



Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance

The Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance is a non-partisan advocacy organization that represents the interests of over 150,000 undergraduate and professional, full-time and part-time university students at seven student associations across Ontario.

# INDIGENOUS STUDENTS

The provincial government has yet to make an open commitment to decolonization efforts and supporting Indigenous self-determination. In order to truly commit to truth, reconciliation, and the advancement of Indigenous and non-Indigenous allyship, the provincial government has a duty to openly express support for decolonization efforts and Indigenous self-determination. Each author, contributor, and supporter of this paper has come forward to build the following recommendations to reflect the principles and concerns we believe must be represented, respected, and acted upon by our government in order to ensure that there is not only harm reduction for those in our academic space, but inclusivity and equity. We are thankful and honoured for the support we have seen through the creation of this paper, and we are eagerly expecting the government's unwavering and deserved support.

## THE PROBLEM

### Lack of Indigenous Leadership

Students are concerned that Indigenous Peoples are often not given authority over, included in decision-making, or even consulted in policy programming decisions that impact Indigenous students at post-secondary institutions. They are further concerned that the provincial government has not made an open commitment to decolonization efforts and supporting Indigenous self-determination

### Barriers to Access

Indigenous students have a lack of adequate financial support, and many suffer from discrimination when it comes to accessing financial support and sponsorship that is available. Students without Indian Status (under the definition of the Indian Act) are discriminated against when it comes to applying for financial aid. Students are concerned that many Indigenous students face additional financial barriers that make the cost of course materials and resources helpful to participate in their education inaccessible, and that many Indigenous students do not have proper access to the internet, cell service, or necessary technologies in order to apply for and attend university. Students are also concerned that many remote communities cannot send their students to university due to geographic and financial barriers and that many schools on reserves do not offer pre-university courses needed to attend university. Additionally, universities do not offer a comprehensive understanding of intersection-

ality and intergenerational trauma.

### Colonial and Harmful University Culture

Requiring or asking for proof of Indigenous ancestry or community ties is discriminatory and happens in some campus spaces. Further, Indigenous art, symbolism, and expression are excluded from most campus spaces, with the exception of Indigenous Student Centres, and post-secondary campuses memorialize colonial violence with the presence of colonial names, labels, statues, and symbolism across their campuses. Students are concerned that Indigenous students and allies who challenge colonial and racist symbolism on their campus face harm from campus security services and Special Constables and may be arrested and/or criminally charged for their resistance actions.

Post-secondary institutions in Ontario operate on stolen Indigenous land and continue to perpetuate colonial violence against Indigenous Peoples. For example, post-secondary campuses do not provide safe, ventilated, accessible, and respected physical spaces for Indigenous students to practice their cultures and ceremonies, including smudging, and when Indigenous students do have a physical space on their campus these spaces are often stigmatized and disrespected. Students are concerned that Indigenous students who come from First Nations Reserves, or rural and northern communities, may experience "culture shock" as they transition into post-sec-

## INDIGENOUS STUDENTS

ondary education, particularly if they have no access to their culture or land. Further, the normalization of binge drinking, heavy drinking culture, and stigmatization of sober culture at post-secondary institutions can be especially harmful to Indigenous students.

Indigenous students face racism, discrimination, and microaggressions from students and staff on their campuses, and there is no clarity or transparency about consequences against perpetrators of hate and there is no promise of justice.

### **Lack of Non-Indigenous Allies**

Students have told us that post-secondary institutions do not have the resources and tools necessary to foster an environment for building allyship on campus; that some classrooms do not facilitate an environment of understanding, empathy, and respect towards Indigenous Peoples and issues; and that post-secondary institutions often place the responsibility for all Indigenous outcomes and projects on Indigenous Peoples without adequate support or compensation.

### **Barriers for Indigenous Faculty & Staff**

Students have raised concerns about the fact that Indigenous full-time faculty and senior leadership are severely underrepresented in post-secondary institutions. They are concerned that non-Indigenous faculty and staff exhibit bias against, can be discriminatory towards, misrepresent, and tokenize Indigenous students, faculty, and staff, and that non-Indigenous students can be racist or discriminatory to Indigenous faculty and staff, yet many Indigenous-focused courses are taught by non-Indigenous faculty or instructors.

Indigenous faculty and staff are also not sufficiently supported in being able to anonymously and safely report and discuss when another faculty, staff member, or student's behaviour impacts their access to a safe, welcoming, and inclusive work environment. When Indigenous faculty and staff speak out about experiencing harm, a lack of tolerance, and unsafe and inequitable environments, they are often not taken seriously, action is not taken to protect Indigenous staff and faculty, and they are forced to either stay in a harmful environment or remove themselves from the institution. Overall, there is a lack of support for Indigenous faculty and staff to access while on campus, as well as a lack of community with other Indigenous Peoples on campus, despite

the fact that Indigenous faculty and staff have expressed the emotional and physical harm that occurs to them as a result of working in a colonial institution that does not respect their ways of knowing, methodology or wellbeing.

Students are also concerned that hiring practices and requirements for faculty and instructors are colonial and do not respect or recognize the value of Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing; that Indigenous faculty and staff are not always hired into full-time, long-term positions and they often work alone in their roles; and that Indigenous staff carry the burden of repeatedly teaching information sessions to faculty on cultural sensitivity and inclusion, and are made to outline which of their behaviours and teachings are racist towards Indigenous Peoples.

### **Barriers to Data Sovereignty**

Students are concerned about the history of abuse through the collection of data from Indigenous Peoples, and the fact that data is routinely collected from Indigenous Peoples without their consent or input, which leads to harmful laws, policies, and programs.

### **Barriers to Accessing Supports**

Indigenous students sometimes face barriers to knowing how to find the Indigenous Student Centre on campus, how to get involved, and what kinds of events, supports and services are offered because there is not enough signage or information easily accessible and visible to students in campus spaces and online. Further, student supports and services on post-secondary campuses are predominately available in English which makes these supports and services less accessible for Francophone Indigenous students and Indigenous students who speak or prefer to speak an Indigenous language.

Students are particularly concerned that funding for Indigenous Student Centres on post-secondary campuses is inadequate and inconsistent. Indigenous Student Centres do not receive adequate funding to hire enough staff to be of support for students, to lead student affairs and initiatives, to advocate for student wellbeing and Indigenous representation, to provide adequate outreach on campus, and to connect with students, faculty, and staff, which results in the tokenization of Indigenous staff on campus and overworking staff to compensate for lack of sup-

## INDIGENOUS STUDENTS

port. They do not receive adequate funding to compensate for inviting Elders, Knowledge Keepers, Healers, as well as other Indigenous Peoples to be involved an appropriate amount on campuses in supporting students and holding cultural events and Ceremonies, which is necessary to promote Indigenous Students wellbeing and mental health. Students are concerned that Indigenous Student Centres are targets for racism, vandalization, and are not respected or honoured by the non-Indigenous campus community.

Indigenous students do not have consistent access to Indigenous counselors or mental health services, nor are campus wellness centers connected to services and supports provided for Indigenous students within the Indigenous Student Centre. Students are concerned that universities do not have easily accessible mental health and wellbeing support when it comes to dealing with intergenerational trauma, addiction, etc.

### **Colonial & Racist Classrooms**

Indigenous students face racism and microaggressions in the classroom at the hands of students, staff, faculty, and other instructors, and they are rarely made aware of the reporting process when racism occurs should such a reporting process exist. This is exacerbated by the fact that classroom content and discussions often perpetuate a misunderstanding of Indigenous affairs, culture, and history and course content often offers racist and problematic themes, ideologies, and information. However, Indigenous students are also often tokenized, exploited, and made to represent ALL Indigenous Peoples, and Indigenous students feel that they cannot speak up against professors or instructors, course content, or the institution for fear that their degree or education may be in jeopardy.

Indigenous students are also concerned about the quality and appropriateness of their education. For example, Francophone Indigenous students are often subject to linguistic barriers, lack of resources, uninformed professors, and misleading Indigenous course content that has been translated. Further, Indigenous students are often subject to “Indigenous Peoples 101” in Indigenous courses regardless of the year of study, due to the lack of prerequisites, and unless students are entering into Indigenous studies, they are not receiving an education on what should be their university’s values and expectations of

students in practicing cultural inclusion, and understanding of truthful historical and current affairs, cultural sensitivity, inclusivity, and how to be actively anti-racist.

Students are concerned about the fact that Indigenous students are often subject to outdated and stigmatized content referring to Indigenous Peoples; that they often lack access to seeing and learning their traditional language in western spaces; that non-Indigenous students’ views on Indigenous content are often prioritized; and that Indigenous professors are made to operate under western ideas of success.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Indigenous Self-Determination in Post-Secondary Institutions

A crucial step for the provincial government to support Indigenous students is to, in collaboration with Indigenous sectors and student leaders, develop, publish, and honour a plan to consult with, receive consent from, and follow Indigenous leadership when engaging in any and all work related to Indigenous Peoples at post-secondary institutions, including when implementing the recommendations set out in this paper. The provincial government should also fund an Indigenous Student Alliance that is independent of the government to promote Indigenous representation in governance and further decolonization solutions in post-secondary spaces, and make a dedicated commitment to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action and to honouring, respecting, and supporting Indigenous Peoples in post-secondary spaces, and as such the Ministry of Colleges and Universities should work with post-secondary institutions to realize the recommendations set out below, in line with the values expressed in this paper.

#### Enhancing Access to University

To enhance access to university for Indigenous students, the provincial government should create better financial support opportunities targeted specifically for Indigenous students, including, but not limited to, increasing funding for the Indigenous Student Bursary Program and advocating the federal government to expand the Post-Secondary Student Support Program. The provincial government should provide post-secondary institutions, including Student Financial Aid offices, with a comprehensive document outlining the intricacies of band funding and its relation to treaty rights, fund distribution, and the choice of First Nations to provide financial support to their students. The provincial government should also work with the federal government to expand eligibility requirements for all financial assistance programs and supports to include all self-identified Indigenous students regardless of factors such as status or blood quantum.

The provincial government should further support financial accessibility for Indigenous students by amending the eligibility requirements for the Ontario Indigenous Travel Grant to be available to any self-identified Indigenous person

who lives in a remote First Nations community regardless of their OSAP eligibility or assessment; re-evaluating the funding model for the Ontario Indigenous Travel Grant to account for distance travelled, access to public transit, and fluctuating transportation costs; and creating a grant for Indigenous students to put towards the cost of course materials or other resources helpful to participate in their education.

To increase access overall, the provincial government should provide and fund better access to cell service and the internet for First Nation and remote communities; bridge the gap between remote communities and universities by providing extra support during the application process, advocating to the federal government to re-evaluate the school funding on reserve, and aiding in the funding of specific recruitment; and provide proper resources to allow access to higher learning in on-reserve and remote high schools.

The provincial government should also provide funding to: Indigenous communities and post-secondary institutions to develop and implement recurring, mandatory training and ongoing education opportunities for non-Indigenous students, staff, and faculty to begin to decolonize institutions. They should also provide funding to post-secondary institutions' registrar's offices to cover application fees for Indigenous students so students can freely apply to post-secondary institutions. Additionally, the provincial government should create a funding program to grant First Nations and remote communities access to proper technology, and provide post-secondary institutions with a template for communications conveying important information to students.

#### Building Non-Indigenous Allies

To help build non-Indigenous allies, the provincial government should, in consultation with Indigenous sector leaders, develop a performance management and evaluation framework that allows faculty and instructors to receive performance feedback regarding the facilitation of a safe learning environment surrounding Indigenous academia and provide funding to post-secondary institutions to hire Indigenous educators to develop and implement recurring, mandatory training and ongoing education opportunities for non-Indigenous students, staff, and faculty.

## INDIGENOUS STUDENTS

### Supporting Indigenous Faculty & Staff

To support Indigenous faculty and staff, the provincial government should mandate that post-secondary institutions implement clear policies and procedures when it comes to Indigenous bias, discrimination, and harm coming from an adult in a position of power. They should also mandate that university administrations and faculties, in collaboration with local Indigenous Education Councils, develop a recruitment and retention strategy for faculty, instructors, and staff that honours Indigenous ways of knowing and does not require Indigenous faculty to hold doctorate degrees.

The provincial government should work with the Council of Ontario Universities to develop institution-specific toolkits and guidelines for search, hiring, and advancement committees that account for a broad definition of academic success that respects the endeavours, achievements, and remarkable accomplishments of Indigenous staff and faculty. This should be accompanied by a fund for post-secondary institutions to conduct equity audits, the results of which are shared publicly, to identify equity gaps in institutional hiring and retention practices across faculties, departments, and offices, and inform the creation of policy, programs, and services to be developed in support of Indigenous faculty and staff once hired. The provincial government should mandate that post-secondary institutions create and support senior-level positions for Indigenous Peoples dedicated to creating and teaching Indigenous content in education and provide funding to post-secondary institutions to hire Indigenous educators to develop and implement recurring, mandatory training and ongoing education opportunities for non-Indigenous staff and faculty.

### Data Sovereignty

To support data sovereignty, the provincial government should mandate that post-secondary institutions adhere to the First Nations principles of OCAP® along with the recognition of Indigenous Peoples' data and intellectual property, when and where it is being shared, researched, and discussed in academic settings. Further, the provincial government should responsibly and meaningfully consult with Indigenous Peoples (students, faculty, staff, educators and communities) to ensure that the Data Standards for the Identification and Monitoring of Systemic Racism can be appropriately applied to the post-sec-

ondary sector, and mandate that any collection of equity-based data should use the Data Standards for the Identification and Monitoring of Systemic Racism as amended through responsible and meaningful consultation with Indigenous students and communities.

### Access to Student Supports

To ensure Indigenous students can access needed supports, the provincial government should provide funding for post-secondary institutions to put up signage displaying information about how to find and contact the Indigenous Student Centre, as well as what events, supports, and services are happening through the Indigenous Student Centre on campus, in English, French, and local Indigenous languages. Additionally, the Ministry of Colleges and Universities should issue a statement on the importance of integrated student supports and the need for all student support services and offices to be up-to-date and able to provide students with information about the supports and services provided by the Indigenous Student Centre.

The provincial government should provide funding to student support offices to offer services in French and Indigenous languages; to post-secondary institutions to hire Indigenous educators to develop and implement recurring, mandatory training and ongoing education opportunities for non-Indigenous staff working in student support spaces; to Indigenous Student Centres through the Postsecondary Education Fund for Aboriginal Learners, without the need for recurring grant applications; and to post-secondary institutions to hire Indigenous Peoples to expand their staff within the Indigenous Student Centre to ensure that there are multiple Indigenous counsellors and Indigenous Student Support Coordinators working in secure, long-term, full-time positions.

Further, the Ministry of Colleges and Universities should work with Indigenous Student Centres on post-secondary campuses and provide the financial, resource, best practice sharing, and legislative or policy support Indigenous Student Centres and Indigenous student groups need to host ceremonies or cultural event, and the provincial government should mandate that post-secondary institutions develop a policy that outlines reporting mechanisms and accountability measures in place to respond to instances of disrespect, vandalization, or targeting of Indige-

## INDIGENOUS STUDENTS

nous Student Centres on campus.

To ensure Indigenous students receive appropriate support for their mental and physical well-being, the provincial government should provide post-secondary mental health care funding to hire Indigenous staff who can better understand and support the perspective and needs of Indigenous students; mandate that all student-facing health services staff undergo mandatory, recurrent training and ongoing education opportunities covering cultural sensitivity; provide funding for all Indigenous Student Centres to ensure all staff is trained in crisis intervention and responses; mandate that all non-Indigenous student support staff be trained in culturally appropriate crisis intervention and response to support their work with Indigenous students; provide or increase funding to Indigenous-specific crisis resources to support awareness and access to service for Indigenous post-secondary students; and provide funding to community-based Indigenous health and wellness supports to expand their capacity to support Indigenous post-secondary students whose needs are not met by on-campus resources.

### **Supporting Safe Classrooms & Indigenous Worldviews**

To support safer classrooms for Indigenous students the provincial government should mandate that post-secondary institutions make trauma-informed and anonymous reporting mechanisms be available for all students who experience racial and religious discrimination in post-secondary institutions, as well as performance management and evaluation systems that allow non-Indigenous faculty and instructors teaching Indigenous courses and content to receive performance feedback on their ability to facilitate a safe learning environment with opportunities for further training when a need is identified. This should be accompanied by funding to post-secondary institutions to hire Indigenous educators to develop and implement recurring, mandatory training and ongoing education opportunities for non-Indigenous faculty and instructors. To support Indigenous students maintain the connection they have with comfort and their mental health, the provincial government should mandate that institutions increase funding for Elders, Knowledge Holders, and Indigenous Peoples.

Additionally, the provincial government should

mandate that all courses offering an Indigenous lens, mentioning Indigenous Peoples, or teaching Indigenous ways of knowing to be reviewed by a committee of compensated Indigenous Peoples to ensure they are up to date, accurate, and appropriate. The provincial government should also provide funding to post-secondary institutions to hire a committee of Francophone Indigenous Peoples to review all translated Indigenous material, resources, and course content, and provide funding to post-secondary institutions to hire Francophone Indigenous translators to ensure that resources for Indigenous Peoples are translated into the French language using an accessible Franco-Ontarian dialect. The provincial government should mandate the requirement of prerequisites upon entering Indigenous courses in order to assess the students' knowledge of Indigenous Peoples and offer a more comprehensive understanding through the course content, particularly in upper-year courses. This should be accompanied by a mandate that post-secondary institutions, under the leadership of the Indigenous Education Council, implement a required education component for all non-Indigenous first-year students that teaches cultural sensitivity, inclusivity, and how to be anti-racist.

The provincial government should also create a grant to compensate Indigenous Peoples for their knowledge when shared in academic spaces; provide funding to Indigenous Education Councils at post-secondary institutions to hire Indigenous Peoples to develop and review any and all Indigenous content; provide funding to ensure that all post-secondary institutions offer classes reflecting the language of the Peoples of those territories; provide funding for every post-secondary institution to hire and/or invite (always with appropriate offering and compensation) Indigenous Peoples including but not limited to Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and Healers to interact with and support students; provide better incentives for post-secondary institutions to prioritize Indigenous Peoples to teach Indigenous content; provide funding for Indigenous librarians to develop a standard guideline for citing Indigenous knowledge and oral history; and provide funding for the establishment and the long-term continuation of Indigenous Education Councils on each post-secondary campus to support Indigenous-led research, course teaching, and all other academics.