

Experiences in a Culturally Responsive Student Affairs: An Indigenization Journey

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We write this as non-Indigenous student affairs professionals who are asking questions as well as trying to understand how Indigenization fits into our work with all students.

There's been a lot going on recently around indigenization and decolonization of curriculum and many institutions are developing and implementing an indigenization strategy, including ours. For us, as an immigrant and White Canadian, the question still remains, "How do we actually implement indigenization in student affairs and our day-to-day work?" Does just being aware of the calls to action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission as well as engaging in/supporting the events put up by our Indigenous centres cover all we have to do for the indigenization journey?

We took the 2019 CACUSS Conference as a starting point to challenge our thinking (a key Bow Valley College strategic priority) on what indigenizing co-curricular and student affairs could look like. This piece includes some of our findings as we learned more about the indigenous ways of learning. We dare to state that student affairs work in many institutions offers many examples of indigenization just by the very nature of the work we do as student affairs professionals. According to the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (n.d.) ... ("Sources of Indigenous Knowledge"), the characteristics of Indigenous knowledge include:

- a. Indigenous knowledge is personal
- b. Indigenous knowledge is orally transmitted
- c. Indigenous knowledge is experiential
- d. Indigenous knowledge is holistic
- e. Indigenous knowledge is narrative

Similarities between the Indigenous Ways of Knowing and student affairs (SA) work can be seen in the following philosophies, which guide our work:

1. The Student Personnel Point of View (Williamson et al., 1949, p. 3), one of the foremost philosophies of the student affairs profession, views student development from a holistic view and the work of SA professionals to include improvement of instruction; emphasized collaboration with faculty, parents, and other constituencies. We say this is very much in line with the Indigenous ways of knowledge
2. Universal Design for Learning (UDL), a way of thinking about teaching and learning to give all students an equal opportunity to succeed and offers flexibility in accessing, engaging, and demonstrating learning creates pathways for supporting student success, which is at the core of the work done by student affairs professionals. This aligns with the Indigenous ways of teaching and learning through spirituality and making connections between morals, values, and intellect. It represents the holistic view of a person who cannot be separated from their emotions, culture, various skills, etc.

At CACUSS 2019, Arlayna shared her experience of facilitating student workshops based on Bonnie Watts' book *True Directions - Living Your Sacred Instructions, Volume 1*. These workshops are interactive experiences combining the Medicine Wheel and True Colors Personality Assessment (based on the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator). True Directions is intended to help people locate, clarify, reaffirm, and celebrate their Sacred Instructions to live life to its fullest potential. Having the experience of working in True Directions allowed Arlayna to work with a western assessment tool that incorporated elements of Indigenous culture. An Indigenous writer (Bonnie Watts) adapted the material, and Arlayna worked with representatives from Bow

Valley College's Iniikokaan Centre (Noella Wells & Gerald Ratt) for the implementation of the workshop. This partnership created a workshop with two viewpoints complementing and coexisting in one experience. Other experiences we shared at the presentation include:

- The use of symbols to create inclusion and encourage learner engagement
- Sharing circles and panels for workshops and trainings
- Use of medicine wheel on intake forms for at-risk learners
- Learning a new Blackfoot word weekly through the student services weekly newsletter

Co-presenting on this topic during CACUSS 2019 was exciting. It was, as well, pleasing to hear some of the experiences of the conference participants in relation to the programming for their campuses. It is interesting to note that we seemed to be at the same stage, learning to move forward in our culturally responsive daily practice to meet the needs of our learners.

The Indigenous worldview is in line with the holistic view of the learner and universal design for learning. As we experiment and create programming that integrates Indigenous ways of knowing, we will only continue to enrich the student experience and support the inclusive vision of post-secondary education in Canada.

References

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