Reconciliation and the Academy: Experience at a Small Instituion in Northern Manitoba

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Abstract

This article accepts a definition of reconciliation that includes a need for fundamental change in society. The article argues that *knowledge* is critical to the business of the academic enterprise and that the relationship the academy has with knowledge is fundamental; for the academy to truly reconcile, then, changing that relationship is essential. This article describes the experiences of University College of the North as it undertakes reconciliation and how it is seeking to redefine its relationship with knowledge within the context of a larger and westernized post-secondary environment.

Keywords: *reconciliation, indigenization, higher education*

Introduction

The question of the role that post-secondary institutions can and should play in contributing to reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in Canada has been asked as recently as earlier this year (Sampson, 2017). There are few definitive answers. In reality, others are better situated than I to lead an in-depth discussion on indigenous issues – I am a political scientist, raised in an Irish Catholic home in southern Manitoba who finds himself serving in a senior executive role at a northern university college with a mandate to serve a region whose population is more than 70% Aboriginal. I cannot speak authoritatively about experiences with colonization, decolonization, and the impact those concepts have had and continue to have on Indigenous peoples, their history, culture, or language. However, I am able to talk more credibly about the "Indigenization of the academy," and what that might mean in practical terms. I can certainly talk authoritatively on how University College of the North (UCN) is going about pursuing the matter. In this article, I seek to describe the practical approaches being undertaken by UCN in the task of reconciliation, and in so doing, demonstrate how UCN's efforts reflect the critical need for the academy to change its relationship with knowledge.

There are many reasons for universities and colleges to participate in reconciliation. A very pragmatic and dramatic example of this need is the involvement of at least one Canadian university in nutritional experiments on Aboriginal people in The Pas and Norway House in the 1940s (Aboriginal Nutritional Experiments had Ottawa's Approval, 2013; Special Committee on Reconstruction and Re-Establishment, 1944; Weber, 2013). It may not be possible to know whether and how other universities might have been involved in such experiments until more sources become available (Weber, 2013). However, one instance may be enough to establish at least the *prima facia* case for the urgency of the academy's involvement in reconciliation.

In exploring the practical aspects of reconciliation in a post-secondary setting, I will focus on my own particular context – how changes in academic and research processes at UCN seek to support and advance an agenda of reconciliation. In so doing, I hope to contribute to and share UCN's growing understanding of reconciliation in the academy while at the same time providing some practical advice and examples to those who are seeking to better understand what reconciliation might look like in post-secondary education.

About University College of the North

Established in 2004 from the former Keewatin Community College, UCN was created as and remains a public institution. UCN operates two main campuses in Thompson and The Pas, each respectively located 800 km and 600 km north of Manitoba's capital city of Winnipeg. UCN also maintains 12 regional centres throughout the north, nine of which are located in First Nations communities. UCN is a small institution with an annual enrolment of approximately 2,000 students roughly distributed one-third in Thompson, one-third in The Pas, and one-third in regional centres. Students can take Apprenticeship, college, or university programs, including degrees in Arts, Business, Education, and Nursing. Certificate and diploma programs are offered in health and human services, business, and in a variety of trades, with enrolment generally split between college and university programs, often favouring college programming.

UCN's educational mandate focuses on serving northern and Aboriginal Manitobans, and its location in northern Manitoba helps to reduce competing pressures on that mandate. So focused, UCN can and does spend relatively more of its resources and efforts pursuing an agenda of reconciliation more aggressively than may be possible for other larger, southern post-secondary institutions with broader mandates. Additionally, UCN's student body is composed of more than 70% Aboriginal students, a fact which suggests that UCN must be more responsive to the needs of Aboriginal peoples than might otherwise be the case.

Indigenization is woven into the structure of UCN, whose enabling legislation explicitly states that UCN is "to serve the educational needs of Aboriginal and northern Manitobans" (University College of the North Act, 2004). Unlike any other public post-secondary institution in Canada, the legislation establishes a Council of Elders as an advisory body to the Governing Council and the Learning Council. Members of the Council of Elders sit on the other two councils and serve as voting members on Learning Council committees and on hiring committees.

Drawing on UCN's unique experience, this article seeks to answer the following questions. First, how should reconciliation be understood from the perspective of the academy? Second, how can the academy participate in reconciliation? Finally, what does reconciliation mean in terms of the need for change in the academy? After discussing reconciliation and examining the concept within the context of the role of knowledge in the academy, the article explores efforts underway at UCN.

Reconciliation, Knowledge, and the Academy

Reconciliation in education is well studied (Battiste, 2013; Corntassel & Holder, 2008; Freeman, 2014; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2001; MacDonald, 2016; Mihesuah & Wilson, 2004; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015a), and there is little need to repeat those findings here. This article accepts the definition offered by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015b) that "reconciliation is about establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in this country. For that to happen, there has to be awareness of the past, acknowledgement of the harm that has been inflicted, atonement for the causes, and action to change behaviour" (p. 3). How this definition applies practically in the academy is neither obvious nor simple.

For Brim and Harrison (2015), reconciliation is generally about how dominant and Aborig-

inal cultures engage in dialogue about a shared future. Reconciliation "… cannot so much as begin without widespread non-indigenous engagement and mobilization" (McGonegal, 2009, p. 70). Reconciliation is not a concept externally visited upon non-Aboriginal Canadians concerning Aboriginal peoples, but rather is a process that all Canadians must share in together, and more importantly, must act towards.

Reconciliation includes restitution and decolonization as well as acknowledging the inherent right of Aboriginal peoples to self-determination, allowing for the transformation of relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities (Corntassel & Holder, 2008). Reconciliation is, however, more complex than just repairing relationships,

> …reconciliation [is not] … a process of seeking forgiveness or "getting over colonization" or simply "making friends" or "working together" without any substantive changes to the underlying relationship between [Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal] peoples. Rather… reconciliation [is] a multi-faceted and ongoing process of building the relationships, alliances and social understandings that are necessary to support the systemic changes that are true decolonization. (Freeman, 2014, p. 216)

True reconciliation requires a shared commitment to not only forgiveness – both offered and accepted – but also a shared commitment to strategies for how substantive, systemic, and fundamental change is achieved within societal institutions (Corntassel & Holder, 2008; Freeman, 2014; MacDonald, 2016; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015a).

This fundamental change must be based in the truth. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada wrote that telling the truth "restores the human dignity of victims of violence and calls governments and citizens to account. Without truth, justice is not served, healing cannot happen, and there can be no genuine reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in Canada" (2015a, p. 12). The connection between reconciliation and the truth provides an important understanding with respect to how the academy can participate in reconciliation. Truth is linked intimately to knowledge, and knowledge is the *sine qua non* of the academy. How knowledge is created, communicated, who owns it and under what circumstances, how it is recognized for purposes of faculty appointments, tenure, and promotion decisions, as well as other facets of the management of knowledge in the academy is central to higher education.

Accordingly, the critical challenge facing the academy in an agenda of reconciliation is found in the very nature of the academy itself. Universities and colleges are part of the dominant culture (Brim & Harrison, 2015), are fundamentally Eurocentric in their outlook (Battiste, 2013), and are key to preserving and promoting a westernized view of knowledge (Kirkness & Barnahrdt, 2001; Paquette and Fallon, 2014).

The truth is connected to knowledge, and in the academy, the curriculum is at the centre of how knowledge is recognized, communicated, and managed. Referring to the criticality of knowledge in universities, Canadian political philosopher George Grant (1969) asserted that the "curriculum is the essence of any university" (p. 113). Grant went on to say that the curriculum

> … consists in what students formally study at all stages from the undergraduate to the research professor. It determines the character of the university far more than any structure of government, methods of teaching, or social organisation. Indeed, these latter are largely shaped by what is studied and why it is studied. The curriculum is itself chiefly determined by what the dominant classes of the society consider important to be known. (1969, p. 113)

The curriculum is a key expression of knowledge in the academy, and the academy is, as already noted, part of the dominant western culture. Western perspectives regarding knowledge and the structures that support its management organizationally define the academy in ways that other phenomena do not. Different knowledge systems can create challenges for the academy and Western and Aboriginal knowledge systems are at odds with each other (Battiste, 2013; Oulette, 2011).

Hatcher, Bartlett, Marshall, and Marshall (2009) argued that Western approaches to knowledge separate knowledge from the learner allowing the learner to understand how the universe works and to "gain power over nature" (p. 142). Additionally, Western perspectives see knowledge as objective, independent, value-free, and neutral in both its intent and its effect (Henry & Tator, 2009). Indigenous perspectives regarding knowledge see learners and knowledge as closely connected – learners seek to understand how to live in harmony with nature rather than to dominate it (Hatcher et al., 2009). Whereas Western perspectives view knowledge as a noun, a thing to be passed on, Indigenous cultures view knowledge as a verb, a thing denoting action in life where "the teacher and the learner play a constructive part" (Hatcher et al., 2009, p. 146).

> IK [Indigenous Knowledge] does differ from Western science in a number of ways. IK is very local and social, [and] is defined by relationships. Much of Western science conversely searches for universal laws… Aboriginals with a traditional lifestyle have developed an understanding of local interactions over centuries within their very small geographic locations. Western science is conversely very much concerned with applying and testing generalizations, which go beyond one's field of experience. …IK [is seen] as being imprecise and wholly political. (Oulette, 2011, p. 68)

Because Western perspectives dominate, Indigenous ways of knowing are not accepted as equivalent to Western knowledge (Oulette, 2011), and indeed, by comparison, Western knowledge is as much method as abstraction: "In the academy, dominant discourses of knowledge are articulated through traditional forms of curricula, pedagogy, research priorities, tenure decisions, and recruitment procedures, and graduates carry with them these cultural expectations, perceiving them as norms to replicated elsewhere and to be used as heuristic devices to assess the validity of all knowledge" (Henry & Tator, 2009, p. 36).

The challenge in relation to reconciliation for the academy is the need to change on this most basic of levels (Freeman, 2014), revisiting the concept that only Western knowledge systems are valid. Practically, this means that reconciliation in the academy necessarily involves a number of internal constituencies who are concerned with knowledge creation and management, such as faculty unions, senates, faculty councils and individual faculty members themselves, as well as external constituencies such as funders, accreditors, and research granting agencies, among others. While much is unclear in terms of the academy's path to reconciliation, "what is clear is that any attempt to decolonize education and actively resist colonial paradigms is a complex and daunting task" (Battiste, 2013, p. 186). For the immediate future, institutions may have to rely on current indigenization initiatives as an indicator of what might work and what might not; the way ahead may be revealed through trial and error. The remainder of this article focuses on choices and decisions that have been made by UCN on its own path to reconciliation, and on the hard-won lessons learned and still being learned.

Method

This article focuses on the case of a single institution, the University College of the North (UCN), as it pursues an agenda of reconciliation. In the act of writing this article I do not claim ownership of the materials I am presenting. My appointment within UCN affords me status as participant-as-observer in most, if not all, of UCN's efforts pertaining to reconciliation. My understanding of UCN's path to reconciliation arises from informal discussions, as well as formally through documents and initiatives developed specifically in support of reconciliation and indigenization efforts, records of meetings, as well as participation in governance processes such as in sessions of Learning Council (UCN's equivalent of a senate), related academic and other committees, as well as in multiple administrative venues. I might further claim action researcher status given that many of the initiatives that UCN is undertaking are significantly shaped and supported by UCN's Academic and Research Division, often directly influenced by me as that

Division's vice-president. I acknowledge that many before and around me have contributed and continue to contribute to the formation of UCN's perspectives. While I express it in writing here, perhaps imperfectly and incompletely, the information shared in this article has largely been informed and generated by the UCN community as a whole.

Reconciliation at UCN

In exploring reconciliation activities at UCN, the key question that I am seeking to answer is: how is UCN fundamentally changing its relationship with knowledge? Answers to this question focus on three general areas: governance, the curriculum, and faculty appointments. The remainder of this section of paper explores these three areas, presenting specific examples of activities being undertaken by UCN.

Reconciliation in Academic Governance

Governance within a post-secondary institution is "the system by which the universities and colleges conduct their own affairs" (Manitoba, 1993, p. 59) – governance is how an institution determines its policies and direction (Smith, 2004). In terms of reconciliation, UCN has had the most experience with its institutional governance structures, helping to exemplify how post-secondary institutions can give a more meaningful voice to Aboriginal peoples. In particular, UCN has operated a Council of Elders since 2004, giving Elders a unique role in a Canadian post-secondary education institution (Loxley, 2009). Elders sit as voting members on Learning Council and on each of its nine standing committees, and participate as voting members on other, non-Learning Council but academic-related committees such as the Tenure and Promotion Committee, UCN's Animal Care Committee, and the Research Ethics Board. Additionally, Elders serve as voting members on hiring committees for all positions, as well as serving on other administrative committees. Thus Elders "are fully integrated into both the administrative and the academic management of the university college" (Loxley, 2009, p. 38). Such participation by Elders reflects a degree of influence and control that helps to define the "thorny issue" of what Aboriginal control might look like in a public institution (Paquette & Fallon, 2014, p. 20).

The participation of Elders in UCN governance, particularly in academic governance, has not been without controversy, and concerns have been raised about the primacy of faculty members in terms of academic policy and curricular content given the voting rights of Elders on various different committees (Loxley, 2009). The Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) originally raised such concerns, particularly in relation to participation on hiring and other non-Learning Council committees, and was ultimately resolved through a series of legislative changes and internal reforms that satisfied CAUT yet did not alter UCN's distinctive governance system or the role of Elders in that system.

Controversy again occurred stemming from UCN's 2015 application for membership in Universities Canada. In its communication with UCN after a site visit, and among other observations, Universities Canada suggested that a successful application for membership would require UCN to revoke Elders voting rights on Learning Council and other committees. This was seen as antithetical to UCN's mandate to better reflect the needs and perspectives of Aboriginal peoples (Learning Council, 2015). These concerns were resolved when, with the agreement of Learning Council, UCN withdrew its application for membership in Universities Canada.

UCN's response to Universities Canada suggests that in pursuing an agenda of reconciliation, UCN is willing to consciously resist isomorphic tendencies that beset colleges and universities (Van Vught, 2008), implicitly accepting that reconciliation means that things have to be done differently. In the case of Universities Canada, UCN chose to eschew governance patterns followed by other Canadian universities in favour of recognizing the contribution that Elders make to UCN in retaining and strengthening the mandate the institution.

Reconciliation and the Curriculum

If George Grant (1969) is correct, then among the most controversial of knowledge-related topics that the academy must address in pursuing reconciliation is that of the curriculum. UCN has accepted that reconciliation in this regard does not only concern just the content of the curriculum, but its oversight, as well as its formation, delivery, review, and ongoing support, and academic governance bodies generally concern themselves with these dimensions of the curriculum. UCN has considerable experience with Aboriginal content and pedagogy through its decade-long delivery of Education using the "*Kenanow* learning model, which places great importance on an Aboriginal focus, emphasizing a place-based approach and appropriate pedagogical or instructional practices … The program also links western and Aboriginal educational perspectives" (Gardiner, 2017, p.49). The *Kenanow* model was developed by Elders and integrated into UCN's teacher education program, and was approved by Learning Council and first enrolled students in the 2008/09 academic year (Gardiner, 2017; University College of the North, 2009).

While successful, the *Kenanow* model was specifically designed for teacher education (Gardiner, 2017) and other faculties have taken the position that the model is not appropriate for their programming. Different approaches are required. UCN's efforts with respect to reconciliation and the curriculum in all programs have appropriately been led by the Learning Council, the institution's academic governance body, helping to reduce the potential for controversy by ensuring that academics retain full control over the curriculum at UCN. Since 2014, the Learning Council has been undertaking a more systematic approach to Aboriginal content in terms of the formation, oversight and review of the curriculum.

The Curriculum and Standards Committee of the Learning Council has changed its processes related to the approval of new or amended courses to include the questions: How are northern and Aboriginal perspectives incorporated into the content of this new or modified course? If they are not incorporated, why not? These two questions allow the Curriculum and Standards Committee to understand how a proposed course or program reflects Aboriginal content, methods, and worldviews, and creates the basis for the Committee to ask questions where necessary, and creates the possibility for the Committee to request that more work be done on a proposal prior to approval. While UCN did not intentionally set out to emulate the approach, it is noteworthy that the University of the Fraser Valley has also modified its curriculum approval processes to incorporate specific questions about Aboriginal content (MacDonald, 2016).

In 2015, Learning Council approved UCN's Academic Plan 2015-2020, establishing objectives and actions that, among other things, set out to help ensure UCN's "relevance to Aboriginal and northern Manitobans" (UCN, 2015a). The Academic Plan seeks to establish structural elements to help ensure the ongoing indigenization of the curriculum through specific actions pertaining to indigenous content in the curriculum (UCN, 2015a). One action included in the Academic Plan requires that the Learning Council define what "indigenization of the curriculum" means for courses and programs at UCN while at the same time, ensuring that UCN must

> recognize that UCN operates within a larger post-secondary environment and that UCN must carefully consider the articulation of this understanding [of the indigenization of the curriculum] in the context of other norms of the academy, such as intellectual property and academic freedom. (UCN, 2015a, p. 10)

This action acknowledges the influence of the wider academy on UCN as it proceeds, but does not restrain UCN's ability to do things differently.

In order to pursue a definition of what indigenization of the curriculum means for UCN, the Learning Council's Academic Planning Committee struck a subcommittee on Aboriginal curriculum with the specific task to revise existing Aboriginal curriculum policy to establish expectations in terms of content, supports provided to faculty members to realize those expectations, as well as options and guidance for faculty members for increasing the Aboriginal content in their

courses so as to help ensure that those facts and perspectives that have in the past often been excluded from the curriculum are reintegrated.

A critical support that is defined by the revised Aboriginal curriculum policy is the appointment of an Indigenous Curriculum Specialist within the Academic and Research Division to serve as an expert resource for faculty members as they consider the development and implementation of Aboriginal content in courses and programs. The policy also includes examples of Indigenous pedagogy for consideration by faculty members, such as the use of land-based teaching, two-eyed seeing (Hatcher et al., 2009), asking Elders to co-teach or guest lecture in courses, inclusion of experiential learning such as clinical placements, practicums, work-integrated learning, etc. The policy also places emphasis on the independence of the Learning Council in setting guidance with respect to the curriculum, as well as the academic freedom of faculty members as they design their courses. The point is clear: the curriculum is the sole province of the faculty, but there are also expectations, established by the Learning Council itself, for curricular content that are in keeping with UCN's Aboriginal focus.

Learning Council, again through the Academic Planning Committee, is also establishing mechanisms to assess empirically the quality and extent of the Aboriginal content incorporated into courses. Beginning in the 2016/17 academic year, students were asked questions in UCN's online course evaluation system that are intended to allow for a greater understanding of the indigenization of the curriculum. These questions are:

- Did this course integrate Aboriginal content? (Y/N) (explanatory note: Traditional Aboriginal teachings, values, history, practices, activities, etc.)
- Did this course enhance your knowledge of Aboriginal cultures? (Y/N)
- What else would you like to see in this course to help enhance your knowledge of Aboriginal cultures? (open-ended)
- Many courses include lecture as a way to teach. Did this course offer student-centred/non-lecture deliveries with regard to Aboriginal cultures as well? Check all those that apply:
  - Student work group
  - Seminar
  - Video/audio
  - Elder teachings (An Elder share with a class his or her knowledge)
  - Land based methodology (examples of land-based education could include field trips, other experiential learning such as through outdoor camps as part of a course)
  - Practical/clinical/experiential learning
  - Other (please specify)

Intended to assess the student's experience of Aboriginal content in courses, these questions were in place for the fall term of 2016. Preliminary results show that students reported that 87% of courses included Aboriginal content. Acknowledging potential weaknesses of student course evaluation results in terms of validity and reliability, on an ongoing basis the results from these questions have the potential to provide a more rigorous assessment of UCN's progress with respect to the indigenization of the curriculum than is currently the case.

Future efforts articulated in UCN's Academic Plan 2015-2020 include considering how Aboriginal content can be best integrated in technologically mediated elements of courses, and involving communities in program management and development through program advisory committees in a way that is similar to industry involvement, an action that is explicitly presented in the Academic Plan as a contribution to helping to define within UCN's own context aspirations pertaining to First Nations control of First Nations education (Assembly of First Nations, 2010; UCN, 2015a). Additional work is also being undertaken to include a review of Aboriginal content in programming during cyclical program reviews.

UCN's activity in relation to the Indigenization of the curriculum is intended to be structural: UCN's Learning Council wants to change *how* it relates to the curriculum, and not just what is included. Appendix 1 presents a visualization of how the above-mentioned processes work together in a systematic way to create a structured approach to Indigenizing the curriculum. Important in this development process is the fact that the policies and processes described above are within the ambit of the Learning Council, and therefore under faculty control.

This structural and procedural approach being taken by UCN is not to suggest that programming is unimportant, and introducing new programs is part of UCN's approach. For instance, UCN's Faculty of Education is working in partnership with the Faculty of Arts, Business, and Science and UCN's Centre for Aboriginal Languages and Culture to enhance language programming, and the Faculty of Arts, Business, and Science is developing a community economic and social development program that emphasizes development in Aboriginal communities. Appendix 2 presents greater detail as to how UCN is responding through programming to the Calls to Acton from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Through new programming and a structural approach to indigenizing the curriculum, UCN's Learning Council is seeking to ensure that the curriculum includes Aboriginal content, reflects Aboriginal worldviews, and appropriately incorporates Indigenous pedagogy in courses and programs.

Faculty Appointment and Reconciliation

Probably among the most challenging of activities that UCN is undertaking in relation to its agenda of reconciliation is associated with processes related to the appointment of faculty. In the context of the present analysis, the hiring and promotion of faculty relates to the recognition of knowledge, rather than its creation or communication. UCN's activity in this regard is associated with two major approaches. The first relates to the development of a Traditional Knowledge tenure and promotion process, and the second relates to strategies designed to attract to UCN more Aboriginal scholars.

Processes associated with the awarding of tenure and the promotion of university faculty members through the ranks of Assistant, Associate, and Full Professor reflect in part how the academy recognizes knowledge. UCN's current existing tenure and promotion process, defined in the collective agreement, mirrors the typical processes that can be found in most university collective agreements, and does not recognize Traditional Knowledge systems. UCN's Academic Plan 2015-2020 gives to the Vice-President Academic and Research the task of addressing this gap (UCN, 2015a).

Pursuing a Traditional Knowledge tenure and promotion process at UCN presents its own challenges. The tenure and promotion process is governed by the collective agreement, and aside from the union representing the faculty, there is no obvious committee or authority within UCN with which to consult on wording. Adapting the process used by the Department of Native Studies at Trent University, UCN's approach has been to review drafts with the Council of Elders, Deans Council, senior administration, the Tenure and Promotions Committee, Faculty Councils, and others, including external individuals, to review and revise the draft with the objective of developing language for a future round of collective bargaining. Key stakeholders in the proposed Traditional Knowledge tenure and promotion process are the Council of Elders, who have thoughts on the definition of Traditional Knowledge, as well as the faculty union. The Council of Elders is supportive of the proposal, and while no definitive perspective can be expected prior to bargaining, the union has been receptive to the idea.

It is important to note that UCN is not alone in the effort to reconsider how tenure and promotion can be awarded. In addition to Trent's Department of Native Studies, the University of Saskatchewan has been reviewing its existing processes to better consider changes to perspectives with respect to scholarship. In the words of the president of that institution, "we have to

figure out how to be more flexible in that regard" (MacDonald, 2016).

The development of a Traditional Knowledge tenure and promotion process has the potential to be helpful in faculty hiring processes. If Traditional Knowledge is defined, and if methods are developed to assess the Traditional Knowledge of candidates for tenure and for promotion, that definition and methodology might also be applicable in assessing hiring of faculty members who have Traditional Knowledge.

There are of course pressures on any educational institution to ensure that students are able to gain some level of mastery in a subject, and that requires specific skills that are often assessed through the use of academic credentials as summary statements of required competencies of a faculty member. In support of recognizing Traditional Knowledge, beginning in 2016, UCN began a discussion about the possibility of better defining the *bone fide* occupational requirements for faculty in hiring processes, rather than focusing solely on credentials to identify skills that a potential faculty member needs in order to ensure that students get the education that they deserve. UCN clearly acknowledges the challenges associated with this course of action, and takes some comfort in the fact that other institutions such as the University of the Fraser Valley is also exploring this possibility (MacDonald, 2016). UCN is at the very beginning of this process, and it is too soon to know how – or if – this initiative will progress.

When considering how UCN has been pursuing reconciliation, it is clear that there are risks that may be amplified for a small, relatively new institution like UCN. Allowing non-academics voting privileges on academic governance committees, establishing greater structure around Aboriginal content in the curriculum, and reorienting UCN's recognition of knowledge to include other knowledge systems in human resource processes can certainly be seen to be outside the limits of western academic orthodoxy.

Yet, if reconciliation requires fundamental change, then it seems that the academy must reorient its relationship with knowledge: the academy must reconceptualise how it recognizes and manages knowledge. From a practical standpoint, this means how knowledge is created (where it comes from and method), what it contains (curriculum), how it is recognized (in the curriculum, in human resource processes), how it is communicated (pedagogy/method, research techniques, mobilization) and how these practical elements are managed (tenure and promotion, hiring, research ethics, academic freedom, intellectual property, etc.). When one considers the possible impact of these actions on institutional reputation, labour relations, existing and potential research partnerships and articulation agreements, as well as the perspectives of funders, it is clear that there are minefields aplenty through which administrators, academic governing bodies, and faculty members must walk on the path to reconciliation.

Lessons Learned and A Cautionary Note

The specific activities being undertaken by UCN are instructive, but potentially only as instructive as any other articulation of, and commentary on, the many indigenization efforts underway at other Canadian colleges and universities in recent years (Pete, n.d.; Sampson, 2017; Shed, 2015). Somewhat different from other institutions, UCN is consciously working to ensure that *reconciliation* is the focus of its activities. Learning Council and UCN as a whole are well aware that this may at times be controversial, and the CAUT concerns raised in the mid-to-late 2000s are still well remembered within the institution.

Despite the potential for controversy and risk, UCN believes that reconciliation requires that such steps be taken because the risks associated with not taking those steps may be greater. Not all will agree. Whether other institutions characterize their efforts as reconciliation*, indigenization*, or *decolonization,* if indeed such distinctions are made and if these distinctions matter at all, perhaps other institutions may find useful the lessons that have been learned at UCN that have helped and continue to help guide its efforts.

Lessons Learned

First, UCN has acknowledged the importance of addressing the Calls to Action articulated in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's report (2015c). UCN has activity in all of the post-secondary education-related Calls to Action that apply to the institution (see Appendix 2). Nevertheless, despite the activity being undertaken directly associated with specific Calls to Action, there is still a strong sense within the institution that there is more that must be done and that simply achieving these Calls to Action will not be enough. UCN has learned that reconciliation may be an ongoing process of dialogue and development – learning together is an important part of reconciliation – rather than a defined end state to be achieved by checking off items from the list.

Second, UCN has learned that alliance building is critical, and indeed perhaps the most important thing contributing to success. UCN has not necessarily always done this well. UCN is beginning to recognize that resistance to initiatives does not indicate the rejection of reconciliation by the resistor, but rather is a reflection of the fact that there is no shared understanding of what a "reconciled academy" looks like, and that this shared understanding must be actively pursued in open, safe, and respectful discussion. Those asking difficult questions will be faculty members, administrators, students, donors, patrons, funders – all people who are not easily labelled and dismissed as "deplorable" for not being on the side of angels. Much work must be done with these stakeholders to build understanding and to agree on courses of action. Faculty unions, collegial governance structures, administration, human resources departments, student organizations, alumni groups, funders, donors, sister colleges and universities, governments and many more, each have a stake in the process.

Third, and perhaps an addendum to the above, it is important to understand that even when they are in agreement, not all allies will be unquestioning converts. The most supportive of allies will not necessarily wholly and enthusiastically embrace every initiative intended to help progress towards reconciliation; even if they do, those allies cannot be expected to abandon their own agendas in the process.

Fourth, individual transformation is needed. Educational opportunities for faculty and staff are essential to better understand Aboriginal cultures, the concept of colonization, the impact of residential schools and its intergenerational effects, treaty relations, the history and impact of *The Indian Act* (1985), etc. It is important that non-editorialized factual information about Canada's colonial history be shared with faculty and staff. The facts speak for themselves, and they do not need embellishment or comparison with other despicable historical episodes from elsewhere in the world. Faculty and staff must have the opportunity to incorporate these facts into their understanding of Canadian history on their own terms.

The fifth lesson learned is that institutional transformation is as important as individual transformation. Indeed, institutional transformation helps to provide an understanding for faculty and staff as to how they can integrate individual knowledge gained into their daily work, thereby contributing to reconciliation; institutional transformation affords the opportunity to provide structures that help faculty and staff recognize what they can do. Bricks and mortar changes, new or revised policies and procedures and other organizational changes can help to support the ideational elements associated with reconciliation. Without institutional transformation, individual transformation, no matter how well done, risks finding no purchase as faculty and staff fall back into existing norms, patterns, and habits.

Sixth, UCN has learned well that the process of reconciliation can be divisive. This is true from all perspectives: some will want to go further and faster, others will want to be more reflective before acting, and still others will not want to make any changes at all. There will be both open and private disagreement, people will walk out of the room, and people will leave the institution. People will also be inspired, become engaged, and will be drawn to the institution.

Seventh, changing the academy's relationship with knowledge carries with it enormous risk. Missteps can lead to dire consequences for the institution's reputation, its articulation agreements, and research partnerships with other institutions, ramifications for relationships with professional associations, difficulty in achieving national memberships (e.g., Universities Canada), or possible labour unrest resulting from disagreements around the knowledge management practices typically found in the collective agreement. To this point, UCN has avoided the worst effects of many of these risks, yet UCN is acutely aware that this effort is risky, especially when the institution is "out there" alone like a mouse among elephants – being crushed is a constant worry. System-wide strategies such as Manitoba's Collaborative Education Blueprint (Martin, 2015), alliances with other institutions – especially if you are small and new – help in managing such risks by helping to create a broad recognition that change is needed, establishing venues for discussion, understanding, and exploration among peer institutions regarding what that change might look like. UCN has learned that there is strength in in pursuing a common effort.

The eighth and final lesson is one that UCN is still learning: patience is a powerful tool in reconciliation. There continues to be significant pressure within UCN to do more and to do it faster. However, post-secondary institutions are not renowned for their nimbleness in terms of organizational change, and even less so when dealing with long-existing structures around knowledge. Western epistemology did not arrive at the academy's doorstep fully formed, and neither has Aboriginal epistemology, and understanding how these concepts work together in the academy will take time. Freeman (2014) wrote that a decade is too short a time to achieve reconciliation. Senator Murray Sinclair has suggested that the timeframe for achieving reconciliation will be shorter than the 150-year history of residential schools, yet he has also said that "reconciliation is going to take us a long time" (Shed, 2015, para. 12). The need for patience can be a difficult lesson to learn.

A Cautionary Note

Brim and Harrison (2015) have identified universities as part of the intellectual establishment. Universities and colleges may be well advised to concern themselves with whether the general population and the intellectual establishment are on the same page in terms of reconciliation. In 2009, McGonegal wrote that non-Aboriginal Canadians "have been emotionally and politically disengaged from, and relatively uniformed about, the legacies of residential schooling" (p. 68). Evidence suggests that this situation has changed for the better since the release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report with engagement and understanding increasing among non-Aboriginal Canadians (Environics, 2016).

However, being informed does not necessarily mean agreement or even understanding. There remains a significant portion of the non-Aboriginal Canadian population for whom negative messages about Aboriginal peoples and reconciliation may resonate. A 2016 survey (Environics, 2016) found that up to 58% of non-Aboriginal Canadians fall into one of a number of "worldviews" in relation to Aboriginal peoples. Shown in Table 1, those falling into three of these worldviews tended to support perspectives that reflected varying degrees of negativity regarding Aboriginal peoples and reconciliation.

Table 1

Non-Aboriginal Canadian Perspectives on Aboriginal Peoples in Three "Worldviews"

Worldview category	Those holding this worldview…	Comments
Informed critics	- Are less supportive of the TRC Calls to Action - Do not believe that there is institutional discrimination - Believe that Aboriginal people are responsible for their own problems - Believe that Aboriginal leadership is generally poor	23% of respondents. This group tended to be concentrated in the Territories, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan.
Disconnected skeptics	- Do not believe there is institutional discrimination - Believe that Aboriginal people are responsible for their own problems - Have lower levels of support for the TRC Calls to Action	21% of survey respondents. This group tended to be concentrated in Quebec, and in smaller towns and rural areas.
Dismissive naysayers	- Believe Aboriginal people have an unhealthy sense of entitlement - Believe that Aboriginal people are responsible for their own problems - Are the least supportive of the TRC Calls to Action - Are the least likely to believe that individual Canadians have a role to play in reconciliation	14% of survey respondents. This group tended to be concentrated in the Prairie provinces.

Note. Adapted from Environics Institute for Survey Research, 2016. Two other world views discussed in this research, "Connected Advocates" and "Young Idealists," are not shown here.

These findings suggest that a majority of non-Aboriginal Canadians (many located in Manitoba and the Prairies) might at best express skepticism when considering an agenda of reconciliation. Such findings provide vital understanding of the general environment in Canada within which reconciliation is unfolding. Paquette & Fallon (2014) warned:

> A society which sees little or no value in Indigenous knowledge and ways of understanding and being can logically be expected to instruct its governments to resist investing scarce post-secondary-education resources in furthering such knowledge and ways of understanding and being. Only, ultimately, if societies come to see value in indigenizing higher-education will they be prepared to authorize their elected representatives to invest in it. (p. 15)

Implications for the reconciling institution include the acknowledgement that placing resisters, critics, and naysayers to reconciliation efforts into a proverbial "basket of deplorables" is as wrong an approach for reconciliation as it was for the Democrats' electoral prospects in the 2016 U.S. presidential election. In order for reconciliation to occur, political pressure must be felt by governments from a majority of the electorate, something that cannot occur with the support of only the Aboriginal population in Canada. This highlights the value of alliances and of building understanding among all Canadians of the importance of reconciliation, suggesting the need for a more broad-based education strategy that, incidentally, is not evident in Canada today. The potential for political disconnects between the general public and the academy is a challenge that

should not be ignored as colleges and universities pursue their reconciliation agendas.

More locally in the case of the academy, immediate, practical, and effective alliances are required with individual faculty members, faculty unions, and academic governance bodies. While vice-presidents, associate vice-presidents, and other executive leads charged with indigenization efforts at colleges and universities represent important focal points for action within administration, they are just that: administration. Reconciliation in the academy must proceed with, ideally, the leadership but definitely the acquiescence, of faculty members and the academic governance structures that are chiefly responsible for the collegial management of knowledge within the institution. This path may be difficult and fraught with conflict, but it may not be possible for the academy to contribute to reconciliation otherwise.

Conclusion

At its outset, this article sought to investigate three aspects of reconciliation in the academy: how reconciliation should be understood from the perspective of the academy, how academy can participate in reconciliation, and what reconciliation means in terms of the need for change within the academy. Reflecting on admonitions that reconciliation cannot be treated as a "buzzword" that has little substantive change behind it (Corntassel & Holder, 2008; Sampson, 2017), UCN's actions demonstrate an approach that understands reconciliation in the context of the *sine qua non* of the academy: knowledge. This suggests answers to the first and second research questions: to understand and truly participate in reconciliation, universities and colleges must reassess their relationship with knowledge. Perspectives regarding what knowledge is, how it is created, how it is communicated, and how it is managed organizationally must be "on the reconciliation table".

The scope of the need for change, and the scale of issues and problems that may be presented when pursuing an agenda of reconciliation also become clear. Research grants, hiring faculty, tenure, promotion, intellectual property, etc. are hot button issues with patrons including federal and provincial governments, funders, industry, universities and colleges, and perhaps most especially with faculty members and their unions. Accreditation processes, funding mechanisms (operating, capital, and research), and human resource procedures, are subject to a broad array of direction including legislation, regulation, and collective bargaining. As the path ahead clarifies, so too do challenges become clearer.

Reconciliation in the academy requires difficult conversations; there will be skeptics and opponents and there will be champions and allies. Fundamental change is difficult for any major societal institution, let alone one which can trace its history back 1,000 years. While it is right to want immediate change, it is only realistic to acknowledge that this change will come with dialogue and reflection, perhaps taking longer than many would prefer.

There are few who can claim expertise in the indigenization of the academy. However, there is a great deal of work occurring in colleges and universities across Canada to achieve goals associated with reconciliation. Little research has been done to assess the impact of this activity. Future research into reconciliation efforts in the academy could help to determine whether or not initiatives are having an impact. Structural changes such as those being undertaken by UCN are important but only if they actually lead to meaningful outcomes (which are themselves not well defined). The challenge facing colleges and universities is that no one really knows what the Indigenized academy looks like (MacDonald, 2016) – so it is difficult to know at this point what effect structural changes might have. As institutions experiment with activities to further an agenda of reconciliation, further research is needed to understand whether those activities actually bring the academy any closer to reconciliation.

UCN has taken some early and sometimes controversial steps on its path to reconciliation, and will likely make missteps along the way. Such missteps do not mean that the dialogue stops;

in fact, the way reconciliation could fail is if dialogue stops. To borrow from Freeman (2014) and import it to the present context, "none of these processes will achieve decolonization on their own and there will be many failed experiments or partial victories in this long process" (p. 221). There may be wrong answers to the question, how does the academy participate in reconciliation, but there may also be no one right answer. The only way to know for sure is to keep trying.
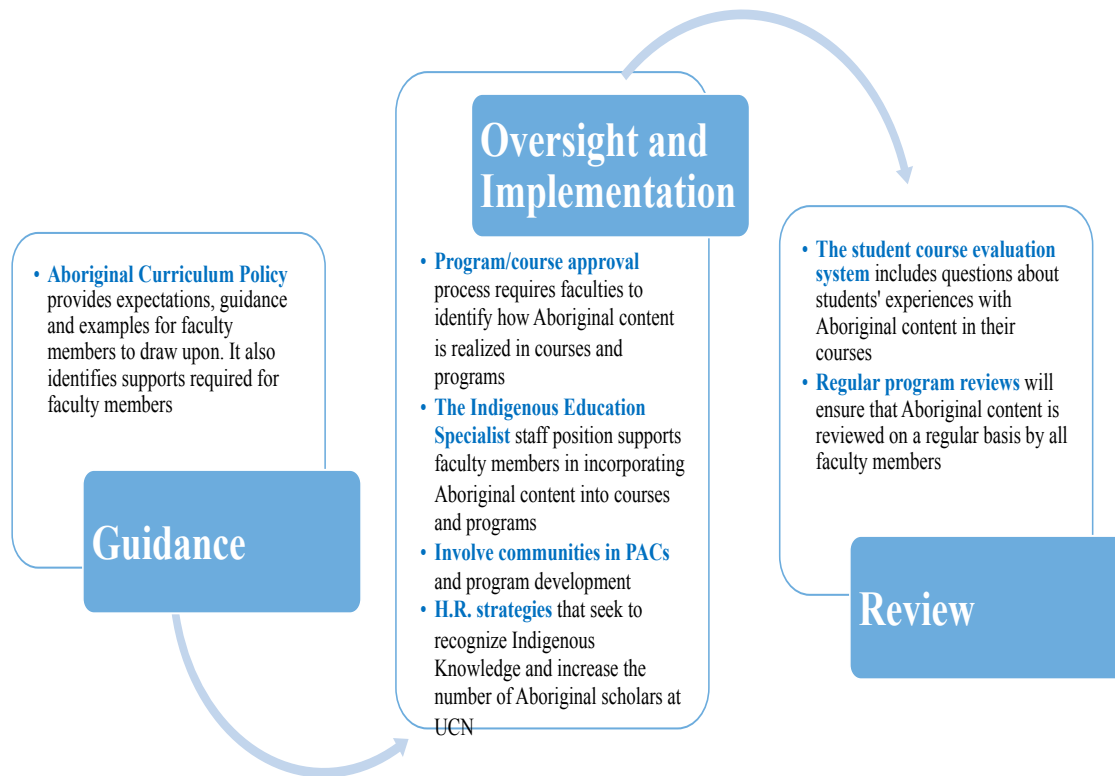
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Appendix 1: UCN's Systematic Approach to Indigenizing the Curriculum

Guidance

- **Aboriginal Curriculum Policy** provides expectations, guidance and examples for faculty members to draw upon. It also identifies supports required for faculty members

Oversight and Implementation

- **Program/course approval** process requires faculties to identify how Aboriginal content is realized in courses and programs
- **The Indigenous Education Specialist** staff position supports faculty members in incorporating Aboriginal content into courses and programs
- **Involve communities in PACs** and program development
- **H.R. strategies** that seek to recognize Indigenous Knowledge and increase the number of Aboriginal scholars at UCN

Review

- **The student course evaluation system** includes questions about students' experiences with Aboriginal content in their courses
- **Regular program reviews** will ensure that Aboriginal content is reviewed on a regular basis by all faculty members

Appendix 2: Specific UCN Activity Related to the TRC Calls to Action

TRC Calls to Action	UCN	Comments
Call to Action 16 We call upon post-secondary institutions to create university and college degree and diploma programs in Aboriginal languages.	• Certificate in Teaching Ininimowin (the Cree Language)-- an immersion Cree program to help train Cree-speaking teachers in methods for teaching Cree in K-12 schools. The certificate program consists of 31 credit hours (ten 3 hour courses and one 1 credit course). Offered through UCN's Centre for Aboriginal Languages and Culture. • Degree courses offered in introductory Cree (two courses, 3 credit hours each) and one course in Cree syllabics (3 credit hours). • UCN operates the Centre for Aboriginal Languages and Culture (CALC) that undertakes and supports research and other projects in relation to advancing Aboriginal languages in Manitoba. CALC is the academic home for the Certificate in Teaching Ininimowin. • *Future activity:* Develop a new certificate in learning Cree that will ultimately ladder into a new Cree language minor. • *Future activity:* Work with Red River College on a partnership for Aboriginal Languages (Cree, Ojibwe).	• Resources are key to this effor. Where there are resources available to hire, faculty members with relevant skills can be difficult to recruit. • The decision to offer language programming necessarily includes decisions to be made with respect to which languages are taught, including which dialects where such considerations are relevant. • A critical component in teaching the language also includes the culture as language and culture are closely related.

TRC Calls to Action	UCN	Comments

Call to action 24
 	
We call upon medical and nursing schools in Canada to require all students to take a course dealing with Aboriginal health issues, including the history and legacy of residential schools, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Treaties, and Aboriginal rights, and Indigenous teachings and practices. This will require skills-based training in intercultural competency, conflict resolution, human rights, and anti-racism.
	• UCN offers the following courses in the Joint Bachelor of Nursing (JBN) program as part of the breadth requirements in humanities:
	  • ANS.1000 Introduction to Aboriginal Studies 1
	  • ANS.1001 Introduction to Aborginal Studies 2
	
	  These courses address residential schools, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Persons, teaties, political, and social issues faced by Aboriginal peoples. While these courses are not required in the nursing program, they are among the few courses in first year that are available to satisfy the breadth requirements in the JBN program.
	
	• Required courses in the nursing degree program include Aboriginal teachings and practices as part of the course content (not self-evident in the course name):
	  • NUR.2510 Client and Context 1: Human Growth and Development
	  • NUR.2516 Client and Context 2: Human Diversity
	
	  Additionally, the "Health & Illness" series of 4 couses includes cultural proficiency, storytelling as a way to gather health information, and examples given by instructors are culturally relevant to the northern and Aboriginal peoples.
	
	• Other courses include:
	  • ANS.3450 Aboriginal Medicine and Health - an optional course in the JBN program: offered when a subject matter expert is available to teach the course.
		UCN does not have a medical school.
		
		ANS.3450 is a comprehensive analysis of traditional and contemporary Aboriginal health and healing. Topics include pre-contact and post-contact disease, illness, and treatment, Aboriginal contributions to modern healthcare, and best practices in health and wellness. Emphasis is given to traditional medicines and healing concepts.

TRC Calls to Action	UCN	Comments

Call to Action 28
 	
We call upon law schools in Canada to require all law students to take a course in Aboriginal people and the law, which includes the history and legacy of residential schools, The United Nationas Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Treaties, and Aboriginal rights, Indigenous law, and Aboriginal--Crown relations. This will require skills-based training in intercultural competency, conflict resolution, human rights, and antiracism.
	• Note that UCN offers the following courses through its Aboriginal and Northern Studies (ANS) program:
	  • ANS.3000 Aboriginal Law 1
	  • ANS.3001 Aboriginal Law 2
	
	These two courses examine Canadian law, historical and contemporary judicial decisions, legal principles, legal interpretations, and the use of such interpretations pertaining to the Indian Act, treaties, self-government, jurisprudence, and regulatory jurisdiction.
	
	Note that ANS.3001 is a follow-on course from ANS.3000.
		UCN does not have a law school.

Call to Action 62 (implied): Post-secondary institutions will "educate teachers on how to integrate Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods into classrooms" (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015c, p.7).	• Certificate in Teaching Ininimowin. • Kenanow Bachelor of Education program educates early/middle year teachers using a land-based approach to teaching methodology. • Indigenous Curriculum Specialist assists faculty members in including Aboriginal content and methods in the classroom. • Faculty of Education and the Centre for Aboriginal Language and Culture are working to fund the development of methods courses for Cree language teacher education.	Based on the following Call to Action: 62. We call upon the federal, provincial, and territorial governments, in consulation and collaboration with Survivors, Aboriginal peoples, and educators, to: ii. Provide the necessary funding to post-secondary institutions to educate teachers on how to integrate Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods into classrooms. To this point, UCN has committed internal resources to support faculty development.

TRC Calls to Action	UCN	Comments

Call to Action 65 (implied):
 	
Post-secondary institutions will support "research program[s] with multi-year funding to advance understanding of reconciliation" (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015c, p.8).
	• Research and Scholarship Committee of the Learning Council manages an allocation of $29,500 in seed money to support research projects. Assessment criteria support topics related to Aboriginal-related research topics.
	• UCN participates in third-party research opportunities using identified principles, that include, among others:
	   • UCN's role in a resdearch project should not solely be related to helping a third-party researcher gain access to a First Nations community to conduct research. UCN must be invested in the project more comprehensively before UCN's positive relationships with communities in the north are exploited;
	   • Where expected and agreed-to by a First Nations community, OCAP (ownership, control, access, and possession) principles must guide all researchers when working with a First Nation community. The participating/sponsoring post-secondary education instituion(s) in the research must commit to supporting and enforcing OCAP with participating researchers.
	• UCN established, maintains, and operates three public libraries in First Nation Communities (Norway House, Easterville, and Pukatawagan).
		Action:
		
		65. We call upon the federal government, through the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, and in collaboration with Aboriginal peoples, post-secondary institutions and educators, and the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation and its partner institutions, to establish a national research program with multi-year funding to advance understanding of reconciliation.