



Indspire

Indigenous education, Canada's future. | L'éducation des autochtones, L'avenir du Canada.



Following the Path

2021 | RESEARCH AND IMPACT UNIT



AUTHOR(S)



Indspire

Indigenous education, | L'éducation des autochtones.
Canada's future. | L'avenir du Canada.

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Emphasizing aboriginal stereotypes and native art in modern culture, his art attempts to examine where native art fits into society in addition to where a native artist fits into the art world. His larger than life depictions of indigenous peoples speak to his passion for both art and his native heritage.

Jonathan Labillois currently resides in Victoria BC, Canada where he continues to expand his body of work and subject matter.





ABOUT INDSPIRE

Indspire is an Indigenous national registered charity that invests in the education of Indigenous people for the long-term benefit of these individuals, their families and communities, and Canada. With the support of its funding partners, Indspire disburses financial awards, delivers programs, and shares resources with the goal of improving educational outcomes for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis students. Through Indspire's education offerings, we provide resources to students, educators, communities, and other stakeholders who are committed to improving success for Indigenous youth. Since 2019, Indspire awarded over \$120 million through more than 33,800 bursaries and scholarships to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis youth, making it the largest funder of Indigenous post-secondary education outside the federal government.

ABOUT RESEARCH KNOWLEDGE NEST

The Indspire Research Knowledge Nest is the first Indigenous research program of its kind in Canada. With data analysis skills rapidly becoming critical to economic success, the Research Nest is poised to seize this exciting opportunity to foster Indigenous engagement and leadership in quantitative research and data science roles. The program will be guided by an Advisory Committee of researchers, leaders, and key stakeholders who will provide direction and input on the development of this important initiative.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We would like to begin by acknowledging and thanking our previous Building Brighter Futures program recipients who shared their experiences and provided valuable insight into the experiences of Indigenous students across Canada. Through the support of Indspire staff, funding partners, and other stakeholders, we are able to provide thousands of bursaries, scholarships, and awards each year to students pursuing post-secondary education and training.

At Indspire, it is important for us to provide space for Indigenous communities to feel seen, represented, and celebrated. The success experienced by Indigenous students, and the ways they use their education to demonstrate reciprocity and to give back to community, are truly inspiring and tells the story of how brighter futures can be built when we work in partnership.

Chi-Miigwetch for the hope and encouragement that you all bring.

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MESSAGE FROM MIKE DEGAGNÉ

Dear friends,

From the inception of Indspire's Research Knowledge Nest, we knew that its mission should be twofold: to uncover insights about the realities that Indigenous learners face in Canada today, both during and after their educational journeys; and to foster the next generation of Indigenous researchers and analysts.

With the genesis of this new report, both aspects of the mission have borne fruit. *Following the Path* would not have been possible without the efforts of our very first cohort of Research Assistants – Felicia Sinclair, Josh Thomas, Kayleigh Wiebe, and Whitney Wolfe – and its success is, in large part, a testament to their perseverance, their skills, and their perceptiveness. We are grateful to them and wish them well in their future pursuits.

In keeping with the direction of our 2018 *Truth and Reconciliation in Post-Secondary Settings: Student Experience* report, *Following the Path* examines how First Nations, Inuit, and Métis learners are experiencing their journey through post-secondary education by examining multiple aspects of that experience. We asked recipients of our Building Brighter Futures: Bursaries, Scholarships, and Awards (BBF) program about many factors, including how they're funding their education; remote vs. in-person learning; the Indigeneity of their instructors and curricula; and non-academic costs such as childcare and transportation. We were fortunate enough to receive feedback from over 3000 BBF recipients – and to include their insights throughout the report, quoting them directly.

An added dimension of the report was provided by the COVID-19 pandemic, which represented a unique opportunity to gain impressions of the post-secondary student experience during a challenge of global proportions.

Following the Path presents multiple insights which will be of interest to educators, students, policymakers, and many others – but I believe that there are three insights of particular note. The first is that there has been quantifiable positive progress since we asked Indigenous learners how they were doing in 2018; the second is that, despite said progress, there is still much work to do to continue supporting the success of Indigenous post-secondary students. And the third is that, when adequately supported, Indigenous learners can succeed in lasting, measurable, profound ways.

I am both pleased and proud to share *Following the Path* with you. What makes it particularly powerful, apart from the quality analysis performed by our Research Assistants, is that it shares the students' voices along with the data.

We are listening to them – and we invite you to join us in acting upon what we hear.

Chi miigwech,



Dr. Mike DeGagné
President & CEO
Indspire

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) released 94 Calls to Action to “redress the legacy of residential schools and advance the process of Canadian reconciliation.” At the five-year anniversary of the release, Indspire wanted to gain insight into the progress of the education-related Calls to Action by learning about the experiences of Indigenous postsecondary students. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has severely affected the delivery of post-secondary education, which presented a unique opportunity to investigate Indigenous student experiences and reconciliation initiatives during a pandemic. In December 2020, Indspire conducted the *Following the Path: Insights into Student Experiences of Truth and Reconciliation in Post-Secondary Education during the COVID-19 Pandemic (Following the Path)* survey of Indigenous post-secondary students enrolled in the summer or fall 2020 semesters who had applied to Indspire’s *Building Brighter Futures: Bursaries, Scholarships, and Awards* program (BBF). The survey asked several questions covering a wide variety of subjects including finances, mental health, cultural connectivity, student supports, Indigenous content, and pandemic complications. From responses to the survey, we learned that Indigenous students are experiencing many challenges during their studies. Several of these were either directly caused by or amplified by the pandemic. We also heard about many positive experiences related to promising reconciliation-related initiatives developed by post-secondary educational institutions.

We found that in 2020, students experienced heightened financial stress and mental health challenges. Indigenous students already faced high levels of financial strain (Table 1) and challenges to their mental health prior to the pandemic (Figure 1), struggling to access the crucial pillars and resources necessary to participate fully in post-secondary education. Indigenous post-secondary students are still experiencing much higher levels of financial stress than other students, which can negatively impact an Indigenous student’s mental and physical health (Asebedo and Wilmarth, 2017) and educational successes (Adams et al., 2016).

Many students reported financial stress stemming from the continued uncertainty of having sufficient funding to continue attending school in future semesters. Compounding this stress, made worse by a lack of consistent access to financial resources, was the lack of fundamental infrastructure and supplies needed to participate in online education, including: housing, food, childcare, adequate internet, computer access, a suitable workspace, and books. These issues of financial strain exacerbate mental health challenges, which has been an added burden amidst the pandemic.

The shift to online learning has enhanced feelings of isolation, loneliness, and pessimistic outlooks on the future. The transition of supports to help Indigenous students traverse their post-secondary journey and help to maintain positive mental health practices have been inconsistently implemented in an online world. During the pandemic, 48 percent of survey respondents reported they did not



take advantage of student support services such as academic guidance, counselling, or administrative assistance, among others. Many students reported difficulty in accessing these supports due to confusion regarding how to access them during the pandemic. In particular, there is a distinct lack of virtual access to various cultural supports and resources for Indigenous students during the COVID-19 pandemic. Cultural connection is an extremely important component of Indigenous students' success and experience while attending post-secondary institutions (Bastien and Gallop, 2016). This often involves meeting with community/family members, attending ceremonies, speaking with Elders, connecting with mentors, and accessing Indigenous spaces and spiritual land. These types of activities and supports were significantly altered or eradicated because of the pandemic.

Maintaining cultural connectedness at post-secondary institutions also includes participating in Indigenous courses and languages, as well as seeing Indigenous faculty representation. Indeed, these were mentioned multiple times in the TRC Calls to Action.

We found that respondents reported mixed experiences regarding Indigenous content and representation in their post-secondary courses. When Indigenous course content was available, many students felt positively about how this information was being delivered. Those who participated in Indigenous language courses during their post-secondary studies expressed the deep value of this with regard to connecting with their culture as well as the post-secondary institution practicing reconciliation. However, an overwhelming number of students reported that they would choose to take on more self-directed projects and research related to Indigenous peoples if they had more Indigenous faculty support. Given that these students are the faculty of the future, more must be done to support them in their pursuits.

We further explored Indigenous learners' feeling of belonging in post-secondary institutions. Most students had never experienced direct instances of racism and discrimination, and many reported feelings of social acceptance at their institution. However, no student should have to worry about or experience discrimination. With the multitude of challenges that Indigenous students face during their studies, racist attacks and feelings of not fitting in are debilitating.

Overall, by listening to the experiences of over three thousand Indigenous post-secondary students, this report summarizes a set of recommendations to support post-secondary institutions, decision-makers and others in following the path to reconciliation. The Recommendations were organized by three themes: Reducing Financial Strain; Increasing Virtual Mental Health, Academic, and Cultural Supports; and Self-Determination Over Education.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report reveals that Indigenous students face many challenges while attending postsecondary education, which severely affects their experiences and ability to succeed. These challenges were often worsened by the pandemic. In many ways, the pandemic setting highlighted the many difficulties Indigenous students experience and provides valuable information on the ongoing and evolving needs of Indigenous learners. We also found many instances of reconciliation initiatives implemented by post-secondary institutions which many students found beneficial. This demonstrates that while there remains a long road toward true reconciliation between the Canadian education system and Indigenous peoples, the recommendations by the TRC can have the intended benefits on Indigenous student experience when implemented.

INTRODUCTION

In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada released 94 Calls to Action and a multi-volume final report. The TRC called upon all levels of government, post-secondary institutions and professional associations in the fields of health, justice, childcare, and education to implement concrete steps to address the legacy of residential schools (NCTR, 2015).

In response to the Calls to Action, many post-secondary institutions have embraced the opportunity to implement these changes over the last five years. However, in 2020, the world experienced the COVID-19 pandemic. The global spread of this virus prompted health authorities in Canada to restrict public and private gatherings in an effort to stop its spread. For post-secondary students, these public health restrictions resulted in the closure of their respective institutions. Many post-secondary institutions began to offer distance-learning courses that took place online. The progress attained in addressing the Calls to Action needed to be shifted suddenly to an online-only world. This report is not intended to assess postsecondary institutions' implementation of the Calls to Action prior to or during the pandemic. Instead, we aim to understand how Indigenous learners specifically are faring within the changing post-secondary landscape.

Following the Path: Insights into Student Experiences of Truth and Reconciliation in PostSecondary Education during the COVID-19 Pandemic (Following the Path) is a survey conducted by Indspire to assess how post-secondary institutions have shifted their implementation of the Calls to Action during the pandemic; it looks at students' experiences during the COVID pandemic. Over 3,150 Indigenous learners responded to this survey. A detailed description of the survey methodology can be found in Appendix A, and a description of the demographic profile of respondents can be found in Appendix B.

This report investigated the financial, mental, and cultural wellbeing of students through a survey administered online to current and previous Indspire's *Building Brighter Futures: Bursaries, Scholarships, and Awards* program (BBF) applicants. This report conveys the voices of over 3,150 Indigenous post-secondary students that responded to our survey. The report is divided into four sections: Financial Freedom: Necessary Elements for Student Success; Examining Mental Health and Distance Learning; Cultural Connections: Cultural Access and Maintenance During the Pandemic; and Respectful Relationships: Indicators of Change.

FINANCIAL FREEDOM: NECESSARY ELEMENTS FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

Financial Constraints

Post-secondary education is expensive. It has been widely shown that the financial cost of pursuing post-secondary education is a significant barrier for Indigenous post-secondary students in Canada (Ottmann, 2017), including Indspire's BBF recipients (Indspire, 2020). In the *Following the Path* survey, 73 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that financial constraints are a challenge to their education (Table 1). Ensuring that Indigenous students who wish to pursue higher education have the funds to do so is unquestionably a critical factor to eliminate the educational gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2016). Nevertheless, this report's chapter focuses on how financial stress affects Indigenous students' experience while attending school, and ultimately examines the implications this has on advancing reconciliation.

Table 1: Proportion of BBF Applicants Reporting Financial Constraints, n=2,441

Financial constraints have been a challenge to my education	Proportion of Responses	Number of Responses
Strongly Disagree	2%	47
Disagree	10%	239
Neither Agree nor Disagree	15%	367
Agree	42%	1,026
Strongly Agree	31%	762
Grand Total	100%	2,441

Financial Strain

Beyond the challenge of raising enough funds to attend post-secondary institutions, there are several more nuanced complications driven by individual financial situations that can negatively impact an Indigenous student's experience and success. The stress and anxiety associated with financial uncertainty can severely affect a post-secondary student. The pressure felt when struggling to meet financial



obligations, defined as financial strain, has been associated with less optimal mental and physical health (Asebedo and Wilmarth, 2017), and lower graduation rates among university students (Adams et al., 2016). To gauge the financial strain felt by BBF applicants during the COVID-19 pandemic, students were asked to complete a Financial Anxiety Scale (FAS) test¹ as part of the *Following the Path* survey. Out of a possible 49, where a higher score indicates more anxiety, the average score from a BBF applicant was 29.9 (Table 2). Because the raw FAS score in isolation does not tell us much, we compared this score with previous studies that conducted this FAS.

We compared BBF recipients' average scores to scores of two previous studies which both consisted of a general sample of university students in the United States. We can see that the BBF score of 29.9 is significantly higher than the other scores of 19.88 and 17.99 (Table 2). The differences in financial anxiety between BBF students and the other samples are likely due to several factors. Some possible factors include extra stress due to the pandemic, unique financial challenges that Indigenous students face, and differences in Canadian and US expenses, among others. A formal analysis of the primary contributing factors which are most associated with differences in relative financial strain of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students is a topic for future research.

Table 2: Financial Anxiety Scale Scores

	BBF	Archuleta et al. 2013	Tran et al. 2018
Sample Size	3000	180	304
FAS Average Score	29.9 (9.28)	19.88 (17.0)	17.99 (9.7)
* A higher score indicates more anxiety			
* Standard deviations are in brackets			

One obvious solution to relieve financial strain is to simply provide more financial support to those experiencing high levels of financial strain. While this proposition may seem self-explanatory, we do find concrete evidence among BBF applicants that financial bursaries may relieve financial strain. Many of the respondents to the *Following the Path* survey had not received a bursary from Indspire at the time of the survey, and those who had reported a lower FAS score (Table 3)².

¹First developed by Archuleta et al. (2013), the FAS asks for the level of agreement of seven statements such as "I feel anxious about my financial situation" and "I have difficulty concentrating on my school/or work because of my financial situation". The respondents are asked to respond on a seven-point Likert-scale, from never to always.

²The difference in FAS score was highly statistically significant: $t(2324.1) = -6.00, p < .001$. The average amount received by those who received a BBF award was \$3,743.



Table 3: Two Sample Welch T-test of FAS Scores of 2021 Funded versus Unfunded BBF Students

Funded Student Average Score (n=1,268)	Unfunded Student Average Score (n=1,077)	t - statistic	p-value	95% Confidence Interval of Difference - Low Estimate	95% Confidence Interval of Difference - High Estimate
31.1	31.1	-6	2.26E-09	-3.01	-1.53

A significant driver of financial strain is the anxiety associated with not knowing where future income will come from. Due to high levels of poverty and lack of post-secondary experiences among the Canadian Indigenous population, Indigenous students often do not receive financial assistance from their families or possess personal savings to help pay for their post-secondary education expenses (Indspire, 2021). Rather, Indigenous learners heavily rely on other funding sources such as student loans, bursaries, scholarships, band and community funding, and other funding opportunities. Also, compared to the non-Indigenous population, Indigenous students typically have to piece together funding from several different sources to pay for their education (Indspire, 2021). There is often a great deal of uncertainty regarding how much funding a student will receive from these sources year-to-year. Many BBF applicants reported that they rely on non-guaranteed sources of income to fund their education and thus are constantly stressed that they will be unable to continue their schooling due to lack of funding.

“I was denied Indigenous sponsorship by my Band because of COVID-19. They lost income so stopped accepting new applications to reallocate those funds. I was scrambled to get other financial support or would’ve had to withdraw, then I got funding from an external organization that had received additional monies from the federal government, and that organization approved my very late application. I’m approved one school year at a time, so I’m very concerned I still may not have sponsorship for my future semesters. Not to mention, the price of food increased noticeably.”

In addition to funding uncertainty, applying for scholarships, bursaries, and loans involves a great deal of effort and time. A post-secondary student has many obligations during their schooling such as studying, making ends meet, caring for family, and extracurriculars. In the midst of these responsibilities, devoting the extra physical and mental effort to apply for funding opportunities is challenging. We heard from students that due to various reasons, including pandemic-related complications, they spend a great deal of time applying for funding, and sometimes do not apply for as many opportunities as they would like.



“Due to the pandemic, my monthly expenses have increased 2.5x-fold, and I am constantly applying for bursaries or scholarships in my free time. I have accessed my bands emergency funding, but I have yet to receive it due to Covid-related delays.”

The pandemic increased uncertainties adding to financial strain and anxiety. Many respondents reported delays in receiving funding for their education, and difficulties transferring funds to their institution. While these pandemic difficulties were likely out of the control of sponsoring organizations, it is important to realize the impacts that these difficulties have had on Indigenous post-secondary students. It is important for post-secondary institutes and funding agencies to consider the ways in which they can ease the process of securing funding. Organizations can advise students about opportunities that were and will continue to be available to them during after the pandemic. It would also be helpful to create common applications for multiple sources of funding, confirm application results earlier and to increase the number of renewable scholarships and bursaries. Indspire’s BBF program is an example of a common application bursary program. When a student applies for a financial award from Indspire, they are automatically considered for around 200 different bursaries and scholarships that Indspire manages³.

Necessary Infrastructure and Supplies for Attending Post-secondary

Another financial barrier for Indigenous students is lack of access to the infrastructure and supplies necessary to succeed at post-secondary studies. These consist of basic living resources, such as housing, food, transportation, and childcare, but also school-specific supplies like adequate internet, computer access, a suitable workspace, and books. These latter supplies have become particularly relevant during the pandemic, when post-secondary education swiftly transitioned to online learning.

“Computer and internet access (has been financially straining). Stress attributed to maneuvering online resources, migraines from staring at a screen for such a long period of time. Not being able to work to fully focus on this transition into school. I have stopped working to fully focus on school during the pandemic.”

³The funds from a BBF award are often disbursed over several students. In 2019/2020, Indspire provided a financial award to 5,124 Indigenous post-secondary students.



The *Following the Path* survey asked BBF applicants whether they experienced shortages of these resources due to the pandemic. The results are shown in Table 4. As can be seen, there are several BBF applicants who report difficulties in obtaining housing (16 percent), food (21 percent), access to a computer (16 percent), internet (27 percent), and a comfortable workspace (51 percent).

Table 4: BBF Applicant's Reported Loss of Resources, $n = 2,517$

During the current school year, have you experienced any of the following due to the COVID-19 pandemic?	Proportion of Responses	Number of Responses
Trouble finding and/or keeping adequate housing	16%	403
Lack of access to a computer	16%	403
Difficulty getting enough food	21%	539
Lack of access to adequate internet	27%	686
Splitting time with childcare and studies	27%	687
Lack of access to a comfortable workspace	51%	1284
Altered course delivery	75%	1890

While the proportion of BBF applicants reporting these difficulties may not appear particularly high, they represent hundreds of Indigenous students without the basic resources to participate in their studies, and thousands if we assume that these proportions are similar for the total Indigenous post-secondary population in Canada⁴. Clearly, if a student does not have these resources, their education will be considerably more difficult, if not impossible. Due to the pandemic, students who had previously relied on campus resources such as computer labs and common workspaces were forced to purchase computers and other workspace supplies, despite tuition fees often remaining unchanged. Students

⁴The sample of BBF applicants may differ from the total Indigenous post-secondary population and thus extrapolating these results should be done with caution.



have varying levels of difficulties in creating an adequate home workspace. For example, some students' living locations may not offer the internet quality needed to participate in online lectures and class discussions. Many *Following the Path* survey respondents described poor home workspaces because of their housing limitations.

“The cost for home technology and office equipment (has been difficult). I spend all my class time via zoom but don't have adequate technology. I don't have an office and sit on the side of a bed with an old laptop for hours. It physically hurts.”

While direct financial support will help students obtaining these resources, we can imagine that other approaches would also help: reducing housing costs, renting out computers, expanding reliable internet to more Indigenous communities, creating more community workspaces. The pandemic has greatly increased the difficulty of securing these resources. Yet, the delivery of post-secondary education has changed dramatically in recent years – a trend that will likely continue. A powerful computer and fast internet have become more and more necessary in the past decade. Careful and timely attention to the resources that Indigenous students require is essential to ensure the success of Indigenous post-secondary students.

CASE STUDY

Filling Indigenous Students' Virtual Learning Basket

SCHOOL: Mohawk College

PROGRAM: *Indigenous Virtual Learning Basket*

LOCATION: Hamilton, ON

Mohawk College offers specialized online training through their Indigenous Virtual Learning Basket to help Indigenous students transition to postsecondary learning in a virtual world. Participants in the Indigenous Virtual Learning Basket program will be provided with resources to help students meet their physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and relational needs during their academic journey.



Through this program, Indigenous students will receive culturally specific knowledge from peers, alumni, Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and educators and build strategies to succeed in an online learning environment. Once students have completed the Indigenous Virtual Learning Basket, they will receive helpful gifts to support them in online post-secondary education, such as earphones with a microphone and wisdom cards from community members. If Indigenous post-secondary students are struggling with access to physical resources, they will also be loaned a laptop and a Hub or Turbo Stick with unlimited data at no cost.

Reconciliation

Financial constraints continue to be a significant challenge for Indigenous students. We have seen that many BBF students are experiencing financial stress and anxiety during the pandemic, and many are having trouble accessing the resources needed for their studies. These complications present many challenges in and of themselves, but also hinder other aspects of a student's experience.

A firm financial foundation supports a student's physical and mental health and allows them the freedom to practice their cultural identity, spend more time on their studies, access student supports, participate in extracurricular activities, and partake in any other activity that improves their student experience and success. A positive and healthy student experience while pursuing post-secondary studies is paramount to close the educational gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada. There are several components that contribute to the success of Indigenous post-secondary students, many of which are discussed in the following sections of this report. A healthy financial situation is one such component, and one that supports all other aspects of a positive post-secondary experience.

EXAMINING MENTAL HEALTH AND DISTANCE LEARNING

Mental health is a broader term for a variation of disorders and challenges that many people endure at some point throughout their lives. It can have an impact on everyday living, interpersonal relationships, and physical health. Taking care of these needs is integral to an individual's ability to live a fulfilling life. Research has shown that post-secondary students experience highly stressful circumstances throughout their studies. However, minimal attention has been given to the specific challenges encountered by Indigenous post-secondary students (Hop Wo, Anderson, Wylie, and MacDougall, 2019).

Some of these challenges include leaving their home community to relocate for school and experiencing greater socio-economic barriers compared to non-Indigenous post-secondary students. As a result, Indigenous learners encounter significant mental health challenges while pursuing post-secondary education. Maintaining mental health and wellbeing is crucial to the academic success of Indigenous post-secondary students. Now, more than ever, Indigenous learners need support to establish and maintain positive mental health and wellbeing practices while successfully achieving their academic goals. This section will examine changes in mental health for Indigenous students prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic and how the shift to online learning has increased mental health strain.

Mental Health Challenges for Indigenous Learners Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic

In order to better understand the mental health challenges of Indigenous post-secondary students prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic, Indspire compared results from the National Education Survey (NES) to the results from the current survey, *Following the Path*. The NES was administered to students before the pandemic began (February 2020) and the *Following the Path* survey was administered amid the pandemic (December 2020 – January 2021).

In both surveys, recipients were asked the same series of Likert scale questions concerning their mental health and well-being (Figure 1). The following questions were included:

- My mental health has been a challenge to my education.
- My physical health has been a challenge to my education.
- My interpersonal relationships have been a challenge to my education.
- The stress of meeting all my obligations has been a challenge to my education.

After performing a Welch two sample t-test comparing the NES and *Following the Path* survey responses, it is apparent that during the pandemic there is a significant rise in mental health strain for most

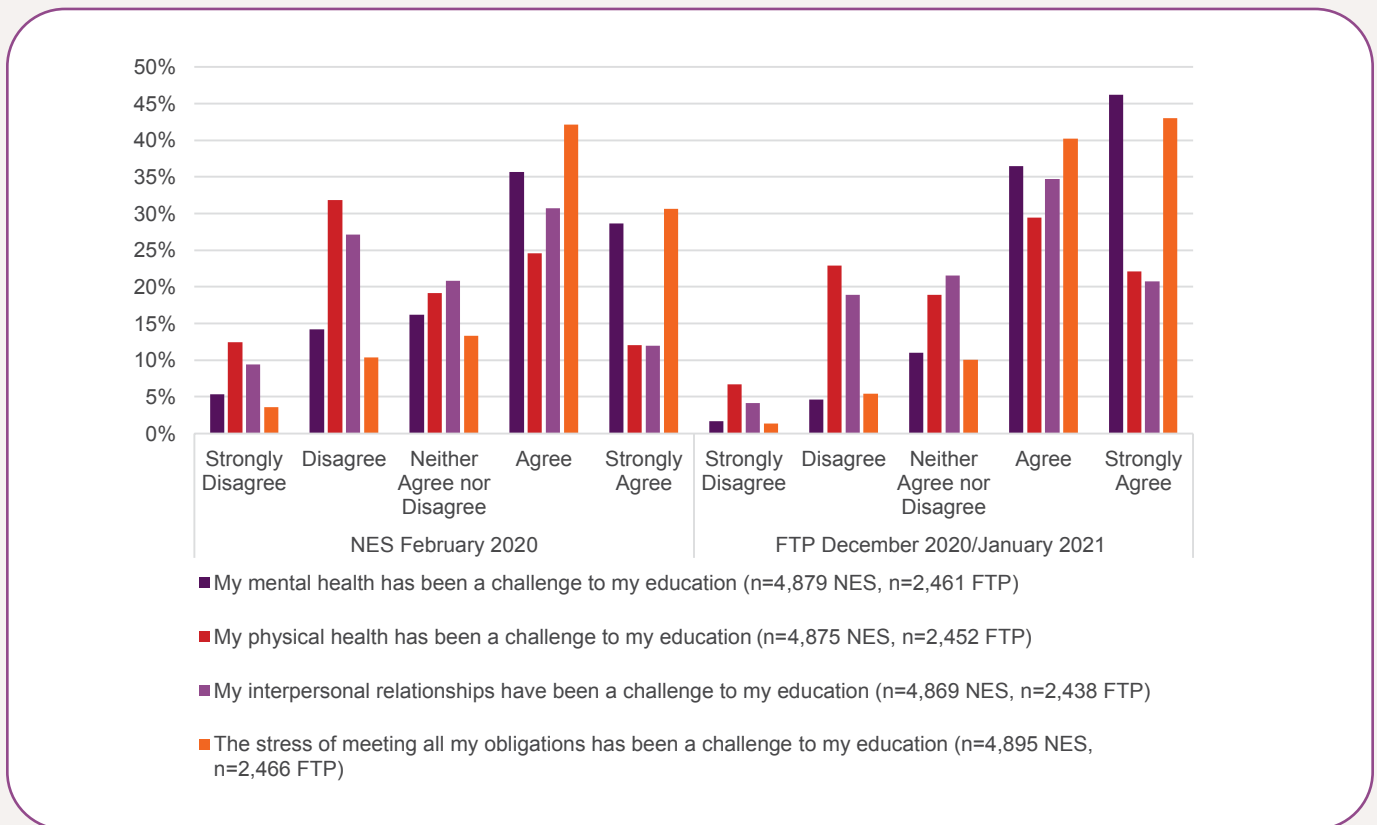


EXAMINING MENTAL HEALTH AND DISTANCE LEARNING

Indigenous post-secondary learners, even though it is evident that maintaining mental health and wellbeing was a challenge for Indigenous post-secondary students before the pandemic began. Prior to the pandemic, 29 percent of students strongly agreed that their mental health has been a challenge to their education. During the pandemic, almost half of respondents (46 percent) strongly agreed that their mental health has put strain on their education. When students were asked whether their physical health has been challenging while pursuing post-secondary education, 12 percent strongly agreed prior to the pandemic, and 22 percent strongly agreed during the pandemic. Respondents also expressed that their interpersonal relationships have created some challenges, with 12 percent strongly agreeing before the pandemic, and 21 percent strongly agreeing following the pandemic. Students reported feeling overwhelmed and stressed while trying to complete their post-secondary obligations. Prior to the pandemic, 31 percent of students strongly agreed that the stress of meeting all their obligations has been challenging and 43 percent of students strongly agreed with the same statement during the pandemic (Figure 1).

“We still have vigorous exams and are expected to do the same/more work compared to pre-pandemic times. I always had stress/anxiety with regular school, but during the pandemic, it has increased substantially.”

Figure 1: Challenges for Indigenous learners prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic



The Shift to Distance Learning

The shift to distance learning was sudden for post-secondary students. With very short notice, students were asked to leave their post-secondary campuses and continue their studies at home. Transitioning to at-home learning has been challenging for Indigenous post-secondary students and continues to impact their mental health. Completing courses online can be difficult with the disconnection from peers and lack of access to campus resources which they were able to access prior to the pandemic. Respondents reported feeling disconnected, lonely, and isolated because of the pandemic.

“My post-secondary experience during the pandemic has been very stressful. It has put a strain on my learning and on my grades. This has been one of the most stressful years of my educational career. It has hugely impacted my mental health and caused more issues than solving them. I miss interacting with my fellow peers and my instructor. I miss being in a physical classroom. The online setting is very difficult for my learning.”

Along with feeling disconnected, lonely, and isolated, 89 percent of respondents reported increased mental health strain due to the pandemic (Figure 2). Within the written responses received, many students experienced anxiety and depression as well. Research has shown that mental health strain can contribute to several negative outcomes for post-secondary students. For example, mental health strain among post-secondary students is associated with poor mental health practices and substandard academic performance (Linden and Stuart, 2019).

Further, over half of the respondents expressed having a pessimistic outlook on the future (61 percent) (Figure 2). When students begin feeling pessimistic about the future, it can impact their goals and current outlook on life. Some students might consider putting their studies on hold until the pandemic subsides and they can return to campus. Many respondents expressed how challenging the school year has been since the pandemic started and expressed feeling hopeless, unmotivated, and ready to give up.

“It seems a lot harder this year and I’ve mentally gone in and out of hopelessness and wanting to give up. It’s been a challenge to stay focused and my physical health has been an issue.”

During the pandemic, 52 percent of respondents indicated they had more balance between work, home, and school than prior to the pandemic (Figure 2). However, a large proportion of respondents had difficulty effectively fulfilling their obligations and finding stability during the shift to online learning.



Many Indigenous students are caregivers, hold employment, attend classes, and complete co-op or practicum placements if required by their program. Maintaining balance in life motivates individuals to achieve their goals and fulfil their obligations while maintaining positive mental and physical health outcomes. Students who struggle to find balance in life are at risk of developing poor mental health outcomes. Balancing obligations has been a challenge because of the pandemic and many students are struggling to find stability and fulfil their responsibilities.

“I am a single parent, doing full time school as well as full time placement and I volunteer. It has been difficult to effectively balance each obligation I have.”

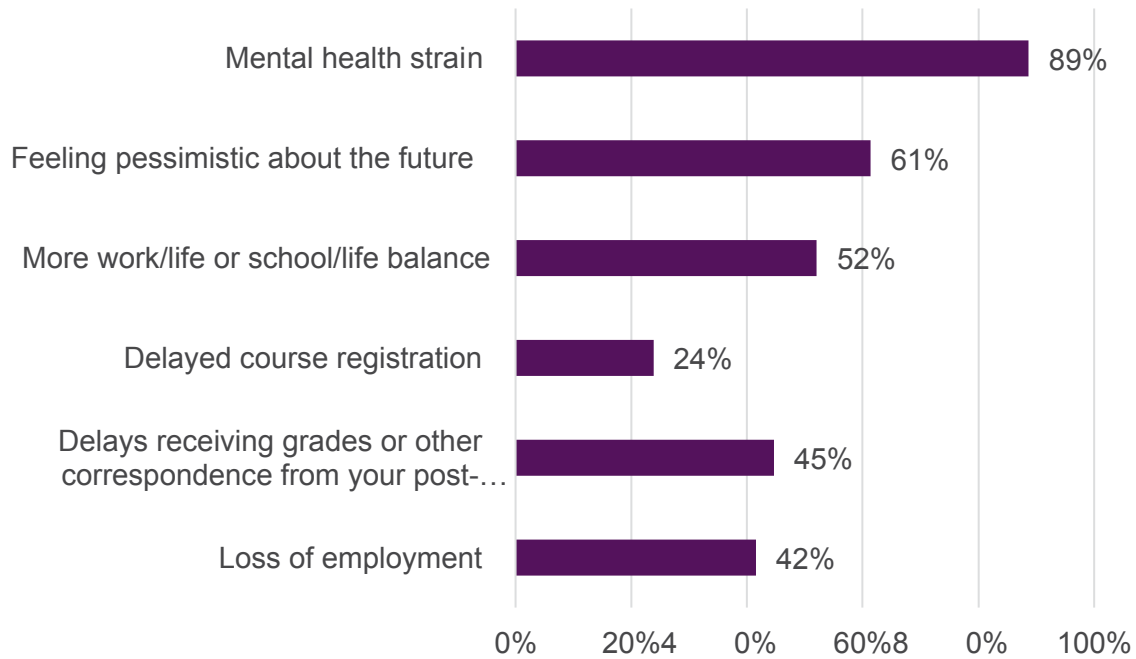
The shift to online learning has affected the administrative responsibilities of post-secondary institutions (Figure 2). A proportion of respondents indicated that there were delays in course registration during the pandemic (24 percent). Further, 45 percent of respondents said they experienced delays in receiving grades or other correspondence from their post-secondary institution. Delays in receiving grades or other correspondence had a major impact on funding opportunities for Indigenous students (Figure 2).

“I was not able to submit all the documents for funding on time because of matters out of my control. I am now not able to access my marks or registration. It has been a lot to handle.”

Difficulty accessing important documents from post-secondary institutions can impact students' ability to access post-secondary funding, participate in work placement opportunities, and maintain employment. During the pandemic, 42 percent of respondents reported loss of employment. Job loss can be detrimental to both mental and physical health. With added financial strain and fewer financial resources, Indigenous learners are at risk of developing mental and physical health challenges after loss of employment (Pappas, 2020). Further, job loss can have an impact on academic performance and plays a major role in students' ability to afford post-secondary education (Figure 2).



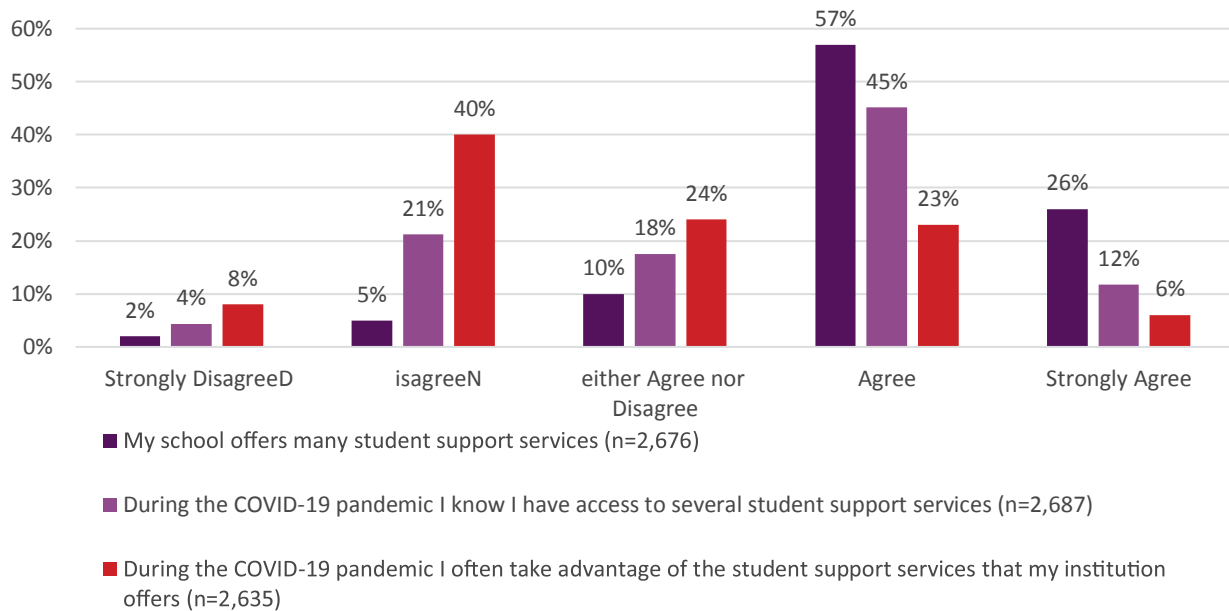
Figure 2: The impact of COVID-19 on Indigenous post-secondary learners, n= 2,517



ACCESSING SUPPORTS AND RESOURCES DURING THE PANDEMIC

When respondents were asked if their post-secondary institution offers many student support services, such as academic guidance, tutoring, financial advice, or counselling services, 57 percent of participants agreed and 26 percent strongly agreed (Figure 3). Over half of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they understood how to access student support services during the pandemic (57 percent). Further, when asked if they often take advantage of the student support services, 48 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Figure 3: Accessing student support services during the COVID-19 pandemic



The pandemic happened unexpectedly, which left post-secondary institutions struggling to continue to provide the necessary supports and resources for Indigenous post-secondary students to access. Accessing student supports online is a much different experience and many students had difficulty reaching out to advisors or professors in a virtual setting. Respondents expressed how challenging it was to access student support services online and many students did not receive the help they needed. This left Indigenous learners feeling frustrated and unsupported by their post-secondary institution. This sudden transition also exacerbated existing challenges for students.



“Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, many student services changed with little explanation to students how systems have changed making it difficult to receive the help students need to feel supported during this time.”

Unfortunately, retrieving academic support services was not the only challenge for Indigenous learners. Respondents also emphasized an urgent need for more counselling services during the pandemic. Some students attempted to connect with a counsellor several times and were unsuccessful.

“I attempted accessing an Indigenous Counsellor that I was offered through my school. I ended up giving up after 5 or so emails to connect and continuously being passed around on who to talk to.”

Prior to the pandemic, students had access to many on-campus resources to help them manage academic stress and other challenges they may encounter. Indigenous students had access to various cultural supports and resources such as the option to attend ceremonies, speak with Elders, and access Indigenous spaces on campus. Students have indicated that there is a lack of access to cultural resources due to the pandemic. This has impacted Indigenous learners' mental health and well-being.

“I wish I had access to my culture, but due to the pandemic I am unable to attend cultural events, and this has impacted my wellbeing.”



CASE STUDY

Bridging the Distance—Connecting Remote Students to Mental Health Services

SCHOOL: Cambrian College, Canadore College, Confederation College, Northern College, and Sault College

PROGRAM: *Bridging the Distance*

LOCATION: Northern ON

Access to mental health resources is a challenge for many post-secondary students, but particularly so for those who are learning remotely. A collaborative, online, mental health support network between five northern Ontario colleges—Cambrian, Canadore, Confederation, Northern and Sault aims to connect post-secondary students who are “at a distance from college services, who are seeking information, or who are in crisis and in need of immediate help.” The intention behind this resource is to bridge the gap between “students and the services and information they may need to support their success and continued mental health.” There are introduction videos for this resource in English, French, and Ojibway, an Honour Song in Ojibway, and Redpath’s “The Social Network for Mental Health & Addiction” video, translated in Ojibway.

There is also a page on mental health services offered specifically Indigenous students at each of the colleges and in each regional surrounding area.

Summary

Indigenous learners often encounter significant mental health challenges while obtaining postsecondary education. Prior to the pandemic, nearly half of recipients reported that mental health has been a challenge to their education. During the pandemic, there has been a significant rise in mental health challenges for Indigenous learners. Indigenous post-secondary students need access to services that can help them establish and maintain positive mental health practices to achieve academic success. The shift to online learning has left Indigenous learners feeling disconnected, lonely, and isolated. Social connection is important for both mental and physical health. Some of the mental health risks associated with isolation and loneliness may include anxiety, depression, and, in severe situations, the risk of suicide. Research has shown that disconnection and loneliness can contribute to poor sleep quality, lack of self-care, and an inability to concentrate (World Health Organization, 2021). Indigenous students often require different mental health supports compared to non-Indigenous students. It is crucial that Indigenous learners can access cultural resources to maintain mental health and well-being.

CULTURAL CONNECTIONS: CULTURAL ACCESS AND MAINTENANCE DURING THE PANDEMIC

Accessing Cultural Supports

As stated above, accessing cultural supports during the pandemic has been challenging for students. Many programs and initiatives that post-secondary institutions offered prior to the pandemic were not offered due to pandemic-response restrictions. Such restrictions did not permit people to gather in the same space, and the size of gathering permitted varied from province to province, with many jurisdictions opting to not permit gatherings of any kind. From the responses received, approximately 70 percent agreed that accessing cultural supports was more difficult because of the pandemic, with approximately 54 percent indicating that they struggled to stay connected to Indigenous culture (Table 5). Indigenous cultural practices are rarely solitary in nature; many of the cultural protocols of the Indigenous groups in Canada are based on community gatherings where knowledge and teachings are shared.

An additional benefit of gathering for the purposes of transmitting cultural teachings and knowledge is the accompanying support and encouragement that is offered between people at such gatherings. In response to the Truth and Reconciliation Centre's (TRC) Calls to Action (NCTR, 2015), many post-secondary institutions offered access to cultural supports, such as access to elders and knowledge keepers, prior to the pandemic. Many post-secondary institutions also offered support to Indigenous students through Indigenous student service centres, where Indigenous students could connect with other Indigenous students and staff, participate in cultural events, such as pow wows or sweats, and access Elders or Knowledge Keepers. The maintenance of cultural integrity of Indigenous post-secondary students has been proven to be integral to student confidence, sense of belonging, and overall success (Bastien and Gallop, 2016). Unable to gather, many students lost access to cultural teachings, knowledge, and support during the pandemic. In fact, compared to previous years, 84 percent of respondents agreed that there were fewer opportunities for them to attend cultural events, such as pow wows, talking circles, round dances, and pipe ceremonies (Table 5).

However, students did report positive news as well. Indigenous service centres at postsecondary institutions seem to be adjusting the delivery of cultural supports for students, as nearly half (48 percent) of the respondents agreed that the Indigenous service centre on their campus has been innovative in maintaining connections to the Indigenous community (Table 5). Several respondents indicated that they were able to access cultural supports through their post-secondary institution during the pandemic as well (32 percent) (Table 5). Many respondents were also innovative in accessing cultural supports during the pandemic with a higher percentage of respondents indicating that they had accessed cultural supports outside of their post-secondary institution (42 percent) (Table 5).

Table 5: Accessibility and availability of cultural supports during the pandemic

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, accessing cultural supports and events has been difficult for me. (n=2,549)	2%	7%	20%	42%	30%
During the COVID-19 pandemic, I have struggled to stay connected to my Indigenous culture. (n=2,600)	4%	18%	24%	36%	18%
Compared to previous years, there are fewer opportunities for me to attend cultural events such as Pow Wows, talking circles, round dances, pipe ceremonies, etc. (n=2,550)	1%	3%	12%	36%	48%
The Indigenous student centre at my campus has been innovative in helping me stay in touch with my school's Indigenous community. (n=2,447)	7%	17%	27%	35%	13%
During the COVID-19 pandemic, I have accessed cultural supports outside of my postsecondary institution. (n=2,531)	8%	34%	17%	34%	9%
During the COVID-19 pandemic, I have accessed cultural supports through my postsecondary institution. (n=2,514)	11%	37%	19%	27%	5%

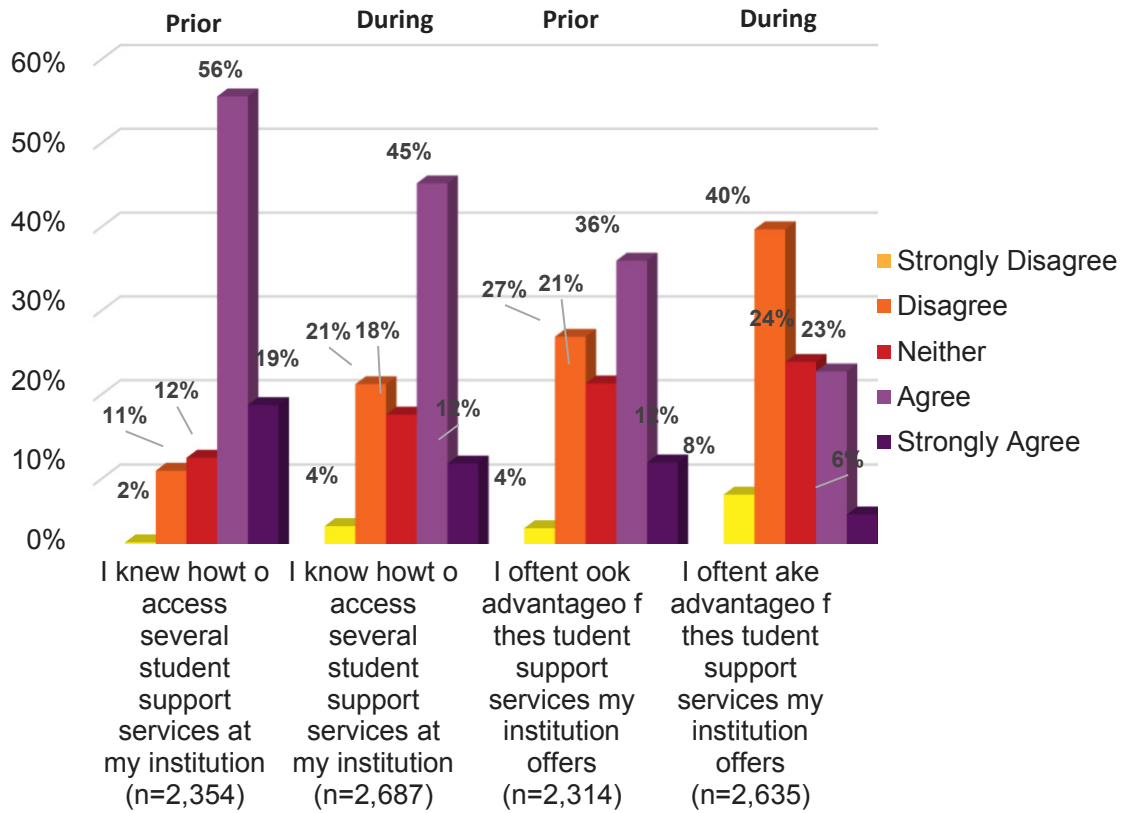
When contrasting the accessibility and availability of supports for Indigenous students offered through the respondent's institution prior versus during the pandemic, there was about a 17 percent decrease in the respondent's knowledge on how to access student support services during the pandemic compared to previous years (Figure 4). The difference in these proportions was found to be statistically significant ($\chi^2(1, N = 3276) = 164.5, p < .001$).



This finding suggests that Indigenous students attending school during the pandemic accessed fewer resources available to them compared to previous years. Based on the previously mentioned findings (Table 5), many of these supports included culturally specific services aimed to increase Indigenous students' sense of belonging on campus. Without the knowledge of how to access cultural support services that may be offered, the intention of these targeted services is lost. In comparison to during the pandemic, nearly half (48 percent) of respondents indicated that they had often taken advantage of the student support services offered through their institution in previous years. It is noteworthy that the pandemic has certainly changed the accessibility of these targeted services during the pandemic (Figure 4).

The data from this survey suggests that there was about a 20 percent decrease in students engaging in the support services available to them during the pandemic compared to previous years (Figure 4). This finding, when combined with the previously mentioned finding, suggests that students were unaware of existing student support services and were therefore unable to access these services to the same extent as prior to the pandemic. Furthermore, another explanation for these findings could be the temporary hold or cancellation of services in response to the new prohibitive health regulations stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic. Such restrictions led to the cancellation of many cultural student support services such as access to Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and ceremonies, among other services. As such, many students may have assumed that all student support services were unavailable during the pandemic and therefore accessed supports to a lesser extent than they had in previous years.

Figure 4: Accessibility and availability of student support services offered by their postsecondary institutions during and prior to the pandemic



CASE STUDY

Successful Cultural Programming Transitions to an Online World

PROGRAM/SCHOOL: *Four Directions Indigenous Student Centre/Queen's University*

LOCATION: Kingston, ON

While many post-secondary institutions have struggled to transition to the new world of online learning, often leaving integral cultural supports for Indigenous students behind, Queen's University's Four Directions Indigenous Student Centre (4D) has created comprehensive virtual programming for students to maintain their cultural connections. 4D hosts multiple recurring events such as weekly meetings with cultural counsellors that provide teachings and spaces for reflection, weekly beading circles, biweekly sharing circles, and the Full Moon Ceremony ("Events Winter 2021", accessed 2021). 4D also provides opportunities for Indigenous students to build academic and life skills, such as the Gather Together program's biweekly workshops that cover topics from resumes and cover letters to exam prep and finding housing, and biweekly peer-led mental health sharing circles ("Events Winter 2021", accessed 2021). Individual academic and cultural counselling through 4D is also available by request online, and students are informed of any additional upcoming events or relevant resources through 4D's active Facebook page ("Four Directions Indigenous Student Centre", accessed 2021).

Indigenous Mentorship

A significant support for many students is the ability to develop and participate in meaningful mentorship. A large contributing factor to meaningful mentorship can stem from being able to identify key attributes in the form of a mentor, which the student aims to emulate. Connections between mentors and mentees can lead to increased confidence and therefore increased student success (Bastien and Gallop, 2016). Having a mentor who is Indigenous or culturally aware of the experiences and challenges that an Indigenous student may face while completing their post-secondary degree can foster positive relationships that lead to increased levels of student success (Bastien and Gallop, 2016).

Respondents to the *Following the Path* survey were asked if they had connected with a mentor or been involved in a mentorship program while pursuing their post-secondary studies. It was disconcerting to



uncover that 74 percent of respondents had not been connected with a mentor or mentorship program while attending their post-secondary institution (Figure 5). It was promising, however, to learn that many of those who were connected to a mentor or mentorship program felt as though their Indigenous culture was both understood (70 percent) and respected (84 percent) (Figure 6).

Figure 5: *Following the Path Respondents who connected with a mentor or were involved in a mentorship program during their post-secondary studies, n = 2,751*

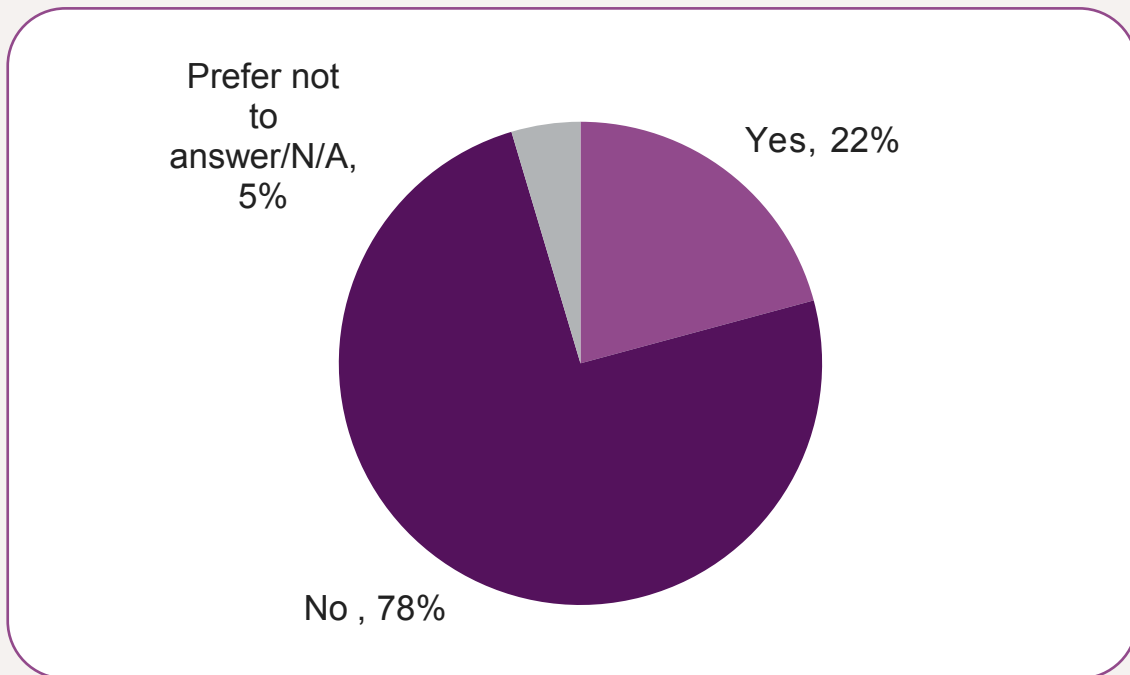
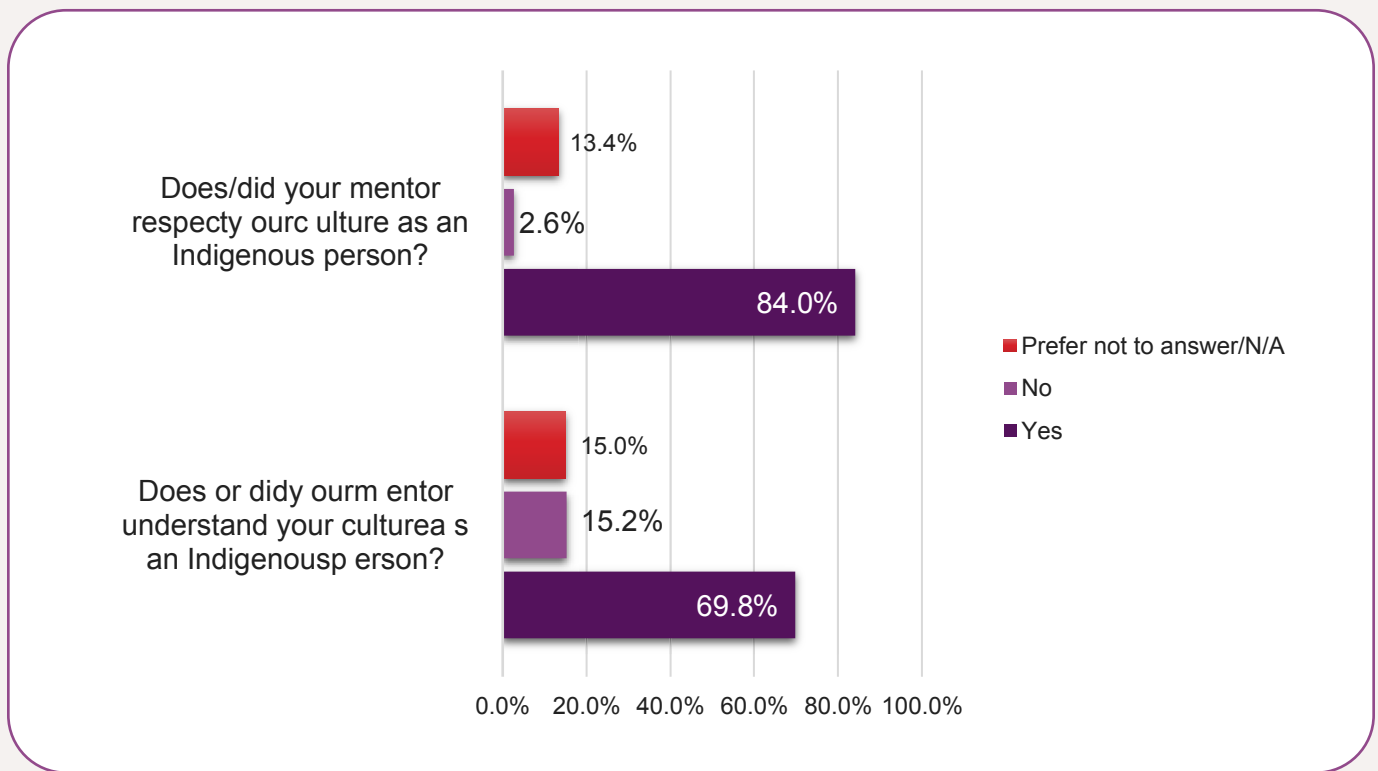


Figure 6: Mentor's understanding and respect of their Indigeneity, n = 539

Value of Indigenous Language

Inspired by the TRC Calls to Action, many post-secondary institutions are making reconciliatory efforts to embrace Indigenous languages by offering Indigenous language courses and programs. One method of staying connected to culture is through language. In fact, the Assembly of First Nations has stated that Indigenous languages are a fundamental element to Canadian culture and society (Assembly of First Nations, 2019). Survey respondents enrolled in a language course or program were asked to indicate the value they felt they received from taking an Indigenous language course. A qualitative analysis was performed to identify the most recurring themes of the responses received. Of the themes identified, respondents stated that the most valuable aspect of taking an Indigenous language course was feeling connected to culture and community (39 percent) (Table 6). Many respondents identified how learning an Indigenous language led to an enhanced understanding of their culture, community, and history.



“It made me feel a lot more connected to my culture and history. Through processes of assimilation a lot of that knowledge has been lost in my family and I've always felt like a part of myself was missing. I feel that I'm finally getting a part of myself back.”

The second most mentioned value was the ability to reclaim or preserve language (14 percent) (Table 6). Many respondents mentioned how different government-implemented programs or initiatives, such as the Sixties Scoop or the residential school program, resulted in the loss of their native language for themselves or their family. Being able to reclaim or preserve their native language for themselves and their children was a prominent theme amongst the responses received for this question.

“When I was younger, I lost my Cree language while attending Prince Albert Indian Residential School, because I was not allowed to speak my own language. Now, I try my best to include the Cree content into various subject areas. I'm proud to say that I'm slowly reconnecting to my Cree Language at school and at home.”

“I began speaking to my grandmother in her language - one that she was taught not to speak in residential school - and she began telling me stories about her childhood. My 91-year-old grandmother who claimed to have all but lost the language started remembering things from long ago - forgotten things - when she heard her mother tongue. I think that is profound. Language keeps our cultures alive. I hope more young people can learn the languages of their ancestors.”

During the pandemic, the barrier to accessing Indigenous culture has grown significantly despite the best efforts of the community, organizations, or post-secondary institutions to keep the Indigenous community connected to Indigenous culture and language. The offering of Indigenous languages and Indigenous language programs during the pandemic by postsecondary institutions not only contributes to the efforts of reconciliation as recommended by the TRC Calls to Action, but also offers a unique opportunity for Indigenous students to stay connected to community, culture, and language during the pandemic. The maintenance of Indigenous culture within post-secondary institutions for Indigenous students fosters a sense of belonging and lends to increased student success.

Table 6: The value of studying an Indigenous language – a qualitative analysis, n = 537

What value did studying an Indigenous language bring to you?		
Theme	Number of Responses	Proportion of Responses
Connection to culture/community	211	39%
Reclamation/preservation	75	14%
Language appreciation	74	14%
Valuable	53	10%
Increased confidence/pride	36	7%
Little or no value	24	4%
Other response	64	12%
Total	537	100%

CASE STUDY

Indigenous Language Revitalization

PROGRAM/SCHOOL: *Indigenous Language Revitalization (Certificate, Diploma, Bachelor of Education, Graduate Certificate, Master of Education, Master of Arts), University of Victoria*

LOCATION: Victoria, BC

The University of Victoria’s Indigenous Language Revitalization programs exemplify how post-secondary institutions can achieve the spirit of the TRC’s Calls to Action to preserve and strengthen Indigenous languages (NCTR, 2015). Through offering a variety of educational entry points to language learning, such as certificates, diplomas, undergraduate and graduate degrees, the University of Victoria increases the accessibility for students to “retain and revive their own language” (“Indigenous Language Revitalization”, accessed 2021). Each unique pathway also personalizes the experience for students as the course content is planned and delivered in partnership with individual language communities (“Indigenous Language Revitalization”, accessed 2021). This collaboration between post-secondary institutions and Indigenous communities creates space for further community control over language acquisition and cultural teachings. Expanding access to language learning and ensuring community-based delivery is an integral step forward in educational selfdetermination that allows for the cultural continuation of languages to be preserved.

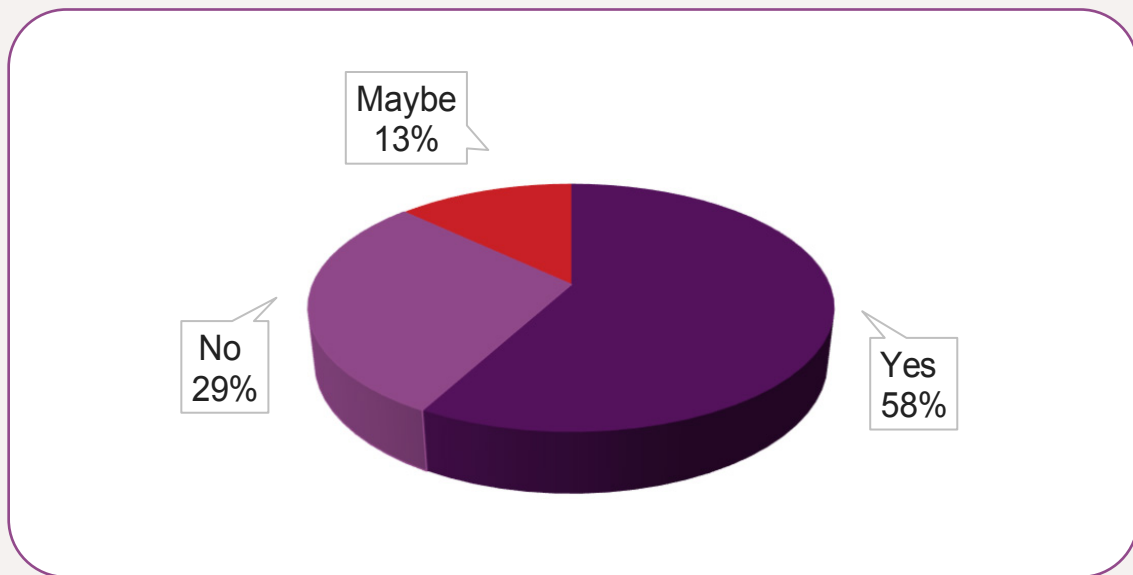
Indigenous Representation and Course Content

In addition to offering Indigenous language courses and programs, many institutions are aiming to include more Indigenous content as well as representation in various courses within a variety of disciplines. Student academic success can be highly influenced by the ability to identify with program instructors and professors as well as the material being taught in school, which is likely why the Truth and Reconciliation Commission called for an increase in both Indigenous content and representation in schools (NCTR, 2015). Increased Indigeneity within a student’s field can increase their level of success in their chosen discipline (Bastien and Gallop, 2016). It is likely that Indigenous instructors are better able to relate to Indigenous students and possess a more informed understanding of the unique challenges that an Indigenous student may face. Conversely, an Indigenous student may better envision their future role within their discipline when seeing Indigenous leaders in their chosen field.



When the respondents to the *Following the Path* survey were asked about the representation and accessibility of Indigenous faculty within their institution, approximately 58 percent of the responses received indicated that they felt they had access to an Indigenous faculty member who was available and accessible for advice and guidance (Figure 7). On the contrary, approximately 29 percent of the responses received indicated that they had no such Indigenous representation within their faculty (Figure 7).

Figure 7: “Do you know of any Indigenous people in your field of study, in any context, whom you feel you could reach out to for advice or guidance on your education or career aspirations?”, $n = 2,826$



Interestingly, when survey respondents were asked to rate their satisfaction with the number of Indigenous people teaching courses in their program, more than half of the respondents (54 percent) stated that they were unsatisfied (Figure 8). This may mean that while there may exist Indigenous representation within their faculty or program of study, the representation may be lower than students are comfortable with. In fact, when students were asked if there was an increased availability of professors who were sufficiently experienced in Indigenous topics, students overwhelmingly indicated (83%) that they would enroll in more courses, complete more research, or complete more assignments on Indigenous subjects (Figure 9).

Figure 8: Satisfaction with the number of Indigenous people teaching courses within their program, $n = 2,688$

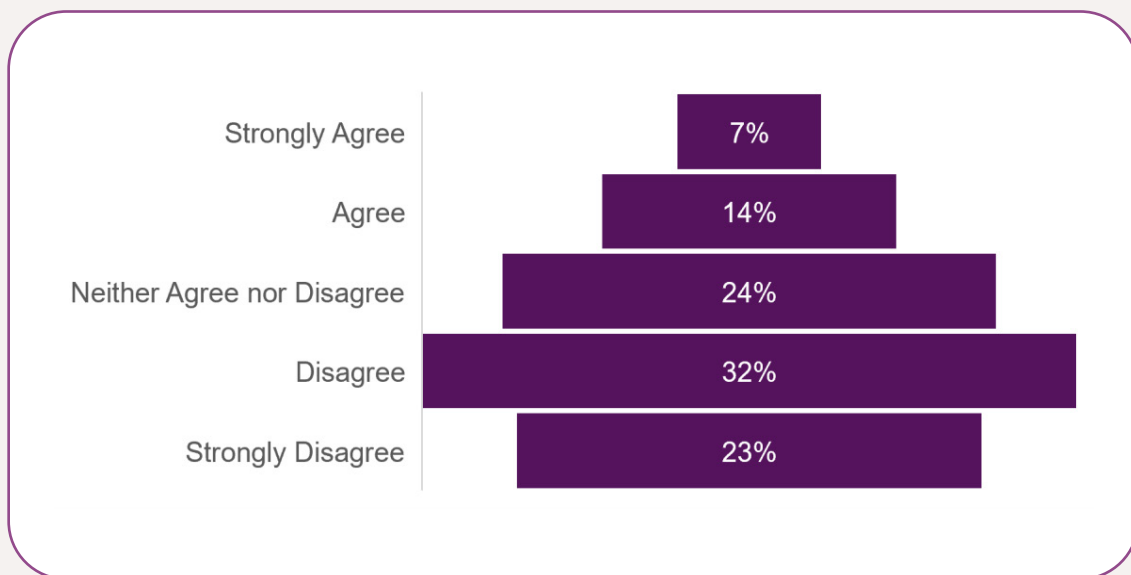
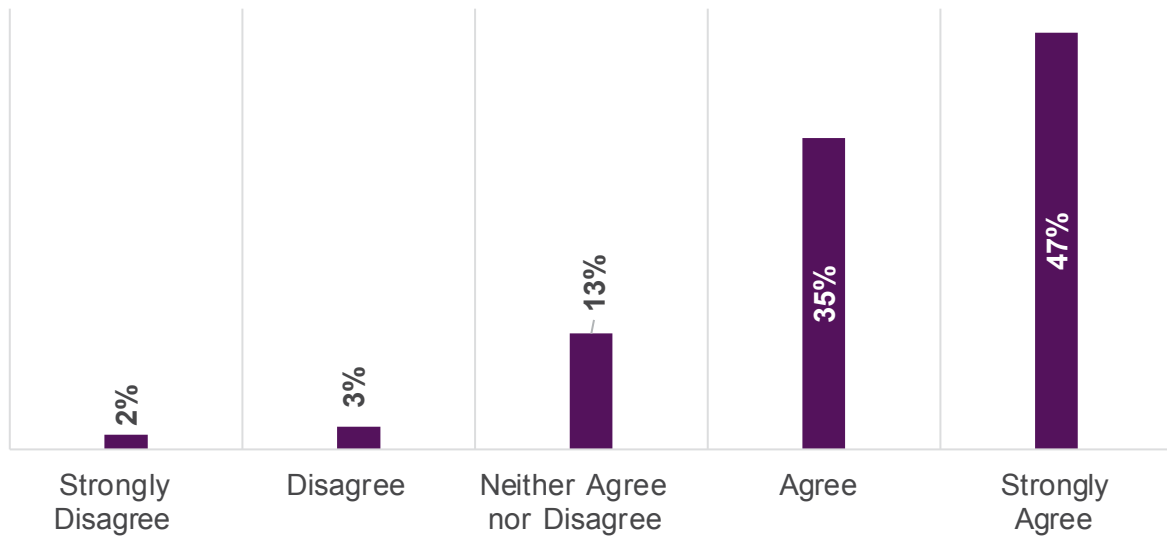
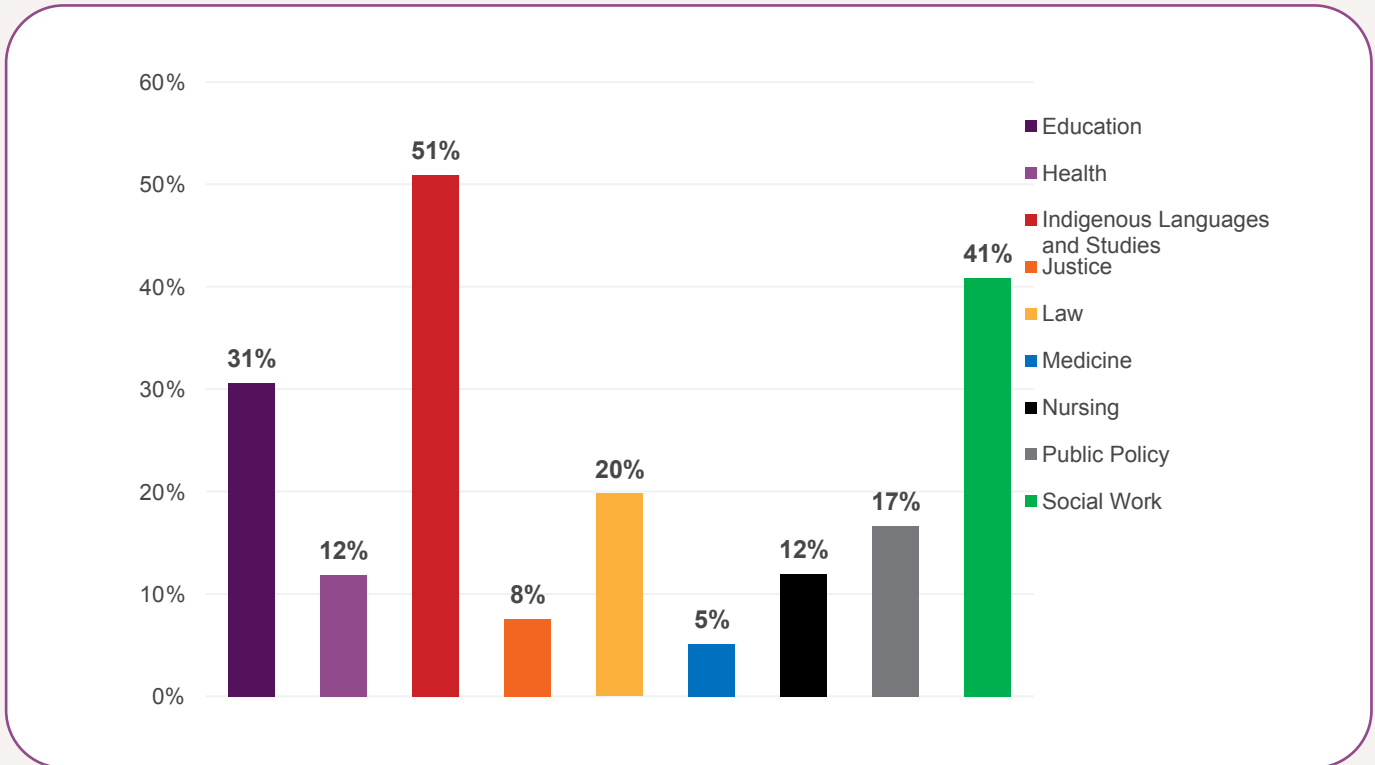


Figure 9: Response to “If there were more available professors with experience working on Indigenous topics, I would choose to take more courses and/or complete more research or assignments on Indigenous subjects.” n = 2,328



When examined more closely, the top three fields of study where students felt that there was adequate Indigenous representation within the faculty were: Indigenous languages and studies (51 percent), social work (41 percent), and education (31 percent) (Figure 10). The two fields of study where the percentage of students who felt there was adequate representation of Indigenous faculty was lowest in were medicine (5 percent) and justice (8 percent) (Figure 10). These findings are important in light of the TRC Calls to Action recommending more Indigenous representation within these fields (NCTR, 2015).

Figure 10: Satisfaction with the number of Indigenous people teaching courses within their program by field of study, $n = 1,457$



Included within the 94 Calls to Action by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada were calls for the integration of Indigenous knowledge into educational content through the appropriate consultation with Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers (NCTR, 2012). With many educational institutions now embracing a holistic approach to learning, some postsecondary institutions are incorporating Indigenous perspectives, ways of knowing, and content into courses and programs. Nearly half of respondents (51 percent) to the *Following the Path* survey agreed that Indigenous perspectives and subjects were often included in their courses (Table 7). However, many respondents (41 percent) also felt that Indigenous ways of knowing were not included as often as they should be (Table 7). However, when Indigenous ways of knowing were incorporated into course content, it was generally perceived to be done in way that was free from discrimination and attack (60 percent) and done so in a respectful manner (69 percent) (Table 7). It is notable, however, that nearly half (51 percent) of the respondents were unsatisfied with the frequency in which Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and other Indigenous community members were utilized in the delivery of their course or program (Table 7).

Table 7: Level of agreement with statements on of incorporation of Indigenous perspectives, ways of knowing, and content in post-secondary courses

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Indigenous perspectives and subjects are often included in my courses. (n=2,422)	11%	26%	13%	31%	20%
Indigenous ways of knowing were included as often as they should be in the delivery of my courses. (n=2,420)	12%	29%	21%	23%	15%
Indigenous ways of knowing in my program are being delivered in a way which is free from discrimination and attack (n=2,239)	6%	12%	22%	38%	22%
Course content on Indigenous peoples and history are being delivered in a respectful manner. (n=2,283)	3%	9%	18%	43%	26%
I am satisfied with how often Elders, Knowledge Keepers and/ or other Indigenous community member are involved in teaching my courses. (n=2,633)	20%	32%	20%	19%	9%

CASE STUDY

Indigenous Studies Course Requirement, ICR

PROGRAM/SCHOOL: *University of Winnipeg*

LOCATION: Winnipeg, MB

In 2015, a group of Indigenous undergraduate students, fueled by the Idle No More movement, spearheaded the proposal for an Indigenous Studies Course Requirement (ICR) at the University of Winnipeg. The proposal was approved and implemented in 2016, making the University of Winnipeg one of the first universities to implement a universal ICR for all programs of study at the university. As such, all degree programs require a course that educates students on Indigenous people and culture. The adoption of the ICR at the University of Winnipeg has set an example of the movement toward reconciliation by post-secondary institutions. Furthermore, for a course to be considered an ICR, the course must be approved by though a consultation process overseen by an ICR committee composed of Indigenous faculty and students.

Summary

Our survey results have demonstrated that Indigenous students are struggling to stay connected to culture and community, and that this connection has been further strained as a result of the health restrictions imposed by the pandemic. Therefore, the efforts toward Indigenous reconciliation and inclusion being implemented by post-secondary institutions should be prioritized. Many of the respondents to this survey indicated that they were either unaware of existing supports, unsure how to access such supports, or that the desired supports were unavailable to them. Increasing awareness of and accessibility to cultural supports and mentorship opportunities for Indigenous students during the pandemic would allow for increased student success.

To further foster reconciliation, post-secondary institutions should continue or begin to offer Indigenous language courses or programs. The results of our survey suggest that in addition to a course credit, Indigenous students are staying connected to their culture as well as reclaiming or preserving their language when enrolled in an Indigenous language course. The maintenance of Indigenous culture through language courses and programs have allowed certain students to maintain connections to their



Indigeneity during the pandemic. However, when offering Indigenous courses or programs, it remains important to ensure that there is appropriate consultation and collaboration with Indigenous Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and community members when developing content for such courses/programs. This ensures that Indigenous ways of knowing are incorporated appropriately and as often as they should be.

Furthermore, efforts to obtain and retain Indigenous faculty should remain a priority for postsecondary institutions, as many of our respondents indicated that they would like to see more Indigenous representation in their field of study. An intensified focus on retaining and obtaining Indigenous faculty should exist for the healthcare (excluding medicine), justice, and nursing fields of study. According to our results, it is these fields of study that demonstrated the lowest Indigenous representation within their faculties.

The Rivers to Success program initiatives offered by Indspire also help Indigenous learners access additional cultural supports outside of their post-secondary institution. This program offers customized cultural resources as well as support systems for Indigenous learners. Students interested in accessing these program initiatives can access supports such as mentorship as well as connect with Elders and Knowledge Keepers. This additional resource available for Indigenous learners assists in filling the gaps that they are experiencing when accessing mentorship services or cultural programs at their post-secondary institutions.

RESPECTFUL RELATIONSHIPS: INDICATORS OF CHANGE

Throughout this report, there have been some positive indicators that, in the wake of the 5th anniversary of the TRC's final report, change is being experienced by Indigenous students during their post-secondary journey. While there are still significant challenges, particularly those amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic, several respondents stated that they have also had a variety of successes in academic settings.

Following the Path survey results suggest that Indigenous students are being subjected to fewer verbal and physical attacks at their post-secondary institution. It also suggests that course content on Indigenous peoples, histories, and ways of knowing are being delivered more respectfully, which may indicate that at least some direct barriers in the learning environment are lessening. This section will celebrate the changing landscape for Indigenous post-secondary students, identify the elements that have shifted in a positive direction, and showcase promising paths that are benefitting Indigenous post-secondary students, while being mindful that the work is not done and that we must continue on this path.

Increasing Freedom from Discrimination

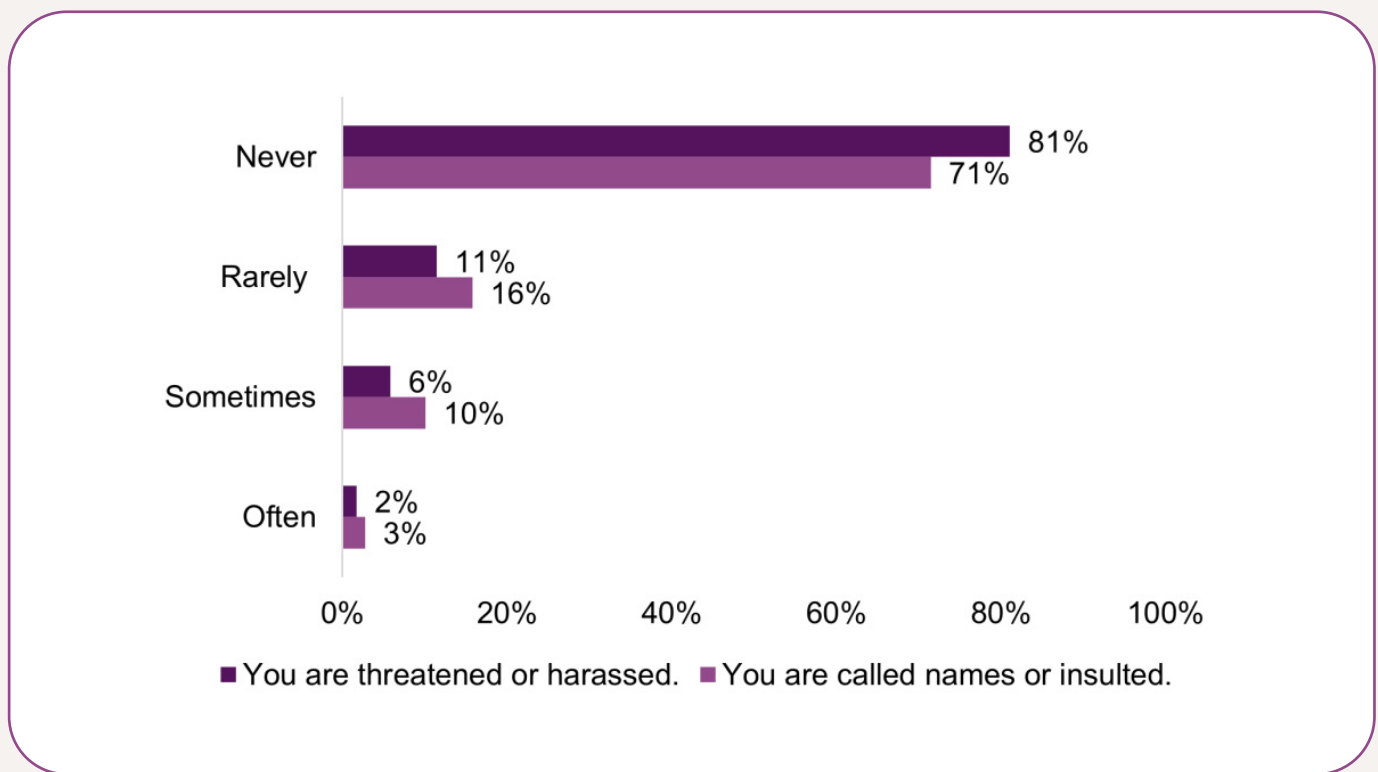
Post-secondary education is challenging in its own right. According to the American College Health Association's National College Health Assessment II (NCHA), results have shown that post-secondary students are under an immense amount of stress, with 61 percent of NCHA respondents reporting that they experience more than average or tremendous stress (American College Health Association, 2019), and 60 percent finding their academic pursuits traumatic or very difficult to handle (American College Health Association, 2019). Increasing stressors that are out of students' control, such as biased, prejudicial, and racist interactions, add a level of psychological distress (Currie, Wild, Schopflocher, Laing, and Veugelers, 2012) that makes an already difficult environment even more challenging (Bastien and Gallop, 2016).

However, enlightening results from Indspire's *Following the Path* survey suggest that Indigenous students infrequently experience direct attacks based on their Indigenous identity. Eighty-one percent of respondents have never felt threatened or harassed at their postsecondary institution (Figure 11) and 71 percent of respondents have never been called names or insulted on campus (Figure 11). These results may indicate that progress is being made on lessening Indigenous students' experiences of overtly racist verbal and physical attacks; but this number does not represent the myriad of everyday aggressions, implicit biases, and institutional, systemic discrimination that Indigenous students face in post-secondary institutions.



These inequities exacerbate Indigenous students' sense of vulnerability, and impact their selfconfidence, physical and mental health (Henry, James, Li, Kobayashi, Smith, Ramos, and Dua, 2017). Unconscious biases also have structural impacts that affect Indigenous students' ability to progress academically and professionally (Henry et al., 2017)⁵. Further research on and tracking of implicit and everyday racism (Hyslop, 2021), along with open and honest conversations about these issues, need to take place “to make visible their impact on practice and unjust outcomes” (Henry et al., 2017), and to direct action so that Indigenous students can experience meaningful change on campus.

Figure 11: Experiences of Discrimination Based on Indigenous Identity, $n = 2,327$



We are seeing similar trends when it comes to the delivery of course content on Indigenous peoples, histories, and ways of knowing, which are seldom taught in a discriminatory manner. Over 60 percent of *Following the Path* respondents stated that Indigenous course content was being delivered in a respectful way (Figure 12), and 69 percent of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that Indigenous ways of

⁵For a detailed list of common unconscious biases and these impacts on racialized students, see “Chapter 11: Dirty Dozen: Unconscious Race and Gender Biases in the Academy” by Malinda S. Smith, with Kimberly Gamarro and Mansharn Toor in *The Equity Myth: Racialization and Indigeneity at Canadian Universities*.



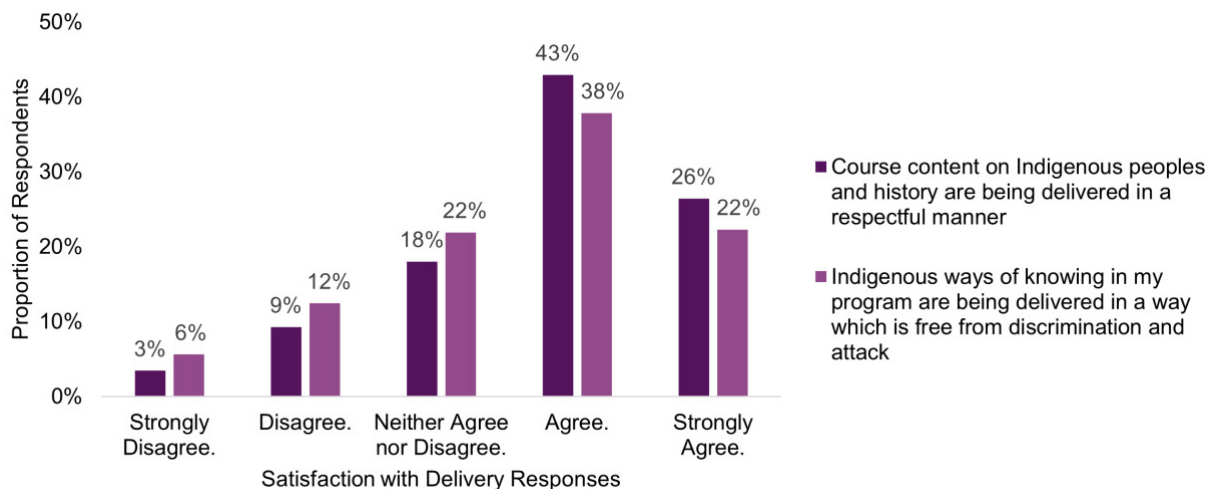
RESPECTFUL RELATIONSHIPS: INDICATORS OF CHANGE

knowing are being delivered free from discrimination and attack (Figure 12). Teaching on these topics in a respectful manner creates a safer environment for Indigenous students, who, instead of having to guard against racist behaviours, can spend their energy focusing on and engaging with the course content (Bastien and Gallop, 2016). As well, when Indigenous-related topics are taught in a way that is free from discrimination, this approach allows for the process of deconstructing biases in learners, and for mutual recognition and understanding to develop, rather than alienation (Choate and MacLaurin, 2018). Establishing positive learning environments increases the ability for Indigenous students to engage with the material without fear of discrimination, and allows for connections to emerge between peers, which is important because peer support is a key component for Indigenous post-secondary students' success (Bastien and Gallop, 2016).

“I feel more respected and known by my classmates once more education is shared on both sides.”

“Had really good success, received a 90 on an assignment related to residential schools related to inter generational trauma because my professor was very respectful and knowledgeable on the subject.”

Figure 12: Respectful Delivery of Course Content on Indigenous Topics, $n = 2,327$



When asked about how at ease Indigenous students feel at their post-secondary institution, 61 and 63 percent of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that they are comfortable and belong at their school, respectively, and 67 percent of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that they are accepted by the campus community (Table 8). Feeling accepted creates an atmosphere where Indigenous students feel assured that they can self-determine their own academic success (Bastien and Gallop, 2016), as demonstrated in the *Following the Path* survey results, where 83 percent of respondents strongly agreed or agreed to the statement: “If I wanted to, I could potentially do very well at my school” (Table 8). It is important to work towards creating learning environments where Indigenous students feel that they belong and that their lived experiences are validated (Bastien and Gallop, 2016) as this heightens their sense of control over and confidence in their own academic journey.

“Connecting to my culture more was relaxing and made me feel understood and not an outcast.”

“In group work during the module, others mentioned how interested they were in learning more and felt I had a lot to contribute to group discussions.”

Table 8: Sense of Social Fit Likert Scale Responses, n = 2,50

Likert Scale Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
People at my school accept me.	1%	4%	28%	54%	13%
I belong at my school.	1%	6%	33%	48%	13%
I feel comfortable at my school.	1%	7%	28%	53%	10%
If I wanted to, I could potentially do very well at my school.	0%	2%	16%	57%	26%

Academic Self-Determination

In a content and thematic analysis of the open-ended questions regarding students' experiences completing projects, reports, or assignments that are specific to Indigenous peoples, the most common theme that emerged was that survey respondents' greatest successes resulted when they have freedom of choice in determining their assignments.

When respondents had the opportunity, they often chose to write on topics related to Indigenous peoples and felt supported to do so. As well, curricula are showing signs of increased Indigenization, and with this progress, many respondents mentioned that they have had success when taking entire courses on Indigenous topics. In particular, when Indigenous knowledges are the structure for a post-secondary program, students feel an increased sense that their perspectives are valued and are motivated to pursue more research on topics of interest to them.

“As an Indigenous student, the...Indigenous Field of Study provides me an opportunity to bring self to research, writing and practice. I research topics that I can see my ancestors journeying through, I write about intergenerational healing and I reflect and dream about becoming a wholistic Indigenous practitioner. This term allowed for safe, restorative healing to happen for me in virtual circle with my colleagues and mentors in class and through experiences outside of class.”

Another promising finding was related to the question regarding potential challenges that Indigenous post-secondary students may have completing projects, reports, or assignments that are specific to Indigenous peoples. One of the top responses was that students had no challenges completing projects or assignments related to Indigenous peoples. This is heartening to hear, as it may indicate that many students feel the freedom to pursue topics related to Indigenous peoples without discrimination or fear that they will be treated unfairly.

“I didn't find challenges as I have had a number of experiences through various sectors, so it was pleasant to learn more but also offer perspective and research things I am very very passionate about such as Gang intervention.”

“I do not recall running into any significant challenges. I had several sources that I was able to use, and my professors did a great job teaching me about Indigenous peoples.”

CASE STUDY

Academic Self-determination: Iyiniw Pimâtisiwin Kiskeyihtamowin Doctoral Program

SCHOOL: *University nuhelot'jine thaiyots'j nistamey imâkanak Blue Quills*

PROGRAM: iyiniw pimâtisiwin kiskeyihtamowin Doctoral Program

LOCATION: St. Paul, AB

Governed by seven local First Nations communities, University nuhelot'jine thaiyots'j nistameyimâkanak Blue Quills aims to deliver culturally appropriate curricula informed by Indigenous ways of knowing (“About Us”, accessed 2021). The iyiniw pimâtisiwin kiskeyihtamowin Doctoral Program is an exemplar program that reflects the University’s values and is an act of sovereignty for Indigenous communities to educate, define, and recognize graduate experts (iyiniw pimâtisiwin kiskeyihtamowin, accessed 2021). Rooted in ceremony and guided by Elders, this doctoral program is intended to be a shared educational experience where cohort members are expected to collaborate on research and be involved in reciprocal knowledge transfer with communities (iyiniw pimâtisiwin kiskeyihtamowin, accessed 2021). There is no candidacy exam, instead “at the conclusion of the program students will make an offering to a circle of witnesses, presenting shared and individual portfolios” (iyiniw pimâtisiwin kiskeyihtamowin, accessed 2021) to focus on collective learning. The iyiniw pimâtisiwin kiskeyihtamowin Doctoral Program is a powerful example of academic self-determination and how Indigenous knowledges can structure for a post-secondary program (iyiniw pimâtisiwin kiskeyihtamowin, accessed 2021).

Conclusion: Building Strong Learning Environments

Indigenous post-secondary students are still experiencing multiple barriers throughout their educational journey. However, despite these challenges, *Following the Path* participants have stated that they have also experienced affirming academic successes.

Course content on topics pertaining to Indigeneity are showing signs of increased respectful delivery, and Indigenous students are experiencing fewer threats and less harassment based on their Indigenous identities. Respectful learning environments are an integral foundation to hold space for Indigenous post-secondary students to pursue their research interests without having to worry that choosing to work on



Indigenous topics will be met with discrimination and unfair treatment. To sustain the current successes that Indigenous post-secondary students are experiencing, Indigenous-related content should continue to be delivered respectfully and free from discrimination and attack.

While we can celebrate these successes that many of our respondents are experiencing less prejudice, the number is not zero. Nineteen percent of respondents have had an experience feeling threatened or harassed at their post-secondary institution and 29 percent of respondents have been called names or insulted based on their Indigenous identity (Figure 11). Ongoing effort will need to be put into ensuring that course content is delivered free of discrimination, that any identity-based harassment and assault are handled appropriately, and that systemic and implicit biases should be better researched, tracked, and addressed (Smith, as cited in Hyslop, 2021). Creating safer and more supportive campus communities gives Indigenous students the freedom to focus on their academic growth (Bastien and Gallop, 2016) rather than spending energy on dealing with or guarding against racist attacks (Currie et al., 2012). Indspire's Research Knowledge Nest is designed to understand barriers for Indigenous peoples accessing and graduating from post-secondary institutions; we are prepared to do further research into this topic. However, to get the most accurate results, we cannot do this alone. To link and consistently track post-secondary data for Indigenous students, partnerships and collaborations with stakeholders need to be developed to best understand the frequency and impacts of systemic racism.

There should also be a focus on providing significant opportunities for completing assignments related to Indigenous topics, especially on creating space for Indigenous students to choose to self-determine their academic works. The Indigenization and decolonization of course content is essential for Indigenous students' success. When culturally specific and relevant topics are given enough space and time to be learned in class, Indigenous students experience "an increase in self-esteem, confidence, and capacity, and subsequently...more equipped to face challenges within the educational milieu" (Bastien and Gallop, 2016).

Eighty-three percent of respondents stated that they would complete more projects, research, assignments, and courses on Indigenous-related topics if there were more professors who were appropriately knowledgeable on these subjects (Figure 8). Therefore, to actualize opportunities for Indigenous students to participate in research or projects related to Indigenous peoples, there should be an increase in Indigenous faculty representation to ensure that course content is accurately delivered and that there is capacity to appropriately grade work on Indigenous-related topics.

The positive indicators outlined in this section demonstrate where post-secondary institutions are succeeding and highlight the best practices to continue pursuing. Focusing on respectful course delivery, creating safer learning environments, and providing opportunities for students to determine their research directions without fear that they will be graded inappropriately will all continue to bolster Indigenous students' success.

LIMITATIONS

The large majority of this report's findings came from a survey administered to BBF applicants enrolled in a post-secondary program in the 2020 summer and/or fall semesters.

This survey data has potential limitations in evaluating the experiences of Indigenous postsecondary students during the COVID-19 pandemic. With 3,178 responses, the survey provided a rich sample of Indigenous post-secondary students. However, this sample may not perfectly represent the experiences of the total Indigenous PSE Canadian population. Generally, BBF awards are distributed based on GPA, financial need, and community involvement. Thus, compared to the total Indigenous PSE population, this survey's sample may consist of individuals with higher levels of these factors and related ones.

Further, this survey may be subject to response bias. For example, students who have experienced severe health issues may be reluctant to share their experiences in the survey. It is also possible that students from certain demographics responded to the survey at higher rates. When analyzing respondents' demographics, we found little evidence of any severe imbalances in response rates (see Appendix B). Finally, it is difficult to discern whether students' experiences were caused by the pandemic, or if their experiences would have been similar in the absence of a pandemic. In a few instances, we were able to pose the same question to BBF applicants as we had in a survey administered pre-pandemic (for example, see Figure 1), but in many cases, there was limited previous data to compare. In future research, many of this report's findings could be used to compare to Indigenous learners' experiences in a nonpandemic state.

Throughout this report, it is possible that the results chosen to be presented were influenced by the authors' implicit bias. Particularly because of the large amount of qualitative data, the authors' personal experiences and opinions will factor into how the data was presented. However, the report was created by five researchers at Indspire with input from many others, which reduces the magnitude of this bias due to the differing contributions of the authors.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The multitude of challenges that Indigenous students face during their academic journey are complex and structural. Our recommendations are intended to provide a clear vision for pathways forward to ensure that the progress of the TRC's Calls to Action can be implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic for the benefit of Indigenous post-secondary students.

The recommendations were developed by merging the feedback received from respondents and were then streamed into three target areas to direct improvement efforts, which include: reducing financial strain, increasing virtual mental health and cultural supports, and selfdetermination over education. Each focus area includes guiding recommendations to create a good foundation for Indigenous post-secondary students to succeed and realize the TRC's Calls to Action in educational spaces during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Reducing Financial Strain

As indicated by the *Following the Path* survey results, Indigenous students experience significantly higher rates of financial strain in comparison to other post-secondary attendees (Table 2) and barriers to accessing the resources needed for at-home learning, such as an appropriate workspace and stable internet (Table 4). To create an environment for Indigenous students to succeed, further action needs to be taken to reduce financial barriers for Indigenous peoples to pursuing post-secondary education. The recommendations below are illustrative of potential approaches identified by respondents of areas where direct support could help alleviate their financial strain.

- Implement strategies to streamline the funding process for Indigenous students through creating common applications for multiple sources of funding and building supports to specifically advise Indigenous students on available funding opportunities.
- Reduce stress and uncertainty around funding security for Indigenous post-secondary students by confirming funding application results earlier and providing more renewable scholarships and bursaries.
- Increase funding for Indigenous post-secondary students and expand financial support to purchase computers, proper desks and chairs, access reliable internet, and other resources needed for at-home learning.
- There are foundational and structural needs that Indigenous students require in addition to financial support to be able to participate in distanced learning, which include safe, reliable, and affordable housing, the expansion of reliable internet to Indigenous communities, and the formation of community workspaces.

Increasing Virtual Mental Health, Academic, and Cultural Supports

Mental health strain has been associated with negative outcomes for post-secondary students (Linden and Stuart, 2019), and 89 percent of respondents reported increased mental health strain during the COVID-19 pandemic (Figure 2). A contributing factor to this increase in mental health strain has been the incomplete online transition of mental health, academic, and cultural supports. Post-secondary institutions are struggling to meet the increased demand for counselling services, structures that students rely on to make it through their education. For Indigenous students in particular, having systems in place to support Indigenous students in maintaining their connection to culture are essential elements for post-secondary success. Providing funding for and clear access to supports and programming will help to decrease the sense of isolation when learning from home, and will help to ensure that Indigenous students have the tools they need to continue their academic journey.

- More effectively transition cultural supports to an online platform and raise awareness of and access to virtual cultural supports available to Indigenous post-secondary students.
- Increase accessibility of counselling services and mental health support for Indigenous students that goes beyond limited counselling sessions. This should also include the hiring and retention of culturally informed counsellors, such as Elders and Knowledge Keepers.
- Develop culturally appropriate stress management tools to identify the factors that contribute to stress and find preventative measures to reduce and manage stress.
- Offer mentorship programs that provide positive mental health practices for Indigenous students, where they have access to an Indigenous mentor who understands and respects their culture.
- Prioritize Indigenous language learning through ensuring that these programs are appropriately funded, instructed, and delivered online.

Self-Determination Over Education

A key element of the TRC's Calls to Action that are particularly directed at educational institutions is ensuring that the delivery and development course content and curricula on Indigenous-related topics involves the full participation and consent of Indigenous peoples (NCTR, 2015). It is imperative to reconciliation that Indigenous communities have a say in educational topics about them, and that Indigenous educators are involved as much as possible in order to uphold the rights and control of Indigenous peoples over their knowledge.

Advancing self-determination over Indigenous knowledge transmission will also ensure that the information delivered is more accurate, respectful, and included as much as possible, and for Indigenous



RECOMMENDATIONS

students to be prepared and provided with significant opportunities to direct their own academic path. It is very important that, when working with Indigenous community members, they are appropriately compensated for their time, effort, and guidance (NCTR, 2015). When students can relate to the instructors and materials being taught, without their focus being detracted by guarding against discrimination, barriers to Indigenous student academic success can be diminished.

- Increase the frequency in which Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and other Indigenous community members are involved in the development and delivery of course content on Indigenous-related courses, programs, and topics.
- Incorporate Indigenous ways of knowing more frequently into course content with direction from Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and community members.
- Provide significant opportunities to complete assignments related to Indigenous topics and choose the direction of their academic topics, research, and assignments.
- Indigenous-related content should continue to be delivered respectfully and free from discrimination and attack. Post-secondary institutions should research and track institutional racism occurring on campus. These results should then be used to structure effective responses and plans to reduce discrimination in the learning environment.
- Foster, obtain, and retain more Indigenous educators and faculty members. Increasing the representation of Indigenous educators and faculty members will create opportunities for Indigenous students to enroll in more courses, complete more research, or complete more assignments on Indigenous subjects. Increasing the number of Indigenous faculty members in the fields of Health, Justice, and Nursing should be prioritized.

CONCLUSION

In the wake of the TRC's final report, 94 Calls to Action were directed at multiple stakeholders "to redress the harms of residential schools and advance the process of Canadian reconciliation" (NCTR, 2015). As the 5th anniversary of the release of this landmark document has passed, Indspire wants to know what progress is being made on the Calls to Action pertaining to post-secondary education, and if their implementation is being experienced by Indigenous students.

While 2020 marked the 5th anniversary of the TRC's final report, it was also a year warped by the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, this report particularly focuses on the impacts of the pandemic on the advancement of reconciliation, how post-secondary institutions are adjusting to be in line with COVID-19 protocols, and where these shifts leave Indigenous learners.

The results from the *Following the Path* survey indicate that there is still much work to be done for the spirit of the TRC's Calls to Action to be fulfilled and felt by Indigenous post-secondary students.

The advancement of these Calls to Action has been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, and adjustments need to be made for Indigenous peoples to be fully supported in their pursuit of post-secondary education. Reducing financial constraints by easing or combining application processes and providing funding for the resources needed to succeed in at-home learning would aid in reducing the added financial strain that Indigenous students are experiencing during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Respondents reported that another difficulty connected to distance learning during the pandemic is an increase in mental health challenges. Necessary cultural supports and programming that Indigenous students rely on as a source of strength through their postsecondary journey have been inconsistently transitioned to a virtual learning environment.

Providing funding for and clear access to cultural supports and programming will help to decrease feelings of isolation, increase a sense of belonging, and enhance Indigenous students' academic successes. Approaches to online cultural programming should extend beyond extracurricular supports to in-class studies, such as offering Indigenous language courses or programs.

Increasing the presence of Indigenous educators in class and in the development and delivery of appropriate course content related to Indigenous peoples are other important factors for Indigenous students to maintain their cultural integrity throughout their academic journey. There are some positive indicators that some progress is being experienced by Indigenous postsecondary students in the process of reconciliation.



CONCLUSION

Eighty-one percent of respondents have never felt threatened or harassed at their postsecondary institution (Figure 11) and 71 percent of respondents have never been called names or insulted on campus (Figure 11). As well, over 60 percent of respondents stated that the delivery of Indigenous course content and ways of knowing are being delivered in a way that is free from discrimination and attack (Figure 12). However, further research is recommended to investigate implicit, systemic, and everyday racism by post-secondary institutions for Indigenous students to experience change on campus.

Establishing safer, respectful learning environments are essential for Indigenous post-secondary students to focus on their academic growth (Bastien and Gallop, 2016) and feel confident to choose the direction they want to take their work.

This report sheds light on the particular needs of Indigenous post-secondary students during the COVID-19 pandemic. To ensure that the advancement of reconciliation is felt by Indigenous post-secondary students, additional actions are needed to transition the implementation of the TRC's Calls to Action into the "new normal" that is online learning.

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APPENDIX A: METHODOLOGY

The majority of the data presented in this report came from a survey administered to applicants to Indspire's Building Brighter Futures: Bursaries, Scholarships, and Awards program (BBF). As this report's intent was to investigate student experience during the COVID-19 pandemic, the survey was sent to BBF applicants who were enrolled in a post-secondary program in the 2020 summer or fall semesters – that is, any time from May 2020 to December 2020. A pre-qualifier question in the survey confirmed that the respondent was enrolled during this timeframe. The survey was sent to 7,009 students from December 17, 2020 to January 12, 2021 and received 3,178 responses, resulting in a response rate of 45.3%.

The survey resulted in both quantitative and qualitative data. A large amount of the quantitative data came from Likert Scale questions. A Likert-style question is a question that asks for the level of agreement of a statement, where the answer options are on some scale. For example, a scale used often in this report was Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Agree, and Strongly Agree. The proportions and counts of Likert responses were calculated and analyzed. Unless stated otherwise, these results included all survey respondents who answered the respective question.

The survey also contained many free-form questions. These questions were important to include as they allowed Indigenous students the opportunity to express their experiences in their own words. The qualitative data from these questions were coded according to common themes, and the occurrence of these themes was analyzed. Further, quotes that were deemed representative of many respondents were selected to be included in the report.

Survey results were not weighted in any way for this report. This was done for simplicity, ease of reading, and because the sample was quite large with no major demographic imbalances. A demographic profile of survey respondents is provided in Appendix B.

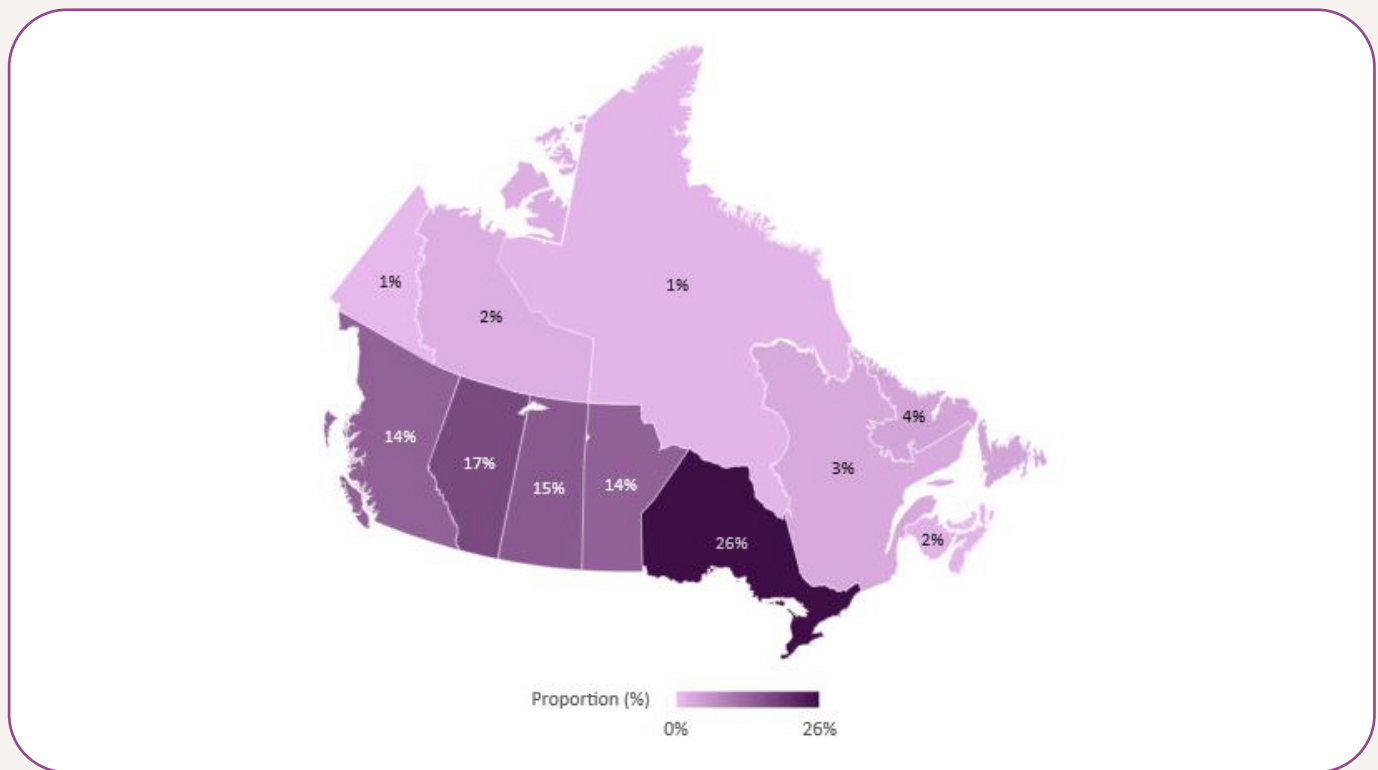
Another source of data used in this report was case studies of post-secondary schools, programs, or initiatives that are examples of positive reconciliation. These examples were identified by investigating reconciliation initiatives at post-secondary institutions across Canada and highlighting those that were determined to be excellent examples of advancing reconciliation. There were several examples of institutions demonstrating reconciliation initiatives that were not included in this report.

After the production of the data used in this report, it was found that there were approximately 15 duplicates in the data due to inconsistencies in students' listed emails. After careful analysis, it was determined that these did not affect the report's results in any meaningful way. At the most, a few of the results would be affected by a percentage point or less.

APPENDIX B: DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF SURVEY RESPONSES

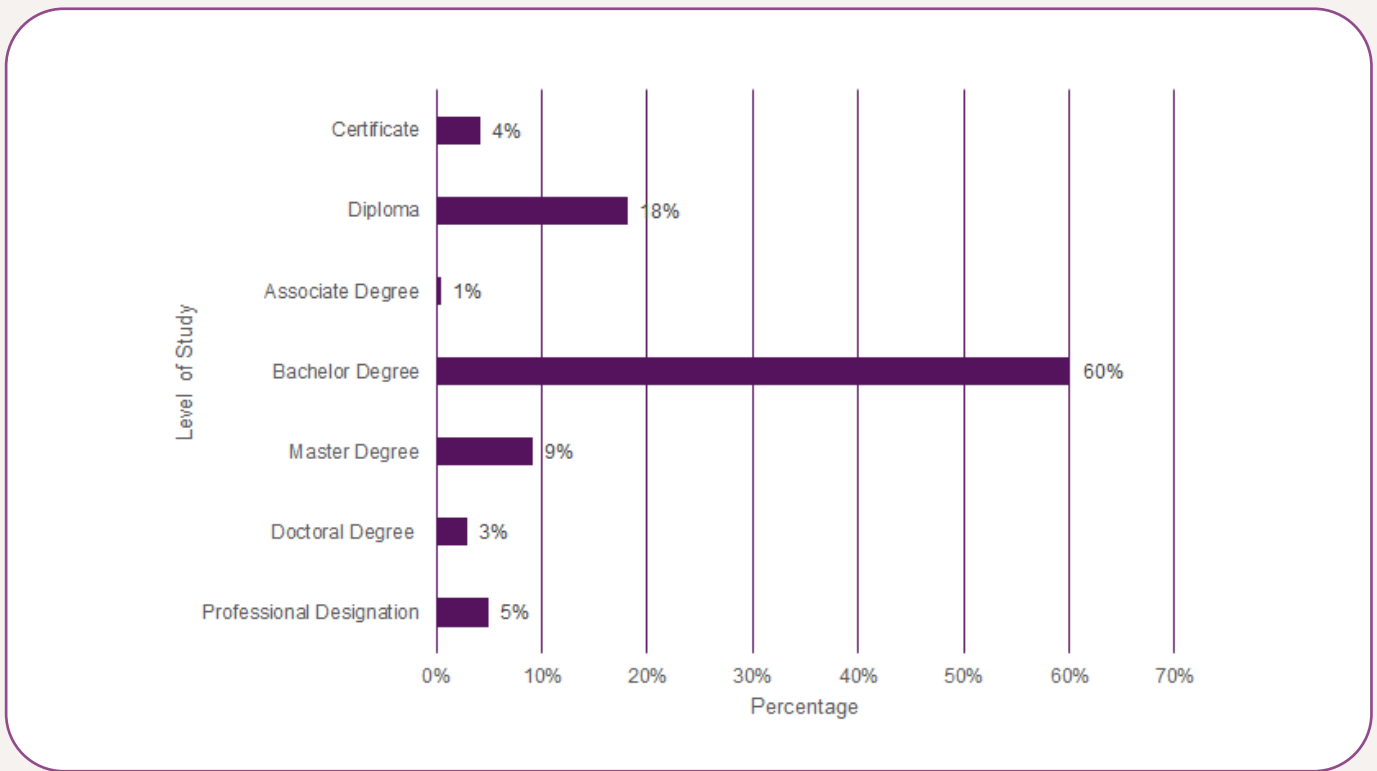
The demographic questions in the *Following the Path* survey were used to understand certain background characteristics of the survey respondents, and to comprehend how well aligned we are with the population of individuals who participated in the survey. Many of the respondents came from one of five provinces: Ontario (26 percent); Alberta (15 percent); Saskatchewan (14 percent); Manitoba (14 percent); and British Columbia (14 percent).

Figure 13: Geographic Distribution of Following the Path Respondents, n=3,178



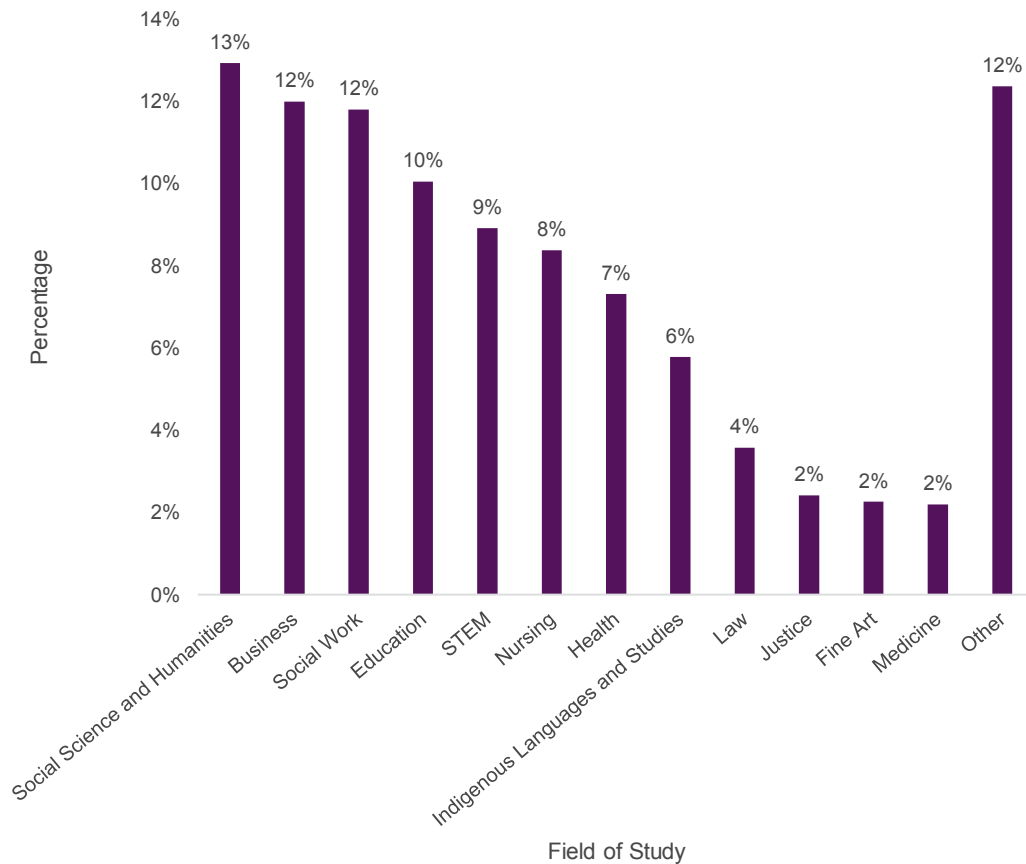
Over half of respondents indicated that they were enrolled in a bachelor's program (60 percent) during the 2020/2021 academic year. Non-university diplomas (18 percent) and master's degrees (9 percent) were also common areas of study for recipients.

APPENDIX B: DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF SURVEY RESPONSES

Figure 14: Level of Study of Respondents to the Following the Path Survey, n=3,178

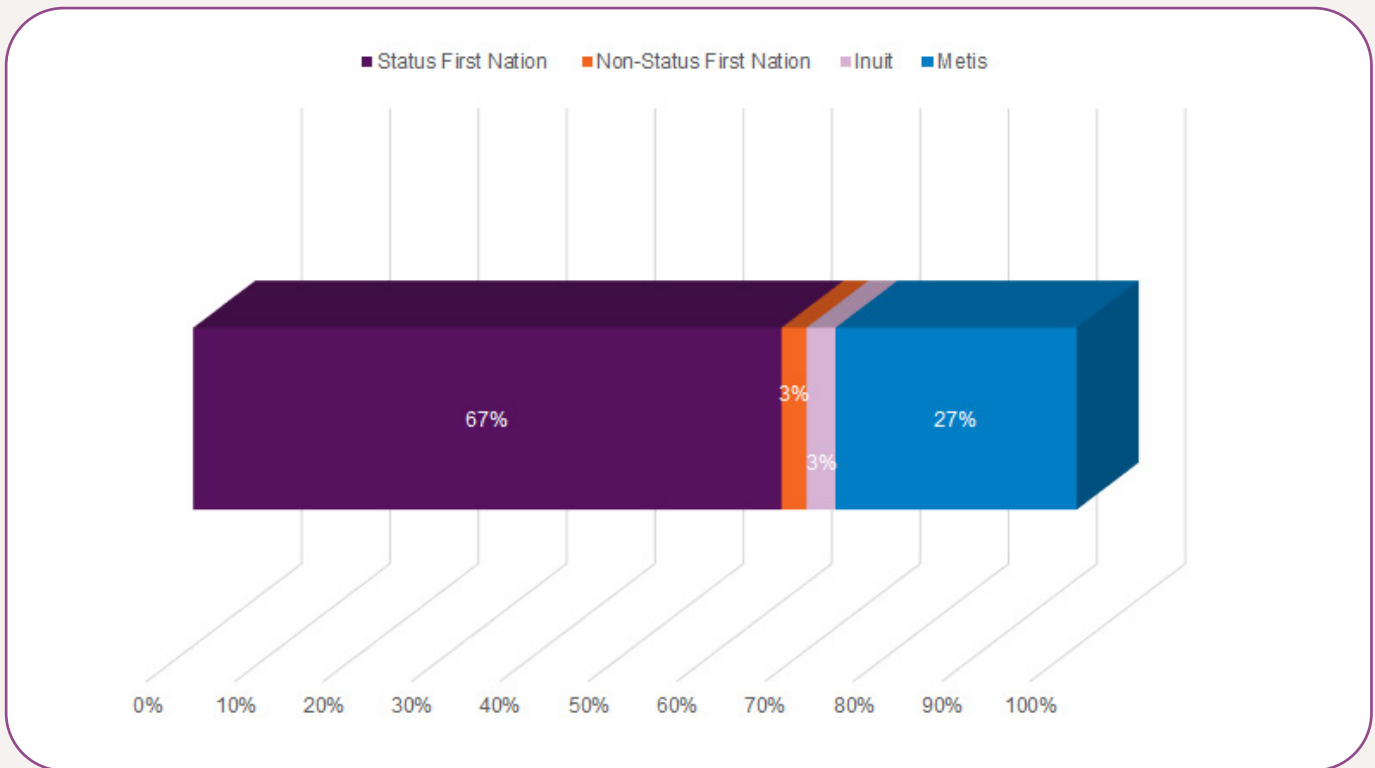
Based on field of study, the most respondents (13 percent) were enrolled in social sciences and humanities, followed by business (12 percent), and social work (12 percent).

APPENDIX B: DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF SURVEY RESPONSES

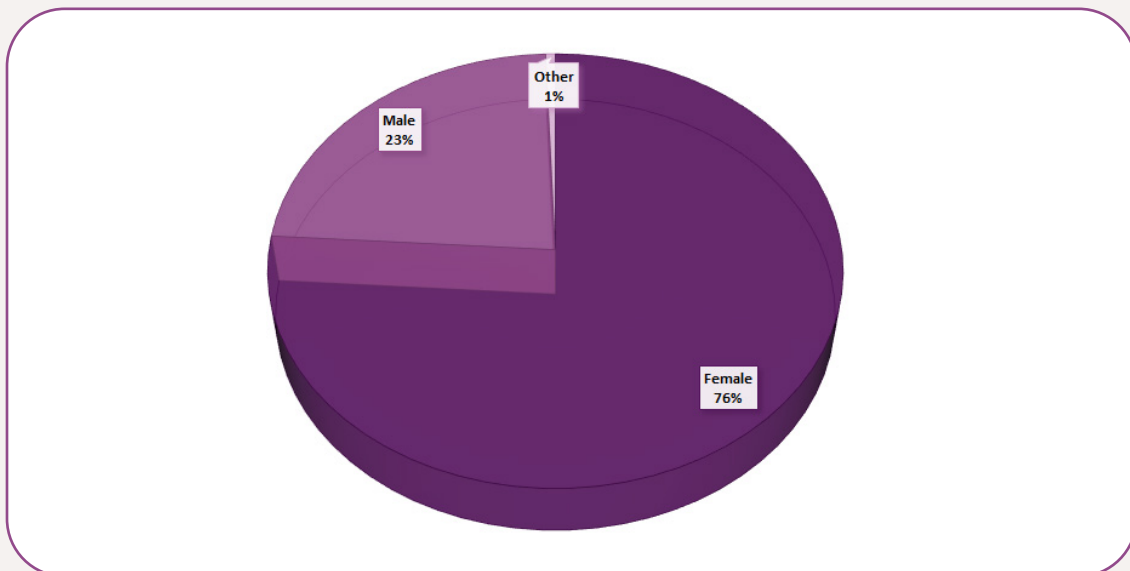
Figure 15: Field of Study of Following the Path Recipients, n=3,185

From our *Following the Path* data, we were able to determine the Indigenous identity of recipients. Most of the participants were Status First Nations (67 percent) followed by 27 percent of Métis recipients. Inuit and non-Status First Nations students represent approximately 3 percent of participants each.

APPENDIX B: DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF SURVEY RESPONSES

Figure 16: Indigenous Identity of Following the Path Recipients, n= 3,178

A large proportion of *Following the Path* respondents were female (76 percent) with 23 percent male and 1 percent other.

Figure 17: Gender of Following the Path Survey Respondents, n= 3,178



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