

**Presidential Advisory Council on Decolonization**  
**Report to the President**  
**14 December 2017**

**Preface:**

The progress and initial recommendations outlined below stem from incomplete engagement with local Mi'kmaw communities and other Indigenous communities/organizations that are linked to our student body and faculty/staff. We expect that with improved community engagement and with the learning that goes along with implementing these initiatives, that our guidance and priorities will evolve and require updating into the future.

**Summary of Progress:**

The Presidential Advisory Council (PAC) on Decolonization has met twice in the Fall of 2017 to discuss campus decolonization initiatives. The recommendations below follow from these discussions, as well as those with the Department of Labour and Advanced Education. The PAC has not yet formally engaged with Mi'kmaq communities, political bodies and advocacy groups beyond the community members of the PAC, and we maintain that this is a essential step in developing a comprehensive decolonization plan. Accordingly, the first recommendation below is that we draft a community engagement plan for 2018. This will take time and multiple sessions, and there should be no pressure put on Mi'kmaq communities to comply with any kind of timeline or deadline. Indeed, this conversation should be ongoing. Likewise, recommendations involving the support of current Indigenous students and the preliminary functioning of the PAC need immediate action and are categorized accordingly.

We have provided second and third tiers of recommendations that have emerged from conversation so far and are somewhat self-evident. We believe these recommendations below be implemented as quickly as possible, however they still require considerable research and deliberation.

We also want to acknowledge two substantial achievements of the Council to date. The Handbook of Practices and Protocols for working with Indigenous Peoples has been very well received and should be made available centrally via the Decolonization website which is under construction. In addition, the permanent raising of the Mi'kmaq Grand Council flag atop University Hall is an historic achievement that we hope will catalyze the decolonization process.

**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.

**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.

**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.

**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.

**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.

**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.

**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.

**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.

### **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.

**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.

**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.

**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.

### **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.

**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.

**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.