

# **President's Response to the Dec 14, 2017 Report of the Presidential Advisory Council (PAC) on Decolonization**

*Acadia University is proudly located in Mi'kma'ki,  
the ancestral territory of the Mi'kmaq People.*

## **Moving Acadia Forward in Reconciliation**

As a nation, Canada is engaged in an important national dialogue on truth and reconciliation, and how we move forward together to create a new partnership with Indigenous peoples and communities across this country. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was a clarion call to Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians alike, and we are working to determine how best to respond to its recommendations and its vision of a better future, not just for Indigenous peoples but for all Canadians. Within this national context, Canadian universities are also involved in dialogue, nationally, regionally, and locally. Universities Canada has adopted a set of principles (<https://www.univcan.ca/media-room/media-releases/universities-canada-principles-on-indigenous-education/>) that all Canadian universities should strive towards, and in our region, the Atlantic Association of Universities has a Working Group that is developing a truth and reconciliation action plan for institutions seeking to implement the Universities Canada principles. Acadia has been part of both the national and regional levels of this dialogue, and a new institutional approach was initiated when the PAC was established and given its mandate to prepare a set of recommendations on how Acadia could respond more fully to the challenges TRC.

I want to thank the members of the PAC for their work in preparing their report, which I have reviewed in the context of the PAC's preliminary report in June 2017, which included the production of a handbook entitled "Working with Indigenous Peoples at Acadia University – Handbook and Protocols". This handbook has proven to be a valuable tool to increase understanding of Indigenous cultures and knowledge on campus and a go-to source of information about protocols, services and supports on campus. The handbook was an important first step in increasing greater understanding in the Acadia community and assisting Acadia staff, faculty and students in understanding cultural protocols. Consequently, I will be making the Handbook available on the website of the Office of the President and once the Acadia Decolonization website is active, it will be placed on that site as well.

The second PAC report provides a series of short-, medium-, and long-term recommendations for Acadia and I am pleased to say that I am able to accept either completely or the intent and direction of all of the recommendations. The implementation of these recommendations will

help Acadia become more compliant with the UA principles and will go a long way to crafting a good response from Acadia towards the challenges of reconciliation and decolonization.

Below I have provided a respond to each of the 15 recommendations, and I have developed an Action Plan table which is attached. I look forward to working with all of you on the next critical steps in Acadia's journey towards reconciliation and decolonization. Working together, we will ensure that Acadia is not only a welcoming and supportive learning community for Indigenous students, but that it is also taking a leading role in how universities should be working with Indigenous communities in the true spirit of truth and reconciliation, and doing our part in the process of decolonizing our relationship with Indigenous Canadians.

## **Recommendations for Immediate Action**

### **1. Community Engagement Plan**

- A community engagement plan should be developed to formally establish meaningful dialogue with Mi'kmaw/Indigenous communities and other stakeholders through representation on various Acadia bodies (see below) and through outreach initiatives by invitation. Priority needs to be given to the engagement of our four local Mi'kmaw communities – Glooscap, Annapolis Valley, Bear River and Acadia First Nations, and to the Native Council of Nova Scotia which is the representative organization for non-status and off-reserve Indigenous Peoples. This extends to engagement with other related organizations such as Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey, Kwilmu'kw Maw-klusuaqn (Mi'kmaq Rights Initiative), Indigenous Students Society of Acadia (ISSA), and the Aboriginal Education Committee of the Department of Labour and Advanced Education.

We also need to engage with various campus bodies such as the Senate, Board of Governors, Faculties, Departments, and the Student Union. Finally, we recommend that a survey of students and faculty members be developed to gather data on current knowledge, practices, and levels of engagement with decolonization across faculties.

**President's Response:** As we move forward it is very important that we engage with our regional Mi'kmaq communities and organisations but also with the internal Acadia community in a new path towards reconciliation. This is a path to be travelled together, and we must be able to demonstrate a collective willingness to be part of the solution to the issues faced by Indigenous Canadians. I accept this recommendation, and will ask the PAC to develop a proposal regarding the nature of the plan and resources required to implement it successfully. The survey should include staff and administration at Acadia, as well as faculty and students, and should form a component of the Environmental Scan (see Recommendation 3 below). The Community Engagement Plan will be a key component of our strategic planning discussions, and it will be one of two top priorities for the PAC and the University going forward.

**2. Presidential Advisory Council** - The Council was initially formed as an *ad hoc* advisory group to prepare recommendations for the President. It is clear that this council needs to be a

standing body of the university with a direct reporting line to the President. We recommend that the Council be co-Chaired by Acadia's Advisor and Coordinator of Indigenous Affairs and an appointed member of the local Mi'kmaw community. *Ex-officio* positions should include the Dean of Arts, Executive Director of Student Services, and the Executive Director of Communications and Marketing. The remaining council positions should be comprised of official representatives from Glooscap, Annapolis Valley, Bear River, and Acadia First Nations, the Native Council of Nova Scotia, as well as at least one elder; other members of the Mi'kmaq community; Acadia Faculty members; representatives from the Indigenous Students Society of Acadia; and Staff members. Terms of reference for the Council will also need to be drafted with clear direction on the Council's role in approving Acadia-led initiatives so as to ensure that protocols are being met.

**President's Response:** A formal body comprising internal and external members, with direct reporting to the President, is a critical part of any university's pathway towards reconciliation. Many universities across Canada have established Aboriginal Education Councils to provide for a direct link between the university and Aboriginal communities, and to provide advice to the President and the university as a whole on all matters pertaining to Aboriginal and Indigenous affairs on the campus. Consequently, I accept this recommendation but in a slightly revised form. The PAC will continue in its present form for the time being and be charged with recommending Terms of Reference and a Constitution for the establishment of an Acadia University Aboriginal Education Council (AEC) that will report directly to the President. This work will be done in the context of the environmental scan (Recommendation 3) of what other universities across Canada have done to create formal Aboriginal advisory bodies. Once in place, the AEC will replace the PAC as Acadia's formal advisory body on Aboriginal and Indigenous matters affecting the University. The development of the AEC will be one of the top two priorities for the PAC and the University going forward.

**3. Environmental Scan** - The Council should complete an environmental scan of Acadia's current situation regarding student support, programming and facilities to determine the priorities and goals of decolonization. It should also survey the initiatives and resources at other universities both in the region and nationally. This work is partly complete through Acadia's participation in the AAU Working Group on Aboriginal Education and the tracking of our accomplishments via the AAU TRC Reconciliation Action Plan.

**President's Response:** I accept this recommendation and it constitutes part of the work necessary to implement recommendations 1 and 2. The survey of Acadia faculty, staff, students and administration referenced in Recommendation 1 should constitute a component of the Environmental Scan. Additional resources will be provided to the PAC in order for it to complete the tasks required in implementing Recommendations 1 to 3.

**4. Indigenous Student Support** – Acadia's Indigenous student population has grown dramatically in a very short period of time. We have realized an increase in self-identified Indigenous students of almost 30% in the last year, bringing our total of self-identified domestic Indigenous students to about 100. In addition, there are a number of other Indigenous students

who have not self-identified, plus those from other countries. With that growth comes the need for an expansion of student support and resources. Acadia will need to examine its recruitment, admission, funding, retention, outreach, enrolment rates, and general support for Indigenous students in order to build a community and enhance a system that is welcoming, supportive, and relevant for Indigenous students. We also feel strongly that the same analysis should apply to African Nova Scotian students. Our Indigenous students come from many different communities/groups across Canada and have a unique suite of concerns and issues relative to non-Indigenous students, but at present we have little support for those students beyond a part-time advisor and a resource room. There is no operating budget or dedicated funding available for financial support, supplies, or activities. Adequate funding to support these needs must be established as soon as possible.

**President's Response:** Providing an appropriate level of support to Indigenous students is critical to Acadia's ability to become a more welcoming learning environment for Indigenous students. The reference to students of African Nova Scotian descent is also important, and while we engage with developing better support for Indigenous students we must also be cognizant of the issues being faced by African Nova Scotia students. This recommendation will be addressed in the upcoming process for developing the 2018-19 budget.

**5. Advisor and Coordinator of Indigenous Affairs** - At present, Acadia employs a part-time Aboriginal Student Advisor. It is clear that the scope of this position has transcended far beyond that of student advising to incorporate leadership in the various decolonization initiatives at Acadia. We strongly recommend that a full-time position be created to combine Indigenous student advising and coordination of Indigenous affairs at Acadia. This position should dually report to the Executive Director of Student Services (student advising) and the President of Acadia University (coordination of Indigenous Affairs). The office should also be provided with a budget for student support initiatives as well as outreach and professional development for the coordinator.

**President's Response:** A full-time advisor on Indigenous affairs is a must if Acadia is to deliver on any of the recommendations in this report. I accept this recommendation, and funding for increasing the current part-time position to a full-time one will either be identified within the current budget year or be included in the 2018-19 budget. We will also look at establishing an Office of Indigenous Affairs to coordinate Indigenous activities at Acadia, working with the ISSA and supported by an Indigenous Circle comprised of Indigenous faculty, staff, students, and external community members. In this context, we should also review the physical location of Welkaqnik to see if it is serving the needs of our Indigenous students as our campus Aboriginal Gathering Space and Resource Centre.

**6. Campus Literacy.** We acknowledge that there has been a significant growth in the quality and quantity of discussions, actions, and activities relating to decolonization in recent years. To ensure that these conversations are happening across the campus and not just in certain clusters, we recommend that a strategy for campus literacy be developed. All faculty, staff, and students should be given opportunities to learn about reconciliation, Indigenous peoples and

specifically Mi'kmaw culture, treaties and treaty rights, and decolonization more broadly. This should include professional development sessions, guest speakers and facilitators, structured discussion sessions, and outreach opportunities to our local Mi'kmaw communities. This campus literacy strategy should be developed based on direction from Indigenous staff/faculty at Acadia, Indigenous members of the Presidential Advisory Council and the Mi'kmaw community at large.

**President's Response:** As Acadia ramps up its activities to increase Indigenisation on campus, a higher level of discourse and dialogue is to be expected and encouraged. Inevitably, different viewpoints will be expressed and debated, but it is important that this be carried out within a broad context of a respectful campus dialogue. I accept this recommendation.

**7. Decolonization Website** - A website is under construction, which will be a central hub containing decolonization resources, the recommendations of the PAC, and a list of campus events relating to decolonization. This should be centrally located in the Acadia web environment and displayed prominently and accessibly. This website is one means to improve campus literacy.

**President's Response:** I accept this recommendation, and we should move quickly to get the site active as soon as possible, and it should be linked to the Acadia home page, as well as the Office of the President, Indigenous Affairs, and any other appropriate web pages.

**8. Territorial Acknowledgement.** The PAC will consult with Mi'kmaw communities/ organizations to determine the most appropriate wording and/or approach for acknowledging Acadia's position on unceded Mi'kmaw territory. Once this is established, it should be the default language adopted where appropriate. The spoken acknowledgement is appropriate for major university events such as Convocation and Matriculation. For other meetings and events, we recommend that a written acknowledgement be included as part of meeting agendas, programs, and minutes, as these are official documents and are historical records of Acadia's activities. We also recommend that email signatures and official letterhead, particularly for those in leadership positions, contain this acknowledgement.

**President's Response:** Recognition of the traditional territory is already being used voluntarily on campus, and in many university communications and at events. The next step is to have a statement formally adopted. I accept this recommendation.

## **Recommendations for Intermediate-term Action**

**9. Mawio'mi** - This annual gathering of Mi'kmaw community members, elders and officials, along with the Acadia and Wolfville communities has become an important annual or biannual event. In addition to being a celebration of Mi'kmaw culture and an important opportunity for

the campus and community to learn from our Mi'kmaw knowledge keepers, the Mawio'mi is also an important piece in the reconciliation process. Through stories, songs, films and music videos, we become more familiar with the destructive legacies of the justice system, education system, and the assimilative policies of past governments. It is therefore crucial that this event be given a stable base to support its cause. This requires an annual budget and planning structure rather than relying on volunteer faculty and community members with unknown and unstable funding sources each year. We recommend that the Advancement team fundraise towards establishing an endowed fund that could provide stable funding going forward.

**President's Response:** The Mawio'mi event is already well established as an Acadia activity, and it should continue as an annual occurrence. It is important that we formally recognize Mawio'mi as an Acadia event, and that we retain it as a true community activity, engaging those who have been instrumental in building it from its grass roots initiation. I accept this recommendation and starting in the 2018-19 budget year, a formal budget allocation will be assigned to the Coordinator of Indigenous Affairs to support Mawio'mi. Eventually this would become an activity of the Office of Indigenous Affairs.

**10. Artwork and Indigenous Gifts** -The Acadia Art Gallery retains a small collection of Mi'kmaw art works. These should be displayed prominently on campus with suitable explanatory texts about the artists and nature of the work. We also recommend that local Mi'kmaw artists be commissioned to create new works for the campus. We are pleased that the Hope Mural is now permanently displayed in the Student Union Building. We must build on this in order to establish a visible Mi'kmaw presence on the campus, particularly in and outside Rhodes Hall where the Indigenous Students Resource Centre is located. Protocols should be established for the acceptance of Indigenous gifts, including works of art that ensures respectful treatment, appropriate acknowledgement and documentation of pieces which clearly outlines conditions of use. A sub-committee of the PAC dealing with art must be created, which would include the Advisor and Coordinator of Indigenous Affairs and the Director of the Acadia University Art Gallery as well as at least one local Mi'kmaw artist.

**President's Response:** Ensuring that we have visible and appropriate displays of Indigenous art on campus is an important aspect of creating an environment that reflects our location on traditional territory and valuing the rich artistic output of Indigenous culture in Canada. Once the AEC is established, a sub-group or circle on this issue should be tasked with developing proposals for the University regarding the collection and display of Indigenous art and artifacts.

**11. Mi'kmaq Language Course** - The development of curriculum needs to be widespread and must proceed after consultation and a review of other university curricula. In response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action, we believe that we should begin to provide introductory courses in Mi'kmaq for all interested students, and that this should satisfy language course requirements in Arts degrees. It would be challenging to find a fluent Mi'kmaw speaker in the local area, so likely this would have to be facilitated through distance education. Online and distance courses are available through Cape Breton University, St. FX University, St. Thomas University and the University of New Brunswick. An articulation agreement must be

developed with these institutions or others to allow for an easy registration and credit allocation process.

**President's Response:** Reviving Indigenous languages is one of the central principles of reconciliation, and this must be a priority for Acadia as it is for any university in Canada. I accept this recommendation but we need to move on this more quickly by collaborating with the NSCC, CBU, and the Maple Leaf universities to deliver courses in the Mi'kmaq language. I will consult with the Vice-President (Academic) on how best to address this recommendation.

**12. Elder in Residence** - Several universities retain an Elder in Residence to help guide the institution. We believe strongly that Acadia would benefit greatly by employing a Mi'kmaw Elder in Residence and we encourage the Advancement team to secure an endowed fund to establish this. Preliminary discussions about residence options for Indigenous students are in progress and involve Indigenous students, the Aboriginal Student Advisor and Residence Life. One potential element under consideration is regular access to an Elder. The Elder in Residence could fill this role.

**President's Response:** As Acadia builds its capacity to support Indigenous students, faculty, and staff, the appointment of an Elder-in-Residence will be an important step in that direction. Typically, AECs have one or two Elders as members of the Council, and this would be the first step to implementing this recommendation. I accept this recommendation, and once the AEC has been established and we have addressed the issue of the Advisor and Coordinator position and the associated budget to support Indigenous Affairs. Advancement will look at the possibility of including support for this initiative, as well as other supports for Acadia's Indigenous activities, in the capital campaign.

## **Recommendations for Longer-term Action**

**13. Governance** - We recommend that the University Senate, the Board of Governors, and the Acadia Student's Union allocate standing positions for Indigenous representatives. The University Senate should create five standing voting positions that would be appointed from each of Glooscap, Annapolis Valley, Acadia, and Bear River First Nations, and the Native Council of Nova Scotia. We recommend that the Assembly of Nova Scotia Chiefs appoint at least one standing voting member to Acadia's Board of Governors. Finally, the ASU should consider adding standing positions for Indigenous and African Nova Scotian representatives to its Students Representative Council.

**President's Response:** I will bring these recommendations to the attention of the Senate, the Board of Governors and the ASU for their consideration. I agree with the PAC that this is a longer-term recommendation, any changes to the University's governing bodies should only be undertaken when the AEC has been established, and when the immediate and shorter-term recommendations have been implemented with some degree of success. Ultimately, it will be up to those respective bodies to determine if any changes are to be made to their composition.

**14. Indigenous Faculty Positions** - We recommend that the Academic Planning Committee develop an institutional plan for the recruitment and retention of Faculty members who are Indigenous and who have expertise in Indigenous ways of knowing and learning in various subjects in all faculties. It is not possible to rely on individual academic units themselves to create positions in the absence of an institutional strategy. In addition to allocating positions, Acadia must examine its hiring practices, standard qualifications for faculty positions, career support systems, and its community environment to assure that qualified candidates may be recruited, fairly evaluated, and retained. This may necessitate changes to the Collective Bargaining Agreement and we encourage both the administration and Faculty Association to examine the relevant articles in the CBA for systemic barriers to recruitment and retention of Indigenous Faculty members. This will necessitate broad consultation and a review of practices at other institutions.

**President's Response:** The hiring of Indigenous faculty members is one of the most lasting impacts that any university can do to increase Indigenisation on campus. It is also one of the most expensive. I agree with the recommendation that this cannot be left to individual academic units, and that it must be part of an institutional strategy. I will ask the Vice-President (Academic) to follow up on this recommendation with the Senate APC

**15. Curriculum** - We acknowledge that several Faculty members and Departments have already established Indigenous content and courses as part of Acadia's curriculum. We recommend that the Senate Curriculum Policy Committee discuss a strategy for developing courses and content throughout the various subject areas across the campus, with an examination of best practices for delivering such courses/content. With a critical mass of courses, the possibility also exists for the creation of an Interdisciplinary program in Indigenous Studies. Please note such a program would require a stable funding base to thrive. The development of curriculum should proceed only after the wide engagement process is well underway and after an institutional plan for the recruitment of Faculty has been established.

**President's Response:** The development of Indigenous curriculum and the hiring of Indigenous faculty go hand-in-hand. At present, we must utilize the resources that we have to provide Indigenous related courses, but we can also look to ways by which we can incorporate Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing into our existing curricula. This cannot be done without due care and consultation with Indigenous people and communities. Once the AEC is established, one of its initial tasks will be to develop a Coordinated Indigenous Academic Strategy for Acadia that would be presented to the Senate for consideration and approval.