

Navigating Colonial Space: A Case Study of an Indigenous Student-Led Decolonial Movement in Canadian Higher Education

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The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada widely shared its Reports and Calls to Action regarding the “Indian Residential School System” in 2015. Since that time, higher education institutions across Canada have been engaged in diverse institutional reform efforts. This article is a case study of an Indigenous student-led reform initiative at The University of Winnipeg that resulted in the first mandatory Indigenous course requirement as a graduation requirement for all undergraduate students in Canada. The research is designed and conducted with Indigenous leadership and partnership and relies on the insights of Indigenous students that led the initiative to consider the impetus, nature, and strategies underlying this curricular reform. Three emergent themes were discerned that are important to systemic reform in post-secondary education: the university as colonial space; navigation of white Settler dominance; and timing as significant to systemic change. The study can be seen as a unique example of the complexity, opportunities, and limitations of decolonial reform in higher education through an Indigenous student-led social movement embodying contentious co-governance and prefiguration.

Keywords: decolonial, higher education, Indigenous, students, social movements, curriculum reform

INTRODUCTION

Since the public dissemination in June 2015 of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada’s (TRC) Reports (TRC, 2015a) regarding the “Indian Residential School System” all sectors of Canadian society have been in some ways aware and responsive to the TRC’s “Calls to Action” (TRC, 2015b). Most notably, institutions of higher education across Canada have been engaged in significant consideration of institutional reform in light of the TRC Reports (Munroe, 2021). Although, collective recognition of the systemic racism and attempted genocide of Indigenous peoples, and the need to engage in substantive decolonizing processes are not widely recognized (Kerr & Parent, 2022). While Universities across Canada are theorizing and approaching needed reform in different ways, the University of Winnipeg (UWinnipeg) received national attention in 2016 for being one of the first universities in Canada to institute a mandatory

Indigenous Course Requirement (ICR) as a graduating requirement for all undergraduate students. What is lesser known is that this curricular reform initiative was not driven nor led by the university's administration, but by the significant efforts of Indigenous student leaders in a primarily undergraduate university. This research is a case study of the Indigenous student-led initiatives that led to the ICR at UWinnipeg with a focus on the narration of their efforts, and articulation of strategies and tactics in working for systemic change in higher education. Public events and sessions were held with the community and students as part of the research. This article predominantly engages the one-to-one interviews with Indigenous students that had leadership roles in the ICR initiative. Within the context of this study, we seek to identify and understand student-led decolonial movements that challenge colonial structures in higher education with attention to the significance of Indigenous voices, histories, places, and knowledge systems.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As Rebecca Tarlau (2021) contends in considering the work of Paulo Freire, “social movements embrace education as a critical component of social change”, but there are few examples of how this can be engaged in systems of public education (p. 527). Acknowledging critiques that social movements in public institutions tend to become more conservative and less effective, Tarlau shares several studies that highlight the ways social movements strategically utilize institutional resources to serve their agenda, but importantly the literature reveals the need for “strong state institutions, grassroots organizing, and state officials committed to the success of participatory projects” and the significance of bottom-up as opposed to top-down reform (p. 157). In the case of the ICR at UWinnipeg, the students engaged in, and the UWinnipeg administration was responsive to, this sort of bottom-up grassroots reform as the students negotiated their vision. This study offers insights into social movements within higher education that effectively manifest systemic change through embodied enactment of non-dominant approaches and official curriculum policy.

This study is approached through border thinking as a praxis of decolonial theory. Walter Dignolo (2012) postulates that decolonial thought attempts to engage missions of liberation from problematic Euro-centred forms of subjugation. As such it is through the embodied presence of Indigenous students in instituting an Indigenous-focused mandatory curriculum that the opportunity to enact thinking beyond Euro-Western borders shifts the geography of reason and opens up possibilities for systemic change and different forms of participation. Border thinking centers on the *colonial difference* that emerges from engagements in knowledge production that decentre Euro-Western ontologies and perspectives. This is based on the understanding by Aníbal Quijano (2007) that Euro-Western colonialism produced an economically-driven racialized global classification system, creating “new social identities using physiognomic traits as external manifestations of their ‘racial nature’” justifying multiple forms of domination of non-white bodies around the globe (p. 171). Exploring the enactment of decolonial thinking allows researchers to challenge “the geo-political ordering of knowledge and the questions of who produces knowledge, how and where, and for what purposes” (Walsh, 2012, p. 11).

The study's approach is based on the understanding that the Indigenous student leaders' promoting the ICR are leading a decolonial social movement in their ways of thinking and doing beyond Euro-Western frameworks in their response to oppressive colonial systems. The epistemological, political, economic, and social conditions encountered by the students cannot be understood solely from Euro-centred forms of thought. Instead, a movement beyond Euro-Western perspectives, in this case, a decolonial theoretical approach, is required as a wider lens on this context and a related approach that centers on Indigenous voice and perspective and engages Indigenous leadership, guidance, and participation throughout.

The study is specifically considering the approach to reform through the means of embodied participation and curricular reform and theorizes curricula as being much more than the documents and policies generally produced and approved by educational authorities. In this work, curricula are viewed as something that is lived through documents and policies emerging from historical events and complex negotiations of power (Aoki, 1993; St. Denis, 2011), and that engage human agency and society in the historical moment (Phelan, 2011). In the context of this study, the strategies and tactics engaged by

Indigenous students in curricular reform are considered in the complex context of settler colonialism. According to Yellowknife Dene scholar Glen Coulthard (2014), settler colonialism can be understood as “interrelated discursive and nondiscursive facets of economic, gendered, racial, and state power [that] has been structured into a relatively secure or sedimented set of hierarchical social relations that continue to facilitate the dispossession of Indigenous peoples of their lands and self-determining authority” (p. 7). The Indigenous students’ public presence and negotiations of the curriculum are considered within the broader frame of higher education as a settler colonial institution in the Canadian context.

METHOD AND METHODOLOGY

This study seeks to contextualize the nature of struggles in higher education and their manifestations that have become struggles of colonial injustice within the context of universities as centers of knowledge production (Andreotti, et al 2015; Kerr, 2014). In this pursuit, the study involved in-depth one-to-one interviews with Indigenous students who participated and led initiatives promoting a mandatory ICR. The methodological theories underlying the study rely on the work of Stó:lō and St’at’imc scholar Jo-ann Archibald (Q’um Q’um Xiim) and Papaschase Cree curriculum scholar Dwayne Donald. The study is framed on Donald’s concept of ethical relationality. Donald (2012) shares that “[e]thical relationality is an ecological understanding of human relationality that does not deny difference, but rather seek to understand more deeply how our different histories and experiences position us in relation to each other” (p. 103). He contends that we need to appreciate that our future as peoples with all living beings on Mother Earth are already tied together (Donald, 2016). His approach draws attention to the significance of attending to the ethical responsibilities of being in relation and is the overarching frame to consider the divided realities and inequalities in a settler colonial institution that are the context of the research. In our work, we were attentive to the felt experiences and relations, and our responsibility to the humans and more-than-humans present in our relations as we undertook the study. We acknowledge within our engagement with Donald’s conceptual development the complexity of the nêhiyaw knowledge underlying his theorizations exceeds the context of what we can fully understand and also share in a written venue.

To support our commitments to ethical relationality, this study engaged with Archibald’s (2008) Indigenous Storywork methodology. This approach offers opportunities to engage participants holistically through the story’s ability to engage the intellectual, emotional, physical, and spiritual dimensions of experience. Archibald’s approach is reliant on Indigenous principles of respect, responsibility, reciprocity, reverence, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy in making meaning from stories. This methodology enables a focus on the complex layers of reform initiatives through the richly contextual stories shared in interviews. We believe this methodology supported our engagement with ethical relationality. As Principal Investigator, Jeannie maintained constant awareness that engaging methodologies based on Indigenous teachings, by a non-Indigenous person, both in research design and analysis, adds the potential for problematic colonial engagements. Jeannie recognizes she has been taught/learned within and from Dr. Archibald’s Indigenous Story work, but that she is not claiming expertise. Jeannie maintains her mentorship from both Dr. Archibald and Dr. Donald.

The key research questions guiding the interviews:

1. In what ways were Indigenous students narrating, resisting, and challenging colonial legacies through activities aimed at promoting a mandatory ICR at UWinnipeg?
2. What strategies and tactics were used by the students to address their priorities?
3. How can this initiative be understood in the framework of decolonial movements in higher education emerging from the priorities, thinking, and actions of Indigenous students?

One-to-one interviews were conducted from August to September 2019 by a contracted Indigenous student from South Africa with the support of Karen for context and local protocols. All interview participants chose to have their names publicly acknowledged rather than anonymized: Sadie-Phoenix Lavoie (Anishinaabe, Sakeeng First Nation); Shaneen Robinson (Cree/Gitxsan); Kevin Settee (Anishinaabe); and Montgomery Withawick (Anishinaabe, Poplar River Anishinaabe Nation (Treaty 5). Recruitment of participants was undertaken through snowball sampling from research supporters and

student leaders Kevin and Sadie-Phoenix. Three other key leaders were identified that did not take part in the interview process.

The Positionality of participants and researchers is fore-fronted in this study. Jeannie is the principal investigator of the study and identifies as a second-generation Settler in Canada of Irish maternal heritage. As the subject of the research is Indigenous student leadership provoking change to colonial structures of the University, Jeannie engaged all Indigenous research assistants to undertake the research and worked consistently throughout the study with the co-authors - Indigenous UWinnipeg Research Assistants– Karen Swan (Lake Manitoba First Nation) on the initial interviewing and focus groups and mentorship of the interview process and Meagan Malcolm (Anishinaabekwe from Roseau River Anishinaabe First Nation) on data analysis. A final report for all supporters was co-authored by Jeannie, Meagan, and Karen and shared for approval before any public dissemination of the study findings. Indigenous leadership on the framing of the study, and support for research activities, have been engaged at every step of the research that started at the initial contact in 2016 with Kevin and Sadie-Phoenix.

This study is also designed with Indigenous partnership and leadership throughout each phase over five years within the places in the university with the leadership and staff at the Aboriginal Student Services Centre, the office of the Indigenous Academic Lead, the Indigenous leadership of the University of Winnipeg Student Association, and all activities were structured through the advice and mentorship of an Elder that attended to the study activities, and an Elder that attended to the connection to the local Communities. Both Elders were officially connected to the University. All research activities were carried out by Indigenous students with Jeannie's support and the Elders' guidance. These choices were made to position this research study as a project that centers on Indigenous student voice and authority, while also opening possibilities beyond Euro-Western frames of reference through Indigenous-led guidance, knowledge, and practices.

Jeannie and Meagan developed their analysis through walking discussions at the Forks in Winnipeg, being the meeting place of the Assiniboine and Red Rivers in what is known as Winnipeg and the traditional meeting place of the Anishinaabeg, Nêhiyawak, Oji-Cree, Dakota and Dene peoples since time immemorial. This particular walking data analysis was inspired by the understanding that places have embodied impact and can be a teacher and drew on the scholarship of Indigenous informed philosophies (Madden, 2016; Marker, 2018). Jeannie's long-term mentorship by Arapaho scholar Dr. Michael Marker informed this approach. Jeannie and Meagan read through the transcripts repeatedly and identified common phrases and repeated patterns with the transcripts. We then met and walked and discussed our ideas orally in the Forks area of the city drawing on the synergy of ideas orally and the opportunity to invite this place to teach us. We made particular note of the similarities and differences between our analyses and found that our perceptions were very much in agreement with each other.

FINDINGS

Understanding the Impetus of the ICR Through Indigenous Voice and Leadership

The impetus for the ICR at UWinnipeg has multiple perspectives. Two independent studies were engaged regarding the ICR at UWinnipeg. A study by Lepp Friesen (2017) focused on the initial implementation year of the ICR in 2016/2017, and a study by Siemens and Neufeld (2022) studied the impact of select ICR courses on non-Indigenous students' attitudes. In both studies, the authors discern the impetus through drawing on available documents and news articles. The result is that the researchers position the impetus for the ICR as emerging from the University administration in response to anti-Indigenous racism on campus. In this study, we are privileging Indigenous student voices in narrating the inception of the ICR. We are relying on both formal documents and interviews with Indigenous student leaders involved in the promotion of the ICR which reveal activities and moments that are not always part of the formal record. We also appreciate that there were major social events that were widely reported on and shared in mainstream media that centered on Indigenous sovereignty and resurgence, and more widespread sharing of truths about the violence of settler colonial systems at a time when the ICR concept was gaining traction at UWinnipeg. The synergy of these events is noted in the interviews and findings.

Shaneen provides the initial context in a classroom in 2005:

I came up with the idea to have an Indigenous, at the time Aboriginal, required Aboriginal course at the time. I pitched a 6-credit hour course for every university student to take as part of their degree.

Shaneen's idea was immediately met with racism from an international student from China in her small working group in class who argued that she did not need to learn anything about Indigenous peoples. Shaneen was motivated to push for an ICR with the support of the Aboriginal Student Council.

...it had offended me the way the student had reacted. I thought people would be more welcoming - especially being guests in our country. So I met with my student council [Aboriginal Student Council] and I brought this idea to the committee. I said "You know what guys, there's underlying racism within our university with students that are visiting our country. We need to be advocating for education within our university for people to learn about the history of colonialism in our country against our people."

Shaneen then attended a meeting with the UWinnipeg President and senior leadership to discuss her idea. Her suggestion was met with positivity, but without action.

They said, "This is a great idea. I don't see that happening anytime soon, that's going to take a lot of years of preparation, but it is a good idea". And we met one more time after that, and then I ended up graduating from the University the next year.

Montgomery Withawick (Monty) noted that it was Indigenous culture that brought the ICR forward in a political way through Indigenous collectivity on campus. In essence, he believes that the ceremonial opportunities, Elder guidance, and space provided by the Aboriginal Student Services Centre (ASSC) for regular dialogue and support brought the idea to fruition:

It was the students themselves. A big part of it had to do with our culture. Because we have ceremonial feasts every month where we come together and have sharing circles. We come together and we eat and we have a discussion about how school is going and what is going on in our lives, and different social factors. We sit down and talk to Elders, we smudge, we pray, we sing and we feast, and talk. [The ICR] was an ongoing theme that kept popping up. It was the students who brought it forward, and it was the Council who went with it. The Council recognized the issue and thought about the problem.

Sadie-Phoenix noted the contentious collaboration between the University of Winnipeg Student Association (UWSA) and ASC on the initiative. UWSA executive reports prepared by non-Indigenous leadership at the time show a shift in the understanding of their work in partnership with the ASC, and a CBC interview held jointly with Raven Hart-Belcourt (ASC Co-Chair at the time) and Rorie McLeod-Arnould (UWSA President at the time) shows the collaboration between the two groups on this student-led initiative (CBC, 2016, Feb16). Discussions continued with the UWinnipeg Indigenous Advisory Circle and were supported by a few select faculty members. The student leaders of the ASC and UWSA continued lobbying UWinnipeg Senators in anticipation of needing Senate approval as the next step.

Sourcing the UWSA Executive Reports throughout the year, Winnipeg Free Press articles, UWinnipeg Communications, and comments through the one-to-one interviews, the process of approval and implementation was quite quick, compared to most complex Senate-involved restructurings, yet was punctuated by resistance. There was a noted absence by the UWSA in engaging Indigenous students with their work – despite the fact it was Indigenous students who had been working on the idea for years. Sadie-Phoenix notes there was also some resistance emerging from faculty members unaccustomed to engaging

Indigenous perspectives and knowledge in their disciplinary area. The documentation for the ICR was submitted to Academic Planning and Senate Executive in February and March 2015 and was approved in principle in Senate on March 26, 2015. Part of the proposal was the formation of the Indigenous Curriculum Requirement Advisory Committee, to lead the implementation plans. Campus events in May and June were furthered by this Committee to develop the specifics of the ICR for implementation in September 2016. A pipe ceremony was organized by Kevin in June 2015 and led by University Elders. There was resistance from a UWinnipeg faculty member to the engagement with Indigenous ceremony and strong opposition to the suggestion by the Elder leading the event for women to wear skirts. The faculty member published an opinion piece in the Winnipeg Free Press (Boucher, 2015, June 17), which was followed by communication to campus from the new UWinnipeg President and Vice-Chancellor Annette Trimbee (Métis ancestry) composed in collaboration with university executives and student leaders. In this communication, they note the difficulties of systemic change and the need to have these difficult conversations in the spirit of Reconciliation (University of Winnipeg Communications - 2015, June 20). The nature of this resistance is engaged in the interviews and the findings.

Between approval and implementation of the ICR, the UWSA Board elections in April 2015 resulted in an important change to the UWSA Executive with Kevin being elected as VP, of Internal Affairs in the UWSA. This change in the UWSA executive directly provided Indigenous student leadership on the ICR initiative from within the UWSA, who was working in partnership with Sadie-Phoenix as then ASC Co-President. Sadie-Phoenix noted the partnership with Kevin and the significant support of Wab Kinew's (Onigaming First Nation) office who was then Associate Vice-President of Indigenous Affairs, in navigating the implementation which was planned for the Fall of 2016. Kinew in his role had previously worked closely with UWinnipeg President Lloyd Axworthy on what they termed, in response to the Idle No More movement, as being 'divided no more through the presentation of a sacred Anishinaabe pipe in a ceremony directed by Elders (Axworthy & Kinew, 2013 – Jan, 11). With a change in Indigenous student leadership of the ICR and support from Indigenous leadership on campus, the UWSA reports start to shift. The previous focus of the ICR was prominently framed as addressing racism towards Indigenous peoples through stereotypes and ignorance, but then shifts to frame the ICR as an aspect of Reconciliation drawing on the TRC Calls to Action, as well as exposing students to Indigenous ways of knowing. This framing is taken up by the UWinnipeg president Trimbee and executives in the University in collaboration with UWSA and ASC student leaders in 2015 wherein they address implementation difficulties through also framing the ICR within Reconciliation (Trimbee et al, 2015 – June 20). In the spring of 2016, the UWSA elections again changed the executive membership with Kevin moving to become the UWSA President and Sadie-Phoenix as UWSA, VP External – noteworthy as unprecedented Indigenous leadership within the UWSA executive.

Interviews are shared through extended quotes in response to the research questions meant to provoke a storied approach. Extended quotes are used to center Indigenous voice in the research.

Findings Organized by Research Questions

Research Question 1: In what ways were Indigenous students narrating, resisting, and challenging colonial legacies through activities aimed at promoting a mandatory ICR at UWinnipeg?

The interviews highlight that the Indigenous student leaders narrated the ICR as an educational response to prevalent systemic racism due to colonial realities, as well as an important corrective to a predominantly Euro-centric curriculum. In resistance to the colonial context of their education, they pushed for an ICR as an educational interruption to systemic racism and as curricular enrichment. The interviews reflect the prevalent systemic racism based on colonial legacies that were being replicated within UWinnipeg from the wider social systems through white Settler and international students as well as faculty members. The ICR is positioned to challenge the stereotypes and misinformation informing that racism. The ICR is discussed as both challenging colonial-based racism on campus to alleviate the negative impacts on Indigenous students and to enhance the university experience for all students. There is also an expectation

that these educational efforts will allow non-Indigenous UWinnipeg graduates to participate in society in ways that are less oppressive to Indigenous peoples.

Kevin: The classroom is a colonial space and it could become violent. It was racist towards Indigenous people and racist students come out of this classroom of the university to work for the community. Racism in my view is a family tradition - racist students come from racist families. I have heard of non-Indigenous students who have never heard about colonization - hence their racist remarks in class. This affected me and other Indigenous students, hence I am saying the classroom is a colonial space.

Shaneen: ...if we are going to be pumping out university grads from all walks of life into this country, our country as Indigenous people, they need to know the history of what happened to our people, because that's why we are suffering so much racism. Especially here in Winnipeg and Regina places like that because there is this idea that our people are failures, that we're nothing but alcoholics, and homeless, and our women are addicted and losing their children. ... All across the country they were raped, deprived of food, - we have mass graves of children that died because of tuberculosis and neglect. ... this is the reason that I came up with this idea. Because nobody knows those things.

Sadie-Phoenix: Settler Canadians - their whole identities are based on the premise of oppressing us. So, it's ingrained in literally all aspects of society. The assumption is that we're either undeserving or have self-induced poverty. All those fingers are pointed at Indigenous peoples and that the victim blame is on us - like it's your fault you can't get yourself out of oppression,

You know the beauty and knowledge that we carry and are willing to share with others. ... I may not have had the greatest university experience, but maybe someone else will, and so that was driving me.

Monty: We were constantly being criticized for our culture. We were constantly being [pause] I don't know how to say it, [pause] it was almost like victim blaming. As if it was our self-doing for the social issues and barriers that Indigenous people face, and so in the classroom, we ended up having to consistently stand up for ourselves. ... We ended up having to do a lot of extra labor in the classroom. We're having to stand up for ourselves consistently. We were constantly battling ignorance and always having to justify, explain and educate people on Indigenous-related issues. A lot of times it wasn't a direct attack, it was just ignorance of them not knowing.

It was like we live in one of the most racist cities in Canada and it was felt every second of every day.

Research Question 2: What strategies and tactics were used by the students to address their priorities?

The Indigenous student leaders note the overwhelming racism that marked the need for the ICR, but also through Sadie-Phoenix's comments noting the beauty of Indigenous knowledge carried and willing to be shared for the benefit of all students. As mentioned, the UWSA documents reflect the reframing of the benefits of an ICR related to bringing Indigenous knowledge to the center of the university curriculum. In terms of the strategies and tactics in moving the idea of an ICR forward, participants reveal a focus on Indigenous sovereignty and settler colonial violence in their communication, as well as their awareness of the timing for the push for the ICR concerning major societal events highlighting both horrific settler colonial violence for Indigenous peoples in Canada and Winnipeg, as well as Indigenous resurgence and leadership that were broadly covered in mainstream media. Reference was made to the initiation of the

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) as part of the survivors' settlement agreement; the rise of the Idle No More movement in 2012 about Bill 64 allowing increased violence to Indigenous land and water; the discovery of the murdered body of a 15-year-old Indigenous girl in the Red River in Winnipeg in 2014; the Final Report and Calls to Action of the TRC in 2015 addressing needed reform in all sectors of society; the publication of a Maclean's Magazine article in 2015 (McDonald, 2015) calling out Winnipeg as the most racist city in Canada; and the start in 2015 of the long-awaited Inquiry into Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls. All participants noted these pivotal societal events, as well as the ultimate need to manage white Settler fragility amongst University faculty in pursuit of the larger goal of an ICR.

Kevin: The goal was to be strategic in meetings that is how we talked about the ICR. We organized events, attended meetings, and mobilized students and the community. It was about keeping people aware that this was our land. That the University was on our territory. There was a need for respect, the need for Indigenous voice and presence in the University because it was on our land. I was obliged to do so as a student. I was born in the Western part of Winnipeg and the University is my place of birth. I was being responsible.

Shaneen: I'm pretty strategic when it comes to dealing with, you know, people coming out of a different background because you have to word it in a different way for them to find it appealing. ... I had to achieve with all white people.

When you are coming in as an oppressed person as a young Indigenous female at the time, you have to be super [pause] almost like walking on eggshells. It's so frustrating. You have to be present in such a way that you let them think that it was their idea. ... You almost have to stroke the egos of the people who are in authoritative positions to almost get what you want, and luckily I'm strategic that way and was able to present it in a kind, gentle, strategic way. ... We at the time were young and angry and frustrated and pissed off at what we were seeing, but we were strategic about it.

Sadie-Phoenix: I guess I was trying to be strategic in a way that I had to compromise with the university to do this – otherwise, it wouldn't go ahead. I had to make people feel warm and fuzzy about doing something good, or what makes them look good for doing it. Any inclination that they have doubt or might receive backlash from somebody, or it's going to cause a slippery slope. It's the uncertainties that they were feeling. So, you have to reassure, and if the reassurance is not there, then you have to move to the "what can we do to support you to feel like ...

... it was just a matter of figuring out: How is this relevant for someone who has never engaged with an Indigenous person ever in their lives? We had to go to the extreme and had to work our way back. ... Making sure the broader community feels involved with the consultation. The Elders were involved. Make sure that Indigenous faculty are involved - instructors and professors who have taught Indigenous courses before who could draw upon their lessons learned so they can share their own experiences for teaching these classes, and trying to pull on peoples' heart strings and also making them feel like they should say that they have a responsibility to this relationship.

Monty: Racism governs what we're allowed to say, and how we're allowed to feel and condone ourselves. If I would start yelling or getting upset then I would just be another *angry Indian* and no one would listen to me. For myself, if I want to be heard, I need to be cool and calm, and collected. I'm not allowed to be angry or have a fit because no one will listen to me at that point. That just makes it worse for me and the other people that are

around me when I'm speaking. My voice is very governed and my body is very policed, so I always have to be aware of how I act and how I speak. I don't have the freedom to be upset.

I'm genuinely scared to do anything violent as it's been seen time and time again that I could be killed by a white man and he's probably going to get away with it. I do fear for my life. Colton Boushie is a perfect example of that. He was shot twice in the back of the head by that farmer in Saskatchewan. People in Canada supported [the farmer] and his charges were dismissed so he was never charged with the murder of Colton Boushie. So, I think that sat with me for a long time. That made me feel how vulnerable I am as an Indigenous person.

Because we don't have the power in numbers we are forced to think of other strategies ... I believe it has to do with the teachings of our culture. I can't say that comparatively, I can only speak for what I know as an Indigenous person. ... when I think about the 7 sacred teachings, there's respect, courage, humility, love, [pause ... laugh] I should know all these. I spent four days fasting last summer. Okay, respect, courage, humility, love, honesty, wisdom, and truth. Our way of life is based on these seven sacred teachings and elaborated in detail.

Research Question 3: *How can this initiative be understood in the framework of decolonial movements in higher education emerging from the priorities, thinking, and actions of Indigenous students?*

The participants' responses indicate an understanding of the shifting nature of institutions that are invited to engage with, or participate within, decolonial initiatives. The nature of the ICR movement itself is seen as an important part of decolonial practices in higher education and a space where problematic societal attitudes can be dispelled and addressed. Yet the participants note that the overwhelming structure of higher education works to reform the movement under institutional power and white Settler privilege. Ultimately, the power of the reform is seen to be somewhat limited in terms of the societal change that is needed, and also the power can be seen as curtailed or disempowered by UWinnipeg structural processes of approval and hierarchy that do not ultimately rest with Indigenous Elders, students, and academics.

Kevin: It was a decolonial movement, but we would never fully decolonize a university, and the decolonization of knowledge was just one aspect. Decoloniality was about us and nature. We cannot live without nature so part of the decolonial struggle in a university must be to teach people to connect with the land, the University must instill values for respect for Indigenous people. ... We maintained our presence within the ICR Advisory Committee and we stood for what we believed in. Our request spread across the University and can be noted as an achievement. The setback was that non-Indigenous people had the power to approve what is taught and what is not being taught. Professors sat to come up with the curriculum without us and this was a setback.

Shaneen: It's an attempt on changing really deep ways of thinking in this country. ... We're dealing with a system of government - federally, provincially, even municipally - that was designed to continually oppress our people through our justice system, our healthcare system, through welfare systems. Everything was designed to oppress Indigenous people - that's the fact of the matter. So, it's a very strong and admirable attempt at decolonizing, however, it is a small ripple in what needs to be a huge wave across this country because our people are suffering.

Sadie-Phoenix: They never let Elders teach courses unless it was associated with a professor or even with a doctorate that they gave to Elders. They still weren't able to teach. So, it was this whole premise on how we value Indigenous knowledge versus Western knowledge. The university couldn't decolonize in the concept of that and therefore Indigenous knowledge is supplementary to Western knowledge.

The fact that we had to do it from the Senate or the Board of Regents, or going through the faculties. Of course, doing that is very - that's more of a colonial process, this whole divide and conquer thing too [laughing] ... we knew that the fact that our consultation like having a pipe ceremony as for our consultation, engaging in the community ... the pipe ceremony as an example, we put it on the poster there ... there was a little written line on there: requested by an Elder that was going to conduct the pipe ceremony. Traditionally we were going to have women wearing skirts and this became a big issue. It went to the media because one faculty member felt that it was super sexist to ask women to wear skirts to a pipe ceremony to engage in this consultation. After all, it was a directive from the Elder. So for us, it was damage control. Here we are trying to decolonize this process and incorporate consultation, then you have a white faculty woman who was like now you're oppressing me, and like completely didn't even care what we were doing. ...

Monty: I think it was decolonizing in a way where it created a place for Indigenous people to be treated as an equal. It made it a lot easier for Indigenous students to just go to class and feel like it's a safe place where they are not going to be attacked or criticized. It allowed students and staff to be able to understand the racial issues of being Indigenous, so our history was no longer being swept under the rug, it was being talked about.

The way the council handled it. We are self-governing people, so having that opportunity to practice our way of life, and that implemented with the education system, was a huge step towards decolonization.

DISCUSSION

Through our analysis and findings, we note three emergent themes that are significant to a consideration of student-led decolonial movements in higher education.

Emergent Theme 1 –University as Colonial Space

In the view of Dwayne Donald (2012) “the significance of colonialism, as a social, cultural, and educative force, has not yet been meaningfully contemplated in Canadian educational contexts” (p. 91). Drawing on the notion of forts as both actual and metaphorical organizing factors in relations between Indigenous and Settler Canadian peoples, he theorizes that Canadian Settler society teaches a denial of ethical relations through upholding racialized, deficit-based, cultural categorizations of Indigenous peoples. In the case of this research, the University is viewed by the Indigenous student-leaders as upholding these colonial fort logics of separation based on the devaluing of Indigenous cultures, perspectives, and people. The Indigenous student-leaders all relay the context of racism that prompted the push for an ICR as an educative corrective force needed to transform the colonial nature of the University as well as the colonial-governed society in which it locates itself. The embeddedness of the University within the context of Winnipeg – noted for extreme racism and violence to Indigenous peoples (Macdonald, 2016), is seen as reproduced within the walls of the University through white Settler students, staff, and professors, as well as international students. As Kevin clearly states: *The classroom is a colonial space*. We draw attention to his use of the word *space*, as in an abstracted location, rather than a *place* that provides room for Indigenous meanings and ontology. The ICR is envisioned as holding the potential to transform the experience of Indigenous peoples within the University by providing an educational opportunity for both white Settlers,

but also international students, to dispel erroneous ideas about Indigenous peoples and the causes behind the violence and exclusions they are forced to endure. This is also viewed as potentially transforming the experience of Indigenous peoples in society through the education of professionals taking up roles in Winnipeg working with Indigenous community members.

While the ICR is viewed as prompting a decolonial direction, the idea of the University as being decolonized is thoroughly rejected. The ICR is seen, in Shaneen's words *as a small ripple* where comprehensive change is required - necessitating a move beyond providing information and towards supporting a change of heart in non-Indigenous Canadians. While the efforts can be seen as *decolonial indigenization* – in seeking to “reorient knowledge based on balancing power relations” (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018), the Indigenous leadership behind the ICR is diminished within that process. These former students' views align with those of Indigenous scholar Adam Gaudry (2016) through his teaching of an ICR at the University of Alberta. He notes the positive ways ICRs can open minds and correct misinformation, but “dispossession and marginalization [of Indigenous peoples in Canada] are the results of colonialism, not ignorance, ... that most [Settler Canadians] have come to accept as part of the natural order of things and thus rationalize its existence” (Gaudry, 2016, para. 10). There are solid concerns raised by the Indigenous student leaders regarding the realities of the University immersed in market capitalism and thus engages the ICR as a part of its brand while maintaining the power structure within a colonial space that devalues Indigenous knowledge.

Emergent Theme 2 – Navigation of White Settler Dominance

Plains Cree educational scholar Cash Ahenakew (2017) draws out the paradoxes and complexities of Indigenous educational initiatives. He argues this educational work “represents a conflict of interest as we are asking colonial institutions created to universalize specific ways of knowing and being to recognize their epistemic violence” (p. 86). Educational scholar Verna St. Denis (2011), member of Beardy's and Okemasis First Nation, poignantly argues that centering Indigenous knowledge in educational settings produces strong resistance as it disrupts entrenched myths of the socially just and innocent Canadian nation-state with which Settler-Canadians strongly identify. St. Denis' and Ahenakew's words point to the complexity of the negotiation of identities and power in the promotion of ICRs in higher education. Again, while those in authority in universities may accept the need for an ICR on a philosophical level to address obvious anti-Indigenous racism, or as a step towards ‘reconciliation’ in the TRC framing, the disruption of the dominance and pre-eminence of a Euro-Western ontology draws out tensions through destabilizing unacknowledged epistemic power and white Settler dominance. The Indigenous student leaders each noted the need to strategically and metaphorically walk on eggshells to continually affirm white Settler innocence in a context of normalized white Settler dominance (Parasram, 2019). The student leaders engaged the concept of the ICR as responding tangibly to the TRC Calls to Action through framing the ICR in TRC-reconciliation discourse. The leaders strategically engaged these discourses to encourage those resisting to allow them to see themselves in doing ‘good’ work bringing them to redemption from the violence of settler society. A step further, Monty's words spoke to the paradoxical reactions of fear by Settlers that view him as potentially threatening when expressing appropriate reactions of anger and strategically needing to downplay and mediate his body to assuage fear to be heard within settler contexts. Ultimately, the student leaders noted that the implementation of the ICR into the curriculum, as well as credentialing of instructors, remained within normative Euro-Western colonial authority structures and thus provoking limited systemic change within the institution.

Emergent Theme 3 – Timing Is Significant to Systemic Change

Shaneen shared her specific idea for an ICR within her course and with the University leadership about a decade before it was recognized as something that was doable and would be supported by the administration. She notes in her interview that it wasn't yet the time for an ICR when she suggested it. The interviews note that the subject of an ICR was consistent within the Aboriginal Student Council, yet there does not seem to be any official movements in the University within the ten years between Shaneen's meeting with the UWinnipeg President and senior leadership and the time it became an official

consideration. The interviews, official documents, and media articles suggest the student-led decolonial movement of the ICR can be shown to align with very specific events and movements that created the institutional will to support the change. At the national level, the rise of Idle No More in 2011 and round dances across the country spoke to the resurgence of Indigenous communities and people to the inherent violence they experienced through settler colonial systems of governance. The TRC was also collecting evidence and testimony of 'Indian Residential School' survivors across the country while holding highly visible events covered by mainstream media. Also, more specifically in Winnipeg, the murder of a 15-year-old Indigenous girl and the public grieving that followed the discovery of her body. Anishinaabe Urban Geographer Heather Dorries (2019) critically dissects McLean's article that labeled Winnipeg Canada's most racist city (McDonald, 2015) along with public reactions taken up in the mainstream media. Dorries notes that there is a push within the McDonald article to reclaim urban Winnipeg as a settler colonial space by showing the ways people in Winnipeg are positioning themselves against the interpersonal racism directed at Indigenous peoples without calling into question the ultimate sources of dispossession and violence for Indigenous people rooted in settler colonialism. The timing of the push for an ICR in 2015 was decidedly different from 2005, and the public discourse around events was highlighting the inherent violence of settler systems which likely a liberal arts university in an urban core may have desired to distinguish itself from. The opportunity to do something was there through responding to the generosity of Indigenous student-leaders offering their time and commitment in support of institutional change.

CONCLUSION

The ICR was long overdue and necessary. The number of Indigenous students enrolling at the university had been steadily increasing since Shaneen originally pushed for the course requirement in 2005, and their presence and leadership resulted in institutional change. The acts of racism Shaneen experienced sparked the initial push for the ICR at UWinnipeg. It was evident that behind the push for an ICR was a desire of the Indigenous student leaders for all students to understand the significance of Indigenous histories, places, and knowledge systems, and for UWinnipeg graduates to participate in society in ways that are less oppressive to Indigenous peoples. The ICR was implemented and took effect in September 2016. Interviews with the student leaders note the personal and systemic racism they experienced on and off campus and their views on how these colonial systems should be changed. We notice throughout the interviews that the ICR is merely a step towards changing the bigger issues in both the university and society that create barriers for Indigenous people.

Jeannie and Meagan's walking analysis led to three significant themes about promoting systemic change for Indigenous-led priorities: 1) University as colonial space; 2) Navigation of white Settler dominance, and 3) Timing is significant to university response. These themes note the resistance that manifested, but also the ways student-leaders strategically connected the ICR to the TRC to gain support through enabling a positive self-image for faculty and the broader university. The specific navigation of white Settler innocence in systemic change is well-documented and theorized in the Canadian context (Parasram, 2019) and should be something that universities should deeply consider in reflecting on their efforts for systemic institutional change. Ultimately, we believe the ICR has raised awareness of settler colonial violence for Indigenous peoples and provided venues for Indigenous knowledge to enrich the curriculum but is one small step in addressing a much larger problem in institutions throughout Canada - especially universities.

We believe that this case study exemplifies an approach to social movements within education that Tarlau (2021) characterizes as 'contentious co-governance and prefiguration'. Tarlau characterizes this type of systemic change in public education as being marked by the need to recognize the contentious nature of negotiations of power on what can become shared goals, but the process itself is both collaborative and contentious within these negotiations. The goal for the movement leaders is a prefiguration within the social movement of their vision for "alternative social and economic relations" through the "embodiment of the social relations and practices that are the ultimate goal of the movement" (p. 548). The Indigenous students engaged systems of recognition based on Indigenous ontologies which itself is a prefiguration of the goals

they sought. Indeed it was the prefiguration of Indigenous ontologies through a ceremony that brought out the most acute resistance and contentiousness within the university setting. Ultimately, the students were less satisfied with the results of the movement, as the power to structure the ICR ultimately did not rest within Indigenous authority, but within settler colonial systems.

We conclude by sharing some ways that universities can support decolonial movements in higher education through ICRs. We share these suggestions with full recognition of the tensions and contentiousness this raises in educational institutions that are part of settler colonial systems of authority. First, there needs to be a decolonial focus within all ICRs and a need for trauma-sensitive teaching. The need for an ICR is not solely addressing an informational problem, but a deeply relational problem in the context of settler colonial violence. Indigenous students should be a focus of attention concerning their needs when seeking to also educate the whole class. Instructors should be prepared in time and training to ethically manage and meet the needs in this complex setting. Second, a decolonial movement does not happen through maintaining or centering colonial practices. Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers are needed to teach courses, and the university should restructure to recognize their expertise by Indigenous systems of recognition rather than colonial, and conversely provide greater awareness and supports throughout the university on ways to disrupt the Euro-centric focus that currently dominates curricula. Faculty require additional funding and support to engage Elders and Indigenous knowledge systems and to connect to the land. Third, universities can support more departments in providing Indigenous-focused courses to broaden the reach across the university. Within that goal, prioritize the hiring of more Indigenous scholars in different areas of the university. Importantly, institutional change needs to be engaged with Indigenous faculty and community leadership. The over-burdening of Indigenous faculty in these pursuits could be recognized through course release or other university mechanisms.

We would like to end by thanking all of the supporters of this research that generously provided their time, expertise, and partnership with the leadership, staff, Elders, and students in the ASSC and the office of the Indigenous Academic Lead. Within that amazing group, we would foremost acknowledge Kevin, Shaneen, Sadie-Phoenix, and Monty for the work they have done, and the ways they continue to engage their teachings and knowledge in the furtherance of Indigenous sovereignty in colonial places. We respect that all decolonial efforts require deep respect for Indigenous sovereignty and collective work. Thank you to Dr. Marc Kuly for reviewing an early draft.

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