
Indigenous representation and the AMS

Summary and response to the October 2nd discussion circle

October 17, 2018

1. Summary of Discussion Circle

The AMS held a discussion circle on October 2nd, 2018 in the First Nations Longhouse to consult with Indigenous students on the ways in which the society can become more inclusive. The AMS invited Dr. Aftab Erfan, UBC Director of Dialogue and Conflict Engagement, to facilitate the meeting. In attendance were members of the AMS Executive, staff, councillors, Indigenous students and community members.

The Town Hall began with Debra Martel, Associate Director of the First Nations House of Learning, acknowledging the meeting was taking place on the traditional, ancestral and unceded territory of the hə́nqəmíṇəṛṇ speaking xʷməθkʷəy̓ə́m (Musqueam) people. After dinner was served, participants gathered in a circle to begin the dialogue. Marium Hamid, AMS President, started the circle by reading the AMS statement of apology to Indigenous peoples (see appendix A). Following this, participants were then given a chance to introduce themselves and respond to the statement.

In this initial round of the circle, many of the non-Indigenous participants expressed their desire to listen and learn throughout this process. Issues were raised that the AMS and its spaces did not feel like a welcoming space for Indigenous students and that the only inclusive programming on campus comes from the Longhouse. However, it was also raised that the Longhouse only has one study table and that there are frequent events taking place that disrupt its use for Indigenous students. The importance of having a space where Indigenous students can convene and see themselves represented on campus was underscored by numerous participants. Concerns of the labour involved in consultations and how the limited number of Indigenous students in attendance cannot represent the entire population on this campus were also brought forward.

In the second round of the circle, participants were asked to begin offering ideas for representation or to identify gaps to be addressed. The opportunity for a referendum to have a student fee that supports Indigenous students and events was raised, with examples from SFU's \$0.75 student fee. A referendum to support an additional AMS Council seat for an Indigenous student was also raised. The idea of referendums to change any bylaws or fees was met with mixed concern surrounding voter apathy on campus and the labour involved in such a campaign. The colonial nature of these limiting bylaws was also raised as a concern.

A big theme across many points was the lack of Indigenous students on campus contributing to the lack of representation. The feeling of being unwelcome on campus was raised by many Indigenous students in the room. It was brought up that there are 900 self-identified Indigenous students on the Vancouver campus. Many participants encouraged the need for solutions that included scholarships and increased recruitment of Indigenous students.

A final round of the circle took place for students to share their parting thoughts on the evening's discussion. Throughout this final discussion, many questions were raised about the timeline of when changes could be expected. This prompted the initial formation of an AMS Indigenous Students committee. The Indigenous students in the circle who left their contact information were then followed up with to set an initial time to meet. Participants were informed that a document of the notes taken at the meeting, as well as a follow-up from the AMS, would be available by the Longhouse lunch the next Tuesday (October 9th).

2. Issues raised

At the discussion circle, four main areas were highlighted by Indigenous students in which the AMS should improve in order to create a representative and welcoming environment for Indigenous students. The suggestions as presented during the circle, as well as an analysis on how the AMS can move forward to implement them, are included below.

A. The Need for Indigenous Spaces

Currently, the Longhouse serves as the only Indigenous-focussed space on campus where students feel comfortable and welcomed. However, the Longhouse is limited in space for studying and socializing, given its calendar of events and programming hosted by other organizations. To address the need for an Indigenous space where students can see themselves represented and feel safe, the AMS should create an Indigenous student space in the Nest.

The AMS is supportive of this idea and understands the importance of this space. Three spaces of varying size and location within the Nest have already been identified as potential rooms that this purpose could permanently occupy. These options will be presented to the Indigenous Student committee at their meeting on October 19th and they will select which space they would like to use. In order to facilitate the growth and upkeep of this space, the AMS President's office will explore hiring an Indigenous Special Projects Assistant to help manage this space.

B. The Need for Indigenous Representation

The need for representation of Indigenous voices with UBC's governing bodies was also raised repeatedly. There was a great deal of enthusiasm for the creation of an AMS Indigenous Student committee. One suggestion was that seats for male, female and two-spirit Indigenous students be created on bodies such as AMS Council, UBC Senate and UBC Board of Governors.

The creation of an Indigenous Student committee within the AMS is something that can be created without much difficulty or bureaucratic process. In order to be flexible to the format and membership of such a committee, **the AMS recommends that this take place as an extraordinary committee of Council.** As standing committees have specific mandates for their membership and structure, creating an extraordinary committee will bypass this and allow for a flexible format.

In 2005, the AMS asked students in a referendum whether they supported amending the AMS Bylaws to add a voting seat on Student Council for Indigenous students. Although votes indicated a strong majority (Yes 5,390; No 2,619), this motion had failed to achieve a quorum of 3/4 majority, which was mandated by the Societies Act of British Columbia at the time. Since then, this provincially required quorum requirement has been reduced to a 2/3 majority – which means that the 2005 vote would have passed were it run under today's rules. The AMS is a student society held accountable through the Societies Act of British Columbia and must abide by the regulations set out in this provincial legislation, as well as our own bylaws. **If recommended by the Indigenous student committee, the AMS will explore a referendum to create an Indigenous voting seat on council.** There are financial resources available to students through our Elections Administrator to create 'Yes' and 'No' campaigns to referendum questions.

In terms of Senate and Board of Governors representation, these are UBC bodies for which the AMS lacks control over the membership. The Senate is the academic governance structure of UBC, led by the Chancellor, President and Provost. The Board of Governors is responsible for the management, administration and control of the property, revenue, business and affairs of the University. As UBC is a public institution, the membership of the Senate and Board of Governors is set out by the province's *University Act* in sections 35 and 27.

C. The Need for Indigenous Scholarships

Many students highlighted the need for funding for Indigenous students to diminish barriers that students face attending university. The lack of scholarships available to students was identified as cause of the lack of Indigenous students enrolled at UBC. It was raised that increased numbers of Indigenous students on campus would contribute to greater representation and sense of belonging, but financial support would be needed.

The AMS agrees and fully supports the idea of increased Indigenous scholarships. **The AMS will advocate that the university use the current Blue and Gold Campaign to significantly expand the scholarships available for Indigenous students.** The Blue and Gold Campaign for students, which was launched in 2017 and hopes to raise \$100 Million for student scholarships. The AMS will also look at our own bursaries and see if we can emphasize support for Indigenous student scholarship.

There is also the possibility of the creation of a student fee to fund Indigenous students and programming on campus. As brought up in the discussion circle, SFU currently has a student fee of \$0.75 for the First Nations Students Association. The creation of a new fee would need to be held through a referendum (outlined in previous section). Discussion surrounding the particulars of what this fee would look like, whether it was a source of AMS-funded scholarships, or funds to support Indigenous programming within the AMS, could be addressed in the AMS Indigenous Student committee.

D. The Need for Indigenous Advocacy

Many topics of Indigenous-centric advocacy were raised, including smudging policies, the availability of traditional Indigenous food on campus, and support for pow-wows organized by Indigenous groups.

As it stands, the AMS does not have a smudging policy for its buildings, but does outline no smoking within its property. In understanding the importance of smudging in Indigenous tradition and culture, the AMS is committed to investigating the creation of an internal smudging policy for use within the Nest. This would fall under the purview of the Operations committee, which will seek guidance from the Indigenous Student committee.

Currently, the First Nations Longhouse is the only location on campus that allows smudging (to a certain extent, see appendix B). There is no UBC-wide policy in place. The UBC Residence Contract does not list smudging, but does ban incense and smoking within residence rooms. Creating an inclusive environment within campus that allows Indigenous students to practice this important part of their culture while away from home is of great importance. The AMS is committed to advocating to the university to consider smudging as a practice allowed on this campus.

Additionally, a campus pow-wow was brought up as an event that could help foster community. In the past, the First Nations Studies Student Association (FNSSA) has held the Nehiyo-paskwa-itsimowan pow-wow on campus, which the AMS has supported financially. The AMS has reserved funds in its budget to help support such a powwow to take place in the 2018-19 year and looks forward to attending the event.

Finally, it was suggested that it would be valuable to have an elder involved in the Sexual Assault Support Centre (SASC), which the AMS will explore further with the Indigenous committee and SASC.

3. Next Steps

Following the discussion circle, Indigenous students who left their emails were contacted regarding the first meeting of the Indigenous Student committee, and the AMS encouraged them to pass the message along to their Indigenous friends and colleagues. The AMS Indigenous Student committee will have its inaugural meeting on Friday, October 19th at 3pm in room 2131 of the Nest (located on the second floor behind Hatch Gallery). This time was chosen via when2meet based on the availability of Indigenous students who attended the discussion circle. In order to help set-up this committee and its terms of reference, the committee will have an AMS representative initially attend – but the future of that presence can be determined by the committee. The committee will also be taken on a tour of the different rooms available within the Nest to create the Indigenous Student Space. The AMS asks that all students respect this committee as a space exclusively for Indigenous participants.