Creating welcoming spaces: Indigenous journalism students' perspectives on programming and representation

Créer des espaces accueillants: Le point de vue des étudiant.e.s autochtones en journalisme sur la programmation et la représentation

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ABSTRACT

Our research explores the first-hand experiences of Indigenous journalism students in Canada, examining avenues through which journalism programs can improve their inclusivity and create a more welcoming environment. This analysis is based on 21 semi-structured qualitative interviews with Indigenous students and former students who attended journalism diploma and degree programs between 1990 and 2022. Participants were asked about representation, content, cultural sensitivity, and other factors which could influence the well-being of Indigenous students. In addition, this study incorporates a quantitative component which provides a recent and thorough snapshot of Indigenous representation in Canadian journalism programs. The findings provide insight into some of the challenges faced by Indigenous students studying journalism, including feelings of isolation and racism. Participants also provide suggestions for educators and institutions working to create more welcoming spaces.

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords: journalism education, Indigenous journalism, decolonization, Indigenous Knowledge, inclusion, representation

Mots-clés : formation en journalisme, journalisme autochtone, décolonisation, connaissances autochtones, inclusion, représentation

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RÉSUMÉ

Notre recherche explore les expériences personnelles des étudiant.e.s autochtones en journalisme au Canada, en examinant les moyens par lesquels les départements de journalisme peuvent améliorer leur inclusivité et créer un environnement plus accueillant. Cette analyse est fondée sur 21 entrevues qualitatives avec des étudiant.e.s et ancien.ne.s étudiant.e.s autochtones qui ont étudié le journalisme entre 1990 et 2022. Les participant.e.s ont répondu à des questions sur la représentation, le contenu, la sensibilité culturelle et les autres éléments qui pourraient influencer le bien-être des étudiant.e.s autochtones. En outre, cette étude inclut un volet quantitatif qui permet d'établir un portrait contemporain de la représentation des étudiant.e.s autochtones dans les programmes de journalisme au Canada. Les résultats permettent de cerner certains des défis communs pour les autochtones qui étudient le journalisme, au nombre desquels le sentiment d'isolement et des expériences du racisme. Enfin, cette recherche intègre les propositions et suggestions des participant.e.s sur la manière pour les éducateurs et établissements d'enseignement, de créer des espaces plus accueillants.

INTRODUCTION

While it has been nearly 150 years since Canada's first journal for Indigenous Peoples, *The Indian*, was published (Queen's University Alumni, 2021), it is only in the past 20 years that newsrooms have begun actively increasing the number of Indigenous journalists on staff. A 2004 survey found that among 37 newspapers across the country, only one employed a full-time Indigenous journalist (Miller, 2005). Twenty years later, the Canadian Association of Journalists' annual Newsroom Diversity Survey[1] found that Indigenous journalists made up 5.2% of newsroom staff (Canadian Association of Journalists, 2023), compared to approximately 5% of the Canadian population (Statistics Canada, 2022). The association does note, however, that these numbers are driven by a handful of newsrooms: in 2022, APTN and CBC employed 63 per cent of all Indigenous journalists in Canada and, to date, many are still employed in part-time and intern-level roles (Canadian Association of Journalists, 2022). The CAJ survey also found that as recently as 2022, about 8 in 10 newsrooms across Canada did not have any Black or Indigenous journalists on staff.

This lack of representation has an impact on coverage. Anderson and Robertson (2011) wrote, "Colonialism has always thrived in Canada's press" (p. 3), and the lack of Indigenous journalists—particularly in leadership roles—is often apparent in the choice and narrative of stories involving Indigenous Peoples and issues. A study by Journalists for Human Rights found that between 2010 and 2016, less than half a percent of media stories in Ontario focused on Indigenous Peoples (Carpenter et al., 2019). Meanwhile, an examination of media coverage of two water pollution incidents in the early 2000s—one involving a First Nation, the other a non-Indigenous community—found a vast difference in the way the media portrayed the causes and handling of the incidents, with far more negative terms being used in the case of the Indigenous community (Burns & Schor, 2021). McCue (2023) discusses the use of warrior and victim narratives in his book *Decolonizing Journalism*, and quotes an Elder who once told him that "the only way an Indian would make it into the news is if they were one of the four Ds: Drumming, Dancing, Drunk, or Dead" (p. 7). The Indigenous Journalists' Association (formerly the Native American Journalists Association), which represents Indigenous journalists in the United States and Canada, even developed a tongue-in-cheek "Reporting in Indian Country" bingo card featuring stereotypes and tropes instead of numbers and letters, to analyze media stories for clichéd storytelling (Indigenous Journalist Association, 2018). And while certain media have engaged in self-reflection and recognized a general lack of nuance and context in coverage (David, 2018; CBC, 2019; Lisk, 2020), change has been slow.

It is also worth noting that while the 2015 Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) Call to Action 84 mentions the need for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation to increase "equitable access for Aboriginal peoples to jobs, leadership positions, and professional development opportunities within the organization" (TRC, Calls to Action, p. 9), and Call to Action 86 is a direct call for journalism program curricula in Canada to better reflect Indigenous experiences and history (TRC, p. 10), the report does not include a specific directive for journalism programs to amplify efforts to increase enrolment of Indigenous students.

Meanwhile, locating statistics on Indigenous representation within Canadian journalism programs is difficult. While some journalism programs have been working to expand their Indigenous-related content and have initiated projects aimed at recruiting Indigenous students, there is still a dearth of available data reflecting Indigenous enrolment and graduation statistics. There is also a notable absence of comprehensive data detailing how Indigenous students feel about their experiences while studying journalism.

This research seeks to address these gaps in the current body of research by examining and providing insights into the challenges and perspectives of Indigenous students in Canadian journalism programs.

Researchers

Drawing from Kovach's (2021) concept of 'self-in-relation', this paper begins with the researchers situating themselves and their cultural identities within the research context.

[1] Voluntary demographic survey conducted by the Canadian Association of Journalists.

Kristy Snell: I am an Associate Professor in the Department of Journalism at Concordia University in Montreal, where I teach Indigenous-related journalism, including a collaborative mentorship project aimed at introducing journalism to Kanien'kéha:ka high school students. I have worked as a journalist in Canada—primarily with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) — for more than 30 years. I am a member of Standing Buffalo Dakota Nation in Saskatchewan.

Gwendolyn Roley: I am an emerging journalist and researcher, the descendant of European settlers who grew up on the shores of Bellingham Bay in the Salish Sea, now based in Montreal/ Tiohtià:ke. My interests lie in history, social science, and literature, which leads me to work in telling stories driven on data. However, while data is a jumping-off point for much of my research, my work and the work of others I admire have shown me time and again that no story is complete without the perspectives and words of the people who live it.

Methodology

We conducted the research with approval from the Research Ethics Unit of Concordia University. Our study's development was guided by four main research questions:

> **RQ1:** What are the enrolment and graduation rates of Indigenous students in Canadian journalism programs?
>
> **RQ2:** What are the experiences of Indigenous journalism students in Canada?
>
> **RQ3:** How can journalism programs improve their support of Indigenous students?
>
> **RQ4:** How can journalism programs better recruit Indigenous students?

Our research addressed these questions using a mixed-methodological approach. The qualitative component involved interviewing Indigenous journalism students (current and former) about their experiences within Canadian journalism programs and asking what they would suggest for improvement. The quantitative aspect looked at the enrolment and graduation rates of self-identifying Indigenous students in Canadian journalism programs over a period of five years ending in 2022.

Qualitative

Concordia University journalism students and the lead researcher conducted qualitative interviews with individuals who self-identified as Indigenous; that is, First Nations, Métis, or Inuit (Statistics Canada, 2021), and who were attending or had attended a Canadian college or university to study journalism. While self-identification is considered fraught in numerous contexts, including academia (Ministry of Innovation, Science and Industry of Canada, 2024), it is the most commonly-used method of Indigenous identity reporting by post-secondary institutions, and the method employed by Statistics Canada in its census. Therefore, it is the method we chose to employ for this study.

Participant interviews

Before contacting any participants for interviews, student research assistants took part in a five-week-long structured preparatory process in accordance with themes outlined in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Call to Action 86 (TRC, 2015), to provide a foundational knowledge and understanding of Indigenous history and experiences in Canada. This included about 10 hours of lectures, discussions, and readings, including excerpts from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Final Report and works by Indigenous creators. Kovach (2021) writes, "Indigenous methodologies require reflection on the self," and, to this end, students completed several reflective writing assignments in which they considered their own positionality and responsibility in relation to the work. They also learned about trauma-informed interviewing practices (Thompson, 2021) in an effort to ensure sensitivity during interviews.

Participants were recruited through several methods. Most were contacted directly by Concordia journalism students through publicly available email addresses of self-identifying Indigenous journalists. Some volunteered by email after an open invitation was extended during an online meeting of a media network's employee resource

group. And, in a few instances, journalism program administrators agreed to collaborate and facilitated outreach to Indigenous students and former students, obtaining consent and subsequently providing contact information to the researchers. This multifaceted recruitment approach aimed to provide a varied and representative sample, although the majority of participants were found to have attended programs in Ontario, Saskatchewan, Quebec, and Nova Scotia.

Interviews were conducted via videoconferencing or telephone between February and May of 2023, involving 21 participants (18 former journalism students—nearly all program graduates — and three current students). Three had attended journalism programs in the 1990s, four in the early 2000s, seven in the period between 2010 and 2019, and the remaining seven participants have attended programs since 2020. Concordia student research assistants conducted two interviews each as part of their coursework, with an alternate essay option available. One study participant opted to respond to the list of questions in writing, rather than doing an interview. Some study participants agreed to be named, while others chose to have their identities remain confidential. The lead researcher interviewed three participants.

Research assistants used a list of 17 semi-structured questions centered around representation, program content, and Indigenous students' comfort and well-being within their respective programs. Participants were also asked whether they had any recommendations for change, and how journalism programs might improve recruiting. Student researchers were encouraged to ask follow-up questions for clarification but nearly all chose to closely follow the scripted questions during their two interviews, deviating very little from the script. Archibald (2008) writes about the use of story in Indigenous pedagogy and the importance of listening with three ears—the two on our heads and the one in our hearts—and student researchers were asked to simply listen carefully to the participants, as the interview was recorded. No other action was required of them, as part of an effort to encourage active listening and meaningful connection with what they were hearing.

After the interviews were completed, the researchers sent the transcripts to participants for review. The lead researcher then analyzed the transcripts, adhering to techniques outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), to identify and examine dominant themes and patterns which reflect the data. These were tallied for the number of times they appeared throughout the completed interviews. The lead researcher then analyzed these themes to draw insights from Indigenous students about their experiences and how they felt their educational programs could be improved.

Quantitative

Demographic representation

The quantitative section of this research involved collecting enrolment statistics from journalism programs across Canada to determine the percentage of Indigenous journalism students and graduates over a five-year period (2017-2022). We compiled a list of Canadian journalism programs using the Government of Canada's official list of designated education institutions on the government website, excluding Nunavut, as it did not have institutions on the list.

The resulting list was manually cleaned and each school's website examined to identify relevant programs. The guiding question for inclusion in the research was "Would CBC or an equivalent news organization hire someone who received this degree/diploma?" The reasoning was that networks such as CBC and CTV are well-known, and viewed as places where emerging journalists might potentially be hired.

The search included the terms "journalism," as well as "broadcasting," "television," "radio," "media," "mass media" and, in some cases, "creative writing" and "communications." Communications programs and writing degrees were included if their descriptions specifically mentioned a journalism specialization option. The final list of programs to contact did not include the Northwest Territories and Yukon, as they did not have any journalism programs, and, as previously noted, Nunavut.

A standard message requesting enrolment and graduation statistics between 2017 and 2022, including the number of self-identifying Indigenous students enrolling and graduating each year, was sent to each program. Messages were initially sent to program coordinators and, on occasion, institu-

tional research departments and registrar's offices, with some Access to Information requests filed.

Data gathering

Data was received in different formats from various institutions and reformatted to be combined with data from other programs. Some schools used a calendar year system (eg: 2018) to record demographic information, while others used an academic year format (eg: 2017-2018). To simplify and combine, data from the end year of the academic year was considered in the same category as that calendar year (eg:"2018" = "2017-2018").

Formatted data from individual schools was combined in a spreadsheet with data from other schools nationwide. We combined the yearly numbers of overall graduates and enrolments to determine five-year totals for both categories, and then did the same for self-identifying Indigenous graduates and enrolments. We then calculated the annual and five-year percentages of self-identifying Indigenous enrolments and graduates. Pivot tables were used to determine self-identified Indigenous graduation rates by province and by degree type (e. g. diploma, Bachelor's degree, etc.). While data was acquired for individual schools, the researchers chose to limit analysis to the provincial level to reduce the risk of invasion of privacy for students.

Limitations

Data precision is limited from the outset, as the study focuses on Indigenous students who are self-identifying. Some Indigenous students may choose not to self-identify or share details of their status to their institution, while others' Indigenous status might be uncertain.

Some schools recorded their enrolment data by using calendar years, while others used academic years. Certain programs only provided totals over a five-year period, while others provided only enrolment or graduation numbers. In addition, some schools did not collect the demographic information at all, while others declined to share it, citing privacy reasons. This meant that researchers were forced to work from a sample. According to Joel Best (2012) in *Damned Lies and Statistics*, working from samples is common when collecting data addressing social issues that affect large groups and geographic areas. Best goes on to say that it is not the size of the sample which matters, but rather the representativeness of the sample. In this study, we included statistics from all degrees and provinces with journalism programs, in an effort to provide a snapshot of Indigenous representation which is as thorough as possible.

Based on the data we collected from institutions, we were unable to track whether students graduated or how long they remained in their programs. However, we were able to determine the *proportions* of Indigenous enrolments and graduates at roughly half the journalism education programs in the country during that five-year period. It should be noted that the proportions of Indigenous students were consistently small, with the addition or subtraction of one or two students having the power to alter the percentages in the dataset.

We then used Statistics Canada 2021 census data to compare the Indigenous population nationally and provincially with our findings.

FINDINGS

RQ1: What are the enrolment and graduation rates of Indigenous students in Canadian journalism programs?

Ninety programs at 48 universities were found to fit our research criteria and selected to be observed. This included one Quebec junior college (CÉGEP), two associate certificate programs, 39 diploma programs, two joint diploma/bachelor's programs, 23 bachelor's programs, 13 certificate programs, three graduate diploma programs and nine master's programs. Of the 90 programs contacted for this research, 48 provided some form of data when requested, 22 programs did not provide data without a response or explanation, and 20 others did not provide data citing either a lack of collection or concerns for student privacy.

Of the 48 journalism programs which did provide data, 3.86% of enrolled students and 3.21% of graduates self-identified as Indigenous. This is lower than the 5.0% of Indigenous people counted in the 2021 census (Statistics Canada, 2021). There were only two provinces in the dataset where the

Indigenous enrolment percentages were higher: Manitoba and Saskatchewan, which also have the highest overall proportions of Indigenous residents. Notably, the three regions with the highest Indigenous population percentages out of all the provinces and territories —the Northwest Territories, Nunavut and Yukon— (Statistics Canada, 2022), were excluded from this research because they did not have any journalism education programs at the time of the survey.

Enrolment rates of self-identified Indigenous students were found to be slightly higher than graduation rates for all degree types and in every province. The percentage of students who self-identified as Indigenous in journalism programs was higher at junior colleges and technical-vocational schools with enrolment rates of 4.23% at junior colleges and 4.41% at technical-vocational schools, and graduation rates of 3.68% at junior colleges and 4.35% at technical-vocational schools. At universities with journalism programs, 3.22% of the students enrolled had self-identified as Indigenous and 2.09% of the graduates self-identified as Indigenous.

The trend continued with lower rates of self-identified Indigenous students as the duration of education extended. For journalism diplomas, which typically take two years, 5.77% of enrolled students and 5.14% of graduates self-identified as Indigenous (with both figures being higher than the Indigenous population percentage estimated from Statistics Canada data). However, for bachelor's degrees in journalism, which typically take around four years, 2.42% of students and 1.73% of graduates self-identified as Indigenous.

Overall, the percentage of enrolled students who self-identified as Indigenous stayed within a range of 3.41 and 4.03% between 2017 and 2022. The percentage of graduates who self-identified stayed within a range of 1.82 and 2.83%, with the exception of 2021 where 4.32% of graduates self-identified as Indigenous.

Manon Tremblay, Senior Director of Indigenous Directions at Concordia University, participated in an interview with the lead researcher on May 3, 2023, to provide context and perspective to the study results. When asked about the proportional increase in Indigenous graduations in 2021, she said it was difficult to pinpoint the exact reason and suggested the possibility of a slight bump in enrolments a few years prior: "Despite the pandemic I have seen years in the past where there's been surges of students. So I wonder if that's what it was." When asked whether the pandemic-related shift to online learning might have led to the increase, Tremblay said it's possible, although she said that in some cases Indigenous students who returned to their communities found that "the Wi-Fi was so bad that it was impossible to take the courses." Tremblay said she also knew of some students who chose to put their studies on hold during the pandemic because the online learning format "just wasn't for them."

RQ2: What are the experiences of Indigenous journalism students in Canada?

Henderson (2000) writes, "When most professors describe the 'world,' they describe artificial Eurocentric contexts and ignore Aboriginal world views, knowledge, and thought. For most Aboriginal students, the realization of their invisibility is similar to looking into a still lake and not seeing their image" (p. 76). Kirkness and Barnhardt (2001) identified factors key to Indigenous student engagement and success in general post-secondary education, outlining the 4-R's: Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity, and Responsibility. "The university must be able to present itself in ways that have instrumental value to First Nations students; that is, the programs and services that are offered must connect with the students' own aspirations and cultural predispositions sufficiently to achieve a comfort level that will make the experience worth enduring" (Kirkness & Barnhardt, p. 6).

While more than two decades have passed since the publication of those two studies, the reflections of many participants in this research underscore the work that remains for journalism programs.

Representation within the program

The 21 research participants were asked the question, "How many Indigenous students were there in your classes?"76. 2% (n=16) said that they were the only Indigenous student in their cohort (n=12) or one of two students (n=4).

For some, this made for an isolating educational experience. Martha Troian said that while studying in her program in Ontario, she didn't know of any other Indigenous students. Troian said that if she'd had Indigenous classmates, it might have limited some of the pressure to explain certain things to non-Indigenous students. She also discussed some of the challenges faced by students studying journalism, saying that normal feelings of stress can be exacerbated by the isolation. "Being included should make you be more engaged with content…and almost make you feel safe," she said.

Faculty

Manon Tremblay says representation among faculty can be a major factor when it comes to the comfort of Indigenous students in post-secondary education because "they want to be able to have people they relate to, people that they can talk to, and that they don't feel like their guard is always up."

When asked how many Indigenous faculty members were teaching within their journalism programs, 90.5% (n=19) said none. One participant (hereafter referred to as Participant A) said there was one Indigenous professor as part of the faculty during the first year they were in their journalism program, but none the following year. Another participant, Brad Bellegarde, mentioned an elective course taught by an Indigenous CBC reporter in the final year of his program in Saskatchewan. He said there was also a Canada Research Chair within the faculty who was Indigenous, but from a country in South America.

Most participants simply responded, "none" or "zero."

Content within the program

Participants were asked how much content related to Indigenous Peoples was included in their programs. A total 47.6% (n=10) responded that there had been no Indigenous content (n=7), or very little Indigenous content (n=3), while 33.3% (n=7) said that *they* were the ones who initiated inclusion of Indigenous content, through their choice of stories or projects to work on. Ossie Michelin, who attended journalism school in Quebec, said of Indigenous content in his program: "Not a thing. Anything that was Indigenous-related was because I brought it in and my professors were receptive to it. "

Cultural awareness

A total 38.1% of participants (n=8) voluntarily brought up an overall lack of cultural awareness in their programs, both among professors and other students. Creeson Agecoutay attended a journalism program in Saskatchewan, and said he was surprised by some students' reactions to the presence of an Indigenous classmate: "It's people not knowing much about the Indigenous people—so when they see someone in class, they stare…I don't know if it happens anywhere else, but you get stared at; you get looked at. "

About a quarter of the interviewees (n=5) said that they were pointed out as possible resources for other students, with some even asked to lead classes or workshops, or to share their knowledge when it came to Indigenous communities, culture, and reporting. "I feel like the teachers were not really prepared to talk about Indigenous-related issues," said Gabrielle Paul, who studied journalism at a college in Quebec. Paul said at one point she was even asked to educate other students in a class setting, which made her feel uncomfortable: "I wasn't prepared to answer questions like that—or to me (they) are not even worth questioning—stuff, like, from stereotypes really, like about taxes and alcoholism."

Brad Bellegarde said he liked helping classmates understand certain aspects of Indigenous cultures including the offering of tobacco as a symbol of gratitude, even going so far as to bring tobacco to the journalism school and make it available for classmates who were doing interviews with First Nations people. However, he spoke in a less positive way about the obligation he felt to explain to instructors different ways to approach issues, and having them occasionally defer questions about First Nations cultures to him. Bellegarde said, "I'm the student; I shouldn't have to educate the people who are educating us on certain things."

Racism

Asked whether they could describe any specific incidents of microaggressions or casual racism, 28.6% of participants (n=6) reported having experienced or noticed some form of racism during the time in their programs.

One participant (who will be referred to as Participant B) recalled a professor speaking about Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls in a joking manner. They also mentioned noticing a "tone of racism" throughout their time in the program: "I guess you'd call that systemic racism, you know, just like little words, like little things here and there, but constant." B said that they personally felt equipped to handle such incidents. However, they worried about the potential harm for other Indigenous students, particularly those who might be younger and arriving right out of high school.

Merelda Fiddler-Potter, who attended a journalism program in Saskatchewan in the late 1990s, said she'd overheard students making comments about being scalped if they ever went on a reserve. She says some claimed that Indigenous students were guaranteed seats without having to meet program entry standards "even though I had a 92 average and there were no such seats. And no professors ever corrected them. "

Maria-Louise Nanipou says that in 1990, to her knowledge, she was the first Indigenous woman ever to study journalism in Quebec. She told the story of a professor looking at her face and asking her whether she was Indigenous, then telling her she would have additional time to complete an exam even though she had not asked for it. She says, "and I said thank you, I am already finished… (and he said) 'no, no, no, take your time. Take your time.' And I never forgot that story."

A participant (referred to in this research as C) said there had been some discrimination based on race and names in the chat functions during some of their online classes.

Another, Gabrielle Paul, also mentioned online comments, saying she'd noticed an instructor had written on social media about Indigenous people getting things handed to them.

Raising Concerns

Research has found that building relationships with professors, including the ability to seek assistance and support, has a major impact on Indigenous persistence in post-secondary education (Walton et. al., 2020). However, several participants in this study said they struggled to build such connections.

Participants were asked how comfortable they felt when it came to raising concerns with faculty members, with 52.4% (n=11) saying they were comfortable. In addition to this, two participants stated that they'd had at least one faculty member within the department with whom they felt comfortable enough to raise concerns. But more than a quarter of participants – 28.6% (n=6) – said they were "not very" comfortable or "not at all" comfortable going to faculty with a concern.

Merelda Fiddler-Potter responded simply, "I would never raise a concern." Another interviewee who will be referred to as Participant D said that it just wasn't worth it: "I knew as the only Indigenous person that I would alienate myself from the rest of the class if I made complaints." Participant B said they would not raise concerns because they did not want to have to explain an issue to a professor who might not understand or be open to it. "Because it was such microaggressions that it would be, you know, a lot of people get defensive or they go like, 'what are you talking about'?" B said they also knew that they would eventually need to find a job in the industry, and did not want to risk upsetting anyone.

Distance

Participants were asked about the location of their journalism programs in relation to their home communities. While too few participants elaborated on this question to provide relevant data on actual distances, a third of participants (n=7) did say that they had found it difficult living away from their communities during their studies.

Robert Doane, who attended a journalism program in Alberta, said family and community are important for Indigenous students, and the isolation in urban centres can be damaging for some. "And they come in, they don't know anybody, and there's not a lot of trust. There's no cultural

supports available, or none that are obvious…it's almost like compounding isolation. So it's just a really big barrier." Gabrielle Paul believes some students might not even consider journalism as a career because they would have to move so far from home to study: "And I think it's one of the factors that really discourage people to apply."

RQ3: How can journalism programs improve their support of Indigenous students?

Participants were asked, "What do you think could be done differently to make Indigenous students feel more welcome in journalism schools?" and "What would a decolonized—or Indigenized—journalism program look like?" They were also asked if they had any recommendations for change, based on their own experiences. Suggestions about program content and hiring were the most common responses.

More Indigenous content

Two thirds of participants (n=14) said that journalism programs should have a mandatory core course for all students on Indigenous reporting and cultural awareness, not just an elective option. Further, 47.6% (n=10) said programs should also do more to embed Indigenous content throughout their course offerings.

Participant B suggested requiring Indigenous Studies classes for all students at any institution of higher education, across the board. Another participant, Shaun McLeod, who attended a journalism program in Ontario, echoed this, saying that greater inclusion of Indigenous content benefits everyone: "By including it in the curriculum it opens up their mind…I think it's win-win…because Indigenous (stories) get more representation in the media and fair representation as well."

Jamin Mike, who attended a program in Saskatchewan, said that Indigenous students doing assignments should be given the freedom to report on Indigenous topics if they choose "because you can pretty well write on anything within the Indigenous journalism umbrella."

Several participants suggested that programs should be putting a special focus on trauma-informed journalism education. Connie Walker, who attended a program in Saskatchewan, said, "I think a big part of my education around trauma has been learning how if someone is treated with respect and given agency in the telling of their own story and are left with a feeling of support and empowerment, it can actually be a healing experience to share your story." Walker said that having an understanding of the science of trauma and the role of trauma in Indigenous communities is crucial for emerging journalists who will be reporting in Indigenous communities.

Ninah Hermiston, who was attending a journalism program in Ontario at the time of the interview, said programs should also be reviewing their pedagogical approaches and methods used to deliver content, saying they could include more oral and visual options to better reflect diverse ways of learning.

More Indigenous faculty

Nearly two thirds of participants (n=13) recommended hiring more Indigenous educators to make programs more welcoming, with several mentioning the significance of Indigenous students seeing their own identities and perspectives reflected. Greg Horn, who attended a program in Quebec, said, "I think the important thing is that our Indigenous students need to see the people from their communities that are successful doing good things and passing on their knowledge." Participant D went a step further, saying representation should reach beyond journalism departments and that there should be Indigenous presence at every single structural level within educational institutions – from staff members, to faculty, to the board of governors.

Greater cultural awareness

38.1% of participants (n=8) called for a commitment to greater cultural competence overall among faculty and students, saying there needs to be greater knowledge and teaching about colonialism and its negative impacts.

Participant C said that faculty members should work to understand the weight of trauma and intergenerational trauma that some Indigenous students may be carrying due to their personal histories (Bombay, 2009). Participant C went on to

say, "we have so many issues that white students don't, that the non-Indigenous students don't. And I think just the general understanding and support and softness from the teachers would be great."

Connie Walker said that Indigenous students' lived experiences are a gift to journalism, and programs should be "providing an education about the Indigenous side of this shared history and the media's role in silencing Indigenous journalists or Indigenous people and our stories." Robert Doane echoed this, saying journalism educators need to recognize that having different lived experiences and knowledge is a strength, not a deficit. "We all have strengths as storytellers that make us distinctly unique. And if you try to put us all in a box… a lot of us won't make it. But if you actually think about journalism or storytelling from the point of view that every one of us has a very distinct style and approach and worldview perspective and is different but also valued, I think that's the way to begin to think about how you're setting people up for success."

Greater collaboration with communities

When asked about ways to better equip all students to tell Indigenous stories, 38.1% of participants (n=8) mentioned connections and collaborations with Indigenous communities.

Participant A suggested having Chiefs, Elders, or Council members visit and speak with students, saying this would help teach them to be more respectful and understanding of local protocols—particularly when communicating with Elders. Participant D spoke about the value of cross-cultural exchange, saying it would mean bumping students out of their cultural comfort zones to work in communities that are not their own. D spoke of the care this would require, saying "it needs to be done on a face-to-face, human to human basis. And that effort needs to be supported by cultural competency training that is informed by Indigenous Peoples."

Greg Horn launched a local journalism website in his home community after graduating and suggested that journalism programs should be working to develop internships and other opportunities with Indigenous media outlets. He says that, too, would contribute to cultural awareness: "And you know, a trial by fire, and then you learn on the job and you go through a lot of these different things, but you know it."

Meanwhile, Ossie Michelin said that programs working to build collaborations should approach them with a desire to create lasting change. "You need to make structural changes so it's not like little finite things. You need to figure out ways to make continual relationships with communities and organizations. Not just individuals." Michelin said that programs need to find a sustainable way forward, and give consideration to how they might build legacies.

More support for Indigenous students

Financial challenges can have a strong impact on Indigenous students, forcing some to abandon their studies due to intersecting factors. These may include "funding issues with their Indigenous community, child care, housing, and having family supports… especially for single parents, most of whom were female" (Walton et. al., 2020).

These concerns were echoed by about a quarter of participants in this research (n=5), who mentioned the need for greater access to support for Indigenous students, financial and otherwise, particularly for those forced to leave their communities.

Connie Walker said that programs need to closely examine the diverse experiences and needs of students, and spoke of the need for cultural awareness when it comes to properly supporting Indigenous students: "Look at the socioeconomic status of Indigenous people in Canada and then apply all of our understanding around those barriers of growing up in poverty, sometimes, with limited access to the same kinds of infrastructure and supports that regular journalism students have."

Even something as basic as finding an apartment can be doubly difficult for Indigenous students, said Maria-Louise Nanipou, who pointed out that they might be perfectly fluent in their own language but face challenges with English or French. She added that racism and stereotyping from landlords is also a very real concern. "And if you are Native and people, they ask you, they don't want to give you access to the apartment. They're afraid you're not paying." Nanipou said institutions that fail to provide support in finding housing might actually be deterring some Indigenous students

from attending their programs.

Manon Tremblay pointed out that the educational journeys of Indigenous students may not follow the same trajectory as those of their non-Indigenous counterparts. Tremblay said that typically in Canadian society, students are expected to finish their schooling and find a career before starting a family. She says universities must recognize that some Indigenous people—particularly those living in their home communities—may choose to live their lives in a different order, starting families soon after leaving high school. "So you know, there is very often a break between high school and the rest of your academic journey…you know, their kids are now not necessarily fully grown but they're done having babies, and so they start turning their attention to finishing their education," she said. Tremblay says supporting Indigenous students as they make this shift to academic life, creating bridging programs to help them meet prerequisites and offering financial assistance, would reduce some of the obstacles they face.

More Indigenous spaces on campus

Among participants, 19% (n=4) mentioned the need for dedicated culturally safe spaces on campus for Indigenous students to meet. They suggest more spaces that celebrate Indigeneity; more spaces where Indigenous students can see themselves—and be themselves.

The university where Ossie Michelin studied had two separate campuses. He discussed how one campus had the Indigenous student centre, while the other campus—where his journalism program was located—had only a statue of two local Indigenous historical figures outside in the middle of the yard. "Like, there's a statue. Are we supposed to go hang out at the statue?" Michelin said it wouldn't have taken much to create a welcoming Indigenous space at the second campus, and even a single room could be enough.

RQ4: How can journalism programs better recruit Indigenous students?

Participants provided an array of responses to this question, with many addressing points previously mentioned in RQ3, including more Indigenous faculty and improving overall cultural awareness and knowledge.

However, the single most common response to this question referred to active engagement, with 38% of participants (n=8) saying that educational institutions should be working to establish real connections with Indigenous communities by regularly being part of open houses, visiting high schools, going to events, and working to build relationships. Robert Doane said institutions and journalism departments need to give Indigenous students a reason to believe they are interested in them, saying, "you plant seeds by being present."

Participant C said that programs also need to show Indigenous students that they are evolving, by shifting away from the media's traditional use of stereotypes and trauma narratives and working to foster positive change when it comes to the way journalism is taught and practised: "So we need to, in some ways, promote the fact that we can be the change, that we can change things. And that's not just for journalism; it's for everything."

CONCLUSION

> *Storytelling has been at the core of life for Indigenous people from the very beginning of time.* (M'Lot, 2022).

Journalism programs in Canada have been working to increase Indigenous representation, with some doing outreach or adding programs targeting Indigenous learners. However, for Indigenous students to truly consider pursuing journalism, they need to know that they will not feel like outsiders in their own programs. Integration is not inclusion; all students—regardless of their backgrounds—should feel welcome and that their knowledge and experiences are reflected and valued.

In a one-year period ending in spring of 2024, three Canadian universities, Carleton University, Concordia University, and First Nations University of Canada hired Indigenous tenure track Associate and Assistant Professors specializing in Indigenous Journalism, a clear effort to improve Indigenous-related story-telling and to attract more Indigenous story-tellers to the field. But

change is a process, and it will not happen overnight.

The data and information provided within this study could provide some guidance. Indigenous students and former students provide concrete suggestions based on their lived experiences, to help journalism programs create a more respectful and inclusive environment for future students. Their insights show that representation and cultural awareness play a pivotal role in creating welcoming and empowering journalism programs, and that the way to better serve and draw Indigenous students is to create an environment where they can see themselves and their worldviews reflected.

In her interview, Maria-Louise Nanipou spoke of her experiences as the first Indigenous woman to study journalism in Quebec, in 1990. She mentioned how for generations under Canadian colonialism, Indigenous voices were silenced through assimilationist and genocidal government policies. Nanipou said that when she started her program, there were still very few Indigenous people working in journalism because for so many years, Indigenous people—particularly Indigenous women—simply did not have a voice in Canada. She says for her, choosing journalism was a conscious decision to break that silence.

When asked what journalism programs can do to make Indigenous students feel more welcome, Nanipou said:

> *They can remind them that they are courageous.*
>
> *They are not alone; they're part of something big.*
>
> *And being there, it's courageous.*
>
> *Because they broke the silence.*

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