

Indigenizing Capilano University

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First Nations peoples in Canada face barriers to access of higher education, including “systematic barriers and inequities, and....barriers to social inclusion (e.g., discrimination, racism, etc.)” (Pidgeon 2016, p. 77). These barriers stem from a history of colonization which echoes through contemporary structures and continues to negatively affect Canada’s indigenous population today. In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) presented 94 *Calls to Action*, to “redress the legacy of residential schools and advance the process of Canadian reconciliation” (p. 1). These *Calls to Action*, if answered, provide for the recognition, welfare, and success of First Nations peoples in Canada. Among the recommendations, the TRC (2015) calls upon educational structures, and post-secondary institutions specifically, to provide for the “improving education attainment levels and success rates” of First Nations peoples (p. 2). Many Canadian universities are beginning to answer this call. Through the Indigenization of their institutions, post-secondary schools are slowly but surely removing the barriers present in the Canadian educational structure. Indigenization is the process of change where universities “become places where the values, principles, and modes of organization and behaviour of [aboriginal] people are respected in, and...integrated into, the larger system of structures and processes that make up the university itself” (Abbott Mihesuah & Cavender Wilson, 2004, p. 88). Indigenization takes many forms, including but not limited to: the implementation of Indigenous advisory councils; more executive positions being held by Indigenous peoples; university-wide graduation credit requirements in Indigenous studies; and “incorporation of Indigenous case studies in course readings and assignments” (Macdonald, 2018).

It is the responsibility of the Canadian institution to recognize the history of colonization and make efforts towards reconciliation through acknowledgement, respect, prioritization, access, and inclusion. The efforts by Canadian post-secondary institutions “to weave Indigenous

peoples, cultures and knowledge into the fabric of their campuses” has been an ongoing process since the 1970s and is visible in the history of Capilano University (Macdonald, 2018). Capilano University operates within the traditional and unceded territories of the Lil’wat, Musqueam, Sechelt, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations, and “continues to prioritize Indigenous learning in response to Truth and Reconciliation *Calls to Action* and in line with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People” (Capilano University’s, 2018, p.2). Savjord (2018) notes that “Aboriginal identity is becoming essential and embedded as Capilano University identity” (Aboriginal Service, 2018, p. 3). This paper will explore the history and ongoing process of Indigenization at Capilano University to establish current efforts as a developing response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s *call*.

Capilano University’s acknowledgement for surrounding First Nations communities is first evidenced in the institution’s initial brand. In July 1971, the Lions Gate Times newspaper published an article about the unveiling of the first Capilano College logo (“David Watson,” 1971). It is explained that the College had been in search of a logo that reflected the institution as “a place of learning, with an [indigenous] name [Capilano] and located by the sea” (“David Watson,” 1971). The resulting logo had distinct First Nations motifs, incorporating “feather formations from the [First Nations] Thunderbird design” (“David Watson,” 1971). Budelmann, Kim, and Wozniak (2010) find that logos “symbolically represent an idea or metaphor...related to an organization’s mission” (p.7). Through its First Nations motif logo, the College, now University, has acknowledged and incorporated First Nations truths into the *organization’s mission* from the very beginning. The University has since rebranded but continues to “honour the Capilano name” and strives to be “both inclusive and meaningful for all” (“Our Brand,” n.d.).

Evidence of developing efforts towards inclusion, prioritization, and access for First

Nations students at Capilano University were visible in the 1980s. On November 19<sup>th</sup>, 1982, Capilano College held a graduation ceremony with a “distinctive [First Nations] flair” for students in the “Band Social Service Worker Program” (*Native Students*, 1982). In this program, First Nations students “travelled from their homes to the College monthly...[and] attended...courses in the Principles and Practices of Social Service Work, Psychology, Sociology, and English Composition” (*Native Students*, 1982). This program recognized the systematic barriers faced by First Nations learners and provided a specialized space for higher educational attainment. By promoting the overall success of First Nations communities through higher education, this program predates the TRC (2015) *Calls to Action* by over 30 years.

Jumping ahead, in the 2004-2005 academic year, Capilano College implemented “Chinook” diploma programs (later renamed “Ch’nook”) to “reflect the needs of First Nations students in a post-secondary setting” (*Capilano College*, 2004, p. 225). In the 2006-2007 academic year, an 8-month ladder program called the “Chinook Foundation Program” was implemented which provided aboriginal learners with the necessary skills to both access and succeed in the “Chinook” diploma programs (*Capilano College*, 2006, p. 243). These programs are now defunct but have been replaced by various and many programs providing for First Nations student success at the University. Through the creation and implementation of these programs, it is evident that First Nations student success has been an ongoing priority at Capilano University over 10 years before the TRC’s (2015) *call*.

Capilano University’s First Nations Linguistics Programs also predate the TRC (2015) *Calls to Action*, especially the call for “post-secondary institutions to create university and college degree and diploma programs in Aboriginal languages” (p. 2). In the 2009-2010 academic year, Capilano University introduced the “Certificate in the Squamish Language and

Culture Program” (now the “Squamish Nation Language and Culture Certificate”) (*Capilano University*, 2009, p. 172). The University also offers the “Lil’wat Language and Culture Certificate” (established in 2013-2014), and the “Sechelt Nation Language and Certificate” (established in 2014-2015) (*Capilano University*, 2013, p. 156; *Capilano University*, 2014, p. 157). These programs have and continue to contribute “significantly to revitalization of language and culture and related pride and personal enrichment” for First Nations individuals and communities (Aboriginal Service Plan, 2018, p.6). The Aboriginal Service Plan (2016) notes:

When programming is developed in collaboration with a specific Band, as has been done with our language and culture programs, there is an agreement that all materials fully respect and reference the community’s protocols and ownership (p. 12).

As mentioned, these programs, which began in 2009, predate the TRC’s (2015) call for post-secondary Indigenous language certification (p. 2). As well, these programs have and continue to answer the TRC’s (2015) call for recognition of “Aboriginal languages [as] a fundamental and valued element of Canadian culture and society, and there is an urgency to preserve them” (p. 2).

In September 2013, under the guidance of Indigenous Faculty Advisor David Kirk, Capilano University celebrated its first Truth and Reconciliation Week (*Minutes: Senate*, 2013, p. 4). In 2013, the Government of British Columbia “proclaimed that September 16-22, 2013 shall be known as Reconciliation Week,” to acknowledge “the injustices and harm experienced by the survivors of Indian Residential Schools, the affected families and the need for continued healing” (“Reconciliation Week,” 2013). At Capilano University, Truth and Reconciliation Week takes form in the various events and activities held at the campus which seek to promote awareness and healing. These events include, but are not limited to, a campus-wide moment of reflection, drum circles, relevant documentary screenings, and Elder walks about campus (*Truth*

*and Reconciliation*, 2018). Capilano University's annual Truth and Reconciliation Week has and continues to answer the TRC's (2015) call for "building student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect" (p. 7). As well, the University's establishment of an annual week of recognition can be recognized as answering the TRC's (2015) call to establish "a National Day for Truth and Reconciliation to honour Survivors, their families, and communities, and ensure that public commemoration of the history and legacy of residential schools remains a vital component of the reconciliation process" (p. 9).

In 2013, the University also opened the Kéxwusm-áyakn Student Centre, "a safe and supportive space for Indigenous students" (*Capilano University*, 2013, p. 38; "Kéxwusm-áyakn Student," n.d.). This space provides Indigenous students with "useful information and resources," "cultural workshops," "contact with in-residence Elders," and other amenities to support First Nations student success ("Kéxwusm-áyakn Student," n.d.). By creating this space, Capilano University answers the TRC's (2015) call for "developing culturally appropriate curricula" and provides for the "improving education attainment levels and success rates" of First Nations learners (p.2).

In May 2016, "in very close consultation with the Sechelt Nation," the University renamed the Sechelt campus "kálax-ay" (*Aboriginal Service*, 2018, p. 3). This name was "chosen by the Sechelt (shíshálh) Nation elders" and "translates to ocean spray bush or ironwood in English" (Wood, 2016). Both the process and result of this renaming reflect aspects of the TRC's (2015) *Calls to Action*, including the call "to reclaim names" (p.2).

In December 2016, with the "thoughtful input from First Nations student representatives, advisors and Elders," Capilano University launched an "award-winning" re-branding of the institution ("Our Brand," n.d.). This re-branding includes a logo featuring "elements [that] are

representative of traditional Coast Salish art fused with modern and abstract treatment” (“Our Brand,” n.d.). Echoing Capilano University’s first brand identity in 1971, this re-branding presents First Nations culture and communities as integral to the institution. The process and result of this re-branding are in line with the TRC’s (2015) call for “Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists to undertake collaborative projects and produce works that contribute to the reconciliation process” (p. 9).

Capilano University continues to answer the TRC’s (2015) call by upholding “a commitment to continuous improvement and systematic change in support of Aboriginal learners and their communities” (*Aboriginal Service*, 2018, p. 4). In 2018, ongoing Indigenization efforts are visible in many of Capilano University’s programs, policies, and initiatives. Some of these established programs and policies include the First Nations Student Services, the Aboriginal Learner Success Strategy, University Study Skills for Aboriginal Learners workshops, University One for Aboriginal Learners, and the Elders-in-residence program (*Aboriginal Service*, 2018). Further efforts are recognized in the University’s First Nations Advisory Council, the Indigenizing the Academy Committee, and plans to implement a President’s Task Force on Aboriginal Education (*Aboriginal Service*, 2018). The University offers many First Nations-focus credit courses available to all students, such as Art History 103: First Nations Art of the Northwest Coast, Anthropology 206: First Nations of British Columbia, History 209: History of Aboriginal Peoples in Canada, and Law 430: Aboriginal Law (“Find a Program,” n.d.). The University also offers various First Nations-focus accreditations including the Linguistics Programs certificates, and the Indigenous Independent Digital Filmmaking Diploma. As of 2018, the University has installed a “permanent First Nations guest at Senate” and committed to hiring “a community engagement officer and a dedicated Aboriginal recruitment staff person”

(*Aboriginal Service*, 2018, p.7). The University continues to develop further programs, policies, and initiatives to ensure First Nations student success now and in the future.

It is recognized, that of foremost importance to the prosperity of Indigenous peoples is “the right of Indigenous peoples to determine their own economic, social, and cultural development” (Harper & Thompson, 2017, p. 41). Pidgeon (2016) notes that “in an Indigenized institution, Indigenous peoples remain empowered in their self-determination and cultural integrity” (p. 77). Capilano University’s history of Indigenization has been visible in the institution’s identity for half a century. For decades, the University has made various efforts towards access and inclusion for Aboriginal learners, including specialized programs and certifications. In recent years, Indigenization efforts have been prioritized and are integral to the Capilano University framework. Through ongoing Indigenization efforts, Capilano University begins to answer the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s *Calls to Action*, establishing their acknowledgement of and respect for First Nations individuals and communities through prioritization, access, and inclusion.



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