

# Decolonizing the Media

## Challenges and Obstacles on the Road to Reconciliation

By Patricia W. Elliott



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**By Patricia W. Elliott**

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## **About the Author**

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# A Call to Action

**“Decolonizing media is more than simply hiring Indigenous reporters. Decolonizing in media challenges us to reform media and to challenge the replication of domination in the field: Who gets to speak, the stories that are told, those stories that get picked up and generated, and those stories, too, that are silenced.”**

**Dr. Shauneen Pete, University of Regina\***

On June 2, 2015, Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission issued 94 calls to action, based on over six years of studying Canada’s colonial experience and gathering testimony from survivors of residential schools. (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada [TRC], *Calls to Action*, 2015). While the TRC was mandated to explore but one aspect of the Indigenous experience in Canada — residential schools — a much wider narrative of racism and colonial oppression underlay the testimonies received. Throughout the process, the Commission’s work was the subject of news media attention, scant at first, then gathering steam as survivors came forth with their stories. “Many of the reporters who covered the National Events were themselves deeply affected by what they heard from Survivors and their families,” the Commissioners noted. “Some required the assistance of health-support workers. Some told us in off-the-record conversations that their

perspectives and understanding of the impact of residential schools, and the need for healing and reconciliation, had changed, based on their observations and experience at the National Events” (TRC, *Honouring the Truth*, 2015, p. 352).

In their summary report, the Commissioners highlighted the news media’s role in shaping public opinion, including a long history of perpetuating negative stereotypes and under-reporting issues of importance to Indigenous communities. At the same time, they pointed to the media’s potential as an arena for the expression of Indigenous identity and the promotion of social justice (TRC, *Honouring the Truth*, 2015). Within this context, they issued three Calls specifically related to the media, highlighting the roles of the public broadcaster (CBC), the Aboriginal People’s Television Network (APTN), and Canada’s journalism schools in aiding reconciliation.

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\*All quotes taken from participants in the Decolonizing Media discussion held at the Royal Saskatchewan Museum on November 5th, 2015. The event, jointly presented by CCPA-Saskatchewan and the University of Regina School of Journalism, marked Media Democracy Day in Saskatchewan.

## Calls to Action on Media and Reconciliation

### Truth and Reconciliation Commission

84. We call upon the federal government to restore and increase funding to the CBC/Radio-Canada, to enable Canada's national public broadcaster to support reconciliation, and be properly reflective of the diverse cultures, languages, and perspectives of Aboriginal peoples, including, but not limited to:
- i. Increasing Aboriginal programming, including Aboriginal-language speakers.
  - ii. Increasing equitable access for Aboriginal peoples to jobs, leadership positions, and professional development opportunities within the organization.
  - iii. Continuing to provide dedicated news coverage and online public information resources on issues of concern to Aboriginal peoples and all Canadians, including the history and legacy of residential schools and the reconciliation process.
85. We call upon the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network, as an independent non-profit broadcaster with programming by, for, and about Aboriginal peoples, to support reconciliation, including but not limited to:
- i. Continuing to provide leadership in programming and organizational culture that reflects the diverse cultures, languages, and perspectives of Aboriginal peoples.
  - ii. Continuing to develop media initiatives that inform and educate the Canadian public, and connect Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians.
86. We call upon Canadian journalism programs and media schools to require education for all students on the history of Aboriginal peoples, including the history and legacy of residential schools, the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, Treaties and Aboriginal rights, Indigenous law, and Aboriginal-Crown relations.

# Indigenous Peoples and the Right to Communicate

In its discussion of the media, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission referenced Article 16.2 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), which declares that, “States shall take effective measure to ensure that State-owned media duly reflect Indigenous cultural diversity,” and that governments “should encourage privately owned media” to do the same, albeit with the codicil that press freedom not be impinged upon (United Nations [UN], 2007, p. 8). The language of Article 16.2 is content-focused and confined to state-owned media and the existing commercial media sector. It does not promote major structural reform of these institutions, or address the underlying power imbalance between colonizer and colonized

The preceding UNDRIP article, Article 16.1 more broadly declares that “Indigenous peoples have

the right to establish their own media in their own languages and to have access to all forms of non-indigenous media without discrimination” (UN, 2007, p. 7). This opens up the circle to include a wider array of media, for example Indigenous community radio, independent film productions, online communities, and First Nations-owned print publications. In Canada, it could also be interpreted as enshrining more equitable access to communications infrastructure, including satellite, radio, and cable broadcasting signals. The language treads closer to recognizing a right to communicate, as described in grassroots declarations such as the People’s Communication Charter, which calls for public participation in media policy decision-making, as well as full and free access to communications channels (The People’s Communication Charter Network, 1999).

**“Colonization is basically when another country or group of people move in on top of your land and take your land and resources and force their form of government on you, and that’s exactly what’s happened to us here in Canada. And the interesting thing is that when we talk about decolonization we’re talking about North America, South America, the Caribbean, Oceania, Australia, New Zealand and great swaths of Africa, so we’re actually talking from a position of strength; the majority of the world’s people have at some time or other been colonized.”**

Doug Cuthand, columnist



As one example of UNDRIP's potential impact on decision-making, Article 16.1 could contribute to greater Indigenous control over satellite TV in the North and access to radio frequencies in Indigenous territory. Provincially, in Saskatchewan Article 16.1 might have laid a foundation for arguing 'duty to consult' in the abrupt de-funding of the Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nation's (FSIN) communications program in 1982 ("Introducing," 1987), and in the 2010 privatization of the Saskatchewan Communications Network (SCN), which had financially supported and aired a significant portion of Indigenous programming (CRTC, 2010; see also Elliott, 2015, Appendix E: data from SCN program guides).

In May, 2016, Canada withdrew its objection to the Declaration and declared its endorsement of the document. However in July, Minister of Justice Jody Wilson-Raybould told the Assembly of First Nations that adopting UNDRIP into Canadian law is "simplistic" and "unworkable" (Wilson-Raybould, 2016, p. 9). Speaking before a gathering of BC Chiefs and provincial cabinet ministers in September 2016, she reiterated the "painful truth" that each right must be separately negotiated into the Canadian legal and constitutional context rather than adopted word for word (Kane, 2016). There is no set timeline for this process and, in the context of Site C Dam and several pipeline proposals, it seems likely priority will be given to negotiating the Declaration's Free, Prior and Informed Consent clause, rather than its statement on media. Thus, the right to communicate remains unrecognized in law by the Canadian colonial state, and Indigenous communities remain beholden to state regulators in crucial areas such as access to the airwaves and inclusion in cable television packages. (For a wider discussion of Indigenous human rights, see Green, 2014.)

## United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

### Article 16

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to establish their own media in their own languages and to have access to all forms of non-indigenous media without discrimination.
2. States shall take effective measures to ensure that State-owned media duly reflect indigenous cultural diversity. States, without prejudice to ensuring full freedom of expression, should encourage privately owned media to adequately reflect indigenous cultural diversity.

*United Nations, March 2008.*

# The CBC Dilemma

In September 2016, CBC publicly announced that CBC Aboriginal had changed its name from CBC Aboriginal to CBC Indigenous. The UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues notes the term 'Indigenous' implies a "strong link to territories and surrounding natural resources," and collective experiences of colonialism and racism (UN, n.d.). The term has gained ground globally (and is used in this paper) for its ability to encompass a wide field of relationships, place and contested sovereignty. CBC's internal memo to employees, however, did not make reference to any changed understandings connected to the new name, only that the corporation sought to keep up with popular usage (Bertrand, 2016). The name change could be seen as one small step toward meeting the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's expectations for public broadcasting.

Specifically, the TRC called for improved funding of CBC, accompanied by doubling-down on Indigenous programming and staffing. CBC has sustained several historical links to Indigenous media production, from opening up access to its northern radio transmitters in the 1960s (albeit in off-peak hours), to creating professional-quality recordings of Indigenous popular music in the 1970s. Today CBC North and CBC Indigenous are the broadcaster's primary vehicles for reflecting Indigenous cultures. Admittedly, we can't assume these vehicles substantially reach the ears of dominant mainstream audiences that have the most to learn about Indigenous experiences. As Green (2016) observes, "Truth-telling in a reconciliatory process is meaningless if the truth is not heard by those who have benefited from or inflicted the damage" (p. 3). Yet they are important platforms for incubating

and celebrating an Indigenous cultural resurgence that is in the process of working its way from periphery to centre.

In its first budget, Justin Trudeau's Liberal government announced an immediate \$75 million increase to CBC's approximately \$1 billion annual budget, and \$150 million extra annually over the next five years (Government of Canada. Department of Finance, 2016). With longstanding historical ties to Indigenous communities and an injection of new funding, CBC seems like a natural flagship for promoting reconciliation.

Under the surface, however, the picture is less certain. To begin with, the corporation's capacity has been greatly reduced over the years, with the elimination of 800 jobs in 2009 ("CBC to cut," 2009), 657 jobs in 2014 (Wong, 2014) and a further 241 in 2015 (CTV News staff, 2015). Even with Trudeau's budget bump, CBC's estimated \$1.04 billion budget in 2016-2017, is still less than the \$1.17 billion — or \$1.7 billion in 2016 dollars — granted over a decade ago in 1995 (CBC/Radio-Canada, 2007); (Bank of Canada, 2016).

In Saskatchewan, CBC budget restrictions of the past decade have led to ongoing staff cuts, including 6 full-time positions lost in 2014 and 11 cut in 2015 ("6 jobs," 2014; CTV News staff, 2015). As well, in 2012 CBC Saskatchewan closed its northern La Ronge Bureau, which had been dedicated to telling stories from Indigenous and northern perspectives (Ladurantaye, 2012). Today, emerging journalists find themselves relegated to a pool of casual short-term contracts. This does not bode well for creating increased employment opportunities for Indigenous journalists.



Tight funding is not the only barrier. All 10 of the corporation's board members are Harper appointees, including eight donors to the Conservative Party of Canada (Friends of Canadian Broadcasting, 2016). Guided by a five-year strategic plan called *CBC 2020* (CBC, 2014), together they have launched the public broadcaster on a path that bears all the signposts of neoliberal restructuring, including sale of assets, workforce casualization, deskilling of journalists by limiting specialized reporting, centralization of services (for example, replacing CBC North's eastern and western regional coverage with one broadcast for the entire North), outsourced content, and the wholesale introduction of an audit culture that equates news value with social media clicks. When earmarking its first \$75 million boost, the board tellingly announced "additional people and software for digital analytics," but no reinstatement of frontline journalism positions (Canadian Media Guild [CMG], 2016). The vision for Indigenous media was restricted to moving an existing Winnipeg program, *Unreserved*, to a national broadcast slot, and a planned archival project of Indigenous-language recordings (CMG, 2016). Announced in April, 2016, these changes fall far short of the TRC's recommendations — which had already been



*CBC Saskatchewan in Regina*

on the table for almost a full year — particularly in the area of ensuring "equitable access for Aboriginal peoples to jobs, leadership positions, and professional development opportunities within the organization" (TRC, *Calls to Action*, 2015).

At last count, out of CBC's more than 8,196 employees across Canada, just 113 are Indigenous; this amounts to 1.4% of CBC's workforce, compared to 4.3% of the Canadian population (CBC, *Diversity and Inclusion Plan*, 2014; Statistics Canada, 2011). Further, Indigenous employees comprise 0% of senior managers and 0.9% middle managers, well below industry estimates of the availability of qualified candidates (see CBC Table). The corporation's

**"We've had reporters, over my time at CTV, come to us who know zero about who we are as First Nations, Métis, Inuit people, like I mean nothing, so where does that begin? Where does that stem from? Education, whether it's in schools, in high schools, in university, in journalism schools, political science classes, history classes, whatever you have, it starts there — not when you get to the newsroom, not when you're all of a sudden working and going to cover a story on a reserve."**

Nelson Bird, assignment editor

## CBC / Radio-Canada Workforce Analysis\* by Employment Equity Occupational Group

Occupational Group	All Employees	Aboriginal Employees		
		Number	Representation	Industry Availability
Senior management	11	0	0.0%	2.9%
Middle and other managers	929	8	0.9%	2.2%
Professionals	3609	49	1.4%	2.0%
Supervisors	14	0	0.0%	1.3%
Administration and senior clerical	182	2	1.1%	1.3%
Skilled sales and service	1	0	0.0%	0.0%
Skilled crafts and trade workers	7	0	0.0%	0.0%
Clerical	641	9	1.4%	1.8%
Intermediate sales and service	149	1	0.7%	1.5%
Semi-skilled manual workers	15	0	0.0%	0.9%
Other sales and service	10	0	0.0%	1.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>8196</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>1.4</b>	<b>2.3</b>

\*Includes permanent full-time and permanent part-time employees. The “Industry Availability” represents the Canadian labour force availability, based on Statistics Canada’s 2011 National Household Survey.

Source: CBC/Radio-Canada Inclusion and Diversity Plan, 2015-2018.

last equity report to Labour Canada recognizes the imbalance, but states that correcting it “may prove challenging in the coming years as we continue to restructure our business, an exercise that may result in limited staffing opportunities” (CBC, Annual Equity Report, 2014).

The disconnect between the CBC board’s current direction and the TRC’s Calls to Action is stark. “Neoliberal values *rule in* and *rule out* how the CBC is imagined internally and externally,” an anonymous staffer recently wrote on the Canadian Media Guild website:

These days, politicians and the people who run the crown corporation talk mostly about ratings, money, efficiency and transparency. These are hallmarks of a neoliberal imagination of the world. The public good CBC provides — its contribution to demo-

cracy and citizenship — is mostly absent from public discourse. (Anonymous [“A concerned CMG member”], 2016)

It is difficult to imagine the Calls to Action will find an easy foothold in this environment. “Despite the partial restoration of its budget by the federal government, CBC governance needs a major overhaul,” argues former CBC board chair Tony Manera (2016). “Action on this front is urgently needed and long overdue.” Manera suggests a depoliticized appointment process, and the addition of two staff representatives to the board. This seems the least that should be done. A public call for deep structural reform to CBC’s governance, including creating space for top-level Indigenous leadership and incorporating Indigenous worldviews, i.e. a process of decolonization, seems essential in the wake of the TRC’s findings.

# APTN: Heavy Expectations, Light Support

The TRC expressly recognized the important role of APTN, and encouraged the cable channel to continue developing Indigenous programming. It is important to view this call within the wider context that APTN, a nonprofit organization, is immersed in the dog-eat-dog world of for-profit cable conglomerates, with few external supports.

APTN evolved out of a long struggle to gain access to northern satellite distribution. When Canada's ANIK B satellite was launched, northern broadcasters were brought on board to test-drive the signal. But once the experiment proved successful, in 1981 the CRTC handed the keys over to a southern private corporation, Shaw Broadcasting Services, then known as Canadian Satellite Communications, Inc. (Cancom). For the next eight years, Indigenous and First Nations organizations pressed the case that they were being denied fair access to the means of communication, and that their cultures and languages were being overwhelmed by southern TV programming (Ross, 1996). Finally, in 1989 Ottawa responded with a pledge of \$10 million toward establishing an independent satellite transponder (Canada. CRTC, 1989, May 26). It took another three years before approval was awarded to Television Northern Canada (TVNC) to operate a transponder serving 94 northern communities (Whiteduck, 2003; Valaskakis, 2000). Although initially a distributor, not creator, of content, TVNC obtained a broadcast license in 1999 to launch APTN, the world's first Aboriginal national network.

As soon as APTN began broadcasting outside the north, commercial operators began complaining that Indigenous media was unfairly subsidized (Valaskakis, 2000). These same commercial

broadcasters and cable providers displayed little interest in covering Indigenous issues and culture, yet they seemed determined no one else should do so, either.

The reality was that available subsidies were meager at best. At one time APTN received an annual grant of \$2.1 million from Canadian Heritage, comprising just 5% of the network's total budget in 2009 (APTN, 2010). This amount was cut by half in 2010, and then eliminated altogether the following year (APTN 2010, 2011). APTN has also drawn on the Canada Media Fund, an industry-sponsored pool for promoting Canadian content. In 2013, the channel suffered a 54% cut in its CMF funding for English language production, and a 41% cut to French-language production (LaRose, 2013). Since that time, English language funding has been partially restored, but French funds have been cut a further 10% (Ille, 2015).

The bulk of APTN's income comes from subscriber fees, which amounted to a full 89% the channel's \$45.4 million revenue stream in 2015 (APTN, 2015). A crucial element is APTN's inclusion in



the 'skinny basic' cable package, guaranteeing a portion of fees from all Canadian households that subscribe to cable TV. In comparison, ad sales make up just 6% of revenue, a portion difficult to increase because Canada's standard viewer audits — the bottom line incentive for potential advertisers — primarily measure mainstream southern audiences, neglecting to count viewers in northern and remote Indigenous communities (Ille, 2015). This measuring anomaly also keeps APTN's Canada Media Fund grants artificially low. The other source of revenue is a funding and satellite distribution agreement with Shaw, amounting to \$1.5 million annually, or 3% of revenues.

Despite these limited resources, APTN has made remarkable strides in recent years, expanding its programming and successfully financing the technological leap to HDTV and online content (APTN, 2015). As well, APTN is planning to expand into US markets in 2017, through a partnership with All Nations Network, a potential source of new audiences and revenues (Levin, 2016).

The channel's current revenue streams are not secured for the long term, however. The agreement with Shaw expires in 2020, and possibly sooner if the CRTC agrees to an early release (APTN, 2015). A similar agreement with CTVglobemedia expired in 2009 and was not renewed (APTN, 2010). As well, there is constant industry pressure to eliminate the

levy that supports the Canada Media Fund. In 2016 alone, two corporate-friendly think-tanks, the C.D. Howe Institute and the Fraser Institute, released reports calling for its removal (Craig, 2016). Finally, should the CRTC respond to mounting public pressure for a purely pick-and-pay system, the results for APTN would be devastating; the channel's CEO estimates the number of subscribers would drop from 11 million to 3 million, adding:

At that level of revenue, we become nothing more than an aggregator of previously made content. It would basically be the end of aboriginal programming in Canada. We'd have to ask if there's any reason to exist anymore. (cited by Ladurantaye, 2013)

Contrary to popular myth, APTN is neither heavily subsidized nor gifted with any special advantages in advertising sales. While working to develop original made-in-Canada Indigenous programming, APTN must also juggle its survival in an increasingly precarious open marketplace. The TRC's call for APTN to "develop media initiatives that inform and educate the Canadian Public" is therefore a tall order (TRC, *Calls to Action*, 2015, p. 350). This is not an unusual situation. Whether the task is delivering diversity programming or serving local communications needs, the societal expectations placed on North America's nonprofit media sector have grown greatly in the past decade, with few corresponding supports (Knight Commission on the Information Needs of Communities, 2009).

# Beyond CBC and APTN

Canada has a vibrant history of Indigenous media production produced by and for Indigenous communities and with limited or no assistance from federal or provincial governments. Much of it emerged through organizations and councils fighting the colonial project; early examples include *The Native Voice*, founded by the Native Brotherhood of British Columbia in 1946 (Avison & Meadows, 2000), and *New Breed*, published by the Association of Métis and Non-Status Indians of Saskatchewan (AMNSIS) between 1970 and 2009 (metismuseum.org). FSIN launched a communications program in 1965, which went on to support popular television and radio productions, and the magazine *Saskatchewan Indian* (Sanderson, 1970). Today's Saskatchewan mediascape includes Missinipi Broadcasting Corp. (MBC), a radio co-operative, seven licensed First Nations community radios, community access cable shows such as *The Four* and *RezX*, and a variety of privately operated print and online newspapers such as *Treaty 4 News*, *Saskatchewan Sage* and *Eagle Feather News*.

When federal cultural programs are announced, this type of grassroots Indigenous media invariably receives mention as a special priority. Yet the reality is far different. Historically, federal support for Indigenous media has been parsimonious, erratic, and controlling. For example, from the beginning, federal funders and regulators have demanded that Indigenous media producers separate themselves from First Nations councils and organizations, and instead form independent corporate boards. This places a complex extra layer of work on media volunteers, who are expected to recruit and manage a board that may be ill-suited to local context and capacity, and goes against the grain of Indigenous media as a collective social project. Some federal programs have also sought to define the media project's audience. For example, for many years *Saskatchewan Indian* was ineligible for Secretary of State funding because of a requirement to equally address Métis and Non-Status issues, even though this didn't reflect the magazine's readership ("Background," 1987). Finally, in 1987, *Saskatchewan Indian* obtained a grant of \$100,000, but only after contorting itself to meet the favoured colonial media model. Forced to divorce itself from FSIN, a notice to readers explained:

... it will be necessary to produce revenue like any other communications corporation. Readers will notice a change in the magazine as more advertising space is sold to meet costs, and the magazine will not be distributed free of charge, but instead will be available by subscription or special bulk rates to bands and Indian institutions. ("Introducing," Fall 1987, p. 21)



*The Native Voice*, April 1965.

*The Saskatchewan Indian Magazine*,  
February 1979.



The *SI* board expected funding to continue annually but in 1993, with no forewarning, the entire funding envelope, called the Native Communications Program, was abruptly cancelled (Demay, 1993).

After the loss of the Native Communications Program, some Indigenous media migrated toward the Canada Magazine/Periodical Fund, operated under Canadian Heritage. Although Canadian Heritage identified Aboriginal media as a priority, in reality a combination of program cuts and eligibility changes over the years resulted in very minimal support for Indigenous media (Canada. Dept. of Canadian Heritage. Corporate Review Branch, 2005; Canadian Heritage recipient lists, 2000-2015). A number of Indigenous media have gone under for lack of funding support, victims of neoliberalism. Barriers include a minimum 5,000 paid subscribers



(Woods, 2010), which immediately cuts out smaller First Nations offering free-of-charge publications. As well, applicants are expected to prepare complex revenue-generating business plans, an almost impossible scenario for remote communities that lack any sort of access to a viable advertising base. Meanwhile, mass market for-profit publications, such as Maclean's magazine and major chains like Quebecor/Sun Media have been much more successful in gaining government subsidies through the Periodical Fund (Magazines Canada, 2008). This explodes the myth that Indigenous media unfairly receives government support to compete against non-Indigenous private sector media.

In this environment, one might conclude that federal funding is not worth the trouble to pursue for Indigenous media producers. However, Chief Marie Anne Daywalker-Pelletier reminds us that the presence of Indigenous media is linked to the health and well-being of Indigenous peoples, and therefore there are treaty obligations at stake that should not be abandoned (cited by Elliott, 2015). Additionally, UNDRIP's declaration that Indigenous people have a right to establish their own media surely demands that Ottawa end inequitable granting processes that exclude and discriminate against Indigenous media practice.

*TRC Commissioner Marie Wilson addresses the Reconciliation and the Media Conference, Saskatoon, October 2016. Photo by Caitlin Taylor.*



# Educating the Next Generation

The First Nations University of Canada (FNUNiv), headquartered in Regina, offers certificate and degree courses in Indigenous Communication Arts, shares a faculty position with the University of Regina School of Journalism, and has been a wellspring of emerging Indigenous journalists over the years. Other Canadian journalism programs offer some Indigenous-focused learning, such as UBC's Reporting on Indigenous Communities course, and the U of R's Indigenous People and the Press course. However, providing isolated courses to those who sign up for them is not enough to transform an educational experience for all students. This calls for creative ways to integrate learning throughout courses and university-community activities.

As one example, Ryerson University turned its Masters-level digital reporting course into an online Truth and Reconciliation reporting project

called 'This is a Canadian Issue,' and invited TRC Commissioner Marie Wilson to deliver the annual Atkinson Lecture on the topic of 'Truth and Reconciliation: What Journalism Can Do' (Watson, 2016). In Fall 2015, the University of Regina School of Journalism, in partnership with CCPA-Saskatchewan, invited Indigenous journalists to lead a town hall-style public forum titled Decolonizing Media. As well, the School's students created a reconciliation section of their online news site to consolidate their work on Indigenous issues ([www.jschool.ca/reconciliation](http://www.jschool.ca/reconciliation)). In the current academic year, the students are working on Reconciliation and the Media projects across three courses, and columnist Doug Cuthand has been invited to deliver the annual Minifie Lecture.

These activities, while positive, fall short of the TRC's call for a mandatory course in all Canadian



*Indigenous journalists gathered in Regina in for Media Democracy Day in November 2015. Photo by Eagleclaw Thom*

journalism programs. U of R journalism students are required to complete at least one Indigenous Studies course or “other courses approved by the Faculty of Arts as having substantial Indigenous content” before entering the journalism school (University of Regina, 2016, p. 111), however there is no required course resident in the School itself. In response to feedback received at its Decolonizing Media event, the School is working toward obtaining a permanent course number for the School’s Indigenous People and the Press course, one step forward in a complex web of post-secondary administration. Meanwhile, in 2017 two Indigenous-focused journalism electives will be offered, one on reconciliation and one on Indigenous issues in the media, delivered by Indigenous scholars.

A baseline study of where Canada’s journalism programs currently sit in relation to Indigenous education would provide a measure of future progress. At most institutions, obtaining mandatory status for a course involves much schedule juggling, followed by shepherding a proposal through a hierarchy of academic oversight committees that meet infrequently. In short, it is a slow and complicated process — but not impossible when there is a will. Progress should be regularly monitored across Canada, not only for the presence of required courses, but also for the manner in which journalism departments, through teaching and faculty research, seek to decolonize and reconstruct the architecture of

dominant media landscapes. Journalism students could contribute to this process through ‘reality check’ assignments.

Although the Calls to Action did not address Indigenous representation among faculty, it stands to reason that this should be part of the picture, particularly in provinces like Saskatchewan, where Indigenous presence in the general population (15.6%) is more than triple the national average (4.3%) (Canada. Statistics Canada, 2011). A complicating factor is a neoliberal environment in which cash-strapped institutions seize on vacated faculty positions as opportunities to reduce staffing. Accordingly, journalism programs in the West typically resort to temporary adjunct, sessional, and research chair positions as a means to address deficient Indigenous faculty representation, although none would consider this an adequate solution. At the U of R School of Journalism, for example, there are no Indigenous faculty in full-time permanent positions. While leaving positions unfilled provides short-term budgetary relief, there are lost opportunity costs to be calculated in the long run. Working toward obtaining support for a permanent full-time position targeted toward Indigenous faculty is a difficult road to take in an era of stagnant faculty growth. This does not mean the road should be abandoned for lack of hope, however. The TRC’s action call may not specifically raise the need for more Indigenous faculty — nonetheless, the

**“This is a time of truth and reconciliation and we all have to take that personally. And when we talk about those acts of reconciliation, each of us has our own role to play in that. And, for me, I see my role as asking the questions, putting the questions out there that someone else might not have asked.”**

**Betty Ann Adam, journalist**

overall context of reconciliation offers university leaders an opportunity to make a strong case to governments that it is time to step up their investments in education.

As noted by the Commissioners, “The media’s role and responsibility in the reconciliation process require journalists to be well informed about the history of Aboriginal peoples and the issues that affect their lives” (TRC, *Honouring the Truth*, p. 351). Given over a century of disparaging and neglectful mainstream media coverage, and the many barriers experienced by Indigenous-run media, this is at best only a starting point for a long-overdue process of decolonizing the media. But starting points matter. The TRC’s Call to Action on the Media provides momentum to move journalism discourse beyond the limited scope of the Call’s words. Indeed, the TRC’s summary conclusion describes reconciliation as far more than a matter of redressing the impacts of the residential school system, stating that “virtually all aspects of Canadian life may need to be reconsidered” (TRC, *Honouring*, 2015, p. vi).

Regarding the media, this process is already underway in several arenas across the country. In Saskatchewan, the U of R School of Journalism, in partnership with CCPA-Saskatchewan, added to the conversation with a Decolonizing Media town hall on Nov. 5, 2015, featuring a panel of 11 Indigenous journalists. This sparked a continuing interaction among the participants, leading to a provincial conference on Reconciliation and the Media, held Oct. 4 and 5 at the University of Saskatchewan (see [www.reconciliationandthemediac.ca](http://www.reconciliationandthemediac.ca)). These back-to-back events have revealed there is a strongly optimistic, motivated corps of Saskatchewan journalists, journalism educators, and citizens committed to forging fundamentally new relationships between news producers and audiences, in accordance with the TRC’s broad conception of what ‘reconciliation’ should look like, and among whom. While the challenges ahead are many, renewed awareness and action are rising to meet them.

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