

# Indigenization as inclusion, reconciliation, and decolonization: navigating the different visions for indigenizing the Canadian Academy

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## Abstract

Following the release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's *Calls to Action*, Canadian universities and colleges have felt pressured to indigenize their institutions. What “indigenization” has looked like, however, has varied significantly. Based on the input from an anonymous online survey of 25 Indigenous academics and their allies, we assert that indigenization is a three-part spectrum. On one end is *Indigenous inclusion*, in the middle *reconciliation indigenization*, and on the other end *decolonial indigenization*. We conclude that despite using reconciliatory language, post-secondary institutions in Canada focus predominantly on Indigenous inclusion. We offer two suggestions of policy and praxis—*treaty-based decolonial indigenization* and *resurgence-based decolonial indigenization*—to demonstrate a way toward more just Canadian academy.

## Keywords

indigenization, decolonization, reconciliation, Canada, university, academy

Prompted by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's *Calls to Action* (2015), Canadian post-secondary institutions are now struggling with how to ethically engage Indigenous communities and Indigenous knowledge systems. Communities, scholars, and administrators want better relationships, but are faced with the challenging task of reconciling these aspirations with a university culture that is still, for the most part, invested in Indigenous erasure and marginalization. Conceptually, *indigenization* represents a move to expand the academy's still-narrow conceptions of knowledge, to include Indigenous perspectives in transformative ways (Kuokkanen, 2008, p. 2). What exactly this transformation looks like in practice is still a matter of debate. Many Indigenous scholars, for instance, argue for an indigenization that provokes a foundational, intellectual, and structural shift in the academy, requiring the wholesale overhaul of academic norms to better reflect a more meaningful relationship with Indigenous nations. For most university administrators, however, this transformative vision of indigenization is too destabilizing and so propose more modest goals of increasing Indigenous student enrollment and hiring more Indigenous faculty and staff. In practice then, despite the growing prevalence of indigenization rhetoric on campuses across Canada, there are several distinct visions of indigenization, only some of which are able to work in tandem with others.

To better describe these tensions, we argue that debates on postsecondary indigenization in Canada actually rely on three distinct uses of “indigenization”; these meanings

are not always compatible with one another, even if this incompatibility is obscured by an overlapping usage of the same terminology. In this article, we break down the diverse uses of the term, to better understand the various claims being made about its importance. We also analyze the three distinct visions for an academic future of each vision of indigenization. The three meanings—Indigenous inclusion, reconciliation indigenization, and decolonial indigenization—exist on a spectrum. On one end of this continuum, the academy maintains most of its existing structures while assisting Indigenous students, faculty, and staff in succeeding under this normalized order, and on the other end, the university is fundamentally transformed by deep engagement with Indigenous peoples, Indigenous intellectuals, and Indigenous knowledge systems for all who attend.

We define these three concepts as follows, *Indigenous inclusion* is a policy that aims to increase the number of Indigenous students, faculty, and staff in the Canadian academy. Consequently, it does so largely by supporting the adaptation of Indigenous people to the current (often alienating) culture of the Canadian academy. *Reconciliation*

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*indigenization* is a vision that 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. *Decolonial indigenization* 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.

These are the three key positions in scholarly and popular debates on indigenization. However, when it comes to institutional practice, we suggest that academic institutions have only started the implementation of the least transformative of these visions. In general, the Canadian academy has *rhetorically* adopted an aspirational vision of reconciliation indigenization, but is in fact largely committed to Indigenous inclusion; in essence, post-secondary institutions are attempting to merely increase the number of Indigenous people on campus without broader changes. Even so, this status quo is deeply contested, in particular by Indigenous professors and administrators often working both within and against these policies to bring about more transformative visions of indigenization. Many of these Indigenous academics push for decolonial indigenization, which would radically alter the entire academic system, something that university administrations have so far failed to seriously consider at most Canadian postsecondary institutions.

We wanted to see the ways in which Indigenous peoples—and settler allies—envision indigenizing in the academy to better understand their perspectives on how to meaningfully indigenize the academy—or if such a move is even desirable. To do so, we asked for the viewpoints of 25 scholars using an anonymous online survey: participants were mostly Indigenous academics and those working as allies. In these responses, we found that not only were these scholars likely to argue for foundational, decolonial change, they were also highly skeptical of half-measures, watered-down policies, and other approaches that downplayed the need for major shifts in how universities operate.

Alongside these responses, we analyze a growing academic literature on indigenization, which includes a number of more forward-looking official positions put forward by university administrations. In analyzing these diverse perspectives, we argue in favor of the more decolonial positions—that overarching change in how the academy engages Indigenous communities, scholars, staff, and students—are only viable option to effectively indigenized the Canadian academy. Other options, we suggest, merely evoke the discourse of transformative change, while using this rhetoric to preserve the status quo—the unsustainable and unjust exclusion of Indigenous nations from an academy built on top of Indigenous homelands.

The impetus for this work came from our in-class experiences teaching Indigenous content at several Canadian universities. Adam is Métis and an associate professor in the Faculty of Native Studies at the University of Alberta

and has taught introductory Indigenous studies classes at three Western Canadian universities, in both elective and compulsory offerings. Danielle is a PhD candidate in the Department of Educational Policy Studies at the University of Alberta. A first generation Canadian of mixed European ancestry, Danielle focuses on social justice and anti-oppressive practices in her research. In approaching this project, our goal was to gauge the attitudes toward Indigenization among those faculty most engaged in the process. We also asked several questions about Indigenous content requirements in post-secondary teaching (see Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018). The research was conducted using an anonymous online survey that contained five open-ended questions within a broader qualitative framework. We relied on convenience sampling to obtain participants: we contacted Indigenous and non-Indigenous individuals who had taught Indigenous content within our professional and personal networks using email, and social media. Since the sampling pool was small, and we had a relationship with the participants, we elected not to collect demographic information (e.g., age, gender, tribal affiliation) in the pilot study. The reason we designed a qualitative study was to gather a sample of the experiences of educators who had taught Indigenous content in the past, and what that could mean if or when mandatory Indigenous content requirements (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018) were brought into an institution.

## Indigenous inclusion

In early 2018, the College of Arts and Science at the University of Saskatchewan made headlines for committing to hire 30 new Indigenous scholars over the next 10 years, inviting applicants “at any rank and any scholarly discipline” to “encourage applications across many [disciplinary] areas” (Putnam, 2018). While this move requires substantial financial commitment for Indigenous inclusion on behalf of both the college and the university, it ultimately sought to add Indigenous people into pre-existing university structures, inserting them into departments where they are likely to be the only Indigenous scholars in their respective unit. Underlying such assumptions is that while the university currently does not reflect the diversity of the broader public, it can do so by including Indigenous scholars with little need to rethink the university’s underlying structure. In other words, in this policy framework—a framework shared at many other institutions—indigenization is conceived of primarily a matter of inclusion and access, and by merely including more Indigenous peoples, it is believed that universities can indigenize without substantial structural change.

Regardless of approach, the most common theme at the heart of the indigenization discourse is an oft-stated *need for change*, regularly accompanied by the argument that universities “need” to better serve Indigenous students and communities and need to better support Indigenous faculty and staff. This was a common concern among respondents, one identified a “*need for Indigenous-based research, curriculum and teaching resources, as well as support services and scholarships for undergraduate and graduate students*”

(emphasis added). Likewise, another respondent wrote that there is “a *need* a comprehensive approach to deal with the complexity of addressing the issues [facing Indigenous students] and having the best possible outcomes for Indigenous peoples” (emphasis added). How these needs get translated into university policy by administrators, on the other hand, tends to be—like those at the University of Saskatchewan—focused on increasing the number of Indigenous bodies on university campuses, with less emphasis on changing the structures that have made universities hostile places for Indigeneity to begin with. Universities thus embrace this need to do better as a need to assist Indigenous faculty, staff, students, and communities in overcoming obstacles, rather than a more direct process of removing the obstacles.

Indigenous inclusion policy is a vision that ultimately expects Indigenous people to bear the burden of change. Indigenous students, faculty, and staff expected to adapt to the intellectual worldview, teaching, and research styles of the academy. While university administrators may argue that universities better connect with Indigenous peoples, communities, and knowledges, but largely by supporting their success within existing structures. Indigenous inclusion policies naturalize the status quo of academic culture, but believe that universities should better support Indigenous people in finding their place within it.

Indigenous scholars have noted this issue for a long time. Postsecondary education has generally expected, as Rauna Kuokkanen (2008) argues, that Indigenous students and faculty “leave their ontological and epistemological assumptions and perceptions at the gates of the university, [to] assume the trappings of a new form of reality” which is markedly different from their own (p. 2). Jo-Anne Episkew (2013) suggests that this motivates universities to attempt to make Indigenous people “feel more comfortable” because the academy typically “perceive[s] that we come with a deficit in our preparation for higher learning, so they must develop special programs to help us fit into their world” (pp. 66–67). Therefore, when indigenization is understood as a means to “include” Indigenous people better in the academy, it also tends to assume that the academy is a natural, or at least neutral, place in which human knowledge is already adequately represented (Battiste, Bell, & Findlay, 2002, p. 83). The problem with an Indigenous inclusion policy is that in its most basic form, it is a program that requires Indigenous peoples, not the academy, to bear the responsibility for change (see Episkew 2013, p. 67).

As policy, Indigenous inclusion promotes many different culturally rooted initiatives aiming to make the academy more hospitable and relevant (Kuokkanen, 2008, pp. 1, 6); these supports can help Indigenous faculty and students learn the university’s expectations and how to succeed under existing structures. There is often extensive discussion about how those expectations and structures can change, how Indigenous worldview can be better included in courses, how tenure standards can better reflect the length of time required to observe Indigenous community-based research expectations, and why subsequently fewer publications may result. But changes to university norms

seem more elusive than the policies that help Indigenous people adapt to them.

It should not be understated that research has shown that Indigenous inclusion policies have had a beneficial impact on Indigenous peoples in the academy, most notably on student completion and retention rates. In one study, Gallop and Bastien (2016) noted that Aboriginal students wanted support in three areas: (a) supports available to all students (e.g. academic advising, health and wellness, accessibility services); (b) specialized, Indigenous-focused services like an Aboriginal support center; and (c) support for learning (e.g. teaching and classroom-based supports). Supportive and positive relationships between Aboriginal students and their Canadian peers were vital for Indigenous student success. Likewise, Pidgeon, Archibald, and Hawkey (2014) determined that Indigenous graduate students who had the support of their peers and faculty in their program were more likely to complete their program. They argue that “the ability to transform institutional practices from within begins with faculty and staff who are committed to making public higher education for [everyone]” (Pidgeon et al., 2014, p. 16). Ragoonaden and Mueller (2017) found that peer mentorship supports and culturally relevant course content also had a positive impact on student success. Indigenous student success, generally, was enhanced when the university focused on ensuring that Indigenous students were able to access specific programming targeted at their inclusion in academic learning.

Certainly, an Indigenous inclusion policy is a vital component of improving the experiences of Indigenous people on campus. However, it is up for debate whether or not inclusion policies are actually indigenization policies. More specifically an Indigenous inclusion policy does little to actually transform the academy, and much more to support the adjustment of Indigenous people to the taken-for-granted and unchanging structures of the modern university. Inclusion is ultimately the low-hanging fruit of indigenization: it’s the minimum level of commitment to Indigenous faculty, staff, and students, not the end goal. Indigenous inclusion on its own fails to meet the threshold of an indigenization policy, as it does not actually work to make the academy a more Indigenous space, but rather it works to increase the number of Indigenous bodies in an already established Western academic structure and culture. As the saying goes, it’s just “more brown faces in white spaces.”

Many survey respondents saw inclusion policies as vital components of indigenization, but not in themselves leading to an indigenized institution. One such respondent pointed out “the increased presence of Indigenous scholars, teachers, administrators, and students on campuses” but as a venue, there is a more foundational need to “increase the presence of Indigenous knowledges and ways of learning.” Other respondents also spoke of the academy as being an inhospitable place, which means that calls to “make spaces hospitable to Indigenous students and faculty” really means overhauling existing policy regimes to better reflect the experiences, worldviews, and needs of Indigenous peoples. For example, one respondent suggests that real inclusion also means

undertaking environmental scans of universities to figure out what current factors limit Indigenous participation and inclusion; investing in Indigenous students, staff, and faculty, and use their feedback to provide an environment that supports their work; considering how pedagogy and research methods, including assessment of research merit, need to be re-evaluated in order to move beyond settler paradigms that disadvantage Indigenous students and scholars.

Inclusion policies then are seen by Indigenous faculty as processes that helps Indigenous faculty, staff, and students adjust to the academy as it is, but as vectors to achieve more transformative ends.

Canadian university administrations have in many cases worked toward implementing some measure of Indigenous inclusion policy, often using transformative language to describe them. In a 2016 study, Michelle Pidgeon also reported that 90% of Canadian postsecondary institutions have some form of Aboriginal student services (p. 85). However, Pidgeon noted that of 124 post-secondary institutional plans published across Canada, only 35% have developed institution-wide strategic plans that had specific Indigenous initiatives (p. 83). In addition, the permanency of these programs and institutional plans, while *en vogue* now, are also often funded on “short-tem, often external funding” and those service providers interviewed for Pidgeon’s study noted that “providing Aboriginal student services without institutional commitment to human resources and campus space continues to be difficult” (p. 85).

Aside from assisting Indigenous students in their transition to university, where Indigenous inclusion may also be of assistance is the increase of Indigenous faculty, staff, and administrators who are the primary advocates for substantial change in the academy. Currently, Indigenous faculty are disproportionately junior faculty and few Indigenous scholars are in senior administrative positions. Inclusion indigenization policy can certainly assist in the promotion of Indigenous faculty to associate and full professor positions as well as into administrative positions—associate deans, deans, vice-presidents—that can lead the way for more substantive structural change. These senior administrative positions are the shepherds of university structures, who build and maintain them, they are also in many ways those who have the time to push for, and ultimately institute systematic changes needed to address Indigenous inclusion in the academy (Pidgeon, 2016, p. 82). With a greater number of Indigenous scholars, and the promotion of those scholars to positions of administrative authority, the larger systemic work is more likely to get done. It is perhaps best to view Indigenous inclusion, then, not as an end goal as many universities currently do, but rather as a strategy for building toward systemic indigenization of the Canadian academy.

## Reconciliation indigenization

The indigenization debate is informed by both scholarship and academic policymaking. It is a debate of relative long standing, as Indigenous communities, governments, and intellectuals have advocated for an increased presence of

Indigeneity—in all its forms—in the Canadian academy. As early as the 1970s, there was concerted organization around Indigenous educational sovereignty; policy programs like the National Indian Brotherhood’s Indian Control over Indian Education (1972) developed as a response to Canadian assimilation policies that used educational institutions as a weapon of cultural destruction (Pidgeon, 2016, p. 78). Assimilatory education, which uses educational institutions as a means to “integrate” Indigenous people into the Canadian social milieu, is often fashioned as a kind of colonial benevolence that helps Indigenous people adapt to the world as it is, an attitude that continues to inform Indigenous inclusion policy. Canadian universities have, for the majority of their existence, operated as a tool of de-indigenization, a legacy that now runs counter to many of the public statements on reconciliation found in institutional plans across Canada.

On the scholarly side of the discourse on indigenization, Devon Abbot Mihesuah and Angela Cavender Wilson’s edited collection *Indigenizing the Academy: Transforming Scholarship and Empowering Communities* (2004) was perhaps the first dedicated publication to wrestle with academic commitment to the creation of spaces of consequence for Indigenous people in North American universities. In the volume, scholars argued for substantial hiring policies for Indigenous academics (Mihesuah, 2004), respect for Indigenous knowledges and histories (Wilson, 2004), and transformation of Indigenous scholarship to serve community interests (Alfred, 2004; Deloria, 2004), the major themes that still inform current indigenization efforts. Likewise, Rauna Kuokkanen’s (2008) *Reshaping the University: Responsibility, Indigenous Epistemes, and the Logic of the Gift* sought to transform the intellectual relationship between the Indigenous and Enlightenment traditions of the academy, envisioning a structural shift to the academy brought about by “the gift” of Indigenous worldviews. Kuokkanen (2008) argues that the university has sanctioned “epistemic ignorance” of Indigenous knowledges, leaving it “unable to profess multiple truths” with a constrained, exclusionary epistemological foundation (p. 5). In other words, Kuokkanen argues that by failing to include other epistemological traditions, the academy has remained focused on a rather narrow slice of human experience, represented by the Enlightenment tradition of the West. Indigenous knowledge, then, represents an opportunity for the academy to expand the scope of what it now considers human understanding, and to include other knowledges made marginal by the myopic view of most contemporary scholarship. Ironically, expanding the academy’s view of what counts as knowledge is actually consistent with the purpose of the university in the first place, to expand the bounds of the human imagination and explore truth in all its forms (see Kuokkanen, 2008, p. 140).

In 2015, the term “indigenization” entered the Canadian university administrator lexicon after the release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada’s (TRC) 2015 release of its 94 *Calls to Action*. Informed by the testimony of thousands of survivors from Canada’s Indian residential schools, the document called for foundational

change in the operation of both Canadian governmental institutions as well as Canadian civil society. Motivated by a shifting political climate in Canada, universities vowed to undertake a concerted program of reconciliation, to correct the historical misuse of education in Canadian colonial endeavors. The new dynamic brought about by the TRC helped expand discussions of indigenization from scholarly debate into administrative dialogue.

In the optimism of post-TRC academia, there was a widespread push among universities to indigenize, what we term *reconciliation indigenization*. While indigenization linked to reconciliation has become a common discussion point at Canadian universities, challenges still remain. There is persistent concern expressed by scholars, students, and community alike that indigenization policies are simply a shift in rhetoric and lack the substance needed to produce real and meaningful change. It is also nearly impossible to implement a “one-size-fits-all model” that addresses the needs of every Indigenous community with unique and varied histories. One respondent, when asked what is the ideal outcome of an indigenization policy, wrote,

*Best possible outcome:* an academic system which is sufficiently cognizant of the nature of social power and oppression to not repeat the horrors of the past.

*Most likely outcome:* an annual intercultural powwow.

While the administrative dynamics on indigenization have certainly shifted, how effectively reconciliation-driven indigenization will be implemented by Canadian universities remains to be seen.

One noticeable shift in university governance brought about by reconciliation indigenization is the establishment of Indigenous advisory and/or reconciliation committees. Many of these committees have set clear goals for reconciliation indigenization for their universities. Moving beyond Indigenous inclusion policies, many of these committees articulate visions of indigenization informed by the demands of reconciliation in Canada. For instance, the University of Regina’s Aboriginal Advisory Committee defines the goal of indigenization 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. (Quoted in Pete, 2016, p. 67)

What sets reconciliation indigenization apart from mere Indigenous inclusion is an attempt to alter the university’s structure, including educating Canadian faculty, staff, and students to change how they think about, and act toward, Indigenous people. Reconciliation indigenization envisions the Canadian academy taking on the role of citizenship education, working to educate Canadians on reconciliation

that has an impact beyond the borders of Canadian university campuses.

However, despite the uplifting language used by these bodies, and the Indigenous leadership that often drives them, Indigenous respondents were still concerned about a detachment of aspirational rhetoric from actual changes in practice. One respondent noted that indigenization “should not be a metaphor: it should not manifest as universities using Indigenous knowledges, motifs, languages, etc., as ‘window dressing’, but should result in substantive change across the entire academy.” At its core, respondents argued that reconciliation-based indigenization should center dialogue and collaboration, which ultimately yields space to Indigenous intellectual traditions. Another respondent told us,

Western approaches to knowledge production will need to be *pushed back* while Indigenous approaches to knowledge production are simultaneously being strengthened in the centre. The goal is to enable Indigenous worldviews to take up more space throughout the entire academy. (Emphasis in original)

Indigenous respondents also repeatedly noted that indigenization must be an Indigenous-led process, and that indigenization “should not be about ensuring settler access to Indigenous nations’ resources. If this is the goal, then Indigenization is just a euphemism for colonization.”

One particularly common approach to reconciliation indigenization is the aspiration to some form of Indigenous course requirement (ICR) which “necessitates students complete a prescribed amount of content focused on Indigenous peoples” (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018). Education, nursing, and social work programs in Western Canada were among the first to implement ICRs in their curricula (many of them over a decade ago), and so program-specific ICRs are relatively well-established policies, premised on notions of improved professional practice for students in professional programs. In response to the TRC, however, two universities—Lakehead University and the University of Winnipeg—spearheaded university-wide ICRs in 2015. With this roll-out there was substantial optimism that this approach would be normalized in many Canadian universities, particularly in Western Canada (Gaudry, 2016; Pete, 2016). Yet, much of this early optimism seems to have dissipated, with few other universities implementing ICR policies of their own, even if the aspiration remains. The seeming loss of momentum notwithstanding, university faculty who teach Indigenous studies, still overwhelmingly believe that ICRs have the potential to help settler Canadians gain greater understanding of Indigenous-Canada relations (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018).

The loss of enthusiasm for a transformative policy proposal is significant, as it betrays that much of this “reconciliation turn” has been more discursive than substantive, and that few policies that have aimed to uproot the established epistemological privilege of the Western tradition, remain a substantial minority. While aspirational language remains the norm, there is seemingly little concrete commitment in many places to actually meet those goals. In spite of this rhetorical shift to reconciliation and

partnership, the university still behaves as what Kuokkanen (2008) refers to as the “guest-master,” that is an entity who is not necessarily hostile to the presence of reconciliatory policies, but still works to contain those policies within the existing academic framework (p. 130). This guest-master is also willing to acknowledge itself as a guest on the lands of others, at least rhetorically, without actually following the protocols of its hosts, or asking their permission, leaving it a now-universally acknowledge guest, that is nonetheless in practical control of its hosts’ house (Kuokkanen, 2008, pp. 133–134).

In this new narrative of reconciliation indigenization, the university on the one hand trumpets a new era of university collaboration with Indigenous peoples while also perpetuating the relations of power and domination of the past. While as guest-master, “the academy represents itself as a welcoming host, but not without conditions. Indigenous epistemes are unconditionally welcome only to a handful of marginal spaces that are insignificant to the academy at large” (Kuokkanen, 2008, p. 131). The institutional acknowledgment of being a guest—recognized through territorial acknowledgements or new “nation-to-nation relationships” with local communities which surrender no decision-making capacity—it is seemingly a rhetorical to reconciliation without the substantial follow through. As Episkew (2013) points out, “good guests follow the rules of the house since they know that they are not at home and are visiting at the sufferance of the host” (pp. 66–67).

Notably, reconciliation indigenization requires power sharing, a transformation of decision-making processes, and a reintegration of Indigenous peoples, faculty, staff, and students, into policymaking that affects them, and their Canadian peers. If reconciliation indigenization is a process aimed at changing how the academy operates to both include Indigenous people, but also to change how Canadians act and think, it requires first that universities practice what they preach. Many universities undertaken rhetorical shifts to aspirational reconciliation, using the language of partnership and transformation, but have failed to seize on the actual meaning behind the various calls to reconcile. Much of the policies proposed by reconciliation committees—and by Indigenous faculty more generally—are informed by this thinking, but the rarity of substantive implementation betrays a merely rhetorical shift.

## Decolonial indigenization

While universities utilized reconciliation rhetoric in most cases to beef up inclusion policies, Indigenous faculty members envision a transformative indigenization program rooted in decolonial approaches to teaching, research, and administration. Both respondents and the secondary literature conceive of a decolonial indigenization that wholly transforms the academy and fundamentally reorients knowledge production to a system based on different power relations between Indigenous peoples and Canadians—and for several respondents this includes a “dual university” structure. Decolonial indigenization is the most radical and substantive approach to indigenization and is by and large

off the radar of most university administrators. In an atmosphere where substantive reconciliation indigenization is difficult to grasp, decolonial indigenization is almost unintelligible, difficult to imagine, and “too radical” to merit serious consideration by many administrators. Yet Indigenous scholars are adamant that this is a necessity to meet long-term Indigenous needs, so much so, that it is often written about as an inevitability. With significant presence of decolonial indigenization discourse in scholarly writing, we also found that these sentiments were echoed among our respondents.

Generally, scholars see indigenization as a decolonial process, something that “exposes places where dominant structures must be re-made to embrace other than dominant ways of knowing and doing” (Sasakamoose & Pete, 2015, p. 4). There is also significant consensus globally that universities have not decolonized; curriculum is predominantly Eurocentric, “rooted in colonial, apartheid and Western worldviews and epistemological traditions” and therefore “continues to reinforce white and Western dominance and privilege” (Heleta, 2016). Likewise, Taii Alfred (2004) describes universities as “grounds of contention,” and Daniel Heath Justice (2004) ascertains that universities are hierarchical institutions that have defined definitions of what constitutes knowledge, built on “the literal bodies of Native people” (p. 101). In addition, Eve Tuck and Ken Yang (2012) argue that decolonization is not a metaphor; in its simplest form, it is something that aims to unsettle and dismantle settler colonialism. This point by Tuck and Yang in particular was specifically mentioned by some of our participants. Linda Tuhaiwai Smith (2012) also argues that universities are places of colonialism, a legacy that has not completely ended. However, Heath Justice (2004) reminds us that “if the academy were nothing more than an ideological death camp” Indigenous peoples would not aspire to higher education (p. 101). Along these lines, he reminds us that “writing and teaching Indigenous history are political acts” which provide the potential for transformation and liberation (p. 146). Scholars often link decolonization to Indigenous resurgence, where resurgent education can challenge “the injustices of colonialism, dispossession, and racist oppression while reaffirming the worldviews of our ancestors” (Gaudry & Corntassel, 2014, p. 167). Affirmation of Indigenous worldviews alongside the practical reclamation of Indigenous educational practices and on-the-land learning provide ways to decentre hierarchal educational structures and empower Indigenous communities to regain educational sovereignty while also working with universities.

Decolonial indigenization, then, envisions dismantling the university and building it back up again with a very different role and purpose. Respondents saw a decolonial approach to indigenization as something that would “radically transform” higher education, remaking it in two ways. First, this decolonial indigenization would use a treaty-based model of university governance and practice.<sup>1</sup> Second, decolonial indigenization supports a resurgence in Indigenous culture, politics, knowledge, and on-the-land skills. While many of these may seem off of the current

radar of Canadian universities, indigenization was quite recently just as unthinkable. The clear articulation of a decolonial indigenization is an important step in realizing these more transformative aspirations.

### *Treaty-based decolonial indigenization*

Throughout territories now claimed by Canada, there are dozens of treaty relationships, most over a century old, that spell out ways in which Indigenous peoples and Canadians would live together on the same territory. From an Indigenous standpoint, treaties are living agreements which evolve over time; they are not fixed at the point of signing, and are constantly re-addressed to ensure that all parties are fulfilling the agreement. Furthermore, they did not eliminate Indigenous political independence, but publicly recognized it. Indigenous peoples understand treaty relationships as living agreements because they necessitate an on-going dialogue between treaty partners. These agreements are constantly revisited by the parties to address any deficiencies or disagreements that may have arisen. In Canada, treaties created an arrangement of “co-existing sovereignty” in which “free and equal peoples on the same [territory] can mutually recognize the autonomy and sovereignty of each other in certain spheres and share jurisdictions in others without incorporation or subordination” (Tully, 2000, p. 53).

Many Indigenous respondents argued that this approach can be used to transform existing academic institutions into universities governed on treaty principles. One respondent argued for the creation of a “dual university” structure in which each university see the university “operate around a global knowledge exchange” with each of the two universities “relating through a . . . treaty to serve the community and students collectively, bringing the benefits of dynamic global collaboration and grounded place-specific learnings.” However, in keeping with treaty principles, the Indigenous side of any such “dual university” would still need to be administratively autonomous and be able to protect the integrity of Indigenous knowledge and community participation. Another respondent cautioned that while room must be made for Indigenous knowledges in the academy, serious consideration must be given to questions about “who owns that knowledge? Who is considered an expert in teaching and engaging these knowledges?” Because, quite simply, “indigenization doesn’t automatically mean decolonization,” or more precisely that the increased presence and engagement with Indigenous knowledges cannot result in an intellectual free-for-all. How the inclusion of these knowledges in governed—by Indigenous peoples and with Indigenous community leadership—is the principle of a treaty-driven, dual institution approach to decolonial indigenization.

To operate universities using treaty frameworks, a substantial amount of treaty education is necessary and as one respondent suggests, in treaty territories, “treaties should be taken to the heart of campus life.” Universities in this model of indigenization can be an important “force for change” by allowing students, faculty, and staff to “understand their place in the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous

people” and to ensure that everyone understands that indigenization isn’t just a “pro forma” program, but rather a process built on collaboration, consensus, and meaningful partnership. To embody these treaty principles, many Indigenous programs will necessarily need more autonomy and more secure funding to operate according to their own directives and those directives coming from Indigenous community partners. A dual university structure could therefore envision more autonomous yet still embedded *faculties* of Indigenous studies at Canadian universities in which Indigenous programs are ultimately in charge of their own governance including budgetary, curricular, and scholarly standards. Like decolonization more generally, decolonial indigenization requires the return of control to Indigenous people, communities, and programs to better govern themselves in ways that the traditional university structure respects and supports, as an autonomous partner connected by a common institutional commitment. A dual university structure would support a second motivation for decolonial indigenization, the resurgence of Indigenous knowledges, cultures, and political traditions.

### *Resurgence-based decolonial indigenization*

Where decolonization looks to transform existing institutions, to remake colonial structures in a new image, resurgence is a parallel movement is focused on rebuilding and strengthening Indigenous culture, knowledges, and political orders. Often referred to as Indigenous resurgence, this is the positive accompaniment to decolonial indigenization. Jeff Corntassel (2012) sees resurgence at postsecondary institutions as strengthening “through ceremony or through other ways that Indigenous peoples (re)connect to the natural world, processes of resurgence are often contentious and reflect the spiritual, cultural, economic, social and political scope of the struggle” (p. 88). Through this contentious transformation, Matsunaga (2016) argues that “Indigenous resurgence . . . reasserts the connection between land-centred decolonization rather than decolonizing settler’s minds and institutions” (p. 33). Such acts, for Corntassel (2012), need “continual renewal” meaning that “through prayer, speaking your language, honoring your ancestors, etc., are the foundations of resurgence” (p. 89).

Despite the academy’s deeply colonial history, respondents identified the university as an important site of resurgence, and one that will become more important if indigenization took a more decolonial path. A substantial amount of this decolonial indigenization requires universities to, in the words of one respondent, facilitate a “re/connection to the land, language and people of this land . . . and support those land, language and cultured based organizations that have already been doing indigenization work . . . but haven’t had the financial support.” The result of the resurgence element of decolonial indigenization is the “centering of Indigenous knowledge and experiences in the discussion of Indigenous issues” and that Indigenous perspectives are the lens through which Indigenous issues are understood. Respondents noted that the resurgence paradigm also breaks down distinctions like “inside/outside of

the academy,” recognizing the centrality of Indigenous intellectual systems in producing and preserving knowledge about Indigenous peoples and the issues they face. Thus, as a resurgence-based indigenization, decolonial indigenization leaves space for Indigenous “subversion and dissent” with the acknowledgment that “there are a variety of Indigenous voices and opinions.”

One particularly important part of decolonial indigenization identified by respondents is the substantive support for on-the-land and community-based research and learning. Intellectual resurgence, above all, recognizes that immense amounts of complex Indigenous knowledge resides in communities, and it is these communities who are best able to govern access to that knowledge and how it is transmitted. Decolonial indigenization involves constructing research programs that rebuild capacity for Indigenous intellectual institutions to determine their own intellectual priorities and establishing local institutions to govern research projects in order to move beyond research collaboration with outsiders to community-led research projects (Gaudry, 2011, 2018) Resurgent research paradigms can build capacity in communities, supporting communities in rebuilding traditional knowledges and traditional institutions.

As a component of decolonial indigenization, community-engaged and land-based research practices also look to decentre the academy as the primary site of knowledge production and dissemination. While the academy occupies a central place in the Enlightenment tradition, Indigenous knowledge systems transmit knowledge in different ways. Elders, ceremonies, and on-the-land learning opportunities can also be robust sites of transformative intellectual development, where knowledge is disseminated to learners through traditional practices, through dialogue, and by analysis of personal experience.

Indigenous communities also have their own processes for determining the validity and accuracy of knowledge, there is often rigorous public debate about the social and political issues affecting communities, and there are discussions about proper protocol for engaging in knowledge sharing or access to territory by outsiders. In decolonial reconciliation, more attention must be paid to how Indigenous communities evaluate knowledge and how it is interpreted. Decolonial indigenization requires that universities work to recognize, respect, and support these processes. Too often Indigenous knowledge is still seen as source material to be analyzed by the intellectual traditions of the West.

Furthermore, decolonial approaches require that how this knowledge is shared or brought into the academy is on its own terms. Much of this knowledge may best be left to reside in the community, as a rush to “include” this information into the academic canon can also strip the authoritative power to interpret it from community. Therefore, by engaging Indigenous knowledge systems in a decolonial approach to academic teaching and research, the university cannot aspire to include or control knowledge in a way that undermines community intellectual power. If indigenization does not strengthen Indigenous communities and

support the resurgence of Indigenous intellectual traditions, then it is not indigenization.

On-the-land learning is an important starting point for this resurgence-based decolonial indigenization (see Wildcat, McDonald, Irbacher-Fox, & Coulthard, 2014). On-the-land learning in university contexts usually combines academic and land-based knowledges in harmonious and transformative ways. In these spaces, intellectual power is shared between university academics and community intellectuals (who are sometimes the same people), allowing the dialogue between, say the history of *Indian Act* policy intervention like residential schooling on a First Nation, and an opportunity for community youth to relearn the traditional knowledge that residential school policies sought to eliminate. On-the-land learning is transformative precisely because of its recognition of authoritative knowledge among community members. In seeing Indigenous knowledge holders as knowledgeable people, decolonial indigenization forces outsider academics to confront their own intellectual ignorance, their own limited knowledge, adopting a learner status and the humility that such a position demands.

If we are to envision a university that is a treaty-university, or a dual institution in which Indigenous and Enlightenment traditions co-exist and engage one another, much of the Indigenous academy will no doubt focus on these traditions premised on land-based knowledge and worldview. Much of this will be directed by community and Indigenous intellectual processes. Moving sites of research and learning off-campus also involves a recognition that universities as they now exist may not necessarily be the key sites of decolonial indigenization, in fact, they may be best directed from outside of their own tradition.

This decolonial approach to indigenization, by far the most popular among respondents, ultimately is about the redistribution of intellectual privilege, working toward collaborative relationships that decentralize administrative power. These are certainly longer-term goals, but there are already many research units, land-based learning projects, and research teams that are organized around decolonial principles that university administrations can better support. These projects can be starting points for larger institutional models, which will need the support of a broad range of people inside and outside the academy, something that—like all treaty-based ideals—calls upon everyone to think about how we can best live together on a shared landscape (or a shared university) while still respecting the autonomy, independence, and differences of each other.

## Conclusion

Indigenization is a conceptual signifier that is increasingly used in the Canadian academy. It denotes a common process, however, obscures its multitude of different meanings which undergird different programs of indigenization. Using responses from an original survey on this topic and utilizing existing secondary research on indigenization, we have defined indigenization using three different approaches. *Indigenous inclusion* is a policy that aims to increase the



number of Indigenous students, faculty, and staff in the Canadian academy. *Reconciliation indigenization* is a vision that locates indigenization on common ground between Indigenous and Canadian ideals, creating a new, broader consensus. *Decolonial indigenization* envisions the wholesale overhaul of the academy to fundamentally reorient knowledge production based on balanced power relations between Indigenous peoples and Canadians, transforming the academy into something dynamic and new. However, we conclude that despite using a language of reconciliation, in practical terms the Canadian academy still largely focuses on policies of inclusion. In contrast, Indigenous faculty, staff, students and their allies are much more likely to envision a fundamental and decolonial shift.

These divergent approaches to indigenization reflect a concerning non-consensus in which administrations are using a different language to advocate for slight more aggressive policies targeted at Indigenous inclusion. With more foundational changes on the radar of most Indigenous people in the academy, and increasing numbers of academic allies pushing for this fundamental shift, universities administrations must be more aware of the distinct programs envisioned here. So too must Indigenous students, scholars, staff, and allies who have witnessed a discursive shift, but have yet to see the promised transformation. Work must be done to bridge these aspirations with the accompanying policy and everyone has a role in this. Students can demand more and better Indigenous content—as many are already doing (see University of Saskatchewan Students Union, 2015). Indigenous faculty can take on administrative roles (appropriate to their career stage) and non-Indigenous administrators and senior faculty can support Indigenous faculty to institute changes without requiring their (often unrewarded) labor. In short, the leaders of this transformative change are rarely already in the senior leadership positions and this change will be bottom-up, not top-down. As our research shows, Indigenous faculty and allies tend to already be ahead of administration and invested in new transformative approaches to a decolonial academy. It is the take-up of these visions that matters now, and people of all backgrounds and ranks should heed these calls to action. If, after all, this new academy is based on principles of treaty and decolonial indigenization, there is a place for everyone to build this vital future, it's just one way forward in a larger struggle for justice, coexistence, and a better world for everyone.

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### Note

1. This model would be least controversial in areas where there are treaties, that is, historic nation-to-nation agreements that

established Indigenous peoples and Canadians as co-equals inhabiting the same territory. In areas where there are no nation-to-nation agreements that govern jurisdiction, perhaps this model would still be reflective of an ideal relationship between Indigenous peoples and Canadians just without the evocation of “treaty” as a grounding institution for this relationship.

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