare system to acknowledge and integrate Indigenous healing practices into patient care, allowing for collaborative work with Indigenous healers and Elders when requested by Indigenous patients.¹⁰⁶ Addressing this call to action is necessary as medical professionals frequently lack cultural competency and, in many cases, exhibit bias or discrimination toward Indigenous patients, which harms students and discourages them from seeking care. Therefore, the provincial government should provide envelope funding to community-based Indigenous health and wellness supports to expand their capacity to support Indigenous post-secondary students whose needs are not met by on-campus resources. Further, the provincial government should provide or increase funding to Indigenous-specific crisis resources, including, but not limited to Talk 4 Healing and the Hope for Wellness Help Line, to support awareness and access to services for Indigenous post-secondary students.

¹⁰⁵ United Nations, Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, art. 24.

¹⁰⁶ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action, 2015, https://ehprnh2mwo3.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf

Across post-secondary institutions in Ontario, Indigenous students lack consistent access to Indigenous counsellors or mental health services provided by Indigenous Student Centres, on campus health and wellness services, or services provided throughout the local community. Similarly, post-secondary institutions do not have widely accessible mental health and well-being supports addressing things like intergenerational trauma and addiction. Studies have found that many Indigenous students rely on connection to their cultural or familial practices during the completion of their post-secondary education.¹⁰⁷ The disconnection from culture and community means that Indigenous students who come from First Nations Reserves, or rural and northern communities, may experience “culture shock” as they transition into post-secondary education, particularly if they have no access to their cultures or lands. A study conducted by the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples found that there were three categories of barriers preventing Indigenous students from pursuing higher education: accessibility, which includes physical barriers and geographic barriers; availability, which includes the availability of adequate physical, financial, and human resources that are suitable for Indigenous students; and acceptability, which includes the creation of culturally safe and appropriate spaces for Indigenous students on post-secondary campuses, as well as the integration of Indigenous cultures, perspectives, and worldviews within educational spaces to ensure that the education all students receive is delivered in a way that is free from racism and prejudice.¹⁰⁸ In order to ensure that Indigenous students are able to access and benefit from services provided by non-Indigenous peoples, the provincial government should mandate that all student support staff undergo mandatory, recurrent training and ongoing education opportunities covering cultural sensitivity; Indigenous cultures, affairs, and trauma responses; and culturally appropriate crisis intervention and responses.

In addition to ensuring that culturally relevant and trauma informed supports are available to Indigenous students in the first place, post-secondary institutions must also ensure that they are hiring Indigenous staff members to work in these spaces. Having Indigenous Peoples working in support service positions across institutional support services, not just those located within Indigenous Student Centres, helps to create a sense of community for Indigenous students, increasing the likelihood that they will benefit from and utilize these supports.¹⁰⁹ However, there is a lack of Indigenous support staff working across university campuses. The provincial government should therefore provide long-term funding earmarked for post-secondary mental health care to hire and retain Indigenous staff who can better understand and support the needs of Indigenous students.

¹⁰⁷ Nicholas St. Germaine, “Barriers and Facilitators for Accessing Indigenous Supports,” *Indspire*, accessed June 23, 2026, https://indspire.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Barriers-and-Facilitators-for-Access-LR_EN1.pdf

¹⁰⁸ The Congress of Aboriginal Peoples, “Post-Secondary Education Needs Assessment,” April 21, 2022, <https://abo-peoples.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Post-Secondary-Needs-Assessment-PSE-CAP-2022-1.pdf>

¹⁰⁹ E. Greenfield, “Supporting Indigenous Student Success in Post-Secondary Education: Thriving from Application to Graduation,” (2020), <https://www.socialconnectedness.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/PDF-Supporting-Indigenous-Student-Success.pdf>

Indigenous students deserve equitable access to health services, including clear and consistent coverage through the Non-Insured Health Benefits (NIHB) program and private insurance. The NIHB is a healthcare program that is run by the federal government and is available to Indigenous Peoples who hold status under the Indian Act and to Inuk Peoples who are recognized by an Inuit land claims organization; Metis Peoples are currently ineligible to receive NIHB benefits. This program helps to facilitate mental health care coverage for services that are not available through social programs, private insurance plans, and provincial health insurance. It is worth noting however that coverage through the NIHB program and private insurance is limited, inconsistent, and difficult for students to navigate, creating barriers to accessing care. This is because NIHB users must first contact their provincial Indigenous services office to receive a list of contracted professionals who will accept this coverage and then the onus is on the person using these services to reach out again to the service provider; creating a difficult barrier for students who may not have adequate internet connection or phone service and who may be undergoing a mental health crisis.¹¹⁰ In order to avoid this initial barrier to accessing health care, the provincial government should provide institutions with a reliable, regularly updated list of external Indigenous health supports and practitioners, and require institutions to disseminate this information to Indigenous students. With the exception of Western University, student health and dental plans offered by our member institutions do not recognize NIHB as a valid form of insurance that makes Indigenous students eligible to opt-out of their institutional plans. To help prevent the affordability of ancillary fees becoming a barrier for Indigenous students to pursue higher education, the provincial government should advocate to the federal government to mandate that all insurance providers allow Indigenous students with NIHB coverage to opt out of post-secondary insurance plans.

Across university campuses in Ontario, there is a culture present that normalizes binge drinking and party culture. Students who chose to remain sober or not participate in these activities often face stigmatization or are questioned for these lifestyle choices. Supporting and respecting sober culture on post-secondary campuses is necessary for the health and wellbeing of all students, particularly Indigenous students. This is because for many Indigenous students, sobriety is not only a personal or health-related choice but can also be deeply rooted in cultural teachings, healing practices, or community commitments, especially in the context of intergenerational trauma and the impacts of colonization. Due to the colonial nature of Canadian institutions, Indigenous Peoples carry a disproportionate burden of the harms caused by substance use.¹¹¹ An increase in substance use amongst Indigenous Peoples is a result of repeated assimilation and genocide attempts by settlers and government policies that continue

¹¹⁰ Nicole Santos Dunn, Jordan McVittie, Jeffrey Ansloos, Anik Obomsawin, & Sara Azarshahi, "First Nations and Inuit Mental Health and the Non-Insured Health Benefits Program: Urgent Priorities for Evaluation," *Canadian Journal of Public Health* 115, no. 1 (2023): 143-147. [10.17269/s41997-023-00837-7](https://doi.org/10.17269/s41997-023-00837-7)

¹¹¹ Karen A. Urbanoski, "Need for Equity in Treatment of Substance Use Among Indigenous People in Canada," *Canadian Medical Journal Association* 189, no. 44 (2017). [10.1503/cmaj.171002](https://doi.org/10.1503/cmaj.171002)

to discriminate against Indigenous Peoples and their cultural practices.¹¹² This is why the normalization of binge drinking, heavy drinking culture, and stigmatization of sober culture at post-secondary institutions can be especially harmful to Indigenous students. In order to encourage the inclusion of sober persons for events hosted on post-secondary campuses the provincial government should provide grant funding for student groups on post-secondary campuses to host sober events and to facilitate safe consumption education for students. Further, the MCURES should work with the Office of Mental Health and Addictions to develop guidelines for hosting sober events on post-secondary campuses. The provincial government should also mandate that post-secondary institutions provide information about, and access to, culturally appropriate resources to support sobriety on campus to ensure that students who are sober or who wish to pursue sobriety have the information necessary to support this step.

¹¹² “Effectiveness of Interventions for the Prevention and Treatment of Substance Use Disorders Among First Nations, Metis, and Inuit Populations,” University of Toronto, 2022, <https://socialwork.utoronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Policy-Brief-Substance-Use-Interventions-for-FNMI-Populations-Final-Web.pdf>

CLASSROOM DISCUSSION & COURSE CONTENT

RACISM & MICROAGGRESSIONS IN THE CLASSROOM

Principle: All Indigenous students should feel safe, seen, and comfortable on campus including in classrooms and course materials.

Principle: All Indigenous students should feel safe and supported in approaching staff and faculty when experiencing racism or microaggressions.

Principle: Individual Indigenous students do not, and should not feel obligated to, represent all Indigenous students and/or Peoples.

Principle: All students should have an integral approach to education that reflects Indigenous values and expectations for cultural inclusion, truthful understandings of historical and current Indigenous affairs, cultural sensitivity, and active anti-racism, regardless of their program of study.

Concern: Indigenous students face racism and microaggressions in the classroom through course content, and at the hands of students, staff, faculty, and instructors.

Concern: Indigenous students may feel that they cannot speak up against professors or instructors, course content, or the institution for fear that it could jeopardize their degree or education.

Concern: Indigenous students are often tokenized, exploited, and made to represent all Indigenous Peoples.

Concern: Students are rarely made aware of the reporting process when racism occurs, should such a reporting process exist.

Concern: Universities programs and classes do not fully educate students on accurate history, intersectionality, and intergenerational trauma beyond certain social disciplines.

Concern: Course content often perpetuates systemic racism through problematic themes, discriminatory ideologies, and harmful misinformation.

Concern: Non-Anglophone Indigenous students, such as Indigenous first-language speakers, and Francophone students, are often subject to linguistic barriers, a lack of resources, uninformed professors, and misleading Indigenous course content that has been falsely translated.

Concern: Indigenous students are often subject to “Indigenous Peoples 101” in Indigenous courses regardless of the year of study, due to the lack of prerequisites.

Concern: Unless students are entering into Indigenous studies, they are not taught Indigenous values and expectations of students regarding cultural inclusion, understanding of truthful historical and current affairs, cultural sensitivity, and how to be actively anti-racist.

Recommendation: The provincial government should mandate that post-secondary institutions add Indigenous-specific performance measures into existing faculty evaluations, allowing non-Indigenous faculty and instructors teaching Indigenous courses and content to receive performance feedback on their ability to facilitate a safe learning environment and pursue additional training when a need is identified. Additionally, including Indigenous scholars in their field can help to broaden the perspectives of students.

Recommendation: The provincial government should direct post-secondary institutions, through the MCURES Research Excellence and Securities, to work with Indigenous Education Councils to develop and implement prerequisite or foundational learning requirements for upper-year Indigenous courses. These requirements should ensure that students possess baseline knowledge of Indigenous histories, cultures, and governance systems to promote respectful and informed engagement with advanced course content.

Recommendation: The provincial government should mandate that post-secondary institutions, under the leadership of the Indigenous Education Council, implement a required education component for all non-Indigenous first-year students and faculty that teaches cultural sensitivity, inclusivity, and how to be anti-racist.

Recommendation: The provincial government should mandate that post-secondary institutions require at least one Indigenous studies credit to be completed regardless of the discipline.

Recommendation: The provincial government should provide funding to post-secondary institutions to hire a committee of Francophone and Indigenous first-language speakers to review all translated Indigenous material, resources, and course content.

Recommendation: The inclusive language funding should also support the development of language-specific academic resources, culturally informed translation practices, and language-access supports to ensure that non-Anglophone Indigenous students can engage meaningfully with course content and succeed academically.

Recommendation: The Provincial government should commit to, when possible, hiring an Indigenous faculty member to instruct Indigenous Studies courses. When this is not possible, an Indigenous knowledge keeper, Elder, or other guest speaker should be implemented in course material.

Recommendation: The provincial government should mandate that all institutions implement anonymous reporting processes for incidents of racism and microaggressions towards Indigenous peoples on campus and widely promote this process among students, staff, and faculty.

All Indigenous students have the right to feel safe, seen, and supported on campus, including within classrooms and course materials. However, Indigenous students continue to experience racism and microaggressions in academic spaces through course content, classroom discussions, and interactions with students, staff, faculty, and instructors. Post-secondary institutions were

founded on, provide information through, and evaluate learning with a colonial Euro-centric focus, which means that navigating these spaces has the potential to be challenging and harmful for Indigenous students.¹¹³ The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada affirms that education systems have a responsibility to address and dismantle the colonial legacies embedded within post secondary institutions.¹¹⁴ The persistence of these harms demonstrates that many institutions have not yet created culturally safe or anti racist learning environments for Indigenous students.

Racism in the classroom can appear in a number of ways, but often takes the form of: inaccurate or incomplete course content; harmful stereotypes; framing of Indigenous Peoples through deficit based or Eurocentric perspectives; a lack of EDI training or considerations; whiteness being centred in pedagogy, research, teaching and learning; and unaddressed barriers to racialized students' engagement, access, and participation.¹¹⁵ Within post-secondary classrooms and lecture halls, Indigenous histories and contemporary realities are frequently simplified, misrepresented, or confined to certain social disciplines, leaving students in many programs without accurate understandings of colonialism, intergenerational trauma, or Indigenous governance systems. This contributes to systemic ignorance among non Indigenous students and reinforces harmful assumptions that Indigenous knowledge is supplementary rather than integral to education. Therefore, the provincial government should mandate that post-secondary institutions require at least one Indigenous studies credit to be completed regardless of the discipline. This requirement should be Indigenous led and include experiential and interactive learning approaches that move beyond abstract discussion. Learning opportunities such as the Blanket Exercise, guided engagement with Survivors or knowledge keepers, or visits to residential school sites where appropriate can help non Indigenous students understand the realities of colonialism and the histories of the land on which they are receiving their education.¹¹⁶ These approaches shift the burden of education away from Indigenous students and place responsibility on institutions themselves.

Individual Indigenous students do not, and should not, feel obligated to represent all Indigenous students and/or Peoples. However, Indigenous students studying at Ontario post-secondary institutions routinely find themselves in a position where they are tokenized within classroom discussions and are implicitly or explicitly expected to represent and speak on behalf of all Indigenous Peoples. During the Circle Work sessions, an Indigenous student stated that conversations that occur within an Indigenous studies course or that cover a topic that an instructor wishes to highlight from an Indigenous lens, typically end with the instructor "asking [me] a lot of follow-up questions and confirmation," a practice which this student finds

¹¹³ "What does Racism Look Like at an Institutional Level?" ECampus Ontario, accessed June 24, 2026, https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide/citation-guide-1.html#cg-website

¹¹⁴ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, Calls to Action, 4.

¹¹⁵ ECampus Ontario, "What does Racism look like".

¹¹⁶ "Blanket Exercise Workshop," KAIROS, accessed June 24, 2026, <https://kairoscanada.org/what-we-do/indigenous-rights/blanket-exercise>

“awkward”. Asking the Indigenous students in your classroom clarification or follow-up questions places an unfair burden on these students to educate their peers and instructors, often in environments where they may already feel unsafe. Microaggressions within the classroom also occur when an instructor refuses to recognize oral histories, community knowledge, or teachings passed down by Elders, as legitimate academic sources. This practice privileges western traditions and knowledge creation, and places these practices as the sole measure of academic credibility; diminishing Indigenous epistemologies and reinforcing the idea that Indigenous knowledge systems are less rigorous or valuable than western frameworks. Indigenous students should never feel obligated to disclose personal experiences or cultural knowledge in order to correct misinformation or justify their presence, or the worthiness of Indigenous knowledges and worldviews, in academic spaces. This is why the provincial government should mandate that post-secondary institutions, under the leadership of the Indigenous Education Council, implement a required education component for all non-Indigenous first-year students and faculty that teaches cultural sensitivity, inclusivity, and how to be anti-racist. Further, the provincial government should mandate that post-secondary institutions add Indigenous-specific performance measures into existing faculty evaluations, allowing non-Indigenous faculty and instructors teaching Indigenous courses and content to receive performance feedback on their ability to facilitate a safe learning environment and pursue additional training when a need is identified. These measures should assess an instructor’s ability to facilitate culturally safe classrooms, engage Indigenous knowledge systems respectfully, and pursue additional training when gaps are identified. Additionally, including Indigenous scholars in their field can help to broaden the perspectives of students.

All Indigenous students should feel safe and supported in approaching staff and faculty when experiencing racism or microaggressions. Unfortunately, many Indigenous students do not feel safe challenging racist course content, discriminatory classroom behaviour, or instructors themselves due to fear that doing so could jeopardize their grades, degree progression, or future opportunities. A study conducted by a researcher from McMaster University found that 92.5% of Indigenous students surveyed had experienced racism during the completion of their post-secondary education, while 66.6% of students interviewed reported experiencing racism specifically when interacting with course instructors.¹¹⁷ An equally concerning fact is that students are rarely made aware of the reporting process of their institution when racism occurs, should such a reporting process exist. The absence of clearly communicated, anonymous, and trauma informed reporting mechanisms contributes to a culture in which racism and microaggressions go unaddressed.¹¹⁸ 76% of racialized students who reported experiencing racism on a post-secondary campus stated that they did not report these incidents, while 35% of these respondents stated that they were unaware of the resources or

¹¹⁷ Kerry Anne Bailey, “Racism within the Canadian University,” 90.

¹¹⁸ “Letter to Universities and Colleges on Racism and other Human Rights Concerns,” Ontario Human Rights Commission, December 18, 2020,

<https://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/news-center/letter-universities-and-colleges-racism-and-other-human-rights-concerns>

support services available at their institution to report these experiences.¹¹⁹ The provincial government should therefore mandate that all institutions implement anonymous reporting processes for incidents of racism and microaggressions towards Indigenous peoples on campus and widely promote this process among students, staff, and faculty. All students should have an integral approach to education that reflects Indigenous values and expectations for cultural inclusion, truthful understandings of historical and current Indigenous affairs, cultural sensitivity, and active anti-racism, regardless of their program of study. Course structures contribute to racist experiences that harm Indigenous students due to an absence of prerequisite or foundational requirements for Indigenous studies courses. Unlike disciplines such as chemistry or biology, where sequenced prerequisites recognize the complexity and rigor of the subject matter, Indigenous studies courses are often treated as universally introductory regardless of level. This signals that Indigenous and traditional knowledge systems are viewed as less complex or less valuable than Western knowledge, rather than as equally rigorous intellectual traditions. As a result, Indigenous students are repeatedly subjected to introductory level content in upper year courses, reinforcing emotional labour and limiting opportunities for advanced, critical engagement with Indigenous scholarship and governance systems. At the same time, students outside of Indigenous studies frequently complete their degrees without any meaningful engagement with Indigenous values, expectations of cultural inclusion, or truthful historical and contemporary Indigenous affairs. This reinforces the idea that Indigenous knowledge is optional rather than foundational to post secondary education. The provincial government should therefore direct post-secondary institutions, through the MCURES Research Excellence and Securities, to work with Indigenous Education Councils to develop and implement prerequisite or foundational learning requirements for upper-year Indigenous courses. These requirements should ensure that students possess baseline knowledge of Indigenous histories, cultures, and governance systems to promote respectful and informed engagement with advanced course content.

Faculty accountability and representation are critical to addressing racism and microaggressions in the classroom. Where possible, Indigenous studies courses should be taught by Indigenous faculty or instructors with lived experience and community accountability. However, institutions must also move beyond colonial credentialing systems when determining who is considered qualified to teach Indigenous content. Reliance on Western academic credentials such as doctorates as the primary measure of expertise excludes Elders, knowledge keepers, and community teachers whose authority is grounded in intergenerational knowledge transmission, cultural responsibility, and lived experience. Given that Indigenous knowledge has never been westernized or documented through academic institutions, these forms of expertise must be recognized as equivalent in value to Western academic credentials. Therefore, the provincial government should commit to, when possible, hiring an Indigenous faculty member to instruct

¹¹⁹ “Understanding Student Perspectives: Racism, Discrimination, and Belongingness in an Ontario University Environment,” Rishika Sen, Leilani Xue, Thirumagal Gowrikanthan, & Sarah Masri, McMaster University, 2024, <https://msumcmaster.ca/app/uploads/2025/02/Understanding-Student-Perspectives-Jan-2025-final.pdf>

Indigenous Studies courses. When this is not possible, an Indigenous knowledge keeper, Elder, or other guest speaker should be implemented in course material.

Non-Anglophone Indigenous students, such as Indigenous first-language speakers, and Francophone students, are often subject to linguistic barriers, a lack of resources, uninformed professors, and misleading Indigenous course content that has been falsely translated. These additional barriers exist due to poorly translated materials, limited language specific resources, and instructors unfamiliar with linguistic and cultural contexts. Feelings of isolation or hesitancy to interact with non-Indigenous students is further exacerbated for Indigenous students who do not speak English as their first or primary language.¹²⁰ To help prevent the mistranslation of materials the provincial government should provide funding to post-secondary institutions to hire a committee of Francophone and Indigenous first-language speakers to review all translated Indigenous material, resources, and course content. This action should also be coupled with the creation of inclusive language funding to support the development of language-specific academic resources, culturally informed translation practices, and language-access supports to ensure that non-Anglophone Indigenous students can engage meaningfully with course content and succeed academically.

INDIGENOUS WORLDVIEWS

Principle: All Indigenous students must feel their voices are valued and respected in the classroom.

Principle: Non-Indigenous faculty and instructors have a responsibility to express the true history of colonialism in Canada, provide up to date information and uplift Indigenous voices when discussing Indigenous perspectives and culture within their course content.

Concern: Indigenous students are often subject to outdated and stigmatized content referring to Indigenous Peoples.

Concern: Indigenous students often lack access to seeing and learning their traditional language in colonial institutions.

Concern: Non-Indigenous students' interpretations of Indigenous content are often prioritized over Indigenous voices and perspectives.

Concern: Indigenous faculty and instructors are made to operate under colonial ideas of success.

Recommendation: The provincial government should provide funding to Indigenous Education Councils at post-secondary institutions to hire Indigenous Peoples to develop and review any and all Indigenous content.

¹²⁰ Tanya Chichekian & Lea Bragoli-Barzan, "Challenges Encountered by Indigenous Youth in Post-Secondary Education," *McGill Journal of Education* 55, no. 2 (2020): 463-485.

Recommendation: The provincial government should provide funding to ensure that all post-secondary institutions offer classes reflecting the language of the Peoples of those territories.

Recommendation: The provincial government should provide funding for every post-secondary institution to hire and/or invite (always with appropriate offering and compensation) Indigenous Peoples including but not limited to Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and Healers to interact with and support students.

Recommendation: The provincial government should continue to provide and increase funding annually for Indigenous Education Councils on each post-secondary campuses to support Indigenous-led research, course teaching, and all other academics.

Recommendation: The provincial government should provide targeted funding and policy direction to ensure that evaluation and promotion standards for Indigenous faculty and instructors recognize Indigenous knowledge systems, community engagement, and relational teaching practices as measures of academic success.

All Indigenous students must feel that their voices are valued and respected within classroom spaces and course content. Post secondary institutions have a responsibility to ensure that Indigenous perspectives are presented in ways that are accurate, current, and grounded in the lived realities and knowledge systems of Indigenous Peoples. Non Indigenous faculty and instructors, in particular, have a responsibility to teach the true history of colonialism in Canada, provide up to date information, and actively uplift Indigenous voices when discussing Indigenous cultures, histories, and worldviews. When this responsibility is not met, Indigenous students are frequently exposed to outdated, stigmatized, or harmful representations that distort Indigenous knowledge systems and reinforce colonial narratives.¹²¹ The provincial government should therefore provide funding to Indigenous Education Councils at post-secondary institutions to hire Indigenous Peoples to develop and review any and all Indigenous content.

During the completion of their post-secondary education, Indigenous students often lack access to seeing and learning their traditional language in these colonial institutions. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission emphasizes that language revitalization is a fundamental component of reconciliation, cultural continuity, and Indigenous self determination.¹²² Despite this, many post secondary institutions do not offer courses in the Indigenous languages of the territories on which they operate. Looking at the courses offered on our member campuses, only 33% offer an introduction to an Indigenous language course. Brock University offers an Introduction to Nishnawbe Languages and an Introduction to Mohawk; the University of Western offers introductory courses for Lunaape, Mohawk, Algonquian, and Oneida languages; and Queen's University offers an Introduction to Indigenous Languages and Culture course.¹²³ The absence

¹²¹ Marie Ann Battiste, *Decolonizing Education: Nourishing the Learning Spirit*, Purich Publishing Limited, 2013.

¹²² Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Calls to Action*, 2.

¹²³ "Timetables: Available Programs," Brock University, accessed June 25, 2026, <https://brocku.ca/guides-and-timetables/timetables/?session=fw&type=ug&level=year1> ; "Courses: Indigenous

of Indigenous language courses offered by post-secondary institutions limits the opportunity for Indigenous students to reconnect with their languages, while also reinforcing the marginalization of Indigenous worldviews within academic spaces, where Western languages and epistemologies are treated as the default standard. This is why the provincial government should provide funding to ensure that all post-secondary institutions offer classes reflecting the language of the Peoples of those territories.

The absence of Indigenous language courses across post-secondary institutions is further compounded by the persistence of Eurocentrism within these spaces. Eurocentric academic frameworks continue to privilege Western ways of knowing while positioning Indigenous knowledge as supplementary, cultural, or anecdotal rather than as legitimate and rigorous systems of thought. In classroom discussions, this often results in non Indigenous students' interpretations of Indigenous content being prioritized over Indigenous voices and lived experiences, further marginalizing Indigenous students and distorting the meaning of Indigenous knowledge.¹²⁴

Eurocentrism also shapes how Indigenous faculty and instructors are evaluated and supported within post-secondary institutions. Indigenous faculty are frequently required to operate under colonial ideas of academic success that prioritize metrics such as publication output, enrollment numbers, and grant acquisition, while undervaluing community engagement, relational teaching practices, language work, and knowledge transmission outside of Western academic publishing. Enrollment based measures of success are particularly colonial, as they reflect institutional priorities rather than Indigenous educational values and fail to account for the cultural, emotional, and community responsibilities that Indigenous faculty often carry¹²⁵ As scholars have noted, these metrics reproduce colonial power by treating growth, scale, and productivity as neutral indicators of success, despite their roots in settler institutional frameworks.¹²⁶ As a result, Indigenous faculty and instructors are often placed in positions where they must conform to Western academic norms in order to advance, rather than having their Indigenous methodologies and responsibilities recognized as academically valid. There are existing models that demonstrate how post secondary institutions can begin to address these structural issues. For example, the University of British Columbia Okanagan's Introduction to Decolonization course intentionally centers both Indigenous and settler responsibilities by structuring separate

Studies," University of Western, accessed June 25, 2026, <https://www.westerncalendar.uwo.ca/Courses.cfm?Subject=INDIGSTU&SelectedCalendar=Live&ArchiveID=> ; "Indigenous Knowledge and Perspectives (INDG)," Queen's University, accessed June 25, 2026, <https://www.queensu.ca/academic-calendar/arts-science/course-descriptions/indg/>

¹²⁴ Adam Gaudry and Danielle Lorenz, "Indigenization as Inclusion, Reconciliation, and Decolonization: Navigating the Different Visions for Indigenizing the Canadian Academy," *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples* 14, no. 3, (July 6, 2018): 218–227, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1177180118785382>

¹²⁵ Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, "Land as Pedagogy: Nishnaabeg Intelligence and Rebellious Transformation," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 3, no. 3, (2014): 1–25.

¹²⁶ Michelle Daigle and Juanita Sundberg. "From Where We Stand: Unsettling Geographical Knowledges in the Classroom." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 42, no. 3 (2017): 338–41. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45147096>.

learning spaces for Indigenous and non Indigenous students, while being taught through a relational and reflexive pedagogical approach.¹²⁷ This model illustrates how Indigenous worldviews can be meaningfully included when institutions approach teaching as an act of accountability, reciprocity, and respect for Indigenous pedagogies, rather than as a neutral or purely academic exercise. This is why the provincial government should continue to provide and increase funding annually for Indigenous Education Councils on each post-secondary campus to support Indigenous-led research, course teaching, and all other academics. Further, the provincial government should also provide targeted funding and policy direction to ensure that evaluation and promotion standards for Indigenous faculty and instructors recognize Indigenous knowledge systems, community engagement, and relational teaching practices as measures of academic success.

¹²⁷ Evan J. Habkirk and Sarah B. Buffett, “Decolonization in Action,” *The Canadian Journal of Indigenous Studies* 1, no. 1 (2025): 44–59, <https://doi.org/10.36939/cjis/vol1no1/art21>.

POLICY STATEMENT

Whereas: Indigenous Peoples have an inherent right to self-determination, including free, prior, and informed consent for decisions that impact them.

Whereas: The provincial government must uphold its responsibility to openly support and work toward decolonization and Indigenous self-determination.

Whereas: Post-secondary institutions have the responsibility to uphold inclusive and respectful approaches to Indigenous identity, ensuring that policies and practices do not retraumatize or isolate any Indigenous students.

Whereas: Post-secondary institutions have the responsibility to mitigate the traumatic impacts on Indigenous students by adopting trauma-informed self-identification practices.

Whereas: Indigenous initiatives must revolve around creating and honouring Indigenous cultural connections, not further displacing or discouraging Indigenous students, faculty, or staff who may be reconnecting with their community and culture while in the post-secondary sector.

Whereas: Post-secondary education can be an important way for Indigenous students who do not have cultural or familial ties to connect with their culture or identity.

Whereas: All Indigenous students deserve equitable access to financial support, both from the government and post-secondary institutions.

Whereas: Outreach programs provided by the provincial government and post-secondary institutions should cater to the specific needs of prospective Indigenous students.

Whereas: Post-secondary and government institutions have a legal responsibility to uphold Indigenous Treaty rights to access education, as the Canadian Charter assures that Indigenous students are entitled to an equitable education.

Whereas: All Indigenous students should be able to apply to university without facing financial or geographic barriers.

Whereas: All Indigenous students should have equitable access to applying and enrolling in university.

Whereas: All Indigenous students should be able to access post-secondary institutions where they feel valued, represented, and heard within their university community to facilitate an inclusive post-secondary experience.

Whereas: Institutional transformation must be oriented toward Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination.

Whereas: Indigenous Peoples and cultures must be adopted into all spaces of their post-secondary institutions, not just Indigenous specific spaces.

Whereas: Indigenous students must be able to practice their cultures and Ceremonies safely, without fear of disrespect or interference from the external campus community.

Whereas: The inherent Treaty right for Indigenous Peoples to occupy traditional lands for purposes such as meeting, feasting, or partaking in Ceremony or knowledge exchange, must be respected and upheld by post-secondary institutions.

Whereas: Post-secondary institutions should have zero tolerance towards non-Indigenous students who perpetuate oppression, discrimination, and/or prejudice at all within post-secondary environments.

Whereas: Non-Indigenous Peoples are expected to work towards decolonization, honoring the truth and reconciliation commitments outlined by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Whereas: Non-Indigenous students should respect, honour, and have access to Indigenous ways of learning as part of their post-secondary education in an effort to decolonize academic curriculum.

Whereas: It is not the responsibility of Indigenous People to educate non-Indigenous People and foster supportive connections.

Whereas: Post-secondary institutions have the responsibility to foster Indigenous education and meaningful allyship opportunities for non-Indigenous students.

Whereas: Indigenous ways of knowing, cultural connection, and knowledge should be recognized in accreditation standards for hiring Indigenous faculty and instructors.

Whereas: Indigenous faculty and staff must be supported to thrive in colonially rooted institutional environments that are safe, authentic, and inclusive of Indigenous Peoples, cultures, practices, and academic sovereignty.

Whereas: Indigenous faculty and staff should have an inclusive and safe environment that respects their methodologies, ways of knowing, and cultural, personal, and spiritual well-being across research, academia, and university life.

Whereas: Indigenous faculty and staff should have the ability to practice their culture, engage with other Indigenous faculty/staff, and be made aware of available institutional supports that cater to their needs.

Whereas: Indigenous faculty and staff should not be burdened with the responsibility of teaching sensitivity training.

Whereas: Indigenous faculty and staff should be hired into supportive, full-time, long-term, reliable positions.

Whereas: Indigenous Peoples must have sovereignty and informed consent in all stages over the collection, use, sale, and application of their data, artifacts, knowledge, and teaching.

Whereas: Data on Indigenous student and staff experiences should be applied because it is important to develop effective laws, policies, and programs.

Whereas: Indigenous communities should be able to freely repatriate all cultural artifacts and equally benefit from the value of the artifacts.

Whereas: Indigenous Peoples knowledge, teachings, and derived life value should be equitably compensated for.

Whereas: Every Indigenous student deserves equitable access to safe and culturally appropriate experiences with student support services on their post-secondary campus

Whereas: Access to supports and services for Indigenous students should follow a ‘no wrong door’ policy.

Whereas: Institutions should ensure that Indigenous students have access to and awareness of services, supports, and events offered for them.

Whereas: All Indigenous students should feel welcome to engage in their campus’ Indigenous initiatives.

Whereas: All Indigenous students should be able to access supports and services in their preferred languages.

Whereas: Indigenous Student Centres on post-secondary campuses are essential for providing culturally relevant supports for Indigenous students and fostering community.

Whereas: Indigenous Student Centres should be able to provide compensation to Indigenous Peoples for their involvement in providing ongoing support and cultural services for Indigenous students and staff.

Whereas: Indigenous students and staff deserve to feel safe and respected when accessing or working in Indigenous Student Centres.

Whereas: Indigenous students deserve safe, accessible, centralized, and respected spaces on campus to practice their cultures and Ceremonies.

Whereas: Indigenous students deserve to have mental health help available that is culturally representative and provided in a safe and inclusive manner, and have the option to have services provided to them by Indigenous staff, counsellors, Elders, Knowledge Keepers, Healers, ect.

Whereas: Indigenous students deserve equitable access to health services, including clear and consistent coverage through the Non-Insured Health Benefits (NHIB) program and private insurance.

Whereas: Supporting and respecting sober culture on post-secondary campuses is necessary for the health and well-being of all students, particularly Indigenous students.

Whereas: All Indigenous students should feel safe, seen, and comfortable on campus including in classrooms and course materials.

Whereas: All Indigenous students should feel safe and supported in approaching staff and faculty when experiencing racism or microaggressions.

Whereas: Individual Indigenous students do not, and should not feel obligated to, represent all Indigenous students and/or Peoples.

Whereas: All Indigenous students should have an integral approach to education that reflects Indigenous values and expectations for cultural inclusion, truthful understandings of historical and current Indigenous affairs, cultural sensitivity, and active anti-racism, regardless of their program of study.

Whereas: All Indigenous students must feel that their voices are valued and respected in the classroom.

Whereas: Non-Indigenous faculty and instructors have a responsibility to express the true history of colonialism in Canada, provide up to date information and uplift Indigenous voices when discussing Indigenous perspectives and culture within their course content.

Be it resolved that: The provincial government, in partnership with Indigenous sectors and student leaders, must collaboratively create and uphold a framework that ensures Indigenous student leadership is consulted, and followed, in all post-secondary work related to Indigenous Peoples.

Be it further resolved that (BIFRT): The provincial government should provide sustained funding to Indigenous student organizations which are independent of the government to promote Indigenous engagement in governance and further decolonization solutions in post-secondary spaces.

BIFRT: The provincial government should amend the Ontario Universities and Colleges Act and related ministry directive to require that post-secondary institutions integrate the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action into institutional policy and reporting structures.

BIFRT: The provincial government should mandate annual public reporting on progress, establishing dedicated funding streams for Indigenous initiatives such as the Indigenous student organizations, and requiring at least one voting governance seat for Indigenous student representatives within institutional decision-making bodies.

BIFRT: The provincial government should issue a formal directive prohibiting Indigenous identity policing in post-secondary institutions. This directive should affirm that identity must not be verified through colonial documentation and require institutions to adopt Indigenous-led, trauma-informed, and community-informed self identification processes that strengthen Indigenous spaces while ensuring accountability in access to supports and opportunities.

BIFRT: The provincial government should create “best practices” in consultation with Indigenous education groups and students on the most equitable trauma-informed methods of identity verification or attestation to mitigate continued colonial policing.

BIFRT: The MCURE and MIAFNER should improve financial support opportunities targeted specifically for Indigenous students, including but not limited to, increasing funding for the Indigenous Student Bursary Program and advocating the federal government to expand the Post-Secondary Student Support Program.

BIFRT: The MIAFNER in consultation with the Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada, should provide post-secondary institutions including Student Financial Aid offices, faculty and staff with a comprehensive document outlining the intricacies of band funding in relation to Treaty rights, fund distribution, and the choice of First Nations to provide financial support to their students.

BIFRT: The MCURES should work with the ISC to develop guidelines for post-secondary institutions on ensuring access to post-secondary offered financial aid and support for all Indigenous students.

BIFRT: The MCURES with assistance of the Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada, should guarantee that communication is established between OSAP and First Nations for the purpose of OSAP attestation verification.

BIFRT: The MIAFNER should work with the federal government to expand eligibility requirements for all financial assistance programs and supports to include all Indigenous students regardless of factors such as status or blood quantum, and strive to improve Indigenous community reconnection through reporting declarations of nations.

BIFRT: The MCURES should amend the eligibility requirements for all provincially funded financial aids and supports to be available to any Indigenous person regardless of their OSAP eligibility or assessment.

BIFRT: The MCURES in collaboration with MIAFNER should re-evaluate the funding model for the Ontario Indigenous Travel Grant to account for distance travelled, access to public transit, and fluctuating transportation costs.

BIFRT: The MCURES should in collaboration with delegations of the First Nations Financial Authority (FNFA), Metis Nations of Ontario (MNO), Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC), and Assembly of First Nations (AFN) develop a comprehensive central site for all provincial and federal Indigenous students' financial supports and implement an Indigenous Communities Communication Plan to disseminate this information.

BIFRT: The Ministry of Infrastructure should continue efforts and increase funding through the Improving Connectivity for Ontario Program to provide and fund reliable access to cell and internet service, technology, and infrastructure for First Nations and remote communities, as guaranteed in the Getting Ontario Connected Act, 2022.

BIFRT: The MCURES should bridge the gap between remote Indigenous communities and universities by providing extra support during the application process, advocating to the federal government to re-evaluate the school funding on reserve, and aiding in the funding of specific recruitment.

BIFRT: The MIAFNER should provide support for necessary financial and capital resources at on-reserve, rural and northern high schools to allow access to higher learning.

BIFRT: The MIAFNER and MCURES should collaborate with the Indigenous Institutes Consortium; to provide a guideline for post-secondary institutions on transfer credits between Indigenous institutes and post-secondary institutions to improve the transferability of Indigenous institutes credits and considerations of Indigenous teaching and learning outcomes.

BIFRT: The MIAFNER should collaborate with delegations of the ISC, First Nations Financial Authority (FNFA), Metis Nations of Ontario (MNO), Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC), and Assembly of First Nations (AFN) to develop a comprehensive guide for post-secondary institutions to set, implement, and re-evaluate an institutional level Indigenous student retention and enrolment strategy.

BIFRT: The MCURES with guidance from Crown Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada should mandate that Ontario University Application Centre (OUAC) and/or appropriate application portals are to waive all Indigenous students' application and service fees for post-secondary education so that Indigenous students can freely apply without financial barriers.

BIFRT: The provincial government should provide adequate funding for post-secondary institutions to commission Indigenous students to create art and symbolism to be showcased across their campuses.

BIFRT: The provincial government should earmark funding from the facilities renewal program to upgrade signage and expression on post-secondary campuses to include local Indigenous languages.

BIFRT: The MCURES should develop guidelines to help post-secondary institutions remove colonial and racist symbols and comply with the Ontario Human Rights Commission's proposed policy on discriminatory names, words, and images.

BIFRT: The MCURES should require post-secondary institutions develop trauma-informed, culturally sensitive racial and religious equity policies, with clear and enforceable codes of conduct that explicitly prohibit racism and hate speech; as well as outline clear and enforceable codes of conduct for campus security and/or constables that are culturally sensitive within its response procedures.

BIFRT: The provincial government should encourage post-secondary institutions to prominently display appropriate and relevant Indigenous flags alongside the Canadian and Ontario flags across all campuses.

BIFRT: The provincial government should mandate that all post-secondary institutions create and implement Indigenous Strategic Plans if they do not already have one, led by Indigenous Peoples, with built in short-, mid-, and long-term progress assessments.

BIFRT: Whilst upholding the principles of Indigenous sovereignty, the provincial government should mandate that all post-secondary institutions collect data on Indigenous student success, efficacy of programming, and perceptions of Indigenous initiatives on campus to support the creation of the Indigenous Strategic Plans.

BIFRT: The provincial government should mandate that post-secondary institutions include and engage with Indigenous communities prior to designing or establishing any frameworks, spaces, or programs that are intended to be inclusive of Indigenous Peoples.

BIFRT: The MCURES should, in consultation and collaboration with Indigenous leaders, develop an evaluation framework of Indigenous inclusion and safe learning environments for courses outside of Indigenous studies.

BIFRT: The provincial government should, in consultation and collaboration with Indigenous leaders, develop performance management and evaluation guidelines for institutions to conduct comprehensive performance reviews of faculty and instructors regarding the facilitation of a safe learning environment surrounding Indigenous academia.

BIFRT: The provincial government should provide funding to post-secondary institutions to hire Indigenous educators to develop and oversee recurring, mandatory training and ongoing education opportunities for non-Indigenous students, staff, and faculty.

BIFRT: The MCURES should create a new grant dedicated to funding non-Indigenous allyship initiatives facilitated by broader campus student support initiatives and departments.

BIFRT: The provincial government should mandate that post-secondary institutions promote clear policies and procedures when it comes to Indigenous bias, discrimination, and harm perpetuated by faculty and staff.

BIFRT: The provincial government should mandate that university administrations and faculties, in collaboration with local Indigenous Education Councils, develop a recruitment and retention strategy for faculty, instructors, and staff that honours Indigenous ways of knowing.

BIFRT: MCURES should provide post-secondary institutions with funding to commission equity audits, with results publicly disclosed to reveal hiring and retention gaps and inform policies and programs supporting Indigenous faculty and staff.

BIFRT: The provincial government should provide envelope funding to ensure the creation and maintenance of senior-level positions for Indigenous faculty and staff.

BIFRT: The provincial government should provide funding to post-secondary institutions to hire allies to develop and implement recurring, mandatory cultural safety training and ongoing educational opportunities for non-Indigenous faculty and staff.

BIFRT: The MCURES should mandate that post-secondary institutions adhere to the First Nations principles of OCAP®.

BIFRT: The provincial government should responsibly and meaningfully consult with Indigenous Peoples (students, faculty, staff, educators, and communities) to ensure that the Data Standards for the Identification and Monitoring of Systemic Racism can be appropriately applied to the post-secondary sector.

BIFRT: The provincial government should mandate that any collection of equity-based data should use the Data Standards for the Identification and Monitoring of Systemic Racism as amended through responsible and meaningful consultation with Indigenous students and communities.

BIFRT: The Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming should mandate all successful applicants across funding streams have an approved Indigenous artifacts assessment and if repatriated artifacts are identified, a four year repatriation plan must be established.

BIFRT: The MIANFER should develop in collaboration with the National Aboriginal Capital Corporations Associations, an equitable compensation guide for post-secondary institutions for the use of data, knowledge and teachings, and/or artifacts.

BIFRT: The MCURES in collaboration with MIANFER should mandate the recognition and equitable compensation of Indigenous Peoples' data, intellectual property, and artifacts when it is being shared, researched, and discussed in academic settings.

BIFRT: The provincial government should provide funding to post-secondary institutions to implement accessible signage displaying information about how to find and contact the Indigenous Student Centres, as well as what events, supports, and services are offered, in English, French, and local Indigenous languages.

BIFRT: The MCURES should issue a statement emphasizing the importance of integrated student supports and ensuring all student support services and offices are up-to-date and able to inform students about the resources offered through the Indigenous Student Centre.

BIFRT: The provincial government should provide funding to institutions to provide services in French and local Indigenous languages.

BIFRT: The MCURES should require and support post-secondary institutions in ensuring the Indigenous Student Centres and Indigenous student initiatives consistently communicate that all Indigenous students are welcome and belong in these spaces.

BIFRT: The provincial government should provide funding to post-secondary institutions to hire Indigenous educators to develop and implement recurring, mandatory training and ongoing education opportunities for non-Indigenous staff working in student support services.

BIFRT: The provincial government should provide sufficient long-term funding to post-secondary institutions dedicated to establishing and maintaining a safe, visible, and accessible physical space for Indigenous students to practice their cultures and Ceremonies on campus, with a requirement that decisions be made by Indigenous students, faculty, and support staff.

BIFRT: The provincial government should provide increased and ongoing funding for Indigenous Student Centres through the Indigenous Student Success Fund, without the need for recurring grant applications.

BIFRT: The provincial government should allocate funding to post-secondary institutions to expand staffing within Indigenous Student Centres by hiring Indigenous counsellors, Indigenous Student Support Coordinators, and other appropriate positions in long-term, full-time contracts.

BIFRT: The MCURES should collaborate with Indigenous Student Support Centres on post-secondary campuses to provide support related to financial, resource, and policy needed to host Ceremonies or cultural events.

BIFRT: The provincial government should mandate that post-secondary institutions develop a policy that outlines reporting mechanisms and accountability measures in place to respond to instances of disrespect, vandalization, or targeting of Indigenous Student Centres and their associated spaces on campus.

BIFRT: The provincial government should provide long-term funding earmarked for post-secondary mental health care to hire and retain Indigenous staff who can better understand and support the needs of Indigenous students.

BIFRT: The provincial government should mandate that all student support staff undergo mandatory, recurring training and ongoing education opportunities covering cultural sensitivity; Indigenous cultures, affairs, and trauma responses; and culturally appropriate crisis intervention and responses.

BIFRT: The provincial government should provide or increase funding to Indigenous specific crisis resources, including but not limited to Talk 4 Healing and the Hope for Wellness Help Line, to support awareness for and access to services for Indigenous post-secondary students.

BIFRT: The provincial government should provide envelope funding to community-based Indigenous health and wellness supports to expand their capacity to support Indigenous post-secondary students whose needs are not met by on-campus resources.

BIFRT: The provincial government should provide grant funding for student groups on post-secondary campuses to host sober events on campuses and to facilitate safe consumption education for students.

BIFRT: The MCURES should work with the Office of Mental Health and Addictions to develop guidelines for hosting sober events on campuses.

BIFRT: The provincial government should mandate that post-secondary institutions provide information about, and access to, culturally appropriate resources to support sobriety on campus.

BIFRT: The provincial government should provide institutions with a reliable, regularly updated list of external Indigenous health supports and practitioners, and require institutions to disseminate this information to Indigenous students.

BIFRT: The provincial government should work with the federal government and insurance providers to improve communication and transparency around NIHB and other health coverage, and require post-secondary institutions to provide clear guidance and navigation support to Indigenous students accessing these benefits.

BIFRT: The provincial government should advocate to the federal government to mandate that all insurance providers allow Indigenous students with NIHB coverage to opt out of post-secondary insurance plans.

BIFRT: The provincial government should mandate that post-secondary institutions add Indigenous-specific performance measures into existing faculty evaluations, allowing non-Indigenous faculty and instructors teaching Indigenous courses and content to receive performance feedback on their ability to facilitate a safe learning environment and pursue additional training when a need is identified. Additionally, including Indigenous scholars in their field can help to broaden the perspectives of students.

BIFRT: The provincial government should direct post-secondary institutions, through the MCURES Research Excellence and Securities, to work with Indigenous Education Councils to develop and implement prerequisite or foundational learning requirements for upper-year Indigenous courses. These requirements should ensure that students possess baseline knowledge of Indigenous histories, cultures, and governance systems to promote respectful and informed engagement with advanced course content.

BIFRT: The provincial government should mandate that post-secondary institutions under the leadership of an Indigenous Education Council, implement a required education component for all non-Indigenous first-year students and faculty that teaches cultural sensitivity, inclusivity, and how to be anti-racist.

BIFRT: The provincial government should mandate that post-secondary institutions require at least one Indigenous studies credits to be completed regardless of the discipline.

BIFRT: The provincial government should provide funding to post-secondary institutions to hire a committee of Francophone and Indigenous first-language speakers to review all translated Indigenous material, resources, and course content.

BIFRT: The inclusive language funding should also support the development of language-specific academic resources, culturally informed translation practices, and language access supports to ensure that non-Anglophone Indigenous students can engage meaningfully with course content and succeed academically.

BIFRT: The provincial government should commit to, when possible, hiring an Indigenous faculty member to instruct Indigenous studies courses. When this is not possible, an Indigenous Knowledge Keeper, Elder, or other guest speaker should be implemented in course material.

BIFRT: The provincial government should mandate that all institutions implement anonymous reporting processes for incidents of racism and microaggressions towards Indigenous Peoples on campus and widely promote this process among students, staff, and faculty.

BIFRT: The provincial government should provide funding to Indigenous Education Councils at post-secondary institutions to hire Indigenous Peoples to develop and review any and all Indigenous content.

BIFRT: The provincial government should provide funding to ensure that all post-secondary institutions offer classes reflecting the language of the Peoples of those territories.

BIFRT: The provincial government should provide funding for every post-secondary institution to hire and/or invite (always with appropriate offering and compensation) Indigenous Peoples including but not limited to Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and Healers to interact with and support students.

BIFRT: The provincial government should continue to provide and increase funding annually for Indigenous Education Councils on post-secondary campuses to support Indigenous-led research, course teaching, and all other academics.

BIFRT: The provincial government should provide targeted funding and policy direction to ensure that evaluation and promotion standards for Indigenous faculty and instructors to recognize Indigenous knowledge systems, community engagement, and relational teaching practices as measures of academic success.