McMaster Indigenous Graduate Student Group
Forward With Integrity Project Report
FINAL DRAFT
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MCMASTER INDIGENOUS GRADUATE STUDENT (MIGS) BACKGROUND

But there are endemic issues about governments and participation here in Canada. It's not as if people don't care, it's just not on the radar. And whose job is it to put it on the radar? The university. So we, as academics, we as an institution, have the responsibility. We have to try harder to put that it the radar. There’s so much to do here in terms of filling in that link and my hope is that the momentum we’ve got going now will be sustained and McMaster can be the hub of indigenous research that I really think it can be.

In 2009, Indigenous graduate students and faculty supporters began meeting informally to discuss their research interests and support each other in the graduate school journey at McMaster University. Over time, the group identified themselves as the McMaster Indigenous Graduate Student (MIGS) group and began to organize more formally by articulating a terms of reference. Various structural issues that serve as barriers to educational advancement for both Indigenous undergraduate and graduate students at McMaster were identified. Members often identified challenges that they believed were mainly related to a clash of worldviews between Indigenous and Western ontological perspectives. For example: approval processes for student applications to the Research Ethics Board are often complex and challenging and require the student to validate Indigenous methodologies and theories; mentorship of graduate students is limited due to the small number of Indigenous faculty; also, due to the low numbers of Indigenous faculty, there are too few supervisors for Indigenous graduate students and their research; and those Indigenous supervisors who are on campus have so many competing demands for their time that this impacts their supervising availability.
Since 2009, a few key collaborative activities have been supported by resources from the President’s Office, the School of Graduate Studies, the Faculty of Social Sciences and the Indigenous Studies Program. All events have been attended by invited participants from Faculties of Social Science, Humanities, Health Science; School of Graduate Studies; Indigenous Studies Program; representatives from the ‘Forward with Integrity’ Initiative; various representatives from Indigenous committees/groups. Two events have been attended by President Patrick Deane.

**Collaborative Discussion Circle June 2012**

Representatives from various departments across campus – Indigenous Studies Program (ISP), Social Sciences, Humanities, School of Graduate Studies, Health Sciences, and the Aboriginal Health Science Student Support Office – were included in a cross-faculty dialogue towards planning future steps and collaboration. In June 2012, a collaborative “Discussion Circle” was held and many invited participants from the McMaster academic community were in attendance. The objectives of the Discussion Circle were:

1. To raise awareness among the McMaster academic community and other interested stakeholders regarding Indigenous graduate education issues and successes;

2. To achieve a preliminary inter-departmental common vision regarding graduate level education for Indigenous students at McMaster;

3. To explore mechanisms for establishing a cohesive approach to mentoring of Indigenous undergraduate students in transitioning to graduate level education.
Expected meeting outcomes included: the sharing of common issues and successes related to curriculum and innovative programming (e.g. pre-doctoral programs); development of broad-based recommendations in areas of student supports and sustainable resources; development of cohesive departmental collaboration; and preparing for future cohorts. At this meeting, President Patrick Deane endorsed the topic of Indigenous education as an important discussion that requires an ongoing focus. He specifically affirmed the need for identifying key personal, local and systemic barriers to education for Indigenous people to enable educational reform. A key outcome of the Discussion Circle was the formation of an Indigenous education “wish list” and nine key recommendations for moving forward.

**The “Wish List”**

1. That Indigenous students are equally represented in enrolment across programs.
2. That Indigenous peoples are equally represented on faculty and staff.
3. That Indigenous research and scholarship are encouraged and supported.
4. That Indigenous peoples are recognized as equal partners with McMaster in the development of Indigenous initiatives.
5. That Indigenous initiatives include ‘inter’ and ‘intra’ - university and international collaborations with Indigenous institutions, programs and centres.
6. That awareness regarding local Indigenous protocol be part of all faculty and staff orientation programs.
7. That McMaster faculty and administration recognize and respond to the diversity of Indigenous communities and arrange programs with them respectively.

**Nine Recommendations for Structural Change**
Recommendation #1: To put together a working group that will guide initiatives through a strategic, collaborative, cross-departmental and self-determining approach. Ideally, this approach will work towards addressing existing structural barriers to a culturally secure educational experience at McMaster for Indigenous graduate students.

Recommendation #2: Promote and facilitate an increased awareness and understanding among non-Indigenous faculty and decision-makers on campus of our shared history with respect to Indigenous peoples’ experience in Canada. In order to enhance the Indigenous student experience here at McMaster, we need to understand and respect the past as we look to the future.

Recommendation #3: Develop a culturally secure and innovative undergraduate and graduate education experience for Indigenous students. How can an institution cater to such diverse student needs without marginalizing them? We need culturally specific programs, curricula, and faculty. Cultural security is tied into the land, language, and history of their people. We must have Indigenous faculty to make this possible. Non-Indigenous faculty also have to be flexible and innovative.

Recommendation #4: Create a comprehensive and holistic strategy that will address barriers on multiple levels and move us to an innovative, inclusive and culturally secure Indigenous student experience.

Recommendation #5: Admission policies need to be changed to look at the whole person, not just grades earned. A working group is required to explore the question: “What does supporting Indigenous education at McMaster look like?” Meaningful systemic policy change is required to facilitate structural change to both programs and in an environment that will attract Indigenous students to McMaster.
Recommendation #6: Admission tools are needed and there is a need to elevate Aboriginal students and maximize their potential to ensure that they return and work within their communities. Indigenous students need to have the right to just be students and not be burdened by requests. Mentorship is needed to show people the ropes; connect students with mentors so that when they graduate they become mentors; CV building including conferences and papers; spiritual cultural content needed; listening as students speak.

Recommendation #7: There is a need for further Indigenous pre and post-doctoral fellowships across the university.

Recommendation #8: In reviewing requests to fill faculty positions, the Vice-President (Academic) should consider the potential of appointments of Indigenous scholars to address needs for graduate instruction in Indigenous studies, seeking agreement where appropriate that those hired will be dependently and regularly available for teaching in an approved program.

Recommendation #9: Lead the development of a bachelors program in Indigenous Studies, supported by funding for at least three additional faculty positions required for a vigorous course of study.

A ‘Collaborative Action Circle’ was held in November, 2012 and short-term activities were identified including an environmental scan/survey to determine the needs of students; administrators and Faculties; and agreement to strike a working group that would lead a collaborative process to develop a focused, strategic workplan regarding the structural barriers and learner needs. It was acknowledged that additional resources
would be required and that a part-time coordinator would be needed to minimize burden on graduate students.

**SPICES AND FWI**

MIGS was successful in receiving awards from two McMaster sponsored programs, ‘Student Proposals for Intellectual Community & Engaged Scholarship’ (SPICES), sponsored by the School of Graduate Studies; and the Forward with Integrity (FWI) initiative. Funding of $5,000 from each award enabled MIGS to undertake research towards more clearly identifying specific barriers to Indigenous graduate education and potential needs/opportunities for various departments at McMaster to participate in reform-based work. The Indigenous Graduate Studies Working Group (IGSWG) was established with members representing various departments across campus including student representatives, the President’s office, and faculty. (See appendices for list of IGSWG members.) A formal work plan was approved towards collaboratively addressing and/or implementing recommendations.

**METHODOLOGY**

As part of the research process, MIGS hired a part-time researcher to conduct, transcribe and analyze 15 qualitative, semi-structured, interviews with Indigenous and non-Indigenous faculty, administration and students. The researcher was an Indigenous graduate student at McMaster University and a member of MIGS. Prior to the interview process, ethical approval was obtained from McMaster University’s Research Ethics Board (MREB).
The objective of this research was to explore awareness and understanding of the Indigenous graduate student learning experience at McMaster, including existing structural barriers – such as departmental challenges with respect to recruiting and retaining Indigenous students – and potential collaborative and innovative solutions. The main focus however, was on identifying issues for Indigenous graduate students. However, as the principal investigator pointedly did not guide responses, interviewees predominantly spoke to Indigenous undergraduate experiences. The questions that were asked to participants focused on three key areas: environment, policy, and student support. (See attached interview guide.) Potential interviewees were identified based upon participants’ previous involvement with MIGS events including the Discussion Circle, Action Circle and a MIGS hosted student symposium.

Interviews were conducted over a period of three weeks either in a private office, McMaster’s campus or on the Six Nations reservation at a location of the interviewees’ choosing. The interviews were one-on-one and recorded by the [principal] investigator. They were later transcribed by a professional agency. Analysis of the transcripts was conducted by three Indigenous scholars who identified key themes and commonly documented structural barriers.

**FINDINGS**

Interviewees for this research come from a variety of backgrounds. Collectively, the departments represented by respondents include: English and Cultural Studies, Social Work, Sociology, Health Sciences, Arts and Science, Business, Clinical Epidemiology, Health Policy, Indigenous Studies, and Political Science. While requests to participate in this research were extended to Indigenous undergraduate and graduate students, no
students responded to the call for participation\(^1\). Nine respondents are non-Indigenous and five are identified Indigenous. While most participants from the Humanities, Social Sciences, and Health Sciences demonstrated medium to good awareness of specific barriers and needs related to the First Nations, Inuit and Métis (FNMI) education on campus, interviewees from outside of these departments (especially departments without connections to ISP) showed minimal awareness. It should be noted that many respondents acknowledged McMaster’s show of support over the last several years for Indigenous education and educators; however, this report aims to fill a knowledge gap about barriers and needs at the university and will therefore focus on issues related to improving the quality of Indigenous education.

**ENVIRONMENT**

Questions directed at participants focused on the relationship between McMaster’s learning environments and the quality of Indigenous education at the university. They included the following topic areas:

- FNMI student needs and possible barriers in meeting those needs
- The presence or absence of FNMI related matters in the working/learning environment
- Visual representation of FNMI presence on campus

\(^1\) It is unclear why there were no responses to the call from students. Possible explanations may be that there are so few Indigenous graduate students who self-identify. Another is the small number of current students; three MIGS students were involved in the two projects and therefore could not be interviewed. Other students may have been concerned about negative outcomes related to their participation. (i.e. privacy) Intense workloads that include both individual studies, teaching schedules, pressure to respond to numerous requests for Indigenous graduate student participation, (i.e. to collaborate in Indigenous-related projects, referrals to Indigenous - specific resources, individuals etc.) may also be considered as related factors.
- Structural connections between the university and FNMI communities (especially Six Nations)
- Unique pressures placed on FNMI faculty/staff
- The presence or absence of FNMI focused interdisciplinary work/collaboration in different departments
- The Indigenous Studies Program
- The presence or absence of FNMI issues, perspectives, and scholarship in curriculum
- The inclusion or exclusion of Indigenous Knowledge at McMaster; is IK validated by the university

The most reiterated barriers and needs identified in this section are:
- The fact that there are not enough Indigenous students in undergraduate or graduate studies
- There are not enough Indigenous faculty (to supervise, mentor, be a role model, create curriculum, reflect Indigenous presence, etc.)
- There needs to be more recognition and representation of Indigenous presence at McMaster (signage, safe cultural space, artwork, verbal acknowledgement of traditional territories, etc.)
- There needs to be more validation and incorporation of Indigenous Knowledge in all areas of the university (e.g. curriculum, research, etc.)

Participants who identified these barriers saw them as fundamentally related; low numbers of Indigenous faculty, minimal visual representation of Indigenous presence, and a lack of inclusion and validation of Indigenous Knowledge results in low numbers
of undergraduate and graduate Indigenous students. Additionally, a majority of interviewees identified that while there are in some instances aided admission processes for Indigenous students, there is a lack of support for them as Indigenous students once they have been admitted.

**Student Needs/Barriers**

Some of the most frequently identified barriers to FNMI student success include: funding, student supports, Indigenous curriculum, and Indigenous focused programs (undergraduate and graduate). A majority of participants identified a need for childcare at McMaster to support single, Indigenous mothers returning to university without adequate financial or human resources. Several participants from departments not structurally linked to Indigenous Studies expressed limited awareness and stated a need for faculty education on identifying and meeting FNMI student needs. The two most predominant barriers to student success evident in this section are funding and alienation. One participant cited the proposed new federal guidelines as potentially having a negative impact. One participant detailed how funding for FNMI students has become increasingly insufficient:

> Then the other big barrier, the financial part of it is the PSSSP [Post-Secondary Student Support Program] … the postsecondary funding that our students get is capped, of course. It’s not paying as much as it used to and I think … Six Nations cap at $600 living allowance a month. It hasn’t gone up in a number of years. Just so we can fund students. So it’s hard, it’s tough. And I know that’s like that for pretty much every First Nation.

Relatedly, the misconception that FNMI students do not have to pay for their own tuition is also problematic.

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2 As part of the lack of awareness of FNMI student needs, these participants identified the lack of a self-ID process as a contributing factor.
Several faculty report that intimidating classroom environments and Euro-centric curriculum cause some FNMI students to withdraw from attending or participating in class; not knowing how to support students through this was recognized as a barrier.

_I guess one of the biggest barriers I found that was kind of frustrating is that as soon as... as soon as the students sense ... that something in the structure, something in the curriculum is not ... conflicts with either their own world view or, ... just creates some cognitive dissonance about what they believe to be correct or true, they clam up, shut up, move further into the darkness of the shadows and fear sets in._

Other identified barriers include: institutional navigation; a lack of role models; an insufficient number of potential supervisors; appropriate recruitment; and lack of academic preparedness.

**Indigenous Topics in Workplace/Learning Environments**

Most informants indicated they were inadequately equipped to address matters related to Indigenous topics in their teaching and working environments. While some report using research, organizations, students, guest speakers and elders as informative sources, most rely upon “go-to” Indigenous persons within the university, though they unanimously identify these people as over-taxed. Numerous participants expressed feeling adequately equipped to address FNMI issues as non-Indigenous allies, but usually need to consult Indigenous informants. One participant identified discrimination as a barrier to teaching FNMI content:

_And because I don't look Aboriginal, I got a lot of flak for working in the environment initially, which is tough because it's not always easy to keep proving yourself day after day after day, number one on an Aboriginal] standpoint, number two coming fromWestern] [knowledge] instead of a more traditional background..._
Validation of Indigenous Knowledge & Inclusion of Indigenous Knowledge in Curriculum

A significant barrier identified by a majority of respondents from all backgrounds is having to negotiate with the university’s expectations of what counts as knowledge. Whether this manifests in the classroom as denial of histories, violence and colonial structures, or in the non-Indigenous enforcement of research ethics upon Indigenous researchers, or in the discrediting of Indigenous methodologies and knowledge in a dissertation defense, the invalidation of Indigenous knowledge (IK) was identified as a significant barrier. Relatedly, one interviewee articulated the need to “draw attention to the way that Canada is founded on a relationship with Indigenous people that’s been disavowed largely”; something “the university has disavowed and ignored through most of its history.”

All informants rated the inclusion of IK in learning environments at McMaster as important to very important, especially given McMaster’s location on Indigenous land, its proximity to several Indigenous communities and the rising Indigenous population in Ontario. Several faculty outside of Indigenous Studies include FNMI content in their curriculum, but admit that this inclusion is limited due to their lack of knowledge, the over-taxing of Indigenous “informants” on campus, and institutional pressure to give weight to Western methodologies and epistemologies. Three participants expressed a desire to see Indigenous content integrated into undergraduate coursework across all disciplines. One participant said that “individual faculty members are relatively limited in what they can do” and that curricular inclusion of IK is limited by the lack of policy and
documented support from higher administration. It was also suggested that it is the
university’s responsibility to include IK given its role in developing responsible citizens:

So you have to really make the case about what the overall role and purpose of
the university is. Is this for advancing social well-being and understanding of
society at large and contributing to the greater good and opening minds? All of
that sort of thing or is it about gaining particular technical skills to go get a job in
an area where you may not be working with a lot of indigenous people directly?
And so, what is the purpose of the university? And I think the way that the
purpose has been articulated in the [cap all-president’s] Forward with Integrity
letter, there’s a strong case that could be made that part of what we’re doing here
is to expand our minds and open our minds and develop a sense of global
citizenship and part of that is an awareness of the… of indigenous peoples
whose land this is and what are our relationships and what are our
responsibilities because of that history.

Therefore, the university’s] role in community engagement and President Deane’s
support of these initiatives encourages, in theory, the inclusion and validation of IK at
the Academy; however, practical tools for implementation are needed. A mechanism for
validating IK at the university is needed. Overall, informants expressed a desire for
McMaster to offer greater support in advancing IK. One participant suggested, for
example, that McMaster could change regulations to support oral methodologies so that
“an Aboriginal student writing a PhD in an Aboriginal language or a dissertation in an
Aboriginal language” could be possible.

All participants identified a need for faculty, staff and student education around
Indigenous cultural sensitivity, history, and nation-to-nation relations. One non-
Indigenous participant stated:

One of the reasons why there is what you might call a lack of sympathy to Aboriginal
courses [at McMaster], and it was evident [in] the recent Idle No More movement, has to
do with awareness, you know, and there’s a narrative out there. And unless you counter
that narrative; its people, kids grow up, you know, thinking that’s what Aboriginal people
are, who Métis people are.
To the investigator’s query about whether a mandatory undergraduate course in Indigenous Studies would be beneficial, all respondents replied in support of such a course existing across disciplines, but half the respondents expressed strong concern with the compulsory component. However, there were repeated requests for, and strong support of, increased partnerships around classroom based experiences, and increased interdisciplinary work/collaboration involving IK.\(^3\) Further community engagement with surrounding Indigenous communities (e.g. Six Nations, New Credit, Hamilton/Toronto urban communities, etc.) was also cited as a way to combat racism and ignorance and increase cultural sensitivity at the university.\(^4\)

Overall, participants expressed the desire to implement changes that will show Indigenous students that their knowledge and experience is valid and present at the university. This is seen as a way to support students as Indigenous once admitted to McMaster, to increase Indigenous student interest and enrolment at McMaster, to strengthen Indigenous student engagement, and to expand/aid the learning of non-Indigenous faculty and students as well.

**Visual Representation**

Most participants can identify other post-secondary institutions that promote Indigenous culture in their environment to some degree. It is generally felt that McMaster could be doing more in this regard. Informants agreed that visual and spatial representations including art, architecture, signage, and ceremonial spaces are important for fostering a

\(^3\) Again, one of the identified barriers to this kind of interdisciplinary work is the over-taxing of a limited number of Indigenous faculty and graduate students on campus.

\(^4\) Raising awareness about current community engagement/collaboration between McMaster and Six Nations was also identified as a need.
welcoming atmosphere to Indigenous learners. Participants agreed that such visual representation demonstrates acceptance, support and validation of diverse peoples, worldviews, and knowledges. One participant felt that in addition to using visual representation to acknowledge FNMI presence, practices that verbally acknowledge settler presence on Indigenous lands could be instituted:

Last year I was in Sydney, Australia for an international conference and this conference had nothing to do with Aboriginal rights. This was a social science conference … It was actually Congress at the University of Sydney. And they started each session with an Aboriginal prayer and they gave thanks to the Aboriginal people on whose land this university’s built and by whose generosity we are all here today and I found that very interesting. So I asked the conference organizers, I said, “Is this usual?” and they said, “Yes, it’s actually a policy of the university passed by senate.” You know, that at every public event it must be acknowledged that the land of which the university’s built, the University of Sydney is Aboriginal land and thanks have to be given. It was more of an acknowledgement of, you know, of Aboriginal presence and Aboriginal involvement in the existence of that institution which I think is something we can borrow from them in Canada.

Visual and verbal recognition of FNMI peoples is needed in order to create a welcoming atmosphere and prevent internalization of isolation and estrangement.

Structural Community Connections & Interdisciplinary Collaborations

Very few non-Indigenous participants had awareness of structural connections between McMaster and Indigenous communities. Participants who could not identify structural community connections, and those who could, both identified a need for increased awareness about Six Nations Polytechnic and its collaborative projects and programs with McMaster. Many respondents could only identify in broad strokes Indigenous focused collaborations or research involving their department. This also led to an expressed desire for a public online resource that might identify what Indigenous related projects and research are currently underway at McMaster. It is generally agreed that
McMaster could be doing more in terms of fostering connections and collaborations with local FNMI communities and that failure to do so is a “lost opportunity.” Suggestions were made for forming reciprocal partnerships with both reservation and urban Indigenous communities. Some participants expressed concern over the local Hodinohso:ni focus at McMaster and suggested partnerships with other FNMI communities could be a focus. Most collaborative work at McMaster occurs under the auspices of the Indigenous Studies Program; several informants expressed a need for more interdisciplinary involvement. Interdisciplinary partnerships were identified as important for developing a strong Indigenous community on campus:

*I think it helps advance us as a group of people, and I think it will definitely benefit, not only the educators, but the current students and prospective students, and I think that if we have a stronger voice and we’re more unified instead of being kind of butting heads, then we’ll bring more and more people to McMaster, which we should be doing, and we’ll also get more brilliant minds here as well.*

Informants generally identify collaborations as beneficial for all parties involved, particularly for knowledge sharing, bridging different perspectives, building awareness, finding allies, and enriching knowledge. Several participants identified the over-taxing of Indigenous faculty and administration as a barrier to collaboration and another suggested there is a need for a mechanism that can identify possible collaborators across campus. Generally, interviewees supported increased collaboration at McMaster, but could not specify what form such collaboration might take. They did however identify barriers to possible further collaborations, including: exclusion of Indigenous students due to admission criteria; lack of leadership; lack of resources; lack of champions;

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5 A couple informants identified the localizing of knowledge as a potential barrier to learners from other FNMI communities. More awareness is needed around ISPs strategy for localizing knowledge, and around the territorial history of the land McMaster resides on.
demands on time; and competing commitments. One participant suggested that tendencies to collaborate on research and publications can itself act as a barrier in the tenure decision process. This informant explains that part of tenure decisions are based upon publications in established journals in his specific field and that interdisciplinary work and collaboration in this regard counts less towards tenure:

…so if you're talking about interdisciplinary work and collaborating and possibly publishing in other venues, that may not count for as much when I'm up for tenure. So that is a barrier. And it may be the same in other departments, I don't know. I think Indigenous Studies is inherently interdisciplinary in itself but they don't have the recognition as a department right now either.

The tendency amongst Indigenous scholars to communally produce work has the ability to act as a barrier to their success. This speaks to the need for practical tools for implementing what we term as a reclaimative approach in the Academy.

**Faculty**

All participants believe that the expectations of Indigenous staff and/or faculty are burdensome due to, for example: divided departmental commitments; disproportionate administrative duties; higher demand for student support; community expectations of reciprocity; tokenism and identity taxation; and an overall lack of Indigenous academics, but high demand for FNMI involvement. One participant identified evaluative measures of their performance as a faculty member as burdensome due to the unique set of responsibilities and expectations placed upon them as an Indigenous person that have no recognition in the academic setting. Another interviewee reports feeling exploited for their community connections:
It can be burdensome in a couple of ways and I think one of the ways is that because there’s a bit of a disconnection with what I mentioned about being a person and being that sort of human structural connection between the community, we understand that. And the university will come alongside of that kind of work but in a limited way because they don’t fully understand what is happening. They don’t really value it in the same way. So they can start to expect that you’re just going to do all of this work for free, that this is all going to happen without any sort of recognition or acknowledgement of what you’re actually doing for them as a university and, you know, because eventually it benefits them, not just our community, right. And that can become very burdensome because it’s a heavy load because as an Indigenous person, there’s this responsibility that you have to your community and it’s very important and so with the university always asking for more more more from you, it’s almost like they tie into that sense of connection you have to the community or responsibility to the community and it almost feels like it gets abused a little bit because it doesn’t get recognized.

Most participants believe that expectations of Indigenous faculty constitute a unique occurrence. One informant says: “We have people who are directors of programs before they are even finished their PhD … that’s a unique burden.”

**POLICY**

**Recruitment, Retention, & Graduation**

There are several identified barriers to the successful completion of study for Indigenous students, including: lack of academic preparedness; need for student support; lack of confidence; discounting of IK and Indigenous methodologies; evaluation mechanisms; lack of FNMI curriculum; racism; and poor retention of other Indigenous students and faculty. Slower graduation speeds and low retention were attributed to culturally unique community commitments and a lack of institutional recognition of these diverse responsibilities. While several informants admitted ignorance to the ways in which policies and institutional practices may impede the recruitment and retention of FNMI staff and
faculty, some identify hiring policies, isolation, lack of support networks, expectations for production, tenure track policies, and over-taxation as barriers to the success of Indigenous faculty and administration.

One participant explains how the divided responsibilities and commitments of Indigenous faculty threaten their chance at tenure:

…there are a lot of expectations on them [Indigenous faculty] and they’re being pulled in so many different directions. I don’t know how they can possibly get their own research done and that’s a problem. Especially if you want to recruit tenure track faculty and bring them up and make sure that people get tenure if they’re going to be evaluated in terms of research productivity and yet you have them doing all of these administrative tasks, that becomes all the more difficult. So there needs to be some recognition there in either altering the way that tenure cases are evaluated to consider some of the other things that indigenous faculty have to do.

One informant states that low numbers of FNMI students, faculty and administrators contributes to low FNMI enrolment:

The perception of inclusion and, as a visible minority myself, I can speak to this firsthand. If you don’t see enough of people like you in a particular kind of space, there’s a disinclination to be there. And so one of the obvious structural barriers would be just the fact that we don’t have enough. And so what that tells me as an administrator is that we have to incentivize having more Aboriginal students on campus.

The need for an increased population of FNMI learners and educators was repeatedly stressed and linked to a number of barriers such as low numbers of Indigenous graduate students due to the unavailability of Indigenous supervisors, role models, and mentors. One participant also expressed that because there are so few Indigenous faculty and so many pressures and commitments on them, Indigenous graduate students tend to take on a lot of extra administrative work that would normally not be their responsibility. This in turn affects the graduation rate of Indigenous graduate students.
**Pre- and Post-Doc Appointments**

Most participants are aware that McMaster has pre and post doc appointments for Indigenous graduate students and rate the importance of these positions as very important. A majority of informants also expressed caution in regards to these appointments as they believe they have the potential to cause further barriers, such as: overburdening; tokenism; and the appearance of favouritism. Several informants however, also agreed that such positions offer necessary and appreciated benefits such as supporting the transition from being a student to teaching, retention of talented scholars, and increasing McMaster’s accountability to Indigenous education. One participant also suggested that positions such as these demonstrate that McMaster can be a destination for Indigenous learners.

**Compulsory Cultural Training**

Most informants identified a need to raise awareness and increase education regarding Indigenous peoples, cultures, and histories on campus. While some interviewees thought online resources or training could be helpful, and some thought a mandatory Indigenous 101 course would increase understanding of Indigenous perspectives, others argued that such measures may backfire. Several participants thought compulsory education could take the form of an introductory course with a focus on community engagement. But general student resistance to compulsory courses, lack of sympathy for Indigenous courses and discriminatory backlash against sensitivity training were all offered as potential, negative outcomes. A few informants suggested that instead of a compulsory course, a component of IK should be integrated into all courses across all disciplines. Numerous informants said that an educational resource is needed
and would be greatly appreciated (especially by non-Indigenous faculty). Further, it has been suggested that a resource explaining the focus on local Hodinohso:ni culture and in regards to the Indigenous territory that McMaster is founded on would be helpful for overcoming perceived barriers of exclusivity.

**Best Practices**

All informants are supportive of best practices for Indigenous education, but many were unable to identify what those practices might entail or how they currently function at McMaster. This suggests a need for raising awareness both in regards to types of best practices for Indigenous education (reclaimative and decolonizing), and to specific practices on campus. A few faculty informants expressed desire for training in best practices. Those who could identify best practices were typically Indigenous educators who suggested that there needs to be an expansion of these practices to other areas of the university (outside of ISP and ASHS). Funding was again raised as a barrier to application of best practices.

**STUDENT SUPPORT**

**Goals & Future Opportunities**

In general, participants believe that FNMI students share the same types of goals as mainstream students in attending post-secondary education, with the exception of community responsibilities and commitments. Informants judge that FNMI students have some culturally specific reasons for seeking post-secondary education, including: decolonization; community healing; redress of the education system’s historic damage; to change policy; to better equip themselves for defence against ongoing colonial systems; to break cycles of poverty and dependency; to become educators and role
models; and to empower their communities and nations. Informants identified similarly broad future opportunities for FNMI students who graduate from both undergraduate and graduate programs at McMaster. The majority did not distinguish between opportunities for Indigenous and non-Indigenous graduates. Most participants agreed that McMaster could be doing more towards providing opportunities for FNMI students, but that financial support is a barrier. Several informants suggested that McMaster could be working towards increasing Indigenous graduate student numbers, especially given the statistics on increasing Indigenous populations in Canada.

Transitions, Mentors & Role Models

Informants predominantly responded to questions about FNMI student transitions by referring to undergraduate experiences. Respondents assessed that transitional difficulties include: culture shock; unfamiliar pedagogies; balancing academic, family and community life; unexpected financial needs; sexuality issues; and alienating curriculum. Needing to reframe what counts as knowledge and different ways of generating knowledge was also identified as a transitional barrier. Most informants suggest that FNMI students need a safe place in order to successfully navigate these types of transitions. The need to build confidence is also seen as a transitional issue. The importance of mentors, tutors and role models arose in the interviews as essential to the resolution of these types of transitory issues:

The transition from undergrad to grad, like I said at the outset is we don’t have a lot, you know, we need more of a mentoring group, I guess, to sort of coach students. I’d say, you know, it wouldn’t hurt to sort of pull some students aside and they’re doing really well and just say, hey, you should consider graduate students… or graduate work.
Mentors and role models therefore, were identified as essential for aiding Indigenous students in successful transitions, but also for garnering interest in continuing studies, for enabling Indigenous focused research and for building an inclusive community. The low number of Indigenous graduate students, faculty and administration however, continues to serve as a barrier to Indigenous mentorship, role modeling and academic supervision. Several informants see a direct relationship between mentorship and retention, continuity and success of Indigenous learners:

The mentors can… they do simple little questions. Showing someone around town when they’re here. Tutoring. Writing. How to study. How to, you know, switch gears. Cultural connections. So may not be the same nation or community, but there’s still those bonding. The mentors also get professional development so that they go to conferences. So we’ve taken… one of our mentors went to Australia this year to present… To build their resumes. We bring them on committees so they’re working with deans and the higher administrative folks here so they’re getting that experience. So trying to get them sort of really well rounded and exposed to all the different things they should be doing. Research grants. Teaching. All those types of things.

The lack of available mentors for FNMI graduate students was also named a barrier, gesturing once again to the low numbers of FNMI faculty as a barrier and implying another instance of overburdening of FNMI faculty.

Student Services

Informants could name FNMI student services on campus, but most were unable or unwilling to speak to the effectiveness of these services for those students. There were very few services identified as available for FNMI graduate students. One informant reported hearing that students from First Nations not as well represented on campus felt alienated because of the heavy emphasis on local FNs and that services for these
students were felt by those students to be lacking. Expectations that Indigenous students act as cultural experts in the classroom was also recognized as an issue:

\[ \text{It can come from both the professor who is trying to perhaps engage, recognize, respect their background but it can also come from students who see them as local experts. And yeah, that is a burden.} \]

**Indigenous Graduate Students**

In some cases, this seems to speak to a need to raise awareness concerning Indigenous graduate students at McMaster and on the other it speaks to their extremely low population and lack of self ID process. Issues that specifically apply to Indigenous graduate students and that reoccurred throughout the interviews are:

- Too few Indigenous graduate students results in a lack of community, limited collegial support, identity taxation, increased responsibilities (administrative work, guest speaking, acting as informants, etc.) and the added pressure to change policies and methodological boundaries.

- Too few Indigenous faculty results in limited numbers of supervisors who have an Indigenous knowledge base, too few role models and mentors and pathways to further professionalization.

- Finally, there needs to be a policy or mechanism for validating Indigenous Knowledge at McMaster so that Indigenous graduate students do not have to constantly defend their use of Indigenous methodologies, ontologies, and epistemologies as an added burden to the work of graduate study itself.
RESOURCES

Throughout the interview process, several needed resources were commonly identified and included:

- On campus child care

- An online resource or Indigenous Portal that would list all Indigenous related courses, services, programs, events, organizations, and funding opportunities not only at McMaster but in surrounding areas as well (e.g. Six Nations, Six Nations Polytechnic, Woodland Cultural Centre, Hamilton/Toronto urban Indigenous communities, etc.). This resource would also have profiles on professors engaged in Indigenous education and research, as well as on Indigenous graduate students. It could also be used to inform the McMaster public about different Indigenous related research projects so that possible collaborations might develop.

- A self-ID process for Indigenous graduate students. Currently, there is no way to know where Indigenous graduate students are at McMaster or how many there are. This makes it very difficult to generate community, support or critical mass for any change making efforts.

RECLAIMATIVE APPROACH

Indigenous scholars seek recognition and acceptance that the Indigenous Knowledge they utilize is critical to both their scholarly pursuits and their learning experience. As Marie Battiste notes, an equitable education is required for Indigenous graduate students, one that requires development and alignment of legislation and policies that advances this objective and promotes a respect for “distinctive
perspectives and understandings and ways of knowing" that are offered, in order to
achieve these goals (2000:xxix). In Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision, Battiste
describes how European colonization and its resulting systemic oppression created a
“cognitive imperialism” and contributed to establishing “cognitive prisons” for Indigenous
peoples. Battiste and other respected Indigenous scholars articulate how the first
generation of Indigenous scholars paved the way towards addressing this issue in 1996.
Battiste reports that those invested in Indigenous education seek “ways of healing and
re-building nations, peoples, communities and selves” by restoring Indigenous
ecologies, consciousnesses, and languages and by creating bridges between
Indigenous and European knowledges (2000:xvii). Indigenous scholars can apply these
concepts as a reclaimative process. Directed by a desire to implement these
reclaimative strategies, we question how such processes can engage Indigenous
Knowledge, peoples, and communities in meaningful ways within the institution. How
can the McMaster community address both academic and systemic/administrative
structural barriers towards both enhancing the Indigenous graduate student learning
experience, increasing the number of graduate students at McMaster, and informing the
development of collaborative, innovative solutions? In line with much of the current
scholarly discourse on decolonizing and indigenizing the Academy, MIGS’s reclaimative
process seeks to both deconstruct some of the oppressive colonial systems within the
Academy at the same time that it seeks to increase and empower Indigenous
knowledges, pedagogies and activism.

According to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples there are currently,
very few post-secondary educational programs in Canada that focus curriculum on
Indigenous languages, content, processes, perspectives, philosophies, knowledge, and Indigenous methods of teaching and learning (RCAP Volume, 3, 1996). Leanne Simpson points out the contradiction for Indigenous students who are told that education is essential to their futures and yet are denied access to education that could enable them to “better the social, environmental, and political conditions in their communities.” She states:

Few programs are designed to enable students to address the issues of colonization and colonialism in their communities, effect healing and decolonization at the individual, community and national levels, facilitate resistance strategies in response to current injustice, and promote the building of healthy, sustainable Aboriginal communities and Nations based on traditional cultural values and processes. These skills are essential to enable Aboriginal students to return to Aboriginal communities and urban organizations and effect change. More often post-secondary educational programs are designed to prepare students to fully participate in the economic and academic life of the dominant society. (2002)

Access to post-secondary education primarily meant to benefit Euro-western students is not adequate for the culturally specific goals of Indigenous students. In order to create a supportive academic environment for Indigenous graduate students, including support for their research, local community investments, and broader goals, reclamation of Indigenous knowledge and ways of learning within the structure of the Academy is necessary. While we recognize that as a colonial institution there are significant limits to decolonizing the Academy, we also suggest that “wholistic” academic reform that is in keeping with both a top-down strategic and lateral-collaborative approach is possible through reclaimative processes. Reclaimative strategies seek to entrench Indigenous knowledges, methodologies, pedagogies and aspirations within the academic environment. Referring to such processes as “insurgent education” Jeff Corntassel explains that rather than acting as cultural brokers the goal of Indigenous education and
the work of its champions is to challenge the dominant colonial discourse by “raising awareness of Indigenous histories and place-based existences as part of a continuing struggle against shape-shifting colonial powers.” Corntassel argues that “by questioning settler occupation of Indigenous places through direct, honest, and experiential forms of engagement and demands for accountability,” insurgent education creates “decolonizing and discomforting moments of Indigenous truth-telling that challenge the colonial status quo.” An important part of reclaimative education according to Corntassel, is for its educators to relate their efforts for “Indigenous resurgence” to broader audiences using innovation to “inspire activism and reclamation of Indigenous histories and homelands.”

At McMaster an Indigenous graduate student reclaimative approach has been active for the last three years. MIGS has undertaken a reclaimative process through: activism work, which seeks to increase awareness, promote IK and address structural barriers; community engagement, that connects students, faculty, administrators and members from both urban and reservation communities; and informal learning, which validates elders, talking circles, personal narratives and mentorship. Ongoing efforts for reclaimative strategies require practical support from the Academy at all levels, including senior administration, and faculty.
APPENDIX #1:

INDIGENOUS GRADUATE STUDIES WORKING GROUP: LIST OF MEMBERS**

Andrea Cole - Diversity Coordinator, School of Graduate Studies

Daniel Coleman - Faculty, English and Cultural Studies, Former Co-Chair, President’s Committee on Indigenous Issues

Kaitlin Debecki - PhD Student, English and Cultural Studies (MIGS Coordinator)

Bernice Downey - PhD Candidate, Anthropology and Health Program (MIGS Member), Sessional Instructor, Indigenous Studies Program

Bonnie Freeman - PhD Candidate - Western University, Pre-Doctoral Program - Faculty of Social Work, McMaster, Lecturer, Faculty of Social Work

Chelsea Gabel - Associate Professor, Health Ageing and Society - Indigenous Studies (Former MIGS Member)

Dawn Martin Hill - Paul R. MacPherson Chair in Indigenous Studies, Faculty, Department of Anthropology

Randy Jackson - PhD Candidate, School of Social Work, Pre-Doctoral Program, Lecturer - Social Work-Health Ageing & Society

Mary Koziol - Assistant to the President, Special Community Initiatives

Rick Montour - Faculty, English and Cultural Studies, Director Indigenous Studies Program

Lisa Schwartz - Arnold L. Johnson Chair in Health Care Ethics, Director, PhD in Health Policy, Department of Clinical Epidemiology and Biostatistics

Peter Self - Assistant Dean, Graduate Student Life and Research Training, School of Graduate Studies

Spencer Smith - Director, Engineering 1, Faculty of Engineering

Isik Zeytinoglu - Faculty, School of Business

** Members list & titles at time of FWI Survey