Canadian Journal of Indigenous Studies
Vol 1, Issue 1 (2025) 44-59

ISSN:
https://doi.org/

DECOLONIZATION IN ACTION: SETTLER ENGAGEMENT IN AN INDIGENOUS COURSE REQUIREMENT

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Abstract. In 2021, Indigenous course requirements became mandatory at the University of British Columbia Okanagan Campus. For students, this meant attending *Indigenous Studies 100: Introduction to Decolonization*, which presented many challenges, most notably an influx of settler students into the Indigenous Studies program, placing the cultural safety of Indigenous instructors and students at risk. This paper explores the implementation of the Indigenous course requirement and asks critical questions surrounding the role of settler scholars as universities respond to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action and move to educate students about historical and contemporary Indigenous peoples and issues in Canada.

Keywords. Settler Engagement, Decolonization, Post secondary, Indigenous Course Requirement

1. Positionality Statement

Evan Habkirk: As a non-Indigenous scholar, my positionality in Indigenous studies has always been awkward. I strive to create spaces where Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples can exchange ideas and assert Indigenous peoples' understandings and worldviews as essential to the discourse. I have a breadth of knowledge informed by an advanced history and Indigenous studies education and many years of working with Indigenous communities. Empathetic to the challenge my presence may pose to some, I approach the responsibility of teaching Indigenous issues with immense care, both inside and outside the field of Indigenous studies. Decentring my voice on Indigenous issues and lived experiences, I unerringly defer to Indigenous voices with guest speakers, films, and scholarly work created by Indigenous experts (Gaudry, 2016). Drawing on my imperfect learning journey into decolonial paradigms, I endeavor to model self-reflection, humility, and lifelong growth. For some, my careful positionality has been an example of good allyship-accompliceship to Indigenous people. However, regardless of my continued efforts, there is nothing that can be done to lessen my status as

Date: Received: February 13, 2025
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non-Indigenous in an Indigenous-focused space. This has sometimes negatively affected my relationships with other Indigenous studies scholars and how students relate to me. I understand my role as an ally-accomplice scholar to be taking the burden of educating settler students from Indigenous scholars: explaining Indigenous ideas and concepts to non-Indigenous people, exploring how these ideas have been misused by settler culture, highlighting how Indigenous peoples have challenged these misconceptions, and reminding non-Indigenous peoples that the privileges many of them enjoy come at the expense of Indigenous people. I do my best to address these concerns and remain open to discussions about the appropriateness of my presence in the ICR in the future.

Sarah Buffett: I am Red River Métis and English on my mother's side and Norwegian and Scottish on my father's side; I was raised on a colonial livestock and grain farm near a small town in Saskatchewan, near the border of Treaty 4 and Treaty 6 territory. As a Métis (Michif) scholar, I embrace the intersection of my Indigenous heritage and Canadian roots, which shape my perspectives on community and culture. In my role as a graduate student at UBCO, I am committed to community-engaged research and relationships defined by Indigenous peoples that generate value for community-identified priorities. I have been afforded a significant education, providing access to spaces that can enact anti-colonial change, and am regularly exposed to a broad range of Indigenous and non-Indigenous voices and perspectives that carry with them the opportunity to engage with varied worldviews. Therefore, I seek to mobilize my positions of privilege to move the needle on social justice and equity issues for all Indigenous peoples and communities. As an Indigenous TA working under a non-Indigenous scholar, I recognize the distinctive bidirectional power dynamics present and seek to understand their influence. In this ICR work, I have functioned as a participant and facilitator but most often as a witness to student and instructor experiences.

From our observations and reflections, we raise fundamental questions regarding the presence of settler scholars in Indigenous content areas as universities consider their approach toward the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to teach Indigenous content and worldviews and the history and current state of Indigenous peoples in Canada. In the interest of extending this work to public scholarship (Yapa, 2006), we hope to express the tangible value of our approaches and invite discussions surrounding the challenges we have encountered over time.

2. Introduction

At the end of our final online lecture, a student asked to address the instruction team and fellow students. This was unusual given our typically quiet lectures, especially at the tail end of a term that had opened students to sensitive conversations and tense emotions, and it was unclear what might come of this interaction. The student turned on her camera, began to thank the instructors and the TAs, and shared their experiences as an Indigenous student in the course. They entered this course with a disquieting uncertainty, carrying hesitations about a non-Indigenous instructor being at the helm while realizing many

of her classmates were likely present only as a degree requirement. The student candidly shared her family's history, their fight against racism experienced in British Columbia, and their desire for Canadians to be educated in the detailed treatment of Indigenous peoples in Canada.

They emphasized how their late father would have been dumbfounded to see this course being taught by a settler who fervently asserted the same unvarnished historical and contemporary accounts of Indigenous lived experiences that the student's family had fought so hard for Canada to hear and—after a silent pause—they offered gratitude for our work through a song. The weary faces of the teaching team revealed the tolls taken beyond the intellectual stamina required to dredge up Indigenous traumas by the three TAs—two Indigenous and one non-Indigenous—and a non-Indigenous instructor. Months of building cultural sensitivity in the classroom, regardless of our own lived experiences, created strains that spilled over into our offices and homes throughout the term. While it is impossible to know whether the student understood the gravity of their gift at that moment, their reciprocity demonstrated the good relationships fostered when settlers share the burden of teaching university-required ICRs—a particular burden that we assert can be an immensely powerful element of decolonization in action.

3. Background

In 2021, the University of British Columbia's Okanagan Campus (UBCO) implemented a plan under which all undergraduate students across all faculties would take a university-approved Indigenous breadth requirement course.[1] Between fall 2021 and summer 2023, over 2,000 students passed through the ICR. This action was in direct response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's call to action 62: for federal, provincial, and territorial governments—in consultation and collaboration with survivors, Indigenous peoples, and educators—to provide the necessary funding to post-secondary institutions to educate teachers on how to integrate Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods into classrooms (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). Considering the Canada-wide fluctuations in commitments to the TRC's calls to action (Habkirk, 2019; Niergarth, 2021; Yellowhead Institute, 2023), this action underscores the importance of refining ongoing institutional and educational activities in step with greater reconciliation and decolonization efforts.[2]

The continuum of related yet distinct approaches commonly considered in ICRs spans Indigenization, reconciliation, and anti-coloniality, but we were also obliged by the course title to adopt the fourth approach of decolonization. Antoine

[1]When implemented in 2021, ICRs were only required for students in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. As of September 2024, this was expanded to include the Faculty of Science. This paper focuses on the experience of the Faculty of Arts and Social Science from 2021 to 2023.

[2]The authors would like to thank Shawn Wilson, Program Head for Indigenous Studies at UBCO, for support and advice during this inquiry and former UBCO graduate student and INDG 100 TA, Jordanna Marshall, for her support during data analysis.

et al. (2018) provide an exemplary conceptual and personal framing for this stance.

> Decolonization refers to the process of deconstructing colonial ideologies of the superiority and privilege of Western thought and approaches. Decolonization necessitates shifting our frames of reference with regard to the knowledge we hold; examining how we have arrived at such knowledge; and considering what we need to do to change misconceptions, prejudice, and assumptions about Indigenous Peoples. For individuals of settler identity, decolonization is the process of examining your beliefs about Indigenous Peoples and culture by learning about yourself in relationship to the communities where you live and the people with whom you interact.

The ICR presented a substantial challenge for the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASS) at UBCO, which averages a student base of over 7,000 students across its undergraduate program in a wide array of subject areas, including anthropology, gender and women's studies, geography, economics, international relations, philosophy, political science, history, sociology, psychology, philosophy, politics, Indigenous studies, and a Nsyilxcn Language Fluency program (UBCO, n.d.-a). Moreover, UBCO attracts a diverse cohort of domestic and international students with varied knowledge sets, socio-cultural backgrounds, and personal experiences related to Indigenous issues in Canada. Prior to this course requirement, only one course fulfilled the guidelines set by the University's Indigenous Course Content Working Group and was slated to become the new ICR. According to its course description, INDG 100 was to "provide students with an overview of the discipline of Indigenous Studies including the history, cultures, and experiences of Indigenous people" (UBCO, n.d.-b). Given settler instructor involvement in the course and our espoused definition, we suggest the decolonization approach is most appropriate for INDG 100 and perhaps other ICRs.

The Indigenous Studies program at UBCO navigated significant concerns in welcoming an influx of settler students into the classroom, which would inevitably put the cultural safety of Indigenous instructors and students at risk, given the different levels of cultural awareness students would bring with them. One solution was to engage a settler scholar who would teach large sections of settler students, introducing them to Indigenous core content areas, the Indigenous Studies program, and their host nation—the Syilx Okanagan peoples. As a result, one year before the ICR's official implementation in fall 2020, Habkirk was assigned an elective section of Indigenous Studies 100 (INDG 100) to hone his course delivery and simultaneously develop content suitable for a broader range of the FASS settler student population soon to enroll. Habkirk came to this work as a non-Indigenous, cisgender, male academic of privilege whose family immigrated to Canada in the early 1800s and who has continued to live on and benefit from the lands on which they settled. Habkirk called on his positionality and training as a historian and Indigenous studies scholar to shape the course's delivery. This

role carried with it an inherent tension as the university sought to understand the role of settlers in reconciliation and decolonization efforts like ICRs.

By fall 2021, INDG 100 class sizes and the number of course offerings increased substantially to accommodate the ICR; the three smaller sections in the 2020–2021 academic year (three classes of 50 to 100 people) became five classes of 100 to 200 people in 2021–2022. Sections were offered in the fall, winter, and spring terms and were delivered primarily online by Habkirk, with course content tailored for settler students from all FASS degree program areas. Meanwhile, a sixth section was offered expressly for Indigenous students and led by an Indigenous faculty member with adjusted curriculum and pedagogy facilitating and supporting relevant discussions within a culturally safe learning environment. Buffett, a Métis master's student at UBCO, joined Habkirk as the lead TA for the settler sections in the 2021–2022 and 2022–2023 academic years. Her academic background in Indigenous studies and community engagement provided an influential lens on the course material, and her role as lead TA was formally designated during the second year as a mechanism to mentor and support for other TAs across all INDG 100 sections. These TAs shared the teaching load and, at times, also coped with resistant student voices during the ICR experience.

Following two years of experience on this rotating instructional team as a settler instructor and Indigenous lead TA, we offer our reflections on the reality of engaging in a new ICR program involving direct contact with approximately 1,200 undergraduate students, compelled by its potential benefit of institutional leaders considering their approach to the ICR to articulate challenging and successful moments instructional teams may encounter and to discuss the inherent complexities of non-Indigenous instructor identity and engagement in a course focused on decolonization. Our discussion centres on several notable successes and challenges during the course's formative years through accumulated reflections drawn from course delivery, student assignments, student-student, student-TA, and student-instructor interactions, and feedback sessions Buffett held with course TAs from various sections of INDG 100 at UBCO. Autoethnographic reflections by Habkirk, alongside student course evaluations from his teaching of INDG 100, further address the counterintuitive role of settler scholars in Indigenous studies and discuss the particular benefits, risks, and challenges involved.

4. THE ICR EXPERIENCE

After two and a half years of developing and teaching this ICR for a majority settler audience,[3] we have witnessed similar patterns among students engaging with course materials. As they dive deeper into the course content, their worldviews are challenged, triggering emotional responses. Extraordinary efforts were

[3]Although this course was designed for a majority settler audience, there were Indigenous students in the course at times. Some struggled to reconnect with their Indigenous identity, while others took this section of the course because it fit best within their course timetable. Students were informed during the first lecture that this section of the course was designed for a settler audience and that there was an Indigenous student section of the course.

required of the instructional team to engage in this sensitive subject matter; however, this was also a notable experience for students, pushing them well beyond the abstract notions typically associated with the social sciences. To support this iterative self-exploration, the course evaluation process and design provide numerous opportunities for students to share their experiences before, during, and after the course with the instructional team, including weekly reflections on assigned course materials, posing discussion questions as they may arise, and two self-assessments that bookend the course term. These outlets illuminated several common areas of experiential processes in this unique course experience, with the most predictable being paradigm-shifting grief, as candid content challenges their existing worldviews, including potentially outdated perspectives that no longer align with the newly acquired understanding of the world they leave behind at the course's conclusion.

While there appears to be grief involved in losing an outdated reality, we acknowledge that all student experiences are different. Not everyone shares in that grief at the same level, in a linear manner, or even at all; yet we posit that there are key similarities aligned with the psychological articulations of this complex phenomenon by Kübler-Ross and Kessler (2014), which may include the following:

(1) **Denial**, often transposed as ignorance and an initial unwillingness to accept or to justify away new perspectives, information, and facts;

(2) **Anger**, a complex reckoning with being misinformed by a seemingly thorough education system or being deceived by a superficially upstanding Canadian government;

(3) **Bargaining**, frequently appearing as indefensible clemency for wrongdoings or even victim blaming;

(4) **Depression** in the form of settler guilt, whereby an overarching feeling of hopelessness about what can be done about these perpetuated challenges; and ultimately,

(5) **Acceptance**, which brings growth, hope for the future, and a tangible direction from the individual where grief can be released.

5. Many Successes, Some Challenges, and One Settler Scholar

Amid these social-emotional and intellectual learning phases, we observed various unforeseen challenges for the instructional team that often resulted in successful student growth. Here, we detail those concerns and their contexts and discuss the settler instructor's role in addressing and mediating these emerging issues in an ICR.

5.1. **Moving from saviour to ally-accomplice.** [4] Weekly insights into the nefarious treatment of Indigenous peoples stimulate many students to express a well-meaning desire to enact social change in solidarity with Indigenous peoples through activism and other means. Troublingly, saviour propositions often centre on performative–and non-performative uses of privilege to support injustice but expose the lack of fundamental efficaciousness required to become a genuine ally or accomplice (Ahmed, 2021). Defining and supporting such moves to solidarity, including examining personal biases and motivations on a meaningful level, is challenging to achieve in a lecture-based course. While some students naturally and effectively make this shift over time, the concern remains that others will leave the course with an invigorated but poorly positioned platform on Indigenous issues. Moreover, students' abundant use of "we" and assertions of readiness to engage their acquired capacity to "educate others about Indigenous issues" in student narratives must be carefully addressed and re-oriented to ensure their efforts are genuinely beneficial for Indigenous causes and to improve the potential for their voices to be validated rather than dismissed in social contexts. We see culturally fluent settler instructors who model good allyship-accompliceship as a site of learning for students in ICR courses through visible relationality in their teaching, centring Indigenous perspectives and challenging or refuting colonial narratives.

5.2. **Cultural fluency is forsaken for cultural probing.** Upon entering our ICR, students' initial self-assessment was where cultural probing emerged, most commonly when outlining with an earnest eagerness what they hoped to take away from the course. Primary areas of interest that tended to surface included wanting to learn about their host nation's stories, language, and distinctive cultural practices; unfortunately, these settler desires often contain phrasing more appropriate for a fiction novel review, such as finding Indigenous culture and history *interesting, eye-opening, or captivating*, language that can be experienced as insensitive, extractive, or tokenistic (Jones & Jenkins, 2008). More concerning instances include students' probes for access to information on protected traditional ceremonies or protocols. The hidden curriculum of INDG 100 is building cultural fluency through implicit learning activities that are also the crucial aspects of Indigenous cultures, including communication, worldviews, community structures, and, of course, teaching and learning. We approach this subject with graciousness, as students' conceptions of what they might learn often appear as reflections of their previous exposures through colonial narratives and ways of being—a reckoning of worldviews that a settler instructor has inevitably encountered and learned to be critical of.

[4]We refer Suyemoto et al. (2020)'s reflections of the ally's "ongoing developmental process of conscientization, empathy, perspective taking, and action rooted in care" (p. 4) and the accomplice's "standing actively in opposition to supremacist systems" as dual term existing on a continuum, or as an ally-accomplice Suyemoto, K. L., Hochman, A. L., Donovan, R. A., & Roemer, L. (2020). Becoming and fostering allies and accomplices through authentic relationships: Choosing justice over comfort. Research in Human Development, 18(1–2), 1–28.

5.3. **Welcoming "critical thinking skills plus" as a way of being.** While students grapple with the dissonance between their imagined version of Indigenous studies and the complex realities of the Indigenous experience in Canada, they may attempt to use their acquired knowledge sets to challenge material presented in class. However, amid several implicit course lessons, one of the most formative is learning the difference between being critical thinkers and being overly critical of the subject matter. Given the students' sweeping range of disciplines, we empathize that this task may prove difficult. Many have only been exposed to clinical, technical, or Western modes of critical analysis in their prior studies, often based on deductive interrogation and binary thinking. One case saw a student openly postulating that forced education is often completed begrudgingly and has no effect on the individual, further hypothesizing that many Canadian [K-12] teachers required to include residential school content would simply refuse to teach this topic because they "know the students do not care," thus dismissing the meaningful possibility that mandatory education can, if somewhat ironically, contribute to the decolonization process. Navigating this lesson with tact and forbearance is crucial to developing culturally safe non-Indigenous voices who may later speak about delicate, human-centered subject matter. Maintaining a healthy distance between the critiques and the instructor's lived experiences and culture can be advantageous in addressing these tensions, a role for which settler instructors may be well positioned.

5.4. **This will not be an easy A.** A general challenge faced by many compulsory introductory-level courses is the assumption the course will lack substance or challenging content and be a GPA-boosting opportunity. Such an expectation can lead students to not apply their full attention to the course material and attempt to circumvent actual consideration of the issues presented, focusing instead on the marking rubrics and imitating the views of their assignment markers. The core issue with this expectation involves a difference of philosophy that runs counter to decolonization work by doubling down on Western measures of value and success and placing a number ahead of the vital knowledge they could gain if they applied themselves. Relatedly, substantial documented academic misconduct has occurred since the ICR implementation, and although higher levels of misconduct and more severe cases have been noted at UBC and other universities in Canada (J. Friesen, 2023) when compared to other sections of INDG 100, the starkest increase was seen exclusively in the settler sections of the course. While there is insufficient evidence to suggest this is solely due to a lack of engagement with the course materials, we ascertain that some students may demonstrate complacency or disregard for the material by consciously choosing to plagiarize, with some groups of students attempting to cheat collaboratively. Any instructor should find this behaviour difficult to tolerate. Still, given the social context, we suggest that this act is highly disrespectful toward Indigenous peoples and conceivably less personally sensitive for a settler instructor to work through.

5.5. **Aggressions come in all sizes.** Unsurprisingly, the instructional team has encountered many transgressions by students, and although this paper has detailed some common macroaggressions—we also encountered countless small,

often unconscious prejudices in student communications, or microaggressions, throughout the course. With a natural rotation of TAs, the instructional teams were always comprised a mixed group of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Depending on their lived experiences, however, microaggressions may be easier for some to spot, but these subtleties are quickly becoming the prevailing form of racism, discrimination, and perpetuating stigmas for marginalized groups across the globe. Common examples of microaggressions found in student writing include the continued use of outdated and racialized terms like *native and Indian* or not bothering to capitalize the word *Indigenous*, even after extensive discussions of its intentionality and importance, while the use of language such as *pre-history* and *history* perpetuates the notion that Indigenous peoples exist only within historical contexts, thus rejecting their existence as unique communities today. While the prolific use of microaggressions in student writing is often caused by ignorance, carelessness, or unconsciousness, managing them remains a significant challenge to consider in this course, especially for Indigenous instructors and TAs who often face microaggressions in their daily lives. Once such aggressions are noted, settler instructors can help take assertive action and begin working with students and TAs to mitigate their use and interference in the learning environment.

5.6. **The cost of emotional labour is high.** Creating opportunities for Indigenous and non-Indigenous TAs to meaningfully engage in the academy's efforts towards social change is explicitly achieved through spaces like the ICR. By centring Indigenous students' voices and faces in the classroom, there is potential for all to benefit (Cannon, 2012); however, this opportunity requires immense courage and vulnerability on the part of Indigenous TAs. Several instances of students calling the credibility of Indigenous TAs' grading and feedback have been noted. Although we recognize a line cannot be directly drawn between the TA's Indigeneity and this student pushback, this experience does add to a lifetime of discrimination and dismissiveness. We contend that this kind of student conduct is unacceptable and that, at times, having a settler instructor to mitigate issues and validate the Indigenous TA in question has been productive for this subset of students who at best may feel they do not want to participate in a university-mandated course or at worst hide their implicit racism toward Indigenous peoples under the guise of "free speech."[5] In some cases, as in the instructor

[5]Students are made aware of the consequences they may face if they breach any of the university's non-academic misconduct policies, including instances of hate speech, as hate speech or otherwise offensive language is not tolerated in this course. Some of these consequences can be found in the URLs below.
UBCO's Student Code of Conduct:`https://okanagan.calendar.ubc.ca/campus-wide-policies-and-regulations/student-conduct-and-discipline/discipline-non-academic-misconduct-student-code-conduct`
UBC's Statement on Respectful Environment for Students, Faculty, and Staff:
`https://hr.ubc.ca/sites/default/files/documents/UBC-Statement-on-Respectful-Environment.pdf`
UBC's Policies and Documents related to Academic Freedom:
`https://academic.ubc.ca/academic-freedom/related-policies-documents`

interventions mentioned above, work and grading involving adversarial students can be reallocated to non-Indigenous TAs or taken on by the settler instructor; however, this does not simply mean having a few more papers to grade. While creating cultural safety in the classroom for Indigenous instructors, TAs, and students is of the highest priority, we acknowledge that the cost is still high for the non-Indigenous ally-accomplices in the classroom.

5.7. **Three months of education and engagement is not enough.** Even for the few students who arrive at the ICR with a strong background in Indigenous topics from their previous education, the learning curve can be steep during their time in the course; this is more of an issue for those who enter with little to no background education—including international students—and are quickly exposed to an endlessly complex and contradictory version of Canada. At best, students leave the course with terminological improvements, a basic overview of historical and current Indigenous issues, and an opportunity to recalibrate their daily actions and mindsets. Still, with only 12 weeks of learning that is typically part of a busy term courseload, it is pertinent to note that an ICR can only scratch the surface of a much deeper societal wound. We assert that while all people—Indigenous and non-Indigenous—may walk the road of decolonization, not everyone begins from the same place. This is where we see the significant potential and actual value of settler instructors in this course, as they have likely engaged in similar journeys as the settler students and thus have the potential to embody the educational principles of modeling what a true ally-accomplice can do, how to understand their power and privilege, and lay out the inherent limitations in this particular classroom space.

6. CONFRONTING THE SETTLER

Instructor feedback provided in end-of-term course evaluations of students throughout the 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 academic years revealed some valuable student perspectives, specifically regarding what an appropriate instructor for an *Introduction to Decolonization* course could be. We acknowledge that student evaluations are widely regarded as comprised of outlier perspectives (McCallum, 2017), with feedback more often following a strikingly positive or negative experience or outcome in the course, rather than a merely satisfactory one. For this reason, we note that the inclusions here do not provide a fully representative opinion or reflection of the instructor by students, especially those with negative views. While the instructor was the recipient of the commentary covered in this section, we have reason to believe that any comparable settler instructor in this role would encounter similar reflections. Still, we acknowledge and respect students' contributions over these two years—they have raised many of the same concerns we have, some of which we have reconciled, and others we continue to pursue.

Shouldn't the instructor be Indigenous? The assumption behind this question has often been described as an equity-based notion that a non-Indigenous person is taking a position that an Indigenous person should hold. We agree that this

bears truth in that no one is more qualified to speak on issues of Indigenous studies than Indigenous people who move from their own lived experiences and have extensive expertise in one or more fields in Indigenous studies. To this end, we wholeheartedly agree with others, including Gaudry and Lorenz (2018), that Indigenous people should be at the heart of Indigenous studies work, and we uphold the new generation of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people graduating with PhDs in Canada to take their rightful seats at the table and at the front of the classroom.

As to ICRs specifically, however, we refute two key ideas that may flow from this assumption. First, we reject the notion that decolonization work in institutional spaces is the burden of Indigenous people alone, having provided in this paper numerous examples of substantial cultural safety concerns for Indigenous instructors and students in the classroom. Second, we dismiss any presupposition that Indigenous faculty members are automatically prepared, let alone obliged, to invest their emotional labour and expertise into a mandated Indigenous Studies course, especially one that describes to hundreds of unfamiliar, non-Indigenous people the details of colonial harms perpetrated against an instructor's community and family (Ahmed, 2012). Should Indigenous scholars choose to take on an ICR, we can only imagine the immense power of their voices in the classroom; still, we maintain that this role is not their burden unless they choose to bear it.

In contrast to notions that racial identity is the paramount feature of ICR instruction, students articulated key insights surrounding the perceived impact of instructor self-awareness and ethical conduct in the classroom. More than one Indigenous student spoke explicitly of appreciating the fact that ICR was conducted by a non-Indigenous person dedicated to truth-telling and handling complex topics with care, thus reinforcing our position that settlers can demonstrate positively impactful engagement in decolonization work by instructing ICRs when requested by Indigenous Studies departments. Students took up aspects of curriculum and pedagogy, including most crucially the felt presence of authentic Indigenous voices in the classroom throughout the term. All course materials were created by Indigenous knowledge holders, public figures, community members, and scholars. The instructor's lectures were interspersed with Indigenous guest speakers invited to share their uncensored perspectives on indigeneity (Minthorn, 2022). Here, we emphasize the importance of deliberate decentring for an ally-accomplice engaged in ICRs.

We contend that the willingness of non-Indigenous people to step forward with a guiding humility and sensitivity in the affirmation and enactment of commitments toward institutional decolonization has potential when approached with vulnerability and a high degree of responsibility for their positionality. We further assert that a non-Indigenous person doing work in Indigenous spaces will—and should—be held to the highest ethical standards of those who have concerns about settler presence, engagement, and desires, including the potential extraction of Indigenous knowledge(s) or the obstruction of Indigenous advancement. And to those squarely focused on the placement of Indigenous instructors into ICRs, we

encourage a careful cost-benefit analysis for the Indigenous people they seek to support, including the reverberating colonialisms that we continue to see from students in the classroom.

Other student concerns surrounded the instructor's tone when addressing students during lectures and the desire for more student-engaged discussion on course topics. In Habkirk's first year of instruction, optional biweekly tutorials were open to students to discuss ideas surrounding the subject matter. By the end of the first year, each session had only one to two students, and the sessions were subsequently replaced with discussion-friendly open office hours. In all versions of the course, students were required to post weekly discussion posts summarizing their reflections on the course materials and connecting them to the lecture themes. These were static posts, meaning students were instructed to read other students' ideas, although they were not to respond. This allowed students to learn from one another, pose questions to the instructor, and build community by relating to other students' questions and their process of working through new concepts.

For classroom safety, student discussions and engagement were deliberately limited in this course. As noted by Indigenous instructors who have designed and taught ICRs, in-person class instructors simply cannot monitor all student discussions, leading to students with Indigenous heritage becoming "spokespeople" for all Indigenous people or Indigenous students feeling bullied or disrespected by their non-Indigenous peers (McCallum, 2022). Since this was an online course—and break-out rooms on Zoom with 150 to 200 students would be immensely challenging to moderate—the instructional team concluded that ensuring safety in discussion groups was unsustainable.

During emotionally heavy topics such as residential schools, the Sixties Scoop, and the child welfare system, some students noted an escalation in the instructor's tone, which left those students feeling as if they were being scolded or even yelled at for issues that they had not personally caused, with others calling into question whether this was an effective teaching method. In these same course evaluations, however, other students noted that they were engaged throughout the class and online lectures due to the instructor's passionate delivery and ability to connect settler students to the topics. Therefore, in reflection, we suggest that these vastly differing accounts and experiences of the same course material may relate to the social, emotional and intellectual capacity of students, with some offering a humble and reflective response, and others reacting with a projection of white privilege and fragility (McIntosh, 1988).

We continue to reflect on how these and other tensions may emerge with an Indigenous instructor at the front of the class—perhaps differently or even not at all—and how these concerns could be navigated to create a culturally safe environment. We pose this question to be taken up by those involved in ICRs and invite discussions around these topics.

7. CONCLUSION

Although installing a curricular and pedagogical model in an inherently challenging socially, emotionally, and at times politically charged space involves many trials and tribulations, we reiterate that sharing our reflections and experiences is intended only to encourage transparent conversations for universities and Indigenous Studies departments so that others may be able to proactively address potential challenges from the centre of their course design outward.

Substantial successes arose from this decolonization work in progress and through monitoring coursework, we saw demonstrable step-wise growth in the vast majority of students in crucial areas. For instance, from our experiences and those noted in studies about ICRs at the University of Winnipeg (H. L. Friesen, 2018; Siemens & Neufeld, 2022), many final assignments expressed gratitude to the instructional team and the instructor for changing students' worldviews, opening up conversations with family and friends, and expressing learners' desire to carry these new paradigms into their careers and lives. Others suggested that the ICR challenged them to rethink previously presented notions of Indigenous peoples, bringing their understanding of the Indigenous experience in Canada as not just historical challenges but as part of the deeply rooted systemic issues from which they still benefit as settlers and which need to help change. We note that Indigenous students who were placed in the settler section of this course due to scheduling conflicts or other reasons often thanked the instructional team for helping them reconnect with their own culture or understand their relatives' experiences at the hands of the Canadian state.

We conclude that Indigenous Course Requirements must remain in place to further the decolonization efforts on university campuses, that Indigenous and non-Indigenous people must participate in their development and content, and that departments should collaboratively designate appropriate roles for all. Although ICRs present certain unique institutional challenges, settler ally accomplices need to take on their share of the burden, and we see little rationale for a complete dismissal of settlers' collaborative role in this work. It has been demonstrated that should ally-accomplice settler instructors act with humility and an evolving self-awareness of their positionality and ongoing responsibility to Indigenous peoples, as well as the responsibilities, risks, and optics of having their role in an Indigenous Studies department, they may contribute meaningfully to answering institutional calls for reconciliation, bring Indigenous voices to the forefront of this conversation, and provide relief from the relentless emotional labour that Indigenous scholars and leaders routinely face in trying to educate resistant settler students, conserving their voices and efforts for more profound decolonization, reconciliation, and community work.

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