



DALHOUSIE
UNIVERSITY

Understanding Our Roots

Nestimuk tan wtapeksikw

TASK FORCE ON SETTLER MISAPPROPRIATION
OF INDIGENOUS IDENTITY

Dalhousie University

October 2023





PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

As I enter the role of president at Dalhousie University, I would like to take this opportunity to bolster the university's collective commitment to building deep and meaningful partnerships with Indigenous Peoples across Canada. This commitment is especially true of our relationship with the Mi'kmaw, Wolastoqey, and Peskotomuhkati nations on whose territories the university resides. This work is guided by our Strategic Plan 2021-2026, Si'st Kasqimtnaqnipunqekl Teli L'wi'tmasimk - Third Century Promise and the Dalhousie Indigenous Strategy 2018. With this guidance, the university strives to uphold the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and rise to the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC). We know that reconciliation is our shared responsibility, and we recognize that our commitment is meaningless without fundamental shifts in the way we find shared priorities, goals, resources, policies, and institutional levers of power.

Understanding Our Roots addresses the issue of settler misappropriation of Indigenous identity. This report is one piece of the larger reconciliatory process that provides Dalhousie with a deeper understanding and appreciation of how colonialism operates within our institution. It calls on us to forge a wider path towards authenticity and accountability.

The report provides a snapshot of an immensely complex issue that has deep roots in our colonial history. The implementation of the recommendations contained within the report will be difficult and painful for some. Support for change is required. We are committed to working with Indigenous Peoples at the local, regional, and national levels to implement these recommendations.

I would like to acknowledge the task force members – Dr. Brent Young, John R. Sylliboy, Elders Ann LaBillois, and Catherine Martin. They worked tirelessly to find a path forward amidst pain and uncertainty. Their support and guidance will be critical as we revise and improve our processes and policies. I would also like to thank each Indigenous Elder, colleague, community member, and leader for their invaluable contributions to the report. Their honest, direct, and thoughtful input enabled us to approach this complex issue in the spirit of truth and reconciliation.

Kim Brooks
President and Vice-Chancellor

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LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

These lands are Indigenous. This pretext is integral to everything that we do, including the development and implementation of this report. This task force encourages settler Canadians to move beyond superficial land acknowledgements, as we will do here.

Dalhousie University operates in the unceded territories of the Mi'kmaw¹, Wolastoqey², and Peskotomuhkati³ Peoples. These sovereign nations, along with the Penobscot, are part of a wider alliance known as the Wabanaki⁴ Confederacy. Those who live within these territories are collectively bound by the Peace and Friendship Treaties, a fact affirmed by the Canadian constitution.

Mi'kma'ki is the land of the Mi'kmaq or L'nu'k.⁵ It spans the colonial boundaries of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland, Quebec, and Maine. The Wolastoqey Nation surrounds the Wolastoq⁶ watershed and crosses the colonial boundaries of New Brunswick, Quebec, and Maine. Peskotomuhkati territory surrounds the Skutik River and Passamaquoddy Bay. It spans the colonial boundaries of New Brunswick and Maine.

The land provides the water, food, air, and material goods that sustain us. Netukulimk is a traditional Mi'kmaw principle that describes

how L'nu'k must live in balance with the land and its resources. The recent establishment of settler colonial states within these territories has seen widespread abuse and degradation of the land, contrary to Netukulimk. Settler states have facilitated the extraction of an inconceivable amount of wealth from the land to the detriment of Indigenous Peoples.⁷

Unsustainable practices in drilling, mining, forestry, agriculture, and real estate have been a major source of revenue for colonial governments and private enterprises in what we now call Canada. Indigenous nations continue to be denied access to these same resources and revenue streams, while they are systematically diverted towards the priorities of the settler population. Astonishingly, colonial discourse continues to falsely reposition Indigenous Peoples as the net beneficiaries of state welfare in Canada. This speaks to how powerful and subversive settler colonialism is in its ongoing attempt to undermine and eliminate Indigenous Peoples from these territories.

Dalhousie University, like most colonial institutions, has yet to come to full terms with its own complicity in this colonial project. Dalhousie continues to derive benefit from the exploitation of the land to the detriment of Indigenous Peoples. This report provides an opportunity for

1 Mi'kmaw is the singular form of Mi'kmaq, which is a plural non-possessive word. Mi'kmaq is derived from the word Ni'kmaq, which means "my kin-friend."

2 Wolastoqey is an adjective derived from Wolastoqiyik, which refers to the "people of the beautiful river." Wolastoqiyik is used in the context of nationhood. "Maliseet" is also used to describe the Wolastoqiyik, but this term is not based in the Wolastoqey language, and it is still used but becoming less common.

3 Peskotomuhkati means "those of the place where pollock are plentiful."

4 Wabanaki means "people of the first light."

5 L'nuk is the plural form of L'nu, which means "The People of the Same Tongue." It was the original term used by the Mi'kmaq to describe themselves. Tuma Young describes how the word, "denotes a group of people who have experienced the same forces of the ecology and have a shared cognitive solidarity." Some L'nu use the word to refer to Indigenous people more broadly, and this is how it will be used here.

6 Wolastoq refers to the "beautiful and bountiful river." This river is also known as the St. John River.

7 Indigenous Peoples, when capitalized and used in this report, is used interchangeably with Indigenous nations.

the university to understand a small part of this truth and build a more authentic process of reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples, especially the Mi'kmaw, Wolastoqey, and Peskotomuhkati Nations.

These nations have always sought peaceful coexistence with settlers. This coexistence has been embodied in the Peace and Friendship Treaties. To this day, L'nu'k are not seeking the dissolution of settler governments and institutions. Thus, the most ethical path forward for institutions such as Dalhousie University involves an authentic process of reconciliation. This report will illuminate a small portion of this path, but rebuilding Dalhousie's relationship with rights-holding Indigenous Peoples within these territories will require more than reports, strategies, commitments, and promises. It will require the equitable return of resources and power back to the Mi'kmaw, Wolastoqey, and Peskotomuhkati Nations.

Many who spoke with the task force pointed out that Dalhousie has erred by positioning Indigenous Peoples among other equity-deserving groups. The Mi'kmaw, Wolastoqey, and Peskotomuhkati Nations have long asserted their distinct position as rights-holders within these territories. The task force received a clear message that Dalhousie University must recognize this distinct position and move away from the colonial practice of equating Indigenous Peoples with other equity-deserving groups under the broad umbrella of equity, diversity, and inclusion.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The task force would like to acknowledge those who have made direct and indirect contributions to this report. This topic is highly personal and nuanced, which makes it emotionally taxing for Indigenous people to navigate. There are a number of champions who continue to take a strong stand against those who commit Indigenous identity fraud despite the real and potential ramifications for their own personal and professional well-being. Reports commissioned by the University of Saskatchewan, University of Manitoba, and Queen's University have played a key role in shaping our understanding and approach to this issue.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Policies that prioritize the recruitment and retention of Indigenous people at Dalhousie University are intended to foster a diverse and inclusive campus environment. These policies also seek to mitigate barriers that have led to the underrepresentation of Indigenous people at all levels of the university. While the effect of such policies is most visible at the individual level, they have a wider and less visible impact when it comes to improving the well-being of Indigenous families, communities, and nations. A single Indigenous person who gains post-secondary education will often go on to inspire, influence, and support a multitude of others. This phenomenon was described during multiple engagement sessions, and one community member described it as the “ripple effect.”

Where someone makes a false claim to Indigenous identity, membership, or citizenship, the harmful ripple effect can be equally expansive. The most obvious harms flow from the misappropriation of resources that are intended to support Indigenous Peoples; however, there are less obvious harms that are collective in nature. These

harms flow from Indigenous people being denied education, employment, income, and decision-making authority in favour of non-Indigenous people. Regardless of the perpetrator’s intent, the effect is the same. It is to undermine the Indigenous right to self-determination. The leakage of intended supports in the form of bursaries, scholarships, employment, and designated seats for Indigenous people is an enormous economic and spiritual loss to a community that has been made marginal by the hands of colonialism.

A vast majority of those engaged by this task force made it clear that all institutions must take swift and decisive measures to mitigate the harms that arise from false claims to Indigeneity.

Those engaged made a resounding call for Dalhousie University to use the considerable resources it has at its disposal to take a strong and confident stand when conflict inevitably arises in this arena. To do otherwise is to place undue burden on Indigenous Peoples, who will be forced to deal with yet another harm perpetrated by non-Indigenous people.



PURPOSE

The purpose of this task force was to make recommendations surrounding the disruption of false claims of Indigenous identity, membership, and citizenship at Dalhousie University. Where made with intent for personal or financial gain, this phenomenon has been referred to as Indigenous identity fraud. The task force sought to centre the voice of Indigenous people who have lived experience and expertise with this issue. This was deemed essential in establishing a baseline understanding of the extent and impact of Indigenous identity fraud at the university.

It was not the purpose of this task force to investigate specific allegations of false claims to Indigeneity at Dalhousie. Specific allegations that arose during the engagement process were directed to existing reporting mechanisms. The task force has not been made aware of any formal reports that have arisen as a result.

This report is intended to serve as the basis for future Dalhousie University policies related to the verification of Indigenous identity, citizenship, or membership. This task force did not have an inherent, cultural, or legal mandate to establish new criteria for Indigenous identity, membership, or citizenship, and it did not attempt to do so.

BACKGROUND

There have been several high-profile cases of Indigenous identity fraud in Canada. This has caused growing concern among Indigenous people who have fought long and hard to reclaim space for Indigenous Peoples across many institutions. Prior to the formation of this task force, some Indigenous

initiatives at Dalhousie University were taking steps to address this issue independently. Unfortunately, this work has been limited by resource constraints and a lack of a coherent approach from the university.

Despite initial concerns that verification processes would create additional barriers for Indigenous people, they have been met with early success at Dalhousie. In the Faculty of Medicine, a record number of Mi'kmaw and Indigenous students were recruited to the undergraduate medical education program in 2023 with the introduction of an Indigenous Admissions Pathway. This pathway includes aggressive measures to mitigate known barriers for Indigenous people, particularly those associated with the Medical College Admissions Test (MCAT). Because many people struggle to achieve the minimum MCAT score required for admission to Dalhousie Medical School even in the absence of systemic barriers, it was hypothesized that mitigation measures would incentivize false claims to Indigeneity. Thus, proactive steps were taken to verify claims to Indigenous identity, citizenship, or membership. In the first iteration of the Indigenous Admissions Pathway, 30% of applicants failed to meet the criteria outlined by the Indigenous Admissions Subcommittee. With evidence of widespread issues mounting and the protective effects of verification emerging, it became clear that a university-wide approach would be needed.

Most members of the Dalhousie Indigenous Advisory Council (IAC) acknowledged that false claims to Indigenous identity, membership, and citizenship were causing harm; however, despite numerous discussions over several years, the IAC was unable to present recommendations to the university

on this matter. Considering this, a group of IAC members proposed a task force that would seek a mandate and consensus from Indigenous communities. The Mi'kmaw, Wolastoqey, and Peskotomuhkati Nations were centered given their distinct status as rights-bearing Peoples within the territories on which Dalhousie University operates.

Dr. Brent Young, the academic director for Indigenous health at Dalhousie University, developed a proposal with feedback from Catherine Martin, the director of Indigenous community engagement, and Patti Doyle-Bedwell, a Dalhousie University senator who represents the IAC. Dr. Theresa Rajack-Talley, the vice provost of equity and inclusion, supported this effort. The proposal gained approval from Kim Brooks, the acting provost and vice-president academic at the time.

The task force consisted of three Indigenous people internal to the university and one Indigenous person external to the university: Ann Labillois (Mi'kmaw, Eel River Bar First Nation; Elder; Internal), Brent Young (Anishinaabe, Sandy Bay First Nation; Chair; Internal), Catherine Martin (Mi'kmaw, Millbrook First Nation; Advisor; Internal), and John R. Sylliboy (L'nu, Millbrook First Nation and Eskasoni First Nation; Co-chair; External). The external member was selected from a shortlist of candidates previously proposed by the IAC.

Together, these task force members hold extensive knowledge and experience in Indigenous community engagement in the context of research, post-secondary education, health policy development, and culturally specific community needs in the Atlantic region and nationally.

Their combined perspective and expertise are multigenerational. It combines L'nuwey

worldviews with western-based academics, which is consistent with the Mi'kmaw concept of Etuaptamumk or Two-Eyed Seeing. Task force members were intentional in their efforts to build kinship and mutual respect during engagement sessions.

PROCESS

Over a period of 12 weeks, the task force led an Indigenous engagement process that involved community leaders, governing bodies, and kinship networks. Given that Dalhousie University's largest campuses are located in Nova Scotia, there was a particular emphasis on engaging with the Mi'kmaw community in the province. The intent was not to create division among Indigenous nations, but rather to provide appropriate weight to the distinct cultural perspectives, local contexts, and treaty relationships that apply to Dalhousie. The engagement process aimed to incorporate the cultural protocols of the Mi'kmaw Nation under the guidance of task force members who carry these teachings.

Throughout the engagement process, diverse First Nations, Inuit, and Métis perspectives were sought and heard. Participants were recruited through the networks of each task force member at the local, regional, and national levels. The task force facilitated individual meetings and sharing circles, emphasizing that participation was voluntary and that *ad hominem* attacks would not be tolerated during these sessions.

The task force met with a small group of Indigenous students who were identified by Indigenous faculty and staff across various units. There were 16 members of the IAC external to the task force who were

engaged during individual meetings and/or during at least one of three group sessions held on Carleton Campus. A small number of individuals at the university reported psychological distress with the introduction of the task force, and they were directed to counseling supports as appropriate. There were 23 community members external to the university who participated in engagements that took place online and at various locations, including the Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre (Kjipuktuk [Halifax], NS), Millbrook Community Centre (We'kopekwtik [Millbrook First Nation], NS), Membertou Trade and Convention Centre (Maupeltuk [Membertou First Nation], NS), and Maqiyahimok Centre (Sitansisk [Saint Mary's First Nation], NB). There were no reports of psychological distress related to these discussions.

Members of the task force also attended the 2023 National Indigenous Citizenship Forum, which was hosted by First Nations University. The task force and select university leaders also heard from other universities who are moving forward to address this issue. An environmental scan was submitted to the task force via Dalhousie Human Resources. The task force also engaged with representatives from the Dalhousie Faculty Association.

The task force took measures to protect the privacy of those who chose to engage with the task force during closed sessions. In drafting this report, efforts have been taken to anonymize information where appropriate. Feedback was sought from three external reviewers prior to the submission of the final report.

LIMITATIONS

A common theme that emerged during engagement sessions was that there are many unanswered questions on this topic. Being able to act and mitigate harm in the face of such uncertainty requires strong leadership. Participants noted that Dalhousie would be in a better position to lead on complex issues such as Indigenous identity fraud if it had deeper partnerships with Indigenous Peoples. There are some areas of strength to draw upon within the university, but there is a wide perception that the university has fallen behind others in the region with respect to prioritizing Indigenous issues.

Our nations are emerging from a period of assimilation and cultural genocide. Settler governments have attempted to control and limit everything about us, including our identities. With the advent of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) Act, more nations are asserting their right to self-determination in relation to identity, citizenship, and membership. Progress in this domain is variable and rapidly evolving. It will be a new experience for many of our nations to formally confer identity, citizenship, and membership, and it will be a novel experience for many institutions to verify such titles. There are diverse perspectives and experiences that will naturally emerge as a result.

Our nations are dynamic and constantly evolving. Our collective knowledge will also grow with time. This report provides a sample of present-day thinking on the matter of Indigenous identity fraud. Members of the task force are not naïve to the fact that this thinking will change over time, and parts of this report

will become outdated. The future reader may even feel that some of this content is obtuse. This is the nature of growth and development, and this task force embraces change in all its complexities and challenges.

FINDINGS

This report synthesizes prevailing perceptions and opinions expressed by individuals engaged by the task force between April and June 2023. These statements are not intended to represent legal fact. Specifics have been omitted to protect the privacy of those involved in task force proceedings.

The task force heard the following:

1. There is reason to believe that some students, faculty, and staff have made false or misleading statements about their own Indigenous identity, membership, or citizenship at Dalhousie University. Numerous claims are likely to have gone undetected.
2. Indigenous Peoples continue to experience harm due to false claims to Indigenous identity, membership, and citizenship at Dalhousie University. Such claims have created an atmosphere of suspicion, mistrust, and conflict.
3. Dalhousie University and its affiliates may face significant reputational, financial, and legal hurdles as a result of past indifference and inaction on these matters.
4. There is fear that highlighting this issue will bring harm to Indigenous People who have already faced intrusive questioning and suspicion in the absence of a consistent verification process at the university.
5. There are concerns that Indigenous people who have been disconnected from their nation as a result of colonial violence could be harmed by attempts to disrupt false claims to Indigenous identity, membership, and citizenship. Such colonial violence includes the Sixties Scoop, Millennial Scoop, Indian Residential Schools, Indian Day Schools, incarceration, and enfranchisement. Care and diligence will be required when assessing claims made by those who purport to have been disconnected from their nation. Those making false claims have been known to exploit these historical realities to support their otherwise unsubstantiated claims. This need for vigilance is but another example of how fraudsters continue to place undue burden on Indigenous people who are already experiencing marginalization.
6. Decision-makers at Dalhousie have, at times, resisted efforts to disrupt false claims to Indigenous identity, membership, or citizenship. Indigenous people have described a misguided sense of allyship and white saviorism among non-Indigenous people who have interfered in efforts to disrupt fraudulent claims to Indigeneity at Dalhousie in the past.
7. Indigenous people at Dalhousie who have taken reasonable efforts to disrupt Indigenous identity fraud have experienced intimidation. This intimidation is often perpetrated by those who have had their claims questioned.
8. There is no consistent policy mechanism for verifying Indigenous identity, membership, or citizenship at Dalhousie University.

9. There is no clear policy mechanism for addressing complaints related to false claims to Indigenous identity, membership, or citizenship at Dalhousie University.
10. Many Indigenous Peoples are asserting their right to determine Indigenous identity, membership, citizenship. There is a desire to provide recognition to those who have been genuinely disconnected from their nations as a result of colonialism.
11. Although imperfect, it is reasonable and acceptable for Dalhousie University to accept documentary evidence issued by the federal government or a federally recognized First Nation for the purpose of verifying claims to Indigenous identity, membership, and citizenship. One exception that will need to be considered on a case-by-case basis would be those whose claim is based on Indian Status that was gained solely through marriage prior to 1985. At this time, any such claim would require further supporting evidence to demonstrate that the applicant meets the criteria for Indigenous identity, membership, and citizenship set forth by the respective First Nation.
12. Although a small number of those engaged implied that Indigenous Peoples must adopt customs and practices that pre-date colonization, most accept the reality that our nations have been forever impacted by colonialism, and that we will continue to interact with colonial governments and institutions for the foreseeable future. Many nations are also actively pursuing self-governance frameworks. Most of those engaged agreed that these realities necessitate the timely and accurate identification of Indigenous people. Although a modern concept, many Indigenous Peoples have turned to and will continue to turn to documentary evidence in the form of identification cards. This has not been, and it will not be the sole approach, but it represents a natural progression in our efforts provide recognition to those who hold status within our nations.
13. There is substantial support among Indigenous Peoples for Indigenous-led university initiatives that centre the voice of community. Although the task force heard reasonable cautions, the vast majority of those who participated in task force proceedings were supportive and grateful for this effort.
14. There is interest in a regional approach to addressing Indigenous identity fraud in academic environments. There is also an opportunity to collaborate with universities outside of Wabanaki to better understand Indigenous identity, membership, and citizenship within their local contexts.
15. Indigenous participants expressed frustration amidst a perceived lack of progress in addressing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) Calls to Action pertaining to post-secondary education. There is a perception that this is driven, in part, by a lack of accountability and meaningful relationships with Indigenous Peoples.
16. Many people within Indigenous communities viewed this task force as a prudent first step in Dalhousie's effort to develop more meaningful partnerships with Indigenous Peoples, especially the Mi'kmaw, Wolastoqey, and Peskotomuhkati Nations

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. The president, on behalf of Dalhousie University, must apologize to Indigenous Peoples, especially the Mi'kmaw, Wolastoqey, and Peskotomuhkati nations, for the harms that have arisen out of the university's overreliance on Indigenous self-identification policies.**

Institutional accountability begins with truth. This is a crucial component of the reconciliatory process. The president must acknowledge that Indigenous self-identification policies, although initially developed in good faith, have left the door open to false claims of Indigeneity at Dalhousie University. These false claims have had detrimental effects on Indigenous Peoples, irrespective of the claimants' intent. While Indigenous individuals can often easily identify false claims, non-Indigenous individuals may struggle to recognize them. Even more harm has occurred where non-Indigenous people have ignored or resisted Indigenous people who have raised concerns about Indigenous identity fraud. Institutions led by non-Indigenous individuals have been slow to respond, or they have failed to respond at all. At Dalhousie, this delay is partly related to the university relying on those making false claims to propose solutions through existing governance structures.

Conflict, disillusionment, and an erosion of trust have arisen because of this delay, particularly in spaces intended for Indigenous people. False claims

frequently lead to the misallocation of resources intended to support Indigenous Peoples. Therefore, Dalhousie University has an obligation to verify that any claim to Indigenous identity, citizenship, or membership is consistent with the customs and traditions of the respective Indigenous People. Dishonest and misleading statements regarding an individual's Indigeneity, made for personal or financial gain, must be recognized and treated as fraud.

The apology must also acknowledge that the Mi'kmaw, Wolastoqey, and Peskotomuhkati Peoples hold unique status as rights-bearing nations within these unceded territories, and, as such, they have been disproportionately impacted by this issue. The president must reiterate Dalhousie's commitment to building stronger relationships with Indigenous Peoples. Although the university centres diversity across most contexts, the distinct position of the Mi'kmaq, Wolastoqiyik, and Peskotomuhkati within these territories requires the university to foreground the priorities of these nations.

- 2. Dalhousie University is not positioned to determine Indigenous identity, citizenship, or membership, and it must not adopt any policy that attempts to do so.**

The Mi'kmaq, Wolastoqiyik, and Peskotomuhkati have consistently asserted their status as distinct nations with the inherent right to self-determination. This position is supported by the UNDRIP Act,

which became law in Canada in June 2021. The Act recognizes and upholds the right to self-determination for all Indigenous Peoples in Canada. This right is collective and applies to distinct Indigenous Peoples as a whole, rather than individuals. Regarding Indigenous identity and membership, Article 33.1 of the UNDRIP Act affirms that “Indigenous peoples have the right to determine their own identity or membership in accordance with their customs and traditions...”

Consistent with this legislation, the Mi’kmaq of Nova Scotia have signed a memorandum of understanding with the Métis Nation that asserts the right of each nation to determine identity and membership for their respective nations. The Mi’kmaq of Nova Scotia now have a process known as Wula Na Kinu, which is intended to provide a mechanism by which the Mi’kmaq can determine who holds Aboriginal and Treaty Rights in Nova Scotia. Similar efforts are underway among the Mi’kmaq in Prince Edward Island.

Dalhousie and, by extension, this task force is in no position to infringe on the collective right of Indigenous Peoples to determine their own identity or membership. Where an individual lays claim to Indigenous identity, citizenship, or membership, but this claim is inconsistent with the customs and traditions of the respective Indigenous Peoples, Dalhousie University must not intervene by recognizing this individual as Indigenous. Any individual who petitions the university to intervene in such a way must be redirected to the Indigenous

People to which they claim membership, identity, or citizenship. Where a collective claims the right to determine Indigenous identity, citizenship, or membership, but there is insufficient evidence to demonstrate that they hold a mandate or authority to do so on behalf of the respective Indigenous nation, Dalhousie University must not confer such a mandate or authority by recognizing any individual as Indigenous if their claim is based solely on their recognition by such a collective.

Indigenous people, especially Elders, have been exploited to support fraudulent claims to Indigeneity in the past. Where it is found to be customary of an Indigenous People to allow for oral or written testimony to demonstrate Indigenous identity, citizenship, or membership, the credibility of such evidence must be tested and considered among all evidence provided to support a claim.

3. Dalhousie University must implement a mandatory university-wide process for verifying claims to Indigenous identity, membership, and citizenship where material gain may arise from such a claim.

Indigenous Peoples have fought long and hard to resist systemic racism and establish equitable access to post-secondary education and employment. Equity policies and legislation now include provisions for prioritizing access to education, employment, and supports for Indigenous people. These approaches are essential at Dalhousie so long

as Indigenous people continue to be underrepresented, and so long as broader societal inequities persist. This is the type of material gain that is being exploited by perpetrators of Indigenous identity fraud.

Examples of situations where material gain may arise out of a claim to Indigeneity may include, but are not limited to, applications for designated teaching positions, awards/bursaries/scholarships, pathway programs, professorships, promotion, tenure, and grant funding. [Figure 1](#) outlines a proposed process for verifying claims to Indigenous identity, membership, and citizenship. [Table 1](#) and [Table 2](#) provide preliminary lists of pathway programs and awards/bursaries/scholarships that may be prioritized under future verification policies.

4. The provost must strike a standing committee with a mandate, resources, and powers to disrupt false claims to Indigenous identity, membership, and citizenship at Dalhousie University.

The purpose of this committee will be to develop, revise, and implement policies and procedures related to the disruption of false claims to Indigenous identity, membership, and citizenship at Dalhousie University. This committee will also be responsible for receiving and investigating complaints filed against members of the Dalhousie University community as they pertain to false claims of Indigenous identity, membership, and citizenship. Members of the Dalhousie University community subject to the purview of this committee will include, inter alia, faculty,

staff, students, applicants, residents, clinical fellows, postdoctoral fellows, consultants, clinicians, and contractors.

Any policy related to Indigenous identity fraud must include protections for both complainants and respondents. This includes clear protections against retaliatory action or frivolous claims. The committee will be empowered to recommend disciplinary action or remedy where the committee finds fraud has occurred.

All voting members must be Indigenous, and such claims must be verified by the Director of Indigenous Community Engagement using the recommendations contained herein. Where additional expertise is required, the Director of Indigenous Community Engagement must be provided with adequate resources to consult with those who hold such expertise.

Initial committee membership may include a chair, an Indigenous faculty member, an Indigenous staff member, an Indigenous student, at least one member of the Mi'kmaw, Wolastoqey, or Peskotomuhkati Nations, and two external members who hold membership or citizenship with a recognized Indigenous Peoples. Where committee duties fall outside of the scope of an established employment contract, committee members must be compensated in a manner that is commensurate with their level of experience and expertise.

This committee will report to the Provost via the Vice Provost of Equity and Inclusion and, eventually, the Associate Vice Provost Indigenous Relations (AVPIR). When hired, the AVPIR will be responsible for overseeing the effective functioning of this committee.

5. Dalhousie University must take immediate action in light of any allegation involving false, exaggerated, or misleading claims to Indigenous identity, membership, or citizenship.

The implementation of these recommendations will take time. The harms related to Indigenous identity fraud are immediate and persistent. As such, Dalhousie must not wait for the full implementation of these recommendations prior to pursuing any investigative or administrative action against those accused of false, exaggerated, or misleading claims to Indigenous identity, membership, or citizenship. Ad hoc committees or consultants may be required in such circumstances.

6. The Dalhousie University secretariat as well as all academic and administrative units must identify and amend all relevant policies, procedures, guidelines, protocols, and regulations to include reference to the harms and consequences of false claims to Indigenous identity, membership, or citizenship.

Such policies, procedures, guidelines, protocols, and regulations must be submitted to the vice provost of equity and inclusion and forwarded to the standing committee as soon

as possible. Where an applicable reference to Indigeneity is made, the committee may mandate the use of the following statement:

False claims of Indigeneity are harmful regardless of intent. Such claims produce an erosion of trust, and they can result in the misappropriation of resources that are intended to support Indigenous Peoples. Where an individual asserts a claim to Indigenous identity, citizenship, or membership, Dalhousie University has an obligation to verify that such claims are consistent with the customs and traditions of the Indigenous Peoples to which the individual claims belonging. Fraudulent behaviour will be investigated and treated in accordance with university policy.

Many Indigenous nations are embarking on the complex task of restoring ties with individuals who have been disconnected due to colonialism (e.g., Sixties Scoop, Millennial Scoop, Indian Residential School, enfranchisement, etc.). If you have been impacted in this way, we encourage you to connect with the university to explore how some have re-established membership or citizenship within their nations.

7. Dalhousie University must move away from positions that are designated non-specifically to “Indigenous” people. In formulating role descriptions, responsibilities related to the wider and more diverse “Indigenous community” can be listed, but the university must work to understand and provide recognition to the specific Indigenous nations that exist locally, regionally, and nationally.

A transparent and deliberate approach must be taken to establish minimum targets for positions that are designated for Mi'kmaw, Wolastoqi⁸, and Peskotomuhkati people. Targets that are proportional and indexed to the local population are a good starting point, but these targets should be seen as a bare minimum given that members of these nations have been underrepresented and made marginal at the university since its founding 205 years ago.

Designated positions for members of other Indigenous nations are also important but should not take priority over the nations who hold title within the unceded territories on which the university operates. Notwithstanding this, the university should maintain some flexibility and allowance for members of other nations within Turtle Island who have established roots in the region as a result of being displaced from their home territories due to colonial policy (e.g., Sixties Scoop survivors, Indian Residential School survivors). The passage of time which has resulted in a significant generational gap between an individual and a distant Indigenous ancestor ought not to be equated with such circumstances.

8. **All Indigenous advisory and decision-making bodies at Dalhousie University must confirm that Indigenous members have had their claims to identity, membership, or citizenship verified through the university's verification process.**

Where applicable, these bodies must amend their terms of reference to align with this recommendation, and those leading these bodies must ensure that this standard is upheld and reported to the standing committee annually. Before engaging with such bodies, the university, through the standing committee, must be satisfied that effective decision-making power rests with those who have undergone mandatory verification of Indigenous identity, membership, or citizenship in accordance with university policy. Any body that purports to represent Indigenous people at the university must not be granted advisory or decision-making powers if it cannot demonstrate that its Indigenous members have been verified. Where a complaint arises concerning this matter, the proposed standing committee must be delegated authority and power to investigate and determine whether such bodies are in compliance with this recommendation. Such investigations must use a fair, consistent, and transparent approach.

9. **Dalhousie University must work to ensure that guidelines, policies, and collective agreements do not preclude the university from taking action against those who are found to have made false, exaggerated, or misleading claims to Indigenous identity, membership, or citizenship for material gain.**

Colonial law and policy have often failed to meet the needs of Indigenous Peoples.

⁸ Wolastoqi is the term used to describe people who belong to the Wolastoqey Nation.

In this context, we anticipate that some people who commit Indigenous identity fraud may seek protection under current university policies or labour law. This has been seen at other universities. It is imperative that Dalhousie exercises all options with the support of Indigenous leaders should this arise. Anything less will be viewed as the university offloading this burden onto Indigenous Peoples.

10. The Board of Governors must pursue a memorandum of understanding with each of the Mi'kmaw, Wolastoqey, and Peskotomuhkati Nations to recognize and affirm their distinct rights-bearing statuses within the unceded territories on which Dalhousie University operates.

The distinct nation-to-nation relationship that exists between Indigenous Peoples and the Crown ought to be reflected in the colonial institutions that also extract wealth from Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous lands. This memorandum must reflect the spirit and intent of the Peace and Friendship Treaties, TRC Calls to Action, and UNDRIP.

11. The president, on behalf of Dalhousie University, must publish a five-year progress report on each of the recommendations made under the Dalhousie University Indigenous Strategy no later than December 2023.

While Dalhousie University is not alone in the problem of fraudulent claims to Indigenous identity, the institutional response has been tenuous. Conversations

related to this topic have been occurring among Indigenous circles at the university for at least a decade. These conversations intensified in 2021 when a prominent researcher at another Canadian university was accused of Indigenous identity fraud. Additional allegations of this nature have since entered public discourse.

The university may have been better positioned to respond if outstanding recommendations from Dalhousie University's Indigenous Strategy were implemented earlier. These recommendations were designed to strengthen Indigenous governance within the institution and to bolster relationships with Indigenous nations. The publication of a five-year progress report will ensure ongoing accountability and transparency around these recommendations and mitigate the risk of ongoing challenges perpetuated by under resourced Indigenous governance structures.

APPENDICES

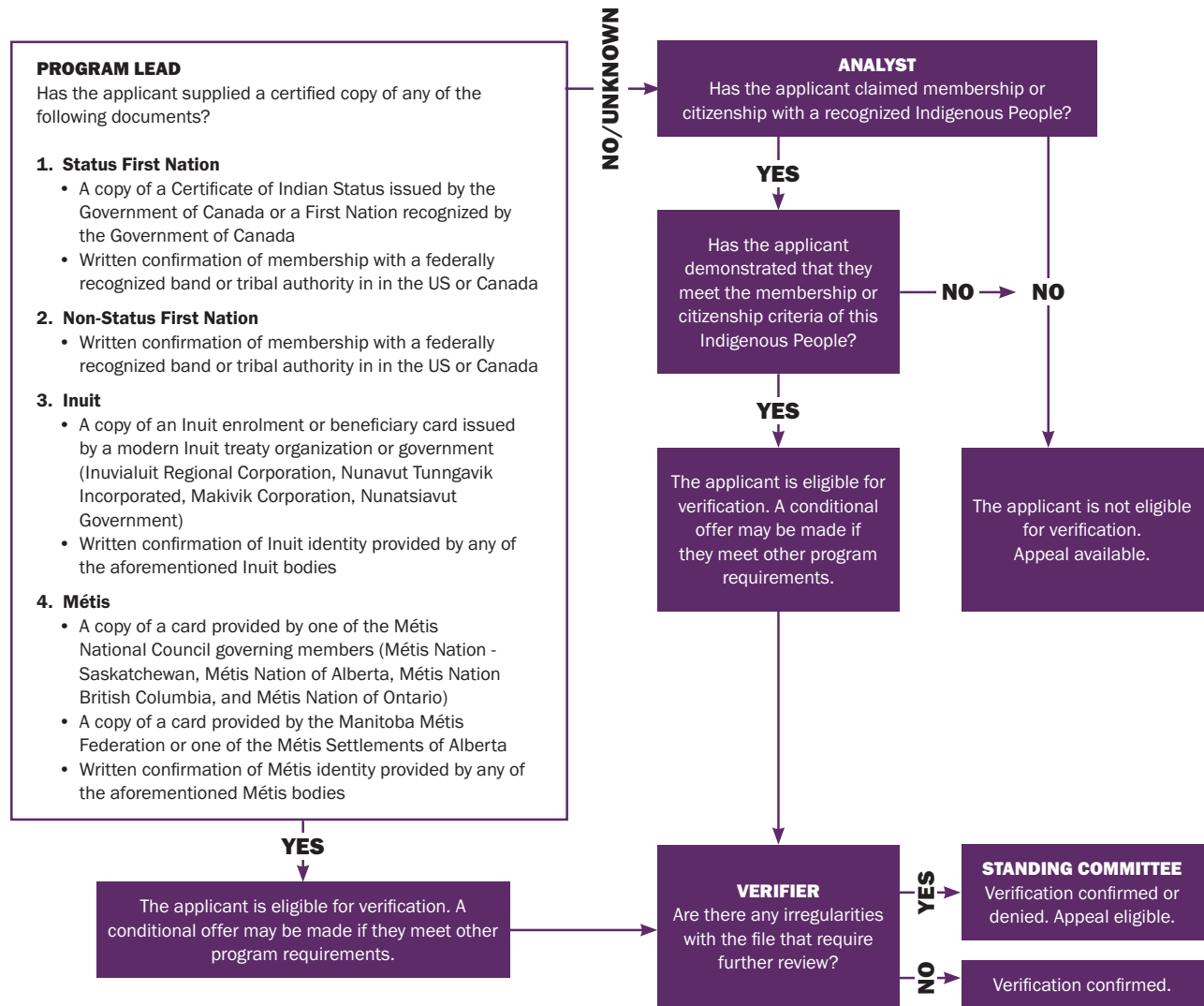


FIGURE 1

Overview of a proposed process for verification of Indigenous membership or citizenship at Dalhousie University. All information must be collected and securely stored in a single online portal. As additional information is gathered, this process may be subject to change with standing committee approval. For example, there may be additional documents that are deemed acceptable at face value, and these could be added to the list of documents that are eligible for preliminary verification by program leads. Program leads, analysts, verifiers, and standing committee members would all be required to receive standardized training in the form of a mandatory asynchronous module followed by an assessment. They would also be required to attend at least one synchronous session, which may be held on a regular or as needed basis.

TABLE 1

Preliminary list of pathway programs that may be prioritized under Dalhousie's verification process.

Indigenous Admissions Pathway
Undergraduate Medical Education
FACULTY OF MEDICINE

Canadian Residency Matching Service Self-
Identification Questionnaire
Postgraduate Medical Education
FACULTY OF MEDICINE

Indigenous Black and Mi'kmaw Initiative
Juris Doctor Program
SCHULICH SCHOOL OF LAW

Transition Year Program
FACULTY OF OPEN LEARNING AND CAREER
DEVELOPMENT

Indigenous Student Access Pathway
Extended Learning
FACULTY OF AGRICULTURE

Inclusive Pathways to Medical Professions
Medical Sciences Program
FACULTY OF SCIENCE



TABLE 2**Awards, scholarships, and bursaries.**

Anita Garbarino Girard Pathways
Graduate English Memorial Scholarship
Computer Science Bursary for Black Canadian or Indigenous Students
Dept Political Science Bursary for Black/ African Canadian or Indigenous Students
English Bursary for Black or Indigenous Students
FSPA Music Bursary for Black & Indigenous Students
History Bursary for Black or Indigenous Students
Nursing Bursary for Black/African Canadian or Indigenous Students
Johnson Pathway Scholarships
Smallman Family Pathways Scholarship
Biology Bursary for Black & Indigenous Students
Chemistry Bursary for Black/African Canadian or Indigenous Students
Psychology & Neuroscience Bursary for Black/ African Canadian or Indigenous Students
Office of Advancement Bursary for Black Canadian or Indigenous Students
MD Class of 1994 Legacy Bursary
FSPA Theatre/Cinema Bursary for Black Canadian or Indigenous Students
Kostman Family Bursary
Reverend J.W.A. Nicholson Bursary
Athena Bell Colpitts
Charles A Smith Memorial Bursary
Forsyth Family Nova Scotia Undergrad Scholarship
Shaw Group Promise Scholars
Fiera Capital Promise Scholars

TABLE 3

Links to select reference material that informed this task force report.

[Indigenous Identity Fraud: A Report for the University of Saskatchewan](#)

[deybwewin | taapwaywin | tapwewin: Indigenous Truth](#)

[Enge v Canada \(Indigenous and Northern Affairs\), 2017 FC 932](#)

[Examining the Nunatukavut Community Council's Land Claim](#)

[Exploring Inequities Under the Indian Act](#)

[Fraudulent claims of indigeneity: Indigenous nations are the identity experts](#)

[Listening to First Nations, Métis and Inuit Communities: Engagement on Recognizing and Supporting Indigenous Identity and Kinship](#)

[Memorandum of Understanding Between The Métis Nation and The Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia](#)

[Queen's University Indigenous Identity Project: Final Report](#)

[We Have Always Been Here](#)





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