

Learning to be Effective Allies to Indigenous Communities: Perspectives from the Sheridan College Community

by Bethany Osborne, Ferzana Chaze & Elijah Williams

with

Katrina Chahal

Denise Dejong

Mikaela Lucido

Katrina Walsh

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Acknowledgements

We are very grateful to 179 staff, faculty and administrators who participated in the online survey.

Thank you also to our interview participants:

Andrea Bradley, Faculty, FAHCS
Andrea England, Vice Provost, Research
Patrice Esson, Faculty, FHASS
Tracy German, Faculty, Bachelor of Film, Media and Television
Jody Harbour, Indigenous Education Council Member
Alex Hollenberg, Faculty, FHASS
Yael Katz, Vice Provost, Academic and Dean, FHASS
Jodie Kerr-Alich, Indigenous Initiatives Coordinator, Centre for Indigenous Learning and Support
Sirena Liladrie, Faculty, FAHCS
Maria Lucido Bezely, Dean of Students
Kirsten Madsen, Faculty, FHASS
Sandy McKean, Dean, PSB
Heather Morton, Faculty, FAAD
Sean McNabney, Dean, FHASS
Janet Morrison, President
Mary Louise Noce, Director of Research, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion
Michael O’Leary, Dean, FAHCS
Stephen Paquette, Indigenous Education Council Member; Director, Board of Governors
Enrique Ponce, President of SSU
Jessica Pulis, Faculty, FHASS
Ronni Rosenberg, Dean, FAAD
Michael Rubinoff, Producing Artistic Director, Canadian Music Theatre Project
Melanie Spence-Ariemma, Provost and Vice-President Academic
Miguel Turato, Project Manager, Sheridan Facilities Services
Cherie Werhun, Associate Dean, Teaching and Learning
Meredith White, Faculty, FAAD
Elijah Williams, Manager, Centre for Indigenous Learning and Support

We would also like to acknowledge the work of the student research assistants who worked diligently on this project:

Mohamad Ali, Community Worker- Outreach and Development Program
Shiba Anjum, Social Service Worker Program
Bianca Burns, Social Service Worker Program
Katrina Chahal, Social Service Worker Program
Rhonda Daniel, Social Service Worker Program
Denise Dejong, Social Service Worker Program
Mikaela Lucido, Bachelor of Creative Writing and Publishing
Alesia Natale, Social Service Worker Program
Daniella Sanchez, Social Service Worker Program
Katrina Walsh, General Arts and Science Program
Alyssa Warnock, Community Worker-Outreach and Development Program
Katrina Walsh, General Arts and Science Program

We would like to extend our immense thanks to the production crew of Sheridan Production House in the recording of the interviews and editing of the videos:

Tiago De Sousa, Camera Operator
Taylor Habel, Grip #1; Video Editor
Alessia Holowachuk, 1st Assistant Producer
Gillian MacLeod, Assistant Director
Chyann Maracle, 1st Assistant Director
Matthew Mioduszewski, Camera Operator
Winnie Murphy, Video Editor
Sofia Notte, Video Editor
Andre Schumann, Camera Operator
Jason Richard, Gaffer
Declan Rolph, B Camera Operator
Spencer Seibert, Location Audio
Daphne Simone, Director
Jon Woodburn, Location Audio
Jessica Whittingham, Camera Operator

There are many others whose invaluable contributions we are thankful for:

Thanks to Susan Shepley, Research and Scholarly Engagement Librarian and to the Scholars and Researchers Hub, Sheridan Library for the use of the SRCA hub for the recording of the videos for Phase 1 of this study.

We are very thankful to Edward Sykes, Director, Centre for Mobile Innovation and to the use of the space provided by Sheridan's [Centre for Mobile Innovation](#) for the recording of videos for Phase 2 of the study.

Thank you Robert Diltz, Manager, Sheridan Production House for providing guidance and expertise through the whole process.

Catherine Hale, Director, Creative Campus Galleries for providing creative support in the video production stage.

Kirsten Madsen, Chair of the Research Ethics Board, Sheridan College.

Kamelija Velkovska, for help with the copy editing of this report.

This project was conducted in collaboration with the Centre for Indigenous Learning and Support.

This project was made possible through Sheridan SRCA growth grant funding

Sheridan | Scholarship, Research
and Creative Activities

And through support from the Faculty of Applied Health and Community Studies.

Sheridan | Faculty of Applied Health
and Community Studies

Letter from the researchers

Dear Reader,

Since the release of the 94 Calls to Action by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2015, there has been much dialogue at the School of Community Studies at Sheridan College on how to respond to the Calls that pertained to Education. More specifically, about enhancing curriculum related to Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing and building a shared understanding in the student community

The conversations that led rise to this research began in 2015. Bethany and Ferzana had been in conversation with Centre for Indigenous Learning and Support about possibilities for more interaction between the Centre for Indigenous Learning and Support and students in the Social Service Work and Social Service Work- Gerontology programs. As we talked, we realized that as much as it would be ideal to an in- person interaction between the Centre for Indigenous Learning and Support and each of the students in our classrooms, there were a number of challenges that prevented that from happening. The biggest challenge was scope. Within our one program, there were many courses that would benefit from input and interaction from an Indigenous community member, and each of those courses had multiple sections. At the time that our conversations began, there were only two full-time staff and one part-time Elder working at the Centre. It was a mathematical impossibility. Elijah shared that he received many requests to visit classrooms and to give input across the institution. The programs in the School of Community Studies represented only one of many programs that could benefit from the input and connection of an Indigenous community member.

The solution that we came up with was to create digital media that was Sheridan specific that would meet the learning outcomes for specific courses and could either replace or enhance curriculum. The idea emerged to have a series of video interviews with Sheridan's Indigenous community members about their journeys and about their successes, strengths and obstacles.

The goal was to create a series of videos that could be used in our classrooms as a step towards introducing our students to some of Sheridan's Indigenous community members, so they could learn from their journeys and to provide our students with the tools to become more effective allies to Indigenous communities. As our discussions continued, it also became clear that in addition to engaging with Sheridan's Indigenous Community, there was real value to starting the conversation about being an effective ally to Indigenous communities with staff, faculty and administrators.

After a number of conversations, we were ready to formalize our ideas into an arts-based research project. We applied for a Sheridan SRCA growth grant funding in January 2018 and were delighted to receive this funding in April 2018. This study received ethics approval from the Sheridan Research Ethics Board in May 2018. Data collection began in September 2018 and was completed in March 2019. Throughout the process, members of the Sheridan community were interested and engaged. It was a daunting task to try and organize a large group of staff, faculty and administrators and yet, the process was made easier because people made their participation a priority. We saw a similar level of engagement with the survey. We launched the survey in September, and despite being a busy time of year, there were 179 respondents, approximately 11% of the Sheridan staff population. We were impressed with the time that Sheridan staff, faculty and administrators took to engage with the questions thoughtfully.

One of the important goals of this project was to provide an opportunity for research that was uniquely Sheridan, to initiate a dialogue about an important subject and to provide an opportunity for some of Sheridan's Indigenous community members to tell their stories and share how they have had an impact on their communities, on the Sheridan community and on the broader world. It was also important to produce content that could be used to enhance curriculum across Sheridan. The videos that have emerged from this study will provide the opportunity for this to happen. There will be study guides that accompany each video so that faculty and staff have support for using the videos in their classrooms and other learning environments.

Since the time we began this study Sheridan College, as an institution, has taken many steps to be more inclusive of Indigenous communities and knowledge. We are optimistic that the findings of this study about how to be an effective ally to indigenous communities, will continue to expand the conversation on campus, into the classroom and beyond Sheridan.

We appreciate your time, your investment in this project and your continued engagement with this important question.

Miigwetch,

Bethany Osborne, Ferzana Chaze and Elijah Williams

Introduction

In Our Voices: Sheridan's Indigenous Community and Allies is an arts-based research project conducted in collaboration with the Centre for Indigenous Learning and Support at Sheridan College. The larger research project from which these findings emerged was focused on the dual purposes of understanding how the Sheridan community views the role of an effective ally to Indigenous communities and to highlight stories of strength, resilience and discovery of Sheridan's Indigenous community members. The research was funded by a Sheridan College SRCA growth grant. This study received ethics approval from the Sheridan Research Ethics Board in May 2018. Data collection began in September 2018 and was completed in March 2019. This report focuses on the findings that emerge from interviews with faculty, staff and administrators and Sheridan's Indigenous community members as well as from an online survey that sought to understand what it means to be an ally to Indigenous communities.

Being an Ally: Literature Review

There is much debate on what it means to be an ally. In Canada, approximately 4.9% of the population identifies as Indigenous (First Nations Peoples, 2018, para 1). This equates to 1,673,785 people currently residing in Canada who identify as Indigenous (First Nations Peoples, 2018, para 1). For many years, the effects of colonization have disadvantaged Indigenous people and continue to do so to this very day.

The context: A history of colonization, forced Assimilation and marginalization

It is important to acknowledge the history of oppression (among Indigenous communities. With this knowledge, we can better understand how allies can become a better support and advocate.

According to McDonald and Steenbeek (2018), the process of assimilation heavily disrupted the Indigenous way of life. Along with a blatant abolition of the culture, several other areas suffered as well; these include the communities' health, socio-economic status, lifestyle, and access to social services. The effects of both colonization and forced assimilation are still felt today, resulting in on-going marginalization.

The Indian Act, formed in 1876, was legislation utilized during the process of colonization. The purpose of the act was to exert power over and gain control of Indigenous peoples. In doing so, European settlers allowed for the catastrophic oppression of an entire population (Loose Lips Magazine, 2018). This began with the creation of reserves, land restrictions, travel bans, rules around women and their role in society, as well as many others. Furthermore, the act banned any traditional ceremony, dress, and healing practices, leaving Indigenous communities disengaged from their culture almost entirely ("21 Things," 2015, para. 5). Though we have seen some amendments to the Indian Act throughout the course of history, it is still in existence today. There are still Indigenous Communities continuing to live on reserves, separate from society, many of whom do not have access to clean water or sanitation systems ("Finding a Solution", 2018, para. 12).

In addition to the Indian Act, the Government of Canada partnered with different religious organizations in the creation of residential school, as part of their strategy towards forced assimilation. This added negative impacts of a social and psychological nature to Indigenous communities as children were taken from their families, lost access to language and traditions and experienced abuse and neglect. Today, Indigenous children are placed in child-welfare care at 12 times the rate of other children, because of poverty, poor housing conditions, mental-health and addiction issues (Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). However, despite the fact that there is much discussion about these issues within Indigenous communities, little has changed in the way that we support Indigenous children- there are still systems in place to take them away from their families, rather than working with Indigenous people to help address child well-being within their own communities (Blackstock, 2019).

And this phenomenon extends beyond the child welfare system to other parts of Indigenous communities. According to a recent national inquiry into the cases of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls (MMIWG) in Canada (Reclaiming Power and Place, 2019), Indigenous women are 12 times more likely to be victims of such atrocities in comparison to other women in Canada. Based on the findings, these acts have been referred to as genocide. Other studies have linked the phenomenon of MMIWG to the lasting effects of colonization, poverty and racism (Puzyreva & Loxley, 2017, para. 10).

Statistics within our prison system illustrate a similar phenomenon, with a much larger percentage of the prison population being made up by Indigenous community members than is representative of the general population. Chartrand (2018) says that “The Canadian justice system works against Indigenous people at every level, from police checks and arrests to bail denial and detention, sentencing miscarriages and disparities and high incarceration rates” (para. 3). She has observed that since Canada started moving away from formal assimilation policies, prisons and the child welfare system have quietly begun to assume a new role in the lives of Indigenous people. Prior to the 1960s, Indigenous people only represented one to two percent of the federal prison population, while in 2018 the incarceration rate of Indigenous people was 26.4 per cent of the federal prison population, though these communities make up only four per cent of the Canadian population. (Chartrand, 2018).

Sharing these impacts is not meant to indicate that Indigenous communities are without hope or without agency. In fact, Indigenous communities have been resilient and have many things to offer. However, it is important to recognize that despite agency and resiliency, the impacts of the kind of violence whose purpose is to make you forget who you are, are profound. The role of an ally is to listen to those stories, to actively support the process of decolonization. In order for this process to be effective, it must be done in conjunction with the Indigenous communities who have lived the experience firsthand. Part of being an ally means working with communities, being responsive to what they express their needs are, the type of process they are comfortable with and being willing to take a step back when it is more appropriate to do so.

Who is an Ally?

According to the Anti-Oppression Network, allyship is “an active, consistent, and arduous practice of unlearning and re-evaluating, in which a person in a position of privilege and power seeks to operate in solidarity with a marginalized group” (Allyship, 2017, para. 1). It is important to acknowledge that being an ally is not an identity, it is a “lifelong process of building relationships based on trust, consistency, and accountability with marginalized individuals and/or groups of people” (Allyship, 2017, para. 1).

Burns (2017) describes being an ally as a selfless action (2017, para. 3). According to Burns, an ally does not call to attention to what they have done for the community. An ally is someone who is a “behind the scenes” supporter (Burns, 2017, para. 3). This illustrates that being an ally is not about recognition, nor is it about proving to society that you care. An ally understands their space, which means “recognizing your privileges and expressing solidarity with groups that are marginalized or oppressed” (Burns, 2017, para. 1). Recognizing privilege means to understand that, within society, an ally benefits from these privileges. Also, expressing solidarity with groups means different things. According to *Guide to Allyship*, “an ally does not necessarily mean that one completely understands what it feels like to be oppressed. It means taking on the struggle as your own” (n.d. para. 12).

Furthermore, Bishop (n.d) states it is important to understand that everyone in the oppressor group is part of the oppression. She believes that all members of society grow up with oppressive attitudes and are “marinated in it” (Bishop, n.d., para 4). In addition, being an ally is not about guilt (Burns, 2017). The Anti-Oppression Network elaborates that allies “do not act out of guilt but out of responsibility” (Allyship, 2017, para. 5). Allies should recognize their privilege first and foremost, not because they feel guilty, but because they wish to create positive change. Allies can help by continuously learning, teaching, and dismantling systems that cause further oppression. Allies should be allies for the sake of social justice.

In her famous essay on White Privilege, McIntosh (1988) discusses how she had been taught to see racism as “individual acts of meanness” rather than “invisible systems conferring dominance” on her group. She lists the daily freedoms she enjoys simply because of the colour of her skin. McIntosh discusses the ways in which this privilege was normalized by society. As part of a dominant group, in order to be an effective advocate and ally, there must first be a comprehension and awareness of this “invisible package of unearned assets that we can count on cashing in each day, but which we were “meant” to remain oblivious...it is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, visas, tools, clothes” (McIntosh, 1988, para. 3). It is only through the act of self reflection that an ally can truly understand those rights which were unearned, that are accessible and awarded simply because of skin colour. In doing so, it will allow a prospective ally the opportunity to better see the deep seeded systems of oppression. Only then can one clearly identify the social injustice that still exists even in today’s modern world.

As important as it is for an ally to recognize unearned privilege, there must also be an understanding of how this shaped one’s upbringing and, as a result of that upbringing, where potential biases lie. According to Heaslip (2014), this is key to better understanding a marginalized group, and the forms of oppression they have experienced. She suggests that “a good place to start is by learning one’s own cultural and family histories. Knowing oneself and where one comes from creates a stronger ability to be honest with oneself about privilege and power” (Heaslip, 2014, para. 6). It is only through the act of self-reflection that a breakdown of learned patterns of behaviour can begin. Questioning individual opinions, actions, and

assumptions on a more consistent basis will help to identify where internal work is still required. This recognition typically has a humbling effect on the individual. When humbled and expressing feelings of humility, there is more willingness to “make mistakes and reflect deeply on those experiences. It means becoming conscious of what is not known and taking the time and energy to pause, listen, and learn” (Heaslip, 2014, para. 15). Being unafraid to make mistakes is an important trait of a good ally, as it is impossible to know everything about a marginalized group. Allyship is not about having all the answers, it is about being aware of our own history, and being confident in the unknown. This confidence allows for the ability to create space for the stories and hardships of others, strengthening the relationships with those within the community.

In addition, an ally understands the space they take up and do not draw attention from those who are marginalized. Allies are willing and ready to speak up against unfair actions. Micro-aggressions is another way in which the power of oppressed groups can be undermined (Burns, 2017, para. 5). Micro-aggressions are any sort of “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioural, or environmental indignity, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicates hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults” (Burns, 2018, para. 6). Micro-aggressions can cause further alienation within marginalized groups. Allies should speak up when they witness these circumstances, using it as an opportunity to educate others. However, they should not take the space away from the marginalized community. As an ally, one must listen and provide the space for marginalized groups to be heard (Allyship, 2017). It is important to remember, to be an ally, it is continuous work and requires ongoing action (Utt, 2013).

Being an Ally to Indigenous Peoples

It is important for allies to listen to Indigenous people’s stories, needs, and wants. According to *Amnesty International*, an ally connects with Indigenous people in their communities, building relationships, while still making sure everything is led by Indigenous peoples. (2018). We must give space to marginalized voices. Listening is seen as an important trait of being an ally to Indigenous peoples. As stated in the *Ally Bill of Responsibilities*, listening goes along with

reflecting “through the medium of subjectivity and critical thought”, ensuring that allies understand they do not know what is best (Gehl, n.d., para, 7).

Allies can show their support to Indigenous communities in many ways. Amnesty International advises that while saviours are not needed, solidarity is (2018, para. 11). Solidarity means showing up to support the community and that “your presence alone should be the baseline not the endgame” (2018, para. 11). Supporting Indigenous communities includes knowing one’s role and being aware that one will not always be familiar with or understand oppressions Indigenous communities face. Allies to Indigenous communities can show support by continuously educating themselves, being aware of their privileges and by being receptive to open communication. In doing so, the oppressive social structures can continue to be challenged.

Along with this knowledge of privilege, it is important to know the historical and cultural contexts that impact the current situations of Indigenous communities. The issues Indigenous communities face are derived from years of continuous trauma, passed down through each generation. It is not the responsibility of the community to educate people on the effects of intergenerational trauma, instead, allies must ask questions and know that without understanding the history, we cannot be effective advocates (Amnesty International, 2018, para. 6). Similarly, the *Ally Bill of Rights*, delves further into the impact and current day prevalence of historical contexts. We still see on-going issues and systems of oppression as a result of colonization. An example of this is the intersectionality Indigenous communities experience, such as an Indigenous woman facing colonialism, sexism, racism, and other “isms” depending on her circumstances (Gehl, n.d., para. 11). Allies should not support the erasure of history, but instead acknowledge that Canada has been founded on capitalism and genocide (Loose Lips Magazine, 2018, para., 8). Poverty, the unsolved murders of Indigenous women, the prevalence of the Indian act, and the lack of access to clean water and sanitation on reserves; all of these are current examples of the effects of colonization (Loose Lips Magazine, 2018, para. 8). Allies should know the history, continue learning, and know how the past affects the present. As allies engage in the process of continued education, they will be called to advocacy within society. As such, it is their responsibility to be supportive and speak up against any circumstances that further oppress marginalized groups. Speaking up when bearing witness to

racist remarks being uttered, false information, or information reinforcing stereotypes being expressed against Indigenous communities, is a key part of being an effective and successful ally (Finlay, 2018, para. 14). However, allies should not speak over, or for Indigenous people. Instead, allies should prioritize front-line voices, showing support of those causes that are most relevant, educating themselves on the issues and working alongside the community. In support of that, Finlay (2018) comments that “true self-determination means supporting us, working with us, but allowing us to speak on the subjects that affect our lives” (para, 11).

While working towards decolonization, it is an ally’s responsibility to “ensure that they are supporting a leader’s, group of leaders, or a movements effort that serve the needs of the people” (Gehl, n.d., para.12). Keeping abreast of policies, proposed bills, and relevant actions in support of this process is yet another aspect of what it means to be a true ally. Part of the ability to advocate and fight for social justice is knowing what is already in process and finding ways in which to offer support.

Beginning in the year 2007, through to 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), funded by the Canadian Government, travelled Canada hearing the stories of those whom had experienced historical and intergenerational impacts of Residential Schools (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, n.d.). The TRC report includes 94 calls to action to redress the historic impacts of the residential school system and to help move Canada along the journey of reconciliation. Allies to Indigenous communities need to become familiar with these recommendations, and on where Canada stands in implementing these actions. Allies need to take the time to read the executive summary, continue to learn the history of Canada’s residential schools and truly listen to the stories of those who survived such traumatic experiences (Walker, 2016). Reflecting on actions that can be done day to day, no matter the size, and putting steps into place to execute them will allow an ally to build a deeper, more trusting relationship with Indigenous communities (Personal Acts of Reconciliation, 2018, para. 2). Calls to action include recommendations such as; sending letters to our Prime Minister regarding the implementation of said actions, seeking out others in the community who also have the same passion and interest in advocacy, or creating educational programming which focuses on the impacts of colonization (Personal Acts of Reconciliation, 2018, para. 19). It is the responsibility of Canada as a whole,

and the sum of its parts to bring the goals of the TRC to fruition, “this is not only an Indigenous issue, this is a Canadian issue” (Walker, 2016). In educating ourselves on the findings of the TRC and by doing what we can, at the individual level, we continue to prove ourselves passionate and effective allies.

Allies to Indigenous communities also need to “reassess your entitlement to the land you live on” (Loose Lips Magazine, 2018, para. 10). Land acknowledgments are a step in that direction. Recognizing that the majority of the population of Canada are settlers residing on stolen land is a key aspect of what the acknowledgments are looking to achieve. The ability to not only recognize this, but to respect it and show gratitude towards Indigenous Communities is yet another way in which to express the desire to support and advocate. It is not enough to simply recognize the land, the words themselves do not have meaning or impact if the historical context is not adequately absorbed. An ally’s responsibility is to bring awareness to why these acknowledgments are so important and to educate those who simply do not know. To do this effectively, the people are encouraged to “know enough about who you are and how you got here”, and “take the time to find out the birthplace of your maternal and paternal grandparents, understand your lineage” (Loose Lips Magazine, 2018, para. 7). In doing this we can see the migration of our own ancestors, how they came to Canada, and their country of origin. While answering these questions may prove difficult, the exercise itself will serve a far greater purpose, it will assist in supporting decolonization, knowing that the majority of our families were not born here, they came and settled on this land. Showing gratitude and respect for the land upon which Canada, as a country, was formed, is one of only a few ways we can begin to change the story. Advocate where possible, educate when the moment presents itself, and never cease learning; this is what it means to act as an effective and passionate ally.

Methodology

Data for this report was collected through video interviews with key stakeholders from the Sheridan College community; in-depth video interviews with members of Sheridan's Indigenous community, and from an online survey that was conducted with the Sheridan community on what it means to be an ally to Indigenous people. All participants for the video interviews were selected based on consultations with the Centre for Indigenous Learning and Support.

Participants for the **first phase** of interviews included key decision makers at Sheridan College as well a representation of faculty, administrators and staff across the institution. A total of 23 individuals participated in the video interviews over three days in September 2018. Twenty-three faculty, administrators and staff participated in the in-person video interviews in Phase 1. Of those people who participated in the in-person video interviews, no one self-identified as being Indigenous. Simultaneous to the video interviews, an online survey was launched in September 2019 to elicit the perceptions of the larger Sheridan body on what it means to be an ally to Indigenous people. A total of 179 individuals at Sheridan College approximately 11% of the Sheridan staff community, participated in this anonymous online survey. The survey was open for six weeks and advertised multiple times through the *Sheridan Insider*, a staff communication bulletin that is distributed two times a week. Survey respondents identified themselves as faculty (n=120), staff (n=42), administrators (n=23) and students (n=1). Four out of the 179 survey respondents self-identified as Indigenous.

In the second phase of the research, in-depth interviews were conducted with six members of Sheridan's Indigenous community between January and March 2019. Participants for Phase 2 of the study were selected based on consultations with the Centre for Indigenous Learning and Support and included a faculty member, three staff members and two members of the Indigenous Education Council (one of whom also sits on the Board of Governors at Sheridan College). The interviews with Sheridan's Indigenous community members focused on exploring the participants' reflections on their journey of life, their definitions of success, forces that impacted them, obstacles they faced and resources/strengths they drew on. Additionally, participants were asked about what they thought made an effective ally to Indigenous communities; what they

perceived of as an Indigenous worldview and what advice they would have for students to be effective allies to Indigenous communities¹. Each interview lasted approximately an hour.

This report focuses on data collected from the video interviews and from the online survey around three questions:

1. What does it mean to be an effective ally to Indigenous communities?
2. What does Sheridan need to do to be a more effective ally to Indigenous communities?
3. How can Sheridan's students be effective allies to Indigenous communities at Sheridan, in their field placements/internships and as they graduate and go out into the field?

Data from the survey was analysed using frequencies and percentages. The open ended data was coded using qualitative analysis techniques. Data generated from the video interviews were transcribed and coded using qualitative analysis techniques.

¹These interviews were transcribed and the videos are still in the production phase at the writing of this report (August 2019). There will be six stories of discovery, one video that discusses an Indigenous Worldview, one video that discusses support for students and another one that discusses what it means to be an effective ally. The perspectives that Sheridan's Indigenous Community shared on being an effective ally has been incorporated into the Findings section of this research report.

Findings

i. Defining the term Ally

We asked survey respondents to define the term ally. 173 people responded to this question. A listing of key terms used by these respondents is provided in the table below.

Table 1.1: Words used to define the term ally

Words used to define the term Ally	Total Number of respondents (n=173)	%
Support /Supportive	80	46.00%
Respect/Respectful/"Honors	38	21.96%
Understanding/Understands	24	13.87%
A friend/ friendly	22	12.70%
Willing to learn/Knowledgeable/Educate oneself	20	11.56%
Advocate	19	10.98%
Aware	13	7.50%
Works together/ collaborate/unite	12	6.90%
Takes responsibility/ Recognize privilege	11	6.36%
Listens	8	4.62%

A large number of survey respondents (n=80) spoke of an ally as a support to Indigenous communities, their culture, way of life, practices, beliefs, views, and to Indigenous rights and freedom. For some respondents, supporting Indigenous persons meant actively working alongside with Indigenous people to decrease the oppression these communities faced.

“An ally is someone who respects Indigenous experiences, supports their advocacy efforts and values the contributions which Indigenous people have made in society. It also requires an acknowledgement of the wrongs done to the community in both the past and the present and an understanding that my experiences as a white Canadian grant me privileges that I may not be aware of.” (Survey Respondent)

For almost 22% (n= 38) of the survey respondents, an ally was someone who respects Indigenous culture, practices, beliefs, values and views. Respect included honouring the land we live on, recognizing it as “taken land”. Others stated respect means creating a space where people can challenge biases and acknowledge past injustices. Respect, to some respondents meant co-existing with Indigenous people in Canada.

“In my opinion, an ally in respect to the Indigenous people of Canada is someone who makes an honest effort to learn about the history, traditions, and rights of Indigenous people of Canada, while respecting and honouring the land on which the country of Canada has been established”.
(Survey Respondent)

Respondents believed that as allies it was important to take the effort in understanding the experiences of Indigenous people (n=24) and educating themselves on the history of colonization and on prevalent issues (n=20). Other survey respondents defined an ally in terms of a friend (n=22), an advocate (n=19), a person who is aware (n=13) and who works together/collaborates with Indigenous communities (n=12), takes responsibility or recognizes their own privilege (n=11) and listens (n=8).

ii. Characteristics of being an effective ally to Indigenous communities

We asked both survey respondents and interview participants what they see as the characteristics or role of an effective ally. Table 1.2 below provides a snapshot view of the survey responses.

Table 1.2: Characteristics of an effective ally to Indigenous communities

	Total Respondents (n=171)	%
Cognitive Characteristics of effective allies		
Learn (Willing or Open to)	35	20.47%
Understanding	30	17.54%
Educated/Informed/Knowledgeable	22	12.87%
Open minded/openness	21	12.28%
Aware	18	10.53%
Ability to recognize supports and goals	8	4.68%
Behavioral Characteristics of effective allies		
Listens	44	25.73%
Respect	43	25.15%
Supportive	41	23.98%
Speaks/Stands up to emphasize Indigenous voices	19	11.11%
Help/Helpful	10	5.85%
Active	8	4.68%
Inclusive	7	4.09%
Friendly	4	2.34%
Trust	4	2.34%
Emotional Characteristics of effective allies		
Empathy	15	8.77%
Compassionate	10	5.85%
Humility	5	2.92%
Sincere/Kind/Nice	4	2.34%
Non-judgmental	4	2.34%
Critical Self Reflection	4	2.34%

Cognitive Characteristics

According to survey respondents, being willing and open to learning (n=35) was an important characteristic of an ally. Respondents recognize that Indigenous people have endured struggles throughout history and it takes continuous commitment to learning to be an effective ally. In addition, respondents listed understanding (n=30), being educated and informed (n=22%), open-minded (n=21), aware (n=18) and able to recognize supports and goals of Indigenous people (n=8) as characteristics to being an effective ally.

“One of the characteristics is to challenge ourselves and learn more about Indigenous people, their culture, way of life and struggles.” (Survey Respondent)

Interview participants reiterated and elaborated on some of these ideas. Maria Lucido Bezely, (Dean, Students) stated *“I think in order to be an ally, you need to be a good friend. In order to do that, you need to understand their lived experiences, their history, what makes them tick.”*

Andrea Bradley (Faculty Member, FAHCS) spoke of the importance of educating oneself not only about the past but also about where we, as a country stand in the journey of reconciliation in Canada. Meredith White (Faculty Member, FAAD) spoke of the importance of learning from history, to understand the role of Eurocentricism on the way in which history is taught and to examine the impact of that on Indigenous students: *“I think, to be an effective ally, as a non-Indigenous person, I first need to understand how a Eurocentric history which was written and traditionally taught has influenced all of our stories – but especially the stories of Indigenous students.”*

Cathy Coulthard (Associate Dean, FAHCS) perceived that while understanding may not always be achievable it was important for allies to strive to be open to understanding. *“I think what it means to be an effective ally is to be open to understanding. I could never understand but I could be understanding. So, an effective ally is understanding and open to what happened before and how we can make a difference going forward.”*

In addition, a few interview participants underscored that an ally should appreciate, value and participate in Indigenous culture and ceremonies and that this appreciation should become a norm for all.

A few interview participants described being aware of one's privileges and an ongoing commitment and responsibility to checking the same and using one's privilege to provide support and build capacity was important in being an ally to Indigenous communities.

“I hold a very special position in my ability to be able to not only identify gaps to check certain assumptions but to also build capacity both in faculty and in students' ability to be effective allies and to provide support where necessary.” (Mary Louise Noce, Associate Dean, FAHCS)

“In many way, becoming an ally is stepping out of the passive- of recognizing one's privilege in the overall system and then recognizing that you need to act. I have the responsibility to clear paths and to make connections, to recognize how the system is excluding and oppressing all of our potential and vitality.” (Cherie Werhun, Associate Dean, Teaching and Learning)

Behavioural Characteristics

One most repeated behaviour of an effective ally that was identified by survey respondents (n=44) and many interview participants was *listening*. According to the survey respondents, an effective ally listens to the voices of Indigenous people by giving them space to share their experience without speaking for them or passing judgement. Listening was seen as crucial for both educating oneself as well as for making informed decisions.

“An effective ally is someone who listens and is empathetic; someone who does not try to speak for Indigenous peoples but creates opportunities for Indigenous peoples to speak for themselves in a platform where they will be respected.” (Survey Respondent)

Interview participants shared that listening involved taking a step back to create space for others, to understand different perspectives, and history. Effective and ethical listening was seen as a primary responsibility that builds both awareness and authentic relationships.

“The role of an effective ally is to support, to listen, and I would say above all to be real, to develop and nurture authentic relationships that are grounded in organic engagement.” (Yael Katz, Dean, FHASS)

“An effective ally to an Indigenous community begins I think with doing a lot of listening. working with any community requires understanding their perspective, understanding their story, understanding the history that has brought us to this point.” (Michael O’Leary, Dean, FAHCS)

“I think that perhaps the most important first step is understanding that we have to be ethical listeners, and what I mean by that is approaching Indigenous stories and people with humility, understanding that the stories that they tell aren’t our stories but that doesn’t mean that they don’t have any value. In fact, they have a lot of value because often Indigenous stories are rewriting stories that we’re more familiar with in Canada.” (Alex Hollenberg, Faculty Member, FHASS)

Over 25% of the survey respondents (n=43) felt that an effective ally is one who demonstrates respect for Indigenous peoples’ feelings and their experiences. Some survey respondents combined the notion of respect with compassion. To these respondents, respect and compassion go together and means giving space to Indigenous people to share their experiences without other people’s input. Others stated in order to be an effective ally, there is a need to respect Indigenous cultures. To these participants, respect meant being aware of Indigenous people’s practises and giving them the space to practise their traditions.

For many of the survey respondents (n=41) being supportive was a characteristic of an effective ally. Support was seen as an active role, in which effective allies attend events, incorporate Indigenous studies into curriculum, and continuously educating oneself about Indigenous history and culture. Survey respondents indicated that another way in which allies

could support Indigenous communities was through aiding Indigenous goals and aspirations. Respondents also stated that support can be shown through standing in solidarity with Indigenous peoples. For some respondents, support meant working together with the Indigenous community instead of for Indigenous peoples. To others, support meant being considerate of Indigenous people's feelings and not minimizing their experiences.

“It is important to recognize and support the goals and aspirations of individuals that connect on a cultural level to Indigenous peoples and embrace, as part of the Canadian culture, everyday activities that enhance and support their cultural identity. Be sure that individuals feel welcome without them having to adjust and change their culture. Acceptance is key.” (Survey Respondent)

Over 11% of the survey respondents (n=19) identified an effective ally as one who stands up for/speaks up for Indigenous communities. Interview participants also spoke of the need to advocate on behalf of Indigenous communities. This was seen as particularly important if an individual holds privilege that would bring more attention to these issues.

“It's also about stepping up and speaking out particularly when your position or privilege would allow you to amplify Indigenous voice or perspective.” (Andrea England, Vice Provost, Research)

Other behavioural characteristics of effective allies identified by survey respondents included being helpful (n=10), active (n=8), inclusive (n=8), friendly (n=7), and establishing trusting relationships (n=4).

Several interview participants reiterated that building and maintaining an inclusive environment is an important part of an ally's role. Participants spoke of the need for Indigenous students to be able to see reflections of themselves - of their history and culture - throughout the curriculum.

“I think that being an ally as an educator mean incorporating Indigenous epistemologies, Indigenous ways of knowing into my course work, into my research, finding intersections where they might lie.” (Alex Hollenberg, Faculty Member, FHASS)

In addition, this representation, as one participant shared, should be sensitive to lived experiences and intergenerational trauma

“It has the two-prong approach being inclusive education wise but also being really sensitive to the experience of those students that may [be experiencing] intergenerational trauma.” (Heather Morton, Faculty Member, FAAD)

Inclusion should be done in ways that help to *“foster and facilitate a community that embraces, infuses, appreciates, understands the Indigenous ways of knowing and all the things that come with that.” (Patrice Esson, Faculty Member, FHASS)*

Further, interview participants identified for allies to work in collaboration with Indigenous communities. Collaboration with Indigenous communities include a mutual understanding of individual resources, roles, and responsibilities. Being able to identify resources people bring to the table was seen as key to building a successful partnership. Furthermore, as an ally it was seen as important to allow Indigenous people to lead the way: *“As an ally, you recognize that you are not necessarily driving the bus, but you're certainly a valuable member of the bus.” (Michael O’Leary, Dean, FAHCS)*

Emotional Characteristics

Survey respondents identified important emotional characteristics of an ally including empathy (n=15), compassion (n=10), humility (n=5), sincerity (n=4), non-judgemental attitude (n=4), , and critical self reflection (n=4). Interview participants spoke of the need for allies to be genuine, sincere and authentic in order to lay the foundation for learning, understanding and supporting Indigenous communities.

“If we're genuine, if we're sincere, we'll be able to get a better understanding of what we can do to better support the Indigenous community, to support learning and understanding amongst all our students along with all faculty and staff.” (Kirsten Madsen, Faculty Member, FHASS)

For further consideration, watch the video that was created as a part of this research project: [What do you see as a role of an effective Ally to Indigenous communities?](#)

iii. Examples of effective allyship at Sheridan College

We asked survey respondents to share examples they had seen either at Sheridan college or in the community of someone being an effective ally to Indigenous people. It was disheartening to note that 23.42% of the respondents (n=37) were not able to identify examples of allies at Sheridan or in the community.

The examples of allyship at Sheridan mentioned most often included land acknowledgement practices at Sheridan (n=17), the presence of the Centre for Indigenous learning and support (n=17), and the inclusion of Indigenous content in the curriculum (n=16).

“Acknowledging the traditional lands upon which Sheridan sits at Sheridan events, meetings and in class; faculty committing to implement the recommendations of the TRC into their courses; in a class setting, discussing other ways of knowing, and acknowledging the lack of diverse perspectives and voices in our texts and constructions of Canadian history.” (Survey Respondent)

“One female student who another male student made serious racist remarks to, about some of the other students who were in the same class, 'Mistakenly thinking' he was white and that she was white too. The female student was Inuit and deeply offended, rightly so. It was brought to me as female faculty and this happened in my classroom. She also connected to the Indigenous Office, and then went through Sheridan's Code of Conduct where the situation was addressed directly. Thankfully, the Inuit female student did reach out to her supports. She did feel some support, but it was certainly a difficult situation all around. Detrimental for sure! The male student did come to understand how offensive language and terminology can be... facilitating a moral educational/learning environment, needs to be safe for everyone... I was glad to know she could turn to the Indigenous Office who were there to help support her taking the process forward, during and after.” (Survey Respondent)

Examples of allyship on campus also included institutional and Indigenous political alliances (n=9), Indigenous-specific practices during convocation (n=4), initiatives like *Sheridan Reads* (n=4), the inclusion of Indigenous guest speakers (n=7) and the celebration of Indigenous events (n=5). Other examples mentioned by single respondents included the Sheridan insider, the Medicine wheel garden, the signing of the *Sheridan Indigenous Education Protocol*, the self identification campaign, Indigenous awareness week, and the blanket ceremony.

iv. Things that the Sheridan Community can do/continue to do specifically to be effective allies to Indigenous Communities

Many of the interview participants were very appreciative of the strides that Sheridan has made in recent years in relation to the inclusion of Indigenous communities. Both survey and interview participants had many suggestions on what Sheridan could do to be more effective allies to Indigenous communities.

“I'm really impressed with what we've done in a short space of time. So Elijah presented at the Senate this spring- the new policy- in terms of how we admit Indigenous students into high demand art programs with a portfolio- I think that's fantastic. And so those kinds of things, just to enable and facilitate more Indigenous students in our project.” (Ronni Rosenberg, Dean, FAAD)

Of the 166 survey respondents who responded to the question in relation to what Sheridan could do to be more effective allies to Indigenous communities, 19.88% (n=33) mentioned Indigenizing curriculum, and offered up many suggestions for doing so. Respondents stated one way to Indigenize curriculum was by bringing in real world Indigenous examples to class content. Another way to Indigenize curriculum was through using research about Indigenous communities in class. Others thought hiring Indigenous faculty is one way to Indigenize curriculum. Some spoke to educating Sheridan students on colonialism in class and re-organize curriculum to include Indigenous teachings and learning styles.

“Be open to cultural and linguistic differences. Include their histories and stories into our curriculum and the workings of Sheridan. Don't practice tokenism- but really integrate their culture into Sheridan's. Hire an Indigenous person or several persons to be in the Sheridan Executive who could have a say in policies, the direction of the institution, etc.” (Survey Respondent).

Interview participants also spoke of Indigenizing curriculum. Participants underlined integrating and harmonizing Indigenous ways of knowledge in the curriculum.

“Building curriculum, that takes into consideration Indigenous world views, and indigenizing the education in very strong and constructive ways is very key.” (Sirena Liladrie, Faculty Member, FAHCS)

“We can harmonize; harmonize Indigenous ways of knowing within the fabric of teaching and learning at Sheridan.” (Yael Katz, Dean, FHASS)

“I think what we need to look at is how we each can identify ways in which we can meaningfully bring these stories, this information these individuals into the curriculum.” (Michael Rubinoff, Producing Artistic Director, Canadian Music Theatre Project)

Participants suggested that educators should consult with Indigenous communities in order to make their classroom a platform for Indigenous voices and leaders.

As can be seen in Table 1.3, Over 19% (n=32) of survey respondents felt that Sheridan can do more by way of hosting Indigenous related events, workshops and programs. Respondents felt that there needed to be more events to create space for and awareness of Indigenous communities through lectures and by organizing fundraisers. Respondents stated there needs to be opportunities to increase awareness and knowledge about Indigenous communities as well as opportunities to get involved with Indigenous communities. Respondents saw providing information and education, either through class content, research, or by supporting initiatives that can help educate people on Indigenous community and issues as important.

“Acknowledge ceremonies and events are taking place on Indigenous land, provide venues for them to have their stories and voices elevated, create designated spaces to spread knowledge about and express their culture, and provide supportive safe spaces.” (Survey Respondent)

Over 16% of survey respondents (n=27) perceived that Sheridan needed to educate faculty members and students to become more effective allies. The respondents explained it is important for Sheridan students to know the full history of Indigenous people in Canada.

Table 1.3: What Sheridan can do to be more effective allies to Indigenous communities

	Total number of respondents (n=166)	%
Indigenize Curriculum	33	19.88%
Provide Indigenous events, programs and workshops at Sheridan	32	19.28%
Educate faculty members and students	27	16.27%
Be inclusive and respectful	21	12.65%
Be aware/Raise awareness	19	11.45%
Connect with Indigenous population within the community	18	10.84%
Support Indigenous Community (i.e. knowledge, history, traditions, culture)	17	10.24%
Support the Indigenous Centre	14	8.43%
Create Space	12	7.23%
Land Acknowledgement	8	4.82%
Hire Indigenous Faculty	7	4.22%
Outreach to students	4	2.41%
Learn/Implement TRC	3	1.81%
Acknowledge Indigenous Identity of students	3	1.81%

“Providing information through education i.e. being sure that content related to Indigenous people (already in Health Promotion for Community Workers) is included in courses like Sociology, Human Development: Lifespan (determinants of health - currently Aboriginal status), Social Psychology, and History. More courses/research dealing with issues related to Indigenous communities. Teaching students how to be advocates, including being involved in related community activities and lobbying MPPs.” (Survey Respondent)

Interview participant Sean McNabney (Associate Dean, FHASS) also felt that Sheridan could play an important role in fostering opportunities for learning about Indigenous people and their history: *“What Sheridan can continue to do is to foster opportunities for those folks who maybe*

don't know much about Indigenous peoples or Indigenous history, to provide more opportunities for them to learn."

Survey respondents also discussed the need to be more inclusive and respectful to Indigenous communities (n=21) and suggested ways in which Sheridan could do so, including giving Indigenous people a safe space, bringing in more Indigenous students, celebrating Indigenous cultures, art, traditions as a "way of showing respect in a positive manner" and by providing more opportunities "to build across divides".

"Celebrating the Indigenous art and traditions is a huge way of showing respect for the culture in a positive manner. Telling and sharing the stories of what really happened historically to Indigenous cultures and honoring their sacrifice. Being open and honest about current struggles the reservation communities and Indigenous individuals face today and recognizing that these issues should be addressed with respect as citizens of this great country. How Canada and the Americas came to be formed may be flawed - and we cannot change the history - but it is how we address those facts in a positive inclusive environment moving forward that matters." (Survey Respondent)

Nineteen respondents felt that Sheridan needs to do more to raise awareness about Indigenous communities and culture. They stated that organizing and creating events will help raise awareness. In addition, respondents stated people have to be aware of the larger oppressions that exist. Also, 10.84% (n=18) of respondents stated that Sheridan needed to do more by way of connecting with Indigenous population within the community. Respondents suggested asking Indigenous communities what is needed and working with them to reach the goal. In addition, 10.24% (n=17) of respondents felt it was important to support Indigenous communities through sharing of Indigenous knowledge, history, and traditions. These respondents identified that Sheridan could promote Indigenous community's events and workshops. It was important to respondents that there is cultural expression for Indigenous people. Some respondents (n=14) stated Sheridan should further support the Centre for Indigenous Learning and Support.

Creating space for Indigenous people (n=12) was seen as an important way in which Sheridan could be an effective ally. This meant creating spaces for Indigenous students to “feel at home” (Survey respondent) and safe. Interview participants also highlighted the importance of creating space for Indigenous students: *“I think the one major facet that will ... help build an inclusive environment for Indigenous [communities] is having space for Indigenous students on each campus.”* (Enrique Ponce, President, Sheridan Student Union)

Participants spoke of the importance of creating spaces where Indigenous students could see themselves and their culture reflected on campus and in the curriculum. Providing the medicine garden as an example, Janet Morrison (President of Sheridan College) noted that *“there are ways that we can transform not just the medicine garden but other places on campus to recognize and acknowledge the land and the ancestors who called this land home for generations before.”*

Melanie Spence-Ariemma (Provost and Vice President Academic) stated that it was important for Indigenous students to be able to *“see themselves, their history and their culture reflected in our buildings, our spaces, our classrooms and in the experiences they have.”*

A few participants focused on the importance of creating classrooms that were inclusive and safe spaces for Indigenous students.

“I think it's important to share these stories in a classroom setting and to create safe spaces on campus for Indigenous students, and to ask tough questions from non-Indigenous students who may have them. It's also important to dispel myths and speak in a voice of truth that we acknowledge the harm that was done and what we need to do to move forward. We need to recognize that post secondary is a colonial institution and understand the impact of this for Indigenous students.” (Jessica Pulis, Faculty Member, FHASS)

A few interview participants emphasized that although the Centre for Indigenous Learning and Support provides a physical space for Indigenous students to identify with, it was limited by its current location, as this support is only offered at the Trafalgar campus and needed to have a presence on all three campuses.

Others felt that if Sheridan wanted to be welcoming to all students, the Centre for Indigenous Learning and Support should not be the only place where Indigenous students felt they could connect. Participants saw the Center for Indigenous Learning and Support as a step in the right direction. Acknowledging the work already being done, the participants spoke of the need to advocate for bursaries and scholarships and to work with community partners for more access.

Survey respondents noted other ways in which Sheridan could be allies to Indigenous communities including continuing/increasing land acknowledgements (n=8) in classrooms, at workshops, events or programs; hiring Indigenous faculty (n=7), outreach to students (n=4), learning about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and calls to action (n=3) and acknowledging the Indigenous identity of students (n=3).

Interview participant Mary Louise Noce (Associate Dean, FAHCS) elaborated on the need to respect and act on the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation commission:

“Respecting the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and actively working to embed those recommendations where possible and modeling the expectations that we have for the entire institution in terms of both adopting the recommendations, creating action plans”

Cherie Werhun (Associate Dean, Teaching and Learning and Educational Technology) cautioned against the calls for action simply being seen as a checklist of action items and instead urged Sheridan as an institution to reflect on its policies and procedures, and how they might be playing a role in producing and reproducing systems of oppression currently:

“In my own growth, I’ve realized that these Calls to Action can be treated as just documents- this is something that happened and this a document that lists some actions of what I need to do next. But, if we go back to the idea of a system that is living and breathing, we need to start understanding the way that our system is producing and reproducing new systems of oppression right now. And then we need to sit in that space and look at our policies, practices and procedures and think expansively about all of our members- especially our Indigenous members”

Interview participants also identified the need for more outreach to Indigenous students in addition to those already provided to the local Indigenous communities. Some suggested adjusting the entrance criteria to accommodate for challenges that Indigenous students face in post-secondary education.

“I would love to see more outreach into, and I know there has been some into local Indigenous communities, to try and track those students. I can assume that there is stuff going on around trying to maybe adjust some of the entrance criteria so we can take into account some challenges maybe those students have in reaching post-secondary education.” (Heather Morton, Faculty Member, FAAD)

Participants underlined the integration of Indigenous ways of knowledge in the curriculum. They suggested that an educator should consult with Indigenous communities to make their classroom a platform for Indigenous voices and leaders. Sirena Liladrie (Faculty member, FAHCS) stressed that when discussing topics related to immigration or multiculturalism, it is vital to acknowledge colonization and Indigenous experiences. Participants shared that they are working to involve Indigenous academic writing in the classroom. Additionally, there was mention of how the Center for Indigenous Learning and Support would serve as a great resource for changing how content is delivered. Throughout the discussion of inclusion, a common thread was the importance of maintaining sensitivity and extending support toward Indigenous communities.

“We have a responsibility to our students to understand, to provide them with support, and to provide them with the tools to allow them to be successful. so, we are allies on a day to day basis with our students, and if we're not, we're not doing our jobs.” (Sandy Mckean, Dean, Pilon School of Business)

For further consideration, watch the video that was created as a part of this research project: [What can Sheridan do to be a more effective ally to Indigenous Communities?](#)

v. Advice to students on how to be more effective allies to Indigenous communities

We asked the interview participants what advice they would have for Sheridan students as they continued on at Sheridan and as they enter the field. Participants urged students to be curious, empathetic, genuine and courageous in the process of becoming allies to Indigenous communities.

“My number one advice to students is to be real, just to be yourselves, to be true to their values. I would say that being an ally involves first and foremost being authentic.” (Yael Katz, Dean, FHASS)

“The.. courage to do something; the courage to learn, the courage to approach the, courage to become a part of the Indigenous ally, it doesn't take years of education, it doesn't take years of schooling, it doesn't take a masters, o PHD or bachelors or diploma, it takes motivation, courage and the willingness to want to make a difference.” (Patrice Esson, Faculty Member, FHASS)

“Be kind, be respectful of one another and celebrate diversity, be One Sheridan, be one Canada and...be curious and inquisitive; learn about the history, culture and practices of our peoples and be inspired to make things right.” (Melanie Spence-Ariemma, Provost and Vice President Academic).

Students were advised to take it upon themselves to educate themselves and to identify ways in which they can be effective allies *“Educate yourself, I think that is really important because it is not the responsibility of Indigenous people to educate us at this point. We have a responsibility to learn what went on and what is going on today. The burden is not on Indigenous people to tell us what we should do, the burden is upon settlers of all stripes to figure out how they could help.” (Alex Hollenberg, Faculty Member, FHASS).*

Participants stressed that students should take advantage of the opportunities they have at Sheridan to gain a real understanding and awareness of the history of Indigenous persons so that they can make informed contributions toward truth and reconciliation. Participants urged students to see themselves as part of the solution, and then act on that by challenging discrimination, barriers, and asking critical questions.

Students were urged to further their learning by *“asking questions and digging deeper, reading, watching documentaries, and things that were recommended by the truth and reconciliation commissions are good places to start.”* (Sirena Liladrie, Faculty Member, FAHCS). Students were encouraged to experience Indigenous communities, to visit friendship centres, take day trips to reserves, experience ceremonies and Pow Wows as a way of learning and building allyship. They were also encouraged to learn from the lived experiences of those around them at Sheridan and in the community.

Participants encouraged students not to be scared of admitting ignorance, or be fearful of saying something embarrassing or asking embarrassing questions. Patrice Esson (Faculty Member, FHASS) suggests that *“The only way to get over that ignorance is to ask, and to be willing and open to learn, to get over that fear that's been holding us back.”*

Participants felt that given the abundant and widely accessible nature of today's resources, there is more of an opportunity to educate oneself on Indigenous issues and therefore there is no excuse to avoid getting involved. In addition to widely accessible non-fiction sources for research, students were encouraged to explore fiction and other creative works which could serve as valuable resources in developing an understanding of Indigenous experiences, or opening oneself to the idea of an experience different from their own.

They also felt that it is important for students to understand Canada's colonial legacy, and to be open to hearing different voices; checking their assumptions; and continuing to educate themselves. Participants felt that students need to be open to the idea the history they have learned so far may not be the true history of the country and that there is much that can be learnt by hearing different stories.

“You have to be open to understanding that there are a lot of things you don't know yet, and we perhaps won't understand everything, but you have to be open to hear the different stories. Because what we've been told isn't necessarily the truth.” (Cathy Coulthard, Associate Dean, FAHCS)

Students were urged to shift their perspectives to see the world through the lens of Indigenous people to better understand their experiences. Students were also encouraged to connect issues experienced by Indigenous communities to their own lives and the ways in which everyone in society is impacted by the oppression of a group of people.

“My advice to students is to immerse yourself in personal ways so that you can connect to lived experience. Think about how your communities are unsafe through access to resources and the experiences of Indigenous women. If anyone is unsafe or doesn't have access to resources, we are all unsafe- the vitality of community is compromised- so make it personal. Connect with the personal- that's my advice to students.” (Cherie Werhun, Associate Dean, Teaching and Learning)

Students were also encouraged to shift their mindset to see themselves as people who are settlers benefitting from Indigenous treaties: *“I think important truth that all of our students should have and be leaving our institution with is that the idea that we all are treaty people, and this is something that we are, as people who are settlers, we need to shift our mindset a bit. You know, we are all here by the virtue of the treaties, modern and historic and we all benefit from the treaties as well.” (Andrea Bradley, Faculty Member, FAHCS)*

Interview participants urged students to continue seeking awareness of the truth in relation to Indigenous people and were encouraged to act on their awareness. The participants had faith in students as change makers of the future and to identify and work for change regarding the situation of Indigenous communities within their own spheres of influence. Participants encouraged students to be change agents and active citizens and to become familiar with and act on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action.

“The idea that Truth & Reconciliation, the Truth part came from the Indigenous side, and they have told their stories and they have been telling their stories. And our job was to listen and now our job moving forward is to figure out reconciliation. ... So that’s sort of message I would have for students as well as you know, you need to do your part, in that journey, you know we all do.”
(Andrea Bradley, Faculty Member, FAHCS)

“I think part of that is recognizing and acknowledging that being a citizen -- an active and engaged citizen in our democracy in Canada -- necessitates an understanding and a consciousness around Truth and Reconciliation. The first thing is that every student, every learner, every faculty member, every staff person, should read the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action. That’s foundational reading and people need to be at least modestly conversant in what the message is.” (Janet Morrison, President, Sheridan College)

“Remember one simple thoughtful action can have a significant and resounding impact so be that person, be that person that does one small kernel of something and make a difference”
(Melanie Spence-Ariemma, Provost and Vice President Academic).

For further consideration, watch the video that was created as a part of this research project: [How can Sheridan students be allies to Indigenous Communities while they are at Sheridan and as they enter the field?](#)

Hearing from Sheridan’s Indigenous Community

There were a number of thematic areas that arose from the interviews with Sheridan’s Indigenous community members on the subject of what it means to be an ally to Indigenous communities. The thematic areas that stood out most prominently were *Building Relationships and Taking Action*; and then *Creating Spaces for Learning and Creating Physical Space*. The first two thematic areas are connected because the Indigenous community members saw action

flowing directly from the relationships that they formed with Indigenous communities. The second two thematic areas pertained to the kind of spaces that are necessary for supporting learning and the formation of the environments where good dialogue is possible and support relationships where Indigenous community members and settlers can community and settlers can learn how to become allies.

Building Relationships

The participants expressed that the concept of *Relationship* or *Building Relationships* was key to being an ally. There wasn't a particular formula that people needed to follow in order to achieve the relationship, but as Stephen Paquette, a member of Sheridan's Indigenous Education Council and a representative on the Board of Governors' described it, it was more about an attitude or a feeling:

"To be honest for me it's a little difficult to put into terms for most people to understand. It is knowing somebody's heart, it is knowing somebody's spirit. It isn't something that I can say you could put down on paper or even in a book, and say "here read this book, go see this movie, look at this manual". Indigenous allies 101, or Indigenous allies for dummies, it is not that easy, and again it really comes down to a relationship and acknowledging that spirit, in my worldview is if I can feel somebody's spirit, I know they are an ally".

Participants were clear in distinguishing between building relationship and representation and articulated that relationship had much more to do with knowing each other than with 'checking off boxes'. Stephen Paquette shared that he was clear with Sheridan from the beginning that his connection with them needed to be a 'journey' that they embarked on together, not just a box that they ticked. And, in this, he said, he has not been disappointed:

"One of the interesting things is that when I was first approached by Sheridan to do some work with them, what I asked is this going to be a relationship or is this going to be a one off. That's a question I ask to a lot of people, because if this is something you simply want to check off and present to your board of directors or board of governors or to the larger community that yes, we have engaged the Indigenous community, tick here we go. Then I say you have to wrong person, I said and again my overarching theme is relationships, truth and reconciliation is a journey and

that might not even take place in my life time I don't know if it going to happen truly within my daughter's lifetime, but we are moving in that direction. So, when I was invited to participate with Sheridan on this journey it is with explicit understanding that this is a journey".

Elijah Williams, the Manager of the Centre for Indigenous Learning and Support, shared a similar sentiment when he reflected on what it means to be an ally:

Being an ally isn't just being like "okay, I made a friend with an Indigenous person so does that make me an ally?" Not really....the best example of an ally that I can give is a colleague of mine...the first thing that she did...[was ask] "was the Indigenous Centre consulted?" The response was no, so that was her first thing, to come to the Indigenous Centre to say "okay, I was given this task but how can we build a relationship to make it happen?" So, from her perspective, she's done a lot of work with Indigenous Communities.....she understood that early on, she understood the importance of needing to start the idea with the group that you're talking about first, not saying that you have this idea and then coming to them at the end of saying "what do you think?" That's not a good relationship either, so, she would be a perfect example of what an ally should be or should aspire to be..."

Jodie Kerr-Alich, the Indigenous Initiatives Coordinator in the Centre for Indigenous Learning and Support talked about being an ally as a partnership, but one that doesn't happen overnight. She emphasized that we need to look at the whole picture, not just at one piece:

"The biggest thing you can do as an ally is to listen to stories and to try and show empathy not sympathy, try and feel what the other person is going through, try and see even as a Western or an Indigenous world view how that affected that individual look at the whole picture, don't just look at a piece. So, for an example if somebody has been through trauma in their life don't look at them as a trauma survivor, look at the whole person and everything they have accomplished as well. So being an ally really then is partnering with somebody else and working with them realizing that they're the expert in their own community."

It is that long term commitment to relationship that Jody Harbour, member of the Indigenous Education Council emphasized when she talked about the role of an ally:

You need to find out what it means to be an Indigenous person because you live in Canada....We don't have another country to go home to, this is our country....This is our homeland. I have been an Indigenous woman in Halton for almost 30 years and I want to know what you are doing. I want to know is it what we really need or is it a check mark right or is it long term?

Taking Action

A number of the participants talked about the connection between being in relationship with members of Indigenous communities, talking about Indigenous issues and showing through actions that Indigenous issues are important. Miguel Turato, a Project Manager at Sheridan shared his perspective on the importance of taking action by showing respect for Indigenous culture and by using one's privilege where possible to advocate for Indigenous communities.

I think as a community it is really important to engage with a certain level of respect for .. the culture that exists for so many years. It is really important to advocate I liken it to male privilege .. as a man we have the ability to capture an audience slightly differently than a woman and that is just as a result of our biology and that is not fair, but it is the reality. And acknowledging that also kind of lends us to acknowledge that we have a platform and a voice that has to be heard and that has to be used

Stephen Paquette shared a similar sentiment about the need for allies to take action to support Indigenous communities. He emphasised the need for action to take the form of political solidarity and support:

I think the most important thing is supporting us politically. Politically because that is where the change is going to come from, you know sometimes people want to send something to a First Nations' Community. "Can we send books?" "Can we send bottle watered?" Those are all band aid solutions and quite frankly it's not your responsibility to do that, it's the government's...Maybe a notion to start something from the grass roots and holding your Members of Parliament accountable. Why do we still have unsafe water in First Nations' Communities? Why do we still have First Nations' Communities that don't have high schools?

Why do we still have First Nation students that have to come off reserves found in the community down south and by south, I mean Thunder Bay, to simply to continue going past a grade 6 education? These are the things that need to change.

Elijah Williams spoke to the same need for change, and for action that arises out of solid relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. He spoke about building relationships with Indigenous communities, particularly those who have had historically difficult and broken relationships with settlers. He talked about building new, genuine relationships where the needs of Indigenous people are central, where settlers really take the time to listen. This, he feels, is the role of an effective ally:

Someone who asks questions in terms of, not necessarily bringing a solution, but they want to find out what they can do. So, being able to ask questions but also being able to listen, to listen to the needs of what Indigenous people are talking about. We have seen so many times where non-Indigenous people thought they had the solution to “fix” the Indigenous problem, that seems to be the narrative of the country since Confederation and when that happens you see terrible examples. You see things like the Indian Act created, you see things like the White Paper policy, you see things like the over representation of children in care. So that’s what happens when you don’t listen and when you don’t build relationships with the Indigenous community, you don’t find out what those needs are. You see policies that are racist and discriminatory, you see the policies that continue to marginalize people, so that’s what happens when those things aren’t in place. So, I think to be an effective ally, you need to continue to ask those questions, listen, build those relationships with communities because, quite frankly, a lot of them are broken.

For Tracy German, taking action can happen in simple, everyday acts such as acknowledging Indigenous lands and people, learning Indigenous history and key phrases in Indigenous languages:

I think that a foundational piece is that you need to acknowledge the land on which you’re standing and that first and foremost you know was inhabited and still inhabited by Indigenous people. They have not disappeared, they’re still here and they should be recognized and

respected. It is foundational history and that we should know this history first and I am very honored that my series² is part of that piece of that also can be utilized in the classroom as a way to educate people in a non-threatening matter. ... So, I think acknowledging where we are, the geography is the first piece to acknowledge, to learn a little bit of language or at least Miigwetch in Ojibwe or Nya:weh in Haudenosaunee or whatever territory- that's a simple thank you or as well is also a powerful act also telling Indigenous people who you are, stating who you are and where you come from is also a very powerful act of being.

In addition to taking the time to build relationships and collaborative partnerships, and learning how to take action, many of the Indigenous participants highlighted the importance of creating spaces for learning as being significant in creating allies.

Creating Spaces for Learning

Jodie Kerr-Alich talked about the importance of making an investment in creating space in curriculum for students to learn about Indigenous communities:

"I think there are a lot of post-secondary educational institutions that have offered courses within the social services field with an Indigenous stream or an Indigenous piece to it, and I think it's wonderful to have settlers that are allies and are interested in not only learning about but working with our communities and really showing that understanding that are communities are looking for and that empathy toward what they are going through....."

Jody Harbour talked about the value of creating spaces that would foster inclusion and learning about Indigenous cultures.

"....How can we encourage you to come and be a part of the community and feel safe in that community? All I know that is we were the most abundant culture in the world, people came looking for, for our things, we had. So, to create that space for all people to understand our

² Tracy German is a documentary film-maker and has a series called Wild Archaeology on APTN- to learn more about this series, see <https://aptn.ca/wildarchaeology/>

essence, the essence, true essence of our people is what is going to possibly heal the world. That is what an ally is.

As she continued to speak about the importance of creating spaces for learning, Jodie Kerr-Alich discussed establishing forums where Indigenous and settler students could learn from each other, and misconceptions could be dispelled:

“I think also bringing the two communities together, I think a lot of settlers don’t understand the Indigenous history and the challenges that Indigenous people face. So, I think our Indigenous students face a lot of stereotypes out of not maliciousness but out of ignorance’s. So, I think the curriculum needs to include realistic and accurate portrayals of the history of colonialism of Canada as well as the history and the subsequent challenges that our communities face as a result of those acts of colonialism and then just maybe more get-togethers or pot lucks or things of that nature to bring the non-Indigenous and Indigenous communities together in friendship and reconciliation”.

Creating Physical Spaces

Similar to findings from the Phase 1 interview and survey responses, the need to create physical space emerged as a theme from the Indigenous interview participants. A couple of the community members spoke directly to the importance of the creation of physical spaces as important actions that an institution like Sheridan College can take. They acknowledged the work that had been done over the last number of years but also spoke to the importance of the creation of physical space continuing. Faculty member Tracy German spoke poignantly about the power of physical space in building community:

“I think Indigenizing space is really important. There has to be visibility, first and foremost..... When you walk into Simon Fraser University or any institution out west, you see totem poles, you see big houses, you see the masks, you see representation of the community in that and the culture, the rich culture that is still thriving. Now here, we’re 500 years plus into colonization. So, it has been stripped of the landscape more and more but there still is.... a little bit of it poking through Currently or the Mississauga New Credit or the Ojibway or the rich cultural

knowledge that's all within three hours of here .. There's a huge amount of history here that goes back 12 thousand years. It's not gone, it just needs to be brought to the forefront. I think that it can be visible here. I don't see why it couldn't- we're an art school".

Jodie Kerr-Alich also spoke strongly about the importance of physical presence. She spoke about both Sheridan College extending its presence into Indigenous communities as well as the importance of a physical presence of the Centre for Indigenous Learning and Support at all three of Sheridan's three campuses.

"I think Sheridan needs to be in the communities, I think it's important to take trips to the different reserves in Canada, not just the ones that are local but some of the northern reserves, or some of the other reserves in the Provinces to get a good sense of number one, what the community looks like, what the challenges are in the community and how the education that Sheridan provides can help those community members better their communities with that education. I think also that there should be a presence of the Centre for Indigenous Learning Support on all three campuses. Currently, were only at Trafalgar and have a dedicated space here. We have a space for one morning a week at the Davis campus and the engagement at Davis' is huge. We really need something more and something more permanent there and as well as at HMC".

Conclusion

This research represents an important moment in Sheridan's history. It represents an engagement with a conversation on being effective allies to Indigenous communities and represents a commitment of many faculty, staff and administrators to continue that conversation.

The participants of this research have provided many suggestions about ways in which the community can be better allies to Indigenous communities. Suggestions for the College included Indigenizing curriculum, providing opportunities for more Indigenous events and programs, educating faculty and students, creating physical space, hiring more staff for the Centre for Indigenous Learning and Support, infusing curriculum with Indigenous content and hiring

Indigenous faculty. From the conversations that we had across the institution, we have a sense that Sheridan is moving in a good direction, as the institution and its members, seek to be in relationship with Indigenous communities and to respond to the Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. In particular, over the past year at Sheridan, we have seen a number of positive changes on this front including:

- Signing of the Indigenous Education Protocol
- Development of a new Strategic Plan for the Centre for Indigenous Learning and Support
- Changes to Admission Policies for Indigenous Students
- Addition of Indigenous representation on Senate and Board of Governors
- Renovated office space for the Centre for Indigenous Learning and Support at the Trafalgar campus
- Temporary space for the Centre for Indigenous Learning and Support at the Davis Campus with plans for a permanent space in the Academic year 2019-20. A presence of the Centre staff at the HMC campus.
- Hiring of 4 new staff for the Centre for Indigenous Learning and Support (2 Indigenous Initiatives Coordinators, Indigenous Knowledge Keeper, Health and Wellness Coordinator)
- Hiring of two new Indigenous faculty members in the 2019-2020 Academic Year in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences and in the Faculty of Applied Health and Community Studies
- Creation of a new full-time Indigenous Curriculum Consultant position in the Centre for Teaching and Learning (to be hired in Fall 2019)
- Creation of curricular resources in FHASS through the *Walk the Talk* research project
- Creation of new Sheridan specific Indigenous curriculum resources in FAHCS through the *In Our Voices* research project
- Creation of a new research ethics protocol for Sheridan researchers working with Indigenous communities
- Creation of an Indigenous Working Group as part of the FAHCS strategic planning group to create collaborative initiatives with the Centre for Indigenous Learning and Support and better equip faculty to support Indigenous students and teach Indigenous content and ways of knowing

Many members of the Sheridan Community spoke to the value they see investing in initiatives that support Indigenous Communities. They are proud of the institution's investment over the past decade, but also want to see more investment so that Sheridan College, as an institution, is perceived as an ally to Indigenous communities. This will require that we continue to make choices about building relationships. As we move forward at Sheridan, we have a good foundation to build on. We have the gift of the presence of many colleagues from Indigenous communities; a strong and growing Centre for Indigenous Learning and Support and an administration that has demonstrated continued engaged and support of Indigenous communities over the past number of years. The results of this study have also shown that many staff, faculty and administrators are eager to find ways to engage with Indigenous communities. There is a need and desire to engage in learning on all levels, and to transfer that learning to the students who are central to the Sheridan community.

As we move forward as an institution, we need to look to our Indigenous colleagues, to continue this journey of learning to be effective allies to Indigenous communities. As we listen to what they need to support their work and their communities, to build the Indigenous community at Sheridan College, there may be times when we need to be allies, accomplices or co-resistors (Montreal Urban Aboriginal Community Strategy NETWORK). As a community we need to have the willingness to engage, and make decisions that build an inclusive community and contribute to healing and reconciliation.

Learning from the Two Row Wampum



Gusweñta- Two row wampum³

The Gusweñta- the two row wampum belt represents the first treaty that was made between the Haudenosaunee and the Dutch. There were three principles that were part of this treaty and they were included to ensure that the treaty would last: friendship; the Haudenosaunee and their white brothers will live in friendship; peace; there will be peace between their two people; forever; that this agreement will last forever (Onondaga Nation, n.d.). The belt pictured above, made of white and purple wampum shells, was a way for the Haudenosaunee people to record this historic treaty. The belt has two purple rows running alongside each other representing two boats. One boat represented the canoe with the Haudenosaunee way of life, laws, and people. The other represented the Dutch ship with their laws, religion, and people in it. The boats will travel side by side down the river of life. The treaty noted that each nation will respect the ways of each other and will not interfere with the other (Onondaga Nation, n.d.).

What this treaty teaches us is that friendship is key to both building and maintaining good relations. It also reminds us of the fact that all of us on Canadian soil are impacted by the treaties and benefit from them. This means that each one of us, living in Canada, becomes implicated in the historical and current significance of treaties. Understanding this is the beginning of what it means to be an ally. This is about a relationship, that we are in this together, not an ‘us’ and ‘them’ but people who have a historical and current relationship that we need to continue to work on, and learn from. Miigwetch.

³ More information about the Gusweñta- Two row wampum can be found at <https://www.onodaganation.org/culture/wampum/two-row-wampum-belt-guswenta/>

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