



BUILDING BRIDGES:

An Indigenous Education
Strategic Plan for
Red Deer College

November 2018 edition



Tansi kitamiskatinawaw. Ninaskomon oma
kamamoyo-atoskatamah oma
pimotahaywin-kiskinamotowin ohci.
Oma meskanaw ka-wichito-yak tansisih-kesi
nisoteyah-ekwa kakanawapatamah
kakiyaw esi-tipastekwaw kiskinoma- tonah.

I greet you. I appreciate the opportunity to work together on this important journey of learning. The willingness and eagerness to partner by all. This path of engagement is us working together, how to synergize the importance of learning and to look at all parts as being interdependent in education.

(English translation of the Cree)

Red Deer College recognizes that our campus is situated on Treaty 7 land, and serves Treaty 6, the territories of the Blackfoot and Cree peoples and the Metis. We honor the First Peoples who have lived here since time immemorial, and we give thanks for the land we cherish where Red Deer College sits.

INTRODUCTION

Red Deer College is a public post-secondary institution in Central Alberta serving a broad and diverse student population. At this moment in Canadian history, the College pauses to re-envision the relationship between the Indigenous peoples and the settler and immigrant populations. The release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's *Final Report* and its associated *Calls to Action* has heightened the awareness of many Canadians to the horrors of the residential school experience and its enduring and multi-generational negative impacts.

It is the education system (both the K-12 system and post-secondary) that many look to now as leaders in this *new relationship* – a possible way to reverse the repression and cultural erasure of the residential school system and other colonial residue. This places a great deal of responsibility on public institutions (educational and others) to work collaboratively with local Indigenous populations to better serve them and their youth

Indeed, across Canada, post-secondary institutions are undertaking to “indigenize” their campuses. What is that, exactly? “Indigenization is the process whereby the institution begins to adjust to the presence of our knowledge, our knowledge systems and structures and our truth tests. Indigenization in my mind is about creating a site within the [college] for the exploration of our own ideas first for ourselves and then for all of humanity” (Newhouse 2015). In other words, “indigenization” is not so much about accomplishing a list of tasks or initiatives as it is about providing an ethical space for dialogue, respect, and mutual understanding and appreciation. What is it NOT? It is not about creating an Indigenous institution, as at First Nations University or the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies where the governance structures are designed entirely around an Indigenous worldview and populated entirely by Indigenous people. Rather, indigenization is more about creating the space for a dialogue – a series of dialogues – marked by respect and a commitment to co-create a better future.

For Red Deer College, which serves an Indigenous student population of approximately 3% (self-identified) of the student body, it means a few interrelated things. First of all, it means providing Indigenous students with a welcoming atmosphere, and with the services and supports they need to succeed. Of course, Red Deer College welcomes students from many different backgrounds, as is appropriate for a public post-secondary institution. But we could make more obvious our valuing of the cultures of the Indigenous peoples who have been here for millennia.

With these things in place, Red Deer College can serve more Indigenous learners and contribute to the economic and social development of regional Indigenous communities. But it extends beyond these measures of “student recruitment and retention”. The College can also foster constructive dialogue both on-campus and beyond about what a new relationship might look like in Canada. Programs and courses may be designed or re-imagined in order to more fully honour and respect the place of Indigenous peoples in Canada’s history. Alternative delivery models for education must also be explored as part of the “indigenizing” response. And all of these in the context of a pluralistic, inclusive educational setting at a time of limited resources.

This Plan is being developed with a belief that its recommendations will be recognized as priorities at either the College level, the provincial level, or the federal level, and that funding may be secured or allocated to support these important initiatives – because walking this path will require some commitment of resources in order to accomplish some of the important steps along the way. And the path is never-ending – that is to say, the College should never lull itself into thinking “that task is complete, and indigenization is done”. That is why, for all of these things, the overriding approach is one of authentic and sustained dialogue and collaboration rather than a set of one-directional College recommendations, in the belief that we can accomplish more and learn more together than on our own.

Red Deer College has a number of interested faculty, students, and staff, and is developing expertise and capacity in several areas of the College. As examples, see the activities inventoried in a report on Indigenous awareness training that was submitted to the Ministry in May 2017. This Plan aims to extend those activities, and to focus that interest, expertise, and energy to provide clear paths for the College to undertake a cohesive “indigenization journey”.

SITUATING THIS PLAN

The work on this Indigenous Education Strategic Plan was directed by several statements in various Red Deer College planning documents, including the *Comprehensive Institutional Plan (CIP) 2016...2019*, and *RDC 2020: A Learner-Centred Future*.

From the *Comprehensive Institutional Plan*
Goal 1, Priority 1: "Develop and implement an Indigenous strategic plan for RDC through authentic collaboration and consultation with internal and external stakeholders."

From *RDC 2020: A Learner-Centred Future. Strategic Plan 2017/18 to 2019/20*
Priority 2:
"RDC will increase the participation of Indigenous learners and underrepresented groups through increased engagement and support."
Priority 6:
"Every student will find 'their community' at RDC."

From the *Academic Plan*
2) "Every learner will be supported in developing personal learning networks communities [sic] and taking responsibility for their own success."

And further, some of this work was supported after this statement in *RDC 2017 A Learner-Centred Future Strategic Plan*: "in response to the needs of our students, and the Calls to Action from the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, RDC committed ongoing funding to establish a new Aboriginal Liaison Coordinator position."

One task for the Coordinator is to create an authentic, collaborative, and consultative process with both internal and external stakeholders, and embark on the development and implementation of an Indigenous Strategic Plan for the College. We believe that foundational to the success of the IESP is to build bridges with Indigenous stakeholders, and to mutually develop and produce partnerships in Indigenous Education.



GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- 1) Red Deer College recognizes the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and is committed to responding actively and appropriately.
- 2) As part of this response, Red Deer College is developing a Strategic Plan process to determine how best to coordinate resources in order to achieve the goals in existing College planning documents, and to indigenize the College more broadly.
- 3) The Strategic Plan will be informed by First Nations, Metis, and other Indigenous communities. Red Deer College seeks to establish long-term relationships with these groups in order to develop collaborative approaches to best serving Indigenous learners and their communities.
- 4) The work on the Plan will be guided by the "four Rs" of Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity, and Responsibility.
- 5) Red Deer College recognizes the diversity of Indigenous nations, histories, and cultures, and endeavours to understand this diversity, and to respond in ways appropriate to each learner.
- 6) The Plan seeks to engage the broadest possible internal College community: students, faculty, and staff in all academic and service units.

PROCESS THAT INFORMED THIS PLAN

April – December 2016 [Phase 1 – Preparing the Ground]:

The task to create an authentic, collaborative consultative process began in the early spring of 2016 with the hiring of the Indigenous Liaison Coordinator, and continued until formal meetings were set with the stakeholders in January 2017. We have broken down the process thus far into three “Phases”. Phase 1 is the work done by the Indigenous Liaison Coordinator with faculty and staff, Indigenous students, and Indigenous communities from her arrival at RDC until the end of 2016. Phase 2 describes the consultations undertaken early in 2017, and attempts to draw out important themes and identify the areas of strategic priority for RDC. Phase 3 recommends an “operational plan” for the 2017-18 academic year, and looks forward to further work on a multi-year plan that will be presented to the College community in Fall 2017 for discussion, refinement, and approval.

The Indigenous Liaison Coordinator began her role in April 2016. As part of a comprehensive new employee orientation developed by the Student Services Division, the Coordinator was provided with the opportunity to meet with RDC faculty, administrators, and staff from various service departments and Schools. The orientation provided an opportunity to share the goals of the position, and understand perceptions and current activity related to Indigenization and support for Indigenous students. The meetings also provided the Coordinator with the opportunity to share the institution’s priority for the position, the development of an Indigenous Education Strategic Plan. The Coordinator also had the opportunity to share how the Strategic Plan was expected to unfold and to ask each individual if they would be interested in being part of the consultation sessions. These informal, authentic and collaborative conversations created interest in the strategic planning process. Many individuals expressed a genuine commitment to participate once the consultation was initiated. The most frequently asked question was, *how can I help Indigenous students succeed?*

An Indigenous Student Welcome Event was held in September 2016 and created an exceptional opportunity to engage and connect with students at the beginning of the academic year. This informal gathering not only helped students connect with each other and the College, but also opened up the lines of communication that would serve to facilitate how the Coordinator and the College planned to engage and connect with students throughout the year. The curiosity and interest shown by the students established the path of how the relationship was going to be forged. The students expressed the interest to have seamless access with Indigenous Services. They wanted a place they can be welcomed without borders or appointments. Most importantly, they wanted to be supported to be full participants of the RDC experience. The RDC Indigenous



students want RDC to be inclusive and to have *a space for the students that would create the Nehayew/Indigenous community feeling and would lead to more Indigenous students succeeding in post-secondary studies.*

The informal connections to the Rural/First Nations communities were initiated by inviting Elders from the First Nations communities in Central Alberta to different functions at RDC, and getting RDC students from the communities to help guide the Coordinator to key contacts in their home communities. The Coordinator also reconnected with Elders she had previous relationships with. Direct phone calls to Band offices and the Principals at on-reserve schools created important connections with key stakeholders. Informal discussions occurred with the Elders, community members, and agencies about the role of the Indigenous Liaison Coordinator, RDC’s intended Indigenous Strategic Planning journey, and how each community would be invited to participate in the strategic planning process. When asked to participate in the strategic planning sessions, the vast majority of the individuals were excited and eager to be involved. Many community members offered to invite others to attend the sessions and actively sought a suitable replacement if they were unable to attend. Most community people stated that *Elder access at RDC would benefit students and help more Indigenous students succeed in post-secondary.*

With the urban Indigenous community, connections were made through visits with agencies, attendance at their strategic planning sessions, and other functions held in the City of Red Deer that the Coordinator actively participated in. Again, the Coordinator had the opportunity to engage with RDC alumni, community members and Elders and invite them to actively engage in the strategic planning process. The response was very positive, and they were very eager to and appreciative of having the opportunity to provide input into this important initiative. The majority of these individuals stated that *RDC needs to have an Indigenous Student Centre. The supports that a Centre would provide for Indigenous/Metis students to succeed in their post-secondary studies is critical.*

January – March 2017 [Phase 2 – Gathering Voices]:

Starting in January 2017, the community collaboration and consultation plan was implemented. The planning group developed the questions for the stakeholders, and planned a schedule for stakeholders' consultation. The plan was to collect the feedback and then identify the themes, which would then lead to the development of strategic planning goals that 1) can be implemented immediately, and those goals that 2) can be developed in the second part of the consultation process.

A. INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Planning Committee formulated two questions to prompt discussion at the strategic planning sessions:

1. How does your community and RDC support post-secondary students to succeed as learners?
2. What does your community require from RDC to facilitate post-secondary student success?

B. FACULTY AND STAFF AT RDC ENGAGEMENT

The Planning Committee formulated two slightly different guiding questions for the internal strategic planning sessions for faculty, staff, and administrators:

1. How do you as RDC faculty and staff support Indigenous students to succeed as post-secondary students?
2. What do faculty and staff need to facilitate Indigenous student success at RDC?

C. RDC INDIGENOUS STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Once again, the Planning Committee modified the questions for the student consultation:

1. How can RDC bring out the best in Indigenous students to help them succeed in post-secondary?
2. What do you as a student of RDC need to be successful at post-secondary learning?

Strategic Planning Participant Summary

Community	Date(s)	Number of Participants
Big Horn First Nation	Feb. 13, 2017	15
Samson Cree Nation	Feb. 22, 2017	5
Montana First Nation	Feb. 22, 2017	6
Ermineskin Cree Nation	Feb. 24, 2017	3
Louis Bull Tribe	Feb. 24, 2017	2
Red Deer College Staff and Faculty	March 9, 2017	22
Red Deer College Staff and Faculty	March 10, 2017	17
Sunchild First Nation	March 13, 2017	8
Red Deer College Aboriginal Students	March 14, 2017	20
Red Deer Aboriginal Community	March 15-16, 2017	22 Participants
Montana, Ermineskin, Louis Bull, Samson	March 22, 2017	Montana – 1 Ermineskin – 1 Louis Bull – 2 Samson – 1
O'Chiese First Nation	March 28, 2017	2
Total Participants		114

Work must continue in order to consult with other partners in this enterprise, like the school divisions in Central Alberta, and the various Indigenous schools, both K-12 and post-secondary. That ongoing dialogue is one of the primary goals of this Plan.

WHAT WE HEARD

After collecting all the responses from the various consultation sessions, the four-member planning committee met on a Friday to identify common themes and ideas for initiatives. The result of that work is the following themes (arranged in no particular order) regarding the support of Indigenous student learners, and honoring the spirit of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Report and work.

- RDC must approach and engage Indigenous and Metis communities in establishing and maintaining partnerships. Of the seven Indigenous communities, members of the Red Deer Indigenous and Metis community, RDC Indigenous students, staff and faculty consulted, all unanimously feel that there needs to be improved relationships between RDC and the Indigenous communities the institution serves. These relationships must be created by the President's Office and throughout the organization.
- Develop an Indigenous Student Centre. This important gathering place will provide the opportunity for Indigenous students to feel welcomed and connect with other Indigenous, Metis students, and non-Indigenous students as well. The Centre can also be the space where anyone can go to learn more about Indigenous realities and ways of knowing. Staff and faculty can take these teachings and create ways to integrate new information into their respective courses and curriculum.
- Consider the role of RDC in supporting federal and provincial implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action regarding Education, Language, Culture and History.
- Provide professional development and education opportunities for faculty and staff to learn more about Indigenous peoples' experience, history, culture, and perspectives.
- Utilize distance learning opportunities and satellite campuses in the surrounding Indigenous and Metis communities. Focus on Indigenous languages and a variety of academic courses and programs.
- Develop a support network utilizing both internal and external resources and expertise. Develop specific resources for Indigenous students.
- Create an Elder-in-Residence model.
- Treat as an institutional priority developing meaningful relationships and partnerships with the Indigenous communities that the College serves. A general consensus is the College needs to act on the research it has done in the past and is currently doing regarding Indigenous and Metis students and communities.
- Develop policies that are less restrictive regarding Indigenous and Metis realities and ways of knowing.
- Increase the number of Indigenous faculty, staff, and administrators at RDC.
- Develop quantifiable outcome measures for the Indigenous Strategic Plan and for the improved engagement, support and success of Indigenous learners in general.

From these general themes and messages, and some of the detail provided in the various consultation sessions, we moved to identify our strategic priorities for the College, along with some goals within each area.

While these are arranged below into five separate categories, there are initiatives that cross over from one to another, and the five categories do need to be considered somewhat together as a comprehensive and integrated approach to Red Deer College's indigenization project.



Theme 1: Building and Maintaining Positive, Reciprocal Relationships

Many of the things we heard from the external consultations with nations and communities had to do with moving away from assumptions and outworn approaches and moving more towards respectful, ongoing, reciprocal relationships. One goal, therefore, of this Plan would be for the College to intentionally approach Indigenous communities to see what their own education plans might look like, and to explore where there might be cooperation with the College. This could take the form of high-level Memoranda of Understanding that state a desire to cooperate, followed by specific “service agreements” to deliver RDC courses or undertake certain joint activities. In no case does Red Deer College see these as infringements upon treaty rights – rather, they would be stand-alone, time-limited arrangements for the delivery of courses, programs, or services. Whether or not such agreements are in place, a more regular presence of RDC leadership and staff would contribute to establishing positive relationships with Indigenous groups and nations.

Theme 1 Goals

	Description
Strategic Priority 1	A commitment to indigenizing the College, and to developing and maintaining authentic relationships with regional First Nations, Bands, schools and colleges, as well as urban Indigenous and Metis groups
GOALS	
1	Red Deer College becomes a signatory to the CIGan “Indigenous Education Protocol”.
2	The completed version of this Strategic Plan be approved after wide consultation within the College, as well as continued consultation with Indigenous communities.
3	RDC will explore the terms under which we could enter into individual learning agreements with First Nations and other communities, depending on their unique capacity and requirements.
4	RDC undertakes regular visits to its partner communities for updates to the learning agreements, exploring joint funding opportunities, and so on.
5	RDC explore transfer/articulation/prior learning agreements with the First Nation colleges in our region.
6	Consideration will be given to identifying a single point of contact for external communities enquiring about Indigenous matters – perhaps Continuing Education as the most prepared first “home” of such a contact.





Theme 2: Indigenous Students' Experience at Red Deer College

Another topic that came up repeatedly was the question of what more could be done for student support. When the ideas were considered as a whole, it became clear that a comprehensive "strategic enrolment" continuum would provide the best approach. In other words, the College ought to be thinking not only of the proper academic, financial, and registration advisement, materials, and visits going into Indigenous communities and working with urban Indigenous students, but also reviewing the relevance of program content, as well as a critical and ongoing evaluation of the academic supports that exist to best ensure student success. As well, there was a widely held belief that RDC visits could begin earlier in prospective students' K-12 experience – perhaps grade 10, or even grade 8.

Theme 2 Goals

	Description
Strategic Priority 2	Enhancing the Indigenous student experience, especially the transition into Red Deer College
GOALS	
1	More regular visits to FN communities, not merely as recruitment exercises, but as opportunities to advise about the range of programs, entry requirements, and so forth. For example, summer youth camps aimed at attracting Indigenous youth could be built around math or sciences, but could just as well be with an athletic or arts theme.
2	Review new student orientation to consider ways to enhance the welcome for Indigenous learners.
3	Continue to seek ways to support under-prepared learners through upgrading courses, tutoring support, ESL support, and other academic supports.
4	Consider options for an Indigenous student space, making it a priority in College planning.
5	Develop an Elder-in-Residence program.
6	Work with communities to identify appropriate ways to visually represent their culture on the RDC campus (flags, signs, sculpture and other artwork, etc.)
7	Develop clear policy or procedure on where smudging can occur (interim solution and then policy).
8	Expand scholarships, bursaries, and emergency funding sources for Indigenous learners.
9	Work with others in the provincial post-secondary system, and with provincial and federal agencies, for system-wide programs and policies to support Indigenous students, and to identify new sources of funding for such programs.

Theme 3: Faculty and Staff as Learners

While our attention tends to focus on students, and in particular Indigenous students, when we begin thinking about Indigenous education, we must recognize the oft-repeated desire for knowing more that we heard from faculty and staff during our internal consultations. This aligns nicely with the College value of “learner-centredness”, as it places us all in the position of learner. Many faculty and staff expressed a desire to contribute to reconciliation efforts, but confessed to not knowing exactly where to begin – almost being “frozen” in inaction because they did not want to respond in a way that might unknowingly be disrespectful. Educating the campus community on the history, cultures, and contemporary issues of Indigenous peoples in Canada becomes a necessary part of any true indigenization project.

At the same time, we must recognize and build upon the capacity that is already here, in departments and Schools. Whether it be individual faculty with specific expertise gained through research or preparation for courses, or programs that have collectively undertaken professional education aimed at better understanding how their graduates must take account of Indigenous issues, the College should employ these people as catalysts around which to build dialogue and understanding.

Theme 3 Goals

	Description
Strategic Priority 3	Providing cross-cultural education for faculty, staff, and students
GOALS	
1	RDC to implement any provincially-mandated programs for faculty and staff education, supplemented to recognize our College’s and region’s uniqueness.
2	Continue programs like Red Deer Reads, The Quiet Book Club, etc., with selections by First Nations writers.
3	CTL continues to facilitate faculty and staff education about indigenous peoples, cultures, and issues through online courses, MOOCs, video screenings, pedagogical tips, and other strategies.
4	Consider developing a position of Indigenous Teaching and Learning Scholar for the CTL to work with programs and Schools on curriculum elements and pedagogical approaches.
5	Work with Schools and programs to develop appropriate supports for students, education for faculty, and improvements to curriculum in the areas of indigenous history, culture, language, and perspective.
6	Begin an Indigenous Speakers’ Series with authoritative speakers coming to campus to speak on topics of interest regarding Indigenous cultures, history, worldview, language, and experience.

Theme 4 Goals

	Description
Strategic Priority 4	Establishing a “voice” for indigenous peoples in all facets of the College’s operation
GOALS	
1	Work with Strategic Planning and Analysis on data collection and outcome measures related to Indigenous learners.
2	Establish an RDC Advisory Committee with broad internal and external representation to advise the VP, Academic.
3	Work with all RDC departments and units to consider how policies and practices might better support indigenous learners.
4	Review human resources practices to see how we might increase the number and profile of Indigenous people employed at RDC.
5	Ensure respectful protocols for students and faculty undertaking Indigenous community-based research.

Theme 4: Indigenous Voice in College Governance

Red Deer College is fortunate to have, at present, First Nation and Metis members of its Board of Governors. From there, we need to consider ways to increase representation across the College in order that Indigenous culture and worldview may inform College decisions and practices in the widest possible way.

Theme 5: Programs, Schools, and Departments Respond

Two important principles are embedded in this section:
 1) we do not support the notion that there is a single module or course that all students should take as a graduation requirement, and 2) therefore, each service or academic department, program, and School must determine the most appropriate curricular and learning support responses that make the most sense. For example, for disciplines in the health sciences, this may mean actual coursework about working in Indigenous communities with Indigenous clients, or even practicum placements in such settings; in science and math courses aimed at pre-med students, this may take the form of tutoring or peer support networks.

Theme 5 Goals

	Description
Strategic Priority 5	Schools and Programs designing and revising curriculum, and delivering programming with an aim to ensure an understanding of the history, culture, language, and present-day communities of indigenous people (as appropriate to the program outcomes and the discipline).
GOALS	
1	New course and program proposals developed with the goals of the TRC Calls to Action in mind, and employing the expertise of the Indigenous Student Services Coordinator.
2	Working from existing relationships, offer appropriate programming in a variety of ways: at RDC, at regional sites, online, or other.
3	As we transition to a university, consider how ALL students in a program need to be educated on matters of Indigenous history, language, culture, and perspectives.



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