

## Accessibility and Indigenous Students

Indigenous post-secondary students can face several systemic barriers related to accessibility and accessing education. These systemic barriers can make it challenging for Indigenous students to access and succeed in higher education. Indigenous students face accessibility challenges in the areas of their own wellbeing, Participation, engagement, and achievement and by addressing these systemic barriers we can support reconciliation and meet the needs of Indigenous student facing barriers in accessing post secondary education.

### Cultural connections

Indigenous students may feel that their culture is not represented in the curriculum or may feel isolated from other students who may not understand their history or traditions. This feeling can make it difficult for an Indigenous student to feel safe in their academic environment and could result in feelings of isolation and disengagement which would result in difficulties for the student to fully participate in their studies and feel a sense of belonging on campus.

### Indigenous self-identification

Indigenous self-identification is an important aspect of asserting and preserving Indigenous identity and culture. This helps with accessing services and benefits, building community connections, and promoting reconciliation efforts as it is an crucial aspect of reconciliation efforts between Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous Canadians. This allows for the recognition and redress of past injustices and helps to build understanding and respect between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. This can provide a sense of belonging and connection to cultural traditions, language, and spiritual practices for Indigenous students who may not realize their own cultural identity.

### Mental Health

Indigenous students may face mental health challenges related to historical trauma of the Indian Residential School System (IRSS), cultural dislocation, and loss of culture. These challenges can make it difficult for an Indigenous student to focus on their academic work and may require additional support and resources not only from the Institute but from the community at large.

### Access to Financial Supports

Indigenous students may struggle to pay for the cost of tuition, textbooks, and other expenses associated with post-secondary education. There is wide misconception around the myth of free tuition for First Nations students which can prevent students from meeting admission and deposit deadlines. Financial barriers also prevent students from accessing resources such as technology, supplies, uniforms, books, or transportation to get to and from school.

### Academic Preparation

Some Indigenous students can face challenges related to academic preparation, including a lack of access to quality education in their communities, some students travel from their home community to go to high school with historically low graduation rates. This can make it difficult for them to succeed in post-secondary education, which often requires a high level of academic preparation and proficiency.

### Land-based cultural supports

Indigenous students may need to leave their home community which can be remote or rural communities, which can make it difficult to access post-secondary education. Indigenous students may need to travel long distances to attend school, which can be a financial and emotional burden. Indigenous students may feel isolated on campus and may not have access to the same support networks as non-Indigenous students. Indigenous students who travel for schooling can feel isolated and unaware of local community supports as well as not knowing supports at their school. This can also include the need for and ability to access culturally relevant counselling, mentorship, and tutoring services, which can be important for success in post-secondary education for Indigenous students.

### Accessibility challenges addressed.

Indigenous students face systemic barriers such as discrimination and racism that can prevent them from accessing post-secondary education. The impact of generational traumas because of colonization are important to recognize and stresses the importance of Indigenization plans to address the Calls to Action and implement decolonizing plans for post secondary schools. This includes historical policies like residential schools that have had lasting impacts on Indigenous communities which can be misunderstood without looking at these issues without a cultural lens. This can include a lack of understanding and support from faculty and staff or limited access to funding and resources. Accessibility to accessing higher education can be stunted before an Indigenous student even applies stressing the importance to a commitment to recognise the harm done and move forward in a good way to mitigate negative stereotypes and impacts that Indigenous students face not just for themselves but the Indigenous community at large.

### Office of Indigenization at JIBC

#### Support for Indigenous Students through JIBC Office of Indigenization (OI)

The Office of Indigenization works collaboratively across the institution to support students, faculty and staff while building and enhancing relationships with indigenous peoples, organizations, and communities. Indigenization at JIBC is a commitment to understanding the historical, social, and economic conditions of Indigenous populations. With this understanding, we work to foster respect and understanding of the cultures, traditions, languages, and protocols of Indigenous Peoples in the learning environment.

#### Objectives of the office

- Ensure culturally appropriate education and services for Indigenous learners.
- Increase, retain and ensure the success of those students.
- Share Indigenous culture, history, and knowledge with the JIBC community, as well as with the public.
- Ensure curriculum and policies reflect Indigenization.
- Increase our community engagement and partnerships with Indigenous communities, organizations, and institutions.

#### Living Indigenization 2022 – 2027 - Indigenization is part of JIBC strategic plan

Living Indigenization provides accessibility and entry points for engagement with Indigenous staff, students, Elders-in-Residence and guides the good work provided by the Office of Indigenization. Addressing systemic issues that Indigenous students face in the post secondary education pathways and provides direction for the future on supporting Indigenous students wherever they are on their education journey.

[The Indigenization Plan](#) was identified as a strategic objective in both the JIBC Strategic Plan and the Academic Plan. The Strategic Plan explicitly lists “Identify and offer professional programs that meet the needs of Aboriginal Peoples in BC” (item 1.4) and “Recognize the unique identity and educational needs of Aboriginal Learners and enhance equitable and collaborative partnerships with Aboriginal Peoples to provide culturally appropriate education, training and research” (item 2.6) as part of the document.

Find the plan online at the following address: <https://www.jibc.ca/sites/default/files/2021-11/Living-Indigenization-2021-2027-22Nov.pdf>

#### Services for Indigenous students at JIBC

- Career planning and guidance
- Indigenous activities and events
- Social and emotional support from staff at the OI
- Access to financial aid, scholarships, and bursaries
- Access to Elders-in-Residence program
- Indigenous Garden at NW Campus, growing traditional medicines such as Tobacco and Sweetgrass.
- Connection to Indigenous communities and local services.

*The content for this document was prepared by Nicole Mate Program Planner – JIBC Office of Indigenization. The interactive presentation was produced in cooperation with Naz Maghsoudi at CTLI.*