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# Mapping Approaches to Decolonizing and Indigenizing the Curriculum at Canadian Universities: Critical Reflections on Current Practices, Challenges, and Possibilities

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## Abstract

This article identifies five predominant approaches to Indigenizing the curriculum occurring within Canadian universities today. Examining these approaches in relation to theories of change articulated by Gaudry and Lorenz (2018) and Stein (2020), the article considers the possibilities and limits of each approach as well as the degree to which they challenge the colonial and Eurocentric edifices of Canadian universities. While many of the current approaches to curricular change involve minor reforms that focus on individual transformation rather than substantive structural shifts, the authors also identify promising initiatives that push toward greater Indigenous intellectual sovereignty and institutional autonomy. The article concludes by calling on academic institutions to better center Indigenous Peoples, lands and knowledges in curricular change, and more specifically, to embrace structural revision that ensures Indigenous leadership and autonomy.

## Keywords

Indigenizing, decolonizing, curriculum reform, higher education

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## Mapping Approaches to Decolonizing and Indigenizing the Curriculum at Canadian Universities: Critical Reflections on Current Practices, Challenges, and Possibilities

Since the release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada's final reports in 2015, post-secondary institutions increasingly sought to "Indigenize" their campuses. This institutional work has involved a range of initiatives including recruiting Indigenous faculty, staff, and students, creating new Indigenous spaces, supporting curricular transformation, and developing broad-based institutional policies about Indigenizing campuses. In response, a growing body of scholarship has emerged, outlining the possibilities and limits of movements to Indigenize the academy (Andreotti et al., 2015; Gaudy & Lorenz, 2018a; Pidgeon, 2016; Stein, 2019; Tuck & Yang, 2012). In this article, we focus on how Indigenization is being implemented specifically with regard to curricular change at Canadian universities. Given that teaching and learning is one of the core missions of universities, the question of how Indigenization is being pursued at the curricular level is of utmost importance. Recent research in this area has provided significant insights into initiatives such as the establishment of new Indigenous Course Requirements (ICR) (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018b; Tanchuk, et al., 2018) as well as the integration of Indigenous perspectives across disciplines (Pete, 2015, 2018; Steele et al., 2020) and within field-specific curricula in education (Anuik & Gillies, 2012; Bissel & Kortewag, 2016; Cannon, 2012; Csontos, 2019; Pewewardy et al., 2019; Takanak, 2016), geography (Hunt & Stevenson, 2017; Moorman et al., 2021), journalism (Todorova, 2016), law (Drake, 2017; Hewitt, 2016), library and information studies (Ball & Lar-Son, 2021), literary studies (Brunette-Debassige & Wakeham, 2020; Styres, 2018), medicine (The Indigenous Physicians Association of Canada and the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada, 2009; Lewis & Prunuske, 2017), natural sciences (Michie et al., 2018), nursing (Harder et al., 2018; Sanderson et al., 2020), pharmacy (Swidrovich, 2020), psychology, (Schmidt, 2019), social work (Sinclair, 2004, 2019), and STEM fields (Friesen & Herrmann, 2018). Having surveyed this body of work as a whole, it is now possible to take a step back and consider what this scholarship collectively tells us about the approaches to Indigenous-related curricular changes that are emerging across Canadian universities in the post-TRC era.

### Methodology

This paper emerges from the work of the *Indigenous Curriculum and Learning Committee* at Western University located on the territory of the Anishinaabek, Haudenosaunee, Lunapéewak, and Chonnonton Peoples. The authors of this paper all played critical roles as either initiators and/or active members of the Committee assembled in 2019–20. Recognizing the significance of introducing oneself in Indigenous research and life, the authors of this paper came together from diverse intersectional positionalities and experiences with a shared commitment to advancing decolonizing and Indigenization efforts in the academy. Candace Brunette-Debassige is a member of the Mushkego Cree Nation in Treaty 9 with mixed Cree and French white settler ancestry. She is an Assistant Professor and longstanding leader in Indigenous education. Pauline Wakeham is an Associate Professor in the Department of English and Writing Studies and a settler scholar of English and German descent. Cindy Smithers Graeme is a settler scholar of European descent. Aisha Haque is a second-generation Pakistani settler and the Director of the Centre for Teaching and Learning. Sara Mai Chitty (she/her) is mixed Michi Sagig Anishinaabekwe and white British settler. A member of Alderville First Nation, she is a Curriculum and Pedagogy Advisor

in Indigenous Initiatives at Western University, with a background in media and curriculum development.

Over the course of nearly two years, the Committee, co-chaired by Candace Brunette-Debassige and Aisha Haque led discussion across broad campus and community partners to mobilize Indigenous curricular changes. As part of the Committee's planning process, we sought to learn from existing Indigenization scholarship by tracing the broader picture emerging across Canada and considering the successes and challenges experienced by teachers, administrators, and students elsewhere. To do so, we conducted a comprehensive literature review of scholarship on decolonizing and Indigenizing teaching and learning at universities across the settler states of Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand. We searched over 30 databases representing the Arts and Humanities, Social Sciences, Law, Medicine, Sciences, and Education using the key terms "Indigenization," "decolonization," and "reconciliation." This approach resulted in a list of thousands of citations published over several decades, thereby reinforcing the vital recognition that efforts to decolonize and Indigenize the academy began long before the TRC, thanks to the foundational work of Indigenous and decolonial intellectuals across the globe (Battiste, 2000a, 2000b, 2013a, 2013b; Cupples & Grosfoguel, 2018; Grande, 2015; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991; Mignolo, 2009; Mihesuah & Wilson, 2004; Smith 1999). While drawing upon this rich tradition of scholarship, in order to map post-TRC developments, we honed in on a short list of approximately 50 peer-reviewed publications focusing on the recent Canadian context. Mindful of the fact that academic publishing can be hampered by time lags and colonial norms that may occlude important insights and marginalize Indigenous voices (Battiste 2002, p. 2), we combined our review of published scholarship with a survey of "grey literature"—institutional policy documents, as well as online reports and blogs by Indigenous support staff and academics—to provide an up-to-date and multi-perspectival understanding of institutional changes in recent years.

In analyzing the Indigenous curricular landscape, we noted recurring themes that surfaced in the academic and grey literature and combined these themes with our own professional experiences and observations working with the Indigenous Curriculum Committee at our university. Through this process, we discerned several patterns in the ways universities across Canada have approached curricular transformation in light of the TRC's Calls to Action. In this paper, we identify what we view as five emerging approaches to curricular transformation and discuss the resultant challenges and possibilities. These approaches are: 1) including Indigenous knowledges and perspectives across the disciplines; 2) capacity building through curriculum support and informal learning/unlearning opportunities; 3) mandatory Indigenous course requirements; 4) increasing Indigenous autonomy by elevating and creating Indigenous programs and offices; and 5) creating partnerships with Indigenous organizations.

In theory and practice, these five approaches are not necessarily mutually exclusive; in fact, they can coexist and intersect within a single institution. However, each approach deserves specific attention to better understand the possibilities and constraints that educators are encountering as they implement them. Through mapping these approaches, we also identified that there has been little formal academic discussion of the "theories of change" (Tuck, 2018) informing different curriculum transformation initiatives. In other words, while existing scholarship and grey literature reveals discernible trends in decolonizing and Indigenizing the curriculum across Canadian universities, the rationales informing these approaches have yet to be considered in detail. What kinds of change are each of these approaches

designed to effect? In what ways might such changes leave the Eurocentric logics and structures of the university largely intact or push toward more radical decolonial transformation? As we outline the five emerging approaches to Indigenizing the curriculum at Canadian universities, we will take up these questions by analyzing what these approaches might tell us about the theories of change that underpin them.

### How to Transform a University: Diagnosing the Problem, Imagining Solutions

In their article, “Doing Indigenous Work: Decolonizing and Transforming the Academy,” Linda Tuhiwai Smith and Graham Hingangaroa Smith (2018) offer a compelling diagnosis of the problems with the colonial academy in terms of its historical exclusion and oppression of Indigenous Peoples and knowledges. Recognizing that these colonial structures and norms continue in universities today, Smith and Smith call on scholars committed to decolonizing the university to continually ask themselves: “What changes as a result of what we are doing?” (p. 24). With this question, Smith and Smith highlight the need for decolonial theory and scholarship to be put into transformative action in ways that are accountable and positively contribute to Indigenous communities and futurities.

Smith and Smith’s insights resonate with Eve Tuck’s (2018) recent call to examine underlying theories of change at play in the larger movement to Indigenize the university. Put succinctly, theories of change shape “[h]ow we conceive of a problem,” what its root causes are, and “what we propose” as solutions (Stein 2020, p. 672). Such theories may be conscious and explicit, but other times they may take the form of implicit assumptions and normalized practices that can unintentionally reproduce colonial structures, logics, and power asymmetries. For example, a university might seek to “Indigenize” itself by wanting to hire more Indigenous scholars. However, if such hiring processes proceed without proactively educating and preparing departments and appointment committees regarding Indigenous peoples and scholarship, unequal power dynamics can be reproduced via processes that fail to adequately recognize the time and energy involved in community-based research or the validity of Indigenous research methodologies (Sensoy & Diangelo, 2017). This example is consistent with Sharon Stein’s (2020) assertion that too often universities’ approaches to change tend to hinge upon solutions that do not radically challenge the colonial and Eurocentric edifices of these institutions—or what Stein calls “the house modernity built”—founded on three building blocks: “[t]he wall of enlightenment humanist knowledge,” “[t]he wall of the nation-state,” and “the roof of global capital” (p. 669, 671-672). Drawing upon previous collaborative work (Andreotti et. al. 2015), Stein outlines three theories of change. As Andreotti, Stein, Ahenakew, and Hunt stress, these categories are “*pedagogical* rather than normative”—they are meant “to provide a visual representation of complex and juxtaposed spaces that we inhabit” rather than definitively capturing all possible nuances or setting the terms for how change might occur in the world (p. 22). The first category, which Stein denotes as “minor reform theories of change,” do not substantially question the foundations of the Euro-Western university. The approach to problems that arise, therefore, is not to fundamentally “change the system, but [to] change individuals to ensure that the system runs more fairly and efficiently” (p. 675). The second category—what Stein calls “major reform” theories of change—“identify deep structural flaws” in universities “and advocate for more drastic changes” (p. 675). Major reform theories thus call for changes in practice as well as in the epistemological foundations of universities, seeking to disrupt ways of knowing and to create spaces of “epistemological diversity” (p. 675). Major reform theories may also entail “radically reimagining

existing universities, including not only diversifying representation within curriculum and the makeup of the student body and faculty, but also “redistributing ... resources ... to support” marginalized members and potentially engaging in some degree of institutional re-structuring (p. 676). Finally, the “beyond reform theory of change” views “the foundations of the modern university” as being “deeply entangled with racial and colonial violence” (p. 678). After all, racism is structurally embedded in educational systems and curriculum, often accompanied by violent consequences for Indigenous and racialized groups, thus feeding enduring processes of colonization (Henry & Tator, 2009; Henry et al., 2017). Indeed, many Indigenous scholars have exposed these interconnections of institutional racism and colonialism in universities (Henry, 2012; Monture, 2009; St. Denis, 2007). In light of this, the beyond reform theory of change accordingly questions and recognizes that “even radical efforts to include different ways of knowing, being, and relating into the institution will risk decontextualizing” and appropriating them (p. 678). As a result, the beyond reform theory understands “that the institution itself may not be salvageable and that something new may need to arise in its place if we seek to cease its harms” (p. 678).

One of the key problems that has emerged in the post-TRC movement to Indigenize the academy is that the concept of “Indigenizing” has been used too capaciously to refer to a range of initiatives, some of which are informed by minor theories of change that reinforce the status quo and some of which are shaped by a recognition of the need to radically alter and unravel the colonial university system. Adam Gaudry and Danielle Lorenz (2018a) have identified three different visions of Indigenization emerging in and beyond Canadian universities that exist on a “spectrum” and that resonate with (but are not identical to) Stein’s minor, major, and beyond reform theories of change (p. 218). Like Stein’s minor reform theories of change, Gaudry and Lorenz’s first category—that of “*Indigenous inclusion*”—is an approach to Indigenization that largely confines change to the level of individuals rather than interrogating institutional structures. In this approach, Indigenizing the academy “is conceived of primarily [as] a matter of inclusion and access” (p. 218). The solution, therefore, is to “increase[] Indigenous students, faculty, and staff in the Canadian academy” (p. 218). While Stein’s examples of minor reforms focus on changing non-Indigenous peoples through “cultural competency” or anti-racism training (p. 10), Gaudry and Lorenz’s term “Indigenous inclusion” denotes an approach that “expects Indigenous people to bear the burden of change” (p. 220). In practice, most Canadian universities seem to be focusing on both non-Indigenous and Indigenous university community members, though the overwhelming power differential between a largely white Euro-Western majority and a very small Indigenous minority within these institutions means that the burden of fitting into the institution continues to rest upon Indigenous Peoples. The second category that Gaudry and Lorenz identify as “*Reconciliation indigenization*” locates indigenization on common ground between Indigenous and Canadian ideals, creating a new, broader consensus on debates such as what counts as knowledge, how should Indigenous knowledges and European-derived knowledges be reconciled, and what types of relationships academic institutions should have with Indigenous communities” (p. 218-19). Reconciliation Indigenization thus shares with Stein’s major reform category the emphasis not only on changes in practice but also in epistemological orientation and possible structural reform. Finally, the third category identified by Gaudry and Lorenz is “*Decolonial indigenization*,” which “envisions the wholesale overhaul of the academy to fundamentally reorient knowledge production based on balancing power relations between Indigenous Peoples and Canadians, transforming the academy into something

dynamic and new” (p. 219). While Gaudry and Lorenz’s idea of Decolonial Indigenization asserts the political sovereignty of Indigenous Nationhood in education and the need for an “overhauling” of the university, it does not appear to go as far as Stein’s “beyond reform” theory of change, which recognizes that the university may not in fact be salvageable.

Similar to Stein, Gaudry and Lorenz contend that, unfortunately, in post-TRC Canada, the changes currently being implemented by most universities have remained at the level of minor reforms rather than embracing deep epistemological and structural change. In this vein, the “academy has *rhetorically* adopted an aspirational vision of reconciliation indigenization” but, thus far, “the changes at most universities amount only to bolstering Indigenous inclusion” (p. 219). This engenders many challenges for Indigenous students, staff, and faculty who continually encounter ignorance of, or disregard for, their knowledges while being asked to perform immense amounts of labour on behalf of the university’s token Indigenization initiatives (Greenwood et al., 2008). The idea of Decolonial Indigenization, therefore, still remains far beyond what Canadian universities’ Indigenous strategic plans’ can achieve in practice.

Given the fact that the term “Indigenization” has been used too loosely to describe a range of projects, it is important to establish definitional clarity before proceeding. In its best form, we understand Indigenization “[a]s a process of resurgence” and re-centering of ... Indigenous ways of knowing” (Grafton & Melançon, 2020, p. 135). As Grafton and Melançon note, Indigenization should therefore be led by Indigenous Peoples and should respect Indigenous intellectual sovereignty—namely, Indigenous leadership and self-determination—regarding the teaching and study of Indigenous knowledges, languages, and methodologies. To emphasize that Indigenization must be led by Indigenous Peoples, we use the capitalized “I” throughout this essay. In order to create respectful spaces in which Indigenous Peoples, knowledges, methodologies, and pedagogies can thrive throughout the academy, we argue that Indigenization must be accompanied by decolonizing processes, which involve rigorous analysis and dismantling of Eurocentric and colonial ideologies embedded in disciplinary structures and canons as well as university governance, policy and practice. We remain mindful, however, of Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang’s powerful caution that decolonization is not a process that can be limited to the university; in its most robust, sense, decolonization involves nothing less than the dismantling of colonial power structures and “the repatriation of Indigenous land and life” (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 1). Some scholars have argued that before Eurocentric institutions can begin to become respectful environments for engaging with Indigenous knowledges and methodologies, these institutions must first decolonize (George, 2019). Without specifying a sequential order, we agree that decolonization and Indigenization are distinct but complementary projects.

### **Mapping Emerging Institutional Approaches to Indigenizing the Curriculum**

Now that we have outlined three broad visions of Indigenization for Canadian universities and related them to a spectrum of minor, major, and beyond reform theories of change, we can turn to the particular ways that Indigenization is being approached with regard to curricular transformation. To do so, we have mapped the five approaches we have discerned from our literature review onto this spectrum and analyzed the theories of change informing them. Our preliminary survey of the literature study reveals that, unfortunately but not surprisingly, many of the approaches to Indigenizing the curriculum currently pursued by Canadian universities remain in the category of minor reforms. In making this contention, we

recognize that we are tracing unfolding transformations in the post-secondary education landscape at broad institutional levels. Within each university there may be particular programs or specific units in which more radical transformation is occurring. Moreover, the examples we will soon discuss demonstrate that there are gradations within the minor reform category itself; many of the approaches have great potential as well as challenges within current institutional contexts. Additionally, such approaches are not uniformly implemented or homogeneous from institution to institution nor are they necessarily static. Thus, even as we chart these different approaches, we recognize that it is important to remain attentive to nuance and change over time.

### **1.) Including Indigenous knowledges and perspectives across the disciplines**

Perhaps the most common approach universities have taken to Indigenize the curriculum in the post-TRC era is to expand engagement with Indigenous knowledges and perspectives across the disciplines, rather than isolating the teaching of Indigenous content within Indigenous Studies programs alone. This approach tends to be premised on the belief that Indigenous knowledges have interdisciplinary application across a range of subject areas, which can help foster more widespread transformation across campus. To effect this widespread Indigenizing of the curriculum, universities are engaging in two strategies which are often pursued in conjunction with each other: hiring more Indigenous faculty across the disciplines and encouraging non-Indigenous faculty to include Indigenous content in their courses. We view these strategies as minor reforms given that institutional change is largely focused upon the level of individual transformation, either through including new individuals within the university or encouraging existing individuals to undertake new learning and professional development. The word “inclusion” that we use to describe this approach references Gaudry and Lorenz’s “Indigenous inclusion” category and signals a process in which Indigenous knowledges are conditionally incorporated into the existing Euro-Western university, often at the expense of a more thorough interrogation of the institution’s foundational assumptions, norms, and structures.

Although hiring Indigenous faculty is absolutely essential to Indigenizing the academy, when Indigenous scholars are tasked with introducing Indigenous knowledges and pedagogies into traditional Euro-Western disciplines and university departments, they are often marginalized and isolated, left to challenge entrenched and “invisibilized” dynamics of settler colonial power” without the resources necessary for such work (Tuck & Yang, 2012). On the other hand, in an era of so-called austerity in public education, limited opportunities to hire new faculty has also meant that universities seek to Indigenize the academy by relying on the benevolence of existing faculty members who are predominantly non-Indigenous and not based in Indigenous and/or decolonial studies to incorporate Indigenous content into their courses on their own terms. This anyone can ‘add and stir’ approach to Indigenous curriculum change (Battiste, 1998) not only undermines the integrity of the fields of Indigenous and decolonial studies; the approach undermines Indigenous intellectual sovereignty and by assuming that anyone can pick up Indigenous knowledge and teach it, as though Indigenous Studies and Indigenous knowledges are not rigorous enough to require scholarly specialization. Non-Indigenous scholars do have important roles to play in decolonizing the university—namely, studying and teaching the history of settler colonialism in Canada and encouraging reflexivity regarding privilege, power, and perspective amongst themselves and their students. However, the work of Indigenizing the curriculum requires substantial specialized education and experience. Even well-intentioned efforts by non-



Indigenous faculty lacking a foundation in Indigenous and/or decolonial studies can end up reinterpreting Indigenous knowledges through Western liberal and multicultural lenses that reify colonial norms. For example, Indigenous knowledges can easily get decontextualized and taken out of context, overgeneralized and often oversimplified by failing to understand linguistic and Indigenous national specificities. Moreover, such approaches can “risk ... usurping Indigenous knowledge from its basis in Aboriginal communities, Elders, and Native Studies departments and de-contextualizing it into various objects of Western knowledge expansion” (FitzMaurice, 2011, p. 72). Increasing concerns about non-Indigenous faculty members’ rush to Indigenize their syllabi suggest that Gaudry and Lorenz’s category of “Indigenous inclusion” depicts only one half of the problem with such minor reform approaches to Indigenizing the curriculum. The flip-side to “Indigenous inclusion” can become, in its worst forms, what Erica Violet Lee has called “Indigenizing the academy’ without Indigenous people”—a movement that re-centres colonialism and whiteness by ostensibly attending to Indigenous knowledges, yet divorcing that process from Indigenous leadership and expertise.<sup>1</sup> When efforts to Indigenize the curriculum take this wrong turn, an initiative underpinned by a minor reform theory of change ends up detrimentally reinforcing rather than altering the status quo.

## 2.) Capacity Building through Curriculum Support and Informal Learning/Unlearning Opportunities

In conjunction with the post-TRC interest in encouraging widespread engagement with Indigenous knowledges across the disciplines, some universities have invested in Indigenous-led support for capacity-building and decolonial learning and unlearning amongst leadership, faculty, and staff. This approach seeks to address the problems that can arise when non-Indigenous faculty members lacking the necessary scholarly foundations attempt to incorporate Indigenous content in their classrooms. It does so by teaching the teachers, so to speak, providing instructional resources and Indigenous-led expertise and support for curricular transformation and professional development for faculty and staff lacking background knowledge and experience.

One such initiative involves the creation of shared curriculum resources for instructors who do not have subject-matter expertise. An example is Carleton University’s *Collaborative Indigenous Learning Bundles* program created in 2018. The idea was conceived of by Mohawk scholar Kahente Horn-Miller based on her own online teaching experiences where she developed a series of online modules based on broad level themes with interdisciplinary relevance. At Carleton, the Bundles (Steele et. al., 2020) became a way to digitize some Indigenous faculty members’ lectures for other instructors to use without overwhelming the limited Indigenous scholars and community members in repetitively delivering the same presentations in university classes. Moreover, the Bundles reciprocally partner with Indigenous Knowledge Holders (IKH) to bring their perspectives into teaching materials in respectful ways. These are remarkably generous offerings provided by Indigenous intellectuals that can reach many faculty and students. At the same time, such initiatives leave the labour of decolonizing and Indigenizing the

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<sup>1</sup> Lee used this phrase in a blog post titled “Indigenizing the academy’ without Indigenous people: Who can teach our stories?” This article was posted on Lee’s blog, *Moontime Warrior*, on November 9, 2015 at the following url: <https://moontimewarrior.com/2015/11/09/who-can-teach-indigenous-philosophy>. Unfortunately, this post is no longer available online.

curriculum largely to Indigenous faculty and community partners and share their intellectual and cultural property for a wide range of courses.

Another related initiative is BC Campus' open education resource *Pulling Together: A Guide for Indigenization of Post-Secondary Institutions; A Professional Learning Series* (BC Campus, n.d.-a) which provides a comprehensive framework to participate in Indigenizing curriculum. The Guide includes self-reflection exercises and may be adapted and localized to respect Indigenous knowledges, languages, and practices in other regions and territories. Moreover, the *BC campus Indigenization Project: Environmental Scan Summary* highlights the importance of educational program design features such as collaboration (both across universities and with local Indigenous communities), face-to-face interactions (to support transformational learning), co-teaching opportunities (in partnership with local Knowledge Keepers and facilitators), and safe spaces (to encourage respectful practice and reflection). While this environmental scan is specific to postsecondary institutions in the province of British Columbia, it provides several valuable insights and references to nation-wide resources (BC Campus (n.d.-b)).

Increasingly, Canadian universities have also been hiring Indigenous curriculum advisors (see Table 1) housed within Centres for Teaching and Learning or sometimes within new Offices of Indigenous Initiatives (as we have done at Western University). These academic development roles are often tasked with the responsibility to advise faculty and staff members in Indigenizing their curriculum, and mentor them on how to work ethically and respectfully with Indigenous knowledges and communities. In addition to supporting faculty in developing their academic courses, Indigenous curriculum advisors also often lead professional development opportunities for staff and leadership that encourage critical self-reflection and relationship building with Indigenous communities and Peoples. Yet as Raffoul et al. (forthcoming) suggest, the “institutional rhetoric focused on Indigenization” lacks a “willingness to adequately resource” this work. In their review of Canadian university websites, the authors found only 31 Indigenization-focused Education Developer (ED) positions across 26 institutions, with the majority (77%) having a singular ED position responsible for curriculum across the entire university. The authors further note that this data does not account for the Indigenous faculty and staff who continue to take on the Indigenization of curriculum off the sides of their desks, and in addition to their other responsibilities. Certainly, Indigenous curriculum advisors play integral roles in preparing academics to teach; however, their status as staff members and “advisors” indicates the power differential that exists when they engage with faculty members who have the security of tenure and academic freedom, not to mention the authority of disciplinary expertise. The challenges of navigating these power asymmetries as well as entrenched Euro-Western norms is often very onerous work.

**Table 1. U15 Senior Indigenous Leadership Positions**

<b>U15 university</b>	<b>Indigenous leadership roles</b>	<b>Curriculum and pedagogy support roles</b>
University of Alberta	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vice-Provost (Indigenous Programming &amp; Research) (2019)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lead Educational Developer, Indigenous Focus</li> </ul>
University of Calgary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vice-Provost (Indigenous Engagement) (2018)</li> <li>• Director, Indigenous Strategy (2017)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educational Development Consultant (Indigenous Ways of Knowing)</li> </ul>
University of Manitoba	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vice-President (Indigenous) (2019) (previously Vice Provost (Indigenous) (2017))</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indigenous Initiatives Educator (2 positions)</li> </ul>
McMaster University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Director (Indigenous Research Institute) (2021)</li> </ul>	
Queen's University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Associate Vice Principal (Indigenous Initiatives &amp; Reconciliation) (2018)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educational Developer, Indigenous Pedagogies and Ways of Knowing</li> </ul>
University of Saskatchewan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vice Provost (Indigenous Engagement) (2017)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Edu. Development Specialist</li> <li>• Cultural Advisor</li> <li>• Manager, Indigenous Edu. Initiatives</li> </ul>

**Table 1. U15 Senior Indigenous Leadership Positions (continued)**

<b>U15 university</b>	<b>Indigenous leadership roles</b>	<b>Curriculum and pedagogy support roles</b>
UBC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Senior Advisor to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor on Indigenous Affairs (2019)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Senior Strategist, Indigenous Initiatives</li> <li>• Educational Resource Developer: Indigenous Initiatives</li> <li>• Educational Consultant, Curriculum and Student Development</li> <li>• Educational Consultant, Indigenous Initiatives</li> <li>• Senior Educational Consultant, Indigenous Initiatives</li> <li>• Education Consultant, Staff Training</li> <li>• Educational Consultant, Classroom and Campus Climate</li> </ul>
McGill University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Special Advisor (Indigenous Initiatives) (2017)</li> </ul>	
Western University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Special Advisor (2018-2020)</li> <li>• Vice-Provost/ Associate Vice-President (Indigenous Initiatives) (2020)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indigenous Curriculum and Pedagogy Advisor</li> </ul>
University of Toronto	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Director, Indigenous Initiatives</li> <li>• Academic Advisor on Indigenous Curriculum and Education</li> <li>• Academic Advisor on Indigenous Research</li> </ul>	
Dalhousie University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Director of Indigenous Community Engagement (2020)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educational Developer (Indigenization)</li> </ul>
Université de Montréal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Senior Advisor for Relations with the First Nations</li> </ul>	
University of Ottawa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Director of Indigenous Affairs</li> <li>• Academic Delegate for Indigenous Engagement</li> </ul>	
Waterloo University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Senior Director, Indigenous Initiatives (2020)</li> </ul>	

Other universities have created funding envelopes that invest in Indigenous curriculum development at both the individual faculty member and programmatic levels. For instance, the University of Manitoba, University of Victoria, and Western University have created funding mechanisms that support proactive Indigenous curriculum planning. These funds are distributed annually on a competitive basis and were institutionalized with the support of Indigenous strategic leadership. Such funding can support Indigenous and non-Indigenous faculty who require time and resources in order to engage with Indigenous knowledges in deep and reflexive, rather than superficial, ways.

As part of these institutional investments in capacity building, some universities have addressed Indigenizing and decolonizing curricula beyond academic programs, creating learning and unlearning opportunities within the walls of academic institutions and beyond. We view the extension of Indigenizing and decolonizing work into these realms of “informal curriculum” as vital for effecting change throughout the university and society as a whole. One example of such an initiative is Mount Royal University’s Faculty Learning Community (FLC), developed and offered in partnership with Treaty 7 Indigenous community members. FLCs offered seminar-style discussions of assigned readings, guest speakers and media, and experiential learning opportunities including In<sup>^</sup>ibi (sweat lodge) ceremony hosted by the <sup>^</sup>Iyarhe Nakoda Nation and a 2-day workshop hosted by Old Sun Community College on the Siksika Nation (Yeo et al., 2019).

Seeking to educate beyond the walls of the institution, other universities have undertaken the creation of Massive Online Open Courses (MOOC) available widely and to the public. Perhaps the best-known example is *Indigenous Canada*, originally curated by Nehiyaw’ iskwew instructor Dr. Tracey Bear during her time at the Faculty of Native Studies at the University of Alberta. This free online course explores Indigenous histories and contemporary issues in Canada and offers critical perspectives regarding national and local Indigenous-settler relations. On a smaller scale, Cape Breton University has offered the online open course *Learning from the Knowledge Keepers of Mi’kmaki*, (also known as “Mi’kmaw Mondays”). Co-facilitated by a Mi’kmaw Hereditary Chief (Stephen Augustine), and a former faculty member (Dr. Ashlee Cunsolo), the objective of this course was to teach Mi’kmaw knowledge, history, culture, identity, and contemporary issues. A subsequent evaluation of the course found that a key strength was its grounding in traditional ceremony and opportunities for relationship building and collaborative learning between instructors and community members (Root et al., 2019). Yet despite the success and high level of engagement with such initiatives, very few universities have dedicated time and resources to create such broad-based opportunities. Moreover, learning opportunities such as those described above are rarely mandated for employees working within higher education.

While it is clear that Indigenous faculty and staff have led generous and innovative curriculum change initiatives in Canadian universities, we argue that these initiatives are largely minor reforms as they focus on changing individuals through consciousness-raising rather than radically challenging and altering Euro-Western institutional structures and system. That said, many of these initiatives are vital steps toward greater transformation, courageously initiating much-needed education and unlearning for academic leaders, staff, faculty, and the broader public. Without such a starting place, it would be difficult to catalyze more systemic change. These initiatives also highlight Indigenous voices and expertise as

necessary elements of any attempt to Indigenize the curriculum. At the same time, these initiatives often do not provide sufficient amounts of institutional authority and resources necessary to adequately support and compensate Indigenous experts who give their time and knowledge to this work, thereby often continuing to place Indigenous people in vulnerable positions. More needs to be done to ensure that Indigenous faculty and staff at the heart of these programs are granted the power and autonomy they need to do their work.

### **3.) Mandatory Indigenous Course Requirements**

An increasingly common approach taken by universities to Indigenizing curriculum is the development of Indigenous Course Requirements (ICRs). ICRs require that students at undergraduate or professional levels complete a prescribed amount of Indigenous-focused content or service courses that provide foundational information and context regarding settler colonialism in Canada as well as Indigenous Nations, languages, and knowledges. Some disciplines, including social work and education, have instituted ICRs for many years, often as a strategy to improve professional practice and cultural competency (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018b; Goerke & Kickett, 2014). More recently, the TRC's Calls to Action have prompted other disciplines—specifically healthcare, journalism, and law programs—to embrace ICRs. To date, few universities have mandated ICRs as a general undergraduate degree requirement. Notable exceptions include Lakehead University, Laurentian University, Trent University, the University of Saskatchewan, and the University of Winnipeg, all of which require incoming undergraduate students to complete an ICR. More recently, the University of Manitoba and UBC Okanagan announced that undergraduate students in the Faculty of Arts will be required to complete an Indigenous Content requirement effective Sept. 1, 2021. While these are bold institutional commitments, there continues to be no uniform requirements at higher education quality council levels. Moreover, their implementation is not always accompanied by adequate funding, resources, and communication strategies necessary to support positive and meaningful engagement.

As such, the implementation of ICRs continues to be controversial, with much of this debate taking place on social media and in the press (Dehaas, 2012; Gaudry, 2016; Sohail, 2016). Proponents of ICRs argue that they have the potential to provide a foundational knowledge of colonial injustices and Indigenous-Canadian relations (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018b; Tanchuk, et al., 2018). Critics of ICRs often assume that these content requirements would somehow infringe upon individual faculty members' academic freedom by mandating learning outcomes in every course. Yet, many universities are not mandating Indigenous content to be included in every university course; they have instead created policies that require academic programs to embed a specific amount of Indigenous content in certain courses at the program level. Moreover, it is important to recognize that the academic system has epistemic biases already built into it where mandatory science and/or humanities credits are part of existing undergraduate degree requirements and do not get interrogated, thus raising questions as to what is deemed essential knowledge at programmatic or degree levels. Beyond these matters, some scholars worry that ICRs can too easily become box-checking exercises or an "easy way out" of the greater decolonizing work and structural transformation that needs to be done across post-secondary institutions (Kuokkanen, 2016).

To date, only a few academic publications have analyzed ICRs in more systematic ways (Friesen, 2018; Fiola & MacKinnon, 2020; Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018b; Tanchuk et al., 2018, University of Winnipeg, 2020). Moreover, as ICRs are fairly new initiatives, there is little data regarding their long-term impact. Gaudry and Lorenz (2018b) surveyed Canadian faculty, university administrators, graduate students, and instructors to explore perceptions of the purpose of ICRs, their transformative potential within the academy, and whether these policies were effective in addressing the needs of Indigenous Peoples in a university context. Their findings revealed that a vast majority of respondents expressed great optimism and positive experiences with ICRs. Similarly, a study by Australian scholars Aberdeen, Carter, Grogan, and Hollinsworth (2013) concluded that foundational courses resulted in significant shifts in non-Indigenous students' views of Indigenous Australians as well as an increased commitment to social justice.

Certainly, ICRs draw on institutional power to take bold policy steps toward mandating Indigenous curriculum at the student level. From a theory of change perspective, ICRs recognize that colonialism is structurally embedded in the curriculum and that policy mandating learning in this area is necessary to shift these hegemonic norms. Despite bold policy efforts, however, we argue that ICRs still sit on the cusp of minor and major reform as they face several limitations when putting them into practice. Gaudry and Lorenz (2018b) have identified a number of structural, pedagogical and ideological barriers associated with ICRs. At a structural level, they point to the challenges that many Indigenous Studies units face when instituting ICRs as they are often administratively marginalized, poorly funded, and face a chronic under-representation of Indigenous faculty members (Aberdeen et al., 2013; Deer, 2020; Fiola & MacKinnon, 2020). Pedagogically, the faculty members who teach ICR's tend to be employed in precarious positions (e.g., sessional or pre-tenure roles), and face student resistance to taking mandatory courses, often in the form of negative teaching evaluations. As such, the impact of early ICR implementation on Indigenous faculty members has at times bordered on exploitative and marginalizing. For these reasons, while ICRs demonstrate important potential, they require much greater levels of institutional security and support for the instructors and programs that develop them.

#### **4.) Increasing Indigenous Autonomy by Elevating and Creating Indigenous Programs and Offices**

The fourth approach to Indigenizing the curriculum in the post-TRC era hearkens back to but also expands upon a previous moment of institutional change. Prior to the 1960s and 1970s, if Indigenous perspectives were studied within universities at all, they were often relegated to the fields of anthropology, archaeology, and folklore. Under the guise of purported scientific objectivity, racist discourses were perpetuated by examining Indigenous Peoples and ways of knowing as atavistic objects of fascination. The American Indian Movement in the United States and the Indian Control of Indian Education Movement in Canada (Newhouse, 2008) during the 1960s and 1970s propelled the development of Native Studies programs in universities across Turtle Island as a way of wresting primary jurisdiction over the study of Indigenous Peoples from disciplines like anthropology and archaeology. Native Studies (now often referred to as Indigenous Studies) programs became vital spaces in which Indigenous scholars could begin to establish intellectual sovereignty—namely, Indigenous leadership and self-determination over the study and teaching of Indigenous epistemologies, knowledges, and languages (Newhouse, 2008; Teuton, 2008, p. 10-11). In contrast to the Euro-Western tradition of segmenting knowledge into academic disciplines, Indigenous Studies departments foster wholistic

approaches to Indigenous knowledges based on Indigenous methods and pedagogies that are embodied, relational, and land-based (Andersen & O'Brian, 2016; FitzMaurice, 2011; Pidgeon, 2014; Pidgeon 2016).

Since the TRC, universities have increasingly established Indigenous Studies programs where they did not previously exist or have elevated those programs to the status of departments rather than sub-programs run within larger academic units. As a result, these programs have expanded their long-term role in the flourishing of Indigenous knowledges and intellectual perspectives as well as the recruitment and retention of Indigenous students and faculty members (Andersen & O'Brien, 2016; FitzMaurice, 2011; Pidgeon, 2016).<sup>2</sup> FitzMaurice and others have advocated for centering Indigenous Studies programs as sites of leadership for academic Indigenization initiatives. We view this recommendation as resonant with a major reform theory of change because it pushes toward a structural transformation whereby Indigenous people are not merely included within the institution but are accorded some degree of intellectual sovereignty over the teaching and learning of Indigenous knowledges. Of course, the level of decision-making authority these programs are able to exercise varies from institution to institution. At the University of Alberta, Native Studies is a Faculty unto itself rather than a department; this model might be one way to create more autonomous spaces for Indigenous academic programs. In practice, however, the possibilities for such programs to weigh in on broader decolonial and Indigenous curricular change across campus or even to develop their own programs is often constrained by under-staffing and insufficient funding as well as through academic marginalization as units within the university (Daigle, 2019; Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018b; Henry & Kobayashi, 2017; Mercier et al., 2011, Pidgeon, 2016).<sup>3</sup>

Since FitzMaurice wrote his article in 2011, the practice of developing Indigenous-led autonomous programs within the university has expanded beyond Indigenous Studies undergraduate programs. Many universities are now recognizing Indigenous academic programs' autonomy at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, often led by Faculties of Education and Law. Both the University of Victoria and the University of British Columbia's Faculties of Education structurally recognize Indigenous Education as departments.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, many institutions have recently created senior administrative positions such as Vice-Provosts of Indigenous Affairs who lead Offices of Indigenous Initiatives. To document this trend, we have created a chart listing current positions at the U15 institutions (research intensive universities) in Canada (Table 1). Indigenous senior leaders are increasingly influencing academic visioning by having a voice at the table of centralized administration from which to guide institutional processes of decolonizing and Indigenizing the university, rather than relegating this work to Indigenous Studies programs that do not necessarily have the resources and administrative authority to oversee university-wide change. While establishing these senior administrative positions and offices opens the possibility for further structural change towards sites of Indigenous leadership, in practice, these Vice-

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<sup>2</sup> While beyond the scope of this paper, we feel it is important to acknowledge there exists a wealth of scholarship pertaining to Indigenous Studies programs globally, including their origins, trajectories, and aspirations. For further reading in this regard, we suggest Andersen and O'Brien's (2016) *Sources and Methods in Indigenous Studies* (see also Andersen, 2009; Nakata et al., 2012)

<sup>3</sup> For this reason, some scholars have suggested that Indigenous Studies programs remain "ghettoized" at the margins of the academy, and isolated from other disciplines (Henry & Kobayashi, 2017, p. 121)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.uvic.ca/education/indigenous/index.php>



Provost and Vice-President roles often do not have voting privileges in academic Senate. Moreover, when it comes to curricular change, most senior Indigenous administrative roles do not have direct academic oversight; rather, their influence is limited to playing a role in facilitating strategic policy and curriculum change initiatives. Nevertheless, Indigenous administrators in these positions can serve as a central connecting force that coordinates networks of Indigenous leadership across the university, engaging Indigenous faculty members and communities to work together toward a common goal of developing academic frameworks that advance Indigenous perspectives and support across disciplines and professional programs.

Collectively, what this cluster of approaches share is the glimmer of a recognition that Indigenizing the academy requires at least some institutional restructuring to create spaces of Indigenous leadership and, ultimately, intellectual sovereignty. For these reasons, we view these approaches as attempting to move toward Reconciliation Indigenization. What existing scholarship illuminates, however, is that the tangible exercise of institutional power and autonomy by Indigenous faculty and staff is still often an aspiration rather than a reality.

### **5.) Partnerships with Autonomous Indigenous Organizations**

A fifth approach to Indigenizing curriculum involves developing academic partnerships with Indigenous communities and organizations. A compelling example of an Indigenous-led educational organization is the Dechinta Centre for Research and Learning on Akaitcho Territory. As “the only fully land-based university accredited program in the world, and the only program explicitly mandated to serve Indigenous people,” Dechinta works “[i]n collaboration with the University of British Columbia and the University of Alberta” to deliver courses and whole semesters of “accredited post-secondary academic programming” (Dechinta, 2018). Universities are also increasingly partnering with Aboriginal Institutes (AIs). AIs are Indigenous owned and controlled community-based educational institutes that develop and deliver culturally enriched, accredited post-secondary certificate, diploma, degree, and post-graduate programs to Indigenous students in partnership with colleges and universities. AIs provide an alternative pathway for Indigenous learners to pursue culturally enriched academic learning developed and delivered in partnership with mainstream colleges and universities to serve Indigenous capacity-building and Nation-building efforts in Indigenous communities. The academic focus of these partnerships vary and are often governed by Memorandums of Understandings (MOU) and Articulation Agreements between Indigenous Institutes and universities. As an example, Six Nations Polytechnic (SNP) has formed a consortium agreement with McMaster University, Brock University, the University of Guelph, the University of Waterloo, Western University, and Wilfrid Laurier University. This agreement allows students to remain in community and complete the first year of their university studies at the Six Nations Native University Access Program. In addition, SNP has developed newer partnerships with many universities and colleges to offer post-secondary education programs to Six Nations of the Grand River and surrounding communities.

While some of the initiatives discussed above pre-date the TRC, in the current movement to Indigenize the academy, universities are seeking to expand their partnerships or to develop new ones. We view such initiatives as resonating with major reform theories of change in the sense that they have the potential to shift the terrain of universities’ engagement with Indigenous communities by moving towards a more

equal balance of power between the colonial academy and Indigenous Knowledge Holders (IKH). Certainly, constraints remain given the fact that AI's typically negotiate provincial funding and educational regulations. That said, such university-AI agreements move towards modes of cross-cultural and cross-institutional engagement between partners. Rather than being enfolded within the university, AIs remain distinct from it, able to engage in respectful relations from a position of Indigenous intellectual sovereignty. Increasing funding for, and the autonomy of, AI's might be one way of moving towards Gaudry and Lorenz's idea of decolonial Indigenization--or possibly beyond it.

### **Possibilities & Limitations of Curriculum Change Approaches**

By mapping these five approaches to Indigenizing the curriculum within Canadian universities, we have sought to better understand their challenges and possibilities. Moreover, we have endeavoured to analyze the theories of change that inform these approaches in order to clarify the horizons of possibility that each approach opens and alternatives that they may foreclose. Our preliminary survey of the literature suggests that many of the dominant approaches to Indigenizing the curriculum pursued by Canadian universities in the post-TRC era are informed by minor reform theories of change that do not view the university's foundational Euro-Western logics, norms, and assumptions as needing to be overhauled. Minor reform approaches are firmly rooted in structural functional epistemologies that assume organizations exist to achieve specific educational aims and, with the appropriate coordination and division of labour, these goals can be achieved. Moreover, the educational aims and epistemological underpinnings themselves are rarely critically interrogated. As such, these approaches seek only to "enhance" the institution by including (adding) Indigenous faculty, student, and staff to their demographics. Indigenous inclusion without structural change creates a paradox for these individuals, by not necessarily acknowledging, or accounting for, collective cultural and intellectual sovereignty, community accountability, or the additional emotional and intellectual labour of doing Indigenizing and decolonizing work while living with the intergenerational impacts of ongoing settler-colonial violence, of which the academy is a part. That said, our research also suggests that not all minor reforms are created equal or homogeneous—some are indeed valuable first steps for exposing hidden colonial ideologies and facilitating unlearning. Those initiatives that are led by and that amplify Indigenous voices and expertise grounded in Indigenous ways of knowing, thinking, and doing are the ones we believe hold the most transformative potential. Additionally, our survey of approaches to Indigenizing the curriculum suggests that the key to moving toward deeper reform—or what Gaudry and Lorenz refer to as "reconciliation Indigenization"—is the active creation and protection of Indigenous autonomy and leadership within post-secondary institutions.

In emerging discourses, scholars have outlined deeper levels of change yet to be realized such as Gaudry and Lorenz's "decolonial Indigenization" and Sharon Stein and other scholars' "beyond reform" theory of change. In the latter, the author asserts the value of navigating different theories of change (e.g., minor, major, and beyond) simultaneously while remaining open to relinquishing attachments to misguided institutional promises that have proven to be unsustainable and even violent for marginalized groups. In this beyond reform space, Stein and other scholars invite practitioners to avoid imposing a particular goal, but rather to learn how to be answerable to our various colonial complicities, engage in collective experimentation, and to learn from the institutions' successes and failures. Sandy Grande (2015) has long advocated for exposing the deep structures of colonial consciousness in curriculum, she also asserts

the value of Indigenous survivance narratives in relation to land as a basis for what she calls a “Red Pedagogy” (2005). Similarly, Mik’maq scholar Marie Battiste has asserted how “place-based knowledge systems are part of the interrelations of living entities” within Indigenous knowledge frameworks (2016; p. 11). Within all of these Indigenous ontological frames, pedagogies of land (Simpson, 2014; Styres et al., 2013) are paramount. After all, land is kin; a mother figure, land is a teacher. In this transformative curriculum change work, we return to Indigenous people and land relationality by inviting curriculum change practitioners to cyclically ask ourselves; how are Indigenous Peoples, lands, and knowledges centered in our curriculum change processes? Do institutional approaches simply try and fit Indigenous People and knowledges into the university, or is the university and its agents actively supporting the resurgence of Indigenous knowledges grounded in the places within which universities are located? Moreover, how might curricular change be envisioned in ways that do not reduce decolonization yet again to a metaphor and, instead, pursue institutional transform with a view toward supporting “the repatriation of Indigenous land and life” (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 1)?

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