



Education the key to reconciliation

Making good on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) 94 Calls to Action presents Canada with one of its greatest challenges—and greatest opportunities—in its 150-year history.

This is a challenge because the habits created by years of ignorance, racism, neglect, and damage are hard to acknowledge and overcome. It is an opportunity because with commitment and strong leadership Canada will emerge more unified, healthier and more inclusive than it has ever been.

Many institutions will need to change significantly if Canada is to do so. One of them is education, at both the K-12 and post-secondary levels. This was stressed at a national reconciliation forum in Winnipeg last week attended by many from the University of Saskatchewan (U of S).

When the U of S held Canada's first National Forum on Building Reconciliation two years ago, TRC chair Murray Sinclair said that "education is the key to reconciliation." If so, a lot of work needs to be done. About 27 per cent of Canadians have a university degree but fewer than 10 per cent of Indigenous people do. If access to education is a sign of a just society, that's injustice in action.

The U of S, which has a strong record of social justice dating back decades, is committed to increasing the number of Indigenous students it registers, supports for success, and graduates. We are seeing improvement in this regard annually.

Our role in Canada's journey to reconciliation involves more than increasing the graduation rates and numbers of Aboriginal students, however.

Among many initiatives, we now have a program in Aboriginal languages, a Cameco Chair in Indigenous Health, and a new law degree program in Nunavut. One of our signature research areas is Indigenous Peoples.

We are increasing our Indigenous faculty and staff numbers, and recently created a high-level leadership position in Indigenous engagement. We have opened the beautiful Gordon Oakes Red Bear Student Centre as a gathering place for students of all backgrounds, and are including Indigenous symbols in our campus buildings.

Content drawn from Indigenous experience and ways of knowing is being incorporated into all our degree programs across campus—not to supplant traditional western understanding, but to enrich it, offer alternatives to it, acknowledge thousands of years of deep learning that occurred here long prior to it, and give all students a richer, more informed and ultimately more compassionate understanding of the world. Through this, the U of S will be an even better university.



We all owe the Indigenous people who have lived here for millennia profound gratitude for providing the chance to receive even some of that knowledge. Few countries and few universities have that opportunity.

The U of S benefits from the hard work, patience, and wisdom of elders, residential school survivors, Aboriginal leaders, and Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal faculty members and student leaders, who believe in the significant role we can play in reconciliation.

We all benefit from partnerships with Aboriginal organizations and communities, and the Office of the Treaty Commissioner, to ensure an understanding of treaties, of which education is a foundation.

And, importantly, the U of S and the people of Saskatchewan benefit from the province's K-12 teachers and administrators who work hard to design and deliver curricula broadly infused with building an understanding of treaties, Indigenous history, and the difference between justice for all and justice for only a few—so that when their graduates come to the U of S they are already well informed.

A challenge of this magnitude means being purposeful and committed. It means not just reconciliation but *reconciliaction*. It will take time and a careful mix of patience and impatience. But I am reminded of Senator Sinclair's statement that "If we agree on the objective of reconciliation, and agree to work together, the work we do today will immeasurably strengthen the social fabric of Canada tomorrow." In Saskatchewan, I often say, if not us, who? If not now, when?

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This Op-Ed appeared in the Nov. 22 edition of the Saskatoon StarPhoenix.