

# A Thematic Analysis of Indigenous Students' Experiences with Indigenization at a Canadian Post-secondary Institution: Paradoxes, Potential, and Moving Forward Together

Iloradanon Efimoff

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Résumé de l'article

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Iloradanon Efimoff

*University of Manitoba, Haida Nation, Canada, efimoffi@myumanitoba.ca*

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## Abstract

Indigenization is a relatively new phenomenon in Canada. It is a broad concept that includes everything from changing physical spaces to challenging Western epistemologies and the status quo. In this study, I describe nine Indigenous students' experiences with Indigenization at the University of Saskatchewan. Students were impacted both positively and negatively by their engagement: They described both opportunities borne of engagement with Indigenization and detriments such as exhaustion and lack of basic needs. In terms of methods to Indigenize, the participants described the importance of representation, centring Indigenous values and knowledges, and creating communities that can Indigenize. I end the paper with four policy recommendations for post-secondary institutions interested in Indigenization.

## Keywords

Indigenization, Canada, post-secondary, recommendations

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## **A Thematic Analysis of Indigenous Students' Experiences with Indigenization at a Canadian Post-secondary Institution: Paradoxes, Potential, and Moving Forward Together**

Haw'aa, Iloradanon Efimoff hínuu díi kya'áang. Hello, my name is Iloradanon Efimoff. I am Haida and European settler. My father is Haida and Russian and my mother is descended primarily from Irish, German, Norwegian, and English ancestors, but identifies as White and Canadian. As young as I can remember, I have known I am Haida: My hadáas (father and paternal uncles), awáa (mother), skáanaa (paternal aunt), náanaa (grandmother), and chanáa (grandfather) have made this clear. The Northwest Coast and the Haida nation are home, despite having lived so many years away from them. The Haida Nation is a First Nation, one of three broad categories that make up "Indigenous Peoples" in Canada, the other groups being Métis and Inuit. Indigenous Peoples are the diverse original inhabitants of what most now call Canada. Indigenous Peoples have resisted violent and racist European-settler policies for centuries.

For example, Indigenous people often experience racism through the education system. A prominent example in Canada is state and church-run Residential Schools. These schools were designed to destroy Indigenous culture (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada [TRC], 2015a). The last of these schools closed in 1996 (TRC, n.d.) but other educational institutions continue to marginalize Indigenous ways of knowing and being (FitzMaurice, 2011). Specifically, though Canadian post-secondary institutions are sites of learning and growth, they have long been sites of racism. For example, the Indian Act of 1876 dictated that status Indians could not pursue a university degree unless they revoked their Indian status (Stonechild, 2006). Current examples of racism in Canadian institutions are plentiful. Debassige and Brunette-Debassige explain that Indigenous people in universities are expected to conform to Western norms at the threat of marginalization and are often denied their agency in knowledge-making (2018). Indigenous students experience racism at universities (Cote-Meek, 2014), such as microaggressions like stereotypes about Indigenous Peoples (Clark et al., 2014; Currie et al., 2012), and erasure or misrepresentation via curriculum (Bailey, 2016; Clark et al., 2014). At the University of Saskatchewan in particular, students have, for example, rallied to create an Indigenous Students' Union, in part to address discrimination (MacPherson, 2018). These experiences of racism, discrimination, and misrepresentation are troubling, especially in light of international and national statements on Indigenous Peoples' rights in education.

That is, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (United Nations, 2007) and the TRC's 94 Calls to Action (2015b) call for educational changes. Article 15 of UNDRIP demands appropriate representation of Indigenous Peoples in education. The TRC's Calls to Action 62–65 call for a series of educational changes, such as mandatory Indigenous content in current curricula (including teacher training to teach this content), building the ability of students to have better intercultural relationships, teacher education on teaching Indigenous knowledges and pedagogies, hiring senior-level officials focused on Indigenous curricula, and funding reconciliation research. They call for many of these changes to be done *with* Residential School Survivors, Indigenous Peoples, and educators. One way in which post-secondary institutions are responding to the TRC's report and Calls to Action is through Indigenization. In this paper, I focus on Indigenous students' experiences with Indigenization at

the University of Saskatchewan. I start by discussing Indigenization at Canadian post-secondary institutions.

### **Indigenization at Canadian Post-Secondary Institutions**

Though Indigenization efforts have been underway for many years (Kuokkanen, 2008; Lavallee, 2020; Mihesuah & Wilson, 2004), they have expanded rapidly in recent years as Canadian post-secondary institutions work to respond to the TRC's calls to action via Indigenization (Bédard, 2018; Debassige & Brunette-Debassige, 2018; Fiola & MacKinnon, 2020; Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018). There is no consensus on the definition of Indigenization in post-secondary institutions (Bédard, 2018; Fiola & MacKinnon, 2020). Many researchers describe Indigenization as a process of embedding Indigenous ways of knowing and being within post-secondary systems as well as increasing the number of and success of Indigenous people in post-secondary contexts (Bédard, 2018; Blair et al., 2020; Bopp et al., 2017; Canadian Association of University Teachers, 2016; Compton, 2016; Debassige & Brunette-Debassige, 2018; Efimoff, 2019; Fiola & MacKinnon, 2020; FitzMaurice, 2011; Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; Kinzel, 2020; Newhouse, 2016; Ottmann, 2013; Pidgeon, 2014; Pidgeon, 2016; Poitras Pratt et al., 2018). Some descriptions of Indigenization call for radical paradigm shifts to achieve such goals (e.g., Blair et al., 2020). Importantly, Indigenous Peoples must be at the head of these initiatives, as without Indigenous knowledges, one cannot Indigenize (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; Grafton & Melançon, 2020; Ottmann, 2013). Many researchers describe Indigenization as deeply interconnected with decolonization<sup>1</sup> (Blair et al., 2020; Debassige & Brunette-Debassige, 2018; Fellner, 2018; Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; George, 2019; Grafton & Melançon, 2020; Madden & Glanfield, 2019; Mihesuah & Wilson, 2004; Ottmann, 2013). Some examples of Indigenization at Canadian universities include providing Indigenous-specific scholarships, offering programs to transition incoming Indigenous students into university life, creating Indigenous course content requirements, hosting Indigenous events, or creating Indigenous hiring strategies (University of Calgary, n.d.; University of Manitoba, n.d.; University of Saskatchewan, n.d.a; University of Winnipeg, n.d.; Vancouver Island University, n.d.).

Gaudry and Lorenz (2018) provide helpful guidance about Indigenization. They describe three types of Indigenization. First, Indigenous inclusion, or increasing the number of Indigenous people on campus. Second, reconciliation Indigenization, or attempting to reconcile Indigenous and European knowledges in part through changes to university structure. And third, decolonial Indigenization, or a radical shift in structures and systems to change knowledge production. Gaudry and Lorenz (2018) argue that most Canadian post-secondary institutions practice Indigenous inclusion instead of reconciliation Indigenization or decolonial Indigenization. Other research highlights experiences within Indigenization.

Most published work on Indigenization shares the valuable experiences and observations of Indigenous people involved with Canadian post-secondary Indigenization processes (Bédard, 2018; Brulé & Koleszar-Green, 2018; Cote-Meek & Moeke-Pickering, 2020; Debassige & Brunette-Debassige, 2018; Downey, 2018; Fellner, 2018; Fiola & MacKinnon, 2020; George, 2019; Hewitt, 2016; Johnson, 2016;

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<sup>1</sup> In an education context, decolonization is “identifying how colonization has impacted education and working to unsettle colonial structures, systems, and dynamics” (Poitras Pratt et al., 2018, p. 1; but see Tuck & Yang, 2012).

Lavallee, 2020; Louie et al., 2017; Ottmann, 2013; Pete, 2015). Many Indigenous authors involved in Indigenization express feeling frustrated at seemingly ineffective or tokenistic institutional Indigenization processes, such as adding Indigenous art to physical spaces (Lavallee, 2020), being treated as a token Indigenous person at events or in projects (Bédard, 2018; Lavallee, 2020), a lack of system change (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018), pressure to conform to Eurocentric educational norms (Debassige & Brunette-Debassige, 2018), or the expectation that Indigenous peoples in post-secondary institutions will do Indigenization work (Debassige & Brunette-Debassige, 2018; Fiola & MacKinnon, 2020; Grafton & Melançon, 2020; Lavallee, 2020). Though Indigenization efforts can undoubtedly help Indigenous people at post-secondary institutions (Bédard, 2018; Lavallee, 2020), Indigenous peoples' experiences with Indigenization highlight its shortfalls. And indeed, Indigenization as a concept is not without critique. For example, Grafton and Melançon (2020) argue that, if not carefully implemented, Indigenization can lead to “misrepresentation, tokenism, and even cooptation” (p. 144). Similarly, Newhouse (2016) warns that Indigenization may be another way for universities to attempt to assimilate Indigenous Peoples, given universities' history of assimilationist tendencies. Overall, the existing Indigenization research is valuable and informs Indigenization efforts; however, there are gaps.

Specifically, no known research has assessed Indigenous *students'* experiences within Indigenizing post-secondary institutions. This is despite the fact that Indigenous students are the largest Indigenous group impacted by Indigenization, as there are more Indigenous students on campuses than Indigenous staff, faculty, or administrative members. Indigenous students are also often heavily involved in Indigenization processes (Efimoff, 2019). Thus, it is important to expand this Indigenization research to assess Indigenous students' experiences with Indigenization. In this study, I expand the Indigenization research within the context of the University of Saskatchewan. As such, I describe their Indigenization processes next.

### **Indigenization at the University of Saskatchewan**

The University of Saskatchewan<sup>2</sup> has made Indigenization a strategic priority (University of Saskatchewan, n.d.b). In their view, Indigenization is a set of institutionally integrated changes that increase accessibility, support societal reconciliation, and increase understanding of past and present realities of Indigenous Peoples (University of Saskatchewan, n.d.b). Indigenization includes adding Indigenous content to courses where appropriate and is intended to “challenge and contribute to Western understandings of knowledge and truth” (University of Saskatchewan, n.d.b, para. 7). In theory, then, the University of Saskatchewan may fall in the first two positions along Gaudry and Lorenz's (2018) continuum of Indigenization, as they focus on including Indigenous content (Indigenous inclusion), supporting societal reconciliation, and challenging and contributing to Western knowledge (reconciliation Indigenization).

In practice, the University of Saskatchewan has taken action to work toward Indigenization. These changes range from inclusion or representation (e.g., presenting Indigenous artwork throughout campus) to more structural changes (e.g., hiring a Vice-Provost Indigenous Engagement). The

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<sup>2</sup> The University of Saskatchewan is in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada. The university has roughly 22,000 students, nearly 3,000 of whom identify as Indigenous (University of Saskatchewan, 2020).

University of Saskatchewan appears to have created space for Indigenous students by building the Gordon Oakes Red Bear Student Centre, a space for Indigenous students on campus, and various Indigenous-specific educational programs (such as the Indian Teacher Education Program and the Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program). The university has also initiated mentoring programs for Indigenous students, such as Indigenous Student Achievement Pathways and the Aboriginal Student Peer Mentor program. They also host many Indigenous-related events, such as the Building Reconciliation Forum, Indigenous Achievement Week, and a Graduation Powwow. It is important to note that many of these initiatives were instigated by the Indigenous community on campus and then supported by the institution.

The University of Saskatchewan has also made several changes that might be considered more structural or systemic. For example, they have “Indigenized” their Learning Charter to incorporate Indigenous knowledges into this guiding document (University of Saskatchewan, n.d.c). The university’s College of Arts and Science (which hosts the largest number of students at the institution; University of Saskatchewan, 2020) is currently developing an Indigenous content requirement for their undergraduate students to facilitate a better understanding of Indigenous Peoples in Canada (University of Saskatchewan, 2017) and some programs already have this in place (e.g., Bachelor of Education; University of Saskatchewan, n.d.d). They even have an Indigenous faculty hiring strategy (University of Saskatchewan, n.d.e). Some smaller organizations within the institution, such as the Graduate Students’ Association, have created formal positions for Indigenous leadership on their executive team (University of Saskatchewan Graduate Students’ Association, 2020). Even these structural or systemic changes may still be considered “inclusion” practices, as they mostly consist of including more Indigenous content and people in the institution. This might be the predecessor of decolonial Indigenization (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018), as systemic changes, such as Indigenizing the Learning Charter, might combine with increased numbers of Indigenous peoples on campus to build capacity to challenge the status quo.

Overall, the University of Saskatchewan appears to focus its Indigenization efforts on Indigenous inclusion. Some of their more structural changes may push the institution into reconciliation Indigenization. However, the University of Saskatchewan, like most Canadian post-secondary institutions, appears far from decolonial Indigenization (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018). This is the context in which I conducted the current study.

### **The Current Study**

I came to this project through my own experiences as an Indigenous student in leadership positions at the University of Saskatchewan between 2016 and 2018 (described further in Efimoff, 2019). I was impressed with the Indigenization efforts I saw. Coming from a small undergraduate institution with very little Indigenous presence, I was pleased to attend Indigenous talks and events, work in the Gordon Oakes Red Bear Student Centre, and join Indigenous graduate students’ groups. However, I also saw areas for improvement, and thus the impetus for this paper was born: Institutions may be able to create appropriate and effective Indigenization policies if they understand Indigenous students’ experiences with Indigenization. As such, the purpose of this study was to share Indigenous students’ experiences with Indigenization. I share the results of my descriptive thematic analysis and discuss the policy implications for post-secondary institutions that may be Indigenizing. This is the first study that I know

of to assess Indigenous students' experiences with Indigenization and thus centers Indigenous students within the discussion of Indigenization at post-secondary institutions.

## Method

In this study, I qualitatively describe participants' experiences with Indigenization. Using this descriptive approach (as opposed to, for example, interpreting constructed meanings) facilitates sharing participants' experiences with Indigenization and provides a broad basis for future research. In this paper, I privilege and center Indigenous students' voices and work to tell their stories, and thus attempt to center Indigenous ways of knowing. This study was approved by the University of Saskatchewan Research Ethics Board.

### Participants

In total, I recruited 10 participants. I recruited seven students who held Indigenous leadership positions on campus with the assumption that they were likely to have experience with Indigenization (purposive sampling; Kovach, 2009; Palys, 2012). I also recruited three students through a study invitation on a University of Saskatchewan online student platform (I posted here to ensure other Indigenous students had the opportunity to participate). Participants' engagement included involvement in Indigenous student clubs, holding formal Indigenous student leadership positions, or sitting on committees focused on Indigenization. Their involvement spanned between 2 months to 3 years. Slightly more participants were women than men, as aligns with University of Saskatchewan demographics (University of Saskatchewan, 2020). Participants ranged in age (from 20 to 61 years) and life experiences (from a self-declared privileged upbringing to Residential School Survivors). Three were parents, and two held staff positions as well as being students. All participants identified as Indigenous, and some were of mixed Indigenous and non-Indigenous ancestry. Participants' academic programs included education, business, medicine, history, Indigenous studies, environmental science, physiology and pharmacology, and social work.

### Data Collection Process

I inductively developed the interview guide for the open-ended qualitative interviews based on my experiences as an Indigenous student in leadership positions at the institution (Appendix A). I used the guide flexibly, and participants shared beyond it. Interviews lasted between 30 and 90 minutes and were collected between July 2017 and April 2018. All interviews occurred in a public place on campus. After participants provided informed consent, they reviewed the interview guide, and we completed the interview. Next, I collected demographic information from the participants and presented participants with a smudging packet<sup>3</sup> and tobacco<sup>4</sup> to thank them for sharing their knowledge and time. Participants decided whether they wanted to remain anonymous, be identified by demographic information, or have their names attached to any quotes I used.

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<sup>3</sup>Smudging a common practice in many Indigenous cultures in Canada, where a bundle of sacred medicines (herbs) is burned as part of a cleansing process.

<sup>4</sup>In many Indigenous cultures in Canada, tobacco is given to acknowledge knowledge sharing.



Building trust is important when generating knowledge with Indigenous communities, given the frequency of problematic research practices involving Indigenous Peoples and knowledges (Mosby, 2013; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). As I was an Indigenous student in leadership positions at the University of Saskatchewan while I collected this data and had worked with some of the participants who were also typically in leadership positions, they appeared to trust me to gather and share their stories appropriately (some even mentioned this explicitly). Though my experiences as a community member made establishing relations relatively easy, using this type of emic approach also has limitations. For example, when reviewing the data, I noted that I did not always ask participants to explicate the implicit—the things we both knew and appeared to agree on. I addressed this during my analysis by closely evaluating my conclusions (e.g., by reviewing my conclusions multiple times after taking time away from the data). Next, I discuss the analysis.

### **Data Analysis Process**

I used thematic analysis to analyze the data. I started by transcribing audio recordings using NVivo (versions 11 and 12, a qualitative data analysis software) as soon as possible after the interview to ensure I could include non-verbal cues in the transcript. During transcription I wrote out preliminary analytical insights. I read the transcripts in their entirety to anonymize them and sent them to the participants. Participants had the opportunity to review the transcript and make changes before signing a transcript release form, confirming they had reviewed and edited the transcript, that it was accurate, and that I could use it for my research. One participant did not acknowledge receipt of their transcript or sign the transcript release form; after multiple contact attempts, I decided to omit this participant's data from the analysis.

Next, I started the coding process. I read through each transcript in its entirety again and began coding using NVivo. I used a primarily inductive approach, though, of course, the impact of my own experiences undoubtedly impacted my coding, as no researcher comes to data completely objectively. After coding the transcripts, I reviewed the codes and created a map of the relationship between the codes in NVivo. I worked through multiple iterations of the code map, each time gaining a better understanding of recurring concepts and contradictions in the data, eventually identifying themes. I then read through each transcript again in its entirety to identify new insights, other pieces related to the themes, and connections among different codes. Next, I discuss the findings, which I present in two parts: the impacts of Indigenization on the participants and methods to Indigenize.

## **Findings**

### **Personal Impacts of Engagement with Indigenization**

On a personal level, participants experienced positive and negative impacts from Indigenization at the University of Saskatchewan. Participants appeared to positively experience many of the Indigenous-oriented initiatives on campus. For example, some shared stories of experiencing personal and professional growth through their engagement with Indigenization, such as gaining skills or experience in public speaking, mentorship, event facilitation, and community-building. Other participants seemed to indicate that spaces, such as the Gordon Oakes Red Bear Student Centre, were permanent places

where Indigenous students could be authentic and safe from racist comments and also had the symbolic effect of conveying that the institution was “serious” about Indigenizing. Participants also noted that cultural events, such as the Graduation Powwow, helped situate Indigenous cultural practices in the present, showing newcomers these practices are a part of Indigenous life. Lastly, participants noted that programming designed to support Indigenous student success, such as the Aboriginal Student Achievement Program and the Aboriginal Student Peer Advisor Program, helped Indigenous students feel comfortable, forge relationships, and access opportunities, ranging from public speaking to meeting the Prime Minister.

Some participants also characterized their engagement with Indigenization as having affirming effects on their identity development. For example, one participant stated:

I guess without the process of Indigenization ... I wouldn't have wanted to sort of Indigenize myself I guess, or decolonize myself and my ways of thinking ... a lot of that was done through peers ... Elders ... really made me feel like I was missing something to myself ... Without this entire process I wouldn't have had that urge to want to learn about a lot of the traditional ways. (Participant 1)

For this participant, self-decolonization was informed by their peers and Elders and further reinforced by their engagement in Indigenization. More of their peers and Elders may have been on campus due to the explicit Indigenization processes at the University of Saskatchewan; the university may have indirectly facilitated this process via recruitment. Another participant described how these processes contribute to cultural identity resurgence:

Indigenous student leaders ... that are really entrenched in their culture, and they're proud of it, and seeing that affirmation by them, and seeing that they're okay, kind of encourages other students to come out and be like oh, hey, I want to participate in my culture! So I think it does help with cultural resurgence ... seeing Indigenous Peoples being proud of their culture kind of makes you proud of your own culture, right? (Participant 2)

For this particular participant, their cultural resurgence and identity journey developed further with support from their supervisor:

I had a little bit of an existential crisis, I was like "oh my god, I don't know if I can call myself Métis or not!" and [my supervisor has] been there helping me, saying identity is always pull and push ... So in that sense I feel that the university has been very supportive, but that's also through my supervisor himself. (Participant 2)

Here, both Indigenous student leaders on campus and the participant's supervisor have helped this participant continue to develop their identity. Again, the effect of Indigenization is more distal: The institution may have created an environment where Indigenous students feel they can be proud of their identity and hired faculty (such as this supervisor) who can support Indigenous students. Unfortunately, however, not all experiences were positive.

Participants also spoke of poor physical and mental health outcomes due to their engagement in Indigenization, such as exhaustion and burnout, in addition to financial and social impacts (for a description of academic impacts, see Efimoff, 2019). For instance, Terrance recounted what happened after he shared his Residential School experience with his classroom:

I went and had such a hell of an anxiety attack after that, [name of friend] had to come and sit with me for about 45 minutes during class time ... Cripes that bugged the hell out of me. I can't do that. I can't do it ... I'll do it for my class because I think it's important for them to understand. And they ask questions and we're able to interact. And they're able to feel empathy. And they're able to support me too like if I didn't have [name of friend] there I don't know what the hell I woulda did.

Terrance's sense of responsibility to share this information with the class, and in a way, to help Indigenize (i.e. through sharing lived experiences of Residential Schools, Terrance may create safer spaces for Indigenous students and increase non-Indigenous students' understanding) had immediate and direct harmful personal impacts.

Participant exhaustion due to engagement with Indigenization was common and connected to involvement on multiple institutional committees, and the physical, emotional, and psychological work required, including the pressure of being the "voice" of Indigenous students. This aligns with many other Indigenous scholars' experiences of Indigenization overwork (Debassige & Brunette-Debassige, 2018; Fiola & MacKinnon, 2020; Grafton & Melançon, 2020; Lavalley, 2020). Although two participants were paid for their time on one research project investigating Indigenous education techniques, positions in many Indigenous student groups are unpaid, and these students are regularly called upon to sit on committees and otherwise be involved in unpaid (volunteer) Indigenization work. Though some participants actively strove to decline requests to prioritize their academic studies, many participants discussed a sense of responsibility and a desire to give back to their community. This drew many participants to take on extra volunteer tasks (such as sitting on committees or organizing events related to Indigenization) that took away from their ability to secure paid work, focus on course work, or even obtain basic needs like time with friends, sleep, food, and housing.

Other participants felt impacts on their relationship with their families, and for the following participant, their community and land:

I do find myself not getting enough time to go home and spend with family and sort of reconnect with my community ... to connect with our part of the earth as well ... when I was little, my dad taught me exactly where the reefs are. And as I was driving he reminded me "oh, you're gonna hit a reef if you keep going straight." So I was like oh goodness! [laughter] So it takes its toll I guess on like family as well, cause during the school year ... I had to make a lot of sacrifices, and family was, unfortunately, one of them too ... I didn't go home once during the second term. (Participant 1)

Being away from family is difficult for many students, and the added responsibility of engagement with Indigenization may exacerbate this for Indigenous students.

Despite these paradoxical impacts at the personal level, participants expressed ongoing desires for involvement, representation, self-determination, and ultimately, to challenge current systems. Many participants discussed how Indigenization could be improved through Indigenous student representation, incorporating Indigenous knowledges and values, and engaging the broader community. Next, I discuss each of these methods of Indigenization in detail.

## Ways to Indigenize

### *Representation*

Many participants talked about Indigenous student representation as a good way to Indigenize. They conceptualized representation broadly, as having Indigenous students, faculty, and staff on committees; consulting with Indigenous students about Indigenization; and simply having more Indigenous people on campus. For example, though Terrance valued the hiring of Indigenous senior administration members, he wanted to see more Indigenous people on campus in general. Jacqueline explained the need to bring Indigenous speakers and Elders to her program (medicine). Both Terrance and Sabrina also referred to representing Indigenous culture within campus spaces—Terrance felt represented by the College of Education because they made Indigenous people “more visible” physically in the space, and Sabrina explained, “at the Gordon Oakes, I feel like I am represented and feel like I am able to see myself reflected in the campus.”

Many participants had a specific role in representing other Indigenous students on campus through their involvement on committees or in leadership positions. Sabrina, Terrance, and two other participants held formal positions in recognized Indigenous student organizations on campus and were often invited to committees to discuss issues relevant to Indigenous students or Indigenization. These participants appeared deeply motivated to do their best to represent Indigenous students. However, direct consultation, in some participants' estimation, was limited: “I have yet to see somebody from administration come and ask the Indigenous student body ‘what does Indigenization mean to you?’” (Participant 1). This participant goes on to explain that there are many active Indigenous students, Elders, and knowledge keepers who could be drawn on, and that the University should engage Indigenous Peoples broadly in creating their vision of Indigenization. Participant 3 explained how they had never had a member of an Indigenous student organization approach them about Indigenization, and that overall, consultation was sparse. The privileging of only a few voices may contribute to the exhaustion of these select students. Relatedly, it may simply be ineffective, as Indigenization is not a one-person job (Lavallee, 2020). Furthermore, when these students leave the University, they leave gaps in institutional memory, which may stall progress. Though the participants in this study had the opportunity to directly share their thoughts on Indigenization on committees or in other forums, much of the Indigenous student body presumably does not. Indigenization processes, thus, might be improved with broader consultation.

However, representation in and of itself is insufficient unless the spaces opened are those in which Indigenous voices are seriously considered. Gabrielle explained this in detail: “I think the best thing the universities can do is just to leave space ... space on committees, space to speak, be heard, space to be taken serious[ly] ... that's the number one thing.” She went on to explain that Indigenous paradigms are

fundamental in creating anti-oppressive approaches for Indigenous students to succeed. Thus, it is important to have consultations where students meaningfully influence Indigenization practices and policies. Several participants, including Gabrielle, discussed the importance of being able to control what Indigenization looks like, and how Indigenization requires meaningful engagement that yields tangible outcomes. For example, Participant 1 explained how Indigenous representation is important but notes that when it comes to what Indigenization should look like, “the reality is the university is already establishing their [vision].” Relatedly, Terrance (and other participants) distinguished between two approaches: “Either for Indians<sup>5</sup> or by Indians. By Indians is us. For Indians is them getting money to do [Indigenous programming], whether we even wanted it or not.” The “for Indians” approach described by Terrance can mean that the work accomplished may not be something that Indigenous Peoples wanted in the first place (and thus is potentially not meaningful), and yet the organizers may not even know this because they have not worked *with* Indigenous Peoples. The implication is that if Indigenous Peoples were fundamental in the creation of such programs, such programs could be much more effective. This desire for Indigenous representation and leadership in the Indigenization process also reflects the experiences of Indigenous scholars more broadly (Gaudry & Lorenz; Grafton & Melançon, 2020). Participants deemed a lack of representation as problematic.

For example, participants often cited tokenism and paternalism as problematic within the Indigenization process. Meaningful representation can help to avoid paternalism and tokenism. Participants described interpersonal experiences of tokenism within their classrooms. For example, for Participant 4, when an Indigenous topic was raised in class, other students slowly turned to look at them for comment. Participants also experienced tokenism on a broader level. Participant 1, who sits on a variety of committees, explained their perception of current consultation processes as infrequent, inauthentic, and insufficient:

Sort of like having these big meetings regarding Indigenous Peoples and then inviting an Elder but only to say the prayer and then that's it ... just like a little dab of this, a little dab of land-based knowledge, a little dab of Elders, and that's it. We're Indigenized.

A very “surface” level of Indigenization means that Indigenous practices are sprinkled on top of already existing programs, but not necessarily integrated or meaningfully addressed (also observed by Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; Lavalley, 2020; Newhouse, 2016; Pardy & Pardy, 2020). Sabrina, who also sits on a variety of committees, takes this idea a bit further:

Indigenization efforts on administration level, like university council, are done very in a salt and pepper manner so that they politically can say that they're doing a lot to Indigenize the campus ... throughout the years [I] have seen or heard about Indigenization differently, which had kind of made me a little less hopeful for Indigenization.

Sabrina identified political motivations for the Indigenization process at the University of Saskatchewan, namely that Indigenization sometimes feels like something the university does to “look good” (as in

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<sup>5</sup> Though First Nations in Canada are legally known as “Indians,” the term is considered inappropriate by many people in current times. However, some Indigenous people still use the term, especially in older generations.

Bédard, 2018; Grafton & Melançon, 2020) The lack of tangible action after Indigenization discussions has made her less hopeful. This connects with concerns that administrative members of the university were not asking students about their perspectives on Indigenization; this, combined with the lack of tangible action observed by Sabrina, might imply the University is not working for the students' benefit, but a reputational benefit. Despite these concerns, Sabrina acknowledged the good Indigenization work occurring (as in Lavalée, 2020) and understood that larger changes take time. However, ultimately, she hoped for an Indigenization that focuses on “epistemologies or Indigenous frameworks.”

Another way that the participants discussed representation was by talking about their own experiences as Indigenous people, and how Indigenization could be designed with these experiences in mind. For example, Terrance, being a Residential School survivor, spoke about the life-long impacts of trauma on learning and explained that faculty needed sensitivity to the level of trauma experienced by some Indigenous students, such as himself. Being highly engaged in his home community, when tragedy struck, Terrance was often on the front line; in one case, a community member was shot, another died in a fire, and another died of cancer in quick succession. He remembers how he felt when he read a harshly worded sign on a professor's door: “students,' it says, 'I want your assignments here, I don't care, the work is no excuse. They have to be here on time.' That was his sign on his door.” In this case, Terrance was able to contact health services on campus to help; regardless, universities may strive to challenge the institutional culture epitomized in that cold and impersonal sign on a professor's door. This would likely help many students, not solely those experiencing community crises or other trauma, and may help institutions to better support Indigenous students throughout Indigenization.

Relatedly, Jacqueline explained a lack of understanding about Residential School trauma:

People learn that “oh this is what happened to Indigenous people a hundred years ago.” It's not history because it's still impacting us. People talk about Residential School like it was a long time ago. No. I went to Residential School. I'm 30 years old. I went to Residential School ... I went to Residential School when I was 8 and I remember, I feel like that's just burned into my memory.

In this case, trauma lingers, as Jacqueline remembers her Residential School experience as if it were “burned” into her memory. It seems likely that students who are Residential School Survivors may feel unheard or hurt when hearing others situate the impact of Residential Schools in the past. Recognizing that current students may be Residential School Survivors or experience intergenerational impacts (Bombay et al., 2011; Elias et al., 2012), or experience deep-rooted colonial trauma in other ways, could help universities work toward an Indigenization process that considers these diverse needs, and thus, is broadly representative of the many diverse Indigenous student experiences.

The paternalistic, tokenistic nature of some Indigenization processes, even if intended to help Indigenous people on campus, sat poorly with many of the participants. Ensuring meaningful consultation, collaboration, and broad representation alongside follow-through and tangible outcomes and actions is important. Participants' reflections also highlighted the importance of integrating Indigenous knowledges, discussed in the next section.

### *Indigenous Values and Knowledges*

Incorporating Indigenous ways of knowing is fundamental to Indigenization. Participants discussed the importance of privileging Indigenous values including spirituality, self-determination, future-looking, culture, and community in the university. Participant 2 explained the need to include Indigenous Peoples in the Indigenization process because, “if you’re not Indigenous, how do you know the Indigenous ways?” They went on to discuss epistemological Indigenization as not only representing Indigenous perspectives but as necessary for challenging Western ways of knowing:

I do think that we need to ... constantly try to think in an Indigenous way. That's going to seem like you're de-balancing Western academic ways of doing things, but I think that's really necessary for the individual researcher's ability to have that equal footing. Because without that kind of heightened sensitivity to Indigenous ways of doing research, you're not going to be self-conscious of your own Western biases.

Given the overwhelming reliance on Western ways of knowing within the academy, we must critically assess our use of these ways of knowing and attempt to consciously incorporate and make space for Indigenous ways of knowing and doing research (also observed by other Indigenous scholars such as Blair et al., 2020; Ottmann, 2013). For some participants, this happened through research. Jacqueline spoke explicitly about gaining a deeper understanding of data when she was allowed to use the Cree language and her own experiences as a Cree woman in the analysis process as a research assistant. Terrance and another participant were also involved in a research project assessing different types of Indigenous knowledge as a way to complement or enrich Western academic styles. These types of projects were held in high regard by the participants as good ways to do research *with* Indigenous people. They showcased Indigenous ways of knowing in an Indigenizing institution. Terrance also talked about making space for spirituality, as an Indigenous way of knowing, within the institution:

You can't deny the spiritual side of people's beings. It's a part of understanding our world. It's a part of understanding things that we can't see, in a spiritual sense ... If the university is going to do something about that, they've got to accept us on that level. So at least their doing some stuff by letting us have our cultural practices.

Allowing for spiritual practices on campus like smudging is one concrete example of making space for spirituality and the Indigenous knowledge held in such practices. Fire codes, safety regulations, and institutional policies can make smudging complicated, however, the University of Saskatchewan has a smudging policy that provides space for spirituality in this regard (2015).

Other participants talked about the importance of Indigenous values, such as self-determination. For example, Participant 1 talked about the two-row Wampum Belt (see Hallenbeck, 2015) or treaties as ideal frameworks for Indigenization: “[Indigenous and White people are] on common ground and they’re working toward a prosperous future. Together. But also being able to do that in their own independent ways.” In this sentiment, the participant expresses themes of autonomy, independence, and self-determination, along with good relations between groups and a shared future. Gabrielle also spoke passionately about the need for self-determination in the form of self-governance; for designing unique

systems that reflect traditional governance practices; and for challenging current systems that are designed to oppress Indigenous Peoples broadly. In terms of Indigenization, self-determination implies large-scale changes, such as wide-scale consultation, actions determined meaningful by Indigenous Peoples, and shifting power to Indigenous Peoples in the process.

Another Indigenous value participants discussed was thinking about the future. Many participants were motivated to work toward Indigenization when thinking about future generations. Sabrina explained, "I think with Indigenization and the continual momentum to move forward, we're doing it not for our own benefit but for the years to come which is obviously embedded in our world view." Sabrina was enrolled in the Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program (SUNTEP), which was created to provide structural support for non-status Indians<sup>6</sup> and Métis<sup>7</sup> Bachelor of Education students. SUNTEP itself illustrates how Indigenous values and knowledges are a method of Indigenization, as students "are encouraged to use [their] world view to teach in the classroom," world views that include working for those who come after us.

Indigenization may also be guided by engagement with Indigenous culture, which is tightly connected to Indigenous knowledges and values. Some participants acknowledged how important Indigenization was in creating an environment where both they and other Indigenous students could reconnect to Indigenous culture. This is illustrated by Participant 3's experience. Their primary caregiver was part of the 60s Scoop,<sup>8</sup> and, as such, they explained how they felt they did not know their Indigenous culture. They were worried about reconnecting because they did not want to, for example, mishandle a pipe at a pipe ceremony, or interact inappropriately with an Elder. They wanted to see workshops that help guide Indigenous students on ceremonial protocol. Another participant from a different part of the country explained that they did not know the protocol to engage in the Indigenous ceremonies hosted at the University of Saskatchewan, which is one of the reasons why they did not attend. Some may argue that learning in Indigenous communities is experiential: learning through observation and attempts, instead of being "taught" in a workshop format. Regardless, providing options for Indigenous students who want to connect but do not know how might help address some students' experiences and simultaneously promote Indigenization, and in some ways, even decolonization. That is, though workshops might be considered "colonial," such workshops could help students realize the experiential nature of learning in Indigenous community, and thus be decolonizing.

Community is another foundational aspect of Indigenous ways of knowing that may help to Indigenize institutions. Participant 1 explained: "When I think of the word Indigenization, I think of tradition as well. Sort of the aspect of building community. That's how many of our Peoples had survived for thousands of generations." This participant situates community building as part of Indigenous culture and fundamental to Indigenous Peoples' survival, as for thousands of years Indigenous Peoples' survival

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<sup>6</sup> Non-status Indians are people who identify as First Nations but are not considered a legal "Indian" by the government of Canada (Government of Canada, 2012).

<sup>7</sup> Métis people are an Indigenous People in Canada with a unique culture and language who have historic connections to fur trading (Métis Nation, n.d.).

<sup>8</sup> Staring in the 1950s, a series of policies resulted in thousands Indigenous children being taken from their families, put into foster care, and then adopted by White families. These children were typically cut-off from their culture (Dart, 2019).



depended on working together in community. And indeed, community effort has been key in producing some of the Indigenous initiatives on campus mentioned previously. Thus, Indigenization can be done well with an Indigenous community who inherently Indigenizes as part of their way of being, by their mere presence. A sense of community is fundamental to participants' positive experiences within Indigenization projects and programs, helping them feel connected and supported in a space where they are otherwise underrepresented. Here we can see the importance of Indigenous recruitment efforts, as discussed by other authors, to build Indigenization capacity (Bédard, 2018; Canadian Association of University Teachers, 2016; Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; Lavallee, 2020; Newhouse, 2016; Pidgeon, 2014)

The examples discussed above illustrate the importance of these Indigenous values and ways of knowing in successfully Indigenizing, and how Indigenous participants incorporate these into their university experience to succeed. Another important way to Indigenize is through community.

### *Creating a Community that can Indigenize*

Indigenization is a big project, and the participants' stories conveyed that it takes a community to Indigenize. The challenges that Indigenization might address are broad and structurally rooted. Participants discussed racism as one of the main challenges. Racism was not the focus of these interviews, but over half of the participants mentioned witnessing, experiencing, or hearing about racism on campus; some even experienced this in their classrooms or interactions with professors (see Efimoff, 2019 for more details). Sabrina discussed fearing anti-Indigenous racist comments when in non-Indigenous spaces and online on a popular page unofficially affiliated with the University of Saskatchewan (You Sask Confessions, n.d.). Participant 4 explained how non-Indigenous students have blatantly applied stereotypes to them as an Indigenous person. Terrance spoke about the university's expectations of Indigenous people to "be White Indians. Middle-class values. Look like them, only skin's brown." Here, Terrance appears to allude to assimilationist tendencies—the desire to assimilate Indigenous people into broader settler Canadian society to ultimately make them disappear. These tendencies are alarming because assimilation is connected with, for example, long standing-racist and genocidal institutions such as Residential Schools (TRC, 2015a).

Related to racism is non-Indigenous students' resistance to Indigenization. Sabrina recalled non-Indigenous student backlash when the Indigenous course requirements were released, with students not understanding the need for the requirement. Merely not understanding why a mandatory Indigenous course is required is indicative of systemic racism, of a culture that overlooks the fundamental importance of race in everyday life. Other participants voiced concerns around mandatory Indigenous courses in the context of non-Indigenous students' resistance. Jacqueline had some specific concerns about Indigenous students' experiences in those courses. She explained that a lot of people in Saskatchewan have poor attitudes toward Indigenous Peoples, so an Indigenous student enrolled in this class may have an uncomfortable experience:

I'm going to feel like for one, all of the sudden I'm the expert on everything Indigenous. Two, I'm gunna have to deal with those people that don't want to be there. And that may say things that are obviously going to be inappropriate because they have bad feelings about Indigenous people. I'm going to be put in a position where I don't feel safe.

Jacqueline's experience of feeling like she is suddenly the "expert on everything Indigenous" aligns with other Indigenous scholars' experiences (Lavallee, 2020; Pete, 2015) and reflects how non-Indigenous people demand that Indigenous people provide education on Indigenous issues (Pardy & Pardy, 2020). Thus, simply mandating Indigenous content is not necessarily the solution, and may have unintended consequences that speak to the pervasive nature of racism: Students in the class may say "inappropriate" things about Indigenous People due to "bad feelings" toward Indigenous Peoples. Racism is a widespread Canadian issue that requires engaging the broader population. To make institutions safe and welcoming for Indigenous students, the entire institutional community needs to acknowledge and address racism. However, participants in this study suggested there are additional systemic challenges the campus community must overcome to successfully Indigenize.

For instance, participants talked about how either themselves or their friends and colleagues also doing Indigenization work need institutional (e.g., changes in policies, administrative support) and financial support. Gabrielle explained the administrative barriers to support her Kokum's Kitchen initiative (an Indigenous-led inter-cultural cooking group designed to increase intergroup contact and understanding and address widespread on-campus food insecurity), such as an institutional liability policy, that prevented her from cooking on campus. Her attempts to create programming to support Indigenous students, to bring Indigenous culture to the forefront, and to work toward good intergroup relations, faced hurdles at each step in the process.

As another example, Sabrina explained, that in some cases, the responsibility for Indigenization work is repeatedly handed back to unpaid and overworked students instead of being addressed at the level of institutional governance. This is of particular concern in cases where administrators are those with the necessary power to create change, as Participant 5 explained:

And it's like, [Indigenous students] are not facing the same barriers, we're in fact facing more barriers than [University of Saskatchewan employees] are. You can say we're going to Indigenize, and the flows going to get going . . . That's because they have less barriers. So as students, where do we fit in that? . . . What do we do? What can we do? Other than just be Indigenous. [laughter]

For the University to better engage in the process of Indigenization, this quote highlights that there is a need for explicit conversations between Indigenous students and university administrators. These power differentials are systemic and impact Indigenous students' ability to be involved.

Despite racism and other systemic challenges, the participants discussed several different ways to create a community that can work to Indigenize. First, institutions could work to build the capacity of Indigenous Peoples on campus. For example, Jacqueline talked about having more Indigenous faculty members, speakers, and Elders incorporated into her program. Jacqueline noted how odd it felt to her, as an Indigenous student, to see White folks researching Indigenous issues: "I know so many great Indigenous academic people that could come in and present on these things!" Unfortunately, it appears there just aren't enough Indigenous people in her faculty; as such, it appears that building Indigenous capacity is important to build the Indigenization capacity of that faculty. Sabrina talked about having formal, paid positions for people who provided support to Indigenization efforts, such as Elders or other

knowledge keepers on campus, as a way to build Indigenous capacity to Indigenize. Other participants talked about the importance of the university providing space for the Indigenous community on campus to gather and build capacity themselves, connecting with the concept of self-determination discussed earlier. Importantly, during the interviews, the Indigenous student body on campus came together to call for an Indigenous Students' Union (ISU) to represent Indigenous students' unique needs. Participants discussed the ISU as a way to build capacity to Indigenize. For example, Participant 2 explained, "I don't see how an ISU would not lead toward Indigenization." Thus, building Indigenous capacity on campus, for some, is tightly related to self-governance and self-determination. In objective and tangible terms, financial support for the Indigenous student leaders who are working to Indigenize would be valuable. Though some of the participants explained they did not care about money, others acknowledged it would be helpful. And given housing and food insecurity for some students, money for this type of work would help create stability in those students' lives, and potentially in Indigenization efforts.

Second, institutions could work to forge community relationships. The participants discussed the need for all of the campus community to be involved in Indigenization. Terrance talked about providing more supports for on-campus units that were working to Indigenize. He explained that some units on campus might not know where to start, but "at least if we've started it then I don't fault anybody for doing stuff ... and I think it's up to us to try and help them as much as we can too." Here, Terrance seems to be talking about the importance of the institution and Indigenous Peoples on campus working together to Indigenize. Sabrina shared something similar. She explained that the university needed to understand that Indigenization can only occur through "teamwork with Indigenous communities, with Indigenous students on campus." So Indigenous people must work with the institution and the institution must work with Indigenous people to Indigenize (as in Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; Grafton & Melançon, 2020; Ottmann, 2013).

Third, the Indigenization process must engage non-Indigenous people on campus. Curriculum is one way to engage non-Indigenous students, and the participants discussed cases of excellent curriculum that integrates Indigenous issues, and examples of poor or even harmful attempts to include Indigenous content (see Efimoff, 2019, for further description). Despite some harmful experiences with professors who were trying to Indigenize their curriculum, Participant 3 explained "non-Indigenous profs are also working really hard ... Profs who are wanting to be involved and wanting to learn more and wanting to see Indigenous students succeed." Two participants in the natural sciences were hopeful too; despite the seemingly inherent challenges of Indigenizing their curriculum, they maintained that there were ways to bring Indigenous content in. Participant 5 explained non-Indigenous interest in Indigenous content may have a snowball effect; if a non-Indigenous professor and other non-Indigenous students in the class were passionate about Indigenous issues, it could increase the willingness of disinterested non-Indigenous students to engage. However, curriculum is not a cure-all, and may not be the most effective in some cases, especially considering concerns around mandatory Indigenous content. Furthermore, as Jacqueline explained, Indigenous content may be ineffective if students are unprepared to engage in the material. Importantly, this sense of unpreparedness may be distinct from the potential anti-Indigenous sentiment discussed in the context of mandatory courses. For example, students may feel like they should not speak to Indigenous issues as a non-Indigenous person.

Many other factors may influence non-Indigenous peoples' engagement in Indigenization. For example, Participant 4 discussed the broader socio-cultural environment as a reason for this, as they expressed doubt that Indigenization could truly reach the many non-Indigenous students who seem to have grown up in racist households in Saskatchewan. They discuss building empathy and understanding as a way to engage non-Indigenous people:

for the idea of Indigenization to become a pretty prevalent idea here at the University of Saskatchewan, I really think that other students and other cultures need to understand what it's actually like to be like, to feel like, a native person.

Furthermore, Participant 2 speculated that non-Indigenous people did not want to be involved in Indigenization for fear of becoming a target of public hostility. Being non-Indigenous and working toward Indigenization can be a dubious position, requiring a keen awareness of your positionality. However, it is also important to consider the concept of allyship. Though in some cases participants were frustrated with non-Indigenous individuals calling themselves allies, in other contexts, they were grateful. Participant 2 says "I think a lot of non-Indigenous people are doing a great job trying to Indigenize." In sum, given the large-scale challenges we need to overcome to Indigenize, it undoubtedly takes a community to do so.

## Discussion

Participants described growing personally, professionally, and culturally through their engagement with Indigenization, as Indigenization offered opportunities to participants. In tandem with these benefits, participants often experienced poor physical health, mental health, financial, and social outcomes due to their engagement with Indigenization. This was often due to participants feeling obligated to contribute to Indigenization and thus spending many hours engaged with Indigenization initiatives. Relatedly, some of the benefits of Indigenization were not strictly benefits; for example, many participants may have benefited through gaining professional skills, but simultaneously spent less time with family and community. Others experienced identity crises through their continued engagement with Indigenous issues that are at the forefront of an Indigenizing institution. The current study is a good example; though many participants commented after the interview that appreciated the chance to share and directed their colleagues to contact me to get involved, it likely had negative impacts. Specifically, it is ironic that I have asked already overworked students to give me even more time and energy to another Indigenization project. Despite these negative impacts, participants strove to be engaged with Indigenization and shared many ways to improve Indigenization, namely, representation, embedding and privileging Indigenous values and knowledges in Indigenization initiatives, and creating a community that can Indigenize. Though this study assessed Indigenous students' experiences at only one institution, the findings presented in this paper may be useful to other Indigenization post-secondary institutions, both in Canada and internationally. The overlap between participants' experiences and the broader literature (spanning countries and continents) suggests these results are broadly relevant.

The participants' attitudes toward Indigenization might be best characterized as ambivalent optimism. Many of the participants had high hopes for Indigenization and benefited from some initiatives coming

out of the process (as in Lavallee, 2020). However, they simultaneously discussed their growing cynicism and skepticism about the process based on their personal or their colleagues' experiences throughout their engagement with the Indigenization process. Their skepticism may be related to desires for a decolonial Indigenization while the University of Saskatchewan's Indigenization more aligns with Indigenous inclusion or reconciliation Indigenization (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018). Indeed, participants discussed Indigenization in ways often aligned with decolonial Indigenous approaches, which may reflect their desire for this means of Indigenization. This skepticism about Indigenization is reflected in current events: In the last five years, nine Indigenous faculty members have left the University of Saskatchewan due to "racism, a hostile work environment and the slow pace of reforms" (Warick, 2020, para. 1). Indigenous faculty members' experiences at the University of Saskatchewan aligned with the participants' experiences in this study. They cited tokenism, racism, dismissal of faculty ideas, seeming inaction or slow reforms to address Indigenous issues, barriers to making changes, overwork of Indigenous faculty members, a dismissal of Indigenous knowledges, and resulting poor health outcomes (Warick, 2020).

It appears, then, that Indigenization is a paradoxical pursuit: Initiatives that are designed to include and support Indigenous students also, ironically, harm them through overwork, over-engagement, and the inevitable exhaustion and burn-out. This situation likely reflects institutional awareness that Indigenization cannot be done well without student input. Indeed, Indigenous students often want to be involved in the process, and in some cases, resolutely claim that Indigenous student engagement is fundamental to Indigenization; however, as this study shows, they are often overworked and not provided institutional support. With this in mind, I want to address a likely critique: "The participants are volunteering to do this work! The university is not forcing them to engage with Indigenization." But, the reality is, the Indigenous participants interviewed in this study felt compelled to do this work. They felt responsible for creating a better place for the next generation of Indigenous students to be educated and improving the current Indigenous community on campus. Importantly, this is not to say that institutions should somehow prevent Indigenous students from engaging with the Indigenization process (as this would directly contradict Indigenous students' desires to be engaged). Institutions should, however, realize the potential for these deep community commitments and strategize ways to best support Indigenous students and prevent exploitation.

Institutions must understand Indigenous students' experiences to support them. For example, broadly, Indigenous Peoples are already at risk for food and housing insecurity (Chan et al., 2019; Homeless Hub, n.d.), and participants' aid with Indigenization may exacerbate these risks, as some participants chose to engage in Indigenization rather than paid work. While it is not the University's job, per se, to feed and house students, these lived realities impact Indigenous students who are already engaging intensely with Indigenization processes on campus. Beyond the participants interviewed in this study, many Indigenous students may have somewhat unique experiences in being far from home (as many Indigenous students come from smaller communities outside of Saskatoon to attend school) and coming from communities that may be more likely to experience tragedy (e.g., widespread suicide in Indigenous communities in Saskatchewan's Northern region; Modjeski, 2016). These experiences influence students' ability to engage in school, let alone the Indigenization process. These realities need to be considered in supporting Indigenous students who are engaged in Indigenization.

An Indigenous student experience that requires special attention is racism. The participants interviewed in this study are not alone in their experiences of racism; other research has illustrated racism toward Indigenous students at post-secondary institutions in Canada (Clark et al., 2014; Currie et al., 2012). Racism is highly relevant to Indigenization, as one of the intended outcomes of Indigenization is presumably reducing racism. For example, the University of Saskatchewan includes teaching the historical and present inequities caused by colonial processes in their description of Indigenization. Ideally, these discussions will curb racist conceptions of Indigenous Peoples and spur understanding of intergenerational trauma and effects. And indeed, many agree that education is an effective strategy to challenge racism (e.g., Justice Murray Sinclair, as cited in Watters, 2015). Institutions that have begun to Indigenize by requiring Indigenous content in courses might later evaluate the impact of these courses on settler student perceptions of Indigenous Peoples. Aside from being particularly relevant to Indigenization, racism is also interconnected with Indigenization. For example, for Indigenous ways of knowing to be incorporated into curricula as valid and complementary to Western ways of knowing as part of Indigenization, students and faculty members must have open minds and hearts to Indigenous knowledges, and must not express epistemological racism.

Racism is varied and ubiquitous, but so are strategies to challenge it. The diversity of racism was paralleled in the range of strategies and thoughts participants had about ways to Indigenize: from the integration of Indigenous knowledges, to advertising campaigns on the value of Indigenous knowledges, to an Indigenous Students' Union, to building empathy, to dismantling entire governance systems. Many of these strategies could be quite effective. Increasing empathy toward Indigenous people through a virtual reality experience, for example, can improve attitudes toward Indigenous people (Starzyk et al., unpublished data). Educational interventions are also potentially useful; one meta-analysis indicates that teaching participants about the history of Indigenous people in Canada can help to increase empathy (Neufeld et al., 2021). Such individual interventions can help improve interpersonal relationships, but systemic changes are also imperative. For example, the University of Manitoba Faculty of Health Sciences created Ongomiizwin in 2017 (an Indigenous health institute with anti-racism as a guiding imperative; Cook et al., 2019) and recently approved Canada's first anti-racism policy at a post-secondary institution in Canada (UM Today News, 2020). Such approaches may help challenge the racism embedded within post-secondary systems at the University of Saskatchewan.

So, where do we go from here? As Indigenization is a relatively new phenomenon, there are many other possible research questions. One that comes to mind immediately, given the importance of the entire institutional community engaging in Indigenization to make it happen, is the perspectives of non-Indigenous university community members on Indigenization. Why are they engaged? Why are they not? Is racial anxiety (the concerns surrounding interracial interactions, such as White people fearing that they are perceived as racist; Godsil & Richardson, 2017) fuelling disengagement from Indigenization? How does ignorance come into play? How about outright hostility? In understanding non-Indigenous university members' attitudes toward Indigenization, institutions can understand what strategies might be most effective in encouraging widescale engagement.

It is important to note, as well, that many of the participants discussed a constant push-and-pull during discussions of decolonization and traditional governance mechanisms and systems that often left

participants reflecting on their need to walk in two worlds (the Indigenous world and the White or Western world). Some students discussed feeling paradoxical themselves: questioning their connections to their identity, the irony of doing this work on campus instead of in their home community, and having this work be restricted by the policies of a colonial and Western institution. The internal conflicts of students in these positions, the inability to feel authentic or be taken seriously, and the deep desire to be at home in their communities would make an enthralling future study.

### Policy Recommendations

I have gleaned the following four policy recommendations from this study that may be useful for academic institutions attempting to Indigenize.

- a. Ensure authentic Indigenous student representation is foundational in Indigenization processes.

Since there are typically more Indigenous students than Indigenous faculty or Indigenous staff at post-secondary institutions, Indigenous students could benefit the most from well-designed Indigenization processes. Each institution will undoubtedly have multiple different contexts, such as geography, student demographics, cultural groups, size of institution, etc. Contextualized processes are fundamental—what works at the University of Saskatchewan may not work in other institutions. It is fundamental to discuss Indigenization with Indigenous students, to work with Indigenous students, and to ensure that Indigenous students are meaningfully represented. Institutions might ask, what does Indigenization mean to Indigenous students? What actions might be considered Indigenization? How do Indigenous students want to engage? The key takeaway: Ask. Participate in open communication. Listen and understand.

- b. Acknowledge the impact of engagement with Indigenization on Indigenous students and work with them to mitigate it.

The Indigenous students I interviewed in this study were incredibly dedicated to their work on campus with the Indigenous community, much of which included Indigenization work. Understanding Indigenous students' lived experiences at an institution and acknowledging the impact engagement with Indigenization may have on Indigenous students is important. Notably, this does **not mean** that institutions should prevent Indigenous student engagement, but should work *with* Indigenous students to best understand how they might provide support. Given potentially unique differences in lived experiences when compared to non-Indigenous students, such as anti-Indigenous racism and intergenerational trauma, institutions might consider offering tailored services that will help Indigenous students to engage in the Indigenization process. These services should come from careful consensual consultation processes to avoid paternalistic or tokenistic practices. Indigenous people on campus may want to create their services, such as the participants' desire to create an ISU. In some cases, autonomy may be valued above institutional support. Institutions may consider creating "Indigenization" roles for staff or faculty to fill, providing stipends to Indigenous students in roles related to Indigenization, or simply providing space and resources for Indigenous students to lead the way. Ultimately though, have these discussions. Indigenous Peoples are incredibly diverse, and there are many different ways to

Indigenize. This ties to the first policy recommendation; institutions really must ensure they authentically engage Indigenous students in Indigenization processes to understand how best to support them as they contribute to Indigenization processes, if they choose to at all.

c. Co-create a community that can Indigenize.

Related to institutional support for involved students, post-secondary institutions should look to co-create a community that can Indigenize. This means that institutions should support Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples alike to work toward a goal of Indigenization. Significantly, as Indigenous Peoples must be at the forefront of Indigenization processes, it is important for Indigenous Peoples doing this work to have the space, resources, and self-determination to discuss *how* they want non-Indigenous people to be involved.

As many participants said, it takes a community to Indigenize. This means that we need better relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples on campus. Strategies to accomplish this could range from intercultural programs, changes to the curriculum, cultural events, or even allyship brochures. Many disciplines, such as social psychology, offer insight into intergroup processes, so further research into these intergroup relationships in the context of Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations would be beneficial.

d. Make Indigenous knowledges and values fundamental in Indigenization processes.

Many of the participants in this study discussed the importance, in specific or general terms, of making Indigenous knowledges and values fundamental in Indigenization processes. This is, of course, embedded in the first three policy recommendations. For example, one can easily see how relationality is imperative in building relationships among Indigenous and non-Indigenous people on campus to create a community that can work together. Working *with* Indigenous students, staff, and faculty is crucial to be able to bring diverse Indigenous knowledges and values to the fore.

Grounding Indigenization processes in these recommendations will help to avoid tokenism or inappropriate Indigenization efforts (recommendation 1) and institutional exploitation of Indigenous students engaged in Indigenization (recommendation 2). They may also help reduce anti-Indigenous racism at post-secondary institutions through improving intergroup relations (recommendation 3) and challenging epistemological racism (recommendation 4). These policy recommendations are mutually reinforcing. For example, ensuring Indigenous Peoples are authentically foundational in Indigenization processes would likely encourage engagement in Indigenization, and thus be part of building a community that can Indigenize. They also may help with addressing Indigenous faculty concerns with Indigenization (Warick, 2020).

## Conclusion

Institutions across Canada are taking steps to Indigenize. It is fundamental that Indigenous Peoples be at the center of these processes and have space and support to work toward Indigenization as they see fit. Indigenization, just like Indigenous Peoples, is diverse; it might come to life through the privileging of



Indigenous values and knowledges, through understanding Indigenous experiences, or through working as a community to challenge racism and structural barriers that stymie it. The participants in this study acknowledged the good work being done and shared their thoughts on improving Indigenization processes. Indigenization without Indigenous input is not Indigenization, and institutions looking to Indigenize must privilege Indigenous voices, input, and meaningful representation.

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## Appendix A: Interview Guide

1. Are you involved with the Indigenous community at the University of Saskatchewan? Please describe.
2. Are you engaged in any way with Indigenization?
3. Why are you engaged in Indigenization? What factors contributed to your engagement?
4. Do you have a role in the process of Indigenization at the University of Saskatchewan?
  - a. Probes: This may include others requesting you to sit on committees, attend meetings, and participate in events. It can also include your own initiatives geared toward Indigenization. Please share anything that comes to mind that you are comfortable with.
5. Would you describe your experiences with Indigenization at the University of Saskatchewan as positive?
  - a. Probing questions: Can you tell me about how your experience with Indigenization at the University of Saskatchewan has improved your academic success, social life, health, cultural connection, or family relations?
6. Would you describe your experiences with Indigenization at the University of Saskatchewan as negative?
  - a. Probing questions: If applicable, can you tell me about how your experience with Indigenization at the University of Saskatchewan has decreased your academic success, or negatively affected your social life, health, cultural connection, or family relations?
7. If you are contributing to Indigenization, do you feel supported by the University of Saskatchewan in this process? Why or why not? If no, how could the University of Saskatchewan better support you?