

"We are All Relations": Indigenous Course Requirement (ICR)



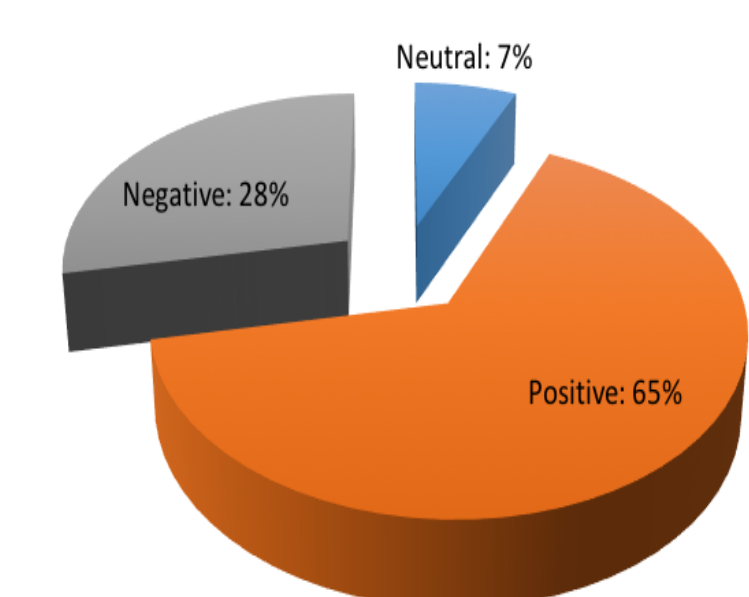
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Abstract

This mixed-methods study consulted with students, faculty, and staff to develop insight into 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.



Sharing Circle Classroom



Overall Student ICR Experience



Aboriginal Student Services Centre

Highlights

Challenges

Most faculty, staff, and students agreed that racism and lack of knowledge exist and that education and relationships are key to changing stereotypes. Key challenges included:

- 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;
- how to manage contentious discussions in class.

Description of Initiative

- UWSA proposed an Indigenous Course Requirement (ICR) to the University's Senate in 2014.
- The ICR was approved by Senate in November 2015 and implemented in the fall of 2016 for all incoming undergraduate students (Indigenous Course Requirement, 2016).
- In 2016/2017, 27 courses with a total of 46 sections were offered across 9 departments.

"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)."

"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... We are on Treaty land, and we should be respectful of that."

Recommendations

Learning languages

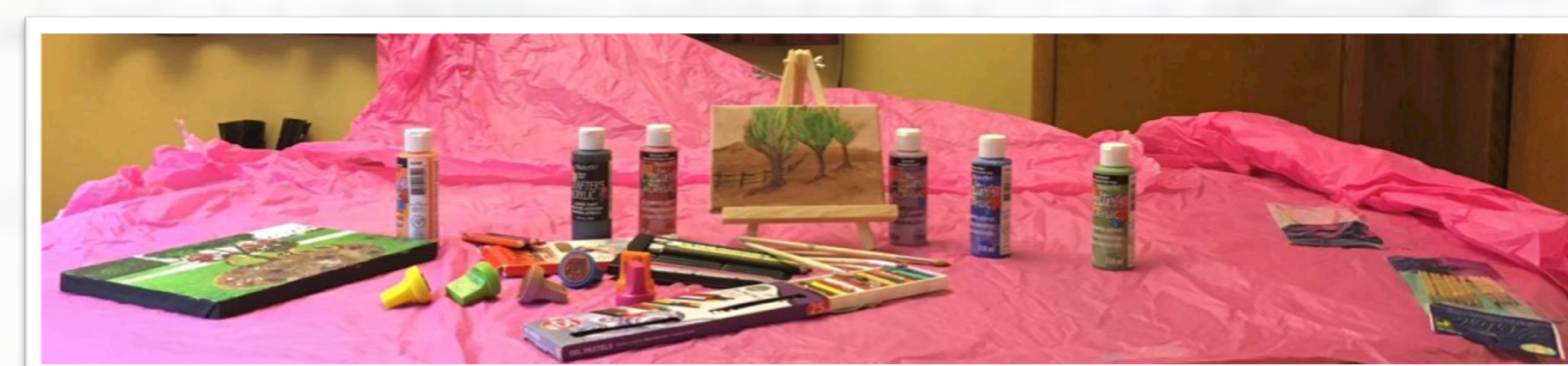
Personal experience stories

Circle method

Elders in the classroom

Clear information about the ICR

More Indigenous hires



Support services for faculty, staff, & students

Science courses for Science students

Storytelling as pedagogy

Art and oral teaching

Many ways of communicating & evaluating

Hands-on learning & full immersion

Methods & Sample

Multimodal data were collected during the winter of 2017 from the following:

- 10 faculty and staff from six departments who participated via 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 who participated in one of three 60-90-minute **focus group discussions**.

Positive Experiences

- Most students said the ICR had expanded their learning in a good and empathetic way, and increased their understanding of Indigenous issues. Many applauded the University and wished they could have learned these things a long time ago.
- Faculty had been concerned about a potential backlash from students but our findings showed a generally positive learning experience.
- Emergent themes were the importance of relationships, respect, and safety; eagerness to learn with and from Indigenous peoples; the desire to work together for a better, more inclusive education system and society.