

## REPORT ON INDIGENIZATION AND DECOLONIZATION FOR CONCORDIA'S FACULTY OF FINE ARTS STRATEGIC PLANNING EXERCISE, 2022

### INTRODUCTION:

Concordia University's [Indigenous Directions Leadership Council](#) launched a renewed action plan in the summer of 2021, setting new objectives and celebrating those that had already been met since the plan's initial launch in 2019. Provost Anne Whitelaw states in the introduction that the [Indigenous Directions Action Plan](#) "embodies Concordia's continuous engagement with the [recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission](#)."

As a community, we are all held to account:

*While the calls in this Action Plan are directly a result of the engagement processes – aimed at the highest levels of our university to ensure long-term, effective institutional change – we welcome and encourage all Concordians to take up the spirit of this living document by considering how each of us can work together towards these shared goals.*

- *Indigenous Directions Action Plan*

As the Faculty of Fine Arts embarks on its own [strategic planning exercise](#), it is important to take stock of our achievements and aspirations around Indigenization and decolonization. What have we achieved so far? Where do our actions need to catch up to our expectations? What are our hopes for the future, and how does our work fit into the larger project of Indigenization and decolonization at Concordia?

To help situate ourselves, we have asked Fine Arts departments and units to reflect on actions taken, directly or indirectly, related to Indigenization and decolonization. The aim is to establish a common baseline from which to collectively make decisions that further our shared goals.

In late 2021/early 2022, we invited respondents to use the six chapters from the *Indigenous Directions Action Plan*, outlined as survey questions, as guiding prompts.

The following report is based on answers received. By definition, it cannot be exhaustive, since individual actions and initiatives are undertaken as much on the personal as on the institutional level, and it is impossible to adequately address all instantiations in one summary. However, it is our hope that the following report sketches a broad picture that encapsulates the Faculty of Fine Arts' current stance with regards to Indigenization and decolonization, and will form the basis on which a broader and more centralized plan can be developed as part of the Faculty strategic planning exercise.

## 1. Governance and Community Participation

*Have you instituted any structures or policies that allow for greater participation of Indigenous communities, students, staff and faculty in the governance of your department or unit?*

The department of Studio Arts has hired three full-time Indigenous faculty in the last four years, one of whom is a Canada Research Chair in Indigenous research, as well as a faculty member on a Limited Term Appointment. Several other departments have also recently hired indigenous colleagues (Art History, Theatre, Design). Faculty members from the department of Art History have participated in a Canada Research Chair appointment in Indigenous Oral Tradition and Oral History. The FOFA Gallery is currently planning to expand its Advisory Board to allow for greater participation of constituents, including Indigenous faculty, students and community members.

At the instigation of the Associate Dean Academic Affairs and the then-Senior Director of the Office of Community Engagement, the winter 2019 Fine Arts Faculty Council featured a speakers series (*Indigenous Ways of Knowing*) pairing key Indigenous colleagues with senior administrators from the Provost's Office as a way of bringing their work of Indigenization and decolonization to the fore, but also to make visible and provide high-level support and accountability at the level of university governance for their work. Topics included "Territorial Acknowledgement," "Inclusive pedagogy and decolonizing curriculum," "A Conversation with the Director of the Indigenous Directions Leadership Group," "Indigenous Student Experience," and "Indigenous Community Engagement: best practices."

One direct outcome of the above series was a new methodology for crafting position requests through workshopping, in an "unprecedented collaboration between the Dean's Office and the departments." Five tenure-track positions were framed to include language on Indigeneity, decolonialism and inclusion, and participants in the process from various departments as well as in the Dean's office report having been directly influenced by issues raised in the Faculty Council speaker series.

## 2. Curriculum and Pedagogy

*Have you integrated Indigenous knowledge and the Principles of Reconciliation into existing courses, programs, and governance structures?*

Several departments have created new courses specifically engaging with decolonial thought and Indigenization. These include Art History courses addressing regional and national styles, but also branching into intersectional topics including Indigenous feminisms and Indigiqueer studies; Contemporary Dance courses using Indigenous scholarship to think through the question of what it means to be in relation as a visitor on unceded land of the Kanien'kehá:ka; and Studio Arts courses incorporating Indigenous perspectives on decolonizing art. Several courses instituted sections from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report as required

reading (in Dance and Sculpture), while students in ArtX were tasked with collaboratively authoring a territorial acknowledgement. The FOFA gallery, soon to undergo a strategic planning process itself, imagines a further activation of its gallery space as a place that can accommodate teaching and learning outside the traditional classroom on topics related to Indigeneity and decolonization.

In the area of broad curriculum adaptation and reform, the Faculty of Fine Arts in collaboration with the Director, Decolonizing Curriculum and Pedagogy (Office of the Provost and Vice-President, Academic Affairs) and the Centre for Teaching and Learning, launched Curriculab, a “laboratory for curriculum re-design and refresh,” with a focus on decolonizing the material and approach to teaching. This work has been stalled several times due to pandemic-related setbacks, but the long-term goal of Curriculab is to address decolonizing curriculum on multiple levels, from individual courses to programme-based review, and eventually leading to the creation of entirely new programmes.

### **3. Institutional Environment**

*Have you undertaken steps to enhance the cultural climate for Indigenous students, staff, and faculty?*

Department representatives have indicated that increased presence of Indigenous students, faculty and staff is a major contributor to an enhanced cultural climate. Some have taken steps to centre Indigenous voices, including the “Students Speak, Professors Listen” series in response to the publication of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report. The CDA has adapted its support model to support Indigenous-run workshops late at night and on weekends. The Centre for Art in Human Development made a connection with the Indigenous Directions Leadership Council in order to incorporate Indigenous musical forms into their adapted art therapy for Indigenous clients. The FOFA Gallery indicates that many of its employees have training in decolonizing and anti-racist Indigenous awareness, though this training was not generally acquired at Concordia.

### **4. Indigenous Students**

*Have you instituted strategies, programs or services to support and facilitate recruitment, admission, retention, and graduation of Indigenous students?*

Anecdotally, several departments have indicated that Indigenous faculty hires have been instrumental in recruitment and retention of Indigenous students, through their networks, but also by creating a safe and receptive environment. A faculty member from Art History wrote a letter of intent for an interdisciplinary graduate diploma to be run through the Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling, intended as a pathway into the university for people with non-institutional learning backgrounds including Indigenous people and refugees. The School of Cinema is working on a “passerelle” program in collaboration with Kiuna College in Odanak to

create a pathway to university for Indigenous students. Several services including CDA and Student Relations indicate that they hope their actions and their centering of Indigenous and POC voices have led to greater retention of Indigenous students. At the beginning of the 2021-2022 academic year, as part of Concordia's 32<sup>nd</sup> Shuffle campaign, the Faculty of Fine Arts raised funds for a Student Success Fund run out of the Otseháktá Student Centre. The Fund provides Concordia's First Nations, Métis and Inuit students unique opportunities to participate in conferences, art exhibits, professional development workshops and career fairs, but also serves as an emergency fund for students whose financial hardship is putting them at risk of quitting their studies.

## 5. Indigenous Faculty and Staff

*Have you instituted strategies, programs or services to support and facilitate recruitment and retention of Indigenous faculty and staff?*

Many of the strategies related to the recruitment of Indigenous faculty are described in the first point on governance. Again, increased presence of Indigenous faculty seems to foster stronger recruitment, through networks and a sort of snowball effect. The FOFA gallery envisions prioritizing an Indigenous administrator position to oversee the content for a new giant digital screen visible to the street – a project that includes a grant to host a series of video works by Indigenous artists.

## 6. Indigenous Research

*Have you fostered, strengthened or showcased innovation by and with Indigenous faculty and students in partnership with Indigenous communities?*

Many of the areas of the Faculty of Fine Arts have participated in the showcasing of art, research and innovation by Indigenous faculty and students. The Indigenous Futures Cluster is hosted by the Milieux Institute, and has served as an umbrella structure for many other Indigenous-led research groups and initiatives. CDA has supported these groups through the construction of a mini lab and hosting web-based activities. The FOFA Gallery has played host to numerous exhibitions, talks, screenings, workshops and activities led by Indigenous scholars, artists and authors, and intends to increase visibility of Indigenous digital art through its upcoming digital screen project (described in point 5), which would create a long-term and public facing space that could function as a prominent landmark to reflect, acknowledge and enhance the histories, voices and perspectives of Indigenous peoples outside the gallery. An event of note was the August 2017 Tillutarniit Film Festival, which celebrated Inuit culture with games, prizes, country food, music and film. Several faculty members from Studio arts are co-founders of Daphne, the Indigenous-run and Indigenous-focused artist centre. A nascent partnership with the Place des Arts aims to create connections between Indigenous initiatives at Concordia such as AbTec and the general public through exhibition in public spaces. Art

Volt's continued collaboration with the Momus Emerging Critics Residency has recently centred Indigenous students, artists and writers through their Global Indigenous Art Criticism residency.

### **A living record of our engagement:**

As mentioned at the top, this report can only ever be preliminary, as we are all continually working on multiple levels to further our efforts at Indigenization and decolonization of our university.

Are there any other actions, projects, initiatives, policies or procedures related to Indigenization and Decolonization within your department or unit that you would like to report? We welcome your continued feedback!

Some may find it difficult to conform to the six categories enumerated above when considering their work in this field. You may prefer to think of initiatives or actions along the following categories:

**Curriculum:** changes, adaptations, additions to core or elective curriculum

**Activities:** Workshops, educational sessions for students, faculty or staff, special programming or collaborations

**Committees:** Policy, governance, hiring, methodologies tracing their ethos to Indigenization or decolonial thought.

We invite you to contribute to this living document and developing record of our collective engagement by writing to [deansoffice.finearts@concordia.ca](mailto:deansoffice.finearts@concordia.ca), with the subject line "Indigenization/Decolonization."