

Toolkit to Create an Indigenous Content Syllabus for Your Academic Discipline

Prepared by the CPSA Reconciliation Committee

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Identify the need and leverage existing work. The first draft of the CPSA syllabus was created using two previous documents, one produced at the University of Toronto and the other at the University of Alberta. As the document developed, other publicly available syllabi (the Canadian History Association Reconciliation syllabus and the Standing Rock Syllabus) were also consulted.

Empower a committee of experts. The [CPSA Reconciliation Committee](#) has to date been comprised of six to eight faculty members with substantial research interests in the field of Indigenous politics. They further consulted with some respected colleagues for additional suggestions.

Develop a clear editorial vision. Creating a bibliography involves vexing decisions – what counts as a major work? What counts as a quality work? Over-inclusion can be as problematic as under-inclusion. Rather than simply listing every article that mentions Indigenous people, it is crucial to adopt a clear editorial vision and stick with it. One important question is the degree of emphasis given to Indigenous-authored works. Another focus identified is the inclusion of anti-colonial, critical race and Indigenous feminist work.

Identify knowledge beyond the academy. Identify the organic intellectuals/experts outside the academy who have written or spoken on Indigenous matters pertinent to your discipline. Give priority here to Indigenous voices themselves, and maintain a commitment to the principle that expertise can arise from direct experience as well as from institutional avenues.

Choose a clear audience. For example, is the document primarily intended to support busy non-specialists with their teaching? Or to aid graduate students or researchers seeking to familiarize themselves with the topic? Or to raise the profile of Indigenous scholarship across the discipline?

Consider how the syllabus fits into other disciplinary initiatives. For example, will it support the adoption of mandatory Indigenous content requirements? The creation of a sub-field for doctoral students? Efforts to recruit Indigenous scholars to the field? Can it help universities identify scholars of note in Indigenous and post-colonial studies within departments of political science?

Hire a graduate student in the area. While the editorial decisions ultimately rested with the [CPSA Reconciliation Committee](#), it is helpful to have a single individual or small team responsible for organizing the document, thinking about its structure, and so on. A senior faculty member was able to devote some of their research funding to hiring an RA for 50 hours to launch the bibliography. The CPSA, in collaboration with the Federation of Humanities and Social Science, has provided subsequent funding.

Develop an efficient process for resolving disagreements and making revisions: The syllabus has used a combination of email discussions, committee meetings, and delegation to a single individual to make tricky decisions regarding inclusion and exclusion. As time has gone on, somewhat more formal protocols have developed. We strive to hear all opinions on our Committee and to make decisions consistent with our understanding of our mandate.

Decide on the longevity of the project and allocate/solicit resources accordingly: Will there only be one syllabus? Or will it be periodically updated? How often, and by whom? Will anyone be paid for this work?

Create a process for updating: Soliciting suggestions for additional works is almost certainly necessary to maintain a current syllabus. But it is helpful to have a transparent process in place to ensure that these suggestions meet the original editorial vision. The [CPSA Reconciliation Committee](#) has been careful not to present our syllabus as available to every new work, nor as the ultimate arbiter of what constitutes important and relevant scholarship on our topics. Ultimately, we select based on our objectives for the syllabus, consistent with our understanding of our mandate. Many good works will not be on the list and we wish to avoid the misunderstanding that any work is entitled to be on the syllabus, apart from the considerations framed in this paragraph.