



Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations  
Union des Associations des Professeurs des Universités de l'Ontario

## **Funding for Indigenous student supports and services**

*May 2019*

### **Context**

In 1992, the Ontario government established the Aboriginal Education and Training Strategy (AETS), in conjunction with Indigenous organizations in the province, to provide funding to colleges and universities for Indigenous program and services support. In 2011, there were some changes to this strategy, and the Aboriginal Postsecondary Education and Training Policy Framework was launched to support Indigenous students attending universities and colleges across Ontario. The funding from this framework has been used to support Indigenous student services including student centers, counsellors, elders, academic skills programs, facilitating access to Indigenous knowledge, Indigenous education councils, etc. The funding comes in the form of targeted grants from the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, which can only be used for Indigenous student support. These services have had profound positive impacts on student success and have made universities more responsive to the needs of Indigenous students and their communities. Moreover, the Indigenous education councils provide support and assistance to universities to shape academic and student support programming for Indigenous students.

In other words, this framework has allowed for supports that would otherwise have to come from institutional operating budgets, and being able to access this different envelope of money has guaranteed a longer-term commitment to these centres, and more stable supports for students. There has been some concern that the funding or the framework may not be continued on a go forward basis. Typically, the university administrators have adopted a wait and see approach to see if the grants would continue; we didn't learn anything about this funding in the recent provincial budget (which has also been the case historically).

### **Why this matters**

If the funding was to be cut, many campuses would lose staff who support Indigenous students and it is unlikely that the administrators would find funds in the operating budgets to continue these programs, especially given recent cuts to post-secondary and a focus on increasingly tying funding to performance metrics. While systematically collected data is limited, anecdotal evidence strongly suggests that Indigenous student retention rates have doubled since 2004 and are approaching the same retention rates of the student population as a whole.

This funding is moving us forward on key aspects of the education-focused Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. If we do not continue to fund these programs, we will move backwards on our responsibilities coming from the Commission's report. There is a lot of work that remains to be done, and this funding has played a significant positive role in beginning to address essential aspects of the needs of Indigenous communities in post-secondary institutions. Thus, ensuring that this funding is protected is central to equity work on our campuses.

## **Possible actions**

- Find out who manages the Indigenous student support center(s) on your campus, introduce yourself to that person, and any staff that work there, as an equity representative for the faculty association.
- Ask Indigenous student support center staff what they need from you and the faculty association to help protect this funding, to expand services, and to build solidarity.
- Speak to your colleagues and faculty associations about Indigenous support services, and this funding framework, so they understand the value of this funding and the need to protect it.
- Be prepared to lend your voice to support this funding on campuses if the grants are cut (note: OCUFA has already sent a letter to the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities indicating that we believe this is important funding that should continue).
- Cultivate relationships with Indigenous academics and leaders on your campus and in your communities.
- Encourage your faculty association executives to attend soup and fry bread lunches, and other similar events on campus, to show solidarity and cultivate relationships.