

University of Alberta

Beyond the Surface: The essential role of university staff in transformational reconciliation
policy in higher education

by

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Abstract

The work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) pushed Canada into an era of ‘reconciliation’ and higher education institutions have indicated their desire to respond towards the elusive goal of reconciliation. The TRC report elicited a change to the narrative being used in higher education, shifting the policy focus from one solely based on inclusion, to the consideration of a more transformational goal of reconciliation. The shift spurred an expanded policy audience with reconciliation requiring equal participation from non-Indigenous people. Staff from all corners of campus have found themselves interacting with reconciliation policy. Despite these developments, conceptualization of reconciliation has remained elusive and progress is likely to remain limited given the unshakable foundation of colonialism in the higher education sector. With no concrete answers of how university staff can work in contribution to reconciliation, this paper culminates with an exploration of questions and tensions. The case study of alumni relations is used to provide a more specific and thorough examination; however, the process is intended to be applicable to other areas within the university.

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Introduction

Over the last decade, the phrase “truth and reconciliation” has entered the Canadian lexicon; the term refers to a societal goal of improving relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians, and restoring equity and self-determination for Indigenous people. The popularity of the phrase ‘truth and reconciliation’ and its associated meaning largely emerged from the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). The TRC issued a final report in 2015 which details the commission’s truth finding mission and addresses policy gaps at every level of society, ranging from higher education and justice to churches and media. The TRC highlighted the disparities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people within Canadian institutions and spurred increased attention to this policy issue. Higher education was one of the sectors called in through the work of the TRC and, in general, universities have indicated their desire to respond towards the elusive goal of reconciliation.

The first major challenge of embarking on this work is conceptualizing reconciliation. There are a variety of viewpoints and the concept of reconciliation is highly contested. Even though there is no consensus of what a reconciled Canada looks like, scholars have outlined frameworks based on decolonization and Indigenization which gives a sense of direction. The journey is guaranteed to be long and arduous, perhaps never ending, but it remains a worthwhile endeavor that resources and effort should be dedicated to.

A comprehensive exploration of the policy landscape reveals that the TRC was an influential event which caused a shift in the policy scope in higher education. The TRC initiated the broad use of the term ‘reconciliation’ which launched a new perspective on Indigenous issues. Inclusion based policies have dominated the response to Indigenous issues in higher education, but with the emergence of the term ‘reconciliation,’ attention has turned to the impact

of historical and current colonial relationships as the root of the issue. This has resulted in an expanded policy audience. All Canadians have been called in to participate, and progress is dependent on both non-Indigenous people and Indigenous people engaging with reconciliation policy. In the context of higher education, staff from all corners of campus, most of who are not Indigenous, are now required to consider the goal of reconciliation within the scope of their job.

Unfortunately, the perpetuation of inclusion-based policies is common and achieving any form of profound reconciliation is unlikely. Regardless of the anticipated outcome, staff can choose to engage as policy makers in a thoughtful and determined way. Before rushing forward with solutions and answers, staff should engage in a process of critical questioning, not only of the larger university structure, but of their position's scope of work. By evaluating their role in sustaining colonialism, staff will begin to realize just how complex reconciliation is. The act of constant evaluation is the only sure way to be present in the reconciliation process, and staff should base their actions on a foundation of relentless questioning.

Using a set of questions developed by Sharon Stein (2020), I will explore the space of alumni relations within higher education, an area that I have worked in for seven years as a non-Indigenous staff person. Using a specific context that I am familiar with will allow me to provide a practical demonstration of using a questioning process to build a foundation. This serves as a starting point for alumni relations professionals wishing to engage in the process of reconciliation. Staff working in other areas of higher education may review this example and apply this approach to their own context.

Conceptualizations of reconciliation

The concept of reconciliation has entered the collective consciousness in Canada as the solution for the historically dysfunctional relationship between Indigenous people and settler-

Canadians (Borrows & Tully, 2018). While the brain might deduce a straightforward definition of the word reconciliation, a concrete conceptualization is highly contested (Borrows & Tully, 2018). At the core, reconciliation indicates a goodwill and mutually agreeable relationship between Indigenous people and settler-Canadians, however, Borrows and Tully (2018) expand on the variety of meanings in practice:

For example, some say reconciliation between settlers and Indigenous peoples is an end state of some kind: a contract, agreement, legal recognition, return of stolen land, reparations, compensation, closing the gap, or self-determination. Others argue that it is more akin to an ongoing activity. Some say reconciliation embodies a relationship stretching back 12,000 years, an existential mode of being with one another and the living earth. It has also been associated with treaty relationships since early contact. For some it is the path to decolonization, for others a new form of recolonization. Some insist reconciliation must be resisted, while others see it as an essential process for ongoing relationality. (p. 4)

Borrows and Tully (2018) also report on the significance of the concept of ‘resurgence’ which signifies a revival of Indigenous society and a focus on self-determination (Borrows & Tully, 2018). The authors propose that reconciliation and resurgence are not mutually exclusive and that both can occur at once (Borrows & Tully, 2018). The authors reject the notion that reconciliation means that Indigenous people need to accept the status quo and express that there is a way for two worldviews to coexist without one dominating the other (Borrows & Tully, 2018). Additionally, complete rejection of the Western worldview is not necessary for resurgence and ultimately, the authors advocate for the middle ground between reconciliation and resurgence (Borrows & Tully, 2018). Ultimately, reconciliation is a highly elusive concept

and therefore, policy aimed at achieving reconciliation is a nebulous endeavor.

In the context of higher education, the term reconciliation is used quite liberally in reference to various initiatives addressing inclusion and equity for Indigenous people, however, Indigenous scholars commonly conceptualize reconciliation in higher education into the processes of decolonization and Indigenization (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; Stein, 2020; Peach, Richmond & Brunette-Debassige, 2020).

Decolonization refers to a rebalancing of power where decision-making agency and sovereignty is given to Indigenous people (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; Peach, Richmond & Brunette-Debassige, 2020). Decolonization is a complex process considering that colonialism has an extremely strong grip on every aspect of society (Alfred, 2004). Colonialism is not a historical period, rather it is a powerful discourse that justifies and strengthens the dominance of Western worldviews and systems (Alfred, 2004). Colonization is defined by Alfred (2004) as "... the fundamental denial of [Indigenous peoples] freedom to be Indigenous in a meaningful way, and the unjust occupation of the physical, social, and political spaces [Indigenous peoples] need in order to survive as Indigenous peoples" (p. 89). In the university setting, Indigenous people only have as much power as the institution deems appropriate; participation of Indigenous people is structured and managed according to the institution's needs (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; Peach, Richmond & Brunette-Debassige, 2020). Indigenous people can be silenced if their perspectives misalign with the institution's (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; Peach, Richmond & Brunette-Debassige, 2020).

Gaudry and Lorenz (2018) propose an approach to higher education reconciliation built on treaty relationships. They describe a dual structure where Indigenous and Western epistemologies are each allowed to flourish and interact through a treaty-style agreement

(Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018). Referring to treaties is a common framework for reconciliation; Asch (2018) explains that treaties were originally drafted to outline the relationship and signed in good faith that the outlined agreements would be followed through on. Treaties are nation-to-nation agreements that respect the sovereignty of each party but outline the relationship as one that is mutually beneficial, collaborative, and respectful of differences (Asch, 2018). By signing treaties, Indigenous peoples did not willingly turn over their lands, they made agreements that they felt would improve their lives and took into consideration the interests of their new partners (Asch, 2018).

Both Gaudry and Lorenz (2018) and Asch (2018) argue that treaties can still serve to guide the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Gaudry and Lorenz (2018) propose a treaty agreement between the Western and Indigenous sides of the dual university that they outline in their article; each side has their own autonomy that does not infringe on the other, and a mutual cooperation and respect guides the interactions between the two sides. If a treaty approach was taken in higher education, the success of this model is dependent on the relinquishing of complete control to Indigenous people over Indigenous curriculum, research, and governance (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018).

In addition to a treaty approach where power is rebalanced, Gaudry and Lorenz (2018) advocate for Indigenization which means Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies are recognized and valued, regardless of their relation to Western epistemology. Indigenous ways of doing higher education may be radically different from the way higher education is currently done and the institution would need to make room for these different methods (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; Peach, Richmond & Brunette-Debassige, 2020). Stein (2020) also comments that Indigenous societies have never lacked a form of higher education. The presentation of higher

education might look drastically different from the Western presentation, but Indigenous people and communities should not be viewed as coming with deficits in this area (Stein, 2020).

One major consideration is land access; Indigenous resurgence is intrinsically tied to the land; social, legal and political systems are in relation to the Earth (Borrows, 2018). Gaudry and Lorenz (2018) note that the site of knowledge production for Indigenous people is not the physical grounds of the university, but across the land and this restructuring of the physical space is key. Additionally, Peach, Richmond and Brunette-Debassige (2020) explain that universities have a role in land development, and that without consideration of Indigenous people and communities, continue to endorse and uphold colonization.

The ideas presented by these scholars provide theoretical conceptions of reconciliation in higher education. Using these ideas, we can begin to reimagine everyday processes and policies. In some cases, the application may be obvious and feasible, whereas in other cases it may seem completely implausible.

The influence of the TRC

Universities in Canada have increasingly recognized the importance of ensuring Indigenous people can participate in higher education. Through many changes in support of Indigenous people in higher education began occurring through the 90s and early 2000s, the work of the TRC has proven to be very influential in the higher education sphere.

It has been duly noted that the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) report of 1996 was the first comprehensive review of the state of affairs for Indigenous people that shined a light on both the historical and contemporary relationship between Indigenous people and Canadian government and society (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada [TRC], 2015; Holmes, 2006). The RCAP, created by the federal government, arose out of the tension

created by the Oka Crisis of 1990 which prompted greater attention of the public on the fraught relationship between Indigenous people and the Canadian government (TRC, 2015).

In 2006, Universities Canada (formerly the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada) a member organization representing higher education institutions in Canada, conducted a landscape review of the services and programs available to Indigenous students at universities across Canada and issued a report (Holmes, 2006). The 2006 report credits the RCAP report of 1996 as “a major watershed in Canada’s recent relationship with its Aboriginal population” (p. 6) and asserts that the RCAP report was the moment in Canadian history that disrupted the status quo and brought attention to the importance of “improv[ing] the socio-economic conditions” (p.7) of Indigenous people (Holmes, 2006). The TRC report of 2015, on the other hand, provided a critical assessment of the outcomes from the RCAP report of 1996. The TRC final report notes that since the RCAP report, which includes a 20 year policy roadmap, very little has actually changed; the majority of government policy reform proposed was not considered or implemented, and the general situation for Indigenous people has not improved (TRC, 2015).

Despite the analysis of these two organizations on the impact of the RCAP report, the Universities Canada report of 2006 indicates that many universities had programs and services for Indigenous students in place; some examples include cultural events such as a pow-wow, Indigenous gathering spaces, elders on campus and academic counselling tailored for Indigenous students (Holmes, 2006). Subsequent reports produced by Universities Canada demonstrate that since 2006, programs and services increased over time; in total, five reports were produced, in 2006, 2010, 2013, 2016 and 2018 (Holmes, 2006; Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada [AUCC], 2010; AUCC, 2013; Universities Canada, 2016; Universities Canada, 2018). Each report provides a useful snapshot of the activity in Canadian universities over the course of

a twelve-year period, which happens to overlap with work of the TRC from 2008 - 2015. Though the work of universities to address disparities in outcomes of Indigenous students precedes the commencement of the TRC process, the TRC has no doubt had a substantial impact.

A review of the Universities Canada reports demonstrates the impact of the TRC on the narrative used within higher education; a correlation can be identified through evaluating the language used in the reports and the progression of the TRC process. The initial reports in 2006, 2010 and 2013 do not contain the word “reconciliation” at all, while the word appears twice in the 2016 report and nine times in 2018 (Holmes, 2006; AUCC, 2010; AUCC, 2013; Universities Canada, 2016; Universities Canada, 2018). “Truth” is mentioned four times in 2018 but does not appear in the reports for any other year (Holmes, 2006; AUCC, 2010; AUCC, 2013; Universities Canada, 2016; Universities Canada, 2018). This change in language denotes an interesting shift in the way that this work is being talked about.

The shift in language has been accompanied by a shift in the scope of audience. The TRC framed this policy issue around the term reconciliation, a concept which is rooted in the existence of a relationship. This framework stretched the responsibility from a few university staff and faculty working in Indigenous support units or academic programs, to nearly every member of the higher education community. The phrase ‘truth and reconciliation’ has become a rallying call for everyone in the higher education community to step up. Where policy around Indigenous initiatives used to occur in the periphery, the influence of the TRC has resulted in the projection of this work to the centre of the institution. The work has expanded from being solely focused on providing programs and services for Indigenous people, to efforts around repairing broken relationships between Indigenous people and non-Indigenous people and institutions. For example, it is now commonplace for anyone leading a university event or meeting to start with a

traditional land acknowledgment. This example demonstrates that no matter the scope of one's role within the institution, there is a base level of understanding and participation in reconciliation policy that is required to navigate the culture in higher education.

There is a 'stickiness' to the work of the TRC, but the uptick in activity is not necessarily a direct outcome of the TRC report. Interestingly, the concept of reconciliation was not introduced through the work of the TRC; it is readily addressed within the RCAP report of 1996 which emphasizes broken relationships instead of focusing on the deficits of Indigenous people, and proposes a structural overhaul of Canadian institutions and legislation in support of increased self-governance, support and respect for Indigenous people and their cultures (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). This demonstrates the elusive nature of policy and shows that two similar documents released 19 years apart were picked up and applied in different ways.

Wright and Reinhold (2011) explain that policy changes are created across sites and across timeframes. The authors theorize that the emergence of new policy is not a linear process. "Making an ideology dominant is not a 'trick' that a single agenda (e.g. 'Thatcher') pulls off. Rather many people with different agendas are involved in a continual process of creating, negotiating and contesting an ideology" (Wright and Reinhold, 2011, p. 94). Similarly, Gornitzka, Kyvic and Stensaker (2005) explain that policy is negotiated during its implementation and that prescriptive policy does not determine outcomes.

Ball (1993) explains that "in complex modern societies we are enmeshed in a variety of discordant, incoherent and contradictory discourses, and 'subjugated knowledges' cannot be totally excluded from arenas of policy implementation" (Ball, 1993, p. 15). Gornitzka, Kyvic and Stensaker (2005) explain that policy is negotiated and produced through the interactions within a

network of institutions and people that are all subject to an ever-evolving social structure. Policy cannot be separated from the influence of people, individually or collectively (Ball, 1993; Gornitzka, Kyvic & Stensaker, 2005).

These ideas help build an understanding of the complexity of policy transformation. It is impossible to understand the effects of one policy document such as the TRC report because this document does not exist in a vacuum. What we can see is that changes are occurring over time, on many levels, and policy scholars reinforce the argument that policy cannot be distilled down into a simple directive document. By looking at ebb and flow of the topic, patterns can be identified which allows for easier navigation of a complex and elusive landscape.

The change of narrative and the underlying discourses

The University Canada reports in 2006, 2010 and 2013 are heavily focused on the economic reasons for undertaking the work of ensuring more Indigenous people attend and complete university (Holmes, 2006; AUCC, 2010; AUCC, 2013). The earlier reports outline gaps in the socio-economic status between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians and point to higher education as a solution to alleviate social problems and grow the economy (Holmes, 2006; AUCC, 2010; AUCC, 2013). Specifically, the reports state that if Indigenous people go to university, unemployment will decrease, annual incomes will increase and skilled labour shortages can be addressed (Holmes, 2006; AUCC, 2010; AUCC, 2013).

Economic arguments dominate the earlier reports, especially the first report in 2006, and point to the presence of neoliberal discourse; Ball (1993) explains that these larger discourses lay the foundation on which all policy and activity forms; he refers to it as the “pre-established terrain” (p. 15). Engulfed in a neoliberalist context, universities perpetuate the concept that market value is the ultimate value; graduates are assessed by their employability, research is

valued based on the grant money it receives, university spaces are considered as readily for their commercial value as they are for their academic value (Abdi & Ellis, 2007; Shore, 2010; Mountz, Bonds, Mansfield, Loyd, Hyndman, Walton-Roberts, Basu, Whitson, Hawkins, Hamilton, & Curran, 2015; Chatterton, Hodkinson & Pickerill, 2010). When neoliberal goals dominate, policy for equity and social justice struggle to flourish because people and communities are only seen for their value in wealth creation (Abdi & Ellis, 2007).

The heavy influence of neoliberalism coexists with a focus on inclusion policies found in the earlier reports. Gaudry and Lorenz (2018) explain that inclusion policies are limited to recruiting and retaining Indigenous students and faculty members. Inclusion policies are criticized for simply placing Indigenous people inside a potentially hostile environment that does not value Indigenous perspectives and practices (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018).

Many of the programs and services for Indigenous people listed in the University Canada reports such as Indigenous-specific gathering spaces, student centres, funding, counselling programs are important and should be resourced, however, these activities can easily exist within an inclusion model and do nothing to create structural changes. An inclusion approach puts pressure on Indigenous people to act if they wish to see structural changes; being put in such a position can open Indigenous people up to additional animosity (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018).

The policy narrative produced is that Indigenous people can either help or hinder economic progress and the focus then centres around creating policy that supports their progression through higher education. This results in viewing Indigenous people from a deficit lens; their struggles to participate in higher education are labeled as personal barriers. The result is that programs and services are created to help them navigate an existing system which has not been critically analyzed for any structural or systemic deficiencies.

There are a few strategies mentioned that are targeted at creating culture and governance change in the earlier reports; some examples are having Indigenous people involved in the governance structures of the university such as seats on the board, or campus libraries reserving space for Indigenous materials. Overall, however, the indications of structural changes are minimal, and the reports do not provide a critical analysis of the colonial foundation of higher education.

In comparison, the 2018 report goes beyond inclusion policies and puts significantly more focus on reconsidering imperialist approaches to knowledge production and education (Universities Canada, 2018). Examples included in the 2018 report are incorporating Indigenous perspectives into curriculum, acknowledging and addressing the history of poor treatment of Indigenous people by Canadian institutions, ensuring Indigenous people are represented at all levels of the institution, and “nurturing respectful relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities reflect[ing] the core values of Canada’s universities” (Universities Canada, 2018, p. 2).

This latest report puts a greater emphasis on disrupting the status quo and making changes that affect everyone within the institution, not just Indigenous people (Universities Canada, 2018). This change of narrative signals an interesting shift that perhaps points to a willingness to consider the root of the issue which is that Indigenous people and perspectives are devalued and suppressed in a system that is dominated by a Western worldview.

Evidenced by the change in language and tone in the Universities Canada reports, a correlation can be drawn between the TRC process and narrative surrounding policies related to Indigenous people. The Universities Canada reports demonstrate that programs and services were steadily increasing prior to, during and after the TRC process. The more significant change

was the narrative describing this activity and the positioning of ‘truth and reconciliation’ as the ultimate goal, as opposed to the mostly neoliberal, deficit based arguments for doing this work as noted in the earlier reports. This perhaps signals a consideration by higher education of moving beyond an inclusion approach, to understanding that a system exists where an imbalance of power is the root cause of the issue.

An expanded policy audience

This shift of narrative opens the possibility for greater structural change because a reconciliation framework includes both Indigenous people and non-Indigenous people. An inclusion framework does not require or lead to structural changes, while a reconciliation framework has opened the eyes of many to evaluate their role within the larger relationship. The concept of reconciliation forces society to evaluate how different worldviews can coexist without the domination of one over the other, especially in a situation where damage has already occurred. A reconciliation framework requires recognition of the imperial, Western worldview that pervades every institution and system which has caused the dehumanization of Indigenous people. Everyone was called in through the work of the TRC and those wishing for a better future, might view their role differently than they did before the narrative change.

This expanded scope of responsibility is noted as important for policy change related to equity initiatives (Ahmed, 2012). Ahmed (2012) describes the desired motions of ‘up’ and ‘out’ for policy change towards increased equity for marginalized groups. ‘Up’ refers to engaging those in leadership positions, closer to the top of the hierarchy, to buying into the importance of the work and / or promoting goals of social justice (Ahmed, 2012). Higher education leaders have become more concerned with positioning themselves and their institutions as leaders in

‘truth and reconciliation.’ This top-level prioritization serves to strengthen the engagement of members of the university community (Ahmed, 2012).

‘Out’ refers to engaging any person involved in the institution with an interest in participating and practicing in the direction of the equity policies (Ahmed, 2012). This outward participation can be witnessed within higher education. People from across the institution have found their job description or role, that previously did not include any reference to reconciliation or Indigenous initiatives, are now required to engage. Examples include facilities departments re-evaluating fire policies to accommodate smudging inside campus buildings, or alumni relations staff learning Indigenous protocols around engaging Elders and Indigenous perspectives in events and programs.

‘Up’ and ‘out’ participation on its own is not indicative of improved equity on campus; pushing back against dominant strongholds and non-transformational solutions are constant activities of those heading the charge (Ahmed, 2012). Ahmed (2012) describes this as an exhausting and relentless task which is heavier on the shoulders of marginalized people.

Those engaging in reconciliation should be aware that neoliberalism, colonialism, and other dominant discourses have a significant influence on the landscape. Basing his ideas off Foucault’s body of work, Ball (1993) explains that discourse is very influential on the policy landscape; it is the “*production of ‘truth’ and ‘knowledge’*” (p. 14); the universal understanding or knowledge base that everyone operates from. Discourse is the unwritten codes that wire our society, it subconsciously directs our movement as a group (Ball, 1993). Discourse sets the stage for all policy to emerge from (Ball, 1993).

In his later work, Ball (2015) expresses concern around the idea of conceptualizing and deconstructing discourses. Ball (2015) remarks that, in many cases, discourse is analyzed

through policy objects such as documents or language; he explains “discourse is not present in the object, but ‘enables it to appear’” (p. 311). He also mulls over the dichotomy between human agency and the omnipotence of discourses and questions the extent to which people have the power to shape discourses versus the concept of people being possessed by discourse in all things they are and do (Ball, 2015). These are philosophical debates that will never be concluded but Ball (2015) emphasizes the importance of sitting in the discomfort of this “ontological duality” (p. 112). It would be naive to assume that any written policy documents are the antidote to the wicked problems of colonialism or neoliberalism. Additionally, it would be reckless to operate in ignorance of the influence of these discourses. With the uptake of participation in reconciliation on campus by a wide variety of people, responsibility is required of individuals and the institution to engage in and promote critical thinking on this topic.

A critical exploration using an Alumni Relations case study

The key to understanding reconciliation is knowing that the work is never perfect, and it never ends (Stein, 2020). Relationships in general are dynamic and fragile; they build and bust, sometimes they can be mended, sometimes they are damaged beyond repair. Relationships in one context are not feasible in other contexts. Each relationship is unique, and what works in one relationship will not work in another. Humans have not solved the mystery of relationships in general, the same logic can be applied to reconciliation.

Much of the literature related to reconciliation in higher education provides either a high-level theoretical picture or a specific case study. Stein (2020) presents a helpful framework for those who wish to embark on the journey of transforming their contributions to the university; she presents a set of questions categorized under “five ‘dimensions’ of coloniality” (p. 163):

historical, political, economic, epistemological and psycho-affective. These dimensions will be used to contextualize the role of Alumni Relations (AR) professionals in reconciliation efforts.

Each university has its own approach to AR but at the core, the AR function is meant to build and maintain goodwill between alumni and the institution for the purpose of contributing to the goals of the university. Alumni programs are meant to extend the university's relationship with students past the date of graduation. Just as there are Indigenous students, Indigenous alumni exist, and AR professionals have a duty to equitably engage all members of the alumni population. Alumni contribute in significant ways back to the university, primarily through volunteerism, advocacy, reputation building and philanthropy.

Alumni contributions of time through volunteerism is important to the functioning of the university. Alumni often take on roles that serve students such as guest lecturing, mentoring, employing students, speaking at events, and contributing to programming that builds student spirit and a positive campus environment. In the area of advocacy, alumni are often sought for their connection to industries and communities; university leaders may seek to engage alumni with these connections to advise on curriculum, support practical components of education and facilitate community connections. Alumni can contribute to the reputation building activities of the university. By aligning the university with the successes of alumni, the university is able to demonstrate the value of their research and education to the larger community. Finally, alumni contributions through philanthropy are highly valued by the university.

The AR unit is integral to the operations of a university. Amongst the many areas that a strong AR plan can contribute to, reconciliation is another area where AR professionals can make a positive impact. As discussed, the TRC created a policy shift within higher education. The narrative has shifted leading to a more holistic approach based on creating structural changes

and expanding the onus for the work to every corner of campus. AR professionals should consider themselves policy makers and evaluate their essential role in reconciliation within higher education. It would be illogical (based on the discussed understanding of the concepts of policy and reconciliation) to build a prescriptive set of recommendations for AR professionals. Instead, Stein's (2020) framework can be used to outline the areas in which thought, and energy should be directed (see appendix for Stein's set of questions).

Historical dimension

In order to move towards decolonization, it is necessary for universities to address this history of colonialism, particularly the history of the land that the university occupies and the history of the relationships between the institution and Indigenous communities (Stein, 2020). AR professionals should have a comprehensive understanding of the historical context which has an influence on the present before they start to engage in reconciliation work. We have a duty to engage equitably across our population; Indigenous alumni should not be excluded from our plans and we should engage with them in ways that move us beyond an inclusion model. Simply inviting them to existing programs, or adding in the odd Indigenous perspective, is not enough.

To do this work, we need to listen, and learn what their experiences have been interacting with the institution. Furthermore, if the institution as a whole wishes to engage in the work of understanding the university's historical relationship with Indigenous people, the AR unit could be a leader in this truth finding mission through the stories and experiences of our alumni. As the adage goes, to change where we are going, we must know where we came from. We may understand generally how higher education has been used as a tool of colonization and cultural genocide, but through our alumni, we may be able to strengthen the details of the story. Of

course, this must be done with diplomacy and sensitivity to prevent pigeonholing our Indigenous alumni into educators of the colonizer.

Political dimension

“In the broadest sense, politics encompasses relations of power, including the distribution of resources and governing authority in a particular place” (Stein, 2020, p. 164). AR professionals may not immediately view their role in the political dimension but in fact, we play an integral role. There are governance or decision making structures within the AR unit. Usually there are alumni-led advisory councils. Often there is a committee that adjudicates awards for alumni. AR professionals should ask: How are Indigenous perspectives considered in these decision-making processes? Are decision making structures prohibitive to Indigenous alumni in certain ways? How are Indigenous alumni being engaged in these processes and is there an openness to change?

An important consideration is that Indigenous people are not a unified group. Indigenous people each belong to their own distinct nation with unique cultural makeups. Just like with any group of people, there are also differences of opinion and disagreements between Indigenous people. These complexities make navigating the political dimension very difficult but by opening the conversation and being open to getting it wrong, we take one step forward.

In addition to internal governance, AR units are often asked to contribute to the larger university governance structures by finding Indigenous alumni who can serve on various committees; examples include creating an Indigenous advisory council to the president or provost, or asking Indigenous alumni to join an existing group such as the university board, a curriculum redesign committee or an admissions committee. AR units should think carefully about the social capital they have with the Indigenous alumni population that they manage the

university relationship with. What responsibilities do AR professionals have to ensure Indigenous alumni participation is not tokenistic? How can AR professionals manage their internal relationships in support of decolonization and Indigenization? These are tensions that AR professionals must consider and step into the discomfort of confronting.

Economic dimension

“It will not be possible to interrupt higher education’s complicity in settler colonialism if we do not consider how institutions support the reproduction of a capitalist economy, including resource extraction that: requires unfettered access to Indigenous lands” (Stein, 2020, p. 165). The economic dimension presents a very difficult cross to bear for AR units because our work contributes to the fundraising capabilities of the university through our engagement with alumni. Potentially the most difficult tension for AR professionals to manage will be that of our duty to facilitate positive relationships with high-level donors and our commitment to reconciliation. What happens when a decision must be made between these two? Which side will win out and how will AR professionals manage the fall out? There is a guarantee these situations of conflict will occur and reconciliation efforts could be a point of contention with donors who do not buy into the vision.

Epistemological dimension

While AR professionals are not directly involved in the teaching and research activities of the university, they play a supportive role. Typically, alumni programs promote the teaching and research activities to the alumni community in the hopes that alumni will provide support through donations, community ties or promotion within their own networks. AR professionals should question how they are drawing attention to Indigenous epistemologies. Stein explains that “when Indigenous epistemologies are grafted onto Western ontologies (Ahenakew, 2016) – for

instance, by being instrumentalised toward reproducing and *relegitimising* settler colonial society – the gifts of Indigenous ways of knowing, and being are lost (Kuokkanen, 2008)” (p. 166). How are non-Indigenous alumni responding to educational programming based on Indigenous knowledges? How are these programming pieces being positioned within the grand scheme? Stein (2020) asserts that simply including Indigenous perspectives is not enough; without addressing larger issues of colonialism, these efforts are tokenistic. Additionally, Indigenous people are not responsible for educating the masses on reconciliation; this assumption places a burden on people who are already marginalized in other ways (Stein, 2020).

The other area to consider is which Indigenous voices are being included. Are the voices being included the ones deemed the most palatable to a general alumni audience? Is there a diversity of voices? It is not enough to simply include; educational programs for alumni aimed at a larger goal of reconciliation need to question Western ontologies (Stein, 2020).

Additionally, AR professionals should evaluate how their programming addresses the needs of Indigenous alumni. The idea of a dual university proposed by Gaudry and Lorenz (2018) could potentially be adapted to the AR unit. This would require decision making power being turned over to Indigenous people and resources being provided for alumni programming founded from Indigenous ontologies. One major question is: who leads these initiatives? Are there Indigenous AR professionals to support Indigenous programming or are Indigenous alumni being expected to volunteer their time without staff support?

These considerations and questions are uncomfortable because they push AR professionals beyond the inclusion approach and destabilize the centrality of the Western episteme. They are necessary, however, if the AR unit wishes to not only support their Indigenous alumni but engage non-Indigenous constituents in reconciliation.

Psycho-affective dimension

Stein (2020) contends that the psycho-affective dimension is the foundation of reconciliation work; she explains that “innocence can be comfortably maintained, and the failure to face one’s complicity in harm can be painted as a problem of ignorance about colonialism rather than an investment in colonialism” (p. 167). Asking the questions is a good first step but when the answers are unveiled and difficult to accept, how is that information internalized (Stein, 2020). Stein (2020) argues that the default is to rationalize the status quo and excuse complicity based on the difficulty or impossibility of achieving reconciliation.

This is not simply a matter of getting the job done or even doing a good job. The psycho-affective dimension revolves around a personal willingness to examine and hack away at the “deep attachments to the colonial values, entitlements, and habits of being into which we have been socialised – including those of demanding control over, and seeking certain outcomes from, the process of transformation itself” (p. 167). How willing are AR professionals willing to mix their professional and personal lives? A commitment to reconciliation makes this delineation impossible. The work of reconciliation requires a deep personal commitment.

The painful and disruptive nature of this psycho-affective work is a diversion from the usual cheerful nature of AR work. Rocking the boat is not a position that the field of AR is used to. The motivation for reconciliation must come from an internal source and AR professionals will need to ask themselves how far they are willing to go. Stein (2020) asks “can I surrender my desires for control, authority, certainty, and security so that I might develop the humility and stamina that are required to be a part of a long-term, multi-layered, messy transformation toward decolonial futures that are not-yet-knowable?” (p. 168).

Conclusion

The path to reconciliation is murky. A holistic understanding of policy demonstrates that prescriptive policy is limited in its influence and that everyone is a policy actor. Universities that approach reconciliation policy from the silo of a central office are unlikely to achieve any form of transformative reconciliation. To truly push the needle, staff from across campus must be committed to moving past an inclusion approach, but this requires a deep personal investment on behalf of the staff members.

An exploration using the example of the Alumni Relations unit within higher education demonstrates the level of integrity that staff members would need to contribute to transformative reconciliation. Staff would need to be willing to engage with feelings of deep personal discomfort and must be brave enough to confront policies, colleagues and constituents who are complicit with colonialism. Though universities talk a good reconciliation game, most are unlikely to demonstrate action towards transformative reconciliation, because to do this, they would need all staff to commit on a deep personal level.

It is perhaps a discouraging message to those individual staff members who envision a better future for Indigenous constituents, however, this should not dissuade those who wish to engage in a more meaningful way. The following sentiment is expressed by the TRC, 2015:

Although Elders and Knowledge Keepers across the land have told us that there is no specific word for reconciliation in their own languages, there are many words, stories, and songs, as well as sacred objects such as wampum belts, peace pipes, eagle down, cedar boughs, drums, and regalia, that are used to establish relationships, repair conflicts, restore harmony, and make peace. (p. 12)

Inspiration can be drawn from this quote; like university staff, Elders and Knowledge Keepers do

not propose a single solution for reconciliation, however, there is a collection of tools and methods available to us all. The sum of all actions, both good and bad, create the reconciliation policy landscape and while no one person, nor the university as an entity, will solve this issue, staff can choose to build towards something that is different from what we have today.

Appendix

Sharon Stein's (2020) questions:

Historical dimension

- By what processes did the land on which the institution sits come to be held by the institution? Who (including humans and other-than-human beings) were affected by those processes?
- What has been the historical relationship between the institution and Indigenous peoples and knowledges, and how has this relationship shifted across time (or not)?
- How does the historical development of higher education in the country relate to (and support or contest) the development and dominance of a settler society?
- How might histories of higher education shift if they started from the perspective of the land itself, and the knowledge of its Indigenous caretakers, rather than that of institutions' colonial founders?
- Who benefits from forgetting certain histories, and what are the responses when we try to remember differently?
- How does the colonial past shape the colonial present, and what contemporary responsibilities follow?

Political dimension

- Is there a relationship between the institution and local Indigenous community/communities, and if so, how is power distributed within that relationship? What, if any, treaty obligations are relevant to this relationship (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018)?

- Can universities shift from relationships premised on ownership and mastery (of land and knowledge) to ones premised on answerability, that is, ‘being responsible, accountable, and being part of an exchange’ (Patel, 2015, p. 73)? What would be the biggest challenges involved in making such a shift?
- In what ways do universities contribute to the socialisation of settler citizens who presume the inevitability of colonialism?

Economic dimension

- How are public and private sources of funding for higher education derived (directly and indirectly) through extracting ‘natural resources’ from Indigenous lands?
- How do colleges and universities contribute to the reproduction of a capitalist economy by training people as labourers within it – including not only those working directly in trades related to extraction (Walker, 2018), but also as engineers, managers, and other middle class professionals?
- What are the origins of the wealth from which institutional endowments derive, and in what industries are those endowments invested?
- How do universities derive profits from the ‘development’ of (Indigenous) lands for which they hold the title, and how might that ‘development’ contribute to the presumption that the land is ‘settled’ (Tetrault, 2016)?

Epistemological dimension

- How/why was it decided that European knowledge would be taught in higher education institutions in settler colonial states, to the exclusion of Indigenous knowledges that developed in and emerged from that place? How do these epistemic foundations continue

to shape institutions' curriculum, research, and administrative organisation, and affect the reception of and resources granted to Indigenous peoples and knowledges?

- Why do so few settler scholars 'research the limits of their own epistemic biases and seek out Indigenous scholars and Indigenous critiques of the Western modernist hegemonies' (Marker, 2019, p. 510)?
- Are settlers expecting Indigenous people to engage in pedagogical labour that should be their own responsibility (Ahmed, 2012)?
- What are settlers expecting to hear when Indigenous people speak, and are they able to 'hear' Indigenous people when they deviate from that script? Do engagements with Indigenous knowledges romanticise and/or homogenise Indigenous communities?
- Are Indigenous critiques engaged in earnest, or in selective and instrumentalising ways?
- What institutionalised norms prevent Indigenous knowledges from thriving on their own terms – for instance: productivity requirements that cannot account for the time required to produce knowledge in/with Indigenous communities; failure to recognise forms of knowledge production/transmission/translation beyond traditional scholarly publishing; rewarding 'ambition and self-promotion', which goes against many Indigenous values oriented by interdependence and humility (Marker, 2004, p. 108); or failure to recognise that some knowledge is not open and accessible to all?
- What institutional values would need to be rethought in order to affirm the equality and integrity of Indigenous knowledges?

Psycho-affective dimension

- Am I willing to put in the affective, political, and intellectual work that is required of me in order to transform existing relations with Indigenous peoples?

- Am I willing to reimagine and reconstruct how I have been socialised to think about and engage knowledge, kinship, labour, the environment, property, rights, governance, my own ‘goodness’ – in short, nearly everything about my existence as a settler on these lands?
- How can I go from merely stating my commitments to decolonisation to enacting them, while recognising that no action or intervention will ever be ‘enough’, and that I will likely make new mistakes in the process of trying?
- How do I react when someone suggests that my ideas or actions reproduce colonialism? Am I willing to be held accountable for my (inevitable) mistakes?
- Do I know how to sit with my complicity in colonial violence without running away from it, dis-identifying with it, or seeking immediate absolution?
- Can I surrender my desires for control, authority, certainty, and security so that I might develop the humility and stamina that are required to be a part of a long-term, multi-layered, messy transformation toward decolonial futures that are not yet-knowable?

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CAPPING PROJECT SIGNATURE FORM

Department of Educational Policy Studies
Faculty of Education
University of Alberta
July 2019

Student Name

Student ID

Instructor Name

Capping Exercise Project Title

Term **Fall**

The undersigned certifies that the student named has completed the requirements of EDPS 900 (capping exercise). The student thus receives credit for this course, which is completed in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education.

Larry Prochner Digitally signed by
Larry Prochner
Date: 2020.12.14
15:52:35 -07'00'

Instructor Signature