



Annual Report: Dean's Advisory Committee on Indigenous Research Teaching and Learning, 2022-2023

Refocussing on our mandate

The Dean's Advisory Committee on Indigenous Research Teaching and Learning (IRTL) was established in 2018 to build on the final recommendations of the [Decanal Working Group on Indigenous Teaching and Learning](#) (ITL Report) to *Truth and Reconciliation* within the Faculty of Arts & Science (A&S). These commitments are further affirmed in Ch. 3 of [Arts & Science 2020-2025 Academic Plan, Leveraging our Strengths](#) (AP).

Over the past year-and-a-half, from September 2022-December 2023, the committee has clarified and acted on the terms and intent of its broad mandate in three overlapping stages:

1) September 2022 – September 2023

We developed tools to clarify our purpose and track our progress towards the fulfillment of the *20 Calls to Action (CtAs)*, improving our ability to both measure our successes and identify areas requiring more focus and support. These tools include our [Terms of Reference](#) and the [IRTL Tracker](#).

2) January 2022 – Present

We continued to foster connections with key divisional offices whose administrative portfolios align with the CtAs and engaged in conversations about embedding the work of the IRTL into various Vice-Decanal Portfolios, shifting emphasis from “the work” to “our work”. This approach necessitated more regular conversations and presentations to the faculty leadership table and concomitant discussions at IRTL committee meetings with Vice-Deans, A&S Directors and Executive Directors, and the Faculty Registrar.

3) March 2022 – Present

We struck strategic working groups and supported strategic engagements with our members, supporters, and Indigenous students to hone key areas of focus, and gain key insights and ideas for program transformations, recruitment needs, Indigenous student experience, and curricular matters to name a few. These engagements and working groups include:

- Program consultations with the Office of Experiential Learning and Outreach Support (ELOS; July – December 2023).
- The Covid-19 Impacts on Indigenous Students Working Group (February – December 2023; See Appendix I).
- The Indigenous Curriculum Review Working Group (starts in January 2024).
- The Indigenous Research Ethics Webinars Working Group (implementation from August 2023 – present)
- As needed consultations on infrastructure development and research funding.

Our renewed sense of clarity and connection to the work of various administrative offices is beginning to yield results. We see indications that our collaboration has increased divisional capacity to engage in matters related to Indigenous research, teaching, and learning with care, awareness, and competence. Though there is still much work to be done, we have gained significant momentum in pursuit of necessary institutional transformations that will continue to develop in 2024 – 2025.

Highlights

Data & Recruitment

Identity-based data is critical to measuring progress with respect to Indigenous student, staff, and faculty recruitment (CtA #8, 14). With the support of the A&S Faculty Registrar and EDI Director, the IRTL collects, discusses, & analyzes available data annually, as part of regular committee business. The data informs many areas of our work, and tells a story of Indigenous presence, absence, and experiences at A&S. Where there are gaps in our knowledge, additional information has been sought, through working groups and supplementary consultations.

Experiential Learning

A 2022 analysis of A&S experiential learning (EL) programs showed that applications related to Indigenous EL were limited. With the Committee's guidance, ELOS undertook a consultation process to inform the redesign of these programs with the goal of more closely aligning them with intended program outcomes and IRTL priorities (CtA #16, 17). This process was seen as exemplary by IRTL members. The resultant program framework closely incorporates their feedback and includes increased funding, enhanced program supports and the de-coupling of "Indigenous" and "international" within the funding envelope for improved clarity and ease of communication.

Curriculum

Calls to Action related to curriculum (#11, 12, 16, 17, & 19) require specific attention due to their breadth and complexity. With the support of faculty leadership, the IRTL established an Indigenous Curriculum Working Group that will develop a strategy to effect curricular matters, especially in relation to curricular review. This will help ensure that "course content concerning Indigenous peoples reflects best practices and contemporary scholarship" (ITL Report, 2017). The cross disciplinary working group will meet from January – December 2024.

Indigenous Languages

In 2022 the IRTL worked with the Indigenous Language Revitalization Team (CIS & Linguistics) to identify ways to support faculty members who work in Indigenous language revitalization at A&S and who continue to teach and conduct research in their own communities and nations. These faculty members are essential to enhancing institutional capacity to meaningfully support community-led Indigenous language revitalization efforts (CtA #10). As such, the Dean's Office approved the creation of an Indigenous Languages Coordinator (FTE) who will coordinate the Team's activities, support partnership development, and assist with grant writing.

Challenges

The committee has found that certain issues arise with some frequency in our discussions. These persistent challenges are barriers to achieving our strategic goals and are structural, systemic, and jurisdictional in nature and are difficult for the committee to effect without additional support.

These include:

- Slow progress and infrequent communication regarding the development of dedicated Indigenous infrastructure that would be the new home for First Nations House, the Centre for Indigenous Studies, and the Office of Indigenous Initiatives (CtA #2).

- A high percentage of Indigenous faculty are Teaching Stream or pre-tenure as opposed to fully tenured faculty, including all Indigenous languages faculty (teaching stream). This has a rippling effect, as it impacts our ability to recruit and support Indigenous students, especially graduate students, attract and retain Indigenous faculty, and build our reputation in Indigenous research.
- Indigenous student recruitment is institutionally complex. Although the [9 Communities Tuition Initiative](#) is a welcome development, the IRTL is seeking a more comprehensive and broadly strategic approach to Indigenous student recruitment, with the widest array of diversified and equity-aligned recruitment supports as possible.

We have requested additional divisional support to address these challenges at A&S and in collaboration with the University.

Next

In the coming year, we anticipate that the work of the IRTL will include the following activities and initiatives:

1) Communication

We have heard that at A&S, the work of the IRTL is not widely known. In the coming year, and beginning with the distribution of this report, we plan on improving our outreach, communication, and web-presence. A public-facing dashboard is being considered as well as more regularized points of connection with our academic community.

2) Supporting ELOS Rollout

As our members are drawn from across the division and sit at various leadership tables, the

IRTL functions as a source of information related to Indigenous research, teaching, and learning at A&S. We have agreed to use our platform to support awareness and uptake of revised Indigenous EL programs by promoting these opportunities to our community/(ies), teams, and departments.

3) Indigenous Research Ethics

As two major IRTL initiatives have recently wrapped (Covid-19 Working Group, ELOS Consultations), focus may now be given to implementing the Committee's vision for the Indigenous Research Ethics Webinars. This will be a series of panel discussions that will highlight Indigenous research exemplars at A&S, consider the history of research in relation to Indigenous communities, and demonstrate what ethical engagement with Indigenous peoples and communities looks and feels like.

4) Follow-up to the Covid-19 Report

Recommendations from *Making a Softer Path, Impacts of Covid-19 on Indigenous Students* report align with our CtAs and give additional insight into the manner in which they might be fulfilled (see Appendix). Of particular note, our findings indicate that Indigenous graduate students are in need of additional supports. This will likely be a key area of focus in the coming year.

Contact Us

The IRTL welcomes your questions and feedback at: IRTL@utoronto.ca

APPENDIX

Sharing Circles Report: Impacts of Covid-19 on Indigenous Undergraduate and Graduate Students, “Creating a Softer Path”: Areas for Action

	Area for Action	Alignment with <i>ITL Calls to Action</i>
1.	Advance findings of this report to IRTLC, Dean Melanie Woodin and the Faculty Management Table, SGS, VP-S, CPAD	N/A
2.	Work with the Vice Dean Graduate Studies, Graduate Chairs, and Dean of the School of Graduate Studies to develop a strategy related to Indigenous graduate students with the goals of improving their experiences at A&S, supporting them in their chosen careers, and hiring more tenure-stream Indigenous faculty members.	#7 – Peer mentorship #8 – Student recruitment #14 – Faculty Recruitment #18 – Training for staff
3.	Work with the Principals and Deans of Colleges to advance a policy that will ensure Indigenous students have priority access to spaces in residence should they need them, even if they have deferred.	#8 – Student recruitment
4.	Collaborate with First Nations House, Colleges, and the OFR to help ensure that Indigenous undergraduate students are aware of financial, academic, registrarial, and mental health supports available to them through FNH, the OFR, and their colleges.	#6 – Developing awareness of “on-campus services” #8 – Student recruitment
5.	Ensure that Indigenous Elders are accounted for in emergency planning, even if they are working on a part-time or casual basis – their counsel is essential to our work.	#9 – Access to Elders & Support Networks
6.	Request a meeting with FNH and OFR to develop a resource list and a purchasing program for students that will help them access low-cost, ergonomic, office furniture.	#6 – Developing awareness of “on-campus services”