Indigenous Students

Expires April 30, 2028

1. Definitions

1. In this Political Policy:
   a. “Decolonization” refers to the dismantling and/or divesting colonial institutions of the power imbalance which predicates their foundation.
   b. “Indigenous” and "Aboriginal" refer to:
      i. A First Nation, Métis, or Inuit person and self-identified First Nation, Métis or Inuit person; or
      ii. Any organization, nation, or group which speaks on behalf of its Indigenous members.
   c. “Indigenization” refers to the process or act of transformative change by which the prima facie inclusion of Indigenous knowledge systems is embedded and included within traditionally colonial structures. Generally, post-secondary institutions in Canada have taken one (1) of three (3) approaches:
      i. “Indigenous inclusion” refers to a policy aimed at increasing the number of Indigenous students, faculty, and staff in the Canadian academy;
      ii. “Reconciliation Indigenization” refers to a vision which locates indigenization on common ground between Indigenous and Canadian ideals, creating a new, broader consensus; and
      iii. “Decolonial Indigenization” refers to the wholesale overhaul of the academy to fundamentally reorient knowledge production based on balanced power relations between Indigneous Peoples and Canadians, transforming the academy into something dynamic and new[1].
   d. “UNDRIP” stands for the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

2. Facts

General

1. According to the 2021 Census of Canada, the Indigenous Peoples exhibits the following population characteristics in Alberta:
   a. In 2021, 284,465 people identified as Indigenous, making the Indigenous population in Alberta the third largest among the provinces;
   b. The Indigenous population in Canada grew by 9.7% between 2016 and 2021, compared to the 5.3% growth of the non-Indigenous population over the same period;
   c. According to the 2021 census: Most of the 1,348,040 Indigenous people in Canada aged 15 and older were either cisgender men (47.4%) or cisgender women (51.9%), another 4,180 Indigenous people were transgender, with 43.7% of this group being transgender men and 56.3% being transgender women. The remaining 4,455 Indigenous people aged 15 and older were non-binary.
   d. The average age of the Indigenous population in 2016 was 29.8 years. By comparison, the average age of the non-Indigenous population in Alberta was 37.8 years; and
      i. The Indigenous population had a much higher proportion of children (29.1% compared to 18.7%), representing a potential future expansion to the undergraduate Indigenous population at the University of Alberta.
   e. The largest Indigenous population lived in the Edmonton region[2].
2. Indigenous students continue to face barriers as a result of the historic and ongoing effects of colonialism.
   a. According to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, the central goal of Canada’s Aboriginal policy for over a century included:
      i. Eliminate Aboriginal governments;
      ii. Ignore Aboriginal rights;
      iii. Terminate the Treaties; and,
      iv. Through a process of assimilation, cause Aboriginal people to cease to exist as distinct legal, social, cultural, religious, and racial entities in Canada.

   b. In addition to Fact 2, the pass system, the historic and ongoing genocide of Indigenous women, girls, and LGBTQ2S+, the Sixties Scoop, and Indian Residential Schools were all part of what Prime Minister Stephen Harper said was a policy to, “kill the Indian in the child.”3
3. Post-secondary institutions have failed to consistently demonstrate how their form of institutional learning can accommodate the First Nations, Métis and Inuit people on campus.’
   a. According to the Assembly of First Nations, broad application of the Indigenous Accord is needed from elementary school through to postsecondary education to create a supportive learning environment for Canada’s Indigenous learners.
4. The University of Alberta has committed to increasing recruitment of Indigenous students and hopes to accomplish this by 20254.
5. The University of Alberta has committed to the creation of a national recruitment strategy which targets support for Indigenous enrolment and retention5.
6. One of the new Campus Alberta Grant performance-based funding metrics for the University of Alberta incentivizes the increased recruitment of Indigenous students through funding, but does not incentivize increased Indigenous student supports.
7. In 2019/2020, there were 1,293 Indigenous undergraduate students enrolled in the academic year, representing a 10% year-over-year increase6.
8. According to the 2021 Indigenous Student Success Survey[7]:
   a. 34.9% of Indigenous students at the University of Alberta were the first in their family to attend university.
   b. 19.5% of Indigenous students attending the University of Alberta had dependent children.
   c. Indigenous students have encountered barriers while in their program, (45.7%), while applying to their program (23.3%), before applying to their program (22.0%), and while accessing university services and/or participating
      in university
      events (19.4%).
   d. 51% of Indigenous respondents identified financial barriers in applying to the University of Alberta.
   e. 31% of Indigenous respondents identified housing as a barrier in applying to the University of Alberta.
9. Indigenous students still face barriers to attaining a degree suitable for professional postgraduate education, such as medical school admission
   a. Such barriers include interpersonal discrimination, subtle forms of racism, microaggressions, feelings of isolation, and dissatisfaction with the university system.[8]
   b. Even with increased degree completion in recent years, Indigenous students have consistently lower undergraduate retention and completion rates than that of the Canadian national average.[9]
10. According to research conducted by the UASU Department of Research and Advocacy:
   a. Indigenous undergraduate students are much less likely to find work during the school year, but tended to work longer hours;
   b. Métis and First Nations students were much less likely than most other students to find work during the school year, but tended to work longer hours.
   c. 2SLGBTQQIA identity is highly diversified amongst Indigenous students;
   d. First Nations and Métis students are more likely to meet Health Canada’s definition of severe food insecurity than non-Indigenous students (21% and 20% vs. 12.4%); and
   e. First Nations students trended slightly lower than average for academic writing confidence, while Métis students trended higher than average.
11. Indigenous undergraduate students are significantly less likely than non-Indigenous students to hold leadership roles10
   a. Indigenous students are far more likely than non-Indigenous students to cite the following as barriers to student governance engagement: (a) lack of mentorship, (b) encouragement/support, (c) funds, (d) volunteers, and (e) campaign organization options.
12. The University of Alberta Students’ Union has established the Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation Committee (ARRC) as a standing committee of Students’ Council, given the delegated authority to advance and promote reconciliation within the Union.

13. In 2019, ARRC released its Recommendation Report with 58 recommendations in four (4) categories: (1) advocacy, (2) education, (3) operational, and (4) Students' Council.
    a. These recommendations were adopted by the 2018-2019 Students' Council, reaffirmed by the 2019-2020 Students' Council, and officially adopted, through ceremony, on September 23, 2019.

First Nations

1. In 2016, the First Nations population in Alberta numbered 145,645 individuals, with an average age of 28.1 years.
2. In 2011, 44.8% of First Nations people had a post-secondary qualification in Canada, compared to 64.7% of the non-Indigenous population11.
3. The Numbered Treaties outline the Crown's responsibility to First Nations, including, including the treaty right to education.
4. In an attempt to meet its obligation, the federal government funds 'status Indians' through the Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP). The principal funding mechanism of status Indians and Inuit students, the PSSSP has been capped at a program increase of 2% since 1996, forcing an already small pot to be spread thinly among an increasing number of students.
    a. While the population of status Indians continues to exponentially increase, funding for PSSSP has not increased enough to match. According to the AFN, 23,625 students received PSSSP funding in 2015. However, 32,690 First Nation students were enrolled, a difference of 9,06512
    b. PSSSP, which is only available to status Indians and is not guaranteed to those individuals, does not consider the costs associated with childcare, northern travel costs, students with disabilities, program incentives, and post-secondary graduate work.
    c. Within the context of Treaty 6, where the University of Alberta is situated, the PSSSP cap violates First Nations' treaty right to educational access
5. The exclusion of Métis and non-status Indians is inconsistent with the federal government's fiduciary obligations to Aboriginal Peoples by virtue of Aboriginal and Treaty rights. Such exclusion was confirmed in the Supreme Court of Canada case Daniels v. Canada.
6. Canada's Mental Health Strategy includes the following First Nation-specific mental wellness priorities:
    a. Close critical gaps in the continuum of mental wellness services, treatments and supports for First Nations, including traditional, cultural, and mainstream approaches;
    b. Disseminate and share knowledge about promising traditional, cultural, and mainstream approaches to mental wellness, such as mental wellness teams and recognizing the role of Elders;
    c. Support and recognize the community as its own best resource by acknowledging local knowledge and by developing community capacity to improve mental wellness;
    d. Enhance the knowledge, skills, recruitment and retention of the range of service providers able to provide effective and culturally safe services, treatments and supports for First Nations mental wellness; and
    e. Strengthen collaborative relationships among federal, provincial, territorial and First Nations governments to improve policies, programs and services related to mental wellness13
7. At the University of Alberta, First Nations undergraduate students are over 7 times more likely than other students to have dependent children14.
8. Canada's Mental Health Strategy includes, "establish[ing] a coordinated continuum of mental wellness services (mental health and substance use services) for and by FIrst Nations, which includes traditional, cultural, and mainstream approaches."15.
9. Establish a coordinated continuum of mental wellness services (mental health and substance use services) for and by First Nations, which includes traditional, cultural, and mainstream approaches.
10. First Nations undergraduate students are more likely than non-Indigenous students to identify as first-generation students (54.7% vs. 31.1%)16.

Métis

1. According to the 2016 Supreme Court of Canada Daniels Decision, Métis and non-status Indians are 'Indians' under section 91(24) of the Constitution Act, 1867. This reaffirms the federal government's fiduciary duty to Métis and non-status Indians.
2. Canada's Mental Health Strategy includes the following Métis-specific mental wellness priorities:

    a. Consult and engage Métis people to develop a Métis-specific mental health and substance-use strategy;
    b. Build Métis knowledge through research to understand fully the intergenerational effects of colonization and the mental health needs of Métis people today;
    c. Develop, increase and sustain Métis mental health human resources;
    d. Improve access to a full continuum of culturally competent and culturally safe mental health services, treatments and supports for Métis people; and
    e. Develop and strengthen collaborative relationships at all levels of government to advance and improve Métis mental health and well-being17.
3. In 2021, the Métis population in Alberta numbered 127,475 individuals, with an average age of 31.8 years18
    a. Alberta has the largest Métis population in Canada.
4. In 2011, 54.8% of Métis people had a post-secondary qualification in 2011, compared to 64.7% of the non-Indigenous population19
5. Métis undergraduate students are more likely than non-Indigenous students to identify as first-generation students (50.4% vs. 31.1%)20

Inuit

1. In 2016, over 65,000 Inuit lived in Canada. Of these, 73% lived in the Inuit homeland of Inuit Nunangat21
2. In Canada, 45% of Inuit reported having a high school diploma, compared to 86% of the non-Indigenous population. Inuit outside of Inuit Nunangat were more likely than Inuit outside of the homeland to have completed high school22.
3. The Inuit Post-Secondary Education Strategy includes student financial support beginning in 2020/2021. The purpose of the Strategy is to, “close the post-secondary education attainment gap between Inuit and non-Indigenous students in Canada through distinctions-based and regionally delivery strategic support.” 23
4. When accessing post-secondary education in the South, lack of access to sufficient and equitable funding is a significant barrier to Inuit[24].
5. Canada’s Mental Health Strategy includes the following Inuit-specific mental wellness priorities:
    a. Close critical gaps in the continuum of mental wellness services, treatments and supports for Inuit, including traditional, cultural, and clinical approaches;
    b. Support Inuit to respond to their mental health needs by drawing on the knowledge and strengths in their communities;
    c. Provide adequate, sustained funding and support to develop the mental health work-force and strengthen recruitment and retention of mental health workers;
    d. Increase the availability of Inuit-specific mental wellness data, research, information, knowledge and training; and
    e. Bring about transformation in mental wellness services through strong partnerships with government, non-government organizations, foundations and the private sector25
6. In 2021, the Inuit population in Alberta numbered 2,945 individuals, with an average age of 28.5 years. Moreover, Inuit in Alberta have the highest growth rate of any Indigenous group over the past 10 years (18.3% Inuit vs. 10.7% First Nation vs. 11.5% Métis)26.

3. Resolutions

1. The Students' Union shall advocate that the University commits to increasing supports available to students who identify as First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (Indigenous) to ensure the success of a growing Indigenous student body.
2. The Students' Union shall advocate that the University hire more people who identify as Indigenous at all levels of the institution to achieve a diverse workforce as outlined in the 2021 Employment Equity Summary.27
3. The Students’ Union shall strive to intentionally hire more people who identify as Indigenous at all levels of the institution to achieve a diverse workforce as outlined in the 2021 Employment Equity Summary.28
4. The Students' Union shall advocate that the University of Alberta streamline information about Indigenous Peoples, including amending the website on Indigenous Information and Resources.

5. The Students' Union shall advocate that the University of Alberta increase opportunities for students to learn about Indigenous Peoples.
    a. The Students' Union shall advocate that the University commit to integrating Indigenous knowledges and histories into each faculty.
    b. The Students' Union shall advocate that the University of Alberta take a more active role in spreading education and information that unpack and challenge stereotypes on Indigenous peoples.
6. The Students' Union shall advocate that the federal government increase available financial supports to Indigenous students.
    a. The Students' Union shall advocate for an increase in Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP) funding, proportional to the increase in Indigenous student population.
    b. The Students' Union shall advocate for the removal of the PSSSP funding cap, and for a higher base level of PSSSP funding.
7. The Students' Union shall advocate that the University of Alberta take measures to reduce barriers to affordable student housing for Indigenous students.
8. The Students' Union shall advocate that the University of Alberta provide more mental health supports to Indigenous students, particularly culturally relevant supports.
9. The Students' Union shall advocate for an increase in support for Aboriginal student services on all campuses, including services that are culturally supportive and trauma-informed.
10. The Students' Union shall advocate that the University of Alberta provide a clear and direct plan to build the Maskwa House of Learning.
11. The Students' Union shall advocate that the University of Alberta reduce barriers to Indigenous participation in co-curricular activities, including financial barriers.
12. The Students' Union shall advocate for more frequent information, updates, and clarity on the University's commitment to Truth and Reconciliation.
13. The Students' Union shall advocate for the creation of a dedicated Indigenous student gathering space at Campus Saint-Jean.
14. The Students' Union shall work to implement recommendations outlined by the Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation Committee.
15. The Students' Union Executive Committee will establish an operating policy that offers educational guidelines for smudging in the Students' Union Building for non-Indigenous students and staff.[29]

Consultation Pathways:

1. ARRC
2. ISU

4. References

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5. ↑ https://www.ualberta.ca/media-library/ualberta/reporting/annual-reports-and-financial-statements/annual-report-2018-2019.pdf
6. ↑ https://www.registrar.ualberta.ca/emreport/Undergraduate_Annual_Report_Overview_2019-2020.pdf
7. ↑ University of Alberta, Indigenous Student Success Survey, 2015. Note: No digital source for this survey can be obtained. University administration is unable to locate the survey. All statistics are based on a paper copy
8. ↑ M. Pidgeon, "Aboriginal Higher Education and Indigenous Students," Preparing Students for Life and Work, pp. 42-63: Brill Sense, 2019

9. ↑ G. L. Black, and C. Hachkowski, “Indigenous learners: what university educators need to know,” Journal of Further and Higher Education, vol. 43, no. 8, pp. 1092-1108, 2019
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24. ↑ QALLUNAALIAQTUT: INUIT STUDENTS’ EXPERIENCES OF POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION IN THE SOUTH
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