

Indigenization of Graduate Studies Programs

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Winnipeg is home to one of the largest urban Indigenous populations in Canada. Consequently, the University of Winnipeg has been involved in efforts of “Indigenization”. Indigenization of the academy, as defined by the University, in part, refers to building an institution that seeks to determine effective ways to be more inclusive of Indigenous peoples, perspectives and knowledge in every aspect of academia. The goal of Indigenization at the University of Winnipeg precedes the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s (TRC) 2015 Calls to Action. This goal has been strategized for undergraduate students through the implementation of the Indigenous Course Requirement (ICR) in the Fall of 2016. The University has thus made it part of its mandate to support incoming students with baseline knowledge about Indigenous peoples and culture.

A strategy has yet to be put in place to address Indigenization at the graduate level. This study sought to identify potential strategies that could be implemented to engage and include graduate students in the process of Indigenization. The research was conducted through a series of semi-structured interviews with representatives from most of the graduate studies programs offered at the University consisting mainly of faculty members and one student. The interviews provided a historical context of efforts and processes of academic Indigenization, examined different understandings of Indigenization among the different graduate programs, acknowledged the structural challenges of the academy and communication between programs, and uncovered potential strategies for graduate level engagement. The findings focus on three emerging concepts: a lack of clarity of the term of “Indigenization”, suggestions for Indigenous-specific cultural workshops, and a lack of communication regarding strategies and practices between departments. Finally, this study presents recommendations for future policy and strategies for Indigenization at the graduate level.

Indigenization may be a point of contention which requires internal and strategic confrontation within academia. Overall, this research sought to open a discourse regarding the integration of Indigenization at the graduate level within different departments and programs. The research did nonetheless reveal the University’s current practices and what participants anticipate for the University’s future in terms of Indigenization strategies. More importantly, what has been emphasized throughout the research is that the process of Indigenization entails a transformation and shift in values within academia.