

Summary Report of Campus Consultations: Indigenization and Decolonization

Introduction

Between February and October 2022, the campus community engaged in a multi-phase consultation process to help shape the future directions and strategic priorities of the University. Initial consultation involved integrated broad-based input from members of the campus community, followed by deeper themed discussions. Input from rights-bearing stakeholders and members of equity-deserving groups was a priority in the consultation strategy and a systematic approach was taken to ensure honest, open discussions with diverse voices.

Consultations with Indigenous communities both on and off campus were identified early in the strategic planning process as requiring additional time for trust and relationship building. A process of listening to and learning from Indigenous communities has begun through the leadership of the Senior Advisor to the President on Indigenous Relations and Outreach. Dedicated Indigenous consultations using informed and appropriate methods will extend into 2023 and will lead to the development of an institutional Indigenous Strategic Plan.

The data summary that follows highlights findings from a collection of consultation activities with the campus community where responses regarding Indigenization and decolonization emerged, some of which included broad questions about the University and others that involved deeper discussions on key strategic pillars of the institution. It is important to acknowledge the critical importance of the ongoing work of relationship building and consultation in ensuring that the University's planning regarding Truth and Reconciliation be truly and consistently guided by the voices of Indigenous rights-bearing stakeholders.

Aspire Survey

The campus community was invited to participate in the Aspire online survey between February and March 2022 as the first step in the strategic planning consultation process. The purpose of the survey was to gather perceptions of where the University of Windsor should be and how the University can best get there. More than 2,000 respondents accessed the survey, with 1,534 complete and usable responses. The questions at this stage of consultation were general in nature with the intention to build on identified key topics in later discussions.

As part of the Aspire survey, respondents were asked: **What do you consider three (or up to three) strengths of the University?** and **What do you consider three (or up to three) key challenges that the University needs to focus on over the next five years?**

A set of themes were developed to organize and group responses, however, contextual analysis of the data was limited as single words or short phrases were provided.

A key finding from this survey data was that faculty, staff and student respondents most often identified equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) as both a strength of the University ($n = 420$) and as a key challenge for the University to focus on ($n = 284$). The EDI data report summarizes these findings in more depth.

Captured within the EDI strengths and challenges data were comments regarding Indigenization and decolonization (strengths, $n = 5$; challenges, $n = 24$). Survey respondents attributed strengths to the University's acknowledgement of the Indigenous community and traditional territory, as well as Indigenous community connections on campus. Respondents also valued examples of Indigenous initiatives on campus, including the establishment of Indigenous Law curriculum and the appointment of the Senior Advisor to the President on Indigenous Relations and Outreach.

When asked about key challenges for the University to focus on, survey respondents stated that the University must continue work on dismantling anti-Indigenous racism, continue efforts toward decolonization, and be more vocal and action-oriented on Indigenous rights. Respondents also stated that the University should focus on enhancing a sense of belonging on campus by integrating Indigenization and anti-racism in coherent and real ways. Establishing more dedicated Indigenous space and Indigenizing spaces on campus, and more inclusive events with representation from Indigenous communities were also identified as key areas of focus. Respondents suggested the University focus on hiring more Indigenous scholars, developing Indigenous courses, content and curriculum in all programs, and accommodating Indigenous students and their ways of learning and knowing. They also expressed the need for more partnerships with local Indigenous communities, stating that the University must focus on relationship building and engagement with Indigenous partners and scholars.

As part of the Aspire survey, respondents were asked: **What specific change do you see as most needed at the University?** A total of 24 responses to this question centred around Indigenization and decolonization. Respondents stated that they wish to see systematic cultural change in terms of how anti-Indigenous racism, anti-Black racism, and other forms of racism are handled on campus; improved representation of Indigenous people among faculty, staff and students; development of Indigenous programs, courses and content; more Indigenous and Indigenized spaces on campus; more support and opportunity for Indigenous students; required EDID training for employees; and an Indigenization Strategic Plan with commitment to funding initiatives and securing staff.

It should be noted this data does not thoroughly capture the complex nature of interpreting questions, nor does it capture the entirety of the on-campus points of view, however, this data provided a starting point for later discussions.

Aspire Café Conversations

In March and April 2022, students, staff and faculty were invited to attend Aspire Café Conversation events across campus. The events involved interactive table discussions targeted at key topics identified through the Aspire survey. More than 650 students and nearly 200 staff and faculty attended the events. The Café Conversations aimed to gather participants' input on key questions intended to shape future directions and strategic priorities of the institution.

As part of the conversation on “an increasingly equitable, just and welcoming campus culture,” students were asked: **Where should the University focus its efforts first to make the campus more equitable for all students?** and staff and faculty were asked: **How can the University of Windsor foster a sense of welcoming and inclusion on our campus?** A set of themes were developed to organize and group responses.

EDI emerged as a key theme for student ($n = 58$) and staff and faculty ($n = 65$) respondents. Students described EDI and belonging as a focus for the University, particularly through the recruitment of a culturally diverse student body, faculty, and staff; equal opportunity for students across departments; and addressing the needs of marginalized groups. Staff and faculty frequently expressed that the University should better address EDI and sense of belonging issues on campus. Comments included hiring diverse faculty and staff, particularly those in leadership roles; calling out and punishing acts of racism, sexism, and bias and modeling appropriate behaviour; equitable opportunities, space and time for all voices to be heard; and mandatory EDID training.

Responses regarding Indigenization and decolonization emerged in discussions on teaching and learning, research and creative activity, and community engagement. As part of the conversation on enhancing teaching and learning, students, staff and faculty communicated that a key change that the University should make so that everyone feels like they belong is Indigenizing and decolonizing curriculum, courses, content, campus infrastructure and policies. Faculty and staff identified Indigenous knowledge and community partnerships as opportunities for the University to enhance excellence in research, and stated that the University can make a difference in the region by building relationships with Indigenous communities; forming Indigenous partnerships on environmental initiatives and social issues; and building Indigenous community spaces both on and off campus reflecting Indigenous principles and values.

When asked about the biggest and most impactful change that the University can make by 2027, responses included: more Indigenous representation in faculty, staff and students; Indigenous language on signage; and courses incorporating Indigenous principles, values and methodology.

Focus Group Discussions

Between June and August 2022, faculty and staff were invited to participate in focus group discussions focused on Teaching and Learning; Research and Creative Activity; Community

Engagement; Campus Climate; Equity, Diversity and Inclusion; and Anti-Racism.

The focus group sessions were 3 hours in length, beginning with a presentation on the institution's history, current initiatives and frameworks, and aspiration for change moving forward. The sessions intended to operate in conjunction with an overall effort to pursue inclusive practice through the planning process – a process that was a learning experience for everyone. A diverse group of facilitators guided the discussion using best practice ORID methodology. The ORID method breaks complicated conversations into specific segments (Objective, Reflective, Interpretive and Decisional) and allows participants to engage key conversation components.

Across the focus group consultations were conversations surrounding Indigenization and decolonization. In discussions on high quality, effective teaching and learning, many participants communicated the need for **broader curriculum development** of programs and courses focused on Indigenous studies and knowledge and **curriculum decolonization** by incorporating Indigenous ways of learning. Participants also expressed that the University should **recognize Indigenous language** and **support Indigenous language revitalization**.

In discussions regarding bold, impactful and relevant research, scholarship and creative activity, participants expressed that there must be **recognition and value of Indigenous ways of thinking and knowing** and support for **Indigenous knowledge creation and mobilization**. Participants also communicated that the University should **value Indigenous methodologies** like that of traditional Western knowledge, decolonize thinking and research for greater impact on surrounding communities, and **centralize resources** for Indigenous research.

To create local and global impact through engagement with communities, participants discussed the need for ongoing consultations with Indigenous communities and **relationship building**, as well as **partnerships with local Indigenous communities and organizations**. Participants also expressed the University should better **engage the Indigenous alumni** community.

In conversations regarding improving campus climate, increasing EDI, and dismantling racism, participants communicated that the University has potential to make campus a safe space both in culture and physical space. Participants acknowledged that a critical mass is needed to **shift the campus culture**, including those in positions of power and others who traditionally benefit from oppression; the work of Indigenization and anti-colonization should not only fall on the shoulders of “in-group” people. Participants communicated the need for **diversification in hiring**, and extensive ongoing **training** for staff, faculty, and students, as well as for senior leadership and governing bodies, regarding anti-Indigenous racism and cultural safety. Participants also discussed the need for more inclusive and welcoming space on campus through dedicated **Indigenous space and through the Indigenizing of spaces**.

External Community Consultations

Between June and September 2022, alumni, industry partners, community leaders, and residents of Windsor-Essex were asked to participate in consultation activities including surveys, group discussions, listening events and community pop-ups. Consultation with the external community involved engagement from more than 700 alumni, partners and residents and a total of 28 hours spent in the community.

Respondents of the Alumni survey expressed that a key change that the University should focus on from now until the next strategic plan in 2027 is welcoming and reflecting Indigeneity on campus, building better connections with the arts and Indigenous studies, and broadening outreach and presence in the local, national, Indigenous, and international community as an educational venue. Respondents also noted agricultural research as opportunity for the Windsor-Essex region in which the University can play a role by tapping into the knowledge of our Indigenous community regarding the environment and best practices.

Consultations with community partners, leaders and residents expressed the desire for the University to play a more critical role in advocacy for EDI, anti-racism, and accessibility in the broader Windsor-Essex community. Respondents noted the importance of building relationships and partnerships with diverse organizations and groups in the community, as well as helping to address poverty, housing, educational attainment, and transit issues.

Next Steps

Over the past several months, the campus community have engaged in thoughtful discussions on future directions and strategic priorities for the institution. Across consultation activities, there was consensus among the campus community that Indigenization and decolonization must be prioritized to continue the journey toward Truth and Reconciliation. These conversations have led to the identification of several tactical actions for the University to take in order to reach its full potential, and have led to the identification of promise areas for future institutional initiatives, many of which focus on the potential for the University to build on current work in order to foster inclusive, fair, and welcoming campus cultures and to become leaders in this work across all aspects of the University's mission and practice. These conversations will help shape the values and goals of the institution, as well as the operationalization of the strategic plan in the cascading strategies and an eventual institutional Indigenization Strategic Plan.