

B.C. Post-Secondary Truth and Reconciliation Summit Report

Post-secondary institutions in British Columbia and across Canada are recognizing the need to work in partnership with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples, and Aboriginal organizations in order to develop and offer programs that meet their needs. With support from both provincial and federal governments, as well as the commitment of post-secondary leaders, many institutions now have staff dedicated specifically to Aboriginal education, Elders who provide wisdom and support, and campus facilities such as Aboriginal Gathering Places that help celebrate and create a welcoming environment for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students.

Provincially, the Ministry of Advanced Education has declared Aboriginal Education a priority with the 2012 release of the Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education and Training Policy Framework and Action Plan. This document confirms the Province's commitment to improving post-secondary opportunities and outcomes for First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples. British Columbia post-secondary institutions have responded by working in partnership with local Aboriginal communities and organizations to determine how best to meet the needs of their students.

For six years, Senator Murray Sinclair and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada travelled to communities across Canada to listen to the stories of 6,750 First Nations, Inuit and Métis students who were put through Canada's residential school system. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission released its findings and 94 "Calls to Action" aimed at building reconciliation and Indigenous culture. Reconciliation is the key to creating a new relationship, one based on mutual respect and understanding.

The B.C. Post-Secondary Truth and Reconciliation Summit took place at the Wosk Centre in Vancouver on October 19 and 20, 2016. The summit was co-hosted by the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology and the Ministry of Advanced Education. The summit was an opportunity for leaders from B.C. public post-secondary institutions and Aboriginal institutes of higher learning to meet to discuss how to implement the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report Calls to Action within the public post-secondary system in British Columbia. Over 130 leaders attended. During the two-day summit there were keynote addresses from: Chief Shawn Atleo, Hereditary Chief of the Ahousaht First Nation and former National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations in Canada; Doug White, director of the Centre for Pre-Confederation Treaties and Reconciliation at Vancouver Island University; and Clara Morin-Dalcol, president, Métis Nation BC.

Elder Margaret George, Tsleil-Waututh First Nation, provided a welcome on both days.

Note: Throughout this report, the words "Aboriginal" and "Indigenous" are used interchangeably to refer to the First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples of Canada.

PLENARY SESSIONS

The student experience:

Mavis Benson, a recent University of British Columbia law graduate, spoke powerfully about her experiences with education, and made the following recommendations:

1. All post-secondary institutions should have culturally appropriate student centres where Aboriginal students can access tutors, mentors and life skills courses.
2. Student housing needs to be available for Aboriginal students; ideally a partnership with a non-profit housing provider to create a housing complex specifically for Aboriginal students that has a daycare on site, culturally-informed tutors available during evening hours, gatherings once a week for support, and an on-site food bank.
3. More Indigenous-focussed curriculum needs to be created, and more Aboriginal faculty are needed to teach this curriculum.
4. Post-secondary leaders should advocate for more federal Post-Secondary Student Support Program funding for students.

Day 1 Panel: What role can post-secondary institutions play in reconciliation?

Dr. Ralph Nilson, President, Vancouver Island University; Dr. Linc Kesler, Director, First Nations House of Learning, the University of British Columbia; Cindy Tom-Lindley, Executive Director, Indian Residential School Survivor Society; and Dr. Verna Billy-Minnabarriet, Vice President, Nicola Valley Institute of Technology, spoke about the role that post-secondary institutions can play in reconciliation. Key messages from this panel included:

- Aboriginal people need to be able see themselves in our post-secondary institutions.
- Post-secondary institutions have a responsibility to learn from Aboriginal communities and to understand Aboriginal cultures.
- It is the responsibility of post-secondary institutions to share the true history of Canada, including the history of residential schools.
- Post-secondary institutions need to advocate for more financial support for Aboriginal students. There is insufficient federal Post-Secondary Student Support Program funding to meet demand. Post-secondary institutions can also provide information about Canada Learning Bond to Aboriginal communities, so that Aboriginal families can benefit from this financial resource.
- Post-secondary institutions can provide tuition-free post-secondary education programs and courses to former youth-in-care – the Vancouver Foundation Youth Futures Education Fund will provide additional financial support.
- Institutional change is a process, and it takes time. Collaboration is key.
- Aboriginal people have a world view that is cooperative, not competitive, and more holistic; the existing focus of post-secondary institutions is on the brain, but there is also a need to connect to the heart.

Day 2 Panel: How does your post-secondary institution move TRC recommendations forward?

Dr. Gwen Point, Chancellor, the University of the Fraser Valley (UFV); Kory Wilson, Executive Director, Indigenous Initiatives and Partnerships, the British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT); Dr. Justin Wilson, Coordinator, Aboriginal Studies, Langara College; and Lauren Terbasket, Vice Chair, Indigenous Adult and Higher Learning Association, spoke about how their post-secondary institutions are moving the TRC recommendations forward.

- Dr. Gwen Point emphasized that leadership is the commitment to hear, to listen, and then to do something. At UFV, key people like the president, the senior advisor on Indigenous affairs, and the provost have the capacity to make things happen and have been taking action to indigenize UFV. Closing classes for one day for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission national event resulted in a shift in the institution. UFV is also hosting reconciliation circles with the Sto:lo Tribal Council.
- Kory Wilson indicated that at BCIT, key to success in moving the TRC recommendations forward has been having a senior position at the leadership table responsible for Indigenous initiatives, and the president's support. BCIT's senior leadership is completing a three hour Indigenous 101 session which will also be provided to all the units. Online modules for faculty and staff will be available by January 2017, which BCIT is willing to share with other post-secondary institutions.
- Dr. Justin Wilson spoke about the importance of rehumanizing education and focussing on the whole person, and recognizing that "you and me are we." This means moving away from adversarial approaches to "good conflict" and exploring issues with curiosity and not judgment. Intercultural communication also needs to be a focus. The important elements of reconciliation are rights, respect, cooperation and partnership, including investing in community-based relationships.
- Lauren Terbasket spoke about how Aboriginal institutes are providing much needed education for First Nations people and help communities to move away from seeing education as a "necessary evil" because of the impacts of residential schools. First Nations knowledge systems are over 40,000 years old. They don't look the same as western knowledge systems and they are just as valid. Lauren Terbasket noted that IAHLA institutes are focussing on the survival/revitalization of First Nations languages. IAHLA institutes are also focussing on their own survival; many are at risk of closing because of lack of funding. Post-secondary institutions can take up the cause of IAHLA institutes and advocate for government funding.

BREAKOUT GROUPS:

There were four breakout groups held throughout the two days, rotating so that participants had the opportunity to participate in three of the breakout sessions. A summary of the findings from each of the breakout groups is below.

Engagement with Aboriginal communities

Participants were asked to consider the following questions:

1. How are effective relationships developed and maintained with Aboriginal communities?
2. How can post-secondary institutions support self-determination for Aboriginal institutes and communities?
3. How can post-secondary institutions support Aboriginal communities to reconcile an educational vision that reflects their linguistic and cultural values?
4. How can post-secondary institutions work with Aboriginal communities to guide systemic change at the institutions?

Participants in this breakout group emphasized the following:

- It is a post-secondary institution responsibility to learn from communities – about their history and culture and protocols. Listen and learn.
- Post-secondary institutions need to invest in community-based relationships. Post-secondary institutions need to understand the needs of the community, to ask the community and students what they need, and build opportunities for conversation. Post-secondary institutions need to build relationships of trust – to be committed to keep up the relationship and get out into the communities. It is really important that the president of the post-secondary institution goes to the community.
- It is difficult to build a relationship based on one-time funding; communities are looking for more community-based programs, rather than short courses/workshops.
- Post-secondary institutions must acknowledge that ownership of language and culture remains with the community, and respect OCAP principles. Language and culture are vitally important to Aboriginal communities.
- Post-secondary institutions must ensure that all training provided in Aboriginal communities is accredited and transferable.
- Post-secondary institutions should consider the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology's approach to community-based education, where community-based assessments are conducted as part of institutional costs.
- Post-secondary institutions need to recognize that communities can choose their post-secondary institution partners, and do not necessarily need to partner with the institution serving their region.
- Post-secondary institutions need to reach out more to Aboriginal institutes, as they play a really important role. Both Aboriginal institutes and ASET-holders have a lot of experience and knowledge of Aboriginal student needs. A win-win could be for public post-secondary

institutions to build their own capacity by learning from Aboriginal institutes while Aboriginal institutes build capacity by learning from public post-secondary institutions.

- Post-secondary institutions need to understand that Aboriginal communities can't engage in reconciliation unless they have the internal capacity to do so – communities have to focus on community needs first.
- Leadership really matters. Post-secondary institutions need Indigenous presence and voice at senior leadership tables, need to provide training/learning to senior leadership, and embrace the challenge to do things differently.
- Reconciliation is a process, not something that can be checked off and considered completed.
- The importance of safe places for Aboriginal students at public post-secondary institutions was emphasized. These spaces need to be welcoming to Aboriginal students both in terms of attitude and the physical environment.

TRC Calls to Action and curricula

Participants were asked to consider the following questions:

1. What can presidents and vice-presidents academic do to ensure that processes, structures and systems support the inclusion of Aboriginal content recommended by the TRC into curricula?
2. How is appropriate curriculum content developed and what is the role of Aboriginal institutes and communities in the development of that content?
3. The University of Winnipeg and Lakehead University have implemented a mandatory course requirement – is this the best approach? What needs to be in place for this to happen?
4. How do we engage faculty and students so they are receptive to the inclusion of Aboriginal content in curriculum?

Participants in this breakout group emphasized the following:

- We need to understand how our past has influenced our present. This includes recognizing the hurt and emotions that are part of Indigenous peoples' experience with education. In addition, studies have been carried out for years that have not resulted in significant change (e.g., the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples in 1996 became a shelved report which at the community level is perceived as empty words) which means that the reality of First Peoples in this country is that there is cynicism due to the lived history; however, there remains a sense of hope. Concern was expressed about raising expectations that are not met or result in short-lived initiatives. Reconciliation in education must result in sustained change.
- Post-secondary institutions need to build trust and equal partnerships with Aboriginal communities. Partnerships are fundamental. Communities have different needs and post-secondary institutions need to be flexible.
- Education needs to be identified, anchored and rooted in community. Community-based education works.
- Presidents and vice presidents academic can:
 - lead change, and ask "why not?" instead of "why?";
 - learn cultural practices so they can lead in an informed way;

- use their influence;
 - share the message;
 - allocate more funding for Indigenous initiatives;
 - support the hiring of Aboriginal staff everywhere in the institution;
 - support Indigenous faculty – because there are few of them it can be lonely and they can become fatigued because of expectations that they will be the Indigenous voice everywhere;
 - ensure that policy development is inclusive;
 - enhance partnerships;
 - listen to Aboriginal communities;
 - ensure that Indigenous voices inform decisions – on committees, etc.;
 - support the integration of Indigenous knowledge into curriculum;
 - engage in dialogue with staff, faculty and students.
- Collective agreements can create barriers to change and unions need to understand the cost of doing nothing.
 - Rather than focusing on an education gap (which is deficit thinking), think about it this way: there is an educational debt that Canada owes to Indigenous people.
 - Decolonizing pedagogies enable transformation of consciousness and teach about colonization.
 - Post-secondary institutions need to do more than engage students' minds; must also engage students' hearts.
 - We need to recognize different sets of values and world views – Indigenous education emphasizes wholeness, connections and strong inter-dependent relationships, while western education emphasizes fragmentation and competition.
 - Post-secondary institutions need to understand the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and avoid pan-Indigenous approaches.
 - There were differing views on mandatory courses. It was noted that it is challenging to make anything mandatory (unions, course load in some programs) but if it is not mandatory then it has to be made VERY, VERY important. Others expressed the view that there should be mandatory courses because it is immoral not to share the true history of Canada with students.

Incorporating Aboriginal protocols into institutional practice

Participants were asked to consider the following questions:

1. What are the protocols of developing the physical infrastructure (signage, art, location, student space, etc.) of campuses that reflect the local Indigenous peoples and how do institutions work with local Aboriginal peoples to make this happen?
2. Why is it important to recognize territory and its protocols; how can this be embedded in institutional culture?
3. How can Aboriginal protocols and practices be incorporated into institutional systems and policies?
4. Are culturally safe spaces important for Aboriginal students?

Participants in this breakout group emphasized the following:

- It is important to start with understanding the people on whose lands you are on, and acknowledging the territory you are on. This includes understanding the history of communities and their traditional protocols and governance systems, what the federal government has done to destroy traditional systems of governance, and how that affects reality today. The Creator and our ancestors protect our territories – if you go into a territory you acknowledge the territory so that the ancestors recognize you are there for good and allow the work to happen.
- Listen, and listen, and listen. Listen with an open heart and open mind. Ask questions. This takes time.
- Build relationships and be accountable to Indigenous communities in support of their self-determination through education, training and applied research.
- Relationships are reciprocal. See the beauty of the land through our eyes; maybe you will walk more gently on it. There is beauty in all cultures: First Nations’ cultures and other cultures.
- Signage and infrastructure is a good place to start – to make us visible, and make us feel at home.
- Post-secondary institutions need to make Indigenous education a priority. This includes:
 - ensuring governance structures recognize and respect Indigenous peoples;
 - spreading responsibility for Indigenous education throughout the institution (for example, UFV has an Indigenous Committee of the Senate, UFV’s Student Union has a position on the board for an Indigenous student, UFV has an Indigenization of Academy statement, UFV board adopted a policy in 2012 on “Fulfilling our Commitment to Aboriginal Peoples”, and all job postings emphasize that indigenization is a priority);
 - incorporating the intellectual and cultural traditions of Indigenous peoples in curriculum and learning approaches;
 - supporting students and employees to increase their understanding of Indigenous peoples and encouraging reciprocity among Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples;
 - committing to increasing the number of Indigenous employees with ongoing appointments throughout the institution, including Indigenous senior administrators;
 - establishing Indigenous-centred holistic services and learning environments to increase learner success.
- Culturally welcoming places are really important – both as a place of refuge for Aboriginal students and a place for cross-cultural understanding/discussions. There is a need to balance concerns about “segregation” with concerns about the space being taken over by non-Indigenous students.

Aboriginal research

Participants in this breakout group were asked to consider the following questions:

1. What needs to be put in place for research that advances our understanding of reconciliation to occur?

2. How can our collective understanding of reconciliation be supported by post-secondary-based research?
3. Is it important that Indigenous research be led by Indigenous academics?
4. What supports need to be in place to grow Indigenous researcher capacity?

Participants in this breakout group emphasized the following:

- Research needs to be supported by communities and involve community members and students, and the results of the research needs to be communicated to the community.
- Research tools must be ethical and respectful, and their purpose must be clear.
- Intellectual property protocols must be in place; need to decide upfront who owns the research, recognizing both Indigenous values of sharing and the need to protect Indigenous knowledge. There must be clarity about what we mean by permissions, approval and ownership.
- Community researchers and advisors need to be compensated.
- Essentials for success: values, principles and ethics of Indigenous people must guide the research; research projects must involve Indigenous people upfront; relationships; integrating the concept of “all my relations” into consciousness; respect for oral traditions; institutional training in Indigenous research methods and protocols.
- Institutions need Indigenous Research Ethics Boards, or Research Ethics Boards with Indigenous leads. Research Ethics Boards need to build relationships with communities.
- Best practices need to be developed in order to build capacity in First Nations communities to respond to requests for research.
- Researchers can support the revitalization of knowledge and help rebuild First Nations communities and build capacity in the community.
- It is vital to support the development of Indigenous researchers.

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Recorders for the breakout sessions: Crystal Brown, Kelly Donaldson, and Ali Antoine, NVIT; Angela White, Indian Residential School Survivor Society.

Steering committee members: Dr. Verna Billy-Minnabarriet, NVIT; Deb Hull, Ministry of Advanced Education; Ruth Wittenberg, President, B.C. Association of Institutes and Universities; Cindy Tom Lindley, CEO, Indian Residential School Survivor Society; Kory Wilson, Executive Director, Indigenous Initiatives and Partnerships, the British Columbia Institute of Technology; Dr. Linc Kesler, Director, First Nations House of Learning, the University of British Columbia; and Marilyn Jensen, Instructor of First Nations Governance & Public Administration, Yukon College.