

Indigenous Initiatives and Responses to the TRC Report: Lincoln Alexander School of Law, Ryerson University

May 2021

In keeping with our commitment to diversity, inclusion and justice, the Lincoln Alexander School of Law at Ryerson University has made it a priority to build relationships with and to serve Indigenous communities and has embedded this commitment as a core value in our Academic Plan. To that end, we have undertaken significant steps in our inaugural year to meet the TRC's Calls to Action and contribute to the important work of reconciliation.

Indigenizing Law School Space

With the recent move to our new law school space, we established the Indigenous Space Sub-Working Group (ISSWG) — a sub-working group of the university's TRC working group — to identify how the space can effectively represent Indigenous peoples and cultures and provide a welcoming space for Indigenous students and faculty.

Indigenizing Curriculum, Teaching and Learning Practices

Curriculum: The Indigenous and Aboriginal Law course is mandatory for first-year students and covers the impact of Canadian laws and colonizing policies on Indigenous people; Indigenous legal traditions and their modern practice; and the legitimacy of Aboriginal rights, including land title and self-determination rights. The course is taught by an Indigenous faculty member and practitioner and is designed to achieve the learning outcomes prescribed by the TRC's Call to Action #28. We are also developing a course on Indigenous theory and legal practice, and will be hiring a graduate student to integrate Indigenous legal education into the general curriculum (e.g., first-year torts). In addition, training and support has been provided to faculty on how to bring Indigenous knowledges and research methodologies into the classroom and curriculum.

Teaching: Our faculty includes two tenure-track members who are Indigenous with research interests and expertise in Indigenous law and legal theory, and two Indigenous practitioners/co-teachers. As we continue to grow our faculty over the coming years, we plan to recruit more Indigenous faculty members.

Clinical and experiential programs: We have assigned a director for our new Indigenous Economic Development Clinic, a program focused on Indigenous economic development. The director will play an important role in supporting the clinical program and shaping its parameters and content. We are also pursuing opportunities within Aboriginal Legal Support Services of Legal Aid Ontario to have students assist through clinical opportunities, and have partnered with Level Justice to allow students to participate in the Indigenous Youth Outreach Program and to create a new chapter. Finally, we have partnered with the Indigenous Justice Division of the Ministry of the Attorney General to send three students to the summer 2021 Debwewin Summer Law Program, an intensive summer internship for students interested in providing legal education and assistance to First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities and organizations in Ontario.

Admissions and Recruitment

As part of our Indigenous recruitment and outreach activities in 2021, we attended the National Advocates for Indigenous Law Students (NAILS) law school information session. Five Indigenous students were admitted to our class of 2023, and for the class of 2024, we made offers to 14 Indigenous applicants, six of whom have accepted to date.

Student Support

Co-curricular activities: Our student services team has created a mentorship program for Indigenous students, and the recently formed Ryerson Indigenous Law Students Association (ILSA) is committed to providing a strong social support network for Indigenous students and to bringing awareness to legal issues affecting Indigenous communities through events, visiting speakers and other forms of knowledge sharing.

Awards and scholarships: The Torys LLP Scholarship is a \$60,000 entrance scholarship for Indigenous students entering their first year (offered in partnership is Indspire). Other awards, such as the Dr. Anver Saloojee Anti-Discrimination award, the Kathleen Wilson Award for Indigenous Law students and the Santan and Omega De Mello Community Leadership Award will be given with a preference for an Indigenous student.

Future Initiatives

Our future plans include hiring a Director of Indigenous Education and Reconciliation Initiatives; fundraising for student development and support (intensive courses, land-based learning, peer support and mentorship); co-curricular programming (lecture series in access to justice and Indigenous law, and opportunities for increasing awareness of Indigenous legal traditions).