Report

DIGITAL STRATEGY PUBLIC CONSULTATIONS WITH INDIGENOUS STUDENTS & FACULTY

UNIVERSITÉ
Concordia
UNIVERSITY

DATE 2020-06-11 **PROJECT NUMBER** 12446-024

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CONTEXT AND OBJECTIVES

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CONTEXT

In 2018, Leger collaborated with Concordia to create the Digital Strategy Persona Handbook. For this particular mandate, we conducted a total of 6 focus groups, 45 individual interviews and 2 creative workshops to establish 8 student personas, 7 staff personas and 7 faculty personas. These public consultations were organized to develop Concordia University's future digital strategy. Since then, the Digital Strategy Handbook has become a tool for decision makers to think of certain groups within the university. For example, personas recently served as a base to design specific journey maps (UX Journey Harmonization mandate, 2020), to provide insights into how new students and employees experience various digital touchpoints, and to identify current and future opportunities to harmonize overall experience, including the ability to present targeted information to community members.

The initiatives described above show how Concordia wants to bring all community members to the forefront when designing services. As an inclusive university, Concordia's team wants to make sure the reality of all community members is taken into consideration. **For this mandate, our goal was to understand the specific reality of Indigenous community members, especially students and faculty.**

OBJECTIVES

Our objectives were to identify Indigenous-specific challenges, if any, related to Concordia's digital environment, and understand what Concordia's main future priorities should be according to Indigenous students and faculty members. To meet these objectives, we asked Indigenous students and faculty members the same questions **we asked community members in 2018 to create the Digital Strategy Persona Handbook. This allowed us to add two Indigenous personas**. In this report, we focus on what makes Indigenous community members unique.

METHODOLOGY

METHOLOGICAL PARAMETERS

METHOD	**9 individual interviews**
RECRUITMENT	**Participants were recruited by Concordia University** and Leger. Special attention was given to ensure each cross-section of the Indigenous community (students and faculty) was represented by a diverse range of participants.
WHO	• **4 Indigenous students** • **5 Indigenous faculty members**
WHEN	**Weeks of April 27 and May 4, 2020**
WHERE	Consultations took place **over the phone**.
LENGTH	**45 to 60 minutes**
MODERATION	**Amélie Bériault Poirier**, Research Director at Leger
LANGUAGE	**English** (as per participant preference)
ABOUT COVID-19	Even though interviews were conducted during the COVID-19 crisis, we chose not to focus on this particular situation. We asked participants to answer questions thinking about how they normally interact with Concordia's digital environment, but invited them to tell us if something has been particularly challenging recently.

HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

VERBATIM

Quotes from Indigenous community members (verbatim) are presented in italics right next to findings in the "Personas" and "Detailed Results" sections of this research report.

NUMERIC SCALES

In qualitative research, numeric scales are used to help participants reflect on their personal experience and make comparisons. Results are presented for information purposes only. They are not statistically significant.

OPINIONS SHARED

Opinions shared in this report are the points of view of participants, not Leger's or the researchers' opinions.

ABOUT PERSONAS

WHAT IS A PERSONA?

A persona is a fictional character created to personify insights gained from qualitative research. A persona has a fictional identity, sociodemographic profile and biography. His or her daily challenges and objectives, motivations, future aspirations and everyday tasks are inspired by several people. They are based on feedback and life experiences gathered using qualitative research methods such as focus groups, individual interviews and usability testing. When using qualitative research to create personas, we are seeking to gain a thorough understanding of a person's point of view, not statistically significant information. Because we focus on in-depth knowledge, a persona is not, in any way, a representation of a real individual, group of individuals or community. His or her personality traits and experiences are often romanticized to put emphasis on key preoccupations, challenges, etc. A persona is a blank canvas for researchers to give a voice to research insights; to make sure they "speak" to decision makers by portraying consumers, community members, colleagues, etc.

HOW TO READ PERSONAS?

In the context of this mandate, personas are meant to be used as a tool to improve services, and more specifically, the digital environment, for Indigenous students and faculty members. Their purpose is to help decision makers focus on the Indigenous community members when designing online tools and services, as they do for other students, staff and faculty portrayed in Concordia's Digital Strategy Persona Handbook, such as international students, or new employees and faculty members in a tech-based program. We acknowledge the fact that insights presented in this report are based on in-depth discussions with nine individuals and are not true for all Indigenous students and faculty members. While they aim to assist Concordia in making sure Indigenous community members are included in the reflexion surrounding its Digital Strategy, they do not address all the facets and complexity of being an Indigenous student or faculty member.

KEY FINDINGS

KEY FINDINGS

Interviews highlighted the following Indigenous-specific challenges. These challenges were mentioned by participants without prompting, but are also reflected in their perception of what Concordia's priorities for the future should be. Indigenous-specific challenges are summarized here and detailed in the next sections.

1 THE **ABORIGINAL STUDENT RESOURCE CENTRE** IS A HOME AWAY FROM HOME FOR INDIGENOUS STUDENTS. HOWEVER, SOME DO NOT DISCOVER IT RIGHT AWAY.

2 FINDING CULTURALLY APPOPRIATE **PHYSICAL SPACE** IS CHALLENGING.

3 THE DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT COULD FACILITATE **ADMINISTRATIVE PROCESSES** TO COMPENSATE INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE KEEPERS AND SUPPLIERS.

4 ACCESSIBILITY IS ESSENTIAL TO ALLOW INDIGENOUS STUDENTS AND FACULTY MEMBERS TO WORK WHILE STAYING CLOSE TO THEIR COMMUNITY.

5 TECHNOLOGY TENDS TO FEEL LIKE AN ADDITIONAL WORKLOAD.

6 THERE IS A NEED FOR ONLINE EMOTIONAL AND PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT.

PERSONAS

INDIGENOUS FACULTY MEMBER
SEAN

Leger

BIO

Sean has been teaching at Concordia for several years. Being Indigenous inspires him daily on how to share knowledge. He always makes sure to stay connected with the Indigenous community at Concordia. Sean is comfortable with technology and often teaches online courses, but feels some digital tools should be managed by a technician. This would allow him to spend more time preparing courses, doing research and meeting students.

SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE	
Gender	Male
Age	54
First language	English
Citizenship	Canadian
Nation of Origin	Mi'kmaq
City of Residence	Montreal

FACULTY PROFILE	
Status	Full-time
Faculty	Arts & Science
Years at Concordia	7 years
% Research	50%
% Teaching	25%
% Admin	25%

USE OF THE DIGITAL ECOSYSTEM	
Concordia.ca	+
MyConcordia	+
Moodle	++
Cspace	+
Library resources	+++
Millennium	++
CU social media	-
Other social media	+

DAILY CHALLENGES & OBJECTIVES

- **Focus on research and teaching** – having to learn and use new technologies leave him with less time for research and teaching. Technology should be a facilitator.
- **Book the right classrooms** – Sean prefers to teach in a circle and at ground level. He feels this approach makes his classes more interactive. New collaborative spaces are great for teaching, but there is no user-friendly booking system to get those spaces.
- **Collaborate with Indigenous suppliers and guest speakers** – long administrative processes make it hard to ensure external collaborators are treated with respect.

MOTIVATIONS & FUTURE ASPIRATIONS

- Make the most of his time as a faculty member by focusing on research and teaching.
- In general, use technology as a facilitator to be more efficient, but also facilitate learning for all students by leveraging mobility (especially Indigenous students).
- Explore new course formats (100% online, 75% online, 50/50, etc.)

EVERYDAY TASKS

#1 Prepare courses, upload course material on Moodle and teach

#2 Work on research projects and submit papers to journals

#2 Involvement with the Indigenous community at Concordia

#5 Answer emails

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INDIGENOUS STUDENT
AUDREY

"Navigating at the beginning was very difficult, trying to find the campus site, the platforms and the classes. My schooling wasn't as advanced as what people do in the city. There was a big gap because I'm also a bit older."

BIO

Now that her children are almost teenagers, Audrey decided to go back to school and learn more about her people. Her first year was challenging. Concordia is very different from what she was used to in her community. At first, she felt behind other students and has worked hard to adapt. She is now planning to pursue graduate studies at Concordia and is an active member of the Indigenous on-campus community.

SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE	
Gender	Female
Age	36
First language	Anishnaabe
Citizenship	Canadian
Nation of Origin	Anishnaabe
City of Residence	Montreal

STUDENT PROFILE	
Program type	Undergraduate
Faculty	Arts & Science
Program	First Peoples Studies
Status	Full-time
Progress	Second year

USE OF THE DIGITAL ECOSYSTEM	
Concordia.ca	++
MyConcordia	++
Moodle	+++
Cspace	-
Library resources	+
Millennium	-
CU official social media	+
Other CU social media	-

DAILY CHALLENGES & OBJECTIVES

- **Catch up with younger students** – at first, she felt behind everyone else.
- **Learn new technologies and procedures** – there was a lot to learn in a few weeks.
- **Stay close to her community and focus on her courses** – she often has to return home for family and cultural events. When she does, she chooses to work on her assignments remotely. Finding balance and staying motivated is challenging.
- **Finding the appropriate spaces for Indigenous events** – she needs particular spaces and there are no rooms designated for Indigenous events. Spaces are booked months in advance.

MOTIVATIONS & FUTURE ASPIRATIONS

- Maintain strong roots with her community while being successful at Concordia.
- Learn more about First Peoples and their place in the Canadian socio-political context.
- Do research about Indigenous worldviews as a graduate student at Concordia.

EVERYDAY TASKS

#1 Go to class

#2 Access course material and assignments on Moodle

#3 Study and do homework at home or at the library in-between classes

#4 Connect with the Aboriginal Student Resource Centre online and offline

DETAILED RESULTS

DETAILED RESULTS
1. Indigenous-Specific Challenges

GATHERING SPACES ONLINE AND OFFLINE

THE ABORIGINAL STUDENT RESOURCE CENTRE IS A HOME AWAY FROM HOME FOR INDIGENOUS STUDENTS. HOWEVER, SOME DO NOT DISCOVER IT RIGHT AWAY.

It can be overwhelming for new Indigenous students when they arrive at Concordia. While Post-Secondary Education is a pull-factor, Concordia's urban and institutional environment can be intimidating. In this sense, the Aboriginal Student Resource Centre serves as a home away from home to offer support and encouragement upon arrival. All student participants appreciate the Aboriginal Student Resource Centre and connect with it regularly either online (e.g., website, Facebook page) or offline (e.g., drop-in centre, Indigenous events). They find the in-person resources made available (e.g., learning specialist) useful for their studies. They believe **all new Indigenous students should be offered the opportunity to connect with the Aboriginal Student Resource Centre through Concordia's digital platforms during their first few days, and even before the beginning of the semester, to help them find community on campus.**

FINDING CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE PHYSICAL SPACE IS CHALLENGING.

The Indigenous faculty members interviewed mentioned that accessing classrooms (or rooms for cultural events) where furniture is movable is a real challenge. Some like to teach in a circle and where everyone is on the same level (not in an auditorium classroom), which requires moving the furniture. Some currently teach in older classrooms and prefer the flexibility of newer collaborative spaces, but find them difficult to book. Indigenous faculty members would like to have a room reservation system adapted to them, "like a TripAdvisor for room booking," which would give them details about each room (e.g., movable furniture, same level, etc.). Students attending the Aboriginal Centre would also benefit from this type of tool (e.g., for study rooms).

"The Aboriginal Centre would be a good place to start at school. I didn't know it existed at the beginning. It can be very overwhelming coming to the university. Someone there could answer questions."

\- A student

"As an Indigenous instructor, I need a room where the furniture is not nailed down to the floor. We like to teach in a circle, so we need to move the furniture. It's not easy to book these rooms. If I book rooms via the normal system, it takes 3-4 days before I hear back."

\- A faculty member

"My department has some very old physical spaces. A lot of the classes don't have windows, but we can move the chairs and tables around. I always book the collaborative spaces for my classes. I love them. It's hard to get access for event booking, it's not clear how to do that."

\- A faculty member

ADMINISTRATIVE PROCESSES AND TECHNOLOGY

THE DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT COULD FACILITATE ADMINISTRATIVE PROCESSES TO COMPENSATE INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE KEEPERS AND SUPPLIERS.

One of the biggest challenges among faculty members concerns the administrative processes related to the compensation of Indigenous guest speakers and suppliers (e.g., caterers coming from Indigenous communities). The process is lengthy and bureaucratic, so guests speakers and suppliers are compensated several weeks or even months later. Although viewed as perfectly normal and accepted by most guest speakers and suppliers, among Indigenous communities, it is seen as disrespectful. According to our interviews, there is a need for a more efficient solution within the digital environment (e.g., option to make Paypal payments to certain Knowledge Keepers and suppliers, have cheques prepared in a timely manner, etc.). Currently, some faculty members feel the need to "front compensation" as a sign of respect for Indigenous Knowledge Keepers and suppliers who are essential contributors in different types of study programs.

TECHNOLOGY TENDS TO FEEL LIKE AN ADDITIONAL WORKLOAD.

Like others at Concordia, Indigenous community members believe that technology should help them accomplish tasks quicker and more efficiently. Certain platforms (e.g., Millennium for faculty members) are seen as complicated to use and time-consuming. Some think they should be able to devote more time to their main role at Concordia (e.g., teaching, learning, research projects, meeting with students, etc.) rather than deal with technology. If technology is a facilitator for teaching or learning, they are willing to use it, but it should not feel like additional work. Interviews showed that technical support is particularly important for the Indigenous community. They want the opportunity to dedicate themselves fully to their main role.

"As an Indigenous teacher who works with Indigenous people, them getting paid in a timely fashion is really important. It is a matter of respect. They do presentations in class and they don't get paid because the university can't process their cheques in a timely fashion or I can't get a cheque in advance to bring it to them the day they come. We don't have a system to reimburse their expenses or pay them an honorarium."

- A faculty member

"The people who are technicians should do the technical work and the teachers should do the content creation work. I don't have 10 hours in a day to learn how to edit a video. I don't want to be a video editor, I want to be a teacher. It's about providing the support to do the technical work."

- A faculty member

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ACCESSIBILITY AND ONLINE SUPPORT

ACCESSIBILITY IS ESSENTIAL TO ALLOW INDIGENOUS STUDENTS AND FACULTY MEMBERS TO WORK WHILE STAYING CLOSE TO THEIR COMMUNITY.

Participants think technological resources must encourage accessibility, particularly through online courses or hybrid courses (an online course with a few sessions in person during the semester). Being able to access resources and course material online is important to them (e.g., all physical books should be made accessible as eBooks). According to participants, Indigenous community members need to stay in their community permanently or temporarily (e.g., to take care of relatives, for cultural events, etc.). Some have to travel outside the city for several days to participate in ceremonies. Also, since some Indigenous students have limited means and are not necessarily equipped with up-to-date technological tools, a few participants suggested a loan system for electronic equipment (e.g., computers, tablets) for home use.

THERE IS A NEED FOR EMOTIONAL AND PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT ONLINE.

Participants believe that technology should support Indigenous on-campus community, both emotionally and professionally. Indigenous students often want to stay connected with their home community. Remote meetings (e.g., through Zoom) with Elders have been helpful during the COVID-19 crisis but could be improved and maintained post-crisis for students who cannot drive back to their community during the semester (e.g., for ceremonies). Students are grateful for the support provided by the Aboriginal Student Resource Centre, but they would like to see more of it within Concordia's digital environment. One participant is especially interested in career support tailored to Indigenous students (e.g., resources explaining how to write a CV).

"We should use technology in a distance learning way. It would benefit Indigenous people because a lot would rather stay in their community."
- A faculty member

"Having a sense of community right now (during the COVID-19 crisis) is a real challenge. So far, technology has helped. We have community meetings on Zoom, we talk to our Elders, that really helps, but for ceremonies it's difficult."
- A student

"I think we need a career support site. I don't think we have one in the First Peoples Studies program. At the Aboriginal Centre, we have someone that comes to help us with essay writing, research paper and assignments. She comes once a week and it helps a lot, but I would like to find these resources online. It would be nice to learn how to write a CV."
- A student

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DETAILED RESULTS

2. Priorities for the Future

PRIORITIES FOR THE FUTURE │ # 1-2-3

Participants gave an importance score to each area of improvement, like students, staff and faculty did during the interviews conducted for the Digital Strategy mandate in 2018. **10 → VERY IMPORTANT priority.**

AVERAGE IMPORTANCE /10		
PHYSICAL SPACES & EQUIPMENT		
TOTAL	FACULTY	STUDENTS
9.1	8.2	9.8
ACCESSIBILITY		
TOTAL	FACULTY	STUDENTS
9.0	8.8	9.3
COLLABORATION		
TOTAL	FACULTY	STUDENTS
8.9	7.6	9.5

PHYSICAL SPACES & EQUIPMENT

According to Indigenous community members, quality physical spaces and equipment are crucial to making Concordia state of the art. Indigenous students mentioned the importance of creating culturally appropriate physical spaces, such as the Aboriginal Student Resource Centre. As mentioned earlier, Indigenous faculty members need classrooms where they can move things around according to their teaching style. A booking system would be the best solution.

ACCESSIBILITY

Since some Indigenous students are more likely to live in or spend time with their communities of origin, participants see accessibility as a priority. For participants, this means allowing students to rent or borrow technological equipment, adapting current courses in full or hybrid online format and including eBooks in the classroom material.

COLLABORATION

Collaboration is an important part of the Indigenous culture. Indigenous students and faculty members want to find the same sense of community at the university as in their home community, especially students. In terms of collaboration, faculty members think efficient communication and sharing tools are key (e.g., Teams).

"It's a struggle to find spaces for Indigenous events. Everything at Concordia is booked for a year. It would be much easier if we had rooms already reserved for us."

- A student

"Indigenous students often have cultural reasons to leave the city. It's important for people who are taking care of their family and children. It would be helpful to be able to easily access things digitally."

- A student

"Having communication tools is very important, especially for an Indigenous student. It's important to have the sense of community that we have in the reserve."

- A student

PRIORITIES FOR THE FUTURE │ # 4-5-6-7

AVERAGE IMPORTANCE /10		
SUPPORT		
TOTAL	FACULTY	STUDENTS
8.7	9.0	8.3
FEEDBACK		
TOTAL	FACULTY	STUDENTS
8.4	7.6	9.5
PERSONAL INFORMATION		
TOTAL	FACULTY	STUDENTS
8.1	7.9	8.4
INTEGRATION		
TOTAL	FACULTY	STUDENTS
8.1	8.0	8.3

SUPPORT

Support is particularly important for Indigenous faculty members. For them, it means having resources (staff or tools) to help with administrative tasks and content creation for their courses. For students, it is about easily accessing the tools required for their studies, while fostering a sense of community.

FEEDBACK

Indigenous students attach great importance to being heard on issues that matter to them or are likely to affect their daily lives. They want to give their opinion on digital platforms, course content and physical spaces. Some believe chat and comment functions on the website would allow for more feedback.

PERSONAL INFORMATION

Like community members interviewed for the Digital Strategy mandate in 2018, participants assume their personal information is protected within the digital environment. It is not a concern.

INTEGRATION

Again, Indigenous community members share the opinion of other students and faculty members about integration. They think the multiplication of platforms is an ongoing challenge at Concordia.

"It's important to show Indigenous students that they have support. Some don't even have the digital tools to study."

- A student

"Feedback is important just to make sure it's working and it's suitable for Indigenous students and professors."

- A student

"I have worked in other universities where the payroll information was leaked. I know it can happen, but it is not necessarily a concern for me."

- A faculty member

"Getting the people on the same platform is the big thing, because we have to learn and use so many different ones to communicate and work at the university."

- A faculty member

PRIORITIES FOR THE FUTURE │ # 8-9-10

AVERAGE IMPORTANCE /10		
DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION		
TOTAL	FACULTY	STUDENTS
8.0	8.0	8.0
DIGITAL SKILLS		
TOTAL	FACULTY	STUDENTS
7.8	7.6	8.0
FLEXIBILITY		
TOTAL	FACULTY	STUDENTS
6.8	7.0	6.6

DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION

Dissemination of information is not an issue according to participants. To learn about Indigenous events, students and faculty members turn to Concordia's social media. Unlike some community members who need to consult multiple sources of information, the **Aboriginal Student Resource Centre is their go-to source of information**.

DIGITAL SKILLS

Most participants think Concordia offers sufficient resources to improve their digital skills (e.g., workshops). As previously mentioned, **a few Indigenous faculty members are concerned about the addition of new technologies to their daily tasks**. They feel new digital skills can also mean new tasks unrelated to their main role at Concordia.

FLEXIBILITY

According to participants, flexibility should be the opposite of a priority. For them, the fact that one can choose any digital tool is an issue (there is a lack of uniformity in Concordia's digital environment). Like other community members, Indigenous students and faculty members think more integration would be ideal, not more flexibility.

"I kind of know what the events are. The Aboriginal Centre has a Facebook page and this is how I find out about events."

- A student

"I have a real concern about digital skills. Technology has to make my life easier and not create more work. I want to be a teacher not a technician."

- A faculty member

"It's important to have a certain amount of freedom, but I also think that in order for people to collaborate together, there has to be a sort of standardization."

- A student

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