

# Building Reconciliation at the U of S

College of Arts and Science, Undergraduate Student Office

## Working Toward Indigenization

### DESCRIPTION

#### Our Plan

The Undergraduate Student Office (UGSO) has undertaken a process that supports Indigenization as a way forward in reconciliation. Staff have committed to reflecting on their position, place and space in relation to colonization, and specifically as this positionality relates to the academy. Through a series of educational and participatory events, staff are actively exploring a plan to become self reflexive, working towards developing processes and protocols to be good allies:

#### Cultural Awareness

- Talk to and with Indigenous people.
- Be open and prepared to ask questions, to continue learning.

#### Cultural Sensitivity

- Recognize and respect different approaches to knowing the world and living lives.
- Consider that Indigenous people have different ways of knowing when making decisions and acknowledge differences.

#### Cultural Competency

- This is about being aware of one's own positionality, being curious, being involved and taking action.
- Focus on finding ways to empower Indigenous people on their own terms.
- Be willing to adjust your social, cultural, and even linguistic approach to meeting Indigenous needs.

#### Cultural Safety

- Being aware that your own cultural values, beliefs, attitudes, AND position can have intentional and unintentional impacts on Indigenous people.
- Challenge power imbalances, instructional barriers, prejudice and discrimination, and be an ally for Indigenous ways of being.

#### Critical and Self Reflective Practice

- Ensuring a baseline level of knowledge, awareness, and capacity among the UGSO team.
- The educational and experiential components we are involved in are moving us toward a shared standard, and that shared standard is in turn a prerequisite for effectively enacting Indigenization, being true allies of Indigenous students, faculty, and staff.

Stryker Calvez and the Undergraduate Student Office (2017)

### PURPOSE

The Undergraduate Student Office (UGSO) in the College of Arts and Science supports 9,009 Arts and Science students, including 1108 self-declared Aboriginal students (retrieved from <http://artsandscience.usask.ca/college/>). As the largest college at the University of Saskatchewan, it is imperative that we engage in reconciliation in order to actively support our students to meet their goals.

The UGSO needs to develop a process to understand our individual and collective space and place, meaning making, knowledge production, decision making models, policy, and protocol development, as well as our personal and professional actions, assumptions and reactions.

Our mandate is to provide support to students through one to one and group academic coaching and advising. In order to be transparent in our practices as we assist students to choose majors, satisfy program requirements, develop strategies to improve grades, understand university policies and procedures, overcome personal barriers, initiate pre-career inquiries and identify career planning resources, we must consider processes, practices, and reflection that support reconciliation.

### SUCSESSES AND CHALLENGES

As a student services unit that serves a large student body, including services that support student success through the University Transition Program and Aboriginal Student Achievement Program, the unit's workday is robust. We serve on-campus and off-campus students, partners and communities. We also provide advising for potential students as well as students seeking second degrees from the College of Arts and Science. The staff serve on several committees that impact the student experience and the professional development of advisors across Canada. Some of these efforts can be seen in active participation in the University of Saskatchewan Advising Council, Wellness Committee, Student Forum, Student Leadership, Provost's Advisory Committee on Gender and Sexual Diversity, Advisors Association of Saskatchewan(AASK), NACADA's Canadian Interest Group, etc. Due to the workload and staff availability it has been a challenge to find the time and space to actively engage in a process that actively supports reconciliation.

The good news is that the staff are fully committed to participating in reconciliation efforts. We have prioritized these activities and believe the impact of this will be institutional, if not Canada-wide. The UGSO's staff are in leadership activities locally, provincially and nationally. As we continue to undertake leadership roles within Canada's student service post secondary arenas, it is imperative that we use our positions to bring reconciliation to the forefront of higher education's discourse, planning, and actions.

### HOW IT BUILDS RECONCILIATION

In order to build reconciliation we need to be open to understanding our space, place, meaning making ,and knowledge production. The staff attend bi-weekly one-hour sessions that are designed to provide education, reflexive practice and ally action in a variety of areas, including cultural awareness, cultural sensitivity, cultural competence, cultural safety and critical self reflective practices.

As we support each other to understand our origins, and our connections to a colonized history, we can begin to be self reflective about our belief systems, values and world views.

We are taking our role with respect to Indigenization and the calls to action of the TRC seriously. We are champions of equity and we acknowledge our position to affect change. Furthermore, as a student-facing unit, we acknowledge the need to develop processes, protocols and procedures that are informed, reflective and equitable for all stakeholders engaged in higher education.

**These processes can guide us to a conscious understanding of our position within our individual and communal lives, including our position within the Academy.**

### CONTACT

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