

# “We Are All Relations”: An Indigenous Course Requirement (ICR) as Part of a Good Way to Reconciliation

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## Abstract

This mixed-methods study consulted with students, faculty, and staff members to develop insight into the range of their experiences of the Indigenous Course Requirement (ICR) in its initial implementation in the 2016/17 academic year at The University of Winnipeg. Although students and instructors had suggestions for how to improve course content, development, delivery, and support, there were far more positive reactions to the ICR experience than negative.

Faculty indicated concern about a potential backlash from students especially in “dominant locations”, but findings showed a better than expected result. The engaged, enthusiastic students had a direct impact on professors also having a positive experience, whereas the disengaged antagonistic students caused concern for both professors and classmates. Themes that emerged from the positive learning experiences were the importance of relationships, respect, safety, an eagerness to learn together with and from Indigenous peoples, and a desire to work together towards reconciliation for a better and more inclusive educational system and society.

Challenges that faculty, staff, and students indicated were the pressure on Indigenous students to take on the role of token authority on “the” Indigenous experience, how to sensitively support students and staff when talking about a traumatic history, and how to manage contentious discussions in class. There was consensus that racism and lack of knowledge exists and that education and relationships are key to changing stereotypes.

Recommendations for improvements were gleaned from participant suggestions. Necessary components to moving forward in a good way included providing students with more information about the ICR and the intentions behind it, and more support services, training, and debrief mechanisms for all involved.

*Keywords:* ICR, Indigenization, racism, reconciliation, TRC, UNDRIP

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# Terms used in the Report

*Holistic education:* The educational philosophy that seeks to engage students emotionally, physically, and spiritually besides the traditionally single intellectual pursuit.

*Indigenous:* People who identify as First Nations, Métis, or Inuit.

*Indigenization:* Changing the education system to include Indigenous content and pedagogy. Indigenization is about safety of learners, of cultural experience, of grieving, of identity, about our well-being and the opportunity to learn and grow together (Lamoureux, 2017).

*Marginalized:* To be treated as less than equal.

*Reconciliation:* An Indigenous student in this study described reconciliation in a succinct way that I will posit as a definition here: “recognising that there are unforgivable histories that have become intertwined through direct action, and now direct action is required by an oppressive party, by a colonial party, to find out what their place is in solving the problems that can be solved and in encouraging healing in areas where there is, potentially, unhealable damage.”

*Settler:* A relational term to describe peoples of original European descent (Vowel, 2016). In our survey, “white” was one of the ethnic identifiers, but in the report, we changed the identifier to “settler” since that is how some participants identified themselves. We recognize that using identifiers like settler, Indigenous, and International are problematic and that there is no one group that is uniform or homogenous. Therefore, we do not use these identifiers lightly. We apologize if these identifiers are offensive. We recognize that each individual in this research project has a name with a unique background and heritage, and that is how we would like to refer to participants, but the reason for this choice is to strive for anonymity as much as is possible.

*Trigger:* An experience that takes a person back to a memory or flashback to a traumatic event.

*Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC):* TRC was established as part of the Indian Residential School Settlement to inform Canadians about what happened in Indian Residential Schools. Completed in December 2015, the TRC documented survivors and communities’ stories and included 94 calls to action to redress the residential school legacy.

*Turtle Island:* Ojibway term for the land known as North America.

*Two Row Wampum Belt:* The first agreement in 1613 between Indigenous and Dutch settlers in North America, which formed the basis for all other treaty relationships. The treaty outlined the commitment to

friendship, peace between nations, and living as brothers and sisters (Venables, 2009). The Two Row Wampum Belt symbolized “two vessels travelling down the same river in the same direction, living and learning together but never crossing paths or interfering with one another” (Koblun, 2016). The treaty was to remain in effect for all time.

*UNDRIP*: United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

# Background

The University of Winnipeg (UW) is a medium-sized urban university with a student body of about 9,400 students where 13% of the student population self-identify as Indigenous (UWinnipeg Fast Facts, 2017). The University of Winnipeg and Lakehead University in Thunderbay, Ontario are the first universities in Canada to put into effect an Indigenous course requirement (ICR) for all incoming university students. Both universities started the implementation of this new requirement in the fall of 2016 (Indigenous Content Requirement, 2017). The goal of the ICR at UW is that all students learn basic knowledge about Indigenous people and culture (Indigenous Course Requirement, 2016). This is a brief history of how the ICR came into effect at UW. Students played an integral role in the process, and eventual implementation of the ICR and these are some of the events that led to the ICR inception.

In a ceremony in the fall of 2012, Wab Kinew, then director of Indigenous Inclusion at UW, presented Lloyd Axworthy, then President and Vice-Chancellor of UW, with a sacred Anishinaabe pipe as a “way to build bridges between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities” (Axworthy & Kinew, 2013). At the time, Idle No More movements marched their way onto main streets and front pages of newspapers across the country, reminding everyone “that this country began with co-operation between Indigenous and European peoples” (Axworthy & Kinew, 2013). The response garnered divided reaction “making supporters of some ‘average Canadians’ and drawing vehement and occasionally, vitriolic opposition from others” (Axworthy & Kinew, 2013). Indigenous peoples were standing up not only for themselves but for the benefit of all Canadians. Kinew and Axworthy (2013) saw the beginning of a new relationship and committed to “work toward mutually beneficial solutions. Let’s be divided no more.”

In February 2013, racist graffiti in a UW washroom targeted First Nations peoples, and disparaging comments about Idle No More appeared online. Axworthy and human resource officials took the actions seriously, expressed their apology, committed to revising the University’s respectful workplace policy, requiring staff to take workshops, and offering a seminar by Wab Kinew. The Aboriginal Students Council applauded the response indicating that Aboriginal students were not the only ones experiencing discrimination on campus, and that learning about mutual respect would benefit everyone (Graffiti at University of Winnipeg, 2013). In 2015, *Maclean’s* published Nancy Macdonald’s article entitled “Welcome to Winnipeg: Where Canada’s racism problem is at its worst.” The city and University took these accusations seriously and again committed to working on what they recognized was indeed a problem. Although both Axworthy and Kinew had left the University by 2014 and 2016 respectively, the established commitment of Axworthy and Kinew’s work combined with racist incidents on campus collectively contributed to the years of 2015–17 bringing major curricular changes to the University.

In 2015, the Canadian federal government released the 94 Calls to Action to redress the previous wrongdoings to the Indigenous peoples of Canada (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada [TRC], 2015). This was in an effort to rebuild relations with First Nations peoples (TRC, 2015). To incorporate

Indigenous knowledge into coursework acknowledges that UW is located on Treaty One land in the heart of the Métis Nation (Indigenous Course Requirement, 2016) and takes the TRC's calls to action seriously.

The University of Winnipeg Student Association (UWSA) was aware of the political, social, and local climate and initially formed the ICR concept in response to national and local events. Through informal and formal discussions, debates, and research the UWSA proposed the course to the University's Senate. The new course requirement, first proposed during Axworthy's presidency was approved by the Senate in November 2015 and in the fall of 2016 was implemented for all undergraduate students (Indigenous Course Requirement, 2016) with the support of Dr. Annette Trimbee, who succeeded Axworthy as President and Vice-Chancellor. In the 2016/2017 academic year, 27 unique courses with a total of 46 sections were offered across 9 different departments.

This study reports student, faculty, and staff response to the first year of the implementation of the ICR. The overarching research question of this study was: How does the University attempt to engage marginalized students through the ICR? How does the ICR's goal of engaging marginalized students fit into the wider objectives of the University?

## Data Collection and Recruitment

Multimodal data were collected during the winter of 2017; collection started on January 31, 2017, and ended on April 24, 2017. Data were collected through individual faculty and staff interviews, student surveys, and focus groups. Faculty and staff were recruited through direct contact with departments that offered ICR courses. Student survey participants were recruited through a mass email to all UW students that had taken an ICR course in the fall term of 2016 and winter term of 2017. Focus group participants were also recruited through the mass email that went to the same pool of students that received the survey invitation.

## Sample Size, Participant Demographics, and Research Methods

Data were collected from the following:

- 10 faculty and staff from six departments participated in the individual 30-minute voice recorded interviews.
- 164 students responded to a survey invitation sent to 1,230 students who had taken an ICR (13% response rate).
- 19 students participated in one of three 60-90-minute focus group discussions.

Where analysis permitted we compared the experience based on gender, ethnicity, and length of time at the University. This report presents descriptive statistics including demographics and length of time at UW and how these variables influenced the quality of participants' experience with the ICR course they took during the 2016/2017 academic year. Qualitative data were organized into meaningful themes and categories using selective and axial coding as suggested by Kleiman (2004). Quotes that pertained to the selected themes and categories were inserted under corresponding headings to quilt together a patchwork of quotes. Next, in the process of axial coding, we connected, interrelated, evaluated, and interpreted common themes that emerged. We then offered a "textural" description of the ICR experience.

## Gender

Gender: 63% of the survey respondents identified as female, 19% identified as male, less than 1% identified as transgender, and 18% chose not to identify. The sample seems representative, since the UW "gender breakdown" for undergrads shows 62% of the student body is female (see Figure 1).

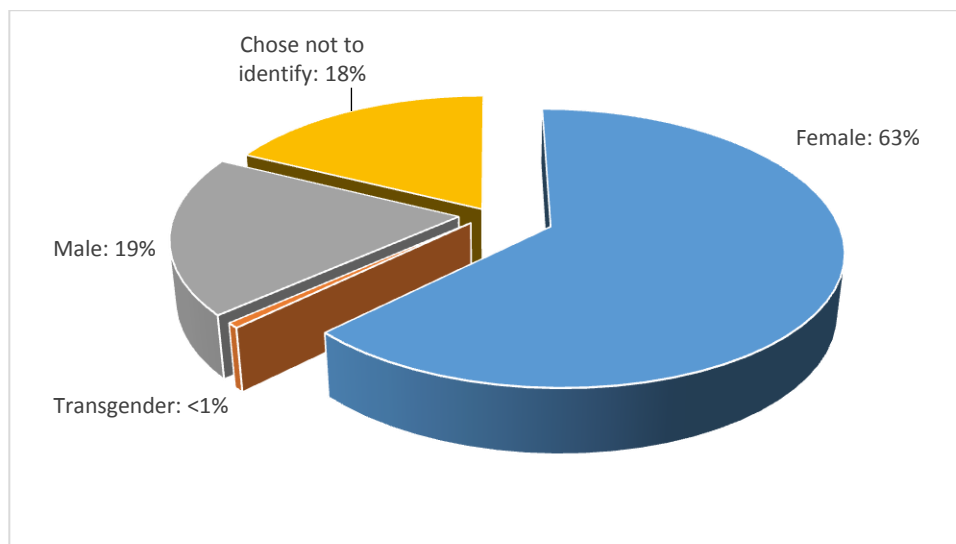
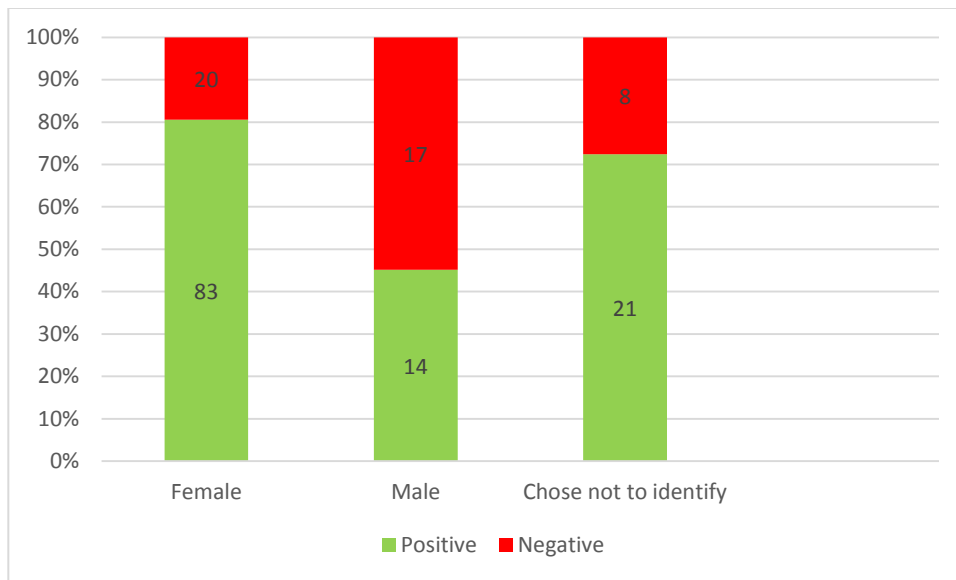


Figure 1: Survey participants based on gender

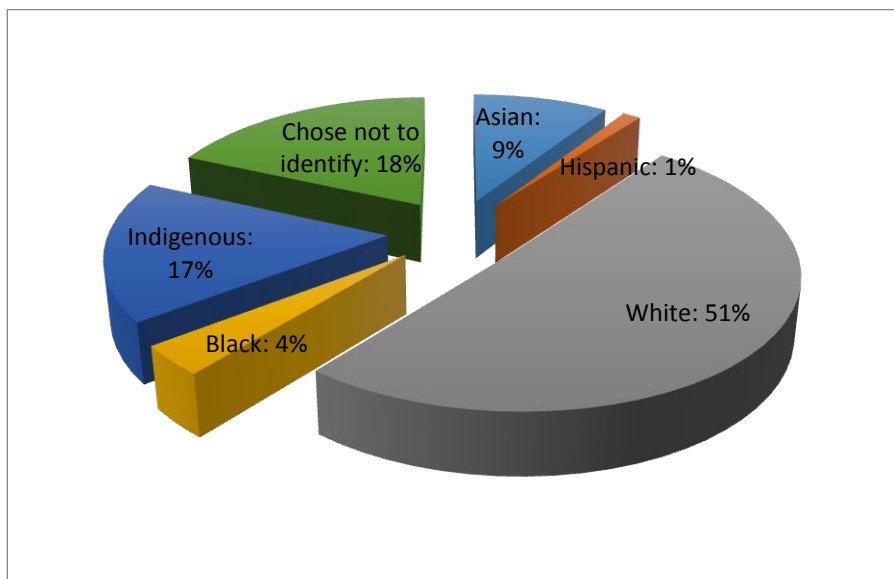
An interesting finding from the survey was that female students reported having had a much more positive experience than males. Four-fifths (80%) of female survey participants gave their course a positive rating, whereas only 45% of the male participants gave their course a positive rating (see Figure 2; numbers on the chart are number of participants).



*Figure 2: ICR student experience based on gender*  
 (Note: Too few cases to report on trans\* participant experiences.)

### Racial Self-Identification

Racial self-identification: 17% identified as Indigenous, 51% as White (note: in the survey, I used the term “White”; however, participants often used the term “settler” and, therefore, in my report I use the term “settler” as well), 9% as Asian, 4% as Black, and 1% as Hispanic, while 18% chose not to racially self-identify (see Figure 3). At 17%, representation of Indigenous participants is slightly higher than the 13% of the student population that identifies as Indigenous enrolled at UW (UWinnipeg Fast Facts, 2017).



*Figure 3: Survey participants based on racial self-identification*

The process leading up to and subsequent implementation of the ICR came with many emotions and polarized views. Looking at the experience based on ethnicity, although Asian students consisted only 9% of the participants, their satisfaction rate of positive was 93%. Indigenous students' experience was 82% positive and White students 70%. Black and Hispanic students comprised only a small segment of the survey population and their satisfaction rate was 50% (see Figure 4; numbers on the charts are number of survey participants).

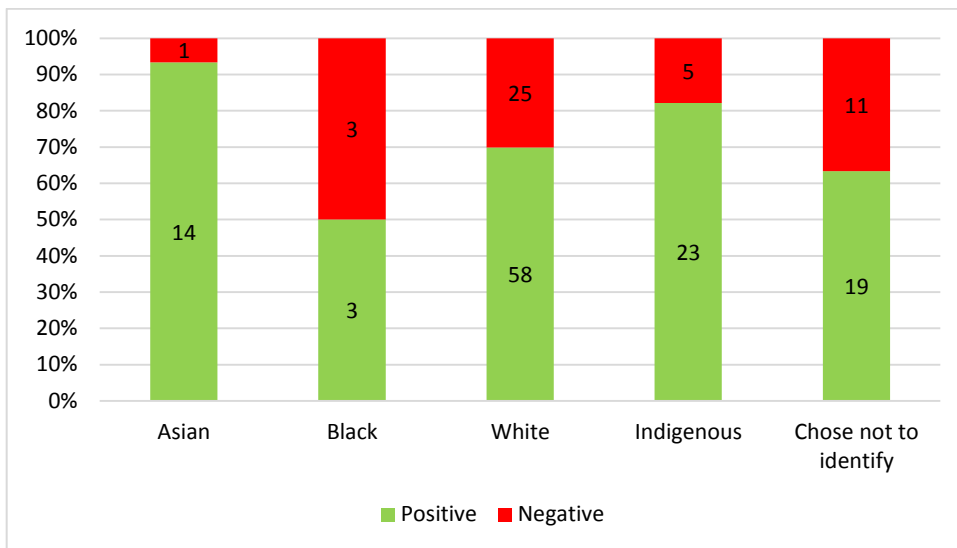


Figure 4: ICR Student experience based on racial self-identification (Note: Too few cases to report on Hispanic participant experiences.)

## Length of time at the University

The length of time at the University: 30% of the students had been at the University for less than one year, 20% for one year, 9% for two years, 26% for three or more years (see Figure 5).

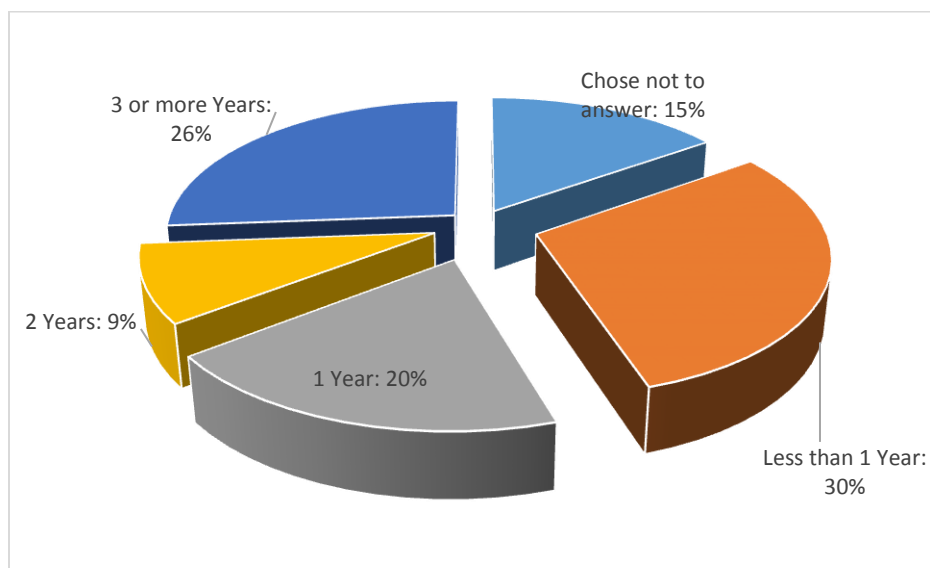


Figure 5: Survey participants based on length at the University



An unusual finding in the survey results was that 35% of the students who took an ICR course did not have to, as they were second-, third-, and fourth-year students. This suggests that they took the course because they wanted to, did not know they did not need to take the course, or were taking it as a departmental Indigenous requirement in Education or Religion and Culture. Of the students taking the course in their second, third, or fourth year, 90% had a positive experience, whereas only 59% of first-year students had a positive experience. This may suggest that electing to take a course versus being required to take a course promotes satisfaction. It is also possible that when students are in their later years, they have more maturity to recognize the importance and ability to handle the themes of these courses (see Figure 6; numbers on the chart are number of survey participants).

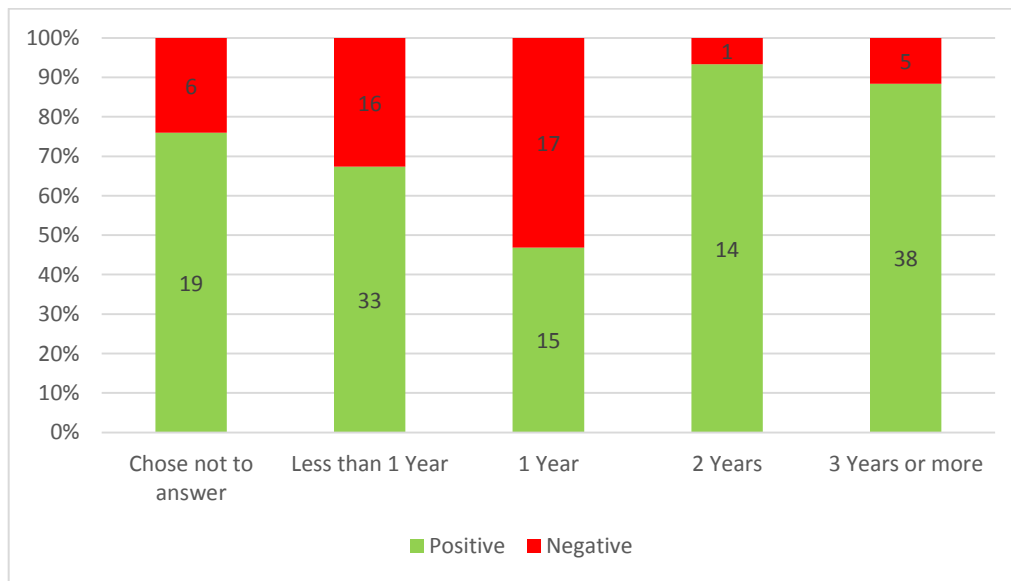


Figure 6: ICR experience based on length of time at the University

## Results and Discussion

### ICR Student Experience

The purpose of this study was to assess faculty, staff, and student experience of UW’s Indigenous Course Requirement (ICR) that was implemented in September of 2016. The overarching research question of the project was: How does the UW attempt to engage marginalized students through the ICR? How does the ICR’s goal of engaging marginalized students fit into the wider objectives of the UW?

Findings revealed that although there is, as might be expected in the first years of implementation, room for improvement in course content, development, delivery, and support, there were more positive overall reactions to the ICR experience than negative. Although there were definitely polarized views on the ICR experience, we take into consideration that 72% of the students indicated they had an experience that ranged from neutral to “wonderful.” Neutral responses included students indicating that the class was the same as any other university class with nothing exceptional or unusual to one of the best classes they took.

Only 28% of the student experiences ranged from support in principle of the ICR but stated they would like a stronger pedagogical approach, to an antagonistic resistance going into the course and a very negative assessment of it going out (see Figure 7 for the overall ICR student experience).

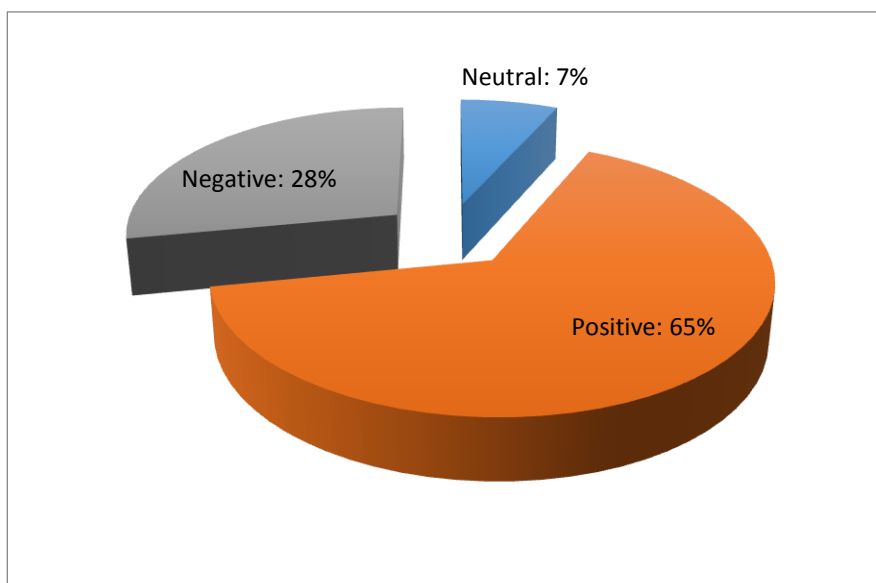


Figure 7: Overall student ICR experience

As we report on the ICR experience as a “room divided,” we keep in mind that overall 72% of the student experiences were on the positive end of the spectrum. Here we look at the aspects that made the ICR experience a positive or negative one for students. Placing the positive experience next to its negative counterpart illustrates the stark juxtaposition of experiences (see Table 1).

Table 1: Student responses to their ICR

Positive Responses	Negative Responses
Awareness and understanding	Detrimental impact on GPA
Respect	Outrage
Reconciliation	No need for more reconciliation
ICR a wonderful idea	ICR a disappointment
Very welcoming attitude	Very unwelcoming and “bad teaching”
Healing emotional responses	Antagonism
Opened the door for conversations	Silenced

Some of the positive emotions that students experienced in relation to the ICR experience included: awareness and understanding gained in the course, respect for Indigenous knowledge, the desire and need for reconciliation, and emotional responses like surprise and relief to be able to open the conversation.

Like the divided response to the Idle No More movement, the ICR garnered enthusiastic support from the majority, but also “vehement and vitriolic opposition” from a minority. People experience cognitive dissonance when new information that they learn is not psychologically consistent with their previous knowledge (Festinger, 1962). Frimer, Skitka & Motyl (2017) explain that cognitive dissonance causes discomfort and people avoiding exposure to information that creates a personal psychological clash is a self-defense mechanism. Further, “People have a fundamental need to feel mental synchrony with others” (Frimer, Skitka, & Motyl, 2017, p. 1), and for some, the ICR course was an experience of conflict with their peers. Many students experienced cognitive dissonance in their ICR classes. For some students, the dissonance resolved into acquiring and owning new knowledge that changed their thinking and action. Others left their ICR course in a stage of anger and even hatred. Some of the negative emotions that students experienced in relation to the ICR experience included: outrage, antagonism, and adverse reactions to professors. The process leading up to and subsequent implementation of the ICR came with strong emotions and polarized views as evidenced by the following themes that emerged. We alternate between positive and negative responses represented in Table 1 in order to give a sense of mixed reactions to the ICR.

### **Awareness and understanding.**

Students of all ethnic backgrounds expressed appreciation for the awareness and understanding gained by taking an ICR course. Students enjoyed learning about their own culture and sharing knowledge about their culture with other students. Because people often “get the wrong idea” (student) about Indigenous culture, Indigenous students hoped that with the learning “other’s perceptions may change about my culture” (Indigenous student). Students expressed appreciation that this gap was being addressed:

I love learning about First Nations people, my people. Any knowledge is worth the time.  
(Indigenous student)

I am an international student and have not learned much about the history of Canada. With the Métis history course, I learned how Manitoba was formed and then how it was taken and the history hidden and retold. It showed me how words can be twisted to fit whatever outcome you might want and that a person should be careful when reading because it might not be the full story. (International student)

For many non-Indigenous students, taking the ICR course was an eye-opening experience. They learned things for the first time and with an open learning attitude:

I think one of the most eye-opening was, you know, when you're taught it in school you always think we were the first ones here when in fact we weren't; you know, the Europeans. I didn't realize there was over eight million Indigenous people in North America when Columbus landed the boat. So it was really quite an eye opener, you know, and being an older student I had no knowledge. (Settler student)

Although this student was not required to take the ICR course, she saw it as necessary because she felt that in her professional work, she needed to know more about Indigenous peoples: “So I need to understand and that’s why I took this course and I’d like to take more courses, you know, dealing with these students ... and the issues that they have to deal with. We were never taught that in school—I applaud the University for having these courses. It’s an awareness that needs to be brought to the front” (Settler student).

Many students embraced the opportunity to learn as it broadened their view on political, economic, and social issues that they realized affect us all in different ways. Students expressed appreciation that the UWSA recognized the gap in the understanding what colonization really is and what its impact has been on Canada. They saw the ICR was addressing a gap in the educational system, a good step forward, and something that should have been implemented in younger grades a long time ago.

### **Detrimental impact on GPA.**

Instead of seeing the course content as leading to a greater awareness or understanding of Indigenous knowledge, some students talked about the ICR course having a detrimental impact on their GPA and the subsequent personal stress from concern about their GPA. For instance, one student said: “It has impacted my GPA negatively and affected my personal life as the work load was that of a 3<sup>rd</sup>-year course” (Settler student). Students held professors responsible for their low GPA and unfair grading system: “Not impressed. I feel as though if I had a better more experienced professor, it would have been better. I got a 98 in the course, and it ended up being an A not an A+??? Course requirements should not bring down your GPA especially if you’re receiving a mark in the high 90s” (Settler student). For these students, GPA did not seem to be associated with a measure of learning, but rather a token to be gained for something else. A specific desired number seemed more important than what they learned.

### **Respect.**

Taking the ICR course helped students gain respect for Indigenous knowledge and that there are many ways of knowing and expressing knowledge. Students realized that there are many viewpoints of the world and that the European way is not the only perspective. Respecting each other and different worldviews were essential to learning with and from each other. A settler student explained: “When I received an essay back, it was pointed out in my feedback that I had provided context for the matter and addressed it from a Euro-centric viewpoint. It was true, and I hadn’t thought of it that way. I appreciated the feedback and the opportunity to consider how I could have written it differently.”

Taking the ICR resulted in students having “more respect for Indigenous people and their history” (Settler student). As a result, they were interested in taking more courses. By taking an ICR course, students also learned to be careful of stereotypes: “The ICR course has taught me to be careful of stereotypes. Learn the history and the people before making general assumptions or agreeing with others on careless and uneducated thoughts and comments. As well this course has made me want to help Indigenous people in the future once I get into the working field (after my studies,) so more than likely I will be taking more

Indigenous Studies courses” (Settler student). An International student said: “we are on treaty land, and we should be respectful of that.”

### **Outrage.**

Some students entered the ICR discussion with repressed antagonistic emotions. Students indicated that they felt it was a waste of time and money and did not appreciate being forced to take a class they did not want. “My most vivid memory was dealing with the outrage leading up to it. On three occasions I saw non-aboriginal students arguing to aboriginal people nearby about how the requirement was ‘stupid’ and ‘a waste of time.’ On the first day, the people in my class seemed very angry that they had to take the course. I remember the room feeling very divided. I felt uncomfortable for the aboriginal students” (Indigenous student).

Some students expressed resentment about being forced to take a class they did not choose to take. “Forced” was a word that came up in many of the negative student responses. Because they felt forced, they went into the course with a negative attitude, which made it difficult for them to learn. They did not appreciate having to pay for the class that they thought was unnecessary. They felt it was unnecessary because they had already learned the material or had no interest in learning it. Although it is important that students acquire a certain knowledge base about Indigenous history that impacts current practice, the goal of the ICR is not forcing knowledge. Settler students expressed their frustration:

Blame white people for everything.

What I now feel is that we should have assimilated the Indigenous peoples by force.

It WAS indigenous land. But not anymore. This land belongs to Canada and its rightful citizens.

When they weren't spewing social justice bs and actually focusing on the course material was when their teaching was most impactful.

Yeah. Don't force students to take this course. And if you are, do it free of cost.

### **Reconciliation.**

In recent years in Canada, reconciliation has been a much-discussed topic. Vivian Ketchum (2017), an Indigenous woman from Wauzhushik Onigum Nation, said: “Reconciliation is an ugly word.” She continued to explain that many lofty words have been said and discussed, and much money spent to try to understand what reconciliation is, without any action coming of it. Sometimes reconciliation starts with an acknowledgement of past wrongs and a desire for restitution and making things right.

In this research, we acknowledge that we are once again talking and discussing reconciliation, with the humble hope that we learn how to move into action. Taking an ICR gave students the opportunity to think about reconciliation in a concerted way. They realized that we all have much to learn about reconciliation, that reconciliation and indigenization are a complicated process, but students were willing to engage, think about it, and take action where necessary. An Indigenous student defined reconciliation as “recognising that there are unforgiveable histories that have become intertwined through direct action, and now direct action is required by an oppressive party, by a colonial party, to find out what their place is in solving the problems that can be solved and in encouraging healing in areas where there is, potentially, unhealable damage.” About the ICR, an International student said: “It helped me understand that reconciliation is something we all must work at. It is a constant and living process. There are many ways to get there and we all can have a hand in it. While it did help me see the big picture it showed me how I can do things day to day to help.”

### **A complicated process.**

The ICR helped students realize that reconciliation is ongoing and would not happen at the same time for everyone. “It is a complicated process that relies on all levels of society” (Settler student). Students acknowledged that action was necessary and “saying we're on someone's territory and not backing it up with actions is not reconciliation” (Settler student).

Settler students found the process of indigenization of the academy an invaluable experience for their learning about Indigenous histories and contemporary movements on Turtle Island. It helped them understand their context as white settlers, and provided them with the learning required to better support reconciliation. The courses laid the framework for reconciliation by learning about traditional ways of life and knowing, along with the ongoing effects of colonialism. The ICR helped students understand that “reconciliation is still a long way off and the struggle for reconciliation must be continuously fought” (Settler student).

### **An arduous process.**

Besides reconciliation being a complicated process, students also indicated it being an arduous process, going in the right direction, but not as fast as it should be. It needed to involve everyone in society, not just relegated to a few. “Reconciliation will be a hard and arduous process that may never come to full fruition. It is hard to meet the needs of both sides as there is much hurt on one side and much stigma on the other” (Indigenous student).

Students acknowledged that the Canadian government broke many of its promises to Indigenous peoples, that there is effort being made at improving the relationship, but that there is still much work to do. “In class we talked about how Canada still has a long ways to go and we need to keep moving in the right direction” (Settler student).

Reconciliation “cannot be done with a sum of money. Reconciliation is a long process that needs to involve more people than the victims and perpetrators of residential schools. The entire country and government needs to be aware of what happened and how to prevent similar events” (Settler student).

### **No need for more reconciliation.**

Evidence of the long and arduous process ahead, foreseen by some students, is exemplified by the following student quotes. Some students felt that taking an ICR course was “a complete waste of time and money,” and that reconciliation is not necessary. “I thought myself liberal before taking the course. But when I was shown what actually happened, I realized we are only prolonging the inevitable. We need to cut the b...s... And force them to adapt to modern way of life. They will die out in a couple hundred years if we don't. And I don't want people to keep dying and living a shitty life on the reserves. That's not fair to them” (student that did not provide ethnic identity). An Indigenous student indicated: “Enough reconciliation has taken place.” A statement like this could mean two things: there is nothing more that needs to be done, or enough talking has happened and it is time for action.

### **ICR a wonderful idea.**

Both settler and Indigenous students supported the ICR and recognized that they had a role to play in reconciliation and that implementing the ICR is a good step forward in education and reconciliation. Many indicated that it was a “wonderful idea.” All degree programs have requirements and prerequisites that are associated with cost and time. Since students are required to take a humanities course, the ICR course fulfills more than just one requirement, which some students acknowledged. Passages like the following evidence support for the ICR:

I think it's a wonderful idea. As a white settler living in Treaty 1 territory, I know far too little about the context of this area and the Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island. (Settler student)

I think that the ICR was a great decision. I think it's extremely important that everyone is aware of Indigenous life in the past, present, and future. (Indigenous student)

Many students agreed that the ICR should definitely be mandatory because there are still many issues to address regarding Indigenous peoples of Canada. An Indigenous student said: “I would say it exceeded my expectations and became one of the best classes I've taken in University.”

### **ICR a disappointment.**

Many students wanted to interact with the material and with their professor and were disappointed when their expectations were not met either because the interaction was uncomfortable or did not happen at all. An Indigenous student said:

When we got our syllabus for the course, [they] had written that we were going to have a ceremony with an elder which I immediately—like this is amazing, that's awesome.... Never.

So there was no interaction. It was honestly just like [they] talked about it, we just watched these... videos, we went home and that was the course... that definitely was not what I wanted to do.

An International student explained:

I just wish we'd had more class discussions; I mean, I understand it's a big class, so that's kind of complicated. Even then, I wish [they would have] had more time to talk after class, because we watched videos—[they] read off a PowerPoint—I just wish there was more interaction between the professor in there.

### **Very welcoming attitude.**

Most students talked about the professor as playing a pivotal role in making the ICR class a good or bad experience. Students went into the class with a range and mixture of emotions including hesitant, dreading the course, looking forward to, and not knowing what to expect. Students expressed appreciation for the welcoming environment that was created in ICR courses. They appreciated it when professors were competent at relaying information, able to manage classroom dynamics adeptly, and sensitive to students who may experience discomfort in participating in unfamiliar ceremonies or exercises.

I think the biggest takeaway for me was understanding that I have so much more to learn and that there's so much more work to be done in this area. The professors I have are really, really awesome and the courses I took were really good at getting content and the classroom itself and the dynamics of watching it all play out. How much work we have to do in order to make the University like a somewhat decent place for all students. (Indigenous student)

A settler student talked about her professor's sensitivity:

Actually, in my section, we did have a smudging ceremony as our first class and it was—yeah, it was very nice and it was very welcoming. Like my professor didn't want to make everyone do it if they didn't feel comfortable but everyone had the option to and it was—like to participate in the ceremony so it was really nice to have that and I definitely think my professor like definitely had a huge impact on like what the course did for myself. (Settler student)

### **Very unwelcoming and “bad teaching”**

Some students expressed criticism of the classroom environment, teaching methods, and strategies. They talked about teachers not being prepared to teach the course, about bad teaching, discomfort in knowing how to offer opinions, feeling like not all contributions were welcome, and disappointed when professors did not allow time or space for interactions.



Some students indicated that although they may have good intentions, professors were not prepared to work with sensitive material that needed to be handled carefully. Several students suggested that the way the content was presented was through a colonial lens, which caused deep frustration. They noticed that professors did not have the skills to manage classroom dynamics that sometimes became tense. Even the lack of enthusiasm or care for the content caused frustration.

And so I think the ways the profs are teaching, is very unprepared, because I feel like they're doing it with good intentions, but in the way they're presenting, the information is really kind of just thrown out. (Indigenous student)

It was awful. If you're going to make a class required, PLEASE assign good profs. Literally none were good. All bad teaching. (Settler student)

But I did notice that there was like a lot of backlash cattiness in those group discussions. And I didn't see the—the prof wouldn't really address it, they just kind of like brushed it off, and it really daunted me. (International student)

And then even when presenting Indigenous knowledge, it's really from a colonial point of view, and it's never from an Indigenous person interpreting what it is. (Indigenous student)

### **Healing emotional response.**

Taking an ICR course came with a range of emotions like surprise, relief, curiosity, intensity, or sadness. Although some students experienced intense emotions like sadness, having an emotional response can still lead to a positive learning experience, but it was incumbent on the professor to create a context where that could happen.

Non-Indigenous students noticed class dynamics when some students did not speak up: “Scattered in the back that wouldn't say anything at all and they didn't—a lot of them seemed actually quite interested but they didn't speak up at all” (Settler student). Situations like this made them wonder about their classmates' voices that were silent.

Some students were surprised by their ICR experience. They were surprised by the content that was new to them and that it was more interesting than they had anticipated. They were surprised at the number of Indigenous students at the University. They appreciated excellent professors and indicated that the ICR really changed their view on Indigenous peoples.

I thought it was going to be just another requirement that I was not going to enjoy as much, that the content was going to be dry or boring. I really liked the course; I learned much more than I expected to (thinking I knew enough information about the Indigenous of North America). It was an enlightening course because I learned about the origins of their

ideologies and their ways of life, and the resilience of their people. I actually was inspired by the beauty in their views and culture, the demise of it all and how resilient some people have been through the midst of all the betrayals they faced. (Hispanic student)

Not only did settler students express surprise that the ICR course went much better than expected, but the course content powerfully and deeply impacted Indigenous students. Information that students had never heard before had an emotional impact: “I mean, like we had this amazing culture, some of these amazing cities, you know, thousands of years before Jesus, you know, and the societies we had is you know, and sitting in class, watching ... I think it was 500 Nations, people would openly cry, you know? It was that powerful” (Indigenous student).

### **Antagonism.**

For some students, taking an ICR course came with extreme negative emotions. Students expressed their antagonism towards the course in comments such as: “It was a horror show of confusion and incomplete information” (Settler student). Not only were non-Indigenous students resistant to the course, but Indigenous students as well: “I thought it was stupid going in and still thought so after I was done” (Indigenous student). An International student stated: “The whole course sucked.”

### **ICR opened the door for conversations.**

The ICR opened the opportunity for conversations that students wanted to have, but did not have the venue or vocabulary to know how to go about it. The learning in ICR courses went much further than just classroom and book learning. Students talked about having conversations outside of classes about what they learned. Those conversations took place at home, over drinks in the bar, or in the hallway. Active learning was going on in many places.

An Indigenous student said that taking the ICR course “gave me the vocabulary to talk with my grandpa about our culture, and that was something that we were, kind of, missing. Like, we knew we were Métis and like, we went to some events but we lacked the vocabulary to talk about, like the complexities of the politics of our history and it, kind of ... it's something where now he's using that vocabulary. So on a level, like a personal level, it really built this stronger connection to who I am and who my family seeing ourselves as who we are” (Indigenous student).

The ICR also gave non-Indigenous students the vocabulary to correct faulty perceptions:



Photo: Aboriginal Student Services Center

When I'm out in the world it made me stand up. When people say things that are inappropriate I correct them. If you can learn racism you can unlearn it. (Settler student)

Actually, that was a conversation with my friends, which kind of shocked me when they said that, but they were just very quiet. I don't know if it changed their mind, but they changed the subject; but it was a first step and I hope it put a crack in the door for further conversations, and that's what these courses are supposed to do, hopefully, is open the door for conversation. (Settler student)

### **Silenced.**

Some students felt discomfort when they felt their voice was not heard. Some felt that their professors were biased and not open to hearing views that did not fit with their worldview. One student explained: “The group discussions were terrible because I felt I couldn’t have my opinion without being bashed. Maybe the teachers shouldn’t be biased and open up to non-Indigenous opinions without making students feel bad. Offer explanations to those opinions” (Settler student).

Tension was palpable in student comments. About the opinions that settler students may want to express in class and sometimes did, an Indigenous student expressed annoyance about questions that she thought were ignorant: “And I think it’s really annoying to think that profs are okay with allowing these ignorant comments to be made, because the whole point of the course is to educate them. And if someone openly says an ignorant comment about an Indigenous person, how come you're not going to address it? It’s really been frustrating, because I love the traditional lifestyle. I always felt that I was attacked in courses” (Indigenous student).

### **Faculty and Staff ICR experience**

Most students and professors seemed surprised that the ICR experience went as smoothly as it did. Students had expected the ICR class to be more painful and professors expected more backlash, although as evidenced in some students’ responses, they did not always feel free to speak their mind. In conversations with professors, we heard many positive perceptions of students and their engagement. Findings revealed that the faculty and staff experience came with unexpected surprises as well as challenges (see Table 2).

**Table 2. Faculty and staff responses to their ICR**

<b>Surprises</b>	<b>Challenges</b>
Anticipated backlash and exception	Pressure on Indigenous students
Engaged students	Tension in the classroom
Relationship building	Negative student evaluations

## **Anticipated Backlash an Exception.**

Some professors took the opportunity to discuss the ICR at the beginning of their course by opening the floor for an open and honest dialogue. Students being able to feel free to say that taking the course was not fair gave professors the opportunity to field questions and comments openly rather than students feeling like they needed to repress their honest emotions about the topic and the requirement. This openness led to positive change and an openness to be a part of the class with an open mind.

Well, I wondered if there was going to be some backlash particularly from students in dominant social locations, white students in particular, and I've been happy to see that, for the most part, people are just super-engaged, you know, and they want to learn and they don't want to repeat the mistakes of the past. (Indigenous professor)

My first impression is that there is far less pushback than expected. I've had one student in the previous second year half course who was more or less openly grumbling about all of this, but that was it. (Settler professor)

## **Engaged students.**

Not only was there less backlash than professors expected, they also found that students were more engaged than they anticipated. Professors expressed that students seemed genuinely interested in learning and came prepared to discuss contemporary issues.

So the second and third year students are in there because they want to be and that is awesome. So having probably a significant portion of the students who are there because they have to be versus this very small number that is there for desire is interesting because that can lead to a very negative classroom dynamic and so far, I'm not seeing that. (Indigenous professor)

As much as students—particularly settler students—might not have a background in Indigenous politics, they are paying attention to what's going on in the media and just what's going on in general, so they are much more informed and aware than I expected them to be when they came into class. (Settler professor)

## **Relationships.**

Faculty and staff talked about the importance of relationships. A staff member said: "I don't think that there's an unwillingness to engage with tough topics; I think it's a respectful approach that places the importance of relationship first in these conversations." The types of relationships that were addressed were: the original relationship, Indigenous-Settler relationships, interpersonal relationships, and relationships with the surrounding community that were essential to the reconciliation process.

### **Original relationship.**

Faculty talked about the original relationship between Indigenous peoples and settlers. The Two Row Wampum Belt was symbolic of the original agreement in 1613 in between Indigenous and European peoples on Turtle Island. It was a commitment to mutual friendship, peace between nations, and living together as brothers and sisters (Venables, 2009). That original relationship was to last forever “as long as the grass is green, as long as the water flows downhill, and as long as the sun rises in the east and sets in the west” (Powless, 1994, p. 21). A settler professor said: “Whenever we're talking about contemporary issues, I encourage them [students] to shed what you've learned over time of Indigenous people being subordinate to Canada, and remember that original relationship. And we talk about two-row wampum and how do you think things should be today if we were to keep that original relationship intact?”



Photo: Two Row Wampum Belt, 2017

### **Interpersonal relationships: We are allies.**

Professors talked about the interconnectedness of people. If we indeed are all related, then we all share the responsibility to watch out for each other and work for the good of the whole community. The goal of the ICR was to teach Canadians about the “true history of this country, about contemporary realities, and that we're all in this together, so we all have a part to play. The grand goal is to impart knowledge as well as ways of knowing that go beyond the western that serve as a corrective for the knowledge that's been disseminated for hundreds of years. So when you do that, you hopefully help Canadians of all backgrounds and even temporary visitors see themselves as relations, so a lot of indigenous cultures use a phrase that is or sounds like we are all relations; it's not a metaphor, it's not symbolic, it means we are literally all relations” (Indigenous professor).

A UW staff member acknowledged that it was important to forge good relationships with students, “primarily students who are Indigenous and have lived experience with the topics being talked about in class which should absolutely be honoured, you know, in any course, looking at indigenous content.”

The importance of Indigenous and non-Indigenous relationships, and educating the general Canadian public about Indigenous realities, stems from the TRC's calls to action. Establishing ally relationships was important and extended beyond just classroom material. Events like the Weweni Indigenous Scholars Speakers Series foregrounded the important work being done and provided opportunities for networking and for “people from different backgrounds to meet each other—learn about the cool work that we're all doing and build relationships because I think that's a key in indigenization, a key in understanding the world from an indigenous perspective, its relationships. We are all—like we are all related in some way; we're all connected and it's our responsibility to figure out how are we related and therefore what are our mutual obligations, our responsibilities?” (Indigenous professor).

In reference to the original relationship in between settlers and Indigenous peoples, faculty and staff worked towards changing reference points. Relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples are key to reconciliation. “We can encourage an environment where we're sharing like that, I think we can do a lot for bettering Indigenous and non-Indigenous relationships” (Indigenous Professor). Faculty recognized the necessity of reframing the relationships:

That's kind of the objective of my class is just to get people thinking different about the relationship. I definitely try to challenge the way that contemporary society looks at Indigenous and Canada's relationship. So we look from a strength base of Indigenous nations being autonomous and sovereign, so I think kind of reframing that relationship. (Settler professor)

### **Relationships with surrounding community.**

Not only were relationships within the classroom and University community important but also beyond the University walls. We know that Lakehead University in Thunder Bay is traveling the same road we are, one professor said: “we could learn from each other, we could help each other out. If the idea is to better relationships across the country, why wouldn't we collaborate, have our two institutions talked about this?” (Indigenous professor).

The University also has the opportunity to establish relationships with the wider community:

With the ICR, indigenization, I mean we're educating and training the public that lives around us right, so I think that there will be positive impact. In the meantime, I think it would be really beneficial to create more relationships between academia and community. Like Indigenous community does amazing stuff, like grassroots community stuff, the North End is just—it's amazing in terms of community and collaboration. (Indigenous professor)



Participants talked about relationships leading to building bridges: “So if we can build bridges, you know with the University and talk with them, collaborate, and increase those kinds of relationships, I think that would also help” (Indigenous professor).

## **Challenges**

The challenges that faculty and staff talked about pertained to the pressure that they felt Indigenous students were exposed to as token authority, the tension in the classrooms, and negative student evaluations.

### **Pressure on Indigenous students.**

A non-Indigenous professor expressed gratitude for the expertise that Indigenous students brought to the classroom: “I’m very grateful for having Indigenous students in class because they are just as much teachers in these scenarios, providing information from their own experience from what they know, what they’ve experienced firsthand, which puts things into perspective” (Settler professor). An Indigenous professor added: “Sometimes what happens is the visibly Indigenous students, those who have identified themselves to the class, get put on the spot to be experts.” An Indigenous student confirmed this experience: “there were times where questions are asked about Indigenous spirituality, or Indigenous knowledge, or Indigenous traditional living styles, and I always get looked at by the prof, because I was the Indigenous student in the class. Indigenous students are now targeted, because of this information” (Indigenous student).

Non-Indigenous students and professors leaning on Indigenous students for real-life examples was problematic because it assumed that all Indigenous peoples’ experiences are the same. It could put Indigenous students in a bad position in that they felt that they had to explain or they had to teach the class in some ways. “So as a non-Indigenous instructor, I can’t speak about it first hand, and so I think students would like to hear that first hand and then they turn to Indigenous students to try to get those stories and that’s—they don’t always have them, it’s not their responsibility to teach, you know, to share them” (Settler professor).

### **Tension in the classroom.**

A challenge that professors did not anticipate was the tension in classrooms. Some professors taught classes that previously were populated by predominantly Indigenous students, but with the new Indigenous Course Requirement, non-Indigenous students now joined these classes. Previously the classes were safe spaces where Indigenous students could learn about their culture and where their identity was celebrated and affirmed. The reaction of non-Indigenous students to an Indigenous centered classroom was very different. “It was, in some cases very negative, because this is the first space they’d ever encountered where the story wasn’t all about them and it was hard; it was very difficult actually. They would become very defensive” (Indigenous professor).

Learning about colonialism and understanding history for Indigenous students was a very different process. For non-Indigenous students the history of colonialism felt like a personal attack, even when it was not meant to be. That was something professors had to adjust to.

Their [students'] reaction was different, very defensive, insecure, awkward, threatening and so what would normally have been a classroom situation of empowerment, really wasn't that same way anymore and it was not the same experience for Indigenous students. And also tension within groups, right? So yeah, you're trying to kind of balance these sort of two sides. It was a bit more difficult in that situation. (Indigenous professor)

Added to the tension of different reactions to course content was the fear that students would resent that the course was required. "I'm not sure how the University really could mediate that more. I think with time that students will just accept it, like you have to take a science credit, you have to take your Indigenous course requirement" (Indigenous professor).

Faculty and staff recognized that "Indigenization requires tough conversations and demands that people not turn away from these conversations anymore, but it also recognizes that for many people these conversations can and will be traumatic" (staff).

### **Negative student evaluations.**

Professors indicated that because the course was required, students would go into the course with negative perceptions and therefore evaluate the professor negatively:

Biggest challenge I faced is because of the type of course it is and it's mandatory. My evaluations per se will go down dramatically compared to a non-mandatory course. There's a lot of students that are actually very receptive to Indigenous issues. There's not all resistance, but the way the course evaluations are set up, if you have one or two who are resistant, that reflects very heavily on your own course evaluations. (Indigenous professor)

Another Indigenous professor agreed:

We'll see what the evaluations are. When these kinds of things are introduced there's typically a backlash where professors get very, very poor teaching evaluations as a reaction to students feeling forced to do something and sometimes those can come across very racial as well. If I get cranky responses because they didn't like the material or they didn't like how it was presented, they didn't like the textbook, well of course I look to how I might change this, again because this is a first prep for me so I'm assuming I'll tweak it as I go along. (Indigenous professor)



## Conclusion

Using multimodal research methods, this study examined student, faculty, and staff experience with the ICR in its initial implementation in the 2016/17 academic year. Findings revealed that although students and instructors had suggestions for how to improve course content, development, delivery, and support, there were more positive reactions to the ICR experience than negative. The 72% of student participants that expanded their learning in a neutral or good and empathetic way indicated their increased awareness and understanding of Indigenous issues. They appreciated the open conversations and the acquisition of new vocabulary to be able to participate in the dialogue in a respectful way. They applauded the University for the ICR initiative and wished they could have learned these things a long time ago.

Of the student participants, 28% had negative experiences, some not because they were opposed to the idea of an ICR, but because their particular class did not meet their expectations. Others may have experienced cognitive dissonance that did not resolve in a positive learning experience. Reasons for the less than desirable experience was the sense that students felt forced to take a class they did not want or see as necessary, which in turn impacted their GPA. Some thought reconciliation was a waste of time and assimilation should continue to be forced upon Indigenous peoples. Besides the course content, professor pedagogy was criticized. Students felt that large classes limited discussions and interaction. These students felt professors were biased and not open to hearing a different point of view.

Professors expressed concern about a potential backlash from students especially in “dominant locations,” but findings showed a better than expected result. They were pleasantly surprised by enthusiastic student engagement. Disengaged antagonistic students caused concern and professors expressed a gap in knowing how to handle tension in the classroom. Professors expressed gratitude for the ally relationships that were being forged with colleagues. Although most Indigenous professors appreciated sharing the ICR workload with non-Indigenous allies, many students revealed a preference for Indigenous professors for the ICR course, though they also noted that overall good pedagogy was extremely important.

Challenges that faculty, staff, and students indicated were the pressure on Indigenous students to take on the role of token authority on the Indigenous experience, how to sensitively support students and staff when talking about a traumatic history that triggered profound grief for some and complete indifference or anger for others, and how to manage contentious discussions in class when there was evidence of overt or covert antagonism, racism, and tension. There was consensus that racism exists and that education and relationships are key to changing stereotypes. The ICR was seen as a positive step towards reconciliation but there was much work that still needed to be done.

Recommendations were gleaned from participant suggestions for improvements. Necessary components to moving forward in a good way included providing students with more information and intent about the ICR, more support services, pedagogical training, and debrief mechanisms for all involved.

## Actions Recommended by Participants

As part of our research, we asked participants for their suggestions for how they thought the ICR experience could be improved. This section summarizes participants' recommendations with the hope that their contributions will be helpful to ICR instructors and to the University as we reflect on further development of the ICR as we go forward.

Most participants agreed that education is key. There was strong agreement from faculty, staff, and students that racism does exist and the University has a responsibility in changing racial stereotypes. The predominant strategy suggested for changing stereotypes was through education and the younger the better. Many participants concurred that the ICR could play a role in starting to decrease the amount of misinformation and stereotypes that exist.

The following recommendations have been developed from our reflections on participants' suggestions for administrators, faculty/staff, and students. As you read this long list, keep in mind that it represents the varied experiences of our participants; these suggestions are gleaned from the whole group who participated in this study and not simply those who recounted positive experiences—and we present them as possibilities for further reflection and possible investigation based on our consultation with a substantial, but still limited number of constituents, not as conclusive recommendations emanating from a system-wide program evaluation.

### For administrators

#### **One standardized course and more.**

Many students suggested the ICR should be expanded to more than one course. Other students suggested that the University should offer one standardized first course that would include all the information that students should know, instead of many different courses. After the first course, students could then sign up for a second course in their area of interest. Having one standardized course would put a lot of pressure on the University to decide on uniform content and mode of delivery, which may infringe upon academic freedom. In response to this suggestion, it is understood that a tension exists between academic freedom and uniform pedagogy and course content, which is problematic. Aside from presenting the further challenge of deciding on one best approach and who would make the decision, one standardized course would lose some of the key strengths of the current approach of the ICR (university-wide ownership and contribution, reflecting faculty members' areas of expertise and pedagogical strength, offering students the opportunity to learn within the context of their own majors or minors, etc.).

#### **Learning languages.**

TRC Action 16 states: "We call upon post-secondary institutions to create University and college degree and diploma programs in Aboriginal languages" (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of

Canada, 2015, p. 2). Action 10.iv also states: “Protecting the right to Aboriginal languages, including the teaching of Aboriginal languages as credit courses” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015, p. 2). Understanding that language is key to culture, participants talked about the importance of Indigenous language instruction and, we recommend that the University make a concerted effort to develop more courses in Indigenous languages.

### **Clear information about the ICR.**

Administrative glitches inevitably happened in the implementation of the ICR and they will be ironed out as time passes. Students were not sure about who needed the requirement and signed up for a course when they did not need it. Once they were informed by the professor, some dropped the course. Many students chose to take the course even though they were not required because they themselves felt it was necessary and important. Providing students with clear information regarding ICR requirement, intent, goals, and outcomes could help alleviate confusion.

### **Communicate with Lakehead University in Thunder Bay.**

Since UW and Lakehead University are embarking on this journey at the same time, participants suggested communication between the institutions to share knowledge, strategies, and experiences.

### **Indigenous hires.**

Many students indicated their preference for Indigenous professors and suggested that an Indigenous professor would have given them a more first-hand experience. Having Indigenous professors was very important to students, which they saw as part of reconciliation, but students were quick to add that using Indigenous pedagogy was just as important as being able to speak from personal experience. Indigenous hires in all positions at the University would be an active way to illustrate reconciliation: not only more tenured professors, but staff positions such as librarians, administrators, food service, and security. In the Truth and Reconciliation’s Call to Action (2015), number 7 states: “We call upon the federal government to develop with Aboriginal groups a joint strategy to eliminate educational and employment gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians” (p. 1).

### **Reconciliation circles.**

A theme that emerged from the research was that establishing relationships was key to reconciliation, which addresses TRC’s Call to Action 46.iv that calls for “Support for the renewal or establishment of Treaty relationships based on principles of mutual recognition, mutual respect, and shared responsibility for maintaining those relationships into the future” (p. 5). In response to this Call to Action reconciliation circles have been established in many places. The goal for these circles “is to establish trusting, meaningful relationships between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous peoples” (Circles for Reconciliation). Reconciliation circles would address TRC’s Call to Action 53.iv, that we “Promote public dialogue, public/private partnerships, and public initiatives for reconciliation” (p.

6). As Sue Deranger (2017) explains, we need to right relations, which is one step further than reconciliation and requires that we all come together, sit together, talk together, live together, and we all stand together (Decolonizing Canada 150 webinar).

### **Research.**

TRC's Call to Action 65 (2015) states: "We call upon the federal government, through the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, and in collaboration with Aboriginal peoples, post-secondary institutions and educators, and the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation and its partner institutions, to establish a national research program with multi-year funding to advance understanding of reconciliation" (p. 8). We are grateful to the University for this opportunity to research the ICR experience and recommend that the University continue to support research that promotes and explores reconciliation.

## **For Faculty**

These recommendations were gleaned both from professors talking about their own pedagogy and suggestions students had for what worked well for them. Although course content was very important, how the content was delivered was just as important. "Race" relations is a sensitive topic and needs to be treated with care.

### **More open discussions.**

More open discussions would be beneficial rather than lecturing. Professors could facilitate a safe space for conversations in which students could explore their emergent understandings and learn from each other. Some students felt that in the large classes were a "hurry up and ask your question" environment. They wanted an environment where they felt comfortable to ask questions and have discussions. "I feel like because the classroom sizes are so large and the time is so short, that it makes it really impossible for students to comfortably discuss what's going on" (Indigenous student). Both professors and students expressed an appreciation for the knowledge and personal experience of Indigenous students in the ICR courses, but also acknowledged the drain and strain on Indigenous students who were expected to act as living resources on course content. Study participants expressed the necessity in open dialogue for sensitivity to students who may be experiencing trauma.

### **Circles.**

Similarly, instead of the traditional hierarchical approach to teaching, professors encouraged everyone to be open to learning from each other, which also included the teacher learning from students, even though sometimes the teacher was standing at the front of the room. The visual form of a nonhierarchical learning environment was a circle instead of desks in rows. One professor succinctly explained the rationale for this structure: "We're all learning together. Everybody is on a learning journey. Everybody has specific gifts and challenges. They may be different from the person

sitting next to you, and to just recognize and be patient with each other because we don't know what the next person is dealing with” (Indigenous professor).



### **Groupwork or clanwork.**

Professors talked about a project-based approach in their pedagogy, where students were given the opportunity to develop their own creativity by doing a project based on a topic instead of writing a 10-page essay about it. When students worked in groups or clans, professors encouraged students to bring their strengths to the projects: “You guys can’t all be the spokesperson, but you all bring to this your own strengths; don’t think about the weaknesses, think about what is it I’m good at? What could I bring to this?” (Indigenous professor).

### **Relationships.**

Participants expressed a strong desire for relationships. Content covered in classes was the jumping board for conversations, and there was an eagerness to have conversations in informal settings, to learn from each other, and to establish friendships in keeping with the understanding that “we are all relations”. Like the workshops for ICR professors, workshops could be organized for students, staff, and mixed faculty, staff, and students, where everyone would be welcome to engage in dialogue.



## Elders in the classroom.

Although the disrespect shown for Elders as classroom speakers was one of the reasons for the implementation of the ICR, participants suggested that bringing in Elders to teach a class would be helpful in understanding and would teach students respect, and one noted that teaching respectful behavior towards Elders in our society would be beneficial.

## Guest speakers.

Participants explained that having Indigenous guest speakers that humanize the issues was important. (See e.g., photo of KC Adams poster [right].)

## Storytelling and humour.

Storytelling and humour was an effective pedagogical strategy. It was important to clarify the strategy of storytelling as a teaching method since sometimes students thought it was entertainment. Information about relationships, histories, current issues, and policy documents could all be relayed in the form of stories that needed to be told rather than a dry, factual, formulaic form.

## Many ways of communicating and evaluating.

Professors acknowledged that evaluating knowledge based on written work was a very important aspect of western education, but that there were many other different ways of communicating knowledge. Visual arts, music, and theatre were all ways of communicating knowledge. Professors indicated students' enthusiasm once they were given an alternative to the traditional research paper and were encouraged to use their unique gifts to illustrate their learning.

## Hands-on learning.

Students desired more hands-on learning: "Sitting in desks in rows, listening to a single person lecture from a textbook while scribbling down notes is not an appropriate way to be learning about ceremony, traditional medicines, or creation stories" (Settler student); "Dialogue. Hands-on experience. Experiencing it through activities—learning and seeing the beauty of the culture. Textbooks are ineffective and won't lead to reconciliation" (International student). In a field course, students learned hands-on things like how to turn hides, work with an Elder and how that all fits into the land, to the region, and the region's history. It is not always possible to go onto the land, but professors tried to bring visuals into the classroom as illustrations.

The poster is for a presentation by KC Adams. At the top, it features the University of Winnipeg logo and the text 'THE UNIVERSITY OF WINNIPEG' and 'The Department of Rhetoric, Writing, and Communications Presents'. The title 'KC Adams' is in a large, bold font, followed by 'Changing Perceptions' in a smaller, italicized font. Below the title, the date 'DATE: Tuesday, Nov. 22, 2016', time 'TIME: 7 pm', and room 'ROOM: 2M70' are listed. A photograph of KC Adams is on the left. To the right of the photo, a bio states: 'Winnipeg-based artist KC Adams graduated from Concordia University with a Bachelor of Fine Arts and her focus has been the investigation of the relationship between nature (the living) and technology (progress). She has been in numerous solo exhibitions, group exhibitions and was included in the PHOTOQUAI: Biennale des images du monde in Paris, France. She has participated in national and international residencies and her work is in several collections including twenty works in the National Gallery of Canada. She was the set designer for the Royal Winnipeg Ballet's Going Home Star: Truth and Reconciliation and a recent recipient of the City of Winnipeg's Making A Mark Award.' At the bottom, it lists co-sponsoring departments: Rhetoric, Writing, and Communications; Education; Indigenous Studies; and Master's in Development Practice: Indigenous Development. Contact information for Helen Lepp Friessen is provided: 'The event is free, but we request that you kindly RSVP, Helen Lepp Friessen: H.LeppFriessen@uwinnipeg.ca 204.786.9713'. The bottom of the poster has the slogan 'DISCOVER · ACHIEVE · BELONG'.

### **Art and oral teaching.**

Students suggested that art and oral teachings would be helpful pedagogical aids, “instead of just another textbook shoved in my hand. Makes everything feel so dull and painful” (International student). Students wanted to hear more personal stories, experiences that happened to individuals.



### **Science courses for science students.**

Some students suggested ICR courses in the sciences to better coincide with their own interests. “If it could be taught in a course that has less of an artistic or social science focus. As a science student, I would love a course focused more on science” (student).

### **Support services.**

Participants talked about the necessity for support services for students, faculty, and staff that could experience trauma as a result of studying traumatic history. Counselling services could be readily available for students, faculty or staff that were triggered or were hurt by insensitive or outright racist comments made in class.

### **Training for faculty.**

Students expressed the need for special preparation and training for educators to know how to deal with issues concerning racism. Since Indigenous education can open wounds and students can be triggered, faculty and staff need to be prepared in knowing how to anticipate and deal with sensitive and highly emotional situations. Students also suggested supports for faculty in terms of pedagogy and interaction with students.

### **Pass/fail course.**

Some students wanted the University to consider having the course be a pass/fail course to take the pressure off students to perform in a certain way. Another suggested (idealistically but perhaps problematically) that perhaps students could be graded on how and whether they changed their thinking in any way that is beneficial to an inclusive society.

## For Students

### **Take interest.**

Many students' recommendation to other students was to have a learning attitude, to take interest, and participate in conversations because the ICR and reconciliation "is very important and not at all boring" (student).

### **Get involved.**

Many students wanted to contribute to the further development of the ICR. Since the ICR was a student-led initiative, perhaps students can continue to be instrumental in shaping it and moving it forward.

### **"Knowing what we can do to help."**

As a result of gaining knowledge, students wanted to know what they could do to move forward with reconciliation. They wanted to know how they could be a part of the process. For these students, the end of the course marked just the beginning of learning. After the end of the course, students could continue to meet to brainstorm further reconciliation efforts. The University could offer a list of places where students could volunteer to learn more and put their learning into action.

In conclusion, this study did not undertake to provide a comprehensive evaluation of the ICR but to consult key stakeholders and to distill their comments into a set of stakeholder recommendations that reflected their experiences. Even those with negative experiences or attitudes that were not conducive to open and engaged learning provide useful feedback that can inform pedagogical approaches and course content. We offer these experiences as a contribution to the UW's ongoing dialogue on how best to move forward with the ICR and further our efforts to contribute to reconciliation, and to right relations, through education.



# Acknowledgements

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