University of Waterloo Indigenization Strategy
Academic Programming Working Group
Academic Support Recommendations

Efforts to Indigenize academic programming at the University of Waterloo will recognize a key attribute of our institutional anatomy – namely, that we are highly decentralized – and consequently, Indigenization will be expressed through a variety of approaches in each of our Faculties. Similarly, individual departments and schools, and the various academic programs they host, will address Indigenization in ways that are meaningful to them. Regardless of how Indigenization of academic programming is manifest in our different Faculties and departments, there is strong institutional support through the Indigenization strategy.

The mandate of the academic programming working group is to make recommendations for institutional initiatives that will be widely applicable and relevant to all instructors and students, regardless of where they teach or study. These recommendations will vary from those that can be implemented in a short time frame (e.g., new courses, minors, special support/programming for instructors and curriculum designers to include Indigenous content, and support for Indigenous students) to those that will take several years to see noticeable change (e.g., hiring of more Indigenous scholars in areas with currently little or no representation, increasing uptake of Indigenous students in STEM disciplines). Waterloo’s initiatives to Indigenize academic programming will be ambitious and sustainable, and they will strengthen our reputation as an institution known for its creativity, impact and reach.

Preamble:
The academic experience and success of Indigenous students come influenced by factors that are distinctive to their Indigeneity. Factors could include family experience of the colonial education system; national efforts to be inclusive in post-secondary curriculum and pedagogy; the distance from home; resources and supports; education (land based and mainstream) prior to reaching post-secondary institutions; and their aims and objectives for post-secondary education.

The academic experience and success of Indigenous students at the University of Waterloo would feel supported, when staff are informed to historical atrocities that factor into the academic experience of Indigenous students. Virtually every other major post-secondary institution in Canada offers more support by Indigenous peoples for Indigenous students than does the University of Waterloo. This support comes through Indigenous student centres, Indigenous student councils, peer networks, Elders in residence, and community liaisons. These resources provide a range of supports for students; our recommendations focus on academic support for Indigenous students by Indigenous people.
**Recommendations:**
The University of Waterloo significantly increase access academic support to Indigenous students including but not limited to the following:

1. In full and ongoing consultation with the Waterloo Indigenous Students’ Centre at St. Paul’s, establish a main campus companion to WISC, to be physically central to campus and to be staffed with positions defined by the Centre as appropriate to its mandate. The mandate of the Centre should include the capacity to participate in governance and to create representation on behalf of Indigenous students and their academic success to the Associate VP Academic. The staff needs of the main campus Centre be determined by the leadership of the Centre in consultation with our communities, and may include counsellors, mentors, academic advisors, and Elders; in addition, Indigenous faculty and staff outside the Centre may play roles in it. The role each of these plays in supporting the academic success of Indigenous students will be shaped by the mandate, staff, and needs of the WISC (both at St. Paul’s and on campus).

2. Increase support for programming for Indigenous students through the Student Success Office. The Student Success Office offers support for academic and personal development including peer mentorships, study skills workshops, and leadership training, and develops programming for student groups with distinct needs (such as international students). Staff from the SSO work with academic advisors across campus also work with academic advisors in the Indigenous Student Centre(s). Developing programs in full and ongoing consultation with Indigenous students, staff, and faculty, and in relation to the diverse needs of students in uWaterloo programs.

3. Ensuring there are academic advisors to help Indigenous students choose courses, fulfill degree requirements, secure supports and accommodations, obtain relief available through policy, and access services such as counselling. Academic advising is available to all students in their home faculties but could also be expanded and made available within the WISCs. The academic advising community across campus is lively and connected, and commonly shares best practices. Advisors for Indigenous students need to be trained by faculty advisors and embedded in the WISCs and in faculty Undergraduate Offices, again with full and ongoing consultation with all those concerned with the academic success of Indigenous students at the University of Waterloo.

**Preamble:**
Indigenous students face significant financial barriers in entering post-secondary education. These barriers include belonging to already financially marginalized communities; the federally imposed funding cap which has resulted in a large gap in education funding at the band level (PSSSP); familial commitments (day care and housing); the costs of relocating from remote communities, and that the majority of Indigenous students
are female (R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd, 2004). Funding structures are also very complicated and vary from Band funding, national and provincial awards and institution-based awards.

**Recommendation:**
In order to support current and future Indigenous students the University of Waterloo should implement funding targeting the unique needs of Indigenous students. Funding should target day care costs, housing, relocation, as well as normal costs associated with education.

**Preamble:**
Recognizing that University of Waterloo is a leader in cooperative education and in field based learning; and that Indigenous experiences are unique across the globe Waterloo should support international education experiences for Indigenous students as well as supporting international Indigenous students to attend Waterloo.

**Recommendations:**
Targeted funding for Indigenous students.
Partnerships / Agreements with other Universities and Companies with leadership in working with Indigenous peoples.

**Preamble:**
Indigenizing academic programming and courses will be an enormous undertaking that redefines the academy, as we currently understand it. It will involve changes at the level of program structure (curriculum) and course content, the faculty teaching those courses, and the pedagogical approaches they use. Most importantly, for these changes to have substance, credibility and longevity, Indigenous faculty and staff must have a leading role in the process and its implementation.

**Implementation:**
1. First and most importantly, there must be hiring of and collaboration with Indigenous curriculum/programming specialist/s and Indigenous knowledge holders.

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<th><strong>Recommendation for Immediate Action</strong></th>
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<td>(i) Hire Elders in Residence and Indigenous Curriculum and Research Advisors with the relevant areas of expertise in every faculty.</td>
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This will give Faculties and Indigenous students immediate leadership and counsel, and give WISC (the Waterloo Indigenous Students Centre) much needed assistance and support. The WISC Director bears, right now, an impossible burden of responsibilities and duties.
(ii) **Hire at least one Indigenous paedagogy specialist in CTE.** This would be an important recognition of Indigenous expertise and knowledge. In addition, it would allow for the training of faculty in Indigenous teaching methods and for advice on how to apply these methods in course design and the classroom.

And then:

(iii) **Hire an Elder/ Elders at the level of the President’s office as Special Advisors.**

2. Hiring of Indigenous Faculty
3. Funding for Indigenous post docs
4. The next steps can take place with greater credibility, legitimacy and substance once the Elders and Indigenous curriculum specialists have been hired:
   (i) Design and launch of new courses with indigenous focus and content
   (ii) Design and launch of new degrees, certificates, majors and minors with indigenous focus and content
   (iii) Decisions about whether courses with indigenous content are made mandatory university-wide or whether courses with indigenous content relevant to specific degrees and programmes are made mandatory
   (iv) Implementation in STEM – certificates in cultural competence and in community-government-industry mediation; Indigenous language milestones/ requisites; recognition of Indigenous science and knowledge in new courses and/or as part of existing courses; application of Indigenous pedagogical methods (learning circles; story-telling, for example), particularly for mathematics and physics; land-based learning; outreach and recruitment of students from Indigenous communities
   (v) Design and implementation of policies around the teaching of Indigenous languages and whether students can write and defend their theses in an Indigenous language

**Preamble:**

Increasing opportunities for Indigenous students and for engagement with Indigenous businesses and other organizations
In the co-op and experiential learning programs, it is difficult to address Indigenous issues and remove the barriers for Indigenous students and businesses, when there are no visible indigenous staff or advisors.

Recommendation:  
To create welcoming environment for Indigenous students and businesses, Indigenous staff and student advisors need to be hired.

Preamble:  
Data around current Indigenous business partners and Indigenous experiences does not seem to be available through the co-op and experiential learning programs. It is not clear if there are already Indigenous businesses partnering with the University of Waterloo through the co-op program, it is also not clear how many Indigenous students are participating in the co-op program.

Recommendation: In an effort to be more proactive about creating partnerships with Indigenous business and better serving the Indigenous student population, a focused project should be undertaken to first find the data about current businesses and students and then research and study the ways the co-op program could better serve Indigenous students and Indigenous businesses.

Preamble:  
The Peace and Conflict Studies department at the University of Waterloo offers two courses that is open to experiential learning in Indigenous issues for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students: PACS 390 is an internship course and PACS 395 is travel course. Other departments on campus may have experiential learning courses like this where indigenous learning could be encouraged or they may want to develop similar courses.

Recommendation:  
Indigenous and non-Indigenous students to be given more opportunities in experiential learning and made aware of the possible experiential learning opportunities relating to Indigenous issues, faculties and departments should develop Indigenous learning possibilities in their existing experiential learning courses and promote and encourage student participation.  
(Addition to annual review)
Preamble:

Expanding Outreach to build Bridges between the University of Waterloo and Indigenous communities.

There is conclusive evidence that for an Indigenous student knowledge acquisition often has strong cultural ties. For this reason, to address the needs of perspective students it is advantageous to understand where the student is coming from both as a potential scholar and as an individual. Moreover, evidence suggests that Indigenous students tend frequently to make their decisions on which post-secondary institution to attend based on existing connections with the institution. This could mean enrolling in the same schools as siblings, friends or other community members, or it could mean studying at school with a pre-established relationship within the perspective student’s community. Post-secondary Institutions that have been most successful in attracting Indigenous students have typically invested considerable effort in establishing a positive presence within these communities.

Recommendations:

1) The University of Waterloo expand outreach activities to build meaningful relations with local Indigenous communities. This will have many implications for uWaterloo.
2) Explore ways to impact teacher training and preparation with a particular focus on the STEM disciplines

Preamble:

There is ample evidence to suggest that one of the primary barriers to Indigenous students pursuing post-secondary studies is inadequate preparation at the K-12 level. This is a particularly acute problem in mathematics and science. In part this is due to the necessity of hiring “generalist” teachers for schools in rural districts with small populations. Such teachers often have limited capacity to support specialized courses within the STEM disciplines. Consequently, amongst Indigenous students the relative rate of participation in the STEM disciplines is exceptionally low in comparison with the general population. For example: University of Saskatchewan study titled: “Indigenous Success in Stem Disciplines; Exploring Assets and Barriers to STEM Engagement for Indigenous Students” found that while Indigenous students made up 14% of University’s population in Social Science disciplines and 24% of the population of the Faculty of Education, only 4% of the students in the College of Arts and Sciences were Indigenous. In the Faculty of Engineering only 3% of their students were indigenous.

While the issue of unequal preparation is complex, address this concern is to give additional support to Indigenous teachers with a particular focus on the STEM disciplines.

Recommendations:

As part of the expanded outreach activities, the University of Waterloo can explore ways to support teachers in Indigenous communities with a particular emphasis on subject matter knowledge base of teachers in the STEM disciplines.
Establish partnerships with other institutions to leverage the impact University of Waterloo has with limited resources.

**Preamble:**
Building relationships with Indigenous communities and establishing support systems for their teachers. This will require a significant investment.

**Recommendation:**
The University of Waterloo explore ways to build relations with other institutions, resources and community agencies to improve access to post-secondary education for Indigenous students.

**Preamble:**
Statistics show that a disproportionate number of mature Indigenous students enter post-secondary

**Recommendation:**
That the University of Waterloo create an entrance model for mature Indigenous students entering post-secondary studies.

Explore online course development to allow Indigenous students opportunities to complete bridging programs or even a significant portion of their studies within their own communities.

**Indigenous Graduate Student Recruitment and Retention**

**Need for More Indigenous Staff and Faculty**

**Preamble:** In an environmental scan conducted at McMaster University that was aimed at better supporting indigenous graduate students, many participants indicated that more indigenous staff and faculty are required to recruit and retain indigenous graduate students.

Graduate students who participated in this scan have mentioned that their Indigenous supervisors are overtaxed with administrative tasks, and consequently, many of these tasks are passed to them. Conducting research while handling these additional administrative duties is a burden that impacts the success and recruitment of indigenous graduate students.

**Recommendation:**
The university hire adequate Indigenous staff and faculty to reduce the burden of administrative tasks on existing indigenous staff, faculty, and students.
Mentorship

**Preamble:**
Several Indigenous undergraduate and graduate students at Wilfrid Laurier University have identified mentorship as a key factor in their success in post-secondary education. Mentorship from experienced Indigenous students, staff, and faculty provides students with emotional support and guidance for students who are away from their home communities and may be the first in their families to attend post-secondary institutions.

**Recommendation:**
The university provide students with mentors to guide them and create a sense of community. To effectively support mentorship opportunities for Indigenous students, hiring adequate Indigenous staff and faculty is again recommended.

Holistic Admissions Criteria

**Preamble:**
Indigenous students often balance their academic lives with their responsibility to their community and their families. Thus, their undergraduate grades may not be as competitive as their non-Indigenous counterparts for graduate school admissions. Consequently, not be admitted into graduate programs.

**Recommendation:**
That all faculties across the University of Waterloo place greater weight on the extracurricular and community activities, as well as on the merit of life experience for students who may not meet minimum grade point average criteria for graduate programs.

Funding (including Childcare)

**Preamble:**
Many Indigenous graduate students, especially mature female students, must support their families and children while pursuing their education. Difficulty finding the financial resources to pay for books, housing, and childcare is an additional deterrent to pursuing graduate studies.

Currently, the University of Waterloo does not offer any specific scholarships for Indigenous graduate students, although they are eligible to for the Ontario Graduate Scholarship awards. Also, childcare is available on campus for students with children, and bursaries for childcare for University of Waterloo students with children are available.

**Recommendation:**
Indigenous students, staff, and faculty be consulted to determine adequacy of current financial resources available to indigenous students. If it is deemed by those consulted that the financial resources are inadequate, it is recommended that the university find additional sources of funding targeted to these students.
There is a need for an Indigenous Pedagogical Specialist in Centre for Teaching Excellence

Potential pitfalls

- Token gestures should be avoided in favour of meaningful approaches rooted in deep and considered engagement with Indigenous communities. Indigenous-led efforts, supported by non-Indigenous allies, can help institutional leaders avoid misrepresenting traditions and drawing experts away from communities where they are needed.

- Institutional leaders should avoid placing the responsibility for reconciliation efforts solely on the shoulders of individual survivors, and should rather ensure that institutions themselves bear the responsibility.

- Indigenous scholars and staff are often over-tapped to participate in events and on committees to ensure authentic Indigenous representation. As such, institutional leaders should be aware of potential workload and resource issues.

- Many Indigenous faculty and staff members have been working actively for years, often on a voluntary basis or with limited funding, to help set the foundation for the programs and opportunities taking shape today. Where needed, institutional leaders should acknowledge the long-term commitment of this group in addition to recognizing new initiatives focused on advancing reconciliation.

- Institutional leaders should ensure that proper terminology and language are used in relation to Indigenous partners. Language that could be interpreted as paternalistic should be avoided. For example, institutional leaders may wish to use the terms “by” and “with” rather than “to” and “for” Indigenous peoples.

- Institutional leaders should be sensitive to the context of Canada’s immigration history and avoid casting all Canadians as settlers who have displaced Indigenous peoples.

(Taken from page 20 - https://uwaterloo.ca/indigenization-strategy/sites/ca.indigenization-strategy/files/uploads/files/resources_on_canada27s_universities_and_reconciliation.pdf)