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*Commentary*

*100 Ways: Indigenizing & Decolonizing Academic Programs*

Dr. Shauneen Pete

*University of Regina*

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# 100 Ways: Indigenizing & Decolonizing Academic Programs

Dr. Shauneen Pete  
*University of Regina*

Tansi. I am serving in my third year as the Executive Lead: Indigenization at the University of Regina. As with many scholars at many Canadian universities, my colleagues and I have been actively working toward greater levels of Indigenization. For us, Indigenization is understood as

the transformation of the existing academy by including Indigenous knowledges, voices, critiques, scholars, students and materials as well as the establishment of physical and epistemic spaces that facilitate the ethical stewardship of a plurality of Indigenous knowledges and practices so thoroughly as to constitute an essential element of the university. It is not limited to Indigenous people, but encompasses all students and faculty, for the benefit of our academic integrity and our social viability. (Indigenous Advisory Circle, University of Regina)

Indigenization is an overarching theme of our university's strategic plan, *Peyak Aski Kikawinaw (Cree: We are one with mother earth)*. In my role as Lead, I animate the vision for Indigenization as identified by the members of the Indigenous Advisory Circle (IAC). In our 2015–2020 strategic plan, the IAC identified five strategic priorities that are aligned with the university's strategic plan, including Governance & Leadership; Student Support; Community Engagement; Indigenous Research; and Academic Indigenization.

In our view, institutional reform must be undertaken on multiple levels, by all peoples in the academic community, and result in a dramatically different structure, relationships, goals, and outcomes. Our insistence on naming this work both decolonial and Indigenizing work is often perceived as overly political and radical by some of our non-Indigenous colleagues. In their view, "Isn't having the policy enough?" An ongoing challenge for members of the Indigenous Advisory Circle and me is how to move this university change effort beyond policy statements and strategic priorities toward greater levels of actual institutional reform. While we view all of our strategic priorities as important and essential to university reform, we feel that building capacity in the area of academic indigenization is one way we can inform great change broadly.

The objectives of academic indigenization include: increasing the number of Indigenous scholars that work at our university; embedding Indigenous practices, ideas, and principles into our academic pursuits; increasing the number of course offerings that explore Indigenous worldviews, experiences, and perspectives; and reducing the barriers to working with traditional knowledge keepers and Elders. The actions that the IAC and I promote include increasing indigenization in each faculty; offering courses in each academic program that specifically address Indigenous concepts; facilitating indigenous knowledge and actions in support of sustainability; working with our Centre for Teaching and Learning

(CTL) to develop workshops and professional development tools in support of academic indigenization; developing experiential and hands-on cultural learning opportunities for students and staff; practicing instructional strategies that aim to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student body; and developing policies for respectful engagement with Elders and traditional knowledge keepers. In our view, academic indigenization is designed to support the reform of faculty's instructional, planning and evaluation practices, and is meant to offer every graduating student an opportunity to learn about Indigenous peoples, histories, contributions, and ways of knowing. As I roll out the work plans aligned with our strategic priorities, I have been asked repeatedly by faculty, "How do I Indigenize academic programs?" That folks are asking the question is viewed by me as a great first step. This commentary is designed to respond to that question.

The following list of ways to indigenize and decolonize your academic programs is not meant to be prescriptive. This list provides suggestions to help deans and faculty begin to commit to greater levels of Indigenization in their program planning and delivery. Please do not assume that this is a step-by-step process; this is a discussion starter. At our university, I've shared the 100 Ways with our Deans' Council; many of them have in turn shared the list with their faculty and term contract instructors. Please take from the list those actions that you find helpful; please add to the list approaches that you find are reflective of your own context.

### **Indigenization & Decolonization: For Deans**

1. Review the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.<sup>1</sup>
2. Review and implement Universities Canada Principles on Indigenous Education.<sup>2</sup>
3. Review and consider how to implement the recommendations posed by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.<sup>3</sup>
4. Recognize that exploring Indigenous knowledges in the academy serves the purpose of academic decolonization.<sup>4</sup>
5. Identify your university strategic plan in relation to Indigenization.
6. Review and consider how to enhance your faculty relationships with local Indigenous peoples, communities, and organizations.
7. Review/define Indigenization in your local context.
8. Promote the inclusion of diverse parties in the process of academic program reform (i.e. local Indigenous educators, Elders, students, Indigenous alumni, and community members)—addressing governance early on may ensure that academic programming reform reflects the priorities, interests, concerns and experiences of local Indigenous peoples.

1 Available from [http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS\\_en.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf).

2 Available from <https://sass.uottawa.ca/en/aboriginal/principles>.

3 Available from [http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Findings/Calls\\_to\\_Action\\_English2.pdf](http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Findings/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf).

4 George J. Sefa Dei, *Rethinking the Role of Indigenous Knowledges in the Academy*. NALL Working Paper #58. NALL (New Approaches to Lifelong Learning), 2002. Available from <http://nall.oise.utoronto.ca/res/58GeorgeDei.pdf>.

9. Recruit and retain more Indigenous scholars and staff.<sup>5</sup>
10. Develop plans to recruit and retain Indigenous graduate students in your field.
11. Consider cross-appointments to build capacity in other areas as well.
12. Provide release time to individual faculty who are working to revise program offerings.
13. Broaden processes related to performance evaluation.<sup>6</sup>
14. Acknowledge and act to minimize the perception of “double-work” that many Indigenous scholars and staff face.<sup>7</sup>
15. Recognize and respect Elders, knowledge holders, and faculty who fulfill important cultural helping roles.<sup>8</sup>
16. Create opportunities for dialogue on how to imagine and envision Indigenous presence in the faculty and departments (this is not just the work of Indigenous peoples).<sup>9</sup>
17. Create physical spaces that reflect Indigenous peoples’ histories, contributions, languages and diversities. Review and develop signage, bulletin boards, and promotional materials for inclusion of diverse students, staff, and faculty.
18. Review your academic program. Consider how Indigenous programs are administered and delivered through the structures of departments, faculties and colleges.<sup>10</sup>
19. As a program or department, develop a scope and sequence of Indigenous content.
20. Develop an advisory circle within your faculty to guide the implementation process.
21. Develop and sustain programmatic approaches to the inclusion of Indigenous knowledges.<sup>11</sup>
22. Institute a policy response on integrating Indigenous knowledges.<sup>12</sup>
23. Prepare a faculty response to allegations that Indigenous content somehow diminishes the perception of a quality higher education.
24. Collaborate with Indigenous scholars, Elders, and others to review program plans.
25. Consider how to structure recruitment efforts by developing cohorts of Indigenous learners for both undergraduate and graduate programming.
26. Consider department-based celebrations and welcoming events aimed at getting to know your Indigenous learners.

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5 Margaret Kovach, Jeannine Carriere, Harpell Montgomery, M.J. Barrett, and Carmen Gilles, *Indigenous Presence: Experiencing and Envisioning Indigenous Knowledges within Selected Post-Secondary Sites of Education and Social Work*. 2014. Available at <http://www.usask.ca/education/profiles/kovach/Indigenous-Presence-2014-Kovach-M-et-al.pdf>.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 Adapted from Kovach, Carriere, Montgomery, Barrett, and Gilles (2014).

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

27. Re-write your Faculty Criteria Document to reflect evolving priorities in teaching and learning.
28. Undertake a department/faculty self-study on efforts to Indigenize
29. Celebrate and honour Indigenous alumni.
30. Invite Indigenous scholars to present to learners in your faculty.
31. Invite Indigenous scholars in your field to Skype into a faculty meeting for the purposes of faculty development.
32. Nominate Indigenous scholars for recognition and awards in your field.
33. As a faculty, review progress towards Indigenizing academic programs annually.
34. Seek out sessional and term hires that have experience in Indigenizing teaching.
35. Promote and provide professional development on Indigenizing your teaching practices with sessional and term hires.
36. Indigenization & Decolonization: For Faculty
37. Identify and practice the local protocol norms (offering of a gift) in your relationships with Indigenous knowledge keepers.
38. Work with your human resources and financial services departments to ensure that you follow the policies and practices supportive of respectful relationships with Elders and traditional knowledge keepers (honoraria).
39. Attend the Aboriginal Perspectives training session offered by your human resources offices.
40. Read Rauna Kuokkanen's book *Reshaping the University: Responsibilities, Indigenous Epistemes, and the Logic of the Gift*.
41. Read Herman Michell's book *Working with Aboriginal Communities in Places of Higher Learning*.
42. Read Herman Michell's book *Working with Elders and Indigenous Knowledge Systems: A Reader and Guide for Places of Higher Learning*.
43. Read Kovach, Carriere, Montgomery, Barrett and Gilles (2014), *Indigenous Presence*.
44. Recognize that "a reorientation of post-secondary education to accept, incorporate, and improve Aboriginal knowledges and sciences in their community services, education and research may require substantial redesign of university protocols and rules."<sup>13</sup> Be prepared to provide leadership in policy reform.
45. Through your relationships with Indigenous scholars, elders, and community-based partners, begin to design courses reflective of Indigenous epistemologies. "Aboriginal programs should to some degree reflect approaches to epistemology preferred by Aboriginal persons and encouraged by Aboriginal cultural traditions ... Aboriginal values and ways of being."<sup>14</sup>

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13 Jerald Paquette and Gerald Fallon, "In Quest of Indigeneity, Quality, and Credibility in Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education in Canada: Problematic, Contexts, and Potential Ways Forward," *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy* 165 (2014), 35pp.

14 Ibid.

46. Some universities require mandatory Indigenous studies courses for all learners (avoid academic ghettos).<sup>15</sup> The work of reconciliation is shared work, not just the work of Indigenous peoples; in order to be better prepared to work toward reconciliation, all students must learn the truth of our collective colonial past.
47. Indigenous peoples seek skills, knowledge, and experiences that will support their leadership in community resiliency and nationhood. Some courses need to be designed specifically for Indigenous learners to allow them to gain a deeper understanding of the theory and practice of Indigenous knowledges and the implications for these in their fields of study.
48. Indigenous learners are here to learn; expecting them to fill in the curricular gaps by addressing Indigenous issues themselves is an unfair burden that is not shared by other learners, nor do they get “extra credit” for doing so. You must be the catalyst. You are in the position of power in the classroom; if you are ill-prepared to bring forth Indigenous topics, you must make the effort to learn about the topics and bring your materials to the classes you teach, and you will need to seek out new relationships and invite these human resources to work with you and your learners so that you may learn together.
49. Faculty must consider the ways in which they promote courses currently offered in other programs (Indigenous Studies, Indigenous Education, etc.), and avoid duplication of course delivery by promoting these courses as important options within your own faculty.
50. Recognize the Treaty territory in your opening remarks to your students and in your course outlines and other resources.
51. Name the Indigenous nations that reside within the Treaty territory in your opening remarks to students.
52. Recognize and name the historically Métis communities in your region.
53. Identify existing courses within your faculty/department with indigenous content.
54. Review course calendar for the order and listing of electives; ensure that an Indigenous course is listed; privilege Indigenous course options at the front of the list of electives.
55. Review individual course outlines for Indigenous content and scholars.
56. Seek out and review the scholarship of Indigenous peoples in your field.
57. Review academic program area for possible cross-referencing of courses with other departments.
58. Recognize that Indigenizing our teaching is not just about culturally relevant teaching; indigenizing our teaching aims to challenge the dominant narratives about our collective histories, contemporary aspirations, and challenges. Indigenizing our teaching is also about supporting Indigenous peoples’ and communities’ goals of self-determination and sovereignty.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

59. Consider how you are taking up social justice issues in your courses. Consider how you address Treaty relationships, the history of colonization in Canada, land use and development, Indigenous sovereignty, residential school histories, and recommendations aimed at reconciliation (Truth and Reconciliation Commission—TRC), missing and murdered Indigenous women, and other matters.
60. Be flexible enough to take up emerging local Indigenous issues as they arise.
61. Visit an Indigenous community to learn more about that context.
62. Require learners to conduct a review of literature on a topic specific to Indigenous peoples.
63. Critically exam colonization and its effects as related through curriculum.
64. Deconstruct the construct of racism.<sup>16</sup>
65. Deconstruct the neutrality of Whiteness.<sup>17</sup>
66. Practice challenging notions of colorblindness and meritocracy.
67. Practice challenging notions that “it all happened a long time ago, so get over it.”
68. Identify, name, and work to correct White dominance in curriculum design, intended outcomes, and resource material selection.
69. “But I teach other people, too.” Folks often think that Indigenizing their teaching will somehow detract from addressing the needs of other diverse learners. Too often, dominant group members want to fall back onto discourses of multiculturalism as a way of practicing curricular inclusion. St. Denis (2011) explains that discourses of multiculturalism actually undermine Indigenous sovereignty.<sup>18</sup> She asserts that some Indigenous peoples believe that multiculturalism serves as a form of ongoing colonialism. Read St. Denis’s scholarship; identify your own response to the comment.
70. Recognize that new Canadians and visiting students quickly adopt the dominant views about Indigenous peoples. Deconstruct with learners the implications for this ongoing alignment with dominance.
71. Explore diverse Indigenous people’s voices (Inuit, Métis, bi-racial, LGBT, global, and local) in your readings and other resource selections.
72. Co-teach courses with other faculty members to build capacity within programs
73. Co-teach courses with Indigenous people from outside the university; consider alumni, local professionals, Indigenous community members, and others.
74. Consider moving away from lecture-style course delivery to classroom design that encourages dialogue (circle format; small table groupings; other approaches).
75. Anticipate and prepare responses to racism.<sup>19</sup>

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16 Sherry Marx, *Revealing the Invisible: Confronting Passive Racism in Teacher Education*. New York: Routledge, 2006.

17 Ibid.

18 Verna St. Denis, “Silencing Aboriginal Curricular Content and Perspectives Through Multiculturalism: ‘There Are Other Children Here,’” *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies*, 33:4(2011): 306–17.

19 Marx (2006).



76. Actively challenge racism, Eurocentrism, and dominant assumptions of knowledge, voice, quality, and delivery of academic programs.
77. Identify the long-term benefits of Indigenization with/for you/your learners, the program, and your profession.
78. Identify institutional and professional association barriers to the inclusion of Indigenous content; actively work to name and correct the barriers.
79. Prepare responses to student questions about the level of Indigenous content (Learners will often complain, “There’s too much Aboriginal content”).
80. Disrupt the dominant idea of deficit thinking directed toward Indigenous learners.
81. Disrupt the idea that Indigenous ways of knowing are subordinate to dominant ways of knowing.
82. Engage in anti-oppressive teaching practices.
83. Work with Indigenous peoples to develop workshops on Indigenizing your Teaching
84. Ask the Executive Lead or a colleague to provide an external review of a course.
85. Create a list of resources people who could work with you as guest lecturers, including local traditional knowledge keepers and Elders, businesspeople, and leaders.
86. Develop a list of material resources to share with your program colleagues.
87. Consider offering land-based learning opportunities.
88. Consider the role that volunteering and community service can play in building cultural competency with your learners.
89. Consider the role that elders and traditional knowledge keepers can play in course reform and delivery.
90. Consider arts-based and non-dominant forms of demonstrating understanding, including re-storying, photo essays, performance, reflective writing, etc.
91. Name the dominant worldview; make visible non-dominant worldviews and work toward what Sefa Dei refers to as “synthesizing knowledges.”<sup>20</sup>
92. Consider the role that ceremony may play in your course design, and in department/faculty norms.
93. Consider offering courses/programs in off-campus locations (i.e., introductory courses taught at the food bank, friendship centre, public library, etc.).
94. Use the traditional names of places in your territory.
95. Initiate political actions in support of greater levels of academic decolonization (submissions or recommendations to university administration and local and federal political bodies).<sup>21</sup>
96. Reward and recognize efforts aimed at decolonizing curriculum—tell your stories; promote departmental initiatives through a website or through media.
97. Recognize and respect that Indigenous scholarship is based on “relational capital” that needs to be recognized within tenure and promotion practices.<sup>22</sup> Develop mechanisms in the faculty review process by which individuals can report on their efforts to develop, sustain, and maintain relationships with Indigenous peoples.

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<sup>20</sup> Sefa Dei (2002).

<sup>21</sup> Sefa Dei (2002).

<sup>22</sup> Kovach et al. (2014).



98. Create an updated list of courses that have been indigenized for your Faculty.
99. Advocate for scholarly focus on indigenization efforts in conference planning and academic societies.
100. Advocate for institutional support to revise courses; this could include a President's/Dean's grant for faculty.
101. Give thanks, in culturally reflective ways, for the fact that we are taking seriously this opportunity to work toward reconciliation.

### **Implications for University Policy**

Engaging in higher levels of Indigenization has some very specific implication for policy reform. I will focus the remainder of this discussion on two areas: the recruitment and retention of Indigenous faculty and staff, and annual review processes for all instructors/faculty. Minthorn and Chavez<sup>23</sup> (2015) state, “one of the most effective ways to transform higher education is to diversify its leaders and its leadership” (257). Universities need to consider the recruitment, retention, and promotion of Indigenous leadership within the university at all levels. In our university, I have been actively seeking Indigenous leaders to join our board of governors and university senate, as well as our alumni association. Having Indigenous decision makers at all levels of the institution, we believe, will promote greater levels of university reform and better reflect the community in which we live. Additionally, we have undertaken an employment equity strategic plan that outlines specific priorities for the university in relation to achieving a more diverse staff and faculty cohort. The plan encourages all managers and supervisors to communicate their commitment to hiring within the equity groupings; to ensuring that they have search committee members from diverse groups; and to promoting employment opportunities in diverse ways (social media, Indigenous community and organizations, etc.). Recruiting Indigenous employees, however, is but one matter; an issue of greater concern is retention. The Canadian Association of University Teachers<sup>24</sup> (2010) identifies some of the common workplace challenges experienced specifically by Indigenous scholars; these include the time required to cultivate and maintain relationships with Elders and Indigenous communities, which often goes unrecognized in the more traditional promotion and annual review processes of Canadian universities. *Bargaining Inclusivity for Aboriginal Academic Staff* (CAUT 2010) is an important policy document that faculty and deans/provosts are strongly encouraged to review. Within faculties, the articulation of an expectation that faculty will include Indigenous ways of knowing and practice Indigenous pedagogies marks progress toward ensuring that Indigenizing academic programming is formalized. Additionally, within faculty criteria documents articulating the role of furthering Indigenous knowledges, relationship-building and the development of ceremonial/language learning can be

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23 Robin Minthorn and Alicia Fedelina Chavez, *Indigenous Leadership in Higher Education*. New York: Routledge, 2015.

24 CAUT, *Bargaining Inclusivity for Aboriginal Academic Staff*, 2010.

recognized formally as central to the work of Indigenous scholars. In this way, when a scholar comes up for promotion or renewal, there is an institutional framework from which to assess the unique contributions that that scholar is making not only to the university but, more importantly, to Indigenous community. CAUT suggests that collective agreements that define “service” solely as service to the academy (professional associations, internal committees, etc.) fail to recognize the time and effort necessary to ensure ongoing relationships with Indigenous communities. These relationships, once nurtured, often inform research and other professional practices.

For non-Indigenous instructors and faculty, departmental/faculty criteria documents must communicate an expectation to demonstrate both the decolonizing and the indigenizing of academic programs. This work cannot be left only to Indigenous peoples, for that work can be too easily dismissed, minimized, or even violently rejected both by our learners who are coming from both the dominant group, and by visiting/immigrant learners who too readily adopt the dominant ways of thinking about Indigenous peoples’ ways of knowing and experiences. I recognize that, like many of our students, faculty too have been structurally denied the opportunity to learn about Indigenous peoples, histories, and worldviews, but that does not mean that they are not responsible for learning those ways as a necessary step toward enhancing their teaching. To support the transformation of academic programming, faculty and instructional staff require support structures that will help them to grow in their own culturally competency, and in their own ability to decolonize and indigenize curricular practices.

### **Final Words**

At our university, Indigenization means “the transformation of the academy.” For us, academic Indigenization challenges the replication of dominant ways of knowing and doing. We work against Indigenization of curriculum that simply adds content without challenging colonial dominance; we work towards transformation by decolonizing our collective work. In our view, Indigenization is a shared responsibility: it is our hope that Indigenous and non-Indigenous people alike will work to disrupt colonialism in the academy. My hope is that this commentary offers you and your own colleagues one way to engage in a conversation about how to indigenize and decolonize your own university.