

Experiences of Discrimination and Transition to University among Indigenous

Undergraduate Students

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April 2015

Approval page

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and Transition to University among Indigenous Undergraduate Students”

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April 2015

Acknowledgment page

I would like to thank Dr. Sonya Corbin Dwyer and Dr. Kelly Warren, both of whom were a tremendous help to me as I was writing this paper. This project was very personal and important to me, and I am very grateful for the support and endorsement of my topic that I received from Dr. Corbin Dwyer. I would also like to thank my fellow Honours students, as we shared great camaraderie during the process of writing our projects. I would also like to acknowledge my family members and friends, who were helpful and supportive during this process. Lastly, I would like to express my gratitude to the Qalipu Band as a whole, as the creation of this institution is what showed me to be proud of my ancestry and inspired me to complete this project. Wela'lioq, thank you, to all.

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Abstract

It has been shown that Indigenous Canadians are well behind national education averages in terms of completion of secondary and post-secondary schooling (Gunn, 2011). This study investigates the social and academic experiences of Indigenous undergraduate students at Grenfell Campus as measured by questions from the *First Year Experience Survey* (CIAP, 2013) and the *Everyday Discrimination Scale* and the *Heightened Vigilance Scale* (Williams, 2014). Twenty-four students participated. It was found that 83.3% of these participants experienced varying levels of discrimination, from less than once per year to at least once per week. The level of discrimination experienced was positively correlated with heightened vigilance, difficulty in adjusting to university, as well as unpreparedness for university. This suggests the need for Canadian university campuses to investigate the matter further to ensure a positive educational experience for Indigenous students.

Introduction

The status of Indigenous Canadians has shifted and evolved immensely over the last 150 years. Programs and institutes designed to help lessen the socioeconomic gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations have become increasingly important in modern Canadian society. Many forms of governmental programs seek to improve the education that Indigenous Canadians receive, including various bursaries and scholarships for Indigenous students. The Indspire Institute in Canada is one such organization that seeks to promote Indigenous education and career development (“Cultivating Tomorrow’s Aboriginal Leaders”, 2012). When seeking to reduce the educational disparity between two groups, one must consider the long history of Indigenous and European-Canadian relations and how Indigenous culture influences learning and education and vice versa.

Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Relations

As the European presence in Canada increased, settling countries needed to develop policies to deal with the existing Indigenous presence. This was done to take advantage of resources, but also to stimulate religious conversion and the shift of Indigenous cultures to European cultures. Once Canada became a dominion in 1867, the Canadian government was constitutionally responsible for Indigenous Canadians and lands (*Handbook of North American Indians*, 1988). The Indian Act, which was modified several times, was passed for the stated purpose of enfranchisement and the protection of Indigenous populations (*Handbook of North American Indians*, 1988). In 1869, the Enfranchisement Act gave Indigenous Canadians the same rights as non-Indigenous Canadians, but only if Indigenous status was relinquished and the person essentially

ceased to be Indigenous (*Handbook of North American Indians*, 1988). This resulted in very few individuals becoming enfranchised. To speed the process of assimilation, traditional practices were attacked as they were seen to hinder the spread of European culture among Indigenous populations (*Handbook of North American Indians*, 1988). The practice of enforcing attendance at residential schools was the government's response to continued Indigenous resistance to assimilation. The residential school systems of North America have become infamous for the abuses and indignities suffered by Indigenous children who attended (Di Mascio, 2012). The children who attended these schools were removed from their family and community and forbidden from engaging in cultural practices and speaking their ancestral language. The mistreatment endured by these children has led to high rates of mental health issues in Indigenous populations. The trauma associated with these schools often led to depression, suicidal ideation, unresolved grief and substance abuse (Di Mascio, 2012). This trauma has led to a proposed diagnosis of Residential School Syndrome as a means of classifying the nature of the trauma experienced by this specific population, but it has not been accepted by the American Psychological Association (Robertson, 2006). Residential School Syndrome is described to be closely related to PTSD, but it is characterized by intense fear and anger with a tendency toward substance abuse (Robertson, 2006). These issues can be passed on to new generations, as a sort of historic trauma, and are often seen as part of the Indigenous experience. Reports of conditions of Residential schools by those with first-hand experience and studies conducted with the purpose of examining the negative psychological impact they had on students later in life began to surface in the 1960s. The

last residential school closed in 1996, and the Canadian government gave an apology to the Indigenous community for this policy in 2008 (Bombay, 2011).

The capacity of Residential School Survivors to accommodate the next generation in terms of parenting skills and cultural practices was compromised by the trauma of attending these schools. Survivors are at an increased risk of suffering from physical and psychological problems, and there are grounds to believe that the children of these Survivors may be at an increased risk for these problems as well (Bombay, 2011). It has been found that children of Residential School Survivors suffer greater depressive symptoms than children of parents who did not attend Residential Schools. These children also report more adverse childhood experiences and adulthood traumas as well as an increased perception of discrimination (Bombay, 2011). The experiences suffered at Residential Schools appear to be associated with an impaired ability to provide adequate parenting and a positive home environment. Thus, second generation Survivors of the Residential School system are affected by what occurred during the program and this has had a tremendous negative impact on Indigenous culture and family structure. It has also compromised the trust that Indigenous populations place in the education system (Gunn, 2011). This highlights the need to approach Indigenous education from an Indigenous perspective, while addressing this population's specific needs.

Cultural Disparity Concerning Educational Attainment

In recent years, the educational attainment of Indigenous Canadians has garnered significant interest in the government and the general public. It has been shown that Indigenous Canadians are well behind national education averages in terms of completion of secondary and post-secondary schooling (Gunn, 2011). There have been multiple

research publications addressing this issue with the purpose of investigating why these gaps exist. There are several factors which have been found to explain why the mainstream education systems fail to promote Indigenous educational attainment. First, there is the failure to account for and recognise Indigenous culture in the school system. When residential schools closed, Indigenous children began to be integrated into mainstream schools (*Aboriginal Cultures and Perspectives*, 1996). These schools expected Indigenous children and adolescents to adapt to mainstream educational norms. When polled, over half of Indigenous students report that, upon entering university, they had trouble maintaining cultural ties and fulfilling cultural responsibilities, which is problematic because over 70% of Indigenous students reported that these take precedence over education (Restoule, Mashford-Pringle, Chacaby, Smillie, & Brunette, 2013). Curricula and resources are often not designed to contain Indigenous beliefs and values or consider an Indigenous perspective (*Aboriginal Cultures and Perspectives*, 1996). In the past few years, there has been a push to include increased Indigenous content in school curricula across the provinces and territories, especially in areas with a large Indigenous presence, to remedy this problem. This movement has focused on providing lessons in Indigenous languages, history and culture (*Aboriginal Cultures and Perspectives*, 1996). There has also been an effort to consider the perspective of Indigenous Canadians in order to create a positive classroom environment. Teachers must be aware of how their Indigenous students feel in regard to their culture. This will help the teacher reduce instances of racism and cultural attacks from both teachers and other students in the school environment. This will also help promote and maintain Indigenous students' motivation and interest in attending and completing school.

Related to the content of Indigenous cultural content in curricula, the differences in styles of learning across cultures should also be considered. Indigenous learning tends to be more holistic and community-oriented than European-style learning (Johnson, 2013). Indigenous knowledge is based on stories shared among family and community. Indigenous ways of learning have shifted over time, but frequently involve teaching stories, learning games, apprenticeships and tag-along teaching (White & Peters, 2013). Instructors are usually community members who have a responsibility of ensuring that each student learns to the best of his or her ability for the sake of the whole community, which is at odds with the style of learning normally experienced in mainstream schools (White & Peters, 2013). Indigenous pedagogy involves recognizing a student as a whole being with physical, spiritual, emotional and mental aspects (Ledoux, 2006). The traditional Indigenous pedagogy addressed all these aspects of the child to foster complete development. Indigenous education systems were designed for informal learning using hands-off methods which allowed opportunities for independent problem-solving and decision making (Ledoux, 2006). Since oral tradition is so important in Indigenous education, ancestral languages are critical to passing on cultural information and practices (Ledoux, 2006). All people are respected and viewed to make important contributions, but the importance of Elders is paramount, as they are the archives of information to be passed down (Ledoux, 2006). Thus, Indigenous children are taught, before even beginning to learn beyond the home, that knowledge and wisdom are gained through listening to and observing Elders. Interconnectedness between a student and the natural world is also emphasized, and the child was taught to see himself or herself as a part of a larger community (Ledoux, 2006). The Indigenous pedagogy means that

Indigenous students tend to acquire information in certain ways that may be different from how non-Indigenous students learn. Indigenous students learn best when the whole is presented before the details, when images and symbols are used more than words, when there are concrete demonstrations, when there is time to reflect on information before using it, when there is time for observation, when there is spontaneous learning and when information is presented in real-life contexts (Ledoux, 2006). As such, teachers in mainstream schools may not be aware of this and seek to impose learning styles that work better with non-Indigenous students. Learning in non-Indigenous Canadian society takes a more individualistic approach, so success is determined by an increased drive for personal gain (Johnson, 2013). The Indigenous teachings of humility are at odds with this approach, as a person who behaves in such a way in Indigenous cultures will be perceived as disrespectful or boastful (Johnson, 2013). Indigenous student achievement should be considered from a broader perspective than is normally used in the mainstream education system. Standardized assessments of Indigenous students do not reflect the purpose or nature of the Indigenous pedagogy.

Another thing to consider is alcohol abuse by Indigenous students. Increased alcohol use is associated with poorer educational results and student retention regardless of ethnicity (Currie et al., 2011). As Indigenous alcohol abuse is significantly more frequent and severe than non-Indigenous alcohol abuse, one must consider the higher impact it may have on Indigenous students as compared to non-Indigenous students in terms of academic achievement (Currie et al., 2011). Several studies investigating alcohol abuse in Indigenous student populations have shown that increased identification with Indigenous culture by Indigenous students is associated with decreased levels of alcohol

use (Currie et al., 2011). Proposed reasons for this are that Indigenous ceremonies prohibit alcohol use and the fact that students report turning to cultural traditions during times when they would otherwise turn to alcohol, such as times of stress or when desiring social rewards (Currie et al., 2011). The problem lies in the fact that Indigenous students frequently feel disconnected with their culture while attending school, as was previously mentioned. As large numbers of Indigenous university students do not feel strongly connected to their culture, one must acknowledge the difficulty these students experience in terms of benefitting from the protective factor against alcohol abuse that Indigenous enculturation appears to provide (Currie et al., 2011). As such, the lack of Indigenous content in curricula, the failure to account for Indigenous perspectives by the education system and the failure to account for the Indigenous pedagogy all potentially contribute negatively to the rates of alcohol abuse by Indigenous students.

Experiences of Discrimination in Post-Secondary Education

In educational settings, Canadian Indigenous students often report feelings of marginalization and poor relations with teachers and peers (Gunn, 2011). They believe that there are expectations of failure and a lack of care and concern in the classroom (Gunn, 2011). Many Canadian Indigenous students feel as though non-Indigenous people do not believe that Indigenous culture is compatible with modern society and education (Clark, 2014). Indigenous students report that they encounter expectations that they live a primitive lifestyle, surprised reactions that they are Indigenous and attending a post-secondary school or instances of cultural mockery (Clark, 2014). Indigenous students often experience a minimization of their academic achievements, as there is a presumption that they have unfair benefits in terms of reserved seating or funding due to

their Indigenous status (Clark, 2014). There is a perception among Indigenous students that others believe that they are not earning their education. My experiences as an Indigenous student are in accordance with this finding. There is also the feeling among these students that Indigenous culture is misrepresented, trivialized and handled with insufficient sensitivity in their courses (Clark, 2014). This could exemplify the mistrust in the education system that is associated with the trauma of Residential Schools.

Indigenous students in the United States have been found to experience more frequent racism than African-American and Latino-American students (Currie, Wild, Schopflocher, Laing, & Veugelers, 2012). Nearly two-thirds of Indigenous university students in the U.S. have experienced discrimination in an academic setting (Currie et al., 2012). This finding is in accordance with my own experiences in school settings as I have encountered, among other types of discrimination, racial slurs due to my Indigenous ancestry. Female university students report shame-based discrimination, such as being accused of using the welfare system or being regarded as a prostitute, whereas male students report more aggressive discrimination, such as encountering racial slurs or physical attacks (Currie et al., 2012). These students state that the frequency and unpredictability of racist experiences is extremely stressful (Currie et al., 2012). Consequently, it is quite possible that experiences of discrimination by students make it difficult to succeed academically.

The effects of discrimination are often expressed through stereotype threat among minority groups. Stereotype threat is the predicament in which minority students often find themselves where they feel at risk of confirming negative stereotypes about themselves (Thames et al., 2013). As negative stereotypes toward Indigenous peoples in

Canada are experienced frequently and strongly by Indigenous Canadians, one must take into account how stereotype threat affects Indigenous academic performance. Stereotype threat has been shown in many studies to be associated with decreased confidence, memory and accuracy in testing situations (Thames et al., 2013). It is important to consider that the effects of stereotype threat are amplified when the examiner is of the group that the examinee perceives to be particularly discriminatory toward his or her own group (Thames et al., 2013). Since Indigenous students receive their education in largely non-Indigenous school systems by non-Indigenous teachers, it is expected that the level of stereotype threat experienced by these students will have a negative impact. Since there is little research examining the specific effects of stereotype threat on Indigenous university students, it is difficult to estimate how much these students are impacted by stereotype threat in terms of academic performance.

Terms Describing Indigenous Peoples

Throughout the centuries, there have been several terms used to describe an Indigenous North American. As time passed, some terms gained negative connotations and some terms describe legal definitions. Today, the term *Indian* is generally considered to be offensive and politically incorrect in Canada when used to describe an Indigenous North American. This word describes people who are now referred to as *First Nations*, and is not typically used to describe Inuit or Métis peoples, and, as such, is not an inclusive term (Kesler, 2009). Regardless, the word *Indian* is commonly used to describe any Indigenous North American as an insult or simply due to lack of understanding on the topic. The organization of landless Newfoundland Mi'kmaq people is now recognized as the Qalipu First Nation Band instead of being referred to as the Federation of

Newfoundland Indians, but the band is still recognized under the Indian Act (Sheppard, 2015). As for the term *Native American*, such a term, by definition, describes a person who was born in North America, just as a native English speaker has English as a first language. As a result, this term seems inappropriate to use when referring to Indigenous North Americans.

The term *Aboriginal* is now more commonly used in daily conversation and in legal matters. It is an inclusive term that describes First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples (Kesler, 2009). I elected not to use this term in this work for personal reasons. The element *ab-* in words that come from Latin denotes entities that are away from or the opposite of entities that do not have this element (Oxford Dictionaries, n.d.). Examples of this are normal and abnormal and oral and aboral. As such, it does not seem right to me to use the term *Aboriginal* to describe a group of people whose ancestors originated in a particular area.

The term *Indigenous* which is used worldwide to describe populations that have an original claim to a territory, but are also a minority and marginalized (Kesler, 2009). This is, to me, the most appropriate term to use when describing First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples due to its universal usage, inclusivity and specific meaning. As such, I have elected to use this term in this work. It is important to note, however, that specific populations may not use the terms *Indigenous* or *Aboriginal* at all when referring to themselves. Most Indigenous populations today have chosen to reclaim cultural terms of self-identification, such as using the word *Mi'kmaq* instead of *MicMac* or *Indian*. While I personally follow this practice, I could not use cultural terms in the work due to the numerous cultural groups I recruited.

The present study

Based on the findings of several studies, such as Gunn (2011), Clark (2014) and Currie et al. (2012), and my own experiences, the present study seeks to investigate the social and academic experiences of Indigenous students at Grenfell Campus. There is a long history of negative relations and cultural disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians which are potentially the biggest reasons for gaps in educational attainment between the two groups. The study will examine whether participants face discrimination in their lives as students and how participants have adapted to university in terms of academic success and social transitions. This will determine whether or not Grenfell Campus has been successful in promoting Indigenous educational attainment.

Based on the findings of previous studies, and my own experiences as an Indigenous student, it is expected that Indigenous students will have difficulty transitioning to university. It is also hypothesized that Indigenous students do experience racial discrimination due to their Indigenous status, and this discrimination will be related to heightened vigilance.

Method

This study used quantitative data collection to investigate the experiences of Indigenous undergraduate students in terms of discrimination and transition to university.

Materials

An informed consent form (See Appendix A) and an information and demographics page were developed for this study (see Appendix B). The *First Year Experience Survey 2013* (FYES 2013) that was used by the Centre for Institutional Analysis and Planning to survey MUN students was adapted for use in this study (see Appendix C). Specific years in the questions or answers were omitted to account for any differences among participants' year of study, and questions 1, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 16, and 25 were used from the survey. This questionnaire was used to gather information about the adjustment experiences of the participants while attending university, including financial, academic and social experiences. Two scales from the *Measuring Discrimination Resource* (Williams, 2014) were used. The *Everyday Discrimination Scale* (EDS) was chosen to assess the extent of the discrimination that participants feel they experience due to their Indigenous status and the *Heightened Vigilance Scale* (HVS) was chosen to assess how the aforementioned experiences of discrimination affect the participants' social experiences (see Appendix D). The questionnaires were stapled into one booklet to be completed at once. The order of the questionnaires was different among participants to prevent any order effects. The HVS, however, was always be presented after the EDS, as this scale builds on the information asked in the EDS. Permission to use the scales was requested and granted from the authors (see Appendices E and F).

Recruitment

Participants were recruited by the Messenger email service at Grenfell Campus (see Appendix G) sent to all students through their Grenfell email accounts. Posters were also placed around campus and the Western Regional School of Nursing (see Appendix H). Miniaturized versions of this poster were placed on tables in the library and student lounge areas and given to participants to distribute to their acquaintances if they chose. For recruitment, the term *Aboriginal* was used in addition to *Indigenous*, as this was thought to be a more common and well-known term amongst the general public. This was done to increase understanding as to the purpose of the study and the population being recruited.

Procedure

Data collection took place over several weeks. The researcher had the survey packages in the Grenfell Campus Indigenous Student Room during Tuesdays and Fridays from 12 pm to 2 pm. Participants, upon entering the study room, were given the research package containing all materials. Participants were asked to fill out the questionnaires in person. Refreshments were available for participants as it took approximately 10-15 minutes to complete the questionnaire package. Once the participants completed the questionnaires, they were returned to the researcher and taken to a secure location.

Participants

This research aimed to investigate the challenges associated with Indigenous undergraduate student life. Twenty-four Indigenous students volunteered to participate. An Indigenous student is defined in this study as a student with Inuit, Métis or First Nation ancestry. Seventeen women and seven men participated. The mean age was 20.46

years, the maximum age was 31 years and the minimum age was 18 years. Ten participants were in first year, 2 were in second year, 5 were in third year, 5 were in fourth year and 2 were in fifth year. The mean GPA was 3.19, the minimum was 1.25 and the maximum was 4.00.

Results

It was hypothesized that participants would experience discrimination due to their Indigenous status, and this would be related to heightened vigilance. It was also hypothesized that participants would have difficulty transitioning to university. To examine these hypotheses, frequencies of the incidence rate and intensity of these experiences were investigated. Pearson correlations between discrimination and heightened vigilance, difficulty adjusting to university and unpreparedness for university were completed along with linear regressions assessing these relationships.

Discrimination and Heightened Vigilance

To investigate whether discrimination had been experienced among participants, the rate of different types of discrimination being experienced was evaluated. Overall, 20 of the 24 participants reported experiencing some level of discrimination in the past year. The areas in which participants experienced the highest levels of discrimination are reported in Table 1. The types of discrimination which participants reported experiencing more frequently were being treated with less courtesy than other people, being treated with less respect than other people and being treated as inferior to other people.

To determine what may have caused these experiences, the frequencies of what participants perceived as being the main causes of discrimination were examined. The most commonly reported cause of discrimination was ancestry, which was reported by 18 participants. Discrimination due to gender was reported by 12 participants. Discrimination due to age was also reported by 12 participants.

Table 1

Frequencies of Various Types of Discrimination Experienced

Discrimination Type	Number of participants reporting each level of discrimination				
	At least once a week	A few times a month	A few times a year	Less than once a year	Never
Treated with less courtesy	1	2	7	4	10
Treated with less respect	1	3	6	5	9
Received poorer service	0	1	3	8	13
Treated as if you are not smart	0	1	7	5	11
Regarded with fear	0	1	1	2	11
Regarded as dishonest	1	0	3	3	17
Treated as inferior	4	4	2	5	8
Called names or insulted	0	2	6	5	11
Threatened or harassed	1	1	0	9	13

To investigate whether heightened vigilance had been experienced among participants, the rate of different types of heightened vigilance being experienced was evaluated. Overall, all 24 participants reported experiencing some level of heightened vigilance. The areas in which participants experienced heightened vigilance are displayed in Table 2. The types of heightened vigilance that were reported most frequently were watched what is said and how it is said and carefully observing surroundings.

Social and Academic Adjustment to University

To determine whether participants experienced difficulty adjusting to university, the frequencies of difficulty adjusting to different areas of university life were examined. The specific areas in which participants experienced the most difficulty adjusting are outlined in Table 3. The areas in which participants reported the most difficulty adjusting to university were the amount of work, the difficulty of work, the methods of instruction and study requirements.

To determine whether participants experienced unpreparedness for university, the frequencies of unpreparedness for specific areas of university that were reported by participants were investigated. The areas in which participants report high levels of unpreparedness for specific aspects of university life are outlined in Table 4. The areas in which participants felt that they were most unprepared for in coming to university were study skills, presentation skills, library skills and research skills.

Relationship between Discrimination and Heightened Vigilance

There was a significant and positive relationship between discrimination experienced in total and heightened vigilance experienced in total, $r(20) = .57$, $p = .005$.

Table 2
Frequencies of Levels of Heightened Vigilance

Heightened vigilance type	Number of participants reporting each level of heightened vigilance				
	Very often	Fairly often	Not too often	Hardly ever	Never
Think in advance about problems	0	4	8	9	3
Prepare for future insults	1	0	1	9	13
Careful about appearance to avoid harassment	1	0	6	9	8
Watch what is said and how it is said	1	7	6	6	4
Carefully observe surroundings	1	9	6	6	2
Avoid social situations/places	2	2	11	6	3

Table 3

Frequencies of Difficulty in Adjusting to Various Aspects of University Life

Aspect of university life	Number of participants reporting each level of difficulty				
	Difficult	Somewhat difficult	Neutral	Somewhat easy	Easy
Amount of work	2	8	6	3	3
Difficulty of work	3	6	5	4	4
Methods of instruction	2	5	6	4	5
Administration Procedures (e.g. registration, paying fees, dropping courses)	0	4	6	6	6
Study Requirements	1	7	8	4	2
Responsibility for own academic success	1	4	4	8	5
Managing finances	0	4	3	6	9
Making new friends	2	1	6	6	7
Size of university	0	0	2	6	14
Size of classes	0	1	3	6	12
Getting involved in university life outside the classroom	0	3	10	5	4

Table 4

Frequencies of Unpreparedness for Various Aspects of University Life

Aspect of university life	Number of participants reporting each level of unpreparedness		
	Not prepared	Somewhat prepared	Well prepared
Reading skills	0	2	20
Writing skills	4	8	10
Mathematical skills	1	6	15
Speaking in class	4	14	4
Listening in class	1	6	15
Study skills	8	7	7
Note taking	3	8	11
Problem solving	1	10	11
Presentation skills	8	10	4
Test-taking skills	2	10	10
Library skills	8	8	6
Research skills	8	12	2
Computer skills	0	2	20
Time management	6	9	7
Stress management	5	10	7

As such, when the total level of discrimination increased, the total level of heightened

vigilance increased. Total discrimination experienced predicts or accounts for 32.8% of the variation in total heightened vigilance experienced.

Relationship between Discrimination and Adjustment

There was a significant and positive correlation between level of discrimination experienced in total and difficulty adjusting experienced in total, $r(20) = .50$, $p = .027$. As such, when the level of total discrimination experienced increased, the level of total difficulty in adjusting to university also increased. Total discrimination experienced predicts or accounts for 24.5% of the variability in total difficulty adjusting to university.

There was a significant and positive correlation between the level of discrimination experienced in total and the level of total unpreparedness for university, $r(20) = .75$, $p < .001$. As such, when the level of total discrimination experienced increased, the level of unpreparedness for university also increased. Total discrimination experienced predicts or accounts for 56.4% of the variability in level of total unpreparedness for university experienced by participants.

Discussion

This study assessed the frequency of discrimination experienced by Indigenous undergraduate students at Grenfell Campus as well as the intensity of difficulty in adjusting to university. The findings of this study support the initial hypothesis that Indigenous students at Grenfell Campus experience discrimination due to their Indigenous status and this is related to heightened vigilance. This study's findings also support the hypothesis that Indigenous students have difficulties adjusting to university. It was found that 41.7% of the 24 participants experienced discrimination a few times per year or more. While 70.8% of participants indicated that experiences of discrimination were due to their ancestry, participants frequently reported several reasons for their perceptions of discrimination against them. For example, 50% stated the discrimination was due to gender and 50% indicated it was due to age. This could suggest that these individuals are experiencing intersectionality in terms of discrimination. Intersectionality in this context refers to the concept that an individual can experience discrimination due to various factors, and the discrimination due to each factor adds to a cumulative experience of discrimination (Corey, 2013). As such, these individuals may be experiencing higher levels of discrimination, and this could be further explored by Grenfell Campus's administration.

Nearly half of the participants found adjusting to university academically to be "somewhat difficult" or "difficult" while only 18.2% of participants found adjusting to university socially to be "somewhat difficult" or "difficult". Particular areas of difficulty were the amount and difficulty of work, study requirements and methods of instruction.

Increased levels of discrimination and increased levels of adjustment difficulty were found to be related.

Support from Other Studies

These results are consistent with the findings of numerous other studies examining the experiences of Indigenous students in university. Currie et al. (2012) found that 71.2% of Indigenous students at university experienced discrimination at school at least once and 60.0% experienced discrimination in a public setting at least once. Clark et al. (2014) found that Indigenous students experience racial microaggressions, or subtle racist acts that may not even be recognized by the perpetrator. These experiences are postulated to have psychologically draining effects which interfere with academic functioning, a finding that supports the correlational relationship found in this study between discrimination experienced and difficulty adjusting to university. It is interesting to note that participants had more difficulty adjusting to university academically than socially. Currie et al. (2012) described their findings as contributing to racial battle fatigue, or the constant stress response to discrimination and the toll it takes on academic performance. This supports this finding in terms of there being difficulty among participants in adjusting academically.

Another interesting finding of the present study is the proportion of participants who struggled to adjust to the methods of instruction in university. Nearly a third of participants found adjusting to the methods of instruction in university to be “somewhat difficult” or “difficult.” This may be related to studies conducted on Indigenous pedagogy and Indigenous ways of learning and of knowing. As Ledoux (2006) states,

Indigenous students tend to learn best when curricula is adapted to Indigenous ways of learning. Ledoux (2006) also maintains that Indigenous students may be neither prepared nor used to the individualistic nature of non-Indigenous schools. Of course, this does depend on whether the student in question attended an Indigenous school prior to university or was taught according to an Indigenous pedagogy at home, which is beyond the scope of this study. Such students may struggle with approaching their education from a perspective of personal gain and may believe it to be boastful and at odds with the value of humility which is more closely associated with Indigenous teachings. This could be related to this study's findings of participants' struggles with workload, study requirements, presentation skills and research skills.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, the study has a low number of participants. This may be due to the small population of Indigenous students at Grenfell Campus. The low response rate could threaten the reliability of the findings of this study. Second, the findings are correlational. As such, no causal relationships between discrimination and academic struggles can be assumed. Furthermore, the study does not address why participants experience academic difficulties. This study cannot show whether discrimination, instruction methods or even another variable is the main reason for academic difficulties. In addition, this study does not take into account acts of discrimination specific to Indigenous peoples or culture, such as racial slurs or cultural stereotypes. Another limitation of this study is that it fails to account for how others perceive the participant in terms of being of Indigenous or non-Indigenous ancestry. If the general student population is unaware that the participant is Indigenous, this could

certainly impact how and why the participant is treated in terms of discrimination. An extension of this is that this study does not take into account whether or not the participant was raised in an Indigenous community. If the participant was raised in a non-Indigenous community and attended non-Indigenous primary and secondary schools, he or she may have different experiences in university as compared to a participant who was raised in an Indigenous community and attended Indigenous schools. This could be because the latter identifies more strongly with his or her identity as an Indigenous person or is more likely to have been taught according to the Indigenous pedagogy. Another limitation of this study is that it asks participants to report incidences of discrimination that happened to themselves and did not include the discrimination directed towards others that they witnessed. A participant may be unlikely to disclose personal experiences of discrimination, or even deny it to himself or herself, as they are detrimental to the participant's self-esteem.

Finally, this study does not address the unique experiences that Indigenous students experience in Newfoundland and Labrador and at Grenfell Campus, as experiences of discrimination by participants may not be exclusively at school. This province is known for its small communities and close-knit societal structure, and Grenfell Campus is relatively small in population and has various student-run societies that promote diversity and seek to end discrimination against marginalized groups. Therefore, the experiences of Indigenous students at Grenfell Campus in Newfoundland may be very different from the experiences of Indigenous students at larger universities in Canada's more populous cities.

Directions for Future Research

Based on this study's limitations, there are several directions for research in this area to continue in the future. Studies could seek to determine the specific causes of the academic struggles of Indigenous students in university in order to effectively address them. Future studies could also determine the specific acts of discrimination that are most problematic for Indigenous students. Likewise, future studies could assess participants' level of identification and involvement with Indigenous culture and learning to see if this impacts experiences of discrimination and academic difficulties. Future studies could also assess the prevalence of discrimination by asking less direct questions that will not be as big a threat to the participant's self-esteem. An example of such a question could be asking if a particular experience has happened to an Indigenous friend or family member. Finally, future studies could compare the experiences of Indigenous students attending relatively small and familial universities to those attending universities in urban environments to see if this impacts discrimination experiences, adjustment to university or even enrolment rates of Indigenous students.

Practical Implications

Despite this study's limitations, there are several implications that can be drawn from the results, and, thus, this study may be considered to be a preliminary study. First, over two thirds of the 24 Indigenous students surveyed at Grenfell Campus perceive themselves as experiencing discrimination based on the fact that they have Indigenous ancestry. In addition, students frequently reported more than one reason for their perceptions of discrimination, suggesting the intersectionality of discrimination. These

are issues that need to be explored further by the university's administration. Poor relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians must end if the cultural disparity between these two groups is to end, as such negative attitudes are related to the poor educational attainment and, thus, low socioeconomic status of Indigenous Canadians as a whole (Currie et al., 2012). A second implication is that as discrimination experienced by participants increased, so did difficulty in adjusting to university. As such, this suggests that students who are experiencing high levels of discrimination may potentially benefit from additional assistance in making the transition into university. This study also indicates the areas in which Indigenous students struggle the most, warranting further investigation on the matter while suggesting that interventions should perhaps focus on these areas in particular. Overall, further research needs to be conducted to explore this issue in more detail.

Conclusion

Though this study has several limitations, it demonstrates the presence of discrimination and academic difficulties among the surveyed Indigenous students at Grenfell Campus. This displays the need for further research in this area to determine the breadth and depth of this issue to see if there are areas that should be addressed. As experiences of discrimination have been consistently shown to be related to psychological distress and academic problems among those targeted, such instances of discrimination must be reduced to promote education and, thus, cultural equality and harmony.

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Appendix A

Informed Consent Form

Study of the Social and Academic Experiences of Indigenous Undergraduate Students**Informed Consent Form**

The purpose of this Informed Consent Form is to ensure you understand the nature of this study and your involvement in it. This consent form will provide information about this study, giving you the opportunity to decide if you want to participate.

Researchers: This study is being conducted by Alissa-Rae Bellows as part of the course requirements for Psychology 4951, Honours Project in Psychology I. I am under the supervision of Dr. Sonya Corbin-Dwyer.

Purpose: This study is designed to investigate the social and academic experiences of Indigenous-Canadian students during their undergraduate education. The results will be used to write an Honours Thesis for Psychology 4951. This study may also be used in a larger research project and may be published in the future.

Task Requirements: You will be asked to complete 3 questionnaires. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions; I am only interested in your opinion of your experiences. You may omit any questions you do not wish to answer.

Duration: The questionnaires will take approximately twenty (20) minutes to complete in total.

Risks and Benefits: This study will contribute to knowledge on Indigenous student experiences in undergraduate programs.

Anonymity and Confidentiality: Your responses are anonymous and confidential. Please do not put any identifying marks on any of the pages. All information will be analysed and reported on a group basis. Thus, individual responses cannot be identified.

Right to Withdraw: Your participation in this research is totally voluntary and you are free to stop participating at any time.

Contact Information: If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please feel free to contact me at the email address abellows@grenfell.mun.ca, or my supervisor, Dr. Sonya Corbin Dwyer, at (709) 639-6454 or scorbin@grenfell.mun.ca. As well, if you are interested in knowing the results of this study, please contact me or Dr. Sonya Corbin-Dwyer after April 4,

2015. If this study raises any personal issues for you, please contact the counselling centre at Grenfell, specifically Ms. Maureen Bradley at 637-6211 or mbradley@grenfell.mun.ca.

The proposal for this research has been reviewed by the Grenfell Campus-Research Ethics Board and found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy. If you have ethical concerns about the research (such as the way you have been treated or your rights as a participant), you may contact the Chairperson of the GC-REB through the Grenfell Research Office (GCREB@grenfell.mun.ca) or by calling (709) 639-2399.

I have explained this study to the best of my ability. I invited questions and gave answers. I believe that the participant fully understands what is involved in being in the study, any potential risks of the study and that he or she has freely chosen to be in the study.

Signature of Principal Investigator

Date

Appendix B

Information and Demographics page

Note: All information reported on this questionnaire is confidential and your identity will remain anonymous. You are not obligated to complete this questionnaire and may discontinue your *participation at any time*. You may ask for clarification of any questions you may have during your participation.

For the following questions, please check the response that best applies to you. Be sure to read the questions carefully.

Age: _____

Gender: _____

GPA: _____

Year of study: _____

Thank you for your participation.

Appendix C

Questions adapted from the *First Year Experience Survey 2013*

Questions adapted from the FYES (CIAP Office at MUN, 2013)

1. What was your main reason for attending University?
 - a. To further my education
 - b. To obtain a specific degree/diploma/certificate
 - c. For personal interest
 - d. My parents wanted me to attend university
 - e. To prepare for a future career/employment
 - f. Not sure I had a clear reason for attending university
 - g. Other (please specify): _____

2. Academically, how would you describe your transition from high school to university?

Very difficult	Somewhat difficult	Neutral	Somewhat easy	Very Easy
1	2	3	4	5

3. Socially, how would you describe your transition from high school to university?

Very difficult	Somewhat difficult	Neutral	Somewhat easy	Very Easy
1	2	3	4	5

4. How long did it take you to adjust to university after you first arrived?
 - a. Right away
 - b. Less than a month
 - c. 1 to 2 months
 - d. The whole semester
 - e. Still adjusting/have not adjusted (GO TO QUESTION 6)

5. Was there anything in particular which helped you adjust to university? (select all that apply)

- a. Family/friends/other students
- b. Residence
- c. Services or resources (e.g. Learning Centre)
- d. Professors/staff
- e. Orientation
- f. Got used to it with time
- g. Other (please specify): _____

6. Please indicate how easy or difficult it was for you to adjust to each of the following aspects of university life.

	Difficult				Easy	N/A
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Amount of work	1	2	3	4	5	6
Difficulty of work	1	2	3	4	5	6
Methods of instruction	1	2	3	4	5	6
Administration Procedures (e.g., registration, paying fees, dropping courses)	1	2	3	4	5	6
Study Requirements	1	2	3	4	5	6
Responsibility for own academic success	1	2	3	4	5	6
Managing finances	1	2	3	4	5	6
Making new friends	1	2	3	4	5	6
Size of university	1	2	3	4	5	6
Size of classes	1	2	3	4	5	6
Getting involved in university life outside the classroom	1	2	3	4	5	6
Living far from family/support system	1	2	3	4	5	6
New living arrangements	1	2	3	4	5	6
Getting used to a new culture or language	1	2	3	4	5	6

7. How prepared do you feel you were for each of the following areas when you came to university?

	Not prepared	Somewhat prepared	Well prepared
Reading skills	1	2	3
Writing skills	1	2	3
Mathematical skills	1	2	3
Speaking in class	1	2	3
Listening in class	1	2	3
Study skills	1	2	3
Note taking	1	2	3
Problem solving	1	2	3
Presentation skills	1	2	3
Test-taking skills	1	2	3
Library skills	1	2	3
Research skills	1	2	3
Computer skills	1	2	3
Time management	1	2	3
Stress management	1	2	3

8. How have your experiences during university enhanced each of the following?

- a. Your sense of personal identity.

Not at all	Very little	Somewhat	Quite a lot	A great deal
1	2	3	4	5

- b. Your ability to lead a purposeful and satisfying life.

Not at all	Very little	Somewhat	Quite a lot	A great deal
1	2	3	4	5

- c. Your ability to develop and maintain personal relationships.

Not at all	Very little	Somewhat	Quite a lot	A great deal
1	2	3	4	5

- d. Your understanding and appreciation of different individuals, cultures and perspectives.

Not at all	Very little	Somewhat	Quite a lot	A great deal
1	2	3	4	5

- e. Your ability to embrace new ideas and experiences.

Not at all	Very little	Somewhat	Quite a lot	A great deal
1	2	3	4	5

- f. Your ability to organize new information.

Not at all	Very little	Somewhat	Quite a lot	A great deal
1	2	3	4	5

- g. Your ability to analyze new information.

Not at all	Very little	Somewhat	Quite a lot	A great deal
1	2	3	4	5

- h. Your ability to integrate new information into your existing knowledge.

Not at all	Very little	Somewhat	Quite a lot	A great deal
1	2	3	4	5

- i. Your ability to relate new information and knowledge gained from your studies into other aspects of your life.

Not at all	Very little	Somewhat	Quite a lot	A great deal
1	2	3	4	5

Appendix D

The *Everyday Discrimination Scale* and the *Heightened Vigilance Scale*

The EDS (Williams, 1997)

In your day-to-day life, how often do any of the following things happen to you?

1. You are treated with less courtesy than other people are.

- Almost everyday
- At least once a week
- A few times a month
- A few times a year
- Less than once a year
- Never

2. You are treated with less respect than other people are.

- Almost everyday
- At least once a week
- A few times a month
- A few times a year
- Less than once a year
- Never

3. You receive poorer service than other people at restaurants or stores.

- Almost everyday
- At least once a week
- A few times a month
- A few times a year
- Less than once a year
- Never

4. People act as if they think you are not smart.

- Almost everyday
- At least once a week
- A few times a month
- A few times a year
- Less than once a year
- Never

5. People act as if they are afraid of you.

- Almost everyday
- At least once a week
- A few times a month
- A few times a year
- Less than once a year
- Never

6. People act as if they think you are dishonest.

- Almost everyday
- At least once a week
- A few times a month
- A few times a year
- Less than once a year
- Never

7. People act as if they're better than you.

- Almost everyday
- At least once a week
- A few times a month
- A few times a year
- Less than once a year
- Never

8. You are called names or insulted.

- Almost everyday
- At least once a week
- A few times a month
- A few times a year
- Less than once a year
- Never

9. You are threatened or harassed.

- Almost everyday
- At least once a week
- A few times a month
- A few times a year
- Less than once a year
- Never

What do you think is the main reason for these experiences?

- Your Ancestry or National Origins
- Your Gender
- Your race
- Your age
- Your religion
- Your height
- Your weight
- Some other aspect of your physical appearance
- Your sexual orientation

The HVS (Williams, 1995)

In dealing with these day-to-day experiences that you just told me about, how often do you:

1. Think in advance about the kinds of problems you are likely to experience?

1	2	3	4	5
Very often	Fairly often	Not too often	Hardly ever	Never

2. Try to prepare for possible insults before leaving home?

1	2	3	4	5
Very often	Fairly often	Not too often	Hardly ever	Never

3. Feel that you always have to be very careful about your appearance to get good service or avoid being harassed?

1	2	3	4	5
Very often	Fairly often	Not too often	Hardly ever	Never

4. Carefully watch what you say and how you say it?

1	2	3	4	5
Very often	Fairly often	Not too often	Hardly ever	Never

5. Carefully observe what happens around you?

1	2	3	4	5
Very often	Fairly often	Not too often	Hardly ever	Never

6. Try to avoid certain social situations and places?

1	2	3	4	5
Very often	Fairly often	Not too often	Hardly ever	Never

Appendix E

Email requesting permission to use questions adapted from the *First Year Experience*

Survey

Pippy, Sharon <spippy@mun.ca>

Fri 16/01/2015 16:16

Inbox

Hi Alissa-Rae,

If your target population is not first year students, then we would not object to you adapting the questions you have indicated here for use in your project. The questions can be cited as adapted from the First Year Experience Survey 2013, Centre For Institutional Analysis and Planning, Memorial University.

Good luck with your project and if there's anything else we can assist you with let us know.

Sharon

Sharon Pippy
Centre for Institutional Analysis and Planning
Memorial University of Newfoundland
709-864-8658

Bellows, Alissa-Rae -.

Fri 16/01/2015 12:04

Sent Items

To:

Pippy, Sharon <spippy@mun.ca>;

Good Morning,

Thank you for your kind offer, but, unfortunately, the timeframe of my project requires me to have my data collection completed by the second or third week of February. I have edited and adapted the questions that I would like to use from this instrument, and attached them for you to view. I have included the question number from the original instrument from which each of my questions was modeled. Since I expect that the majority of students that will participate in my study will not be in first year, and I will not be using the entire instrument or exact questions, I do not expect the First Year Experience Survey will be in the field twice for the same students. If this would be possible for me to do, please let me know. Thank you for your time!

Alissa-Rae

FYE survey

Pippy, Sharon <spippy@mun.ca>

Thu 15/01/2015 12:30

Inbox

To:

Bellows, Alissa-Rae -;

Cc:

Corbin Dwyer, Sonya;

Chancey, Paul <paulc@mun.ca>;

Hi Alissa-Rae,

Following our telephone conversation on Friday, I have discussed your project with Paul and your request to use the FYE questionnaire. As I mentioned, we will be conducting the university-wide administration of the FYE survey next month for all first-year students at Memorial, and the concern would be having the same questionnaire in the field twice for a specific group of students.

We would however like to help with your project and wonder if the following accommodation might be a possibility. We have already been planning to utilize a slightly modified version of the survey for Grenfell students, as some of the questions (e.g., services and resources) will work better if tailored to a specific campus. There then may be an opportunity to include additional wording in the disclosure statement to students that the results will be used for the usual purpose but also will be used to support a research project within Grenfell's Department of Psychology (or something to that effect). As the FYE survey is a census (all first year students are invited to participate) all students in your target population should be included. We could then establish a data-sharing agreement that will permit us to provide you with the data set for the specific group of students that your project involves. I can consult with the University's Privacy Officer to ensure we have the proper protocols in place for this.

I am not sure what your timeframe is for data collection and analysis, but the FYE survey will begin in February and will close in early March (open for approximately three weeks).

If the above assistance is something you would like to pursue, please let me know.

Sharon

Sharon Pippy

Centre for Institutional Analysis and Planning

Memorial University of Newfoundland

709-864-8658

Bellows, Alissa-Rae -.

Thu 30/10/2014 14:14

Sent Items

Hi Paul,

I am currently attending classes at Grenfell Campus, so I will not be able to meet at the St. John's Campus. If you would like to contact me over phone to learn more about my study, my number is 709-638-9420. I could also email you the details if that is preferable. Thank you!

Alissa-Rae

Chancey, Paul <paulc@mun.ca>

Fri 24/10/2014 15:48

Inbox

To:

Bellows, Alissa-Rae -;

Cc:

Pippy, Sharon <spippy@mun.ca>;

You replied on 30/10/2014 14:14.

Alissa-Rae:

Sorry for the delay in responding to your email. I would like to have a chat with you about the work you are doing and how CIAP can help you with it. Unfortunately, I am headed out of the office very shortly until Wednesday. Sharon Pippy looks after survey research for my office and it would probably be a good idea for the two of you to have a chat about this next week to make sure we understand what you are looking for.

By copy of this note, I will ask Sharon to get in touch with you about this.

Regards, Paul

From: Bellows, Alissa-Rae -. [mailto:abellows@grenfell.mun.ca]

Sent: October-22-14 11:27 AM

To: ciap

Subject: Permission to Use Survey

Dear Mr. Chancey,

I am an undergraduate psychology student at Grenfell Campus. For my Honours thesis, I am researching the social and academic experiences of Indigenous students during their undergraduate education. I will be conducting this research under the supervision of Dr. Sonya

Corbin Dwyer (scorbin@grenfell.mun.ca). I would like permission to use the questions from the First Year Experience Survey from 2013 as part of my study. Please let me know if this is possible. If so, would I be able to obtain a copy without the initial explanation of the survey, request for student number and watermark? Thank you for your time, and have a lovely day.

Regards,
Alissa-Rae Bellows

Appendix F

Email requesting permission to use the *Experiences of Discrimination* survey and the
Heightened Vigilance Scale

Permission to Use Resource

Williams, David <dwilliam@hsph.harvard.edu>

Tue 28/10/2014 19:15

Inbox

Very interesting research.

The scales are publicly available. No permission necessary

E-mail remains an inefficient way to reach me. Lengthy delays in responding to messages are routine. Please copy Maria Simoneau (msimonea@hsph.harvard.edu) on important e-mail messages. We will be back in touch with you just as soon as we can.

David R. Williams

(<http://scholar.harvard.edu/davidrwilliams/>)

Florence Sprague Norman & Laura Smart Norman Professor of Public Health

Professor of African and African American Studies and of Sociology

Director, Lung Cancer Disparities Center <http://lcdc.sph.harvard.edu/>

Co-Leader, Cancer Risk Reduction and Disparities Program, Dana Farber/Harvard Cancer Center

Harvard University

Address: Harvard School of Public Health

Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences

677 Huntington Ave, 6th Floor

Boston, MA 02115

Tel. 617-432-6807

Fax 617-432-3755

Bellows, Alissa-Rae -.

Tue 28/10/2014 17:53

Sent Items

To:

Williams, David <dwilliam@hsph.harvard.edu>;

Dear Dr. Williams,

I am an undergraduate psychology student at Grenfell Campus, Memorial University of Newfoundland in Canada. For my Honours thesis, I am researching the social and academic experiences of Indigenous students during their undergraduate education. I will be conducting this research under the supervision of Dr. Sonya Corbin-Dwyer (scorbin@grenfell.mun.ca). I would like permission to use two scales from the Measuring Discrimination Resource (Williams, 2014) to measure discrimination

experienced by Indigenous students. The scales are I. The Everyday Discrimination Scale (a. Original Scale) and IV. Heightened Vigilance Scale (a. From DAS and YES Study). Please let me know if this is possible. Thank you for your time, and have a lovely day.

Regards,
Alissa-Rae Bellows

Appendix G

Participant Recruitment Email

Grenfell students,

I am an Aboriginal fourth year psychology student here at Grenfell. I am conducting a study for my Honours Thesis in Psychology regarding the social and academic experiences of Aboriginal undergraduate students. A participant in this study will be asked to complete three questionnaires assessing his or her experiences as a university student. The total time required will be about 10-15 minutes. If you are a Grenfell student with Aboriginal status (Inuit, First Nations or Métis ancestry) and would like to participate in this study, please visit the Indigenous Student Room (AS 2027) on Tuesdays and Fridays between 12:00 pm and 2:00 pm. If you have any questions about the study, please email me at abellows@grenfell.mun.ca or my supervisor, Dr. Sonya Corbin Dwyer, at scorbin@grenfell.mun.ca. Thank you for your time!

Alissa-Rae Bellows

Appendix H

Recruitment poster



**PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR
A Study of the Social and Academic Experiences of Aboriginal
Undergraduate Students**

I am an Indigenous student looking for Aboriginal student volunteers to take part in a study of the social and academic experiences of Aboriginal undergraduate students. The results will be used for my fourth year psychology Honours thesis.

Participants will complete a questionnaire assessing his or her undergraduate experiences as an Aboriginal person.

Participation involves 1 session about 10-15 minutes long.

Refreshments will be provided!

For more information about this study, or to volunteer for this study,
please contact:

Alissa-Rae Bellows at abellows@grenfell.mun.ca

or

Dr. Sonya Corbin Dwyer at scorbin@grenfell.mun.ca

You can also drop by the Indigenous Student Room (AS 2027) on Tuesdays and Fridays from
noon to 2pm!

This study has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance
by, the Grenfell Campus Research Ethics Board.

