



# **POLICY PAPER**

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## ***Indigenous Students***

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## Introduction

The production of this report has involved thorough literature searches and ongoing consultations with appropriate stakeholders and students at McMaster. The ultimate aim of this report is to enhance the educational experience of Indigenous McMaster Students. However, notably, the research undertaken involved generalizability as not all Indigenous students at McMaster partook in the consultation process. We acknowledge that all learners, including Indigenous students, are diverse and unique in their needs, identities, learning styles, and cultures.

It is important that Indigenous students are supported throughout their studies at McMaster University in a variety of ways. Approximately 528 Full-Time Indigenous students are enrolled at McMaster University<sup>1</sup>, and it is important that any undue barriers to education are removed to ensure that this number continues growing. Retaining and attracting Indigenous students to postsecondary education involves consideration of multiple factors, opinions, and perspectives. However, most importantly, it involves consideration of what is best for these students through understanding the unique needs of this population of students, understanding the systemic barriers they face, being familiar with the policies and legislation currently in place, encouraging reconciliation efforts and accessibility. This is because colonialism, racism, social exclusion, food insecurity, unemployment, poverty, limited access to housing, poor health and a myriad of other issues may face Indigenous communities daily and confront Indigenous students to varying degrees.<sup>2</sup>

This policy outlines principles, concerns, and recommendations under key sections including respect and recognition, accessibility to education, employment, academics, health and wellness, and financing education.

For the purposes of this policy, an Indigenous student will be defined as:

- Any McMaster Students Union (MSU) member who identifies as First Nations, Métis, or Inuit, in Canada.
- First Nations may include status and non-status Indigenous individuals, as defined by the Indian Act<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> McMaster University, “McMaster University Fact Book 2018 | 2019,” n.d., <https://www.mcmaster.ca/vpacademic/documents/FactBook2018-2019.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Pamela Rose Toulouse, “What Matters in Indigenous Education: Implementing a Vision Committed to Holism, Diversity and Engagement,” People for Education, accessed November 25, 2019, <https://peopleforeducation.ca/report/what-matters-in-indigenous-education/>.

<sup>3</sup> Pamela Rose Toulouse, “What Matters in Indigenous Education: Implementing a Vision Committed to Holism, Diversity and Engagement,” People for Education, accessed November 25, 2019, <https://peopleforeducation.ca/report/what-matters-in-indigenous-education/>.

## Acronyms

ISS - Indigenous Student Services

## RESPECT AND RECOGNITION

### Land Acknowledgement

**Principle:** A land acknowledgement is an important first step towards decolonization and reconciliation.

**Principle:** The University should ensure that all efforts are taken in order to further decolonization and reconciliation on campus.

**Concern:** The name of Indigenous lands read during land acknowledgments are often mispronounced.

**Concern:** The University's campus lacks visual acknowledgements of Indigenous lands.

**Recommendation:** The significance of land acknowledgements and the history behind them should be disseminated during Education, Outreach and Support Program sessions held by the Equity and Inclusion Office.

**Recommendation:** The Equity and Inclusion office should create an online video that teaches the pronunciation of the land acknowledgement that takes place at McMaster.

**Recommendation:** The University should further recognize its usage of Indigenous lands by having a Wampum bell present at Senate & Board of Governors meetings.

**Recommendation:** The University should position the Haudenosaunee & Anishinaabe flags permanently on campus in recognition of the intrinsic Indigenous culture and land on which it participates and resides on.

**Recommendation:** A "Dish with One Spoon" flag should be placed on campus as it symbolizes the pre-colonial Wampum Treaty.

Land acknowledgement brings recognition to the history of colonization and recognizes the lands of Indigenous peoples.<sup>4</sup> Reciting land acknowledgements is the

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<sup>4</sup> "Native-Land.ca | Our Home on Native Land," accessed February 18, 2020, <https://native-land.ca/territory-acknowledgement/>.

first step in decolonizing and reconciliation with Indigenous peoples.<sup>5</sup> McMaster University has made efforts to recite land acknowledgments at some events and meetings. Such efforts need to be furthered in order to further decolonization and reconciliation on campus. Land acknowledgements should not be words without meaning and their significance should be known across McMaster's campus. The MSU recommends that the correct pronunciation and significance of land acknowledgements be taught to those who recite them at meetings and events.

## Support and Accessibility to Support

**Principle:** Indigenous students should be made aware of social supports, services, opportunities and funding opportunities that are designated for them when they enter university.

**Principle:** All Indigenous students should be aware of the services offered to them by the University.

**Concern:** Indigenous students who accept their offers to university are not effectively notified of services, opportunities, social programming and funding opportunities for Indigenous students.

**Recommendation:** The University should provide an overview of the services available to Indigenous students when they accept their offer to McMaster and multiple times throughout the school year.

**Recommendation:** The ISS and Student Success Center (SSC) should work with their communication departments in order to create better communication strategies in disseminating information to Indigenous students.

**Recommendation:** ISS should work closely with the Student Success Center to increase attendance of Indigenous students at first year navigation workshops.

Indigenous students at the University may struggle to locate resources as they are not widely available to all students. In addition to the resources available through the University, there are also resources available through the government.<sup>6</sup> Further, there are specific supports and services that are created for Indigenous students but many of these students may miss out on opportunities if they are not effectively advertised. The Indigenous Student Services at McMaster have a plethora of well created services such as the Summer Transition Program that would help students

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<sup>5</sup> "What Is the Significance of Acknowledging the Indigenous Land We Stand on? | CBC News," accessed February 19, 2020, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/territorial-acknowledgements-indigenous-1.4175136>.

<sup>6</sup> "Indigenous Education in Ontario," accessed February 19, 2020, <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/aboriginal/supporting.html>.

transition to McMaster from high school.<sup>7</sup> However, all students eligible should effectively be made aware of these supports and services. The MSU recommends that ISS should prioritize communication with Indigenous groups and students on campus so that all Indigenous students are aware of the support and services that are available to them. In order to achieve this, the ISS may consider expanding their advertising efforts to social media through recruiting students to aid them and offer insight in this pursuit. Students may be able to suggest effective strategies through their own experiences of using the ISS email list and social media sites. In addition, the student service information ISS provides to students upon their acceptance of enrolment at McMaster should be given at multiple occurrences so that students are reminded of opportunities they may have access to.

Welcome Week at McMaster offers students the opportunity to learn about academics, faculties, community, wellness, safety and entertainment at McMaster.<sup>8</sup> The Student Success Centre often advertises and offers many workshops during this week to help students transition into University. In addition, the Student Success Centre (SSC) at McMaster holds a variety of workshops to help students navigate academics and extracurriculars throughout the year.<sup>9</sup> The ISS can work with the SSC to advertise these services to Indigenous students during Welcome Week and throughout the school year by means of an improved communication strategy.

## **ACCESSABILITY TO EDUCATION**

### Transportation

**Principle:** All Indigenous students should have access to transportation to attend post-secondary.

**Principle:** Indigenous students merit access to adequate, grant-based funding for the sake of travel to and from their home, whether on or off reserve.

**Concern:** Many prospective Indigenous students cannot attend post-secondary institutions because of geographical barriers and/or transportation issues.

**Concern:** Indigenous students at McMaster often choose between full-time study away from home over work and committing to personal responsibilities.

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<sup>7</sup> “Summer Transition Program,” accessed February 19, 2020, <https://indigenous.mcmaster.ca/future-students/summer-transition-program>

<sup>8</sup> “Welcome Week - Student Success Centre,” accessed February 19, 2020, <https://studentsuccess.mcmaster.ca/welcome-week/>.

<sup>9</sup> “Home - Student Success Centre,” accessed February 19, 2020, <https://studentsuccess.mcmaster.ca/>.

**Concern:** There is a lack of accessible transportation to and from remote Indigenous communities.

**Concern:** Costs of commuting puts a strain on Indigenous students and grants such as the Ontario Distance Grant do not adequately cover all costs related to travel incurred by students.

**Concern:** Students are only eligible for the Ontario Distance Grant if they have applied for OSAP.

**Recommendation:** The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should create a Student Travel Grant, specific to the needs of Indigenous students with wider eligibility criteria.

**Recommendation:** The University should give the Indigenous Student Services office the ability to manage this grant funding and facilitate distribution to students.

For many Indigenous students, traveling to and from school is a significant challenge.<sup>10</sup> The distance to university indeed affects the accessibility of post-secondary education. Lower enrollment and active engagement in post-secondary education from students residing in rural or remote areas such as reserves can in part be explained by the higher transportation costs, they may be subject to.<sup>11</sup> Further, costs become even more significant when students who have relocated to cities to attend post-secondary institutions also need to visit home again on major holidays.<sup>12</sup> In extension of such transportation barriers to students visiting home from Hamilton, the bus company Greyhound has recently cut services in most of Northern Ontario despite being one of the primary modes of transport to and from cities in remote or rural areas. In turn, this disproportionately affects Indigenous students who may have relied on this method of transportation.

Given the previous cuts to the grant portion of the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) concerted with the amalgamation of the previous Ontario Distance Grant with OSAP, there is notably a need to address the lack of adequate grant-based funding for transportation costs incurred by Indigenous students.

In response to the large costs required to travel to remote communities, the lack of public transport, and airfare costs, the implementation of a specific Indigenous travel grant should be considered. In addition to the issue posited above, it should be recognized that students who do not apply to OSAP are not eligible to receive

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<sup>10</sup> "Canada's Indigenous Peoples' Access to Post-Secondary Education: The Spirit of the 'New Buffalo' | SpringerLink," accessed February 19, 2020, [https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-981-10-4062-7\\_7](https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-981-10-4062-7_7).

<sup>11</sup> Kelvin K. Ogilvie and Art Eggleton, P.C., "Opening the Door: Reducing Barriers to Post-Secondary Education in Canada," June 21, 2011, <https://sencanada.ca/content/sen/committee/411/soci/rep/rep06dec11-e.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd., "Best Practices in Increasing Aboriginal Postsecondary Enrolment Rates," May 2002; Judy Hardes, "Retention of Aboriginal Students in Post-Secondary Education," 2006, [https://ciel.viu.ca/sites/default/files/approaches\\_to\\_ab\\_ed\\_in\\_canada.pdf](https://ciel.viu.ca/sites/default/files/approaches_to_ab_ed_in_canada.pdf).

compensation for travel costs that are considered in the OSAP application. Though Indigenous students may not apply to government assistance for a variety of reasons, the introduction of an Indigenous travel grant can help students receive funding for transportation. If this funding is given to the ISS at respective universities, they may then decide how to allocate funding and work directly with the student applications while also being able to acknowledge different student cases.

## Early Outreach

**Principle:** All willing and qualified Indigenous students should have access to higher education.

**Principal:** All prospective Indigenous students should be aware of the academic programs and services offered through the University.

**Concern:** Many prospective Indigenous students may not attend postsecondary institutions because they are unaware of the application process and admission requirements.

**Concern:** Prospective Indigenous students living in urban areas, are not fully engaged in the recruitment process and/or outreach efforts.

**Concern:** Indigenous students attending the University may not be fully aware of the academic programs or services provided.

**Recommendation:** McMaster should increase the promotion of post-secondary education opportunities at the University through greater outreach efforts.

**Recommendation:** ISS should increase communications via social media or other means of marketing in urban areas.

**Recommendation:** McMaster should provide more funding to the ISS to cover travel costs of commuting to a greater number of communities for University enrollment outreach efforts.

In the efforts to increase the enrolment of Indigenous students, the quality and number of resources should match accordingly. Engagement efforts should be effective and prospective students should be reached in the process. This includes engaging parents of students, administrators, other educators and Indigenous organizations in both on-reserve and off-reserve and in multiple settings. As stated in the consultations with ISS, currently staff in these services attend enrolment and application information sessions at high schools. However, they do not have the resources to outreach to communities further away than those nearby and to a greater number of schools. As such, additional funding is needed to increase in person outreach efforts.

Outreach efforts can also take place on social media. Thus, ISS should consider building their online admissions services internet presence. This may include holding online live question and answer sessions with students from high schools or recording videos to educate students on the application process, requirements, services offered at the University, etc.

Greater resources in regards to funding for ISS outreach efforts may also allow them to contact urban high schools that may be seeking partnerships with University ISS to promote post-secondary education to Indigenous students.

## **EMPLOYMENT**

### **Employment opportunities**

**Principle:** Indigenous students should be provided opportunities for professional development, whether through work-study opportunities or through interactions with community.

**Principle:** Indigenous students should have the opportunity to engage in experiential learning opportunities.

**Concern:** Many indigenous students often do not have connections to workplace/future employers that other students have.

**Concern:** The eligibility criteria for the Work Study Program at McMaster does not factor in the unique needs of Indigenous students.

**Recommendation:** McMaster University should increase funding for further work-study placements, internships, mentorship programs, and opportunities for cultural learning.

**Recommendation:** McMaster University should increase the overall number of seats in the work study program and hold seats in the work study program for Indigenous students.

Throughout the past decade, Indigenous youth have experienced greater unemployment rates than their non-Indigenous counterparts.<sup>13</sup> Many indigenous students pursue education at McMaster University to attain full time employment in the field in which they are interested or to pursue further education. Work opportunities for students not only provide students with work experience they can utilize in the future but they also positively enhance their critical thinking and

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<sup>13</sup> "Indigenous Employment and Skills Strategies in Canada - En - OECD," accessed February 19, 2020, <https://www.oecd.org/canada/indigenous-employment-and-skills-strategies-in-canada-9789264300477-en.htm>.

interpersonal skills.<sup>14</sup> As such, it is vital that the University look into alternative ways of providing Indigenous students with the resources they need in order to foster the skills that will help them succeed in the workforce during post-secondary education or after graduation. The work study program at McMaster can aid in the development of these skills and provide students with an opportunity.<sup>15</sup> Currently, students must be considered full time in order to apply; however, many Indigenous students are part time students and thus are ineligible for such opportunities. Following suit, the MSU recommends that the parameters of the eligibility criteria for the work study program for Indigenous students be reconsidered. The MSU recommends that the funding for such programs should also be increased so as to provide greater opportunity for students to participate in these programs. Increasing the number of seats in the program with greater funding while creating specific seats for Indigenous students may allow for more Indigenous students to partake in the program while also mitigating the issues that would arise if there was a decreased number of seats for all students.

## ACADEMICS

### Academic Accommodation:

**Principle:** Academic accommodations should be considered for Indigenous students for whom travel to and from the university and/or scheduling around life commitments is difficult.

**Concern:** Many qualified Indigenous students may be able to attend classes at post-secondary education due to distance of institutions and conflicts with their personal/professional schedules.

**Recommendation:** McMaster should implement an Intensive Learning Mode policy that allows for students who cannot fully commit to daily travel and/or living on or off-campus. Intensive Learning Mode allows for Indigenous students to reside and study on/off-campus for one full week, while returning home for the remainder of the month to continue with personal and/or professional lives.

McMaster University aims to increase Indigenous student enrolment and can do so by creating alternative pathways for enrolment of prospective Indigenous learners.

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<sup>14</sup> Miriam Kramer and Alex Usher, "Work-Integrated Learning and Career-Ready Students: Examining the Evidence" (Higher Education Strategy Associates, November 2011), <https://higheredstrategy.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/InsightBrief5-FINAL-1.pdf>.

<sup>15</sup> "Work Program - Office of the Registrar | McMaster University," accessed November 11, 2019, <https://registrar.mcmaster.ca/financial-aid/work-program/>.

Another incentive for Indigenous students to enrol at McMaster University is to have their personal and professional lives accommodated through what is known as Intensive Learning Mode, which is used by Indigenous post-secondary institutes in Ontario. This method of learning varies across Indigenous institutes; however, it allows for the student to live and intensively study on campus for one full week out of the month and spend the remaining of the month back in their home community to resume personal and/or professional responsibilities. In this method, the student still maintains a full-time course load and does not have to sacrifice pursuing his/her education.<sup>16</sup>

## Curriculum:

**Principle:** Indigenous students, and communities, should be represented in course content that appropriately and accurately reflects their rich histories and traditions.

**Principle:** All students should have an understanding of contemporary and historical Indigenous issues and culture.

**Principle:** Indigenous courses and content should be easily accessible to students.

**Concern:** Misrepresented Indigenous content can affect non-Indigenous peoples' perceptions of Indigenous people.

**Concern:** There is no regulation or oversight on the accuracy and quality of Indigenous content taught in courses outside of the ISP.

**Concern:** Many students are not being exposed to basic knowledge surrounding Indigenous issues during their time at McMaster.

**Concern:** Not all Indigenous students have the opportunity to take Indigenous courses, such as those students with little elective space in their program of study.

**Recommendation:** Academic program departments that offer majors and minors with no elective space at McMaster should allow for students to make requests in fitting Indigenous Studies Program courses into their timetables.

**Recommendation:** The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should mandate that all post-secondary institutions implement a mandatory online Indigenous content requirement.

**Recommendation:** Faculties at McMaster should be consulting with ISP when incorporating Indigenous content into their course material.

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<sup>16</sup> "Community-Driven Education," accessed February 19, 2020, <https://fnti.net/communityled>.; "Programs – Anishinabek Educational Institute," accessed February 19, 2020, <http://aeipostsecondary.ca/programs/>.

**Recommendation:** The provincial government should increase funding for Indigenous courses and resources at postsecondary institutions.

The educational experience for Indigenous Students in Canada has historically remained contentious. The previous colonial based education system of residential schools was mired in forced assimilation and marginalization. In turn, this has negatively impacted the Indigenous population and has raised a sense of mistrust in the educational system by this population.<sup>17</sup> Racism which leads to negative stereotyping, also continues to exist within schools today. Following suit, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's report cites a need for education about Indigenous culture and history as a way to overcome ignorance and racism toward Indigenous people in Canada.<sup>18</sup> The need for transformative education within the University context should also be recognized where reformation involves cultural awareness on the part of educators and the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge within the curriculum.<sup>19</sup> Other universities in Canada such as Lakehead University, The University of Winnipeg, and Trent University have implemented the mandatory completion of a three credit course in Indigenous history and culture in order to successfully graduate. In addition, as of September 2017 Bachelor of Arts students at Laurentian University are required to complete six credits of course(s). Courses that fulfil these criteria are selected by the University and include at least one sub criterion of Indigenous History, Indigenous Culture, Indigenous Ways of Knowing, Contemporary Indigenous Issues, or Indigenous Languages). While recognizing the barriers to such an approach such as staffing, logistics, and student interest, the University (in consultation with the Indigenous Student Services office and Indigenous community) could determine which structure works best for the institution and for the learning of students. This may include the creation and implementation of culturally accurate online training sessions required for degree acquisition. This could be similar to the logistical approach taken by science departments for students to complete mandatory laboratory training for courses. This university-wide requirement would ensure that the institution remains a leader in this area and works toward the calls to action outlined in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report.

As aforementioned, valuing Indigenous ways of learning, and inclusive policies and practices are vital to an inclusive academic environment. This includes the facilitation

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<sup>17</sup> "Canada's Indigenous Peoples' Access to Post-Secondary Education: The Spirit of the 'New Buffalo' | SpringerLink," accessed February 19, 2020, [https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-981-10-4062-7\\_7](https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-981-10-4062-7_7).

<sup>18</sup> "The Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada." accessed February 19, 2020, [http://www.trc.ca/assets/pdf/Volume\\_6\\_Reconciliation\\_English\\_Web.pdf](http://www.trc.ca/assets/pdf/Volume_6_Reconciliation_English_Web.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> Tiffany Smith, "Make Space for Indigeneity: Decolonizing Education" (Saskatchewan Education Leadership Unit, 2016), <https://selu.usask.ca/documents/research-and-publications/srrj/SRRJ-1-2-Smith.pdf>; "ACDE | ACDE's Accord on Indigenous Education," accessed February 19, 2020, <https://csse-scee.ca/acde/2017/08/19/events-2-2/>.

of appropriate professional staff development. All content exchanged from instructors to students should be accurate and representative, even outside of courses offered by the ISP. At McMaster, students have raised concerns through focus groups of the passing of misinformation by instructors who do not have training in Indigenous studies resulting in feelings of anger, sadness, and trauma. This is why professors who incorporate Indigenous content into their courses should be well informed to Indigenous history and culture through a thorough training process and/or consultation for accuracy and relevance with the Indigenous Studies Program department. Through consultation with the ISS, the feasibility of such measures could be ensured through the hiring of another ISS staff member who would partake in vetting curriculum information.

## Recognition of Credits:

**Principle:** Indigenous students should have greater opportunity for transfer credit acceptance.

**Concern:** It is often difficult to transfer course credits from many post-secondary institutions to McMaster University.

**Concern:** The existing difficulty that students experience in receiving equal credit for their previous courses at other post-secondary institutions creates a barrier for academic and career success.

**Recommendation:** McMaster University Registrar should review and expand their list of accepted courses from students' previous academic experiences.

**Recommendation:** McMaster University Registrar should implement the Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) program.

Indigenous students may complete their degree at varying life stages and at varying post-secondary institutions. As established through previous focus groups and consultation, and due to the remaining areas of needed improvement, a notable difficulty exists for all students at McMaster in terms of gaining credit for transferred courses towards a student's undergraduate degree. These students felt that this may especially pose a significant barrier to Indigenous students in general who already face many barriers in obtaining an undergraduate degree.

The PLAR program allows students to identify, document, and gain recognition for their prior formal, informal or experiential learning experiences. Institutions have the opportunity to assess the legitimacy, relevance, and currency of these experiences for enrollment and transfer credit acceptance through challenge exams, structured interviews, simulations and portfolios. In turn, the acceptance of such a system may allow for improvement and greater opportunity in the credit transfer process. In addition, PLAR programs can decrease duplication of learning, bring to light areas of needed improvement and of proficiency, and can reduce the time and costs of

obtaining a credential for learning previously acquired.<sup>20</sup> Specifically, PLAR can increase the incentive for enrolment for Indigenous students as it can increase access.<sup>21</sup> Many colleges and universities in Canada such as Ryerson University currently have such programs in place.<sup>22</sup>

## Research Opportunities

**Principle:** Indigenous Students should have access to resources to conduct research.

**Principle:** Indigenous Students at McMaster should have the opportunity to enhance their academic skills through partaking in research positions.

**Concern:** The Indigenous Undergraduate Summer Research Scholars Program, which is an excellent opportunity to help Indigenous students build research skills, only accepts 12 students in Ontario.

**Recommendation:** Indigenous Students at McMaster should have the opportunity to enhance their academic skills through partaking in research positions.

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<sup>20</sup> "Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) in Canadian Universities | Canadian Journal of Higher Education," accessed February 19, 2020, <http://journals.sfu.ca/cjhe/index.php/cjhe/article/view/183322>.; "PLAR (Prior Learning Assessment & Recognition)," accessed February 19, 2020, [http://www.novascotiacc.ca/Generic.aspx?PAGE=PLAR+\(Prior+Learning+Assessment+%26+Recognition\)&portalName=ha](http://www.novascotiacc.ca/Generic.aspx?PAGE=PLAR+(Prior+Learning+Assessment+%26+Recognition)&portalName=ha).; "What Is PLAR? | George Brown College, Toronto," accessed February 19, 2020, <https://www.georgebrown.ca/plar/>.; "What Is Prior Learning Assessment & Recognition (PLAR)/ Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)?," *CAPLA* (blog), July 1, 2000, <http://capla.ca/what-is-rpl/>.

<sup>21</sup> "Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) in Canadian Universities | Canadian Journal of Higher Education."

<sup>22</sup> "ONTransfer - Institution Transfer Profiles," accessed November 25, 2019, [https://ontransfer.ca/index\\_en.php?page=transfer\\_profile\\_detail&inst=29](https://ontransfer.ca/index_en.php?page=transfer_profile_detail&inst=29).; "Indigenous Undergraduate Summer Research Scholars | Gs.Mcmaster.Ca," accessed February 19, 2020, <https://gs.mcmaster.ca/graduate-student-life/office-undergraduate-research/indigenous-undergraduate-summer-research>.; "Prior Learning (PLAR) - Humber College," accessed February 19, 2020, <https://humber.ca/transferoptions/transfer-in/plar.html>.; "Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition | Cambrian College," accessed February 19, 2020, <https://cambriancollege.ca/pathways/prior-learning-assessment/>.; "Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition," accessed February 19, 2020, <https://www.algonquincollege.com/plar/>.

**Recommendation:** The University should increase the number of students accepted into the Indigenous Undergraduate Summer Research Scholars Program

**Recommendation:** The University should increase funding for the Indigenous Undergraduate Summer Research Scholars Program (IUSRSP).

There exist multiple benefits of taking part in research to students. These include but are not limited to gaining an understanding of the importance of a thorough research process, development of critical thinking and problem based learning, developing skills in the interpretation of results, developing an ability to analyze data, and developing the ability to integrate theory into practice.<sup>23</sup> McMaster remains a prominent leader in research and fosters many opportunities for its students to contribute to this research.<sup>24</sup> However, it should be recognized that there remains a need for the Indigenous student population to also be involved in these research opportunities and for the number of Indigenous graduate students to increase.<sup>25</sup> As such, a program such as the IUSRSP which is an excellent opportunity to help Indigenous students build research skills, should increase its enrolment numbers.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, more advertisement of such a program is needed to allow more students to be aware of such an opportunity which can also encourage Indigenous students to apply to other research positions and opportunities.

## **HEALTH AND WELLNESS**

### Culturally Appropriate Service Availability

**Principle:** Healthcare services available to Indigenous students should be culturally sensitive and provide a safe, non-discriminatory space for students to obtain care.

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<sup>23</sup> "Research and Critical Thinking : An Important Link for Exercise Science Students Transitioning to Physical Therapy," accessed February 19, 2020, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4738974/>.; "Undergraduate Research: Importance, Benefits, and Challenges," accessed February 19, 2020, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4739295/>.

<sup>24</sup> "Home - Research & Innovation," accessed February 19, 2020, <https://research.mcmaster.ca/>.

<sup>25</sup> "McMaster Aims to Grow Number of Indigenous Grad Students in Canada - The Globe and Mail," accessed February 19, 2020, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/mcmaster-aims-to-grow-number-of-indigenous-grad-students-in-canada/article25715514/>.; "Indigenous Student Education - Universities Canada," accessed February 19, 2020, <https://www.univcan.ca/priorities/indigenous-education/>.

<sup>26</sup> "Indigenous Undergraduate Summer Research Scholars | Gs.Mcmaster.Ca," accessed February 19, 2020, <https://gs.mcmaster.ca/graduate-student-life/office-undergraduate-research/indigenous-undergraduate-summer-research>.

**Concern:** There are many health discrepancies in the Indigenous population in comparison to the non-Indigenous counterparts.

**Concern:** Currently, there is only one mental health counsellor particularly for Indigenous Students, who's service usage continues to increase.

**Recommendation:** The University should, in partnership with traditional healers, establish and develop culturally relevant health promotion programs for Indigenous students.

**Recommendation:** The Student Wellness centre should hire another Indigenous mental health counsellor or make the position of the current Indigenous mental health counsellor full time to be able to cater to the unique needs of this student population.

**Recommendation:** The ISS should make students aware of the mental health counsellor at Student Wellness who has experience and training in counselling Indigenous students.

There is a significant relationship between health and academic achievement.<sup>27</sup> McMaster University continues to make substantial strides in improving the quality and quantity of health services provided to its students. This includes offering students innovate health promotion sessions to educate and help students in multiple facets related to health. Notably, there exist vast discrepancies in poor health conditions in the Indigenous population in comparison to those of non-Indigenous counterparts.<sup>28</sup>

Although there exists counselling drop in sessions once a week for self-identifying Indigenous students, the use of these services has seen a notable increase. The mental health counsellor that offers these sessions has also pointed out that the hiring of another counsellor that is educated and aware of Indigenous practices and can offer culturally relevant care would greatly benefit students. Reports in the literature also highlights the importance of staff that can provide this specialized care.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> "Health, Academic Achievement and School-Based Interventions | IntechOpen," accessed February 19, 2020, <https://www.intechopen.com/books/health-and-academic-achievement/health-academic-achievement-and-school-based-interventions>.

<sup>28</sup> Madeline Arkle et al., "Indigenous Peoples and Health in Canadian Medical Education CFMS Position Paper" (Canadian Federation of Medical Students, n.d.); "Understanding the Social Determinants of Health among Indigenous Canadians: Priorities for Health Promotion Policies and Actions," accessed February 19, 2020, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4506643/>.

<sup>29</sup> Lisa Richardson, Tracy Murphy, "Bringing Reconciliation to HealthCare in Canada - Wise Practices for Healthcare Leaders" (HealthCareCan, n.d.), [https://www.healthcarecan.ca/wp-content/themes/camyno/assets/document/Reports/2018/HCC/EN/TRCC\\_EN.pdf](https://www.healthcarecan.ca/wp-content/themes/camyno/assets/document/Reports/2018/HCC/EN/TRCC_EN.pdf).

Further, there exists a need for a greater number of programs that are catered to Indigenous students along with increasing the number of drop in counselling sessions that would be available upon the hiring of another Indigenous student mental wellness counsellor. The TRC's calls to action include the following item: "We call upon those who can effect change within the Canadian health-care system to recognize the value of Aboriginal healing practices and use them in the treatment of Aboriginal patients in collaboration with Aboriginal healers and Elders where requested by Aboriginal patients." In order to bring about such reconciliation efforts, the implementation of culturally appropriate health promotion programs designed in partnership with traditional healers, is vital.

## **FINANCING EDUCATION**

### Funding Supports

**Principle:** The Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP) should operate to provide support to all eligible indigenous students who wish to access post-secondary education.

**Principle:** Indigenous students should be financially supported by McMaster and the federal and provincial governments to access adequate funding.

**Principle:** The costs of living should be considered in funding allocation.

**Concern:** The federal government's 2% cap on the Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP) limits the available funding for Indigenous students

**Concern:** The federal and provincial funding available to Indigenous students is inadequate in covering the rising costs associated with post-secondary education.

**Concern:** Band funding per student from the federal government is inadequate in covering living costs, including, but not limited to housing, food, childcare and transportation.

**Concern:** Band funding is un-proportional to population. Many bands are receiving inadequate funding for their populations, whereas others are receiving more than is necessary for their population.

**Recommendation:** Indigenous Bands should receive funding that is in proportion with their population.

**Recommendation:** The federal government should work to develop more specific funding resources for Indigenous students who have been placed on the PSSSP funding wait list or who have been denied.

**Recommendation:** The federal government should have a more proportional disbursement of PSSSP funding, so that it is in accordance with population and allocated properly to each location.

**Recommendation:** The University should develop more Indigenous specific bursaries to provide financial aid to students who do not achieve enough through Band funding, or cannot access Band funding.

The MSU believes that all willing and qualified students, regardless of socioeconomic status, must be able to access and excel within Ontario's system of post-secondary education. This idea extends to all student groups on campus, as any existing financial barriers should be

eliminated. Specifically, Indigenous students face greater barriers to financing their educational endeavors and accessing support services. Due to a fixed amount of funding given to reserves,

Indigenous students often do not receive enough funding to support tuition and living costs. Currently the majority of funding for Indigenous education comes from the Federal government and from the Post-secondary Student Support program. However, this program was given a 2%, in 1996 and has yet to be changed.<sup>30</sup> This cap was originally intended to be a temporary solution to the financial deficit, however nearly 24 years later it is still in place and is no longer representative of the financial needs of this growing population. The MSU believes that this arbitrary 2% cap needs to be re-evaluated and ultimately lifted to better reflect the true cost of education and living for Indigenous Students. This is despite a steady growth in both inflation and Indigenous populations over the same period – requiring an annual increase of at least 6.3% since 1996 for First Nations education.<sup>31</sup> Additionally, many band member officials have commented saying that the funding they receive from the government is not reflective of their growing or decreasing populations; some locations with minimal Indigenous youth are receiving more funding than places with higher populations of post-secondary age youth. The MSU believes that the funding should be dispersed in accordance with population, so that all students are guaranteed to receive enough funding, as opposed to others receiving more than needed and some nothing.

Presently the university offers two Indigenous specific bursaries- the Indigenous Student Bursary (ISB) and the Metis Nation of Ontario Bursary.<sup>32</sup> This is a great step

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<sup>30</sup> "The Debate on First Nations Education Funding: Mind the Gap (Working Paper 49)," accessed February 19, 2020, <https://qspace.library.queensu.ca/handle/1974/14846>.

<sup>31</sup> Chiefs Assembly of Education, "Federal Funding for First Nations Schools," n.d., [https://www.afn.ca/uploads/files/events/fact\\_sheet-ccoe-8.pdf](https://www.afn.ca/uploads/files/events/fact_sheet-ccoe-8.pdf).

<sup>32</sup> "Scholarships and Bursaries - Office of the Registrar | McMaster University," accessed February 19, 2020, <https://registrar.mcmaster.ca/aid-awards/scholarships-and-bursaries/>.

towards helping financially support Indigenous students. However, there needs to be greater outreach surrounding the availability of these bursaries as they can be utilized as a resource for students to cover living costs. The university should develop specific strategies such as email lists, posters, drop-in events and fairs to promote the availability of these financial opportunities for students. Additionally, the creation of more Indigenous scholarships is encouraged, presently there is only the two aforementioned bursaries available to Indigenous students compared to the several available for non-indigenous students. Scholarships that exist to reward Indigenous students for their academic contributions and efforts should be created in conjunction with the University, and the Indigenous Studies department.

### **Access to Funding**

**Principle:** Band funding release should be in conjunction and with consideration of the deadlines the University has for payments. Additionally, the University should be conscious of these deadlines.

**Principle:** Financial barriers should not stop Indigenous students for pursuing more than 4 years, if they require, in their undergraduate degree(s).

**Concern:** Indigenous students who are non-status or live off reserve do not have full access to Band funding and/or government sponsorships and bursaries.

**Concern:** Band funding is often not released by the federal government and then to institutions within proper deadlines, thereby subjecting students to interest fees and late payment charges.

**Concern:** Extra years of school are not considered for Band funding.

**Recommendation:** The federal government should remove barriers for Indigenous students to access funding and increase funding to meet the real cost of education.

**Recommendation:** The University should be more conscious of the timeline for Band funding release and ensure that no interest fees or late payment charges are given to eligible Indigenous students who have outstanding tuition charges.

**Recommendation:** Similar to the process of OSAP payments directly to the University and then to students, Band funding release should also be streamlined in such a manner.

**Recommendation:** The provincial government should work with Bands to increase the amount of funding students may receive if they need more than 4 years to complete their degree(s).

All Indigenous students should have equal access to funding and not face unnecessary barriers to funding support. The provincial government should ensure

that funding reaches Indigenous communities in a timely manner; many bands have indicated that they were promised funding that never reached them. Additionally, funding does not always arrive at a consistent time and is not always in time with tuition due dates put in place by the University. As such, the MSU and the University should work together to ensure that students are not being unfairly penalized by late fees on their tuition as a result of funding for Bands arriving late. This can be done by the University being aware of the timelines in which Bands receive their funding and disperse it. The University should have greater contact with Band funding agencies, such as the Grand River Post-Secondary Education Office (GRPSEO), to be aware of certain deadlines. In addition, through coordination by the University with Bands, direct paying of tuition to the University may alleviate stress to students.

Some reasons students may pursue more years than a traditional degree in their program of enrollment may include personal reasons, wanting to pursue a minor or major that will take more years, or because they decide to switch majors. As such, Band funding should be extended to cover these additional years where proof of continuation of courses may be given through the Registrar's office.

### **Funding for Indigenous Students with Disabilities**

**Principle:** Indigenous students with disabilities should be eligible for additional funding to cover extra years.

**Concern:** Funding does not take into consideration those students who require accommodations due to disability, such as funding extra years of school or additional services needed.

**Recommendation:** Specific bursaries should be developed to cater to Indigenous students with disabilities.

The MSU believes that there must be supports available for Indigenous students with disabilities, both visible and non-visible. At present, there are no specific financial resources for Indigenous students with disabilities as the resources exist separately. The MSU believes there should be an amalgamation of these resources for students as Indigenous students face their own unique challenges, that differ from non-Indigenous students with disabilities.<sup>33</sup>The financial barriers they already face often make it more difficult for them to succeed academically, on top of their disabilities.

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<sup>33</sup> Tiffany Smith, "Make Space for Indigeneity: Decolonizing Education."; "Canada's Indigenous Peoples' Access to Post-Secondary Education: The Spirit of the 'New Buffalo' | SpringerLink."; "Canada's Indigenous Peoples' Access to Post-Secondary Education: The Spirit of the 'New Buffalo' | SpringerLink."; "I Don't Want to Grow Up and Not Be Smart': Urban Indigenous Young People's Perceptions of School | The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education | Cambridge Core," accessed February 19, 2020, <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/australian-journal-of-indigenous-education/article/i-dont-want-to-grow-up-and-not-be-smart-urban-indigenous-young-peoples-perceptions-of-school/81EA6E003F2820AD0783DE072C1F994C>.

By working with the Student Accessibility Services office, the MSU should lobby the university to consider the potential of disabilities students may be experiencing when evaluating bursary applications and allocating funding.



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