

July 6, 2024



Indigenous Curricular and Cultural Exchange Gaps in Higher Education

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SUMMARY

This research project examines the gaps in Indigenous curriculum, activities, spaces, and community at Boston University.

Indigenous people protect 80% of global biodiversity despite representing only 6% of the population. Integrating Indigenous knowledge into higher education is crucial for sustainable land management and addressing environmental crises.

BU offers some courses and events related to Native American and Indigenous Studies, but initiatives are fragmented without a comprehensive program. Compared to peer institutions like Harvard, NYU, and Tufts, BU lags in Indigenous curriculum integration, dedicated programs, and student support structures.

- 1) **Conducted** a comprehensive survey of Indigenous curricular offerings and cultural spaces at Boston University, comparing them to peer institutions
- 2) **Surveyed** students, staff, and faculty at higher-education institutions in the US
- 3) **Interviewed** faculty

An illustration of a person with pink skin, wearing a white beanie with orange stripes and an orange long-sleeved shirt. The person is holding a white rectangular sign with both hands. The sign has the words 'RESEARCH METHODS' written in large, bold, green, sans-serif capital letters. The background is a solid dark green color.

RESEARCH METHODS

SURVEY RESPONSES

Out of 79 unique survey responses, and 2 in-depth interviews, our key findings:

- 1) Nearly half of the respondents strongly disagreed that Indigenous knowledge and perspectives are adequately represented in their curriculum.
- 2) 49% indicated that Indigenous knowledge is integrated “not well at all” into their school's curriculum. This gap in education has far-reaching consequences.
- 3) 43% unaware of Indigenous courses/programs at their school.
- 4) 52% believe it's "extremely important" to incorporate Indigenous knowledge.
- 5) 47% strongly disagree that Indigenous perspectives are adequately represented.
- 6) 58% interested in future Indigenous-focused programs.

OUR FINDINGS

**ENHANCE
FACULTY
RECRUITMENT
AND
DEVELOPMENT**

**REDEVELOP
AND
OVERHAUL
CURRICULUM**

**STRENGTHEN
COMMUNITY
TIES**



ENHANCE FACULTY RECRUITMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

One of the largest barriers identified by survey respondents was the lack of faculty who specialize in Indigenous studies.

- Boston University should actively seek candidates who have a background in Indigenous studies for both new and existing positions.
 - Collaborate with organizations that focus on Indigenous scholarship or use recruitment channels that reach Indigenous communities.
- Establishing fellowship and grant programs specifically designed to support research and teaching in Indigenous studies will both attract and retain top talent in the field and encourage other scholars to engage with Indigenous topics.
- These sources of funding could also be used to support masters or doctoral students wishing to pursue research related to Indigenous studies for their theses.

REDEVELOP AND OVERHAUL CURRICULUM

Our curriculum survey of BU was comprehensive, but could go deeper.

- Conduct a comprehensive review of the current curricula across disciplines to identify and address gaps where Indigenous knowledge should be integrated.
 - This should involve auditing research programs and the syllabi of faculty, as well as doing a faculty survey that could identify how Indigenous knowledge is currently being incorporated, and views on its relevance in a particular course.
- This audit should involve input from Indigenous scholars, students, and communities to ensure authenticity and relevance.
 - This is a prime opportunity to strengthen community ties. See next slide.

STRENGTHEN COMMUNITY TIES

Forging stronger connections with Indigenous communities will provide mutual benefits for educational institutions and the communities themselves.

- This is not a system of pure ‘teaching,’ but a relationship which must be fostered and maintained.
- Creating a ‘liaison’ role for an individual (or more) to work between the institution and local Native communities would improve communication, ensure the institution is not operating in a vacuum, and help address issues proactively.
 - For example, such a partnership would allow us to establish more sustainable land management practices on campus which prioritize traditional ecological knowledge.
- Indigenous partners could work with current sustainability groups and initiatives on campus to further these partnerships and convey the ecological importance of Indigenous land use practices.

THANK

YOU

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