



# Decolonizing the Academy: Module 1

## Guide Overview

### Purpose

This Guide offers university instructors background information on the imperial and colonial roots of Westernized universities along with some helpful resources and reflection questions that support instructors in more deeply engaging with the *Decolonizing the Academy* online learning module.

### About the Creator

Candace Brunette-Debassige is a Mushkego Cree iskwew from Peetabeck (Treaty 9 Territory) with mixed Cree and French ancestry. She is an Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Education at Western University where she also serves as a university-wide Teaching Fellow in Indigenous Learning. Western University is located on lands of the Anishnabek, Haudenosaunee and Lenapewuk Peoples in London Ontario Canada. Candace's scholarly work and professional practices center on advancing the liberatory struggles of Indigenous Peoples in educational settings. Her current research agenda is located in the areas of Indigenous and decolonial approaches to curriculum, and leadership and policy educational change. Her scholarly work embodies a deep commitment to advancing Indigenous theorizing, Indigenous methodologies in research, and Indigenous pedagogical approaches to teaching and learning.

### Duration

Total viewing time of the video—approx. 35 min., plus reading and reflection work.

### Open Access and Copyright Disclaimer

The Teaching and Learning Series is licensed with a [Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial-No Derivatives 4.0 license](#), except where otherwise noted. Some images and media featured in the Teaching and Learning Series are protected by third-party copyright, appropriate permissions have been obtained for this purpose only.

## Recommended Citation

Brunette-Debassige, C. (2022). Decolonizing the academy - module 1 [Digital curriculum module]. In *The Indigenous teaching and learning series*. Western University. <https://youtu.be/tMZibUhVMY8>

# Table of Content

Guide Overview .....	1
Learning Outcomes .....	3
Pre-Reflections for Instructors.....	3
Required Readings.....	3
Required Video.....	4
Post Video and Reading Reflection Questions.....	4
Further Readings .....	5
Other Resources .....	6
Podcasts .....	6
Curriculum.....	6
Glossary .....	7
Decolonization .....	7
Indigenization.....	8
Reconciliation .....	9
Settler colonialism.....	11

## Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this online learning module, instructors will:

- Appreciate the longstanding and complex relationship between Westernized universities, imperialism and colonialism, and Indigenous peoples' experiences in Canada with a particular focus at times on Western University located in London Ontario Canada.
- Understand the ways that early Canadian universities served settler colonial projects including early universities affiliations with the residential school system in Canada, the absence of Indigenous voices and perpetuation of colonial myths about Indigenous peoples in early Western research.
- Become familiar with the interconnecting and divergent movements of reconciliation, decolonization and Indigenization in the context of education in Canada.

## Pre-Reflections for Instructors

- What inspired you to engage with this *Indigenous Teaching and Learning Series*?
- What is your current understanding of the colonial origins of the academy, and the ways that ongoing colonialisms shape university systems and individual instructors' approaches to teaching and learning?
- What is your understanding of decolonizing theories and praxis in higher education with a particularity to the geographic place you inhabit and work?
- What does reconciliation mean to you personally, and what are your reconciliatory responsibilities as a university instructor?

## Required Readings

1. Cote-Meek, S. (2020). *From colonized classroom to transformative change in the academy: We can and must do better*. In S. Cote-Meek and T. Moeke-Pickering (Eds.), *Decolonizing and Indigenizing education in Canada* (pp. xi-xxii). Canadian Scholars Press.
2. Gaudry, A., & Lorenz, D. (2018). Indigenization as inclusion, reconciliation, and decolonization: Navigating the different visions for Indigenizing the Canadian academy. *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*, 14(3), 218-227. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1177180118785382>
3. Zinga, D. (2022). Uncomfortable realities: Reconciliation in higher education. In S. Styres and A. Kempf (Eds.), *Troubling truth and reconciliation in Canadian universities: Critical perspectives* (pp. 39-64). University of Alberta Press.

## Required Video

Brunette-Debassige, C. (2022). Decolonizing the academy - module 1 [Digital curriculum module]. In *The Indigenous teaching and learning series*. Western University.

### SECTIONS AND QUESTIONS IN THE VIDEO:

EXPOSING THE COLONIAL ROOTS OF WESTERNIZED UNIVERSITIES, 02:01 MIN.

UNDERSTANDING THE COLONIAL ROOTS OF THE ACADEMY & KNOWLEDGE, 12:54 MIN.

*Stop & Reflect at 15:55 min*

- Can you identify examples of colonial modernistic assumptions at play in the academy, and your disciplines or field?

*Stop & Reflect at 22:11 min*

- Have you ever considered Indigenous knowledges as an epistemology?
- What could an ethical space of engagement look like in the university classroom?

DECOLONIZING & INDIGENIZING THE CURRICULUM, 22:28 MIN.

*Stop & Reflect at 29:53 min*

- What do you notice in yourself after hearing this presentation and call for decolonial change in university teaching?
- What excites and energizes you about this call to action?
- What stops and gives you pause about this call to action?

CONCLUSION, 30:17 MIN.

## Post Video and Reading Reflection Questions

- What new insights about the origins of the Westernized university and knowledge production have emerged from the video and readings?
- What assumptions did you previously hold about the terms decolonization, reconciliation and Indigenization? How have your understandings broadened? How do some critical scholars trouble the use of these concepts in practice?
- Where do you place your university, department and personal/professional teaching practice on the 3-part "Indigenization-continuum" (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018)?
- How can the notion of an "ethical space of engagement" (Ermine, 2007; Zinga, 2022) support people in enacting their roles and responsibilities in decolonizing and Indigenizing teaching practices in education?

- What are some limits of decolonization and Indigenization in the academy in general, at your university, and for yourself personally and professionally?

## Further Readings

1. Andreotti, V., Stein, S., Ahenakew, C., & Hunt, D. (2015). Mapping interpretations of decolonization in the context of higher education. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 4(1), 21-40.
2. Battiste, M. (2013, April 26). *You can't be the doctor if you're the disease: Eurocentrism and Indigenous renaissance* [Lecture]. CAUT Distinguished Academic Lecture, Ottawa, ON, Canada.
3. <https://www.caut.ca/docs/default-source/default-document-library/you-can't-be-the-doctor-if-you're-the-disease-eurocentrism-and-indigenous-renaissance.pdf?sfvrsn=0>
4. Battiste, M. (2018). Reconciling Indigenous knowledge in education: Promises, possibilities, and imperatives. In M. Spooner & J. McNinch (Eds.), *Dissident knowledge in higher education* (pp. 123-148). University of Regina Press.
5. Bhabra, G.K., Gebrial, D., & Nisancioglu, K. (2018). *Decolonizing the university*. Pluto Press.
6. Congress Advisory Committee on Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Decolonization. (2021, March 8). *Igniting change: Final report and recommendations*. Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences. <https://www.federationhss.ca/sites/default/files/2021-10/Igniting-Change-Final-Report-and-Recommendations-en.pdf>
7. Cote-Meek, S. (2014). *Colonized classrooms: Racism, trauma and resistance in post-secondary education*. Fernwood Publishing.
8. Cross, N. & Peace, T. (2021). "My own old English friends": Networking Anglican settler colonialism at the Shingwauk Home, Huron College, and Western University. *Historical Studies in Education*, 33(1), 22-49. <https://doi.org/10.32316/hse-rhe.v33i1.4891>
9. Dion, S. (2009). *Braiding histories: learning from Aboriginal peoples' experiences and perspectives*. UBC Press.
10. Ermine, W. (1995). Aboriginal epistemology. In M. Battiste & J. Barman (Eds.), *First Nations education in Canada: The circle unfolds* (pp. 101-112). UBC Press.
11. Ermine, W. (2007). The ethical space of engagement. *Indigenous Law Journal*, 6(1), 194-203. <https://jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/ili/article/view/27669>
12. Grosfoguel, R. (2016). The dilemmas of ethnic studies in the United States. In R. Grosfoguel, R. Hernandez & E. Rosen Velasquez (Eds.), *Decolonizing the Westernized university: Interventions in philosophy of education from within and without* (pp. 27-38). Lexington Books.
13. Kirkness, V.J., & Barnhardt, R. (1991). First Nations and higher education: The four R's – respect, relevance, reciprocity, responsibility. *Journal of American Indian Education*, 30(3), 1-15.

14. Kuokkanen. (2007). The Gift. In *Reshaping the university: Responsibility, Indigenous epistemes, and the logic of the gift*. Chapter 1 (pp.23-48). UBC Press.
15. Indigenous Initiatives. (2022). Land acknowledgement: *More than words*. Western University.  
<https://indigenous.uwo.ca/initiatives/land-acknowledgement.html>
16. Smith, L. T. (2021). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and Indigenous peoples* (2nd ed.). Zed Books.
17. Smith, L, & Smith, G.H. (2018). Doing Indigenous work: Decolonizing and transforming the academy. In E. A. McKinley & L.T. Smith (Eds.), *Handbook of Indigenous education* (pp. 1-27). SpringerLink.  
[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-1839-8\\_69-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-1839-8_69-1)
18. Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. (2015). *Honouring the truth, reconciling for the future: Summary of the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*. (Electronic monograph in PDF format). [https://irsi.ubc.ca/sites/default/files/inline-files/Executive\\_Summary\\_English\\_Web.pdf](https://irsi.ubc.ca/sites/default/files/inline-files/Executive_Summary_English_Web.pdf)
19. Tuck E., & Yang, K. W. (2012). Decolonization is not a metaphor. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 1(1), 1-40.
20. Wakeham, P. (n.d.). *Key terms*. Learning and Development, Indigenous Initiatives, Western University.  
<https://indigenous.uwo.ca/docs/Indigenous-Initiatives-Key-Terms.pdf>

## Other Resources

### Podcasts

1. Allen, S. (Host). (2021, September 5). Dr. Candace Brunette-Debassige-Undoing the silence. (Episode 85) [Audio Podcast Episode]. In *Phronesis: Practical Wisdom for Leaders*. The International Leadership Association. <https://practicalwisdom.buzzsprout.com/979897/9142246-dr-candace-brunette-debassige-undoing-the-silence>

### Curriculum

1. Brunette, C. & Richmond, C. (2018). *Guide for working with Indigenous students*. Western University.  
<https://teaching.uwo.ca/pdf/teaching/Guide-for-Working-with-Indigenous-Students.pdf>
2. Centennial College. (n.d.). *Our stories: First Peoples in Canada*. Indian Residential School System in Canada Chapter. <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/indigstudies/chapter/chapter-1/>
3. Wilson, K., & Hodgson, C. (2018). Pulling together: Foundations guide. In *Pulling together: A guide for Indigenization of post-secondary institutions. A professional learning series*. BCcampus.  
<https://opentextbc.ca/indigenizationfoundations/>

## Glossary

Pauline Wakeham (2020) “provides a brief overview” of the terms decolonization, indigenization, and reconciliation in the context of describing “universities’ responses to the TRC’s Calls to Action”.

### Decolonization

“This term is typically associated with the mid-twentieth century wave of processes through which subjugated peoples in colonies of occupation sought to attain political independence. It is vital to note that in settler colonial nation-states like Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand, such structural decolonization has never occurred; the same settler government systems imposed upon pre-existing sovereign Indigenous nations and their lands continue to remain in power today. In its most robust sense, therefore, decolonization involves nothing less than the dismantling of colonial power structures, be they political, epistemic, or social, with the ultimate goal of “repatriati[ng] ... Indigenous land and life” (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 1).

When the term decolonization is used in academic contexts, it typically refers to theoretical, methodological, and praxis-centered approaches that actively decentre the dominance of Euro-Western structures of knowing. Decolonizing the university requires a rigorous dismantling of the ways that “the invisibilized dynamics of settler colonialism mark the organization, governance, curricula, and assessment of compulsory learning” in post-secondary institutions (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 2). It also requires a stock-taking of “how settler perspectives and worldviews get to count as knowledge and research and how these perspectives—repackaged as data and findings—are activated in order to rationalize and maintain unfair social structures” (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 2).

Some academics have argued that, before Eurocentric institutions can become respectful environments for engaging with Indigenous knowledges and methodologies, these institutions must first identify their colonial histories and challenge the myriad ways in which they reproduce settler colonial power (George, 2019). Without specifying a sequential order, other scholars contend that decolonization and Indigenization are complementary projects (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018). Some scholars caution against the metaphorization of decolonization—namely, using this word too frequently as a synonym for other important, but not substitutable, social justice projects (Tuck & Yang). This critique seeks to preserve the specificity and urgency of decolonization’s focus on the restoration of Indigenous land and self-

determination (Wakeham, 2019).

## REFERENCES:

1. Gaudry, A., & Lorenz, D. (2018). Indigenization as inclusion, reconciliation, and decolonization: Navigating the different visions for indigenizing the Canadian Academy. *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*, 14(3), 218-237. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1177180118785382>
2. George, C. T. (2019). Decolonize, then Indigenize: Critical insights on decolonizing education and Indigenous resurgence in Canada. *Antistasis*, 9(1), 73-95.
3. Tuck E., & Yang, K. W. (2012). Decolonization is not a metaphor. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 1(1), 1-40.

## FURTHER READING:

1. Monkman, L. (2018, April 6). *What does decolonization mean? Our panel debates the buzzword*. CBC News. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/panel-debate-decolonization-meaning-1.4609263>
2. Smith, L. T. (1999). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and Indigenous peoples*. Zed Books.

## Indigenization

“Indigenization is a term that has emerged since the early 2000s to signal the process of increasing the presence of Indigenous peoples and knowledges in traditionally Euro-Western institutions. The phrase “Indigenizing the university” has become popular since the TRC’s Calls to Action recommended many changes in post-secondary education in order to respect, value, and promote Indigenous languages, knowledges and perspectives. Indigenization should be led by Indigenous peoples and should respect Indigenous intellectual sovereignty—namely, Indigenous leadership and self-determination—regarding the teaching and study of Indigenous knowledges, languages, and methodologies.

In post-TRC Canada, the often well-intentioned rush to “Indigenize the university” has, thus far, engendered mixed results. While many universities have sought to hire more Indigenous faculty and staff and recruit more Indigenous students, Indigenous peoples remain a minority within post-secondary institutions. Such policies of inclusion risk reducing Indigenization to a “tokenized checklist response that merely tolerates Indigenous knowledge(s)” (Pidgeon, 2016, p. 78), leaving the Eurocentrism of the university intact. Moreover, the push for non-Indigenous instructors to incorporate Indigenous knowledges into their curriculum may enable new ways of



appropriating Indigenous knowledge and “de-contextualizing it into various objects of Western knowledge expansion” (FitzMaurice, 2011, p. 72). In its best forms, Indigenizing the academy involves robust institutional transformation guided by Indigenous leadership with a goal of fostering widespread institutional respect for the diversity of Indigenous peoples, knowledges, and methodologies.

## REFERENCES:

1. Fitzmaurice, K. (2011). Transgressing the boundaries of Native Studies: Traces of 'White Paper' policy in academic patterns of Indigenization. *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies*, 31(2), 63.
2. Pidgeon, M. (2016). More than a checklist: Meaningful Indigenous inclusion in higher education. *Social inclusion*, 4(1), 77-91. <https://doi.org/10.17645/si.v4i1.436>

## FURTHER READING:

4. Battiste, M. (2016). *Visioning a Mi'kmaw humanities: Indigenizing the academy*. Cape Breton University Press.
5. Gaudry, A., & Lorenz, D. (2018). Indigenization as inclusion, reconciliation, and decolonization: Navigating the different visions for indigenizing the Canadian Academy. *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*, 14(3), 218-237. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1177180118785382>
6. Mihesuah, D. A., & Wilson, A. C. (Eds.). (2004). *Indigenizing the academy: Transforming scholarship and empowering communities*. University of Nebraska Press.
7. Pete, S. (2016). 100 ways: Indigenizing and decolonizing academic programs. *Aboriginal Policy Studies*, 6(1), 81-89. <https://doi.org/10.5663/aps.v6i1.2745581-89>

## Reconciliation

“This term came into use in the post-WWII period to mark socio-political processes of healing and transformation in the wake of gross human rights violations and major political conflicts. In Canada, reconciliation has come to signify a process of grappling with colonialism and forging better relationships between the Government of Canada (as well as society more broadly) and Indigenous peoples. The TRC “defines reconciliation as an ongoing process of establishing and maintaining respectful relationships. A critical part of this process involves repairing damaged trust by making apologies, providing individual and collective reparations, and following through with concrete actions that demonstrate real societal change” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015, p. 16).

Unfortunately, “reconciliation” is used in very different ways by different constituencies. The Government of Canada often uses the term to suggest that colonialism is over and that the government’s relationship with Indigenous peoples has now changed for the better. However, others contend that reconciliation operates as a “politics of distraction,” obscuring the fact that colonialism has not ended (Corntassel & Holder, 2008, p. 472). For many Indigenous peoples, righting colonial wrongs involves much more than symbolic gestures; it necessitates fiscal compensation, the return of significant portions of land, and meaningful recognition of Indigenous rights to self-determination.

The etymology of the word “reconciliation” also makes its application to the Government of Canada’s relations with Indigenous peoples problematic. First, the “re” in “reconciliation” suggests a return to a previously amicable state of relations that, many scholars assert, never existed in the context of colonization (Chrisjohn & Wasacase, 2009, p. 222). Additionally, the word “reconciliation” is steeped in Catholicism, where it signifies a sacrament through which sinners are “reconciled with the Church” (Garneau, 2012, p. 35). Some Indigenous peoples contend that the term “conciliation” is more appropriate because it “acknowledge[s]” that conflict has occurred and that “distrust” must be “overcome” (Amagoalik, 2008, p. 93)."

## REFERENCES:

1. Amagoalik, J. (2008). Reconciliation or conciliation? An Inuit perspective. *From truth to reconciliation: transforming the legacy of residential schools*, 93-97.
2. Chrisjohn, R., & Wasacase, T. (2009). Half-truths and whole lies: Rhetoric in the ‘apology’ and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. *Response, responsibility, and renewal: Canada’s truth and reconciliation journey*, 2, 217-29.
3. Corntassel, J., & Holder, C. (2008). Who’s sorry now? Government apologies, truth commissions, and Indigenous self-determination in Australia, Canada, Guatemala, and Peru. *Human rights review*, 9(4), 465-489. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12142-008-0065-3>
4. Garneau, D. (2012). Imaginary spaces of conciliation and reconciliation. *West Coast Line*, 46(2), 28-38.
5. Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. (2015). *Honouring the truth, reconciling for the future: Summary of the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*. McGill-Queen's University Press.

## FURTHER READING:

1. Jewell, E., & Mosby, I. (2019, December 17). *Calls to action accountability: A status update on reconciliation*. Yellowhead Institute. <https://yellowheadinstitute.org/2019/12/17/calls-to-action->

[accountability-a-status-update-on-reconciliation/](#)

2. Manuel, A., & Derrickson, R., Grand Chief. (2017). *The reconciliation manifesto: Recovering the land, rebuilding the economy*. James Lorimer and Company.

## Settler colonialism

Settler colonialism is a structure not an event (Wolfe, 1999) structured by the nation state that appropriates Indigenous lands and serves to erase and displace Indigenous peoples and nationhood, and replace it with a dominant national identity, invasive society and national sovereignty. In doing so, settler colonialism has served to undermine Indigenous sovereignty and their self-determining authority over their lands, lives and futures.

### REFERENCES:

1. Wolfe, P. (2006) Settler colonialism and the elimination of the native. *Journal of Genocide Research*, 8(4), 387-409. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623520601056240>