

Office of the Provost and Vice-President: Advancing *ohpahotân* / *oohpaahotaan*

Current State

The Office of the Provost and Vice-President has increasingly embedded Indigenous priorities into programs, services, policies, teaching practices, academic quality assurance processes, and student supports. Across Teaching, Learning and Student Experience (TLSE), Teaching Innovation and Strategic Initiatives (TI&SI), Assessment and Analytics, Academic Health Sciences, and the Prince Albert Campus, Indigenous perspectives are influencing how the university teaches, evaluates programs, supports students, and engages with communities. Although part of the Provost's Portfolio, the activities of the Indigenous Engagement team are not included in this summary but rather appear separately as part of the *ohpahotân* / *oohpaahotaan* reporting.

This work aligns with the *ohpahotân* / *oohpaahotaan* framework's emphasis on learning, relationship-building, representation, safe spaces, reciprocity, stewardship, and transformation. We are moving beyond stand-alone initiatives toward changes in the systems and structures that guide university operations and decision-making.

What Has Worked?

Creating Pathways for Indigenous Student Success

Dedicated Indigenous-focused positions in admissions, wellness, experiential learning, and student employment have strengthened pathways into and through the university. Through collaboration between TLSE and the Office of the Vice-Provost Indigenous Engagement, Indigenous student recruitment, community outreach, wellness supports, and employment readiness opportunities have expanded. The Indigenous Student Employment Readiness Program has become a particularly successful model for supporting Indigenous students' transition to meaningful employment and has received international recognition.

Expanding Access and Community Connections

The Prince Albert Campus has strengthened relationships with First Nations organizations, northern communities, and Indigenous learners through outreach activities, ceremonies, cultural programming, and consultation. Partnerships with organizations such as PAGC, programming for Indigenous students, food security initiatives, and increased access to educational programs are helping reduce barriers and improve the student experience.

Embedding Indigenous Perspectives in Teaching and Learning

The university has made significant progress integrating Indigenous perspectives into curriculum development, assessment practices, and educator development. GMCTL has supported educators in incorporating Indigenous pedagogies, Indigenous-authored scholarship, Elder and Knowledge Keeper participation, and culturally responsive teaching practices. Revised assessment principles now recognize multiple valid ways of

demonstrating learning, creating space for more culturally responsive approaches to assessment.

Strengthening Representation and Belonging

Academic Health Sciences has increased Indigenous visibility through artwork, teachings, and culturally significant symbols throughout shared learning environments. Health professions education is also becoming more representative through efforts to improve Indigenous representation in learning materials and simulated patient programming while reducing stereotypes and tokenization.

Building Institutional Capacity

Professional development opportunities, reconciliation-focused learning programs, workshops, and educator training have expanded awareness and understanding of Indigenous histories, perspectives, and pedagogies among faculty and staff. These activities are helping build the institutional capacity required to support longer-term change.

What Has Not Worked or Remains Challenging?

Measuring Indigenous Activities and Outcomes

One of the most significant ongoing challenges is the lack of external benchmarking data related to Indigenous activities. Assessment and Analytics has identified limitations in national and international reporting systems, which often do not adequately capture Indigenous student supports, Indigenous research activity, Indigenous content, or Indigenous-focused services. As a result, it is difficult to compare USask's performance with peer institutions or assess relative effectiveness using conventional benchmarking approaches.

The UniForum benchmarking system illustrates this challenge. While it provides extensive information about administrative activities at universities, it does not specifically account for Indigenous student or employee supports. This limits the university's ability to assess whether Indigenous support services are adequately resourced or effective relative to comparable institutions.

Sustaining Participation and Engagement

Some initiatives have experienced participation challenges. Efforts to recruit Indigenous students into clinical simulated patient programs yielded limited participation, prompting exploration of new partnerships and recruitment pathways. Community engagement initiatives in northern Saskatchewan have also demonstrated that building relationships and obtaining meaningful feedback takes time and sustained effort. Survey-based approaches have not always generated sufficient information to guide planning.

Moving from Awareness to Organizational Change

While professional learning opportunities have increased awareness of reconciliation and Indigenous perspectives, several units identified the challenge of translating individual

learning into sustained organizational transformation. Meaningful systems change requires ongoing leadership, accountability, resources, and commitment over time

How Are We Changing Systems?

Consistent with the framework's emphasis on transformation, the most significant progress is occurring where Indigenous perspectives are being embedded into institutional structures, policies, processes, and accountability mechanisms rather than being addressed solely through programs or events.

Academic Quality Assurance

A significant systems change has occurred through revisions to the Academic Program Review (APR) process. Previously, Indigenous learner experiences and Indigenous content were not consistently incorporated into program reviews. Self-study templates now require the inclusion of Indigenous data and information about Indigenous curricular content. This ensures that Indigenous learner outcomes and Indigenous perspectives are systematically considered when programs are reviewed and improved. Indigenous considerations are becoming part of the university's formal academic quality assurance system rather than optional additions.

Assessment Policy Reform

The university's revised Assessment Principles represent a structural shift in how learning is evaluated. The principles recognize that meaningful evidence of student learning can take multiple forms, including oral assessment and other approaches beyond traditional examinations. This creates institutional space for culturally responsive and Indigenous-informed assessment practices across academic programs.

Embedding Indigenization into Faculty Development

Indigenization and decolonization competencies have been incorporated into the Certificate in University Teaching and Learning and GMCTL educator development programs. This means Indigenous perspectives are being integrated into formal faculty development systems rather than remaining optional or dependent upon individual interest. More than 100 educators have demonstrated competency in Indigenization and decolonization through these programs, helping build sustainable institutional capacity.

Developing an Institutional Framework for Teaching and Learning

GMCTL and OVPIE have collaborated on the development of an Indigenization of Teaching and Learning Framework. This work is creating common institutional expectations and guidance for curriculum design, assessment, instruction, and educational development. Rather than relying on isolated examples of innovation, the framework supports a coordinated university-wide approach to teaching and learning transformation.

Reshaping Student Service Delivery

The addition of Indigenous-focused positions in admissions, wellness, and experiential learning (with support from the Oyateki program), and career services (with support from the ScotiaRISE Indigenous Student Employment Readiness Program) represents a shift from project-based initiatives toward ongoing institutional capacity. Indigenous student supports are becoming embedded within core university services and operational structures. This helps ensure that Indigenous student success is integrated into routine university operations and planning processes.

Increasing Access Through Flexible Learning

The Flexible Learning Initiative is addressing structural barriers that affect Indigenous learners by improving access to courses and programs in rural, northern, and Indigenous communities. Efforts include expanding virtual learning opportunities, supporting community-based program delivery, developing laddering pathways, and exploring flexible-paced programming that better accommodates family, employment, and community responsibilities. These changes are transforming not only what is offered, but how and where learning occurs.

Changing Curriculum and Educational Content Processes

Within Academic Health Sciences, Indigenous perspectives are increasingly influencing how educational materials are developed and reviewed. Ongoing work to improve Indigenous representation, eliminate stereotypes, review case content, and strengthen Indigenous participation in simulated learning activities represents a shift from adding Indigenous content to redesigning curriculum development processes themselves.

Improving Institutional Data and Accountability

Assessment and Analytics is helping the university identify where existing measurement systems inadequately capture Indigenous activities and outcomes. While external benchmarking limitations remain significant, changes to Academic Program Review processes demonstrate movement toward institutional reporting mechanisms that better recognize Indigenous priorities. Future efforts will continue to strengthen institutional capacity to measure progress, identify gaps, and support evidence-informed decision-making.

Future State

The future state envisioned through *ohpahotân / oohpaahotaan* is one in which Indigenous perspectives are routinely reflected in institutional decision-making, academic quality assurance, teaching practices, student supports, and university governance. Indigenous knowledge systems, community relationships, and Indigenous learner success become embedded within normal university practice rather than addressed through separate initiatives.

Key priorities moving forward include:

- Expanding culturally responsive and flexible pathways into and through academic programs.
- Strengthening partnerships with Indigenous communities, Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and organizations.
- Continuing to integrate Indigenous pedagogies and perspectives into curriculum, assessment, and educational development.
- Further embedding Indigenous considerations into institutional planning, quality assurance, and accountability systems.
- Improving data collection, reporting, and benchmarking approaches to better understand Indigenous outcomes and institutional progress.
- Continuing the transition from awareness-building activities toward systemic and sustainable institutional transformation.

The Office of the Provost and Vice-President Academic is contributing to reconciliation not only through programs and services, but through changes to the systems, structures, policies, and practices that shape the university experience. These changes reflect the framework's aspiration to create lasting institutional transformation grounded in Indigenous knowledges, reciprocal relationships, stewardship, and shared responsibility.