

## An update on MSVU's commitments to Indigenous Peoples

Dear MSVU community,

In October 2021, MSVU held a [ceremony of apology and commitment](#) at which then President Dr. Ramona Lumpkin apologized on behalf of the University to the survivors, their families and communities, as well as all Indigenous Peoples, for the University's role in the tragedy of residential schools in Canada. The Sisters of Charity Halifax, the founders and previous owners of Mount Saint Vincent University, had members who staffed the Shubenacadie Residential School in Nova Scotia, which was open from 1930 to 1967, and the Cranbrook Residential School in British Columbia, which was open from 1890 to 1970.

MSVU's apology was accompanied by a [list of commitments to Indigenous Peoples](#), which came as recommendations from Indigenous members of the [L'nu Advisory Circle](#) at MSVU. The commitments build upon work already being undertaken and were based on an overarching commitment to listening, learning, and enduring action.

I write today to share a progress report on those commitments. Please read below for details. Please also note that a number of other initiatives continue at MSVU alongside these commitments.

On behalf of MSVU sincere thanks to Patrick Small Legs-Nagge, Special Advisor on Indigenous Affairs at MSVU, L'nu Advisory Circle members, and the numerous others Indigenous community members and leaders whose guidance on our journey of Truth and Reconciliation has been instrumental. Your partnership is deeply valued.

Joël

Dr. Joël Dickinson  
President and Vice-Chancellor  
Mount Saint Vincent University



## June 2023: Progress report

### MSVU's commitments to Indigenous Peoples

Originally shared in October of 2021

We have taken steps to change our university but recognize that more needs to be done. We will build upon efforts already undertaken, and with the valued advice of Indigenous community Elders and leaders as our guide. In particular, we are deeply grateful for the continued leadership of the L'nu Advisory Circle at MSVU, a collective of Indigenous and non-Indigenous community, student, faculty and staff representatives dedicated to advancing work in support of Indigenous learners and communities. We will emphasize listening and learning, followed by enduring action.

Specifically:

#### **1) We will continue to decolonize course content and develop Indigenous-informed course content within all Faculties at the Mount.**

##### UPDATE:

- In addition to adding Indigenous-informed content to a number of existing courses, the following new courses have recently been developed.
  - Child & Youth Study consulted on the development of a curriculum inclusive of an Indigenous worldview for the course Nature and Outdoor Play in Early Childhood Education (CHYS 2602). The course will be a required course in the Early Childhood Education concentration within the Child & Youth Study degree.
  - English course offerings at MSVU now include: Introduction to Indigenous Literatures and Cultures (ENGL 2009), Indigenous Literatures (ENGL 3310), and Indigenous Feminisms and Sexualities (ENGL 3311).
  - The Bachelor of Education (secondary) degree includes a core Indigenous studies course. A similar course is in development for the BEd elementary program.
  - The Department of Applied Human Nutrition is exploring the creation of a core Indigenous focused course.

- The Department of Communication Studies is working with King's College to offer a new Indigenous Media Literacy course starting in June of 2023.
  - A number of departments are offering special topics courses with an Indigenous focus, for example a course on Indigenous food sovereignty being offered by Applied Human Nutrition.
  - The Indigenous Student Centre website includes a list of [MSVU courses with Indigenous content](#).
  - Funds have been allocated for an Indigenous Curriculum Consultant to help with course creation and modification.
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## **2) We will work to ensure that students in all programs at the Mount learn about the harmful effects of racism and about the tragic history of the residential schools in Canada.**

### UPDATE:

- The Special Advisor on Indigenous Affairs at MSVU has shared a presentation with groups across every faculty at MSVU and at other universities and government departments titled "Understanding Indigenous Worldviews through the Lens of a 60s Scoop Survivor." He has made this presentation more than 50 times.
  - Many of the new courses being developed with an Indigenous focus feature content on the forced assimilation policies in Canada.
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## **3) We will consult with Mi'kmaq communities with regard to offering academic programs in their communities.**

### UPDATE:

- Representatives from the Business and Tourism Department at MSVU are visiting every Indigenous community in Atlantic Canada to engage with them on the development and delivery of a new [Kinu Tourism Program](#).

#### **4) We will expand financial supports for Indigenous students at the Mount.**

UPDATE:

- Through a \$500,000 gift from philanthropists Scott McCain and Leslie McLean, matched by an investment from MSVU, a new [L'nu Student Success Bursary Fund and L'nu Emergency Fund](#) have been established. The first bursary has been awarded and the emergency fund has also been used to support students in need.
  - The TD Indigenous Student bursary has recently been awarded to students who each received \$2,500.
  - The space above Kina'masuti aqq Apognamasuti (the Indigenous Student Centre on campus, facing Melody Drive) has been dedicated as a residence space for women Indigenous students.
  - [Enterprise Holdings recently established an award for Indigenous Business and Tourism students](#) in their final year of study at MSVU.
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#### **5) We will promote the services of the Indigenous Student Centre, including its provision of residence space for female Indigenous students.**

UPDATE:

- Kina'masuti aqq Apognamasuti (Indigenous Student Centre) is regularly used for studying, socializing and craft making. The upstairs residence is continually being used by women Indigenous students.
  - The Indigenous Student Centre is part of a new EDIA Hub on campus intended to better connect the MSVU community with the resources available to them.
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#### **6) We will host a ceremonial Healing Circle with L'nu members from the Advisory Circle to meet with the Board of Governors and the Senate to hear from First Voices their concerns about what is happening regionally and nationally in Canada.**

UPDATE:

- A healing circle was held with the Board of Governors in 2021. The healing circle with Senate has not yet been scheduled.

## **7) We will ask the Board of Governors and Senate to consider their roles and responsibilities in reconciliation, including the representation of the Mi'kmaq community within University governance bodies.**

### UPDATE:

- A dedicated Senate seat for an Indigenous representative was established in 2023. John R. Sylliboy is the first to hold this appointment.
  - An Indigenous representative has been part of the MSVU Board of Governors for 15 years, and we are working to increase Indigenous representation on the Board. Natasha Agnew of Glooscap First Nation is currently a Board member. She is a Senior Human Resource Advisor with the Public Service Commission of Canada.
  - The Special Advisor on Indigenous Affairs is now a member of the university's leadership team (called Management Forum). This means that MSVU now has Indigenous representatives on the University's Board, Senate, and Management Forum (administration). No other university in the Halifax area has Indigenous representation on all of their highest Management bodies.
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## **8) We will reinstate our Elder in Residence program, creating ways for Elders to be a more vital part of our campus community and ensuring that these Elders' contributions and needs are respected.**

### UPDATE:

- With the input of Indigenous advisors, including the L'nu Advisory Circle at MSVU, the university established an [Auntie in Residence program](#) in the fall of 2022, in partnership with the University of King's College. Emily Pictou-Roberts is the first to hold the position.
  - A policy to reimburse Elders who give of their time at MSVU is in development.
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## **9) We will build upon recent changes in our policies that recognize the value of Indigenous knowledge and research in faculty renewal, promotion, and tenure decisions and that recognize diverse credentials for hiring Indigenous faculty.**

### UPDATE:

- A Committee on Decolonizing and Indigenizing the MSVU Faculty Association Collective Agreement has provided a draft report on collective agreement articles for consideration.
- The university launched an Indigenous cluster hire in January 2023 seeking three new Indigenous professors and an Indigenous librarian.

**10) We will work to engage the campus as a whole in honouring the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, Treaty Day, Mi'kmaq History Month, and other days and events that reflect Mi'kmaq history and culture.**

UPDATE:

- Students working with the Indigenous Student Centre through the Student Works Program have been helpful in planning events and sharing messages to mark these observances, supported by the Communications & Marketing team together with the Special Advisor on Indigenous Affairs. Examples of recent messages include:
    - [Marking Red Dress Day 2023](#) – A message from Patrick Small Legs-Nagge
    - [National Day for Truth and Reconciliation 2022](#) – A message from Patrick Small Legs-Nagge and Dr. Joël Dickinson
    - [Marking Treaty Day and Mi'kmaq History Month 2022](#) – A message from Cassandra Bruhm, Interim Indigenous Student Liaison
    - [Marking National Indigenous History Month 2022](#) – A message from Patrick Small Legs-Nagge, Dr. Sheila Brown and Florence Blackett
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**11) We will host public forums to bring Indigenous and non-Indigenous people together to discuss our country's history of racist practices; the persistence of harms into the present day; and ways we can work together to heal the damage that has been done.**

UPDATE:

- The Research Office's [Black and Indigenous Speaker Series](#) continues to feature Indigenous scholars. The sessions are open to the public.
  - A number of individual faculty also continue to host panel discussions within and beyond the classroom.
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**12) We will seek collaboration with all HRM universities, creating opportunities for Indigenous faculty and staff to share initiatives and work together.**

UPDATE:

- The Department of Communication Studies is working with King's College to offer a new Indigenous Media Literacies course starting in June of 2023.
- With the input of Indigenous advisors, including the L'nu Advisory Circle at MSVU, the university established an [Auntie in Residence program](#) (fall 2022), in partnership with the University of King's College. Emily Pictou-Roberts is the first in the role.
- MSVU, Dalhousie, Saint Mary's and NSCAD have jointly created a Mi'kmaq conversation course, now in its second year. It is housed at Dalhousie University.

**We will also continue the commitments made in our strategic plan 2021-2028, “Strength through Community”:**

UPDATE:

- [Review the latest strategic plan progress report here.](#)
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Mount Saint Vincent University is located in Mi'kma'ki, the unceded ancestral territory of the Mi'kmaq People.