

MEDIA RELEASE

CUFA BC: Faculty mourn the deaths of 215 children from
former Kamloops Indian Residential School

(xʷməθkʷəjəm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) & salilwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) Territories – Vancouver, BC, June 1, 2021) – The Confederation of University Faculty Associations of British Columbia (CUFA BC) stands in solidarity with the Tk’emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation and with all Indigenous faculty, students, and community members following the discovery of 215 children who were buried in unmarked graves at the Kamloops Indian Residential School. CUFA BC stands with First Nations in seeking the truth about missing and murdered children at the hands of church and state in what is a horrific act of genocide whose legacy continues today.

CUFA BC mourns the loss of such young lives and acknowledges the pain and anger this brings to Indigenous families and communities affected by the residential school system, and for Indigenous faculty, staff, and students on campuses. As National Indigenous History Month begins in June, we have a responsibility to learn about the history of Indigenous peoples and the colonial legacy of destruction that tried and failed to eradicate Indigenous knowledge and ways of living.

“There is a greater obligation on institutions of higher education to actively work toward decolonizing and indigenizing the academy,” says CUFA BC President Dr. Daniel Laitsch. “Racism exists on campus, it results in the underrepresentation of Indigenous people within positions of leadership in our community and on our campuses, and an overrepresentation in precarious employment and experiences of discrimination.”

“This is the shameful history of my hometown of Kamloops,” says CUFA BC Executive Director Annabree Fairweather. “The reality of this genocide was known within the Tk’emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation community but this Indigenous knowledge was dismissed until now. We must do better to recognize Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing within our society, including in colonial academic structures.”

CUFA BC calls on stalwarts of the academic community—faculty members, administrators, staff, and students—to commit to fighting colonial systems of oppression and inequality and to take a strong role in being an ally of change.

CUFA BC offers the following recommendations:

- Recognize and support Indigenous colleagues and students during this traumatic time;
- Learn the history of Canadian residential schools, the [Truth and Reconciliation Reports](#) and [Calls to Action](#), and the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#);
- Follow progress on implementing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action: <https://newsinteractives.cbc.ca/longform-single/beyond-94>;

- Incorporate relevant content in your curriculum from Indigenous sources, including
 - the Assembly of First Nations Education Toolkit <http://education.afn.ca/afntoolkit/learning-module/residential-schools/>;
 - the First Nations Education Steering Committee <http://www.fnesc.ca/learningfirstpeoples/>; and
 - the University of Alberta online course offering <https://www.ualberta.ca/admissions-programs/online-courses/indigenous-canada/index.html>;
- Encourage safe space for meaningful dialogue in departments, classrooms, committees, and senates;
- Employ hiring values and practices that countervail biases and incorporate these same values and practices in tenure and promotion processes;
- Better incorporate Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing within colonial academic structures, including tenure and promotion systems;
- Foster research programmes aimed at dismantling systems of racism, discrimination, the criminalization of poverty, and state-sanctioned brutality;
- Give space and opportunities for the voices of members of Indigenous communities as well as marginalized communities; and
- Join us in donating to Indigenous organizations, such as the Indian Residential School Survivors Society (IRSS) <https://www.irsss.ca/> or the Indigenous Adult and Higher Learning Association of BC (IAHLA) <https://www.iahla.ca>.

For further information or comment please contact CUFA BC Executive Director Annabree Fairweather at 604-367-5856 or executive.director@cufa.bc.ca.

CUFA BC represents over 5,500 faculty members, professional librarians, lecturers, instructors, and other academics at the five research-intensive universities in British Columbia, which include University of British Columbia, Simon Fraser University, University of Victoria, Royal Roads University and University of Northern British Columbia.

CUFA BC [celebrates fifty years](#) of working closely with the member Faculty Associations at each institution. Our purposes are to support high-quality post-secondary education and research in British Columbia and to advocate for the interests of our members.

