



INDIGENOUS
STRATEGIC PLAN

⇒ 2018 Community Report ⇐

Mount Royal University is located in the traditional territories of the Niitsitapi (Blackfoot) and the people of Treaty 7, which includes the Siksika, the Piikani, the Kainai, the Tsuut'ina, and the Îyârhe Nakoda. We are situated on land where the Bow River meets the Elbow River, and the traditional Blackfoot name of this place is "Mohkinstsis," which we now call the city of Calgary. The city of Calgary is also home to the Métis Nation.

MILESTONES ALONG THE PATH

In this report we share progress in implementing Mount Royal University's Indigenous Strategic Plan, which commits the University to a course of action to indigenize campus, respect and embrace Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing, integrate Indigenous teachings and practices, and honour Indigenous experiences and identities.

The Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission continue to guide the University's work as we seek to make higher education – so much an instrument of colonization in the past – a path to address the educational inequities it caused and which remain today. At each turn there is another hill to climb. The work – and our learning – is far from done.

In 2018, progress in reaching our goals included the following examples:

- the distinction of being gifted a Blackfoot name and headdress for the University's president and an honour song for the University
- research that values Indigenous ways of knowing
- the inclusion of important Indigenous practices in Convocation ceremonies
- the success of, and continuing need for, housing for Indigenous students on campus
- the enhancement of faculty professional development and progress towards indigenizing curricula

Our focus is always on students, and addressing their needs in at least three ways: by increasing access for Indigenous students; by creating an environment that supports excellence; and by working towards ensuring all students graduate with a heightened understanding of Indigenous Peoples and histories. The inclusion of Indigenous ceremonial practices in Convocation last year was a milestone along our path, and rounded out the student experience that began with the grand entry at New Student Orientation.

In developing the initial plan, we benefited from knowledge and experience within the campus community and guidance from an external advisory committee of local Indigenous leaders and experts in education. This was done to ensure the plan would meet the needs of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students now, as well as set the course for future work. Ongoing work takes a similar approach. We thank the many community partners who continue to contribute greatly to student learning as advisors, knowledge holders and respected elders. We celebrate achievements in our work to date and acknowledge there is much more to be done.


On behalf of the Indigenous Strategic Plan Implementation and Monitoring Committee as co-chairs,



John Fischer
Director, Iniskim Centre



Jim Zimmer
Vice-Provost and Associate Vice-President,
Teaching and Learning



GOAL 1

INDIGENIZING MOUNT ROYAL UNIVERSITY

Cultivate respectful and welcoming environments that prevail over the legacy of colonization.

Siksika elder gifted Mount Royal University with an Honour Song

Siksika elder Clarence Wolfleg Senior (Elder Miiksika'am) recognized Mount Royal University with a rare distinction in 2018: an Honour Song for the University and a Blackfoot name and headdress for then University President David Docherty. The song, composed by Elder Miiksika'am, is used during events and ceremonies on campus as a reminder that the University has made promises, and that people have faith the promises will be fulfilled. Elder Miiksika'am was presented with a buffalo hide and was thanked for his guidance to Mount Royal and for sharing his wisdom.

inii awattoo marked signing of Treaty 7

A new campus installation called inii awattoo (Buffalo on the Move) was positioned near Charlton Pond, where millions of bison once roamed and thousands of students now learn. The installation includes seven carefully placed rocks that came from traditional Blackfoot territory. Facilities Management staff initiated the project as a way to honour the Indigenous population on campus. An instructional assistant in the Faculty of Science and Technology helped select the rocks, which are around 500 million years old. The Iniskim Centre worked with local elders on positioning the rocks in a pattern shaped like buffalo. A sign that points north tells of the vision of the installation and the land acknowledgement.

Blanket exercises promoted truth and understanding

The Iniskim Centre continued to lead KAIROS blanket exercises for the campus community. Developed in collaboration with Indigenous elders, knowledge-keepers and educators, the KAIROS Blanket Exercise program is a unique, participatory history lesson aimed at fostering truth, understanding, respect and reconciliation among Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples. After learning about important historical context, participants take part in a visual, interactive and engaging exercise that helps them imagine the experiences of Indigenous Peoples of Canada over the last 500 years. More than 100 blanket exercises have been offered to over 2,000 people on campus to date.

CULTURALLY RESPECTFUL INDIGENOUS RESEARCH

Foster respect for Indigenous ways of knowing and knowledge-production and increase capacity for Indigenous scholarship.

Indigenous faculty members emphasize resilience as they challenge conventional notions of research

Tracy Friedel, PhD is a descendant of the Nehiyaw-speaking Lac Ste. Anne Métis of west-central Alberta and Mount Royal's first Canada Research Chair (Indigenous Studies). Tracy's scholarship is focused on enhancing research capacity at the level of Indigenous communities so as to enable more effective partnerships with external researchers. Taking the view that research must be of direct benefit to Indigenous communities, Tracy sees her role as one of working alongside Indigenous partners to utilize the strengths and resilience already present in Indigenous communities to identify and resolve issues wrought by the experience of settler colonialism.

Tracy is presently leading research focused on First Nation and Métis experience in the areas of work, learning and health. In this work, she seeks to practise a decolonizing ethic and to incorporate practices in outdoor and land-based learning whenever possible.

Gabrielle Lindstrom, PhD is a member of the Kainaiwa First Nation and an assistant professor of Indigenous Studies, researching how Western academics may unknowingly perpetuate colonial ideologies within their classrooms. She challenges not just what is researched, but how it is researched, maintaining that research is steeped in values based in culture, and seeking to decolonize research and challenge traditional Western views that dominate education.

Her own research involves working closely with, and in, Indigenous communities to create and maintain reciprocal relationships and a focus on resilience — within research and learning. She advocates an understanding of resilience within a Blackfoot worldview, which is vital to establishing a path of self-determination and honouring the diversity of Indigenous nations. She teaches Indigenous students to use their own lived experiences to inform their research projects and to develop research methodologies that include Indigenous protocols and ways of thinking.



Research explores readiness for change in indigenizing social work education


Research conducted by Mount Royal faculty member **Peter Choate, PhD**, together with a faculty member from the University of Calgary and a doctoral student, explored the readiness of students and faculty to embrace Indigenous social and cultural practices in social work education. The research also examined their current understanding of foundational issues, such as the lessons of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC).

Social work and child welfare agencies have long been linked to colonialism and culturally harmful practices, many of which continue today. The TRC called (calls) upon the profession to consider the impact of colonization and to ensure a higher standard of education and training, including the capacity for Indigenous families and communities to provide healing. More than 50 students and 18 faculty members at the two universities participated in 10 focus groups.

The research paper “At the beginning of the curve: social work education and Indigenous content” (Choate, MacLaurin and Saint-Denis, 2018) explained the findings of the faculty focus groups. Participants identified a willingness to change social work education but uncertainty about how to do so in ways that adequately respond to the TRC Calls to Action. They considered how Indigenous elders and knowledge-keepers could be involved in meaningful ways, not just with social work education but with indigenizing institutions as well. Several themes emerged from participants’ comments:

- Faculty learning is a journey in which coming to know and understand the experience of Indigenous Peoples is done through a variety of ways depending on one’s own experiences.
- Whose story it is to tell has to be thought through: who should and should not relate the stories of colonization and impart Indigenous knowledge, and what are appropriate roles for Indigenous and non-Indigenous faculty.
- The roles of faculty and Indigenous students in speaking and teaching the story need to be established.
- Courses are rooted in Western, mainstream practices, but it is often unclear how to incorporate Indigenous ways of knowing and how to teach about residential schools without traumatizing, or re-traumatizing, students. The role of elders was identified as particularly important.
- Concerns about other marginalized groups were raised, including people of colour and immigrant and refugee communities, each with its own experience with oppression.

The authors concluded that social work education and practice has not changed significantly since the TRC Calls to Action, at least in part due to a lack of clarity on how to proceed.



GOAL 3

BRIDGE-BUILDING WITH INDIGENOUS EDUCATION STAKEHOLDERS

Build strong relationships by forging mutually supportive and productive relationships with all stakeholders in Indigenous education.

Important traditional practices added to Mount Royal's Convocation ceremonies

Several important steps were taken to integrate Indigenous cultural practices into Convocation last year in support of the Indigenous Strategic Plan's goals.

Elements included an invitation to Treaty 7 Chiefs to attend as honoured guests in the platform party, and the opening of the ceremonies by Clarence Wolfleg Sr. (Elder Miiksika'am). A number of additions were made to the Convocation booklet, including a declaration of Mount Royal's commitment to indigenization by honouring and embracing Indigenous knowledge and perspectives. Indigenous graduates received a medicine bag as they accepted their parchment, and the Mount Royal honour song was performed for all graduates by the Sorrel Rider drum group.

Respected elders provide model for reconciliation

Roy Bear Chief, a Blackfoot Elder from the Siksika Nation, and Doreen Spence, an Elder from the Saddle Lake Cree Nation, generously continued to share their knowledge and wisdom across campus in many ways. As Espoom Tah with the Department of Child Studies and Social Work, Bear Chief has advocated for tangible and obvious steps to be taken towards reconciliation, such as supporting Indigenous students in Social Work to be successful in their education goals and indigenizing the social work curriculum so Indigenous ways of knowing and perspectives are honoured. As guest speaker in Nursing health equity classes, Bear Chief shared his experience with residential schools and how to move forward with kindness and compassion.

Elder (Grandmother) Doreen Spence has generously given of her time with Nursing students to broaden their capacity for culturally safe practice. She has collaborated with Bear Chief on research within the Faculty of Health, Community and Education, together developing a model to facilitate the TRC calls to action: 'Kimmapi pitsin', meaning kindness-compassion. Using the model, the elders have co-lead four intertribal talking circles, presented at a faculty retreat and have agreed to be presiding elders for the Reconciliation and Health Committee with the School of Nursing and Midwifery. Their teachings are available in an MRU online resource, and will be painted on a buffalo robe by Dion Simon, artist and Medicine Trail coordinator in the Iniskim Centre.



GOAL 4

SUPPORT FOR INDIGENOUS LEARNERS

Work with our communities to enhance the academic, personal and cultural experience of Indigenous learners.

Housing for Indigenous students is a significant contributor to success

The Indigenous Housing Program provides cultural supports and single- and family-unit housing for students who self-identify as First Nations, Métis, Non-status or Inuit. Students qualify for housing based on academic readiness, academic and career goals, and financial need. Residents of family units live on campus year-round with their children, with access to the wellness centre, child care centre and recreation. Family units are in a quiet area of campus, providing a small, family-friendly community.

The Indigenous housing co-ordinator provides connections with academic supports and actively engages all Indigenous students in residence in community-building activities. These activities promote a sense of belonging. During the Indigenous graduation banquet, 2017, the Calf Robe Family gifted the Iniskim Centre with an honour song in gratitude for its continued support of LaTasha.

LaTasha Calf Robe, Kainai First Nation

Graduated with a Business degree in 2017, and lived in a family unit with her two children

“When I first moved into family housing, I was a young, Indigenous single mom trying to figure out life as a student. It was just us alone in the city, and there were a lot of campus supports that were really close by. For me, it let me know that I wasn’t alone, that there were other people going through what I was going through. It built a really nice support network, and it was a safe, secure home. We got to know people who were on campus in the summer, and we would visit the security guards and they’d play with my kids.

Education is something new to my family. I was the first to graduate from university and I now work at Mount Royal. My children grew up on this campus. We watched the new library get built right beside us. It was always a really positive experience for them living here. They now see that university is a place for them – they know it’s what they’re going to do.”

**Debbie Crazyboy, Piikani First Nation**

Fourth-year Education student in a family unit with her three daughters

"I got into housing three years ago and it came at a time I really needed it. I was so grateful for this opportunity. It was a very selective process. Almost 30 students applied for the same house, so I was very humbled to find out that my family had been chosen. Everything went up for us; it was a real pivotal point in my life. My self-esteem and self-advocacy increased and I definitely became more confident in my studies.

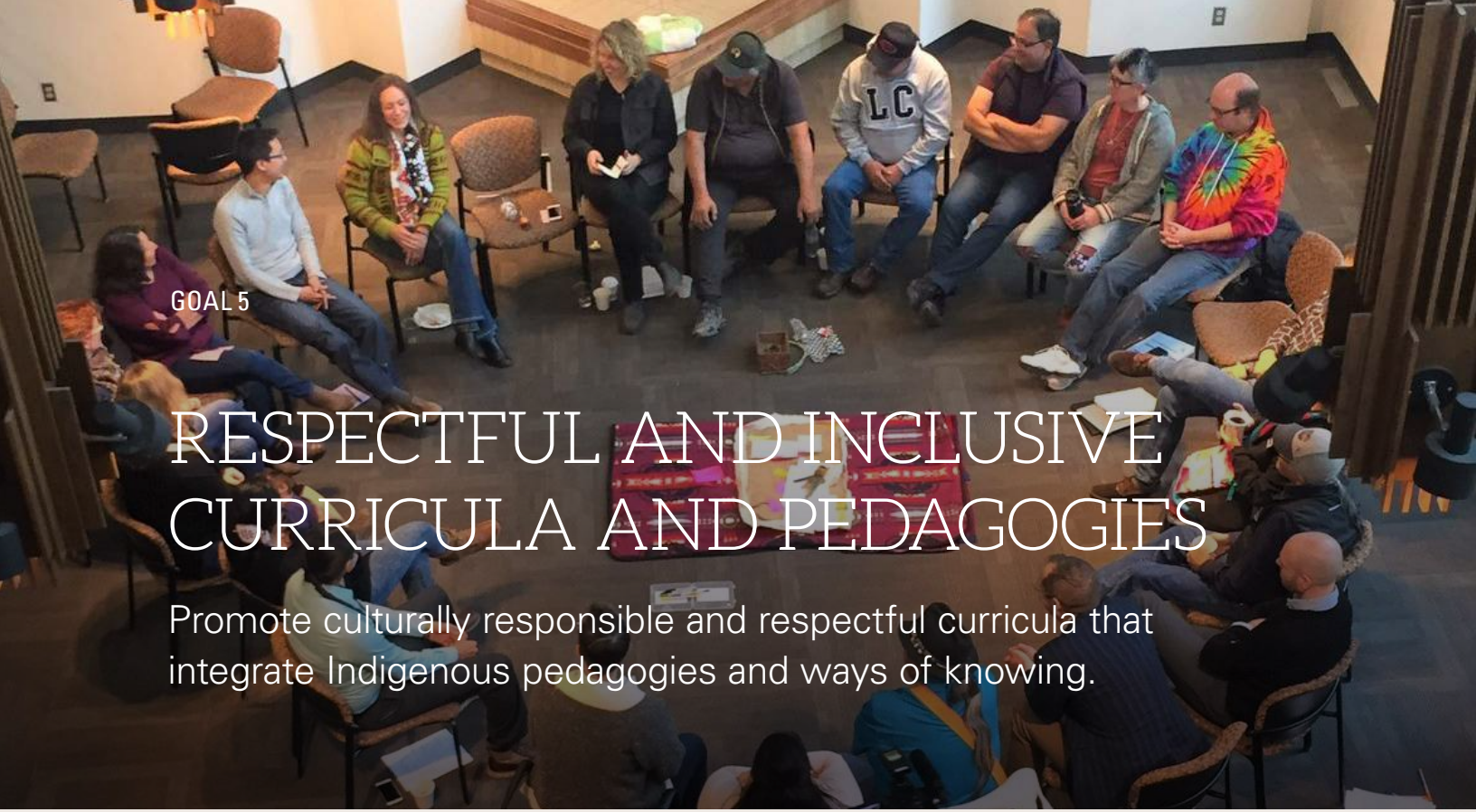
Housing has been a big part of my success. I've been able to save money because my costs were literally cut in half. I never miss a class because it's walkable and It has been such a privilege to go to the library at night. My kids are old enough and I'm right next door. I only wish there were more units for more families. There are only four of us families who stay on campus."

Rain Desjarlais, Frog Lake First Nation in Treaty 6 territory

Fourth-year Nursing student in a family unit with her two sons

"Being a part of the family housing program has ensured my success in the Bachelor of Nursing program as I will be graduating in 2019. I don't have a strong social support here in Calgary as most of my family is in northern Alberta.

Being close to campus and the wealth of resources has been a support for me and my children. Having a safe, affordable home close to campus really took so much burden off my shoulders as the sole provider for my children. It was one less thing to have to stress about. Attending family events created a sense of community that my family did not previously have. Without the housing program I don't think I would have been as successful in my program. I have overcome many barriers and obstacles both personally and as a student, but I still manage to prioritize my education and maintain good grades."



GOAL 5

RESPECTFUL AND INCLUSIVE CURRICULA AND PEDAGOGIES

Promote culturally responsible and respectful curricula that integrate Indigenous pedagogies and ways of knowing.

Enhancing professional development for faculty

The Office of Academic Indigenization (OAI) is leading groundbreaking work that changes how Indigenous content is incorporated and how Indigenous ways of knowing and being reside within the academy. In fall 2018 the OAI began piloting a professional development program in which faculty across campus propose to self-organize development opportunities specific to their program needs. The OAI received proposals from across faculties, demonstrating increased engagement in the goals of the ISP to effect large-scale change on campus.

The OAI continued to offer numerous professional development opportunities in 2018 that included community visits, experiential learning and relationship building with Treaty 7 hosts. Some highlights included: a half-day workshop for the University Leadership Group in June 2018; and, in partnership with the Iniskim Centre, two half-day workshops for the University Strategic Council (USC) at the Brown Bear Woman Centre on the Tsuut'ina Nation.

Indigenizing curricula

It is hoped that in the near future, all Mount Royal students will be required to complete three credits, or the equivalent, of Indigenous coursework. Involving many faculty members and courses across campus, this is a work in progress as the University builds the capacity necessary to do this work well. Last year the OAI began to explore the creation of a self-governing committee of student advisors to assist the University in development of the three-credit equivalent for indigenization.

Faculties were invited to respond to a Call for Engagement with plans for core content, pathways, and courses that will meet or exceed the graduation requirement for Indigenous courses by 2021. The OAI and the Academic Indigenization Advisory Committee coordinate and support the initiative.

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

The following indicators were developed to help measure the goals of the Indigenous Strategic Plan (ISP) and were approved by the ISP Implementation and Monitoring Committee after consultation within the University. The self-identified Indigenous student population at Mount Royal is small at present (5.7 per cent as of 2017/18), but is growing towards our goal of 7.0 per cent of the overall student population by 2025.

We are at the beginning of our journey of measuring our progress in supporting student success and indigenizing our campus. There's work to be done. When dealing with small numbers, small changes can look big, but measuring progress and paying attention to shifts help us strengthen our efforts and sharpen our focus on specific needs and opportunities.

As we work towards indigenization we learn more about what this means and the answers to the questions we are asking may shift. This is important to inform the work we are doing and to continue to work towards the goals of the ISP. These indicators will continue to be monitored throughout the life of the plan.

Performance indicator	Baseline	Updates	
Increase the percentage of employees (faculty, staff, administration) who identify being of Aboriginal or Indigenous ancestry of Canada (e.g., First Nations, Inuit, Métis) ¹	2016/17* 4.28%	<i>*A date to gather new data has not yet been determined.</i>	
Increase the percentage of self-identified Aboriginal or Indigenous employees who agree with the statement "at my organization [institution], I am treated fairly and with respect" ²	2016/17* 73.53%	<i>*A date to gather new data has not yet been determined.</i>	
Increase the proportion of qualified self-identified Indigenous student applicants for credit-term programs ^{3,4}	2015/16 74.9%	2016/17 76.4%	2017/18 77.0%
Increase the proportion of self-identified Indigenous students who register in credit-term programs, of those who were accepted ⁵	2015/16 59.3%	2016/17 62.4%	2017/18 58.1%
Increase the overall proportion of self-identified Indigenous students who attend Mount Royal University ⁶	2015/16 5.2%	2016/17 5.3%	2017/18 5.7%

Performance indicator

Baseline

Updates

Maintain the retention rate of self-identified Indigenous students from first to second year in degree programs only, at a level proportionate to non-Indigenous students**7	Fall 2015 cohort	Fall 2016 cohort
	Indigenous: 84.4% Non-Indigenous: 82.3%	Indigenous: 84.5% Non-Indigenous: 82.9%

**Numbers subject to slight change due to late applications for graduation.

Maintain the percentage of self-identified Indigenous students' agreement with the statement "I feel as if I belong at this university," at a level that is comparable to non-Indigenous students ⁸	First-year students	
	2015/16	Available 2019/20
	Indigenous: 93% Non-Indigenous: 92%	
	Middle-years students	
	2013/14	2016/17
	Indigenous: 85% Non-Indigenous: 87%	Indigenous: 88% Non-Indigenous: 89%
	Graduating students	
	2014/15	2017/18
	Indigenous: 92% Non-Indigenous: 85%	Indigenous: 81% Non-Indigenous: 89%

Increase the percentage of self-identified Indigenous students who say their experience at MRU has contributed to their growth and development in their <i>self-confidence</i> ⁹	Middle-years students (% much/very much)	
	2013/14	2016/17
	66%	51%
	Graduating students	
	2014/15	2017/18
	76%	52%

NOTE: Consistent with institutional results.

Increase the percentage of self-identified Indigenous students who say their experience at MRU has contributed to their growth and development in their <i>spirituality</i> ⁹	Middle-years students (% much/very much)	
	2013/14	2016/17
	23%	30%
	Graduating students	
	2014/15	2017/18
	24%	24%

Performance indicator	Baseline	Updates
	2015/16	2016/17
Self-identified Indigenous senior students ¹⁰ participate in at least one high-impact practice comparable to the percentage of non-Indigenous students ¹¹	Indigenous: 75.0% Non-Indigenous: 87.1%	Indigenous: 76.0% Non-Indigenous: 84.3%

NOTE: New data available in spring 2020.

Increase the percentage of graduating students who said they had taken at least one course during their program that included Indigenous content or perspectives ¹²	2017/18
	82%

Increase the number of Indigenous field schools ¹³	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
	1	2	3

Maintain the proportion of Aboriginal Education Program graduates who enrol in a Mount Royal credit program the next academic year ¹⁴	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
	75%	94.4%	79.3%

NOTE: Due to the relatively small number of students enrolled in, and who graduate from, AEP per academic year, slight changes in the number of graduates, or number of graduates who enrol in credit programs, can have a significant impact on overall percentages year over year.

Contact information

For more information about these measures, or Mount Royal's indigenization activities in general, please contact:

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Endnotes

¹ CCDI Employee Diversity and Inclusion Survey

² CCDI Employee Diversity and Inclusion Survey

³ Includes all MRU FLE generating programs, excluding TVP and ESL

⁴ Indigenous Applicant Funnel Report

⁵ Indigenous Applicant Funnel Report

⁶ Indigenous Enrolment Report

⁷ Institutional Analysis & Planning Retention Visualization

⁸ CUSC surveys of degree-seeking students

⁹ CUSC surveys of degree-seeking students

¹⁰ Degree students who are in the fourth year of their degree program

¹¹ NSSE survey of degree-seeking students

¹² CUSC MRU custom question, survey of degree-seeking students in their graduating year

¹³ Office of Academic Indigenization

¹⁴ Iniskim Centre report of AEP graduates and Banner enrolment data. Effective June 1, 2019 the AEP is renamed the Indigenous University Bridging Program.

