

By Oscar Baker III, CBC News Posted: Oct 01, 2016 2:00 PM AT Last Updated: Oct 01, 2016 2:00 PM AT

UNB among schools figuring out how to add more Indigenous studies

UNB V-P says patience needed in light of Truth and Reconciliation Commission report

The University of New Brunswick's vice-president academic says patience will be required as universities across Canada, including his, try to figure out how to implement calls to action issued by Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission last year.

George MacLean just returned from the Building Reconciliation Forum in Edmonton, the 2nd annual national gathering of post-secondary leaders aimed at discussing what universities should do in response to the commission's report.



George MacLean the vice president of academic at UNB Fredericton was at the forum in Edmonton. (<http://blogs.unb.ca/newsroom>)

"One of the messages that came out of our deliberations yesterday here in Edmonton, was we need to be shown to be making strides but we need to be doing it in a manner that is reflective of the individual communities that we have."

In June 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission issued 94 calls-to-action in its report, a number of them aimed directly at universities. Most

involve changing degree programs, especially in education, law and journalism, so graduates from those programs leave university with a solid knowledge base of Indigenous history and issues.

MacLean said at this point leaders at UNB are still thinking about how best to do that.

"I know there is content in Indigenous studies right across the university ... whether that's in arts or education, in the faculty of law certainly. One of the things we're doing right now is we're engaged in an inventory of the work that is already being done on campus."



Lorna Williams, a member of the Lil'wat First Nation, is an emeritus Indigenous education professor at the University of Victoria, and says in order for post-secondary reconciliation to work they need to commit to Indigenous education. (aboriginaleducation.ualberta.ca)

Lorna Williams, a keynote speaker at the conference, and member of the

L'ilwat First Nation, agrees the issues are complex, but said decisions need to be made.

"I think that once people decide that they're going to do something, to make the change within an institution it actually doesn't take long," said Williams, an emeritus Indigenous education professor at the University of Victoria. Williams feels educators lack a sense of urgency and she's critical of the Edmonton forum's lack of planning to address the loss of Indigenous languages, schooling and way of life.

"We're desperate to further the work in Indigenous languages," said Williams.

Williams spent 43 years as an educator and throughout that time she met teachers who told her they had no knowledge of Indigenous history. She believes that's partly why First Nations students continue to struggle in classrooms.

The University of Victoria has tried to address the problem by including mandatory courses in Indigenous issues for future teachers.

Mandatory Indigenous courses

This year, for the first time, the University of Winnipeg and Lakehead University in Thunder Bay also have mandatory Indigenous courses. George MacLean said UNB is still looking at options, including the idea of mandatory courses.

"It's too early to tell whether that would be the right way for UNB, it's an intriguing way of getting content to students," he said.

A spokesperson for St. Thomas University says that school is forming an advisory committee to make recommendations to the university's senate after reviewing the recommendations.

The University of Moncton and Mount Allison University have no plans to implement mandatory Indigenous courses, but this year Mount Allison started offering an introduction to Indigenous studies course.