

# Empowering Indigenous students and advancing reconciliation



Universities Canada's 2019  
Indigenous education and  
reconciliation survey results



PHOTO: UOTTAWA

A university education can unlock students' potential and protect graduates from economic disruptions like the COVID-19 pandemic and rapidly changing technologies. However, First Nations, Métis and Inuit students face barriers in accessing the benefits of a university degree. As Canada looks to ensure our post-pandemic recovery is inclusive of all Canadians, it is imperative that we provide the tools and services to help more Indigenous students succeed at university.

## Universities' commitment

Universities are committed to empowering Indigenous students and advancing reconciliation within their institutions, their communities and Canada. In 2015, following the release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action, Canada's university

leaders adopted a set of 13 *Principles on Indigenous Education*, developed in consultation with Indigenous leaders.

Universities Canada regularly surveys its member institutions on services and programs for Indigenous students, as well as progress towards reconciliation. Five years after the TRC's Calls to Action and the adoption of the *Principles on Indigenous Education*, we are pleased to share some of the concrete actions our members are taking.

Universities have made great strides but know that the reconciliation journey is far from over. Universities condemn systemic racism against Indigenous peoples and are continuing to address inequities in their institutions for Indigenous students, researchers, faculty and leadership.

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## Answering the Calls

The TRC'S Calls to Action appealed directly to universities to incorporate Indigenous histories, cultures and realities into the curricula that will shape Canada's future professionals. Universities are working to answer these calls.

- Over **80%** of universities have implemented or are implementing curriculum in education programs to empower future teachers to teach about residential schools, treaties and the contributions of Indigenous people to Canada (Call 62, i).
- Roughly **two thirds** of universities with law schools are incorporating or have incorporated a mandatory course on Indigenous peoples and the law (Call 28).
- More than **two thirds** of universities are including or have included a mandatory course on Indigenous health issues in their medical and nursing programs (Call 24).

Much more work is ahead to implement all Calls to Action. Universities embrace their responsibility to educate all students in a way that advances reconciliation in Canada.

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## Universities are working to support Indigenous learners through difficult times

Universities offer many specialized services for Indigenous learners to increase access, retention and success. These types of services will only increase in importance as Indigenous learners face unique challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- More than **90%** of universities offer financial aid specifically earmarked for Indigenous students, including **80%** that offer need-based bursaries and **76%** that offer merit-based scholarships.

- Roughly **three quarters** of universities offer academic and general counselling services specifically for Indigenous students.
- Nearly **60%** of universities offer peer-to-peer mentoring programs to create community on campus for Indigenous students.
- Roughly **two-thirds** of universities have a dedicated online hub for Indigenous student services.
- More than **three-quarters** offer Indigenous student gathering spaces for when it is safe to return to campus.

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## Universities are working with Indigenous partners to ensure quality learning opportunities

- **85%** of universities report partnerships with Indigenous postsecondary institutions, communities, and/or organizations to foster dialogue and reconciliation. One area of partnership is collaborating on courses and programs that keep Indigenous languages, cultures and histories strong.
- Nearly **200** Indigenous language courses covering more than **30** languages are available at Canadian universities.
- Nearly **70%** of these courses are co-developed with an Indigenous community or organization and nearly **60%** include guidance from elders.
- These programs also offer flexibility for Indigenous learners, with options to pursue studies on or off-campus, in community or online. Roughly **one-third** of programs that include an Indigenous focus, or are designed specifically for Indigenous students, feature an option delivered in an Indigenous community.

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## Universities are working toward reconciliation internally

As part of ongoing work to advance reconciliation and address systemic racism in all its forms, institutions are working to ensure their leadership, governance, teaching and research activities honour and respect Indigenous expertise and address internal systemic barriers.

- **80%** of universities have strategic plans for advancing reconciliation.
- **87%** of universities are working to increase Indigenous representation in leadership.
- **70%** are working to increase representation among faculty.
- **70%** of universities are incorporating Indigenous knowledge and methods into both teaching and research.
- **85%** of institutions actively foster intercultural engagement, including events, cultural activities and cultural competency training to create a welcoming and inclusive campus environment for Indigenous learners, faculty and community members.

## Continuing commitment

There is still a long journey ahead to meaningful reconciliation in Canada, and universities are ready and willing partners. More work is needed, particularly when it comes to adequate financing for Indigenous education and comprehensive wrap-around services for students. Further, these data are only part of the story and should be considered alongside lived experiences and the complex and changing context in which universities are advancing reconciliation on campuses, and with partners and communities across Canada.

Canada's universities are supporting the success of Indigenous students and researchers, working with Indigenous partners and combatting systemic racism in their communities. Though progress is evident, universities embrace the significant work that still lies ahead.

Universities Canada hosts an online directory of Indigenous academic programs, as well as services and programs designed specifically for Indigenous students. Our searchable database is available at: **[www.universitystudy.ca/indigenous-programs-and-services-directory](http://www.universitystudy.ca/indigenous-programs-and-services-directory)**.

## Contact

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