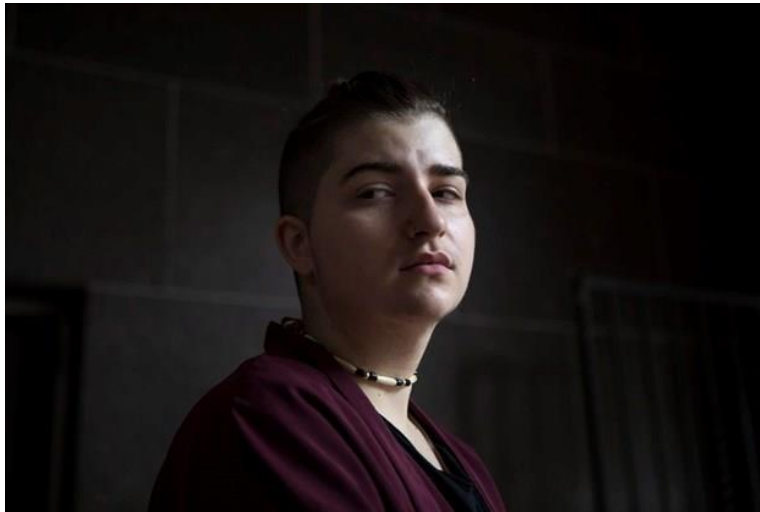


How post-secondary schools are working to Indigenize programs, campus life

In response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada report, post-secondary institutions have created initiatives to meet the demands of the report

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Indigenous student Olson Crow is pictured on the Ryerson University campus in Toronto on Monday, August 27, 2018. This summer, as students prepared to go back to school some post-secondary institutions did preparing of their own to make changes that they say address a legacy of colonialism and respond to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada report. THE CANADIAN PRESS/Chris Young - Chris Young, The Canadian Press

This summer, as students prepared to go back to school, some post-secondary institutions did preparing of their own to make changes that they say address a legacy of colonialism and respond to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada report.

The report, released in 2015, contained a list of calls to action, one of which was a demand that universities and colleges include Indigenous knowledge into their programs and address barriers to Indigenous students' access to education.

Since then, institutions across Canada have created roles to lead those initiatives on campus, along with hiring Indigenous educators and creating programs geared to Indigenous knowledge and culture.

Olson Crow, an Indigenous student at Toronto's Ryerson University, said "Indigenization" is about "incorporating Indigenous ways of knowledge and having Indigenous community members come into the space."

This summer was pivotal at the university, which is named after Egerton Ryerson, a pioneer of public education who is also widely believed to have helped shape Canada's residential school policy. After Indigenous students on campus lobbied the university for years to remove the statue of Egerton, the school instead installed a plaque in July beside the statue that addressed Egerton's role in "cultural genocide."

Crow had met with the university's administration on multiple occasions last school year to discuss the removal of the statue. While he calls the plaque "a great step to raising awareness," he said he will not stop demanding the statue's removal. "I don't think the plaque is a solution and I don't think it's an alternative to having the statue removed," he said.

Ryerson public affairs said the university is open to continuing discussions with students on the statue, but at this time "no decisions have been made."

This summer, Ryerson launched the Yellowhead Institute, calling it Canada's first think tank focused on analysis of policy and law that affects First Nation communities.

Ryerson has also started the process of "decolonizing" their library.

The university's chief librarian, Carol Shepstone, said while she thinks it's important for all universities to address colonialism, there is "added weight to this with the Ryerson name."

"It's about changing the way we describe and think about how we organize information. A lot of the terms used in libraries are very colonial, very inappropriate and not reflective of traditional appropriate names," said Shepstone.

For example, Indigenous history is sometimes classified under the category "Indians of North America" or the word "Indian" is used in some Canadian libraries.

Breaking away from these terms has proven quite difficult in large library systems as there are thousands of headings and subheadings that cannot be changed in an instant with available technology, said Christine Bone, cataloguing librarian at the University of Manitoba, whose research focuses on Indigenous subject headings.

Bone said she is currently working on a project with the Association for Manitoba Archives to find solutions to this issue. She said the project can hopefully be used as a template for other libraries and archives across Canada.

"What we're doing is adding to the larger work that will benefit everyone," said Bone, adding that she has already started implementing some minor solutions at the University of Manitoba including adding an "Indigenous Peoples" subject heading to the appropriate catalogue records.

The University of Saskatchewan and the University of Alberta said they are also in the early stages of changing headings of Indigenous works and history in their library.

New initiatives to increase access to Indigenous knowledge have also been in the works at other post-secondary institutions across Canada.

At Saint Mary's University in Halifax, the institution said it has implemented various recommendations that were included in a 2014 report that was created after Loretta Saunders, a 26-year-old Inuk student at the university, was killed.

The university said that since then, they have hired an Indigenous student adviser, created new academic programming dedicated to Indigenous history, and in early August, the Mi'kmaq Grand Council flag was raised permanently on the university's campus.

At the University of British Columbia, this will be the first school year that the university's new Indian Residential School History and Dialogue Centre will be utilized after it opened in April 2018. The centre's mandate is to be accessible for not only university students and faculty, but anyone who wants to use the centre's open-source libraries and archives, said the centre's director, Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond.

"I want people to learn about the history of the residential schools, but this isn't something you would see in a typical museum space. There is going to be a really active piece to this," said Turpel-Lafond, who is Cree. She said the dialogue aspect of the centre would be to engage community members in discussion and wouldn't be a traditional talk where only one person is speaking.

An exchange program will launch this school year with Indigenous students from Wilfrid Laurier University and Syracuse University in New York state. Three students from each university will swap places while working together to create Indigenous curriculum material.

Jean Becker, senior adviser of Indigenous initiatives at the university, said there can be barriers for Indigenous students applying to exchange programs, and she hopes this program will change that.

"We find that our students don't really even consider doing exchanges," said Becker. "It's a lot of money. And for our Indigenous students just coming to the university, it's such a huge transition."

At McGill University, the school has partnered with the Mohawk community of Kahnawake to offer a Bachelor of Education program on the Kahnawake reserve, which is near Montreal.

This was also the first summer that a program was held at the University of Regina to enhance Indigenous undergraduate students' writing and research skills to encourage them to pursue graduate studies. The Indigenous Summer Research Institute awarded \$3,000 to each student to participate, which included 10 Indigenous students and nine non-Indigenous students.

The Canadian Federation of Students, the country's largest student advocacy group, will also be working to increase Indigenous knowledge in post-secondary education.

Shanese Steele, national chairperson for the organization's National Circle of First Nations, Métis and Inuit Students, said they will be officially launching a campaign in the fall that will demand universities create Indigenous language programs.

Steele said she hopes institutions will do more to address services for Indigenous students. She said while hiring Indigenous educators and creating Indigenous leadership roles is important, she hopes student services, such as counselling, academic advising and food banks geared towards Indigenous students will also be prioritized.

"Universities and colleges are inherently colonial. They're inherently anti-Indigenous," she said, adding that she stresses that universities continue to use the word "Indigenize" and not "decolonize."

"It's hard to decolonize a space that's rooted in that. It's more that just hiring people into these positions," she said.

https://www.thespec.com/news-story/8864174-how-post-secondary-schools-are-working-to-indigenize-programs-campus-life/?utm_source=academica+top+ten&utm_campaign=47febdefe2-email_campaign_2018_08_28_03_32&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_b4928536cf-47febdefe2-51957961