

**Graduate Student Experiences of Indigenous Studies in Post-Secondary Education:**

**A Comparative Study of Norway and Canada**

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By

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## **ABSTRACT**

Indigenous Studies is a newer discipline in post-secondary institutions. In the current literature, much focus has been given to the emergence of the discipline, key qualities and concepts significant in shaping the discipline, and the goals and future of Indigenous Studies. However, at the time of this study, no attention has been given to the experiences of students within the discipline. This study intends to help fill the gap in the literature by exploring what the expectations and experiences of Indigenous Studies alumni in Norway and Canada are, and what this tells us about Indigenous Studies programs in these countries. Through semi-structured interviews and conversational method alumni from four different, yet comparable Indigenous Studies programs in Norway and Canada have shared their experiences in their master's programs. By analyzing these experiences through an anti-colonial framework this study demonstrates that there are inconsistencies in the quality, depth, and breadth of Indigenous Studies master's programs in Norway and Canada, and a gap between student expectations and their actual experiences.

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## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

The discipline of Indigenous Studies (INDGST) has been substantially discussed in academia since its emergence in post-secondary institutions in the 1960s. It is an increasingly important discipline for the visibility of Indigenous peoples in academia, and for the important work it does in challenging hegemonic research concepts and knowledges. The discipline challenges the hegemony by bringing in academically new and diverse theories, methodologies, and understandings of both the research process and of research itself. Since INDGST is a newer discipline in post-secondary institutions, it is constantly shifting and restructuring to fit into western post-secondary institutions. As an academic discipline, part of its role is to educate emerging INDGST scholars. In the research that exists, most focus on the role of professors or scholars in the discipline rather than looking at the experiences of INDGST students. No study looks at the experiences of students in INDGST programs or analyzes INDGST in post-secondary institutions from a student perspective.

This research aims to help fill this gap in the literature by studying graduate student alumni experiences in INDGST programs. Since INDGST is a global discipline, this study focuses on the experiences of graduate students in two countries: Norway and Canada, which allows for global and comparative perspectives. Focusing on graduate student experiences in INDGST unlocks an important perspective on the significance of the discipline. Students have unique knowledge of the inner workings of INDGST programs and can provide an overview of the quality, breadth, and depth of their experiences. By discussing their expectations for their master's programs and elaborating on their experiences in relation to these expectations, students can showcase how well they believed INDGST programs lived up to the global standards of the discipline. This allows for an analysis of INDGST in post-secondary institutions today in relation to student experiences and the standards of the discipline. This study, therefore, seeks to explore what the expectations and experiences of alumni are in INDGST programs in Norway and Canada and what this tells us about the programs in these countries. By exploring the experiences of INDGST alumni, we can begin to understand what INDGST looks like as an educational unit and how well they met disciplinary and student expectations. This research

shows that there are inconsistencies in the quality, depth, and breadth of Indigenous Studies master's programs in Norway and Canada and a gap between student expectations and their actual experiences.

The global focus of this research grew out of a desire to understand the position of INDGST in both Norway and Canada. I am Sámi. I am Canadian. I am Norwegian. I grew up in Tromsø in Northern Norway to a Norwegian dad and a Sámi and Canadian mom. Throughout my childhood, we visited Canada several times, living there for an extended period of time on two separate occasions. I used to say that I grew up between continents. As I got older, I quickly realized that my academic interests were deeply connected to my Indigenous identity. Yet, I did not know where this would lead me. I decided to move to the United States to pursue an undergraduate degree, where I graduated in the spring of 2020 with a double major in Anthropology and Global Studies (with a concentration in development and social justice) and a minor in Native American and Indigenous Studies. It was through this minor that I first got to explore INDGST. I was able to take courses that allowed me to be fully immersed in my Indigeneity and that offered an education grounded in Indigenous perspectives and ways of knowing, something I had never been exposed to previously. I felt at home and knew that I wanted to continue in the same direction. I, therefore, decided to explore options for graduate school in INDGST.

When I started looking for graduate programs I looked to Norway as I was somewhat homesick but had learned from a friend familiar with the only INDGST program in Norway that the program was multi-disciplinary and as such did not provide a degree that was entirely grounded in Indigenous topics and ways of knowing. Although a multi-disciplinary degree has the potential to provide a well-rounded education in INDGST, I had received the impression that this specific program lacked an Indigenous focus in most of their program courses that were offered by different departments than the Center for Sámi Studies (SESAM) which hosts the program. For my own education, I therefore ended up in Canada instead, as I found several INDGST programs across the country that were hosted by INDGST departments, and that had a global approach to the discipline, which suited my interests. After starting my own program in Canada, I continued to ponder whether I had been too quick to judge the program in Norway. Did the multi-disciplinary structure of the program impact its ability to provide a well-rounded



INDGST education for its students? I therefore decided to study the experiences of alumni in INDGST programs to see what factors impacted students' experiences. My primary research question is: what were the experiences of alumni in INDGST programs in Norway and Canada? In order to answer this larger question, this research studies the experiences of alumni from four comparable universities and ask the following questions: (1) what are the standards and criteria of the discipline of Indigenous Studies?; (2) what are the similarities and differences between student experiences in both countries?; (3) how well were their expectations met based on their experiences?; (4) what factors impacted students' experiences?; and (5) what does this tell us about how well these INDGST programs meet the standards of the discipline at these institutions? I believe INDGST is a very important discipline as it has an important role in shaping the future of education and shaping the minds of emerging INDGST scholars. INDGST programs' ability to convey the foundational goals of the discipline to their students is therefore very important.

This thesis focuses on the experiences of INDGST alumni from four separate yet comparable INDGST programs in Norway and Canada. Since Norway only has one INDGST program located at the University of Tromsø (UiT) where a master's degree is the highest degree offering, I sought programs with similar degree offerings in Canada. I found three comparable programs at the University of Winnipeg (UW), the University of Lethbridge (UL), and the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC). My research therefore focuses on the experiences of alumni from these four universities to understand how well their expectations were met based on their experiences, and what this can tell us about INDGST programs at these institutions. Even though all four programs are comparable in relation to their degree offering, they are all structured in different ways, ranging from a multi-disciplinary structure to a cohort structure. Alumni experiences will therefore also inform whether the structure of their programs impacted their experiences.

Chapter 2 provides a review of existing literature on the emergence of INDGST. This review is organized into four sections. The first section focuses on the emergence of INDGST as a discipline and how it found its place in post-secondary institutions. The second section explores what INDGST is, describing what early scholars argued were important to the discipline, an overview of the goals and visions for the discipline and how the discipline has

been shaped since. The third section outlines Indigenous-run educational institutions to study how Indigenous Studies has been created by Indigenous peoples in an Indigenous context. The last section looks at student experiences, focusing on Indigenous student experiences in post-secondary education, as there is no literature at the time of this study that looks at the experiences of students in INDGST programs.

Chapter 3 describes the methodology of this research project. Here, I elaborate on the methods and methodologies used, explaining the research participant criteria, the data collection process and the limitations of this research. This chapter also describes the anti-colonial theoretical framework that informs my analysis.

Chapter 4 provides the research data. This chapter is divided into four sections. The first part of the chapter introduces the participants and outlines their explanation for why they chose to complete a degree in INDGST. In the next section, I outline alumni expectations, providing a chart that highlights the most common expectations among participants. Then I introduce all four programs, outlining the program descriptions, goals, faculty, courses, and students. The last section focuses on student experiences in relation to their expectations and outlines how well each program met students' expectations.

In the final chapter, I provide an analysis of the research findings, using an anti-colonial framework to inform my analysis as the framework focuses on interrogating the power configurations embedded in our society and the ability of minorities to challenge the hegemonic structures. Student experiences are analyzed to see how well each program met their expectations and if their experiences align with the goals of their programs and the discipline of INDGST. The final chapter also includes a comparative analysis of the programs in Norway and Canada, looking at the similarities and differences between alumni experiences in both countries. The chapter ends with a conclusion and a summary of the research findings.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This thesis seeks to explore the expectations and experiences of students who graduated from Indigenous Studies (INDGST) master's (MA) programs and the impacts that the structure of INDGST programs in a post-secondary institution may have on these experiences. In the current literature, there has been a lot written on the discipline of INDGST worldwide.<sup>1</sup> Much of this literature focuses on the emergence of the discipline on university and college campuses, key qualities and concepts significant in shaping the discipline, and the goals and future of INDGST. However, at the time of writing, no major studies have been located on student experiences in INDGST. Studies have been done on Indigenous student experiences in higher education but not on their experiences in the discipline of INDGST specifically. This review focuses on INDGST as a discipline to understand the key knowledges of INDGST and form an understanding of what the founding scholars envisioned for the discipline. This will give me a framework to explore whether the visions and goals of the discipline were experienced by the alumni.

The literature review will start with an overview of the emergence of INDGST as a discipline in post-secondary institutions both in a Canadian and Norwegian context. Then, I will outline the development of the discipline, focusing on early scholars' insight into what the discipline should look like and what scholars today argue are the key aspects of INDGST. This section will elaborate on the emergence of INDGST theories and methodologies, and the goals of the discipline as outlined by INDGST scholars. This will ground my evaluation of student experiences as I analyze whether the goals of INDGST are visible in student experiences. I will also look at Indigenous Education outside western academic institutions to elaborate on the educational opportunities that exist for students in relation to Indigenous topics. Even though I do not intend to focus on other educational opportunities in this thesis, they do deserve mention as they play an integral role in promoting Indigenous histories, knowledges, and cultures in educational institutions. Lastly, I will explore the literature on Indigenous student experiences in post-secondary institutions to give more insight into the challenges that Indigenous students face in western post-secondary institutions. This section focuses on Indigenous students in higher education rather than students in INDGST, as there is no significant research that has been conducted on this topic as of today. This section is important to my research as it looks at the

experiences of Indigenous students in post-secondary institutions and outlines the common grievances that students have with the western education system. Although these students are not in INDGST, they do outline a desire for Indigenous content, Indigenous role models, and Indigenous support systems in their education, all of which can be found in an INDGST program. This emphasized the need for INDGST in western post-secondary institutions.

### **2.1. Emergence of Indigenous Studies as a Discipline**

Several scholars have written on the emergence of INDGST as a discipline in post-secondary education and why the discipline was created. Shona Taner (1999) argues that programs in Native Studies at Canadian universities emerged in the late 1960s in response to First Nations' needs. Taner (1999, 290) highlights that Native Studies was first introduced in Canadian universities at a time when political unrest led to changes in the traditional education system as many believed the universities represented "ivory towers" for only educating the wealthy elite. Students and political activists protested to make higher education more accessible to people who had been under-represented in academia. This point is echoed by Winona Wheeler (2001) who highlights that Native American Studies emerged out of the 1960s civil rights movement and is, therefore, in many ways still considered the intellectual arm of a larger Indigenous movement. In addition to creating space for Indigenous scholars and research in academia, part of the need for the creation of an INDGST discipline is rooted in its supporting role for Indigenous students. Russell Thornton (1978) writes that one of the rationales behind creating the discipline was that INDGST would be helpful in attracting Indigenous students to higher education and helpful in providing cultural support for these students during the educational process. Wheeler (2001, 99) also writes that at its inception, faculty in INDGST were expected to create graduates who would be ready to meet the multifaceted needs for skilled professional workers in Indigenous governments and institutions. Thus, the emergence of INDGST was not only important for current scholars but was also important for the presence, support, and futures of Indigenous students in academia.

Thornton (1978) argues that American Indian Studies emerged differently than traditional disciplines, where the structural entity, meaning the faculty, courses, programs of study, degrees, and departments, came before it emerged as an intellectual entity with a distinct body of knowledge and interests. Based on critiques of the emerging American Indian Studies discipline,

Thornton (1978) outlines the qualities that critics argue should make up a discipline and evaluates INDGST against these standards. He outlines four main elements of a discipline. First, a distinct methodology, where he argues that even though the discipline might develop some in the future, it is not a criterion that they be unique as many disciplines share the same methodologies. Second, unique, abstract concepts, where his argument is similar to the previous, stating that few existing disciplines have unique abstract concepts. Third, legitimate area of concern, where he argues that the discipline is unique as it is endogenous and holistic. And fourth, intellectual traditions, where he highlights that American Indian Studies has largely focused on service to community and argues that this work also needs to be reproduced as research activities to exist as an area in academia (Thornton 1978). Thus, although INDGST emerged in higher education out of a political movement and to get access for Indigenous peoples in post-secondary institutions, INDGST still needed time to be shaped into a discipline with specific methodologies and theories.

In Sápmi, INDGST emerged from grassroots movements demanding recognition as an Indigenous people from the settler governments (Stordahl 2008; Junka-Aikio; Kuokkanen 2005; Olsen 2019; Thingnes 2020). Few people have written articles about the emergence of the discipline, but those who have, describe it as a shift in history. Vigdis Stordahl (2008) argues that discourses around Sámi higher education and research must be understood as an inherent part of academic practice dealing with Indigenous issues and must be interpreted through a framework that reflects the specific features of an Indigenous people and its field of knowledge. She outlines two discourses that emerged in Sámi studies early on, one around who could do Sámi research and one on how to do it. In introducing her chapter, Stordahl (2008) highlights that Sámi Studies emerged in Norway as the government decided to establish a university in the Northern region. A Sami Studies group was established at the Faculty of Social Sciences, however, many Sámi people at the time saw this as a step backwards or as an opposition to their intended goal which at the time was to create a separate Sámi-controlled institution. This is echoed by other scholars as well (Junka-Aikio 2019; Thingnes 2020). Further, many scholars who argue on different topics concerning Sámi Studies highlight that the introduction of the studies into higher education arose from a need to create a space in academia where Sámi people could control the research that was being conducted on them and where Sámi voices would be heard as more than just mere subjects of a research project (Gaski 2013; Junka-Aikio 2019; Keskitalo 1994;

Kuokkanen 2005; Olsen 2019; Thingnes 2020). This echoes the sentiments above, noting that in both North America and Sápmi, INDGST emerged in academia as a need for representation and space in higher education became increasingly important for Indigenous scholars, students and activists.

## **2.2. What is Indigenous Studies?**

INDGST emerged as a structural entity before it emerged as an intellectual entity, meaning that it emerged without set ideas of what INDGST actually encompassed (Thornton 1978). Despite this, what they did know was that the discipline would provide Indigenous perspectives on Indigenous history and life that were missing in universities and that it would reflect the priorities and needs of Indigenous communities (Cook-Lynn 1997). Over time, there have been many discussions on what INDGST should look like as a discipline. These discussions have focused on different topics, including, who can do Indigenous research, what methods, methodology and theories should be used and what makes INDGST theory and methodologies different, and the roles and responsibilities of INDGST to Indigenous communities.

Within INDGST, there have been several discussions on whether non-Indigenous people should do Indigenous research and teach in INDGST. Alf Isak Keskitalo (1994), an early Sámi scholar, outlined the involvement of academia and inter-ethnic relations. One of his key points was that research is a culture-bound phenomenon, which some scholars (Stordahl 2008; Thuen 1995) have analyzed to mean that only Sámi people can conduct research on Sámi issues. In opposition to Keskitalo (1994), most current scholars (Junka-Aikio 2019; Olsen 2016; Öhman 2017) argue that non-Sámi people are just as capable of doing Indigenous research as Sámi scholars are. This opposition, however, might be related to the time gap between these articles, as Keskitalo first presented these ideas at a conference in 1974 when Sámi scholars were trying to incorporate Sámi perspectives in higher education, whereas the latter scholars have written more recently, after Sámi perspectives have already had a place in higher education for some time. In line with the arguments from recent Sámi scholars, but from a Native American scholar's perspective, Elizabeth Cook-Lynn (1997) argues that Indigenous autonomy within the discipline is a crucial condition for its development. She highlights that being Indigenous matters in the development of new epistemologies (Cook-Lynn 1997, 22). In addition to arguments surrounding Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars, there are also more detailed debates within

this topic, specifically on the insider/outsider status of scholars. Robert Innes (2009) argues that it is important for INDGST to participate in the insider/outsider debate, and that it is possible to hold both positions at once, meaning that an Indigenous scholar can be both an insider and an outsider simultaneously. He highlights that this debate is complex and that there are several layers to what it means to be an insider or an outsider (Innes 2009).

Several scholars (Cook-Lynn 1997; Kuokkanen 2000; Kuokkanen 2005; Porsanger 2004; Thornton 1978; Thornton 1998) argue that INDGST needs to create new methodologies, frameworks and theories that are distinct to the discipline. Methodologies and theories have been developed by INDGST scholars across the world, however less in Sápmi than other places (Cram and Philips 2012; Holmes 2000; Kovach 2009; Smith 1999; Wilson 2008). In Canada, for instance, Herman Michell (2015) introduces key aspects of Bush Cree storytelling methodology and argues that sharing stories in education settings validates students' identities as social beings in relationship with others in the community. Melanie MacLean and Linda Wason-Ellam (2006) also discusses storytelling and argues that it is a way to indigenize the curriculum. Further, other scholars use concepts grounded in their native languages to create frameworks and methodologies, such as Bonita Beatty and Arnette Weber-Beeds (2013) who introduced the Cree term *mitho-pimatisiwin*, the good life. They use it as a framework to explore the challenges of helping elderly First Nations into urban areas and how current Aboriginal community practices can teach us how to help foster *mitho-pimatisiwin* for the elderly transitioning (Beatty and Weber-Beeds 2013). Rauna Kuokkanen (2000) is one of the few names that stand out in Sápmi that addresses Sámi methodologies. Kuokkanen (2000, 411) argues for the need of Indigenous paradigms to both decolonize Indigenous minds and re-center Indigenous values and cultural practices by placing Indigenous peoples in the center of discourse. She outlines some of the key characteristics and needs for an Indigenous paradigm. Further, in a different article, Kuokkanen (2005) offers a Sámi methodology that she bases in the language and is focused on the concepts of *láhi* and *attáldat*, two concepts of gift-giving. In addition to Kuokkanen (2005), a book recently published on Indigenous research methodologies in a Sámi context include some chapters on new methodologies. A chapter by Jelena Porsanger, Irja Seurujärvi-Kari and Lydia Nystad (2021) introduces the concept of *muittašit ovttas* 'shared remembering' and use the concept as a relational Indigenous method, framing it in the shape of *sølje*, Sámi traditional jewelry, to explain the framework.

Another key aim of INDGST, as argued by many scholars (Anderson and Cidro 2019; Cook-Lynn 1997; Castleden, Morgan and Lamb 2012; Schnarch 2004), is that research should bring positive change to Indigenous peoples and their communities, that research should be beneficial for the communities, and should be conducted for the benefit of Indigenous peoples rather than for the benefit of research itself. Innes (2010, 2) also supports this as he argues that the three goals of INDGST should be: to access, understand, and convey Native cultural perspectives; to conduct research that benefits Native people and/or communities; and to employ research methods and theories that will achieve these goals. These goals are widely agreed upon by scholars in the discipline (Castleden, Morgan and Lamb 2012; Cook-Lynn 1997; Gaski 2013; Junka-Aikio 2019; Kuokkanen 2005; Öhman 2017; Peacock 2013; Trimmer, Hoven and Keskitalo 2020; Virtanen, Olsen and Keskitalo 2021).

Tsiania Lomawaima, one of the founding members of the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association (NAISA), articulated some of the common themes she witnessed emerging from INDGST. These themes were:

A commitment to the fundamental concept of sovereignty; a privileging or centering of Native names, experiences, voices, and narratives; an inclusive orientation that favors multiple, complicating, diverse perspectives over a monolithic “one size or story fits all” approach; a commitment to the health, well-being and vigor of life in Indian country; responsiveness to the central issues and concerns of Native nations; a dedication to transform the institutional structures of the dominant society, such as schools, colleges, and universities – however frustratingly slow and incremental that process can be (Lomawaima 2007, 1).

These themes are similar to those mentioned above, emphasizing the importance of centering Indigenous voices and experiences, focusing on relevant current issues, and doing so in a way that respects the diverse backgrounds and cultures of INDGST scholars, drawing on appropriate theories and methodologies. Lomawaima (2007) also expressed the importance of INDGST as a discipline for change, something that can transform the institutional structures of the dominant society, which reflects the work of Thornton (1978) and other early scholars.

The initial discussions around the discipline and its key aspects are focused on the methods and methodologies of research and the purpose that research should have in the



discipline, specifically in relation to being community connected. However, little of the conversation is focused on the teaching of INDGST and what scholars envision students will get out of it. The main focus has been on shaping the discipline as a research field, rather than how the discipline operates as an educational program for students in INDGST.

### **2.3. Indigenous Educational Institutions**

In addition to having INDGST as a discipline in post-secondary institutions, there are also Indigenous run educational institutions. Although my focus for this thesis is on student experiences in the discipline of INDGST in western post-secondary institutions rather than on Indigenous run educational institutions, it is important to note that other educational options for studies related to Indigenous topics do exist in both Canada and Norway as they offer an alternative approach to Indigenous topics. INDGST is only one of the pathways in higher education that focuses on introducing Indigenous perspective to students. I am choosing to include this section on alternative Indigenous educational institutions as I think it is important that there are other spaces beyond the mainstream universities that offer Indigenous education, and that INDGST is not alone in teaching Indigenous perspectives and grounding their teachings in Indigenous knowledge. Further, Indigenous run educational institutions shows that having autonomy over your programs and courses allows for more flexibility to ground the education in Indigenous ways of knowing, whereas INDGST programs in western post-secondary institutions are more restricted by the requirements and standards of western ways of knowing. This shows that there is a need for INDGST programs to gain more autonomy over their programs in order to create a space that is further grounded in the goals of the discipline.

The Navajo people in Arizona were the first to create a tribally controlled college in the world in 1968 (Ambler 2005). Now there are many tribal colleges all over the world. Marjane Ambler (2005, 1) writes that the idea of education being a path out of poverty is not necessarily true in places where education is controlled by the colonizer. Thus, by creating their own institutions, Indigenous peoples are able to control their own education, focusing on topics and subjects that are more relevant to Indigenous communities. Cheryl Bull and Justin Guillory (2018, 96) also argue that the goal or core mission of tribal colleges are to rebuild Indigenous nations by focusing the education on tribal histories, languages, and cultures. They highlight that the importance of tribal colleges is that they are rooted in self-determining locations; they were

created by Indigenous peoples, for Indigenous peoples, both in the present and future (Bull and Guillory 2018, 96). Thus, these colleges are an alternative route for students that wish to get an education that is grounded in their own culture and background, rather than attending an institution that is structured by the same framework and worldview that previously sought to eradicate them. In a report by the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (1999), they highlight that tribal colleges were a response to the higher education needs of American Indians, especially for people who lived in geographically isolated areas, with no other means of accessing post-secondary education. As such, they have a similar emergence story as the discipline of INDGST, except more radical because they created entire institutions focused on educating Indigenous peoples, specifically in more rural areas, rather than creating a discipline that would fit within the structures of a western institution.

In Sápmi, the Sámi University College in Kautokeino, Norway, was the first fully independent Indigenous educational institution established. The College opened in 1989, giving Sámi students an opportunity of attending a higher education institution that was structured in their language, for the very first time (Thingnes 2020). Jorunn Thingnes (2020) states that the goal of the institution is to operate in the Sámi language, which makes the College one of the few institutions of higher education in the world that operates in an Indigenous language. Vuokko Hirvonen (2009, 52) also writes that the aim of the college has been to create teaching and research programs that are based on Sámi values and that consider Sámi linguistic, cultural, and educational needs. She states that the college is a leading Sámi institution in teaching and research, emphasizing that the College is also a tool by which sovereignty can be increased (Hirvonen 2009).

Tribal colleges and INDGST programs in universities have similar goals in wanting to create an educational space that draws on Indigenous knowledge and histories, and that is more familiar to Indigenous students than most western institutions are. However, tribal colleges have the power to structure their institutions more freely as they are created and operated by Indigenous peoples, whereas INDGST programs are more constricted by the structures of the western educational institution and can only navigate their discipline within these predetermined borders. This study does not focus on tribal colleges because very few have MA programs to compare to mainstream ones. Rather, this study focuses on the ways in which the discipline and

students navigate the complexities of being within an institution that historically has excluded their people and their perspectives from education, and how they challenge notions of education and of learning by including marginalized perspectives.

#### **2.4. Student Experiences**

There has been no research conducted on educational experiences of students in INDGST MA programs. Of the research available, scholars have focused on the role of the discipline to educate non-Indigenous students and the challenges professors face in doing so (Hollinsworth 2014; McGloin 2015; Page 2014). These studies do not include student experiences in INDGST specifically, rather they focus on the teaching experiences of professors (Hollinsworth 2014; Page 2014). There is also research on the experiences of Indigenous students in higher education in general, but nothing specified to INDGST. As there is no research available on the experiences of students in INDGST this section instead focus on the research that does exist to give an overview of what Indigenous students desire from western post-secondary institutions. I will start by outlining what scholars say on the topic of teaching INDGST and how scholars navigate this position in meeting non-Indigenous students. As INDGST programs are open to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, it is important to understand how having non-Indigenous students in their courses may impact the way professors approach their teachings. I will then explore the research available on Indigenous students' experiences in higher education overall, focusing on the challenges that students face, as well as the proven positive influences that exist in academia when Indigenous students are exposed to more Indigenous presence and perspectives in post-secondary institutions.

Susan Page (2014) looks at challenges in INDGST classrooms. She highlights that teachers face challenges in educating non-Indigenous students on Indigenous topics, as students often come with biases and preconceived notions of Indigenous peoples and cultures. Another research study by Colleen McGloin (2015) highlights the importance of INDGST as both a tool to teach anti-colonialism and as a forum for Indigenous knowledge production. She focuses on the responsibilities of non-Indigenous students in INDGST and argues that “hearing with a sentient knowledge of our – non-Indigenous people’s - position within the colonial relations of power that structure all societal institutions, can be a starting point for productive non-Indigenous/Indigenous alliances” (279). Thus, highlighting the important role the discipline can

have in educating and creating non-Indigenous allies. A study from Australia, however, argues that even though the notion of white supremacy can distinctly identify white privilege, it also promotes even greater resistance to learning in Aboriginal Studies classes from non-Indigenous students, as students argue that individual and structural racism and white privilege are “not their fault” (Hollinsworth 2014, 412). Thus, educating non-Indigenous students in the discipline have had conflicting results; on the one hand students want to learn and engage in their position as allies, and on the other are being hesitant to learn about Indigenous topics. This is generally because they struggle with their positionality as non-Indigenous peoples, grappling with the negative history of Indigenous people’s treatment and the role of non-Indigenous people in this history.

Most research focuses more on Indigenous students’ experiences generally in post-secondary education, rather than student experiences in INDGST. Kerry Bailey (2020) argues that lateral violence is a serious concern for Indigenous students and that the colonized university environment continues to exacerbate the problem. She discusses, however, the developing awareness among Indigenous students and their strategies that enable them to move beyond the lateral violence and find success, through creating safe/supportive spaces, peer support and self-awareness (Bailey 2020). Brian Brayboy et.al. (2012) also argues that the success of Indigenous students depends on institutional practices and tribal-national support. This is echoed by Patrick Walton et.al. (2020) who identify the key supports and obstacles related to Indigenous university student persistence. Through interviews and surveys on student experiences in higher education, their research show that having Indigenous role models on campus is vital to the retention and persistence of students. In connection to having Indigenous role models, students also expressed the high value of course readings, activities and assignments that were relevant to them, such as experiential application of theory to practice, small group discussions rather than larger lectures, and readings that are inclusive of Indigenous perspectives, authors and researchers (Walton et.al. 2020). Several other studies have also shown that culturally relevant curriculum is vital to students’ success (R.A. Malatest, 2010; R.A. Malatest 2002; Marroquín, 2020; Oxendine Taub and Cain 2020; Restoule et al., 2013; Walton et al, 2020). R.A. Malatest (2010, 10) writes that universities should develop course materials that are relevant and culturally sensitive to provide students with a sense of pride in their own culture. They also state that this type of curriculum

should be provided by an Indigenous teacher who can serve as a role model for students. It is clear in this literature that students seek out both Indigenous curriculums and faculty in order to feel more connected to their culture and more at ease in post-secondary institutions as it is more familiar and acknowledges their background in an academic setting.

In an anthology edited by Karen Trimmer, Debra Hoven and Pigga Keskitalo (2020) Indigenous postgraduate students contributed chapters on their experience in higher education. The editors and graduate students share experiences from Sápmi, Australia and Canada. This book shines light on the education system and how Indigenous students navigate it, also highlighting the importance of Indigenous faculty and support within the education system to succeed (Trimmer, Hoven and Keskitalo 2020). Kajsa Gjerpe (2020) a Sámi woman from Norway, writes that her post-secondary success is partly due to the support of supervisors and colleagues, highlighting the need for Indigenous role models. Hanna Helander (2020, 190), also a Sámi woman but from Finland, wrote about the challenges of going through her elementary education learning barely anything about her own people and their history, which lead her to seek out Sámi research topics for her master's and doctoral degrees. As an educator in the Finnish school system, she sought to teach students as much as possible about Sámi people to help address the lack of Sámi perspectives in education that she experienced as a student. Michael Adams (2020) who is Indigenous to Australia, also writes about the need for Indigenous perspectives in education and concludes that even though Indigenous perspectives and knowledges are being included in university curriculums and teaching practices to help academic professionals meet the needs of Indigenous students, the universities still do not understand the importance or the value of recruitment and retention of Indigenous students. Thus, Indigenous perspectives in coursework is an important step towards making Indigenous students feel more seen and finding schoolwork more relevant to their lived realities, but it is not sufficient alone to improve the higher education experience for Indigenous peoples. Attention also needs to be paid to the alternative challenges that Indigenous students face.

A study conducted by Indspire (2018), an Indigenous-led charity that works to advance the educational outcomes of Indigenous peoples found that lack of funding for education was a big issue for students and played a critical role in their educational success (Indspire 2018). Further, they noted that students struggled due to the lack of Indigenous topics in curriculums

and a lack of Indigenous visibility, representation, and support in universities (Indspire 2018). These sentiments echo those above who note that Indigenous representation and resources are important for Indigenous students' success in post-secondary institutions.

Several scholars (Herbert 2010; Kirkness and Branhardt 2001; Ottmann 2017; Wilson 2001) analyze existing studies on student experiences and agree on the importance of adapting post-secondary education to be more inclusive of Indigenous themes. Verna Kirkness and Ray Branhardt (2001) for instance, argue that the under-representation of Indigenous students in post-secondary institutions is due to the lack of understanding from the university. They argue that by including the four R's – respect, relevance, reciprocity and responsibility in schools, Indigenous students will have better chances of succeeding as their realities will be better reflected and understood.

Most of the research on the experiences of Indigenous students focuses on how to better adapt academia for Indigenous students by making culturally relevant curriculums and providing support systems that students can rely on. It shows that Indigenous students want more Indigenous content as it is more relevant to them and their lived experiences. However, little of this research directly reflects on the experiences of INDGST students. This creates a gap in the literature as majority of research around the discipline has either focused on the role of INDGST as a research field, or the experiences of Indigenous students in post-secondary institutions generally. My research will add to this body of literature by researching the experiences of graduate students in INDGST, combining these two subjects of research.

## **2.5. Summary**

Most of the existing research focuses on the formation of the discipline, the focus of the discipline, and the ways in which it can be used to further research on topics pertaining to Indigenous peoples. This will inform my analysis and provide a framework for the goals of INDGST. This also provides a point of comparison, to analyze how well student experiences aligns with the goals of INDGST as outlined by early INDGST scholars. There is also some research on Indigenous voices in academia, which clearly outlines that Indigenous students value Indigenous perspectives and visibility in their education as it improves their educational experience. This shows the need for INDGST programs in post-secondary education. However,

none of the literature on INDGST as a discipline focuses on teaching and its responsibility and goals in relation to educating emerging INDGST scholars. The literature also does not speak to what student experiences in INDGST were and whether or not student expectations were met. My research aims to add to the current literature by exploring students' experiences in INDGST in a comparative context in Norway and Canada. The goal of my research is to understand how INDGST MA programs align with student expectations and how the goals, curriculum, and structure might impact the correlation between expectations and reality as well as elaborate on the potential differences between Canada and Norway. I will assess how well student experiences meet the goals of the discipline.

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<sup>1</sup> The discipline of Indigenous Studies has since its emergence, and still today operated under many names. In addition to Indigenous Studies, it has been named: First Nation Studies (Thornton 1978), Native Studies (Taner 1999), Native American Studies or American Indian Studies (Wheeler 2001) in North America; Maori Studies (Cram and Philips 2012) in New Zealand; Aboriginal Studies (Hollinsworth 2014) in Australia; Hawaiian Studies (Komeiji et.al. 2019) in Hawaii; and Sámi Studies (Gaski 2013; Stordahl 2008) in Sápmi.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The literature review demonstrated that no attention has been paid to student experiences in Indigenous Studies (INDGST) in the current literature. This study seeks to help fill this gap by determining if master's (MA) programs met student expectations and what the overall experiences of students were in their program. In order to answer this question my research takes a multimethod approach including: (1) A comparative study of the goals and curriculum of four comparative master's programs, three in Canada and one in Norway; (2) semi-structured interviews and conversational method interviews with alumni from those four master's programs, and; (3) analyzes of the research findings through an anti-colonial framework.

Given the lack of studies on student experiences in INDGST MA programs I needed to speak directly with alumni of INDGST MA programs. Since Norway only offers one INDGST program at the University of Tromsø (UiT), where the highest degree offering is a MA degree, I found three comparable programs in Canada; University of Winnipeg (UW), the University of Lethbridge (UL) and the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC) as all three offer terminal MA programs. In addition to the lived experiences of INDGST alumni I was also interested in a comparative study between Norway and Canada. A comparative study provides insight into how individual programs interpret and implement the goals of the discipline.

By choosing to do research with INDGST alumni, and including their perspectives in my research, I was able to get a deeper connection to the topic and help give a voice to students that predominantly only get to use their voice as a researcher in their own work. The methodology in my research is shaped by my positionality and understanding of INDGST as described above. To collect data my methodology uses a qualitative research design. Through semi-structured interviews and conversational method, drawing on aspects of Margaret Kovach's (2009) methodological framework, I interviewed alumni from four different, yet comparable programs to map their experiences in INDGST. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the interviews were conducted over zoom, which hindered the relational aspect that is so important in Indigenous research. However, as a fellow graduate student, it was easier to build rapport with participants, despite the online nature of the research. Drawing also on the aspects discussed in the literature



review around research being conducted for the sake of the community (Anderson and Cidro 2019; Cook-Lynn 1997; Castleden, Morgan and Lamb 2012; Innes 2010; Schnarch 2004), it was important for me to help give a voice to students because they have the potential to bring about change to the programs in the future, so that new students may benefit from the honesty and reflectiveness of the people who generously agreed to participate in my research. Even though the research does not directly benefit the alumni I interviewed, I hope it can benefit future students, if INDGST programs understand student experiences better and adjust their programs to better meet student expectations and needs.

I chose to use anti-colonial theory to navigate the themes that emerged after my conversations with INDGST alumni because anti-colonial theory interrogates the hegemonic structures of our society, similar to what INDGST does. The theory argues that power and discourse is not entirely possessed by the colonizer, rather the colonized has the power to challenge oppressive structures of power and privilege, which is reflected in INDGST programs and alumni experiences and will be explained more in depth further on. INDGST is in a challenging position as it simultaneously seeks to challenge western notions of knowledge, while still being located in a western institution, where it has to follow certain guidelines and rules that are set out by universities. Anti-colonial theory, therefore, guides my analysis as it focuses on the concepts of power and privilege, as well as the issues emerging from colonial or colonized relations, something that is increasingly visible in INDGST, both in the discipline itself, and through the knowledge that it instills in students on the history of settler-colonialism and on the resilience and resistance of Indigenous peoples in navigating a system that was not created for them.

### **3.1. Methods**

#### **3.1.1. Master's Programs**

Previous to doing my interviews I reviewed online platforms of post-secondary institutions across Canada and Norway that offered INDGST MA programs to get an overview of what they offer and how they are structured at various institutions. As Norway only has one INDGST program at UiT, I decided to focus on universities in Canada that were comparable to

this program, namely, UL, UW, and UNBC. I reviewed each program's website and using an excel spreadsheet I mapped their programs, charting; the breadth and depth of the curriculum, number, and type of degree offerings (BA, BA Hons, MA), number of faculty, number of Indigenous faculty, number of graduates, among other categories (see table 3 in Chapter 4). Charting these categories provided me with background information on what the programs look like and how they present themselves to future students, what their goals are as an educational entity, and what information is available for students to base their expectations on. I also gained a basis for understanding how INDGST programs, departments and faculties are structured and what their course offerings are. Using the institutions' websites as a foundation for gathering statistical information on the various INDGST programs, such as their program description, goals, course offerings and more, assisted me in better understanding student experiences as it deepened my understanding of the programs themselves and provided me with the same background knowledge that was available to students in these programs before they entered the programs, which helped me contextualize some of their expectations.

### 3.1.2. Alumni Interviews

I conducted interviews with master student alumni from four post-secondary institutions in Canada and Norway, where a MA program is their terminal degree. I interviewed a total of 11 alumni, three each from UiT, UNBC and UW, and two alumni from UL. Although my intended goal was to interview three alumni from each university, it was difficult to locate participants. I interviewed alumni as I wanted my participants to be able to reflect on their overall experience as MA students in their INDGST programs, rather than interviewing students currently in the programs who would only be able to comment on part of the graduate school experience. I interviewed alumni who had graduated within the past ten years (2012-2022) to give insight into the current structures and offerings, and the recent structural changes. I also strove for gender equity within my participants and was able to achieve that in two of the four alumni groups.

I applied the snowballing method to reach additional participants and found others through internet investigation. None of the universities I was focusing on listed their graduates on their websites, so I reached out to the department heads at each university to locate participants. They all graciously agreed to share my call for participants with their alumni,

however only at UiT did this yield any results. The program coordinator for the INDGST MA program at UiT shared my call for participants with alumni who had graduated in 2018 or later. She explained that they re-structured the program in 2018 and it would therefore be more fruitful for my research to interview participants from the restructured program for consistency. I had several alumni reach out to me as a result and scheduled interviews with three of them. With UNBC I had one participant reach out to me using this method, but none from the remaining universities. As such, I found that I had to be creative in reaching the remaining participants. I found some using the snowballing method from my initial participants. Further, I found that although none of the departmental websites listed their alumni, most of the university libraries had a copy of theses that were completed from different departments. I was therefore able to find the names of alumni through the universities' thesis archives. Using google search to find contact information of alumni I was able to reach out to the remaining participants who graciously accepted the invitation to participate in my research. In agreeing to participate, all participants were offered a choice to wave confidentiality, which a few participants chose to do. The majority, however, decided to remain confidential because the small number of graduates from their programs would make it easy to identify them.

Since some participants chose to remain anonymous while others waved their confidentiality, for consistency, all participants are referred to by first names. The anonymous participants are identified with pseudonyms. The latter were given the option to choose their own pseudonyms, four participants chose their own while I assigned random first names to the rest. To protect the anonymity of the participants, certain identifying factors are not included in the demographic profile and analyzes as they may be identified because of the low number of graduates that enter these programs each year. To protect the identity of international students, their nationality is not identified. The exact years the participants attended is also not disclosed. Participants' undergraduate degrees are not disclosed either, with exceptions of participants whose undergraduate degree influenced them to pursue a higher degree education in INDGST as this is relevant to the analysis of the data.

Due to COVID-19 all my interviews were conducted virtually through Zoom. I followed the Oral History Association (OHA) template and guidelines for conducting virtual interviews. The use of the video-conference platform increased engagement with the interviewee as this

made it possible to see facial cues and body language (OHA 2020). OHA (2020) highlights that a video platform allows for added context, such as non-verbal communication and insight into overall interview engagement, which I found true during my interviews, as it made it easier to connect with participants despite the online nature of our conversations. Conducting my interviews over Zoom was beneficial because my participants lived in different areas across Canada and Northern Europe. Doing virtual interviews made it feasible to conduct the interviews as soon as I found participants and was able to schedule them at times that worked best for all without having to travel to each location.

In their qualitative study on the use of Zoom as a tool for conducting qualitative research, Lisa Gray et.al. (2020, 1298) conclude that video conferencing software helps researchers keep research cost relatively low and enables them to gain access to more diverse participant populations, as I was able to do. However, they also highlight that in an online platform, researcher and participants do not occupy the same space which can result in missed opportunities to respond to body language and emotional cues. They also highlight that online interviews may cause interviewees to be in spaces where they have distractions or lack privacy, something I experienced with a couple of participants who at times were distracted by their surroundings. Yet, for the purpose of my research, doing interviews in an online format was more practical, as I was able to conduct the interviews without travel and at convenient times depending on when I found participants. Considering all my participants had completed graduate school recently, they all also had a good understanding and familiarity with technology and using various online platforms, something that made the online interviews feasible. However, I do regret missing out on the face-to-face relational aspect that is so important in Indigenous research. Although it is possible to create connections through online platforms, in-person research and conversations tend to allow for even deeper connection with participants and to create a different sense of relationality than is possible through an online platform. In-person interviews would have been more fulsome as they would have allowed me more time with participants and made it easier to register and reflect on their body language. In-person interviews may also have created more space for follow-up questions as our ongoing relationship would be more relational than online interviews allowed.

The interviews I conducted lasted between 50-60 minutes. I used a multi methods approach consisting of semi-structured interviews and conversational method. Through semi-structured interviews I had set questions that gave me more direct answers, with a possibility to broaden the conversation, while conversational method allowed research participants to diverge from the questions and talk about their experience freely without following a specific prompt. Kovach (2010, 46) explains that conversational method is dialogical, relational, and reflective. It allows for the researcher to enter in conversation with the participant, to be an active listener and a participant in their own research as the process is less extractive and one-sided. The interviews therefore started with some prompted questions about the participant's experience in the program including their initial expectations, their choices around the school and program and their overall experience in the program. This allowed me to understand how student experiences reflected the themes that were found in the literature and if they align with program descriptions and goals. From these guiding topics, participants lead the conversation in directions they felt were important to share. They were able to speak freely and express their thoughts and reflections around their experience in INDGST, specifically focusing on the experiences that had stuck with them the most after completing their degree. This became a conversation where we could share thoughts about the experiences of being a graduate student in INDGST. As the interviews were scheduled online through Zoom, part of the relational aspect that Kovach (2010, 46) states as important in the conversational method was not possible in the same way as she outlines it. Kovach (2010) highlights the importance of building rapport with participants and actively engage with the research group or community in preparation for the research. Due to the online nature of my interviews, I was not able to create the same relationality before the interviews. However, using conversational method allowed me to connect more with participants due to the reciprocal nature of this method, despite connecting through an online space.

Here, the insider-outsider debate becomes relevant as my status as both insider and outsider impacted how I connected with participants. As argued by Robert Innes (2009), Indigenous scholars can be both an insider and an outsider simultaneously. Since my research focuses on experiences of graduate students in INDGST, I am an insider as a graduate student in the discipline. This was beneficial as I believe participants felt more comfortable speaking freely about their experiences as our meetings became more of a conversation between peers than

between participant and researcher. I am also an insider as I am Indigenous, which several of my participants were as well. Being Indigenous means that we have a common understanding of the importance that INDGST can have for our communities. It also means that we have to acknowledge the harmfulness that research has caused to Indigenous peoples in the past and understand what role we, as Indigenous peoples can play in academia in relation to that history. However, I am also an outsider in the sense that I do not belong to the same university communities as my participants did. Nor do I belong to the same Indigenous communities as any of my participants. I am also an outsider as my identity is rooted in two places. Although I am a Canadian citizen, I do not have the same lived experiences as other Canadians do, as I did not grow up in this country. I did however grow up in Norway, yet all my participants from UiT were international students, so although I could connect with them in relation to their experience in Tromsø where the university is located, which is also my hometown, we had different experiences as they were viewing their experiences there through an outsider lens whereas I viewed it from the perspective of my identity and background. I am also an outsider as a researcher. In Innes' (2009) article on the insider-outsider debate, he highlights that the lack of distance between a researcher and participants can enhance research and that it does not challenge the validity of the research. I think my role as an insider in various ways, depending on participants, was very beneficial as it allowed for a deeper connection with participants, and an immediate trust and familiarity in experiences and in topics of conversation.

### 3.1.3. Challenges of Methods

There were a few challenges I had to address in the course of my research. I faced some challenges locating participants. As such, only a limited number of people were contacted to participate in my research. At UL, I located more than three graduates, however, only two were interested in participating. I had also originally intended to interview two women and one man from each program, but as my pool of participants was limited, I only managed to reach the gender equity at two of the four universities, UiT and UNBC. From UW, I interviewed three women and from UL I interviewed two men. I did not limit my participants to only Indigenous alumni in order to reflect the actual demographics of the program. Of eleven participants, six were Indigenous and five non-Indigenous. Five participants were international students, meaning they were students from out of country, five participants were local, meaning they were from the

area where their university was located, and one participant was regional, meaning from the country, but not from the same area as the university.

### **3.2. Theoretical Framework: Anti-Colonial Theory**

According to Sefa Dei and Alireza Asgharzadeh (2001) anti-colonial theory is a framework that interrogates the power configurations embedded in ideas, cultures and histories of knowledge production, validation, and use. It also looks at our understanding of indigeneity, pursuit of agency, resistance, and subjective politics. As such, it allows for the effective theorizing of issues emerging from colonial and colonized relations by using Indigenous knowledge as an important standpoint (Dei and Asgharzadeh 2001). Anti-colonial theory is, therefore, a beneficial framework for my research as I analyze the experiences of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students alike in INDGST, looking at how they navigate the complexities of being in an INDGST program that should be focused on topics, frameworks and ideas that are rooted in Indigenous knowledges, while simultaneously be in a western institution that historically has excluded perspectives that don't align with the hegemonic, western standpoint on research. INDGST is inherently anti-colonial because it challenges the colonial structures and oppressions of society. Interviewing alumni is important for this approach as INDGST alumni have gained skills and knowledges that are rooted in Indigenous ways of knowing and can reflect on the anti-colonial nature of the program through their educational experiences.

Dei and Asgharzadeh (2001) further highlight that the anti-colonial discursive framework argues that power and discourse are not entirely possessed by the colonizer. Rather “the colonized also has the power to question, challenge and subsequently subvert the oppressive structures of power and privilege” (2001, 300). This is what we see with INDGST, where the discipline has managed to establish its base within the university setting, challenging the hegemonic structure that it finds itself within by using notions of Indigenous knowledge, worldviews, and experiences to counter the mainstream ideas and understandings of both research and history. The discipline itself therefore becomes an interesting point of analysis in relation to its position within a western educational institution, as it is able to question the power structures that exist in the larger society, as well as educate students to continue to do the same. As an educational resource, INDGST has the power to teach students how to question the power-

relations they witness around them, as well as to challenge the dominant structure through their research and through their future work as they learn to navigate a system, that for many, especially Indigenous students, was not created for them. Thus, the idea that the colonized is able to challenge oppressive structures of power and privilege is increasingly visible in INDGST. The discipline explores knowledge that is grounded in Indigenous knowledge production and continues to challenge the hegemonic view on history, educating emerging scholars on the inequalities that exist within our society, while simultaneously giving them the tools to navigate these systems and continue to challenge the power relations in our societies.

Choosing to use anti-colonial theory challenges the concept of post-colonial, as ‘post’ implies that we have moved beyond the structures of inequality. For instance, the term ‘post-colonialism’ suggests that we have moved beyond the structures of colonialism. However, as Patrick Wolfe (2006) explains, settler colonization is a “structure rather than an event” (390). It is not something that we have moved passed as settler colonization still plays a huge role in the way our society is structured, and impacts people greatly, some people more negatively than others. This is why INDGST is so important, as it brings to light these inequalities that still exist as a result of living in a settler colonial space and proves that there is a need to include alternative perspectives in education in order to understand the complexities of our society.

Anti-colonial theory focuses on the power-relations between the colonizer and the colonized, and the way in which minorities navigate this relationship and work within the hegemonic system to challenge the colonial framework. The theory therefore helps me understand alumni experiences in INDGST as it allows for theorizing to happen from a minority perspective. Students challenge the hegemonic structures that exist both by being in a discipline that is inherently different from the western structure it finds itself within, and by reflecting on their own experiences within the discipline. Their experiences point out the ways in which INDGST can transform even further to continue to challenge the western structured institution of post-secondary education by further grounding their educational programs in Indigenous knowledges, cultures, and worldviews. Anti-colonial theory therefore informs the analysis by allowing me to theorize within this dichotomy between western and Indigenous education and draw on reflections from alumni who find themselves in the middle of this dichotomy to do so. It also informs my analysis as INDGST itself is an expression of anti-colonialism. This



understanding of the discipline allows me to analyze student experiences in INDGST programs and explain the significance of these experiences in relation to how well they align with the goals of the discipline.

As INDGST works to challenge the western structure of education, so do the students in the discipline. Through online interviews and conversations, alumni from four INDGST programs across Canada and Norway were able to share their experiences in INDGST, including their motivations for entering the program and their initial expectations. As we move on to the research findings, the thoughts and reflections that arose as a result of our conversations will be discussed, specifically focusing on the program expectations of alumni, an overview of each program and alumni experiences in relation to their expectations.

## **CHAPTER 4: GRADUATE STUDENT EXPERIENCES IN INDIGENOUS STUDIES**

Indigenous Studies (INDGST) graduate programs are not all the same, but they share common elements. They generally provide a description of their program goals, the curriculum and the experience their program offers. Alumni entered INDGST graduate programs for a range of reasons and had specific expectations. The interviews conducted with alumni from INDGST master's (MA) programs across Canada and Norway provide clear insight into their experiences and whether their programs met their expectations. Participants were asked questions about the structure of their program, their initial expectations, and their overall experiences in the program (see Appendix A, interview questions). Since the methods included semi-structured interviews and conversational method, alumni were able to discuss their experiences freely, only answering the guiding questions if necessary to move the conversation along. Thus, not all of them shared experiences on the same topics, and not all of them gave specific answers to every question in Appendix A. The expectations and experiences vary among alumni, even among those who attended the same university. The following alumni tell us much about how well the graduate programs met their own program goals from their perspectives. Chapter 4 provides the data, Chapter 5 that follows provides analyzes of this data.

This chapter begins with introducing the alumni participants and providing their assessment of the student demographics in their programs during the time they attended to identify some of the similarities and differences between all four programs. This chapter then describes student expectations of their programs, followed by an outline of the structures and contents of each MA program. Lastly, the chapter presents alumni reflections of their experiences and whether or not their program met their expectations. As my main goal is to present student perspectives on INDGST, I predominantly focus on student voices in this chapter by drawing on the interviews so they can tell the story of what INDGST looks like from their perspectives.

### **4.1. Alumni Introduction and Student Demographics**

#### 4.1.1. Participant Introduction

The interview participants include three alumni from the University of Tromsø (UiT), three from the University of Winnipeg (UW) and the University of Northern BC (UNBC) and two alumni from the University of Lethbridge (UL). I interviewed two women and one man from UiT. Leonora, Millie and Yada were all international students and non-Indigenous. From UNBC I interviewed two women and one man. Yahlnaaw, Natalie and Corbin were Indigenous students from Canada. From the UW, I interviewed three women. MJ was an Indigenous international student; Sam was a non-Indigenous international student and Louise was a non-Indigenous Canadian student. And finally, from UL I interviewed two men. Both Leon and Ira were Indigenous from Canada.

Since all the alumni I talked to from UiT were international students, they had similar explanations for why they chose to study at the university. The main reason was because Norway offers free tuition for domestic and international students alike. According to a study done by Jannecke Wiers-Jenssen (2019), there has been an increasing number of international students in Norway in the past decades due to the offer of free higher education, education in a safe country, and an increase in career opportunities after graduation. All three students stated that the allure of free education was strong, especially considering the high costs of higher education in many other countries for international students. Yada and Leonora said they had previous experience with the UiT and partly learned about Sámi people during their time there, along with some of the Indigenous history, culture, and politics in Norway. These piqued their interests enough to apply to the INDGST program at UiT. For Millie, the choice to attend UiT was more random. Millie knew that she wanted to get a degree in INDGST but found that most of the programs in her home country had too much of a local focus compared to the more global perspective of INDGST that she was interested in, and she was especially interested in Indigenous peoples in the arctic. She was also interested in the Sámi/Norway relationship as it was claimed that Norway had a better relationship with Sámi people than many other settler states do with Indigenous peoples, and she wanted to see if there were any experiences, lessons or policies that could be beneficial if applied to other Indigenous-state relationships that she could bring back to her own home country. As UiT is the only university in Norway that offers an INDGST MA program she was drawn to the university and found that the programs hit all the boxes for her; the education was free, she could travel, and it offered the arctic focus.

At UW, participants' reasons for starting the program were more varied. MJ was a mature student who chose to attend the MA in Indigenous Governance at UW for several reasons. For one, it was convenient as she was already living in the area. But she was also interested in the university as it was downtown, which provided a melting pot with a lot of Indigenous presence, something she believed would make it easier to connect with Indigenous communities in the area. MJ was Indigenous herself and grew up in a family where education was highly valued, along with learning about international Indigenous peoples. She chose to study Indigenous Governance as she believed the training would be beneficial to her Indigenous community back home. Louise had a previous contact at UW and a partnership with an Indigenous organization in the area, so she chose the university and the program as it gave her an avenue to focus her thesis on topics related to her job. Sam was more hesitant about the masters in Indigenous Governance as she wanted to do research on urban planning or urban community development with a focus on Indigenous organizations, but there were no programs that focused in that area. She was not sure if Indigenous Governance was the right avenue for her, however, after conversations with faculty in the department she found them to be very flexible and helpful, and they brainstormed ideas of how the program could accommodate her interests.

Similar to MJ at UW, Corbin at UNBC decided to do an MA at the university out of convenience. He had originally intended to apply to graduate programs at other universities as well but missed the application deadlines as they were earlier than the UNBC deadline. He completed his undergraduate in a different field at UNBC but had taken some courses from the First Nation Studies (FNS) department during his undergraduate degree and had some familiarity with the department and professors. As he was familiar with the university and the faculty, he said that "it felt like a, a warm family sort of thing [...] it was comfortable," to be at the university and in the department as he knew what to expect. Yahlnaaw also did her undergraduate degree, in FNS at UNBC and wanted to continue her graduate studies at a university where she would still be close to her family and friends. She had started her undergraduate degree in psychology but moved to FNS as she realized that the only way to truly address some of the issues that she had witnessed in her community was to use a non-settler discipline, meaning a discipline that is not rooted in western and colonial ways of thinking, as the issues she had witnessed and wanted to focus on had a clear correlation to settler colonialism.

The third participant from UNBC, Natalie, did not do her undergraduate degree at the UNBC. She completed a minor in INDGST at a different institution and was drawn to this INDGST MA to create deeper connections with her identity, family and community. She was used to the academic setting but wanted an avenue within academia to connect with community, where her research would allow her to do relational work. Natalie stated that “for me, Indigenous Studies, First Nations Studies, it’s all about self-determination [...] Indigenous peoples doing the research that they want to do and doing it in the way that they want to do it.” Although her research could have fit in a different discipline, she chose INDGST because of the discipline’s commitment to centering Indigenous voices within scholarship and research. While fulfilling her minor requirements in INDGST during her undergraduate degree, she found the department to be a supportive space, where she made friends and had good professors. She was concerned about attending UNBC as she had heard rumors that it had a reputation for being a toxic environment with an unsupportive learning environment. However, she chose it anyway because she wanted to study at a university that would allow her to move closer to her family and community. She also liked the cohort-based structure, which will be explained later in this chapter, as it made it possible for her to work while going to school.

Participants from UL were both mature students who sought further education close to their communities. Leon did his undergraduate degree in FNS in BC, where, although he was surrounded by Indigenous peoples and communities, learning about topics relevant to Indigenous peoples on Vancouver Island, he still felt like an outsider looking in, as he was so far away from his own community. He therefore decided on UL for his master's degree to be closer to his community and his family and continue his education in INDGST in a place more familiar to him. Ira also chose UL to be close to his community. Since he completed his MA over five years, he was able to work full time next to his studies. He had taken Native American Studies (NAS) in his undergraduate degree and knew that it would be flexible in research topics and methods as well, allowing him to choose research topics of interest to him and his community that he felt comfortable exploring.

**Table 1: Alumni Profiles**

ALUMNI	UNIVERISTY	UNDERGRADUATE DEGREE	GENDER	INDIGENOUS	NON-INDIGENOUS	INTERNATIONAL	DOMESTIC
YADA	UIT	Different discipline	M		X	X	
LEONORA	UIT	Different discipline	F		X	X	
MILLIE	UIT	Minor in Indigenous Studies	F		X	X	
YAHLNAAW	UNBC	Indigenous Studies	F	X			X
NATALIE	UNBC	Minor in Indigenous Studies	F	X			X
CORBIN	UNBC	Different discipline	M	X			X
MJ	UW	Different discipline	F	X		X	
SAM	UW	Different discipline	F		X	X	
LOUISE	UW	Different discipline	F		X		X
LEON	UL	Indigenous Studies	M	X			X
IRA	UL	Indigenous Studies	M	X			X

4.1.2. Student Demographic in Alumni’s Cohorts

Since most INDGST departments and programs are still small units in post-secondary institutions compared to disciplines that have been around longer, most graduate cohorts are also small. As such, MA students are influenced by their peers through sharing of ideas, reflections, and opinions in class discussions and beyond. Their cohort also helps shape their academic community and support system in their programs. It is therefore important to study the student demographics in the alumni’s cohorts to understand how these factors may have impacted their experience in the discipline. The student demographics are based on the following factors: race, sex, domestic, international and age. Although the student demographics are described here, an analysis of their significance to the current study will be addressed in the next chapter.

According to Leonora, the majority of students in INDGST at UiT were women. All three alumni stated that the majority of the students were international. Leonora and Millie’s cohorts entirely consisted of international students. Leonora suggested that the high rates of international students were probably a result of Norway offering free tuition for post-secondary education for domestic and international students alike. She also said that Norway does a lot of advertising internationally to recruit students to their universities, highlighting the free tuition and the many programs that are taught in English which further attracts international students to Norway. There were very few Indigenous students in the program overall. Neither Millie nor Yada had any Indigenous students in their cohort. Yada stated that the program didn’t attract many Indigenous peoples, especially not Sámi students. Millie added that because there was a lack of Indigenous students, the program created very settler, or non-Indigenous centered space.

Similar to the UiT, the INDGST program at the UW also hosts a majority of female students. Both MJ and Sam stated that there were some international students in their cohort, however, the majority of students were domestic students. Along with having more domestic students, UW also differs from the program in Norway in that most of the students that enter the program are Indigenous students. This is similar to UNBC where majority of students were also Indigenous students. Here, Corbin highlighted that most students were from the surrounding areas, which shows that Indigenous students tend to choose educational institutions close to their communities. All three participants from the UNBC also stated that there were no international students in their cohort, which is different from both the UW and the UiT. However, similar to the other two universities, the majority of students in the program were women. Natalie, from the UNBC, also made an interesting reflection on the age demographic of her cohort. She stated that there was a great age split, with some young students and some mature students. Young students are students who have proceeded through the education system without a long break between their degrees. Mature students are students who have taken time away from academia and re-enter the space with more experience and insight from their endeavors outside school. Although age demographics were not explicitly discussed with participants from other universities, all three universities in Canada have a similar combination of young and mature students. This is visible in the age groups of the participants in this research.

From UL, both participants I interviewed were mature Indigenous male students. Since this program is structured differently from the others, it was not possible to study their cohorts the same way. Both participants stated that they were the only student doing an MA in INDGST when they were there. They explained that they had a cohort, however it was a cohort that consisted of students from other departments (sociology, history and psychology) who were also getting their MA degree. Leon, who graduated earlier than Ira, also stated that he was the only identifiable Indigenous student in his cohort, and one of the few at the entire university at the time he was in the program. Ira, who graduated some years later, stated that there were some Indigenous students in his cohort, however he was not sure if they were doing their MA in INDGST or were students from different departments.

## **4.2. Alumni Expectations**

To understand alumni experiences in INDGST, I found it important to consider their expectations before entering the program. Table 2 below charts students' expectations at each university, organized in four categories that highlight their collective most common expectations:

**Table 2: Alumni Expectations**

ALUMNI	INSTITUTION	INDIGENOUS FOCUS	INDIGENOUS FACULTY	COMMUNITY ORIENTED	OTHER
YADA	UIT	Indigenous cultures and ways of life			
LEONORA	UIT	Indigenous research methodologies and the Sámi context			
MILLIE	UIT	Sámi and Indigenous oriented. Indigenous ideologies and perspectives		Broader focus on Indigenous communities beyond Indigenous-state relations. Northern based solutions to arctic challenges	
YAHLNAAW	UNBC	Indigenous research, topics, and peoples	Indigenous scholars	Community oriented	
NATALIE	UNBC	Diverse learning experience that would be grounded in Indigenous topics, issues, and challenges.	Indigenous scholars		Be a challenging experience with a higher academic level than she had previously been exposed to
CORBIN	UNBC	An "intoxicating learning experience" that would continue his academic exposure to new and unique topics.			Research boundaries to be pushed further than they had during his undergraduate degree.
MJ	UW			A community oriented program that created connections between students and local Indigenous communities	
LOUISE	UW			Allow her to continue developing the work relationship she had with a local Indigenous organization.	Did not have any big expectations, but had questions around her identity as a settler in the discipline.
SAM	UW				Centering her coursework around her research interests
LEON	UL				Had a general idea of thesis focus before entering the program but had few expectations of how the program would assist him in working on his project.
IRA	UL	Rich in Indigenous content and connected to topics of research that he was interested in. Also expected to be exposed to Indigenous perspectives			Gaining more critical thinking skills



#### 4.2.1 Alumni Expectations of Indigenous Focus in Indigenous Studies Program Curriculums

Table 2 demonstrates that the majority of the alumni expressed that one of their biggest and main expectations of their INDGST program was to be exposed to an Indigenous focus. This means that alumni expected their INDGST programs to include Indigenous content in the coursework, that the MA would be centered around Indigenous topics, that they would be exposed to Indigenous perspectives and worldviews in their coursework and program, and that their program would reflect Indigenous ways of knowing. Millie, from UiT shared that she was interested in learning more about Sámi people and expected the INDGST program in Norway to be very Sámi and Indigenous focused. Her previous undergraduate experience with INDGST had predominately consisted of looking at the negative aspects of settler-Indigenous relations. For her MA program she was more interested in learning about Indigenous ideologies and to learn how Indigenous peoples in the arctic were making environmental changes and solutions that could be applied other places as well. Entering the program, she also expected to gain deeper insight in Indigenous topics and perspectives, and to dive into Indigenous history, especially in Sápmi. From the same university, Yada stated that he had some previous knowledge about Indigenous concepts and ideas, such as decolonization and traditional Indigenous knowledge, but expected to delve further into studies of Indigenous culture and life. His expectations were very broad, he did not share any specific interests beyond learning more about Indigenous culture and life in general. Leonora, also from UiT, expected to learn more about Indigenous peoples. She specifically expected to learn about Indigenous research methodologies and the Sámi context.

Similarly, Yahlnaaw at UNBC expected to be exposed to Indigenous perspectives, as she had some previous knowledge about the discipline from her undergraduate degree. Yahlnaaw started her undergraduate degree in psychology but realized that the discipline was not right for her as she wanted to address mental health issues in Indigenous communities. In discussing her choice to move over to FNS she said, “it didn’t feel right to be using a colonial tool to address the effects of colonialism.” Thus, she switched to INDGST and was pleased with her undergraduate experience. In her FNS BA program she found good support systems and found a good mentor who helped her through her undergraduate degree and encouraged her to switch from psychology to FNS. She had very high expectations of her graduate school program and the discipline to provide her with tools to help Indigenous communities.

Natalie also had a background in INDGST and knew that the discipline offered diverse learning experiences, where they would learn from Indigenous academics about Indigenous issues and challenges, using a relational approach. She was therefore expecting something similar at the FNS program at UNBC. Corbin also expected to be exposed to Indigenous perspectives as he had previous experience with UNBC. He had a general idea of what he wanted his thesis to focus on and knew that he could organize his coursework around his interests. Because he had a familiarity with the program, he only had a few additional expectations. Corbin explained his undergraduate experience to be intoxicating and he wanted the academic exposure to continue, from what he had experienced during his undergraduate degree. Ira, at UL also specifically stated that he expected the program to be rich and connected to topics of research that he was interested in. He assumed that an INDGST MA program would include Indigenous perspectives and an Indigenous focus in the coursework.

Although not all students explicitly stated that they expected an Indigenous focus to be present in their coursework, many students conveyed this by expressing their dissatisfaction with their coursework and the lack of Indigenous focus that they were exposed to in their MA programs. This will be further expanded upon below. Alumni also expected their MA program to enable them to center their coursework around topics of interest, or that the program would support and assist them with their work on their chosen thesis topic. As these were INDGST MA programs and alumni, all participants focused their thesis on various topics centering Indigenous peoples, cultures, histories and more.

#### 4.2.2 Indigenous Faculty

I included Indigenous faculty as another expectation alumni had of their INDGST MA programs, even though very few numbers of participants specifically stated this as an expectation. However, they expressed a dissatisfaction with some non-Indigenous professors which suggests it was an expectation. Alumni specifically stated the lack of Indigenous focus and perspectives in coursework was related to non-Indigenous professors teaching the course. Only Yahlnaaw and Natalie at UNBC specifically stated that they expected the faculty of FNS to predominantly consist of Indigenous professors. Natalie stated that she expected to be learning about Indigenous topics from Indigenous peoples as an INDGST program should focus on educating students through an Indigenous perspective.

#### 4.2.3. Community Oriented Programs

Another very common expectation that several participants voiced was community experiences. They wanted their programs to offer aspects of community connections, a way for students to meet and connect with local Indigenous communities. Participants from UiT, UW and UNBC all expressed that they were expecting that their MA programs would provide the opportunity to connect with the local Indigenous communities. Millie, from UiT stated that she expected to be meeting more Sámi people and to be learning from them both in the university setting and outside of the university. She expected the program to either have connections with local Sámi communities or that the program would give them the opportunity to talk to Sámi people about some of the topics they were learning about in school, to further discuss the experiences and learn about the reflections of Sámi people. Millie also expressed that she was interested in learning about how the Nordic countries, along with Indigenous peoples, implement change and solutions in the arctic, to gain ideas of how this could potentially be implemented other places in the world. She hoped the program would be more community oriented than what she experienced during her undergraduate degree where she took a minor in INDGST. She also expected the program to focus on Sámi topics that were significant to Sámi culture and people.

From UW, MJ stated that she expected the program to be community oriented. Being an international student, she felt homesick and wanted to experience cultural events and ceremonies in Winnipeg that would remind her of home, to ease some of those unpleasant feelings. She therefore hoped and assumed that the program would enable her to be engaged in local communities and have the opportunity to participate in cultural events. Louise from the same university also had a community-oriented expectation. She had a pre-existing relationship with an Indigenous organization in Winnipeg that she intended to do her research with, so she expected the program to enable her research and support this relationship as she worked towards her MA thesis. Echoing these sentiments of community connection, Yahlnaaw from UNBC expressed that she expected the program to be more community oriented, and that the department of FNS at the university would have an existing relationship with First Nations peoples in the area.

#### 4.2.4. Additional Expectations

In addition to the categories above, a few participants had specific expectations that were unique from the others. Sam, from UW stated that her biggest expectation was that she would be able to center her coursework around her research interests, as she initially had been unsure if Indigenous Governance was the right avenue for her. Leon from UL stated that he did not have any specific expectations of the program other than the opportunity to focus his research on his specific research interests.

Natalie and Corbin from UNBC, and Ira from UL expected intellectual challenges in their MA programs. Natalie expected to be challenged in her learning experience, specifically that the coursework would be challenging and at a high academic level. Corbin expected boundaries to be pushed in his graduate school experience and that the high academic exposure he had experienced during his undergraduate degree would continue during his MA degree. Ira expected to gain more critical thinking skills during his coursework. All three participants had expectations of being intellectually challenged and to learn new academic skills.

### **4.3. Indigenous Studies Master's Programs**

Students looking for MA programs browse university websites to see what the programs offer to make informed choices about which program they want to take. By looking at the university websites, students get an idea of what to expect when they enter a program and base their expectations of the programs on this information. Before providing an analysis of the alumni's experiences, the following review of the four INDGST programs and what they offered will be provided. Since these public representations of the MA programs are what informed the choices of the alumni it is important context for the analysis of how well each program met their expectations. It is important to note, however, that the data below collected from university webpages is based on the data available at the time of this study. The information available to incoming students at the time my participants applied may be different from what I was able to access, for example, changes in available courses and faculty turnovers may have occurred.

**Table 3: Program Descriptions**

	University of Tromsø, Norway Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education, in cooperation with the Center for Sámi Studies.	University of Northern British Columbia, Canada Faculty of Indigenous Studies, Social Sciences and Humanities Programs	University of Lethbridge, Canada Faculty of Arts and Science	University of Winnipeg, Canada Faculty of Arts
Program Structure	<p>Multi-disciplinary program</p> <p>Master of Philosophy in Indigenous Studies (2 year program)</p> <p>The master's programme in Indigenous Studies offers a multidisciplinary approach to the study of Indigenous issues, intending to equip the students with academic and practical skills, critical thinking and knowledge to fill an important role in an increasingly globalized world. The programme aims to recruit both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students from all parts of the world. A mixed group of students will strengthen the comparative aspects of the programme and will contribute to international network building.</p>	<p>Department of First Nations Studies</p> <p>Undergrad (minor, 4 year) and Master of Arts in Indigenous Studies (3 years)</p> <p>The UNBC MA program in First Nations Studies is a unique, multidisciplinary area of study. It engages history, art, music, law, philosophy, and language, among other areas, to address decolonization, revitalization, and resurgence through local, national, and global Indigenous perspectives. This program will open doors in a variety of careers, including law, business and entrepreneurship, community development, cultural studies and museums, and education, to name just a few.</p> <p>UNBC does not list specific goals for their MA program, but throughout their department website there are several visible goals. The department states that their programs will prepare students for careers in community service, law and culture. They also state that students will learn from award-winning faculty and Elders recognized for groundbreaking and respectful research, engagement and curriculum design.</p>	<p>Department of Indigenous Studies, individually created MA program for each student.</p> <p>Undergrad (Minor, 4 year) and Master of Arts in Indigenous Studies</p> <p>Indigenous Studies is a critical, multidisciplinary area of study. It engages history, art, music, law, philosophy, and language, among other areas, to address decolonization, revitalization, and resurgence through local, national, and global Indigenous perspectives. This program will open doors in a variety of careers, including law, business and entrepreneurship, community development, cultural studies and museums, and education, to name just a few.</p>	<p>Department of Indigenous Studies</p> <p>Undergrad (3 year, 4 year, honors) and Master of Arts in Indigenous Governance</p> <p>The Master of Arts (MA) in Indigenous Governance is an interdisciplinary program that provides students with theoretical and practical skills to examine and address Indigenous governance in the political, social, economic, and cultural contexts; including issues related to land claims, social justice, health, education, environment, food security, education, language, and culture. While focusing on Indigenous nations whose homeland is located in North and South America, the international context holds a significant place in the analysis and discussion of shared issues related to Indigenous governance.</p>
Program Focus	<p>Students are expected to have achieved the following learning outcomes:</p> <p>Advanced knowledge of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Indigenous issues, including similarities and differences based on the different cultural contexts; the concepts of Indigenous peoples as used in areas of research and politics on global and local levels; and the scholarly and political debate on these issues; different scholarly theories and methods in the field of Indigenous Studies, including the challenges posed by Indigenous methodology; the history of the global Indigenous movement and the current situation of the Sámi and other Indigenous peoples; the existing state of knowledge related to Indigenous research ethics; and the responsibility of the</li> </ul> <p>Capability to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>critically analyse the situation of Indigenous peoples based on the interdisciplinary approach to Indigenous Studies;</li> <li>deal with challenges that culturally diverse societies and their institutions are facing; analyse existing and relevant theories from the humanities and social sciences, and use these theories independently; find and use relevant research methods to produce the data for an independently designed project; carry out an independent, limited research project under supervision; compare the situation of Indigenous peoples in different historical and contemporary contexts; Make oral presentations at seminars and other official settings.</li> </ul> <p>Ability to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>analyse relevant academic problems in the field of academic Indigenous research; analyse professional and research ethical challenges related to Indigenous issues; apply knowledge and skills on Indigenous issues in order to carry out advanced assignments and projects in similar areas; use the terminology of Indigenous studies and communicate extensively on their academic work both to specialists and to the general public; combine different scholarly approaches to produce new knowledge; contribute to new thinking and innovation processes regarding Indigenous peoples and minorities.</li> </ul>	<p>Scholarship, and research of the priorities and aspirations of Indigenous peoples in Canada and throughout the world. MA graduates are encouraged to engage and non-Indigenous students base the opportunity to learn and think about Indigenous knowledges in creative, transformative and critical ways. The department offers courses that engender a rigorous and respectful understanding of Indigenous peoples' languages, knowledges, cultures, histories, politics, arts, intellectual traditions, and research methodologies.</p>	<p>Indigenous Peoples, Globalization and Development; Biocultural Diversity Conservation; Building Scientific and Religious Knowledge; Indigenous Education in an Era of Transition; Indigenous Governance; Community Frameworks; Gender and Indigenous Rights; and Importance: Human Rights and Indigenous Rights in Latin America; Seminar in Selected Topics; Directed Readings.</p>	<p>The UW MA in Indigenous Governance objectives are to: provide studies in matters of good governance grounded in Indigenous thought and values; provide an in-depth understanding of the human, environmental and financial issues and processes relevant to Indigenous self-determination; promote leadership and skills in areas of policy development and professional practice relevant to Indigenous governance and professional organizations who include Indigenous peoples and create an intellectual space of excellence to engage Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars.</p>
Faculty	<p>1 (with Sámi heritage)</p> <p>6</p>	<p>9 (including seasonal and adjunct professors)</p> <p>6</p> <p>4</p>	<p>5 (including seasonal instructors)</p> <p>6</p> <p>2</p>	<p>6</p> <p>2</p>
Students	<p>1</p> <p>9</p> <p>6</p> <p>6</p> <p>Not listed.</p> <p>The program website provides a link to the university's Theses Archive where alumni can be found through their completed work.</p> <p>From INDC: Introduction to Indigenous Studies; Methodology and Methods in Indigenous Studies; Master's Thesis in Indigenous Studies</p> <p>From other departments: Indigenous Revitalization: Language, Literature and Arts (HIS); History of Indigenous Peoples: Indigenous people ethnic minorities and the multicultural society in the north (HIS); Indigenous Culture, Resource Management and Human Rights (Soc.); Indigenous Peoples - Politics, Institutions and Tools (Soc.); The rights of Indigenous Peoples (FOU).</p>	<p>Not listed.</p> <p>Not listed.</p> <p>Foundations of First Nations Studies: Theory and Practice; The Independent study or attending 4000-level Practice of Research; The State of the Discipline: Special Topics; Research Seminar; Thesis or MA Project.</p>	<p>Indigenous Self-Determination; Pathways to Indigenous Wisdom; Indigenous Research Methodologies and Ethics; Master's Thesis or work practicum. Directed Learning; Seminar in Selected Topics; Required Study in Indigenous Language</p>	<p>Not listed.</p> <p>Indigenous Self-Determination; Pathways to Indigenous Wisdom; Indigenous Research Methodologies and Ethics; Master's Thesis or work practicum. Directed Learning; Seminar in Selected Topics; Required Study in Indigenous Language</p>
Courses and Activities	<p>N/A</p> <p>N/A</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>Indigenous Peoples, Globalization and Development; Biocultural Diversity Conservation; Building Scientific and Religious Knowledge; Indigenous Education in an Era of Transition; Indigenous Governance; Community Frameworks; Gender and Indigenous Rights; and Importance: Human Rights and Indigenous Rights in Latin America; Seminar in Selected Topics; Directed Readings.</p>
Program options	<p>Thesis</p> <p>Fieldtrip to a Sámi community</p>	<p>Thesis and project</p> <p>In the program description the program proposes courses taught in First Nations communities, internships and community based research projects</p>	<p>Thesis</p> <p>Nothing listed on their website as part of the program</p>	<p>Thesis, course (with comprehensive exam) and practicum</p> <p>Their website lists community and organizational engagement that students can take part in.</p>

*Sources:* Data from INDGST program websites for UiT (n.d.); The University of Winnipeg (n.d.); University of Lethbridge (n.d.); UNBC (n.d.).

#### 4.3.1. Program Structure

Table 3 shows some of the main items listed on program websites, outlining the key-components of each program. The first three categories are important as they set the precedence for the program and introduce prospective students to the position of the program at each university. As we can see, all three Canadian programs are hosted in an INDGST department, offering both undergraduate and graduate degrees. Departments are divisions of the university that are devoted to a specific academic discipline with a collection of faculty who specialize in that discipline. A program on the other hand is a collection of courses that lead to a degree or certificate which include a combination of courses hosted by the program itself and courses from other disciplines. Some programs rely more heavily on other disciplines than other programs do. UNBC, UW and UL all have distinct departments dedicated to teaching INDGST which allows for an MA program that is grounded in the discipline and is based in a department that only focuses on Indigenous topics. The program in Norway, however, is hosted in cooperation between several faculties but is administered by the Center for Sámi Studies (SESAM). It does not have its own department and relies on several departments from the larger university to fulfill program requirements as it is a multi-disciplinary program. The program is therefore not fully centered around Indigenous topics as it is based in faculties that have specialties beyond INDGST. UiT is also the only university that does not offer any undergraduate degrees or courses in INDGST, so educational opportunities in the field are scarce at an undergraduate level.

#### 4.3.2. Program Focus

In table 3, program focus describes the descriptions and goals of each INDGST program as these two categories outline the focus of each program. Program descriptions and goals give students an initial idea of what to expect in the program. These are important as they outline the intent of the program, meaning the description and goals, and what skills students can expect to graduate with. In the program descriptions, all four programs focus on providing students with academic skills, as well as to increase their knowledge on Indigenous topics. UiT emphasizes the diversity of students in its program description and presents its program as one with a global

focus. UW also expresses the importance of the international context while emphasizing that the program's main focus will be on Indigenous Nations whose homelands are in North and South America. UL's program description on the other hand describes what INDGST is and emphasizes career paths for graduates in the discipline.

UNBC is interesting as they recently changed their program structure. It used to be structured as a traditional MA program where students take courses the first two semesters and conduct research and write their thesis the following terms. In 2014, UNBC shifted to the unique cohort-system their MA program has today, where courses are taught in-person Fridays and weekends once a month with online meetings in-between. It is therefore easier for students with outside responsibilities or full-time jobs to attend this program as they only need to be present in person once a month during a weekend and can conduct the remainder of their work from home. UNBC's program description also emphasizes community connection through courses taught in First Nations communities, internships, and community-based projects.

While all four universities neatly outline their program description, only UiT and UW have clear goals for their graduate students. UiT's goals for their students is an extensive list that focuses on advancing students' knowledge in INDGST, learning new research skills and learning how to apply the knowledge and skills that they will gain during the program in their professional lives. UW also focus on advancing student knowledge in topics of Indigenous governance, provide leadership skills relevant to the program topic and create an intellectual space of excellence to engage scholars in important conversations. Neither UNBC nor UL present distinct goals on their websites specifically, but their department websites outline some goals for their programs in general. UNBC writes that their programs will prepare students for careers in community service, law and culture. They also state that students will learn from award-winning faculty and Elders recognized for groundbreaking and respectful research, engagement and curriculum design, which paints a picture of a fruitful learning environment. As for UL, their departmental goals state that they offer an international comparative approach and are dedicated to community-engaged scholarship, and meeting the research needs and priorities of Indigenous peoples in Canada and throughout the world. Within the UL department, Indigenous and non-Indigenous students have the opportunity to learn and think about Indigenous knowledges in creative, transformative and critical ways. The department offers

courses that engender a rigorous and respectful understanding of Indigenous peoples' languages, knowledges, cultures, histories, politics, arts, intellectual traditions, and research methodologies.

#### 4.3.3. Faculty

As some alumni had expectations of their program predominantly consisting of Indigenous faculty, the ratio is important to evaluate. This ratio may have changed since participants attended the programs as scholars sometimes leave and are replaced with new hires. Since the program in Norway is a multi-disciplinary program, they only have two faculty positions directly connected to their INDGST program, where one professor is Sámi, and the other professor has Sámi heritage but identifies as non-Indigenous. There is no information on professors teaching courses hosted by other departments. UNBC has a total of fifteen professors, nine Indigenous, including a professor emerita and adjunct faculty and six non-Indigenous, including adjunct faculty. UL has five Indigenous professors including sessional instructors, and four non-Indigenous professors and UW has a majority of Indigenous professors, with six Indigenous professors including contract faculty and two non-Indigenous professors. At UNBC and UL there is a majority of women, which reflects the gender ratio we saw in student cohorts as well. At UiT there is one woman and one man and at UW there is a majority of men which challenges the most common gender balance among Indigenous scholars. This will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

#### 4.3.4. Students

Only the UNBC and UW list their current graduate students on their program websites. UNBC list their current students by name, with accompanying photo, supervisor name and a description of themselves and their research. UW, however, only list the total number of graduate students without providing any information such as name, supervisor, research topic etc. They only identify the number of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students currently in the program. UiT and UL do not provide any information about their current graduate students. None of the universities provide a complete list of students who have graduated from their programs over the years. Only UiT provides a direct link to their Theses Archive where you can locate alumni through their completed works. It is possible to locate alumni from UNBC, UL, and UW in the same way, however, the theses archives are not as readily accessible at these three universities. Their online libraries hold the completed theses of most alumni, but this information



is not accessible through the program webpage. As discussed in the methodology, this lack of acknowledgement of alumni made it challenging to find research participants for this study.

#### 4.3.5. Courses and Activities

One of the main expectations participants had in entering the program was having an Indigenous focus in their coursework, meaning that they expected their programs to include Indigenous content in the coursework, that they would be exposed to Indigenous perspectives and worldviews in their coursework and program, and that their program would reflect Indigenous ways of knowing. Table 3 shows that UiT, UNBC and UW have required coursework centered around Indigenous topics. UiT and UNBC have required courses that all students take, whereas UW have some required courses in addition to a list of electives. Students at UW are required to take 21 credit hours of required INDGST courses and 3 credit hours of elective INDGST courses. At UiT, all course titles have an Indigenous focus, but only the core courses, *Introduction to Indigenous Studies*, *Methodology and Methods in Indigenous Studies*, and *Master's Thesis in Indigenous Studies* are hosted by SESAM. The remaining coursework is hosted by different departments. At UNBC all required courses are hosted by the FNS department. In opposition to the three universities aforementioned, UL is unique here as they do not have a program with a specific set of courses. Rather, each MA student enters on an individual basis and creates their own program with a supervisor. Based on the information on their website, their courses therefore consist of independent studies under the guidance of an instructor, where a student does an independent study consisting of either library research, laboratory research projects or field study. Or students attend fourth year-level undergraduate courses and complete additional work to get credit for it at an MA level. The four INDGST programs also offer different program streams. All participants for this research did a thesis-based MA, but UNBC also offers a project-based MA and UW offers both course-based and practicum based INDGST MA programs in addition to the thesis-based option. Community oriented programs was also an important expectation for some alumni. All programs except for UL outline community engagement activities that are either integrated into the program or listed as an option for students to take part in outside the program. This provides students with the opportunity to connect with community members and engage with local Indigenous peoples.

#### **4.4. Alumni Experiences Based on Their Expectations**

As described earlier, the alumni had a range of expectations to their MA programs. Table 2 outlines these expectations as Indigenous focus, Indigenous faculty, Community Oriented and Other. Alumni were asked if their expectations were met, and they shared their experiences. Although expectations varied among the alumni, even among those who attended the same university, they still share some similarities among them.

#### 4.4.1. Alumni Experiences of Indigenous Focus in Indigenous Studies Program Curriculums

Several participants expected to be exposed to Indigenous perspectives in their programs. At UiT only one participant stated that these expectations were met, whereas the other two participants stated that these expectations were not met. Similarly, at UNBC, one student found that he was satisfied, whereas the other two expressed that their expectations were not met. At UL participants also did not find that their expectations were met. Participants from UW did not specifically state that they expected to be exposed to Indigenous perspectives in their courses. While discussing their experiences, however, they all expressed positive experiences with the Indigenous focus in their coursework.

Yada, from UiT expressed that he was very pleased with the program and that it went beyond his expectations. He stated that the program at UiT delved deeper than only looking at the culture of Indigenous peoples, by also looking at Indigenous rights, politics, and philosophies. Yada did however note that although it reflected Indigenous worldviews, it was limited to Indigenous perspectives from Sápmi and North America. Perspectives from other continents such as Africa were missing. He stated that this focus on Sápmi and North America could be a reflection of faculty research areas. As the scholars teaching these courses were from the West, their class topics also focused on this area. Yada did share that one Western professor included some perspectives from Africa in his coursework, as this was where he had done his research. However, according to Yada, as the professor was not an African professor, the content was still taught from a western perspective.

Leonora from the same university was not as satisfied. She stated that Indigenous perspectives were rarely introduced and visible in courses hosted by other departments. Since the program is a multi-disciplinary program, many of their courses were taught by non-Indigenous professors from other disciplines, who did not incorporate Indigenous worldviews as much, an

issue her and her peers often brought up to the program coordinators as they felt they were lacking a crucial part of their education. She argued that taking courses from other departments was less beneficial as they often ended up in courses with students from different educational backgrounds who had very different expectations of the course. Leonora did not give a specific example but did discuss the challenge of being in courses with students from different disciplines as they had not taken the *Introduction to Indigenous Studies* course or *Methodology and Methods in Indigenous Studies*, and thus had very different approaches to the courses. Since they had different educational backgrounds, they also had different issues that they were struggling with in the courses as they were approaching the topic from a different perspective. Leonora did not elaborate on their issues, but she stated that “it was not so much understanding between those groups of students, because we’re kind of a completely different world almost.” This created frustrations and irritation. According to Leonora it was difficult for the INDGST students to use what they were learning from their INDGST courses in the rest of their non-INDGST courses. For instance, it was difficult for the students to position themselves in relation to the research they were doing in non-INDGST courses, because both their peers in the course and the professor were unfamiliar with positionality statements and the importance of acknowledging one’s relationship to the research. The INDGST students had learned this in their Indigenous methodology course but struggled to apply it in other non-INDGST courses. Leonora did state that they had one really good experience with a Sámi professor from a different department, however, she did not elaborate on what made this course a good experience other than having a Sámi professor. She stated that this course gave her cohort a point of comparison for what an ideal course could look like, in opposition to what most of their courses from other departments ended up being. It is important to note here however, that Leonora had not realized previous to starting the program that most of the courses would be hosted by other departments as she had not read the program description carefully.

Millie, the last participants from UiT had a more mixed experience. Some of her courses provided an Indigenous focus, while others did not. From what she could remember, about half of their courses were hosted by SESAM and the rest were hosted by various other departments, which coincides with the information in table 3. The SESAM courses they took included an introduction course, a methods and methodologies course, and their thesis course, which provided a curriculum with an Indigenous focus, according to Millie. She also discussed a

politics course that contained Indigenous worldviews that was taught by a professor from SESAM, but she was not sure if it was hosted by them or by the Politics department. She did however state that she was disappointed that the Indigenous focused courses did not dive deeper into topics of Sámi history, which she had expected. From the courses she took from other departments, the anthropology course provided Indigenous perspectives, and they were able to discuss point of views that were relevant on a community level both locally and globally. The anthropology professor provided readings that gave students a global perspective on settler-Indigenous relationships. Millie further stated that this anthropology course was more reflective and gave students a chance to contemplate specific case studies personally, which gave them a better overall understanding and a deeper connection with the topic.

Regarding the other courses from other disciplines, Millie stated that they predominantly reflected non-Indigenous views and did not provide an Indigenous perspective. There was one course in particular where her and her cohort had a more negative experience. This course did not include any Indigenous or Sámi perspectives in the lectures even though the course topic was on the history of Indigenous peoples. She did not say whether the required readings were written by Indigenous scholars or not but stated that the course was taught from a western and colonial perspective as the professor was non-Indigenous. Millie had expected the course to include more Indigenous perspectives as its focus was on Indigenous peoples. Rather than focusing on specific examples of how the course had disappointed students, Millie emphasized that she did not blame the professor even though she did feel disappointed by this course, as it had been included in the curriculum for INDGST students. Despite her dissatisfaction, Millie emphasized that to her understanding, the program coordinators could not always account for the ways in which courses were taught in other departments. She was in student government and therefore had some ideas of how the program course list was chosen, even though she emphasized that her understanding was based on minimal information. She stated that program coordinators had no authority over what was taught in the courses offered by other departments. According to Millie, INDGST professors and SESAM could only provide resources and ideas of what they thought the courses from other departments should look like and focus on. They had no control of how the courses were taught or who taught them. To her understanding, the university had the final say, so the program coordinators did not have full autonomy over the courses in the INDGST program.

UNBC was more complicated because of the recent changes to the program structure and the alumni were critical of the change. Corbin, who graduated several years ago, before the program adapted the cohort-based structure it has today was fairly pleased with his courses. He stated that all the courses he took from the FNS department reflected Indigenous perspectives and worldviews. In particular, he took two interactive courses (that will be discussed below) with community connections. He also stated that he was very pleased with the methodology course that was hosted by the department, as it gave him a guiding structure for his own work when he started his thesis. The methodology course also impressed the importance of Indigenous research, teaching him how to do, what he called “good research,” by using Indigenous methodologies and frameworks. The other two participants from UNBC graduated more recently and had been in the program after it shifted its structure to the cohort-based program it has today. Both Yahlnaaw and Natalie commented on the lack of Indigenous perspectives in some of their required courses, which they believed was because of the professors, and will be elaborated on below.

From UL, all their courses were taken with graduate students from other programs and with faculty from other departments, and therefore did not include any Indigenous worldviews. Although Ira stated that he was satisfied with the program overall, he was surprised by the lack of Indigenous perspectives in the coursework. Leon also said that the only course where he was able to focus on anything Indigenous related was in the methodology course, where students did presentations on a methodology. He decided to present on an Indigenous methodology, something that was well received by the professor, who later, Leon said, included more of this in his courses. However, at the time, the only reason this viewpoint was included in his coursework was because he himself chose to include it. He stated that most of the courses he did take were aimed at the general population, which he specified as being Caucasian students, as they were the majority of students at the university at the time he was in graduate school. In the methodology course, Leon was told that he needed to be objective in his research, something that he explained doesn't align with Indigenous worldviews. McLeod (2000, 29) argues that objectivity is one of the largest obstacles to Indigenous peoples articulating their stories and paradigms as the human experience becomes distorted and disjointed. This was articulated by Leon as he stated that he felt like his cultural upbringing was in contrast with him being a researcher, as the methodologies he was learning did not include the relational approach he

wanted to take in his research. Thus, the students at UL were disappointed by the lack of Indigenous perspectives in their education, even though they were satisfied with their overall experience.

Both Ira and Leon stated that they only got an Indigenous focus in their program through their own individual thesis work. They both allowed me to share their research topics which connected to their own communities and histories. Leon did archival work, comparing the White Paper and the Red Paper looking at the discourse of treaties and self-sufficiency in these two documents, while Ira worked with his community to study how industries who are interested in resource developments close to Indigenous territory can consult with Indigenous communities in an effective and efficient way that respects the Indigenous ties to the land. They both stated that they had support from their supervisors to complete this work and were able to thoroughly discuss their Indigenous topics as their supervisors were from the INDGST department. Ira also emphasized that his work was important to his community and that he found it crucial for them to approve of the thesis. Approval from the university itself was not important to him, as long as his community accepted his work.

None of the students at UW stated that Indigenous focused coursework was one of their expectations. However, despite being in the program at different times, all three participants from UW stated that all the courses they took included Indigenous perspectives and worldviews. MJ expressed a specific satisfaction with a course that focused on Indigenous wisdoms and ways of knowing, as it created a foundation for understanding the discipline and what knowledges it is rooted in, as well giving space to have reflective conversations about where people were coming from and how each student could approach INDGST based on their positionality. The course helped both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students understand the core goals of INDGST and to approach the topics with understanding, patience, empathy, and sensitivity. It grounded them and helped them reflect on the ways in which they could approach research in the future.

MJ, Louise, and Sam at UW also highlighted that most of their courses predominantly focused on local Indigenous communities, as the program description described. Louise stated that the focus on Indigenous peoples around Manitoba, was due to the fact that most of the professors were from local and other communities in Manitoba. She stated that professors would

focus on their own background and where they came from. Since INDGST is a relational field, Indigenous scholars and professors often draw on their own experiences, knowledges, and relationships, both in their research and in their teaching (Harris 2002). The three UW alumni stated that while most of the courses focused on local Indigenous knowledges, histories, and teachings, professors also drew on international scholars and concepts, by including readings in the curriculum that were written by Indigenous peoples from other places. MJ also said that she was able to take an Indigenous self-governance or self-determination course that drew on international scholars' work that allowed her to take part in the global discourse. As this is part of the program description as well, alumni were satisfied with the international focus. Sam further stated that in many of the courses hosted by the INDGST department, professors often brought in guest lecturers who provided new, and alternative perspectives that were beneficial for their overall understanding of various topics in their coursework. None of the participants stated who these guest lectures were, but it is clear that they made a good impression. Sam emphasized that talking to people from outside of academia was beneficial as it gave a different viewpoint and provided them with a wider understanding of how various issues they studied in class affect people outside of academia and in the communities. She further said that bringing in guest lecturers from outside academia into the classroom helped bridge the gap between academia and the real world. It gave them insight into the role research can have and its impact on people and communities. It also supports one of the goals of INDGST to strive towards doing work that helps people in the community, rather than only doing research for the sake of research (Anderson and Cidro 2019; Cook-Lynn 1997; Castleden, Morgan and Lamb 2012; Innes 2010; Schnarch 2004).

Alumni had different reflections about whether or not their expectations were met regarding the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives. Although alumni did not state that they expected all courses to include Indigenous content, the majority expressed dissatisfaction with the courses that failed to do so. At UiT, Yada stated that his expectations were met, whereas Leonora and Millie stated that they were not met. Yada had very broad expectations, wanting to learn more about Indigenous culture and life, which, according to him, was covered in his courses. Both Leonora and Millie on the other hand had distinct expectations which may account for their dissatisfaction with the Indigenous focus in their coursework. Their dissatisfaction may also be reflected in the fact that neither had read the program description carefully before they

applied. Leonora stated that she had expected the program to be hosted in one space and did not realize that most of the courses would be hosted by different departments. Millie also admitted that she had not looked at the outline of the program critically before she started the program and therefore did not have a well-rounded idea of what the program would look like before she began. At UNBC, students also had different experiences. Corbin, who graduated before the change to the cohort structure was pleased with the coursework and found that all his courses included Indigenous focused coursework. Yahlnaaw and Natalie's expectations were not met due to the lack of Indigenous focus in a required course taught by a non-Indigenous professor. At UL, both Ira and Leon agreed that the program did not include any courses with an Indigenous focus. At UW on the other hand, all three participants stated that their program did a great job of including Indigenous focused coursework in their courses.

#### 4.4.2 Experiences with Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Professors

My interviews did not include a question about how their experiences were impacted by having Indigenous and/or non-Indigenous professors. This was an issue the alumni raised on their own during our conversations. Yahlnaaw and Natalie from UNBC specifically stated that they expected there would be a majority of Indigenous professors in their program. At UiT, this was expressed as students emphasized the lack of Indigenous perspectives in courses hosted by other departments, which were mostly taught by non-Indigenous professors, whereas the courses hosted by SESAM were taught by Indigenous professors. At UL, students also reflected on the lack of Indigenous perspectives in their coursework due to the nature of the program, as their coursework was taken in a cohort with students from different departments, taught by non-Indigenous professors. At UW, however, none of the students reflected on having non-Indigenous professors in the program. As they were all very satisfied with the Indigenous focus in their coursework, they did not raise this issue in our conversations.

From UNBC, Yahlnaaw was eager to participate in the present study as she had a lot to say about her experience in the FNS MA program. In particular, she expressed dissatisfaction about her experience with a professor in the department who taught the graduate studies theory course at the time. According to Yahlnaaw, this non-Indigenous professor in the FNS department, barely provided any Indigenous perspectives in their course. Rather, the professor taught and expected students to use western theories and frameworks to explain the concepts and



ideas they were looking at, all of which were Indigenous concepts and topics. Yahlnaaw described this professor as having a “superiority attitude” and was unwilling to listen to students' complaints that this FNS course had almost no Indigenous resources or voices included in the curriculum. She said that it did not seem like this professor had given much thought to their positionality, or rather, that the professor acted entitled to speak from an Indigenous perspective as they were close to an Indigenous person in their personal life. Yahlnaaw stated that the professor:

Essentially [adopted] this Indigenous [person's] identity, which in [their] mind gave [them] the qualifications to do what [they do] without any of that [...] moral obligation to consider: 'oh I'm a non-Indigenous [person] teaching Indigenous Studies, what kind of privilege is behind that?'

She felt that the professor took an approach that seemed excessive and overstepping for many of the Indigenous students in the course, as the professor was non-Indigenous, but taking on the identity of an Indigenous person while teaching the course. As the theory course is foundational for thesis research and writing, Yahlnaaw felt like it gravely impacted her graduate school experience and that she did not get a lot of the education and experience that she hoped she would in this FNS program.

Despite the very negative experience above, that greatly impacted Yahlnaaw's education in the discipline, she also spoke about another non-Indigenous professors in the department who did a better job of approaching the subject. In contrast to the professor mentioned above, Yahlnaaw said that this other professor acknowledged their space in the discipline as non-Indigenous and emphasized that their role was to make space for Indigenous students to do their work, and to be there to assist with structure and guidance, ultimately developing the space for Indigenous scholars to flourish. She emphasized the importance of entering the space respectfully and positioning oneself in relation to the work, which this professor did. Yahlnaaw also stated that the majority of professors in the program, both non-Indigenous and Indigenous, did a good job of positioning themselves in relation to their work and were supportive of students. Despite more positive experiences with other professors, Yahlnaaw continued to refer back to her experience with the non-Indigenous theory professor as it was one of her first courses and was a foundational course for her thesis.

Natalie from UNBC also expressed concerns about the focus that some of the non-Indigenous professors brought in. She had courses with both Indigenous and non-Indigenous professors but said that the non-Indigenous professors did not provide Indigenous perspectives from an INDGST approach. She also specified the theory course as an example, stating that the course focused more on the critical field of scholarship and how it led into the creation of INDGST rather than actually looking at Indigenous theories. Natalie said that the reading list for the course included a few Indigenous scholars, but the articles were about how Indigenous scholars used western theories (such as Marxism and critical race theory) rather than exploring Indigenous theories. Like Yahnaaw, Natalie took this course during her first semester but stated that her experience in the program improved during her second semester of courses. During her second semester she took a methodology class from an Indigenous professor who discussed how they had used various Indigenous methods in the past in their own research. This helped the students with their thesis research as the professor was approaching the topic using Indigenous methods and methodologies which is what the students would be doing as well when they started their own research. Natalie also stated that she took other courses that were taught by both non-Indigenous professors and Indigenous professors who did a good job of including Indigenous perspectives in their courses, so her experience was varied.

All participants from UNBC discussed the faculty in the department. Corbin, who was in the program before it shifted to its cohort structure, said that the FNS program was in a transition time where the department was attempting to hire more Indigenous professors. According to Corbin, the faculty at the time consisted of 'half and half' Indigenous and non-Indigenous professors. Yahnaaw, who graduated more recently stated that there were predominantly non-Indigenous professors in the department. She believed this was due to a toxic work environment among the faculty, specifically between Indigenous and non-Indigenous professors, that mirrored the experience she had with the non-Indigenous theory professor. Natalie stated that there was a great flux of professors, something she attributed to professors in the department being overworked and underfunded.

UW participants did not reflect on professors in relation to their identity as all three students were pleased with their coursework and the perspectives they were taught, but Louise did have a similar concern to the students from UNBC in relation to faculty being overworked

and underfunded. She noted that professors in the INDGST department at UW did not have time to meet the needs of students, often leaving them without much guidance and assistance, which further attributed to students staying longer in their programs and struggling to graduate based on the timeline set by the university (2 years). She further stated that one professor had encouraged them to do secondary or archival research rather than conducting their own research such as interviews or focus groups, in order to move students along, as doing their own research would take too long considering the requirements of the university, including submitting ethics applications that often had a long review time. Although Louise understood the value of secondary or archival research, she found it unreasonable that a professor would discourage students who had intended to do their own research from doing so, just to move them through the program faster. Louise attributed this lack of support from professors to their assigned additional work responsibilities in the larger university. She gave an example of a new Indigenous course requirement for all undergraduate students that had recently been implemented at their university, which created an influx of students needing to take classes from the INDGST department. In theory, this is a great initiative as it encourages more students to take INDGST classes and learn about Canada's history with its Indigenous peoples. However, by increasing the number of students who need to take courses in a specific department without increasing faculty, the professors are stretched thin. Louise stated that she had been asked to teach the class when she was in her second semester of her MA, something she felt extremely underqualified to do.

#### 4.4.3. Community Oriented Experiences

Students from UiT, UW and UNBC, specifically expressed that they had expectations of their programs to be community oriented. For Millie at UiT, these expectations were only partially met. She had expected the program to have connections with local Sámi communities that they could create relationships with. They only had one such experience, at the very beginning of the program. The incoming cohort went on a fieldtrip to Manndalen, a small Sámi village in Northern Norway (about two hours from the university) for a couple of days to a week (students from different years reported different time lengths of this trip). On this field trip they were able to go to cultural centers and schools and meet people in the community. Millie explained that they discussed some Indigenous philosophies and had closer conversations on these topics, something she wish had been expanded upon further in the program or in their other

courses once they got back to campus. She did however state that she learned a lot more outside of the program when she went on a road trip to a Sámi music festival during the summer and was able to meet Sámi people there.

Millie also expected the program to provide opportunities for students to talk to Sámi people about the topics they were learning about in school and to learn more from people outside of academia. She was able to create these connections herself, but the program did not provide many opportunities for graduate students to meet people outside the academic setting. She did say, however, that some Sámi professors created space within the program to have conversations that broke down some of the traditional educational barriers between professors and students. Her cohort would have gatherings with some of the Sámi professors in Árdna, a Sámi building on campus. They would sit around a fire in Árdna and have conversations with their Sámi professors in a more relaxed setting where everyone could learn from each other and share stories. Millie stated that these gatherings were beneficial as it allowed their professors to share stories and discuss how they engage in some of the material they were teaching the graduate students in their everyday lives. She said:

We were able to get more of an understanding of where they come from, with their ideas and arguments and their political leanings, or the way they decide to [...] implement [...] Indigenous ideologies in their life and [...] where they come from in their communities and what that means for them. [...] It really helped create a more rounded education.

Millie explained that these conversations were very beneficial as they were not able to have similar discussions in their courses. The courses were less flexible and seldom created space to discuss things more in depth. Lastly, Millie expected the program to have more of a local focus, but the program was very oriented towards the global Indigenous rights movement as a whole, as opposed to focusing on local communities. She did say, however, that this gave a different perspective than she had expected and was a positive aspect. She noted that the program was very international as her cohort was from all over the world, and as such, were able to bring in their own perspectives and knowledge on class topics as well.

From UW, MJ was very satisfied with the community connection that the university had in place and provided her. She was pleasantly surprised that the community connection went

beyond her expectations because it offered additional opportunities she had not foreseen. Through some of her classes she attended ceremonies with her professors who also took them on class excursions several times. All this enhanced her connection to local communities and offered opportunities to meet Indigenous people outside of the university setting. MJ stated however, that there was a lack of funding in the department to go on these trips. She stated that “I knew my, my professors had really great ideas. They had so many things that they wanted to get us involved with, you know, there were just so many things, but it was always about the funding...there wasn't enough funding. It was out of their control.” Even though they were able to go to several events, faculty were interested in organizing even more opportunities for students but lacked the resources to do so.

Louise at UW expected to be able to continue her work relationship with an Indigenous organization during her MA program and was satisfied that her program supported it. She also echoed MJ's sentiments on the importance of engaging with community and highlighted that one of the professors in the department took graduate students to Sweat-lodge ceremonies in the city and brought them to the community where they were able to participate in various activities although she did not give any examples of these activities. Louise took a language immersion course at UW which included a field trip to Riding Mountain National Park where they rented cabins and stayed with Elders who taught them the language through workshops and songs. The students were able to immerse themselves in the language while they were there. She stressed going on the field trip improved her course experience and language learning experience. Louise did not specify what language course she took, but the program at UW requires that student take an introductory language course in either Cree or Ojibwe.

Yahlnaaw, from UNBC, stated that there was little connection to community outside each individual's personal thesis work. All their courses happened in a classroom setting and were predominantly lectures and engaged group activity which focused on preparing them for their thesis work. Yahlnaaw stated that they had a couple of guest lecturers but did not elaborate on who the guest lecturers were or what they talked about. Corbin from the UNBC did not share any expectation of community connections in the program but his experiences were different from Yahlnaaw's. Corbin was in the program before it became cohort based and described one course where they spent time out on the land learning to build a canoe. Although he did not take the

course himself, Corbin attended the canoe making activities because there was a good atmosphere around the work they were doing. In his program students were required to do a field course where they had to work with an Indigenous organization. This was an individual course, so each student worked with an organization of their choosing. Corbin stated that he had been hesitant to take this requirement and had tried to opt out, but to his surprise, the relationships he built during his work with an Indigenous organization was extremely beneficial for his thesis and his life after academia, so it had been very helpful in the end.

#### 4.4.4. Additional Experiences

Some students had experiences that did not fall into the specific expectation categories provided here. Sam, from UW for example, already knew that she wanted to focus her thesis on urban planning or urban community development with a focus on Indigenous organizations but was not sure Indigenous Governance was an appropriate program for her. She expected to be able to center coursework and her research around her research interests and was pleasantly surprised to find the faculty supportive and helpful. She found the courses helpful, as each provided something that benefitted her research and knowledge building. In addition to coursework, the MA program provided Sam the opportunity to work on a research project with a professor from a different department, that involved working with urban Indigenous organizations. She did not have a previous connection to this professor or the research project. Rather, the opportunity was presented to her from one of the professors who thought this project aligned well with her interests. The program therefore exceeded her expectations due to the useful coursework and the support, guidance and engagement from the faculty in the department. Sam noted that she was lucky to get this research opportunity but expressed a concern about the lack of similar opportunities for her peers. She said that there were few ongoing projects in the department that students could join and questioned whether the INDGST department is supported well enough economically to be able to fund students' research opportunities.

Natalie from UNBC expected the program to be challenging but found the courses to be manageable. She said "it often just wasn't a challenging learning experience for me. [...] I felt like I wasn't necessarily [...] being challenged or learning or gaining anything in the actual coursework." She was disappointed by the academic level in her courses. Natalie did however find the program to be more challenging when she started doing individual research and writing

her thesis. She said it was a challenge to conduct her research and be able to make connections and build relationships with participants and a challenge in terms of her ability to motivate herself to write an entire thesis. She therefore concluded that her expectation to learn and experience something different had been fulfilled through writing her thesis, but she did not get that experience from the coursework. Corbin from UNBC also stated that he expected the program to push intellectual boundaries as he wanted to be exposed to new perspectives and ideas within INDGST that he had not been introduced to in any of his undergraduate courses, but his expectations were not met. However, he reflected that this was probably because he took undergraduate courses on similar topics with the same professors, and he might have had more intellectual challenges and gained more critical thinking skills had he stepped out of his comfort zone and gone to a different university for his MA. Ira from UL also expressed a desire to gain more critical thinking skills. Although he said the program met his expectations, he expressed that it fell short in some ways. He said that he felt like something was missing from the courses, he had hoped there would be a more practical aspect to the program. However, he found all the courses to be very theoretical and he lacked support from professors. His courses were all lecture based, and very reading intense, without much assistance or discussions around the readings and the coursework in order to help students really understand the topics, which made it tough to work through the courses.

Overall, student expectations and experiences were complex and varying. Their expectations were both impacted by their background and their previous knowledge of INDGST, and their experiences were framed by their expectations of their programs. Students with higher expectations were more likely to be unsatisfied with their experience, while students with few expectations were more likely to be satisfied with their experience. The main expectations students had, were around the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives, the presence of Indigenous faculty, the space for community connections and the academic level of their programs. Although not all students found that the program met their expectations, most participants found aspects of their programs that they were pleased and satisfied with, that assisted them in completing their programs.

In the next chapter, I will consider the programs from a wider perspective, analyzing participants' experiences through an anti-colonial lens. I will discuss the overall goals of the

discipline and how well both program goals and alumni experiences reflected the discipline's goals. Further, I will discuss the differences and similarities between the programs in Norway and Canada, focusing on the student demographics and evaluate some of the challenges students faced as a result of the structure of post-secondary institutions. Chapter 5 will end with a conclusion.



## **CHAPTER 5: LESSONS LEARNED FROM ALUMNI EXPERIENCES**

The previous chapter provided an overview of the research findings, focusing on the expectations and experiences of Indigenous Studies (INDGST) alumni. This chapter provides an analysis of the research findings in a larger context, focusing on how well the goals of INDGST are reflected in the goals of INDGST programs and the experiences of INDGST alumni. I draw on both alumni analysis of their own experiences, as well as my analysis of their experiences. Further, I analyze alumni experiences in a global context, providing a comparative analysis between the program in Norway and the programs in Canada. This research demonstrates that there are inconsistencies in the quality, depth and breadth of Indigenous Studies master's programs in Norway and Canada and a gap between student expectations and their actual experiences.

The chapter begins with a description of the analytical approach. Then it will provide an overview of the goals of INDGST and analyze how well the program goals at the four universities reflected the discipline's goals. This is followed by an analysis of alumni experiences against the discipline's goals and an elaboration on what this tells us about the programs. Next, I will look at the programs in a comparative context between Norway and Canada to understand the differences and similarities of INDGST in a global setting. Lastly, this chapter will conclude with a summary of the research findings and recommendations based on alumni experiences.

### **5.1. Analytical Approach**

Anti-colonial theory interrogates the power configurations embedded in ideas, cultures and histories of knowledge production, validation, and use (Dei and Asgharzadeh 2001). According to Dei and Asgharzadeh (2001) the anti-colonial discursive framework argues that power and discourse are not entirely possessed by the colonizer. Rather "the colonized also has the power to question, challenge and subsequently subvert the oppressive structures of power and privilege" (2001, 300). INDGST is the expression of anti-colonial theory. The discipline challenges the colonial structure, both within academia and beyond. INDGST interrogates the power-structures within our society, using methods and methodologies that are rooted in

Indigenous cultures and knowledges, and theorizes from an Indigenous standpoint. In academia, INDGST has the power to teach emerging scholars how to see and question the colonial structures around them and teach them alternative ways to approach research and learning that is grounded in Indigenous cultures and histories. INDGST also challenges these structures by introducing new pedagogies such as land-based learning, that diverges from the hegemonic lecture-based pedagogy where professors impart knowledge in a classroom setting, that most universities abide by. Elizabeth Cook-Lynn writes “the truth is that Native American Studies does not ‘fit,’ nor can it, nor should it. Rather, its meaningfulness stems from the fact that it challenges almost everything that America has to offer in education and society” (1997, 25). Cook-Lynn (1997) explains the importance of INDGST and emphasizes its position as an anti-colonial discipline. The anti-colonial discursive framework informs my analysis of INDGST programs as the framework embodies the foundational goals of INDGST. It also informs my analysis of alumni experiences in their MA programs because alumni expectations were met in the classes offered in INDGST that provided Indigenous perspectives. This strongly demonstrates that those INDGST classes grounded in Indigenous perspectives met Cook-Lynn’s (1997) standards that INDGST should be an anti-colonial undertaking.

Alumni contributions to this study are inherently subjective. As participants talked about their personal experiences in their INDGST MA programs, their reflections were influenced by their expectations of their program and their own analysis of their experiences. My interpretation of their experiences is, therefore, also influenced by their subjectivity to a certain degree as my analysis respects their perceptions and their analysis of their experiences. This means that my analysis presents their understanding of their experiences while contextualizing it within a larger context. As a current INDGST MA student, I am an insider and have a personal understanding of the topics alumni discussed. In Chapter 3, I explained the various ways in which I hold a status as both insider and outsider, being Indigenous, an INDGST MA student, and being both Canadian and Norwegian. These qualities shaped the ways I connected with participants and influenced our ability to connect on various topics and ideas that participants shared. With these subjectivities in mind, my analysis is intended to provide a deeper understanding of their experiences within the anti-colonial framework. While this sample is small, it may reflect the experiences of the larger body of INDGST graduate students locally and globally. Clearly more

research needs to be done with more INDGST MA alumni to gather more data to determine if the following analysis has a broader application.

## **5.2. Indigenous Studies Program Goals Reflect the Discipline's Goals**

When INDGST first emerged in post-secondary institutions, scholars discussed what the discipline should look like. The initial vision of INDGST was focused on creating a new distinct discipline that distinguished INDGST from other mainstream disciplines by centering Indigenous voices and creating space for Indigenous scholars and students in academia (Stordahl 2008; Taner 1999; Thornton 1978; Wheeler 2001). As the discipline became more established, a set of goals were outlined by INDGST scholars. These goals provide a standard for INDGST, they describe what the discipline is and why it is important. INDGST programs were expected to mirror these goals.

This set of goals for the discipline was established by early scholars in the discipline and are still important today, as they provide a framework for what INDGST is. The five primary goals of the discipline are: (1) the discipline needs to be autonomous from other disciplines (autonomy) (Cook-Lynn 1997); (2) to develop and use Indigenous methodologies, frameworks and theories that are rooted in Indigenous ways of knowing (Indigenous ways of knowing) (Cook-Lynn 1997; Kuokkanen 2000; Kuokkanen 2005; Porsanger 2004; Thornton 1978; Thornton 1998); (3) to conduct research that brings about positive change to Indigenous peoples and their communities (community benefits) (Anderson and Cidro 2019; Cook-Lynn 1997; Castleden, Morgan and Lamb 2012; Innes 2010; Lomawaima 2007; Schnarch 2004); (4) a commitment to center Indigenous peoples, voices, and perspectives (Indigenous perspectives) (Innes 2010, 2; Lomawaima 2007) and; (5) is dedicated to social and political transformation (transformative) (Lomawaima 2007). These five goals are the foundational blocks of INDGST.

In Chapter 4, Table 3 provides an overview of the program description and goals of each of the four universities in this study. Although these are listed as two separate categories, the program descriptions also include goals for their programs as they show what skills their program expects students to graduate with. The University of Tromsø (UiT) presents its program as a multi-disciplinary program with a global focus. Their program goals are to: (1) advance students' knowledge in INDGST; (2) to teach students new research skills and; (3) to teach

students how to apply the knowledge and skills that they will gain during the program in their professional lives (UiT n.d.). UiT's goals prepare students for a future as INDGST scholars. Even though they state that their program is multi-disciplinary, their description and goals give the impression of a well-rounded INDGST program. The MA program curriculum focuses on teaching students about INDGST topics such as Indigenous issues, similarities and differences between cultural contexts, concepts of Indigenous peoples as used in areas of research and politics, how to use Indigenous methodologies, frameworks and theories, a focus on both the global and local history and movements, and Indigenous research ethics and the responsibility of the researcher (UiT n.d.). These teaching goals reflect the discipline's goal of Indigenous ways of knowing, community benefits, and Indigenous perspectives. Their goal of teaching students how to apply the knowledge and skills that they will gain during the program in their professional lives also reflects the discipline's transformative goal as INDGST scholars have the skillset to challenge the colonial structures in our societies. Their program prepares students to be critical of the colonial structures and to learn how to work and do research from an Indigenous standpoint. However, UiT's goals do not reflect autonomy. Since it is a multi-disciplinary program, where the Center for Sámi Studies (SESAM) shares their teaching responsibilities with other disciplines, the INDGST MA program at UiT does not provide a program that is autonomous from other disciplines. Even though UiT does not present their program as anti-colonial, the content of their curriculums suggest that their courses are anti-colonial.

The University of Winnipeg (UW) presents its program with a local focus but express the importance of the international context as well. Their goals are to: (1) provide students with theoretical and practical skills to examine and address matters of good governance, grounded in Indigenous thoughts and values; (2) to promote leadership and skills in areas relevant to the program topic, preparing them for careers that benefit Indigenous communities and; (3) create an intellectual space of excellence to engage scholars in important conversations (The University of Winnipeg n.d.). Their approach to education shows the potential anti-colonial nature of their program. UW emphasizes that they provide studies in matters of good governance grounded in Indigenous thoughts and values (The University of Winnipeg n.d.), which offers their students an alternative approach to governance, and provides them with the opportunity to learn about governance from an Indigenous standpoint, rather than from a colonial understanding of

governance. Their program goals reflect the discipline's goals as the program is autonomous from other disciplines, they teach students about Indigenous ways of knowing, they emphasize a future for alumni that includes community benefits, they outline an education that is grounded in Indigenous perspectives, and they emphasize teaching students' leadership skills in Indigenous Governance which prepares them for transformative work.

The University of Lethbridge (UL) INDGST program states that their departmental goals are: (1) to offer an international comparative approach; (2) dedication to community-engaged scholarship and; (3) meeting the research needs and priorities of Indigenous peoples in Canada and throughout the world (University of Lethbridge n.d.). Their specific goal on community-engaged scholarship and meeting the research needs of Indigenous peoples is important because these aspects reflect the discipline's goals of community benefits, Indigenous perspectives and Indigenous ways of knowing. Their international focus also reflects Lomawaima's statement that INDGST "favors multiple, complicating, diverse perspectives over a monolithic 'one size or story fits all' approach" (2007, 1). This provides opportunities for students to understand INDGST in a global context and to focus on several different Indigenous peoples, understanding the diversity of Indigenous peoples globally, while their goals of community-engaged scholarship describe a local focus that allows students to engage with topics of importance locally as well. Their program goals do not include a description of autonomy, but as the MA program is hosted by UL's INDGST department, there is the assumption that the program is autonomous from other disciplines. Their program goals do not, however, reflect any transformative aspect. The INDGST MA program at UL, therefore, comprises four of the five discipline goals.

Lastly, the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC) website describes their new cohort structure and explains its qualities. Both their description and goals include goals for the program. These goals are: (1) to prepare students for careers in community service, law, and culture; (2) to create space for students to learn from award-winning faculty and Elders recognized for ground-breaking and respectful research, engagement, and curriculum design; (3) to provide students with courses taught in First Nations communities, internships, and community-based research projects and; (4) to provide courses that orient students to Indigenous perspectives as a starting point for description and analysis, theory and praxis, and contextualizes

issues from their perspective (UNBC n.d.). UNBC's goals largely focus on the future career paths of their students, thus reflecting the transformative goal of INDGST as they intend to prepare students for careers in community service, law, and culture with the anti-colonial framework and toolset alumni should graduate with from INDGST. Their statement of learning from award-winning faculty and Elders also shows that the program is dedicated to teaching Indigenous perspectives and bringing in people with vast knowledge to teach. McLeod (2000) states that Elders are important to have meaningful INDGST. Bringing in Elders to teach reflects the anti-colonial nature of the program as it displays a commitment to centering Indigenous voices and acknowledging the many versions of teachers and knowledge holders. UNBC goals also state that their faculty do ground-breaking and respectful research, engagement, and curriculum design, implying that students in the discipline will learn how to do respectful research, engage with Indigenous peoples, and learn from a carefully crafted curriculum. UNBC's goal of providing courses taught in First Nations communities, internships, and community-based research projects, demonstrates the discipline goals of community benefits. By creating opportunities for students to engage with local communities, the program is accommodating for students to do good research and assisting them to create connections that may be beneficial for their thesis research. Their last goal of providing courses from Indigenous perspectives to teach students description and analysis, theory and praxis, and to contextualize issues from this perspective provides an education that is rooted in Indigenous ways of knowing. The INDGST MA program at UNBC is also hosted by their First Nations Studies (FNS) department which makes the program an autonomous program. Their program goals, therefore, comprise all five of the discipline's goals.

Each of the four INDGST programs reflect the discipline's goals in their individual ways. UW and UNBC comprise of all five discipline goals, whereas UiT and UL comprise four goals. Even though none of the programs specifically state in their goals that their program is in an autonomous discipline, the three Canadian MA programs are hosted by INDGST or FNS departments which shows that their programs are in autonomous disciplines. This suggests that all courses are offered from their departments. UiT on the other hand does not host their program in an autonomous discipline, as their INDGST MA program is hosted in cooperation between several disciplines (multidisciplinary). UiT, UW, and UNBC also outline specific goals that align with the discipline's goal of being transformative, whereas UL does not address this. All four

universities reflect the discipline's goals of Indigenous ways of knowing, community benefits, and Indigenous perspectives. These three goals are arguably the most important to INDGST MA programs as they encompass the key qualities that make a well-rounded INDGST scholar, namely a commitment to develop and use Indigenous methodologies, frameworks and theories that are rooted in Indigenous ways of knowing, a commitment to conduct research that brings about positive change to Indigenous peoples and their communities and a commitment to center Indigenous peoples, voices, and perspectives. The first goal of autonomy is more related to the discipline in academic institutions and the last goal of being transformative inherently follows the three goals that were reflected within all four universities, as all three goals provide the toolset required for social and political transformation.

### **5.3. How well are the Discipline Goals Reflected in Alumni Experiences?**

The goals of INDGST were generally reflected in the goals of INDGST MA programs. But how well are the goals of the discipline reflected in INDGST alumni experiences? Alumni expectations were similar to the goals of the discipline. They had expectations of an Indigenous focus in their curriculum, faculty that provided Indigenous perspectives, and community connections that would give students the opportunity to engage with local Indigenous communities. Alumni experiences tell us that only UW provide an INDGST MA program that aligns closely with the discipline's goals. Participants from UiT, UL and UNBC, however, had varying experiences.

At UiT, alumni received Sámi and Indigenous perspectives in their core courses that were hosted by SESAM. They were also exposed to Indigenous perspectives in a few courses hosted by other departments where the professors included Indigenous perspectives in their coursework, and curriculums. According to participants, these courses elaborated on Indigenous topics and were grounded in Indigenous ways of knowing, which aligns well with the discipline's goal of Indigenous perspectives. One of the required SESAM courses at UiT was an Indigenous methodology and methods course. This is significant as it aligns with the discipline's goal of Indigenous ways of knowing. In addition to learning about Indigenous topics, research methods, methodologies and theories, alumni from UiT also shared that the program organized a field trip at the beginning of the program that took students to a Sámi community where they engaged with people outside the academic setting. This gave them an understanding of why community

connections are important and signify the discipline's goal of community benefits. By going on the field trip and meeting Sámi people outside the academic setting, students were able to learn from people in the community and get an alternative learning experience. With Indigenous perspectives, Indigenous ways of knowing, and community benefits, in some instances the INDGST program at UiT included three of the five goals outlined as important to the discipline.

While some courses in their program focused on Indigenous topics and conveyed various Indigenous perspectives, alumni from UiT also expressed a dissatisfaction with most courses hosted by other departments as these lacked Indigenous perspectives. This is due to the multi-disciplinary nature of the program where the majority of their courses are hosted by other departments (UiT n.d.). The course titles, as listed in table 3, gives the impression that there will be an Indigenous focus in courses hosted by both SESAM by other disciplines. According to Millie and Leonora, however, several courses hosted by other disciplines lacked an Indigenous focus and failed to provide any Indigenous perspectives in the curriculum. Alumni were, therefore, only partly exposed to Indigenous perspectives in their program. Millie noted that to her understanding, the INDGST program coordinators at UiT did not have full autonomy to choose the courses included in their program set-up, and therefore could not control what INDGST students were learning in the program courses that were hosted by other departments. Situated within an anti-colonial discursive framework, the lack of autonomy over the program challenges the INDGST goal of the discipline being autonomous from other disciplines. Even though the program is striving to give students a good INDGST education by providing good courses hosted by SESAM, there are still challenges with the execution as the program relies on the larger university and other department to fulfil their program requirements. They therefore must surrender some of the autonomy over the program which challenges its anti-colonial focus as they lose control over how courses from other disciplines are taught.

Yada, the third UiT participant, did not express the same concerns about Indigenous perspectives in his coursework, as Millie and Leonora do. When asked if his courses reflected Indigenous perspectives and worldviews he said yes, agreeing that both the courses from SESAM and the courses from other departments reflected Indigenous perspectives and worldviews. This is very different from the answers of the other participants from UiT, which I believe stem from Yada's previous and ongoing relations with the university as this relationship



may have influenced his perspective on his education and impacted his answers. Because of his relations with the university, he may be more hesitant to critique his education than Millie and Leonora who do not have any relations with the university beyond their experience in the MA program.

In addition to being dissatisfied with the coursework, Millie expressed a dissatisfaction with the lack of community engagement. Although they did go on one field trip, Millie stated that she had expected the program to provide more opportunities for community engagement and was disappointed by the lack of further engagement throughout the program. Since the field trip took them to Manndalen, which is a couple hours from the university city, these connections were not long-lasting for the alumni and made it difficult for them to engage with people from the community beyond that initial trip. It is important to note, however, that the program does not advertise any other community connection than this trip. Millie had a higher expectation of more community engagement which reflects her understanding of what an INDGST program should look like, rather than the actual UiT program description.

These alumni reflections from participants show that, even though the program is advertising for an education that is grounded in INDGST and aligns with the discipline's goals, several aspects of their program fail to provide students with a well-rounded INDGST education leaving alumni with overall experiences that did not meet their expectations. The INDGST program at UiT reflected the discipline's goals of Indigenous ways of knowing, community benefits, and Indigenous perspectives, through their courses hosted by SESAM and the field trip. However, Indigenous perspectives were missing from some courses taught by professors in other disciplines, and community benefits should have been expanded upon, according to participants.

In contrast to alumni from UiT, the experiences of alumni from UW were more positive. Their overall experiences portray a program that does a great job of including Indigenous perspectives and worldviews throughout the curriculum. MJ specifically outlined a course focused on Indigenous wisdom and ways of knowing, stating that it created a foundation for understanding the discipline and the knowledges it is rooted in. This reflects the Indigenous perspectives-goal of the discipline. The three UW alumni stated that most of the courses focused on local Indigenous knowledges, histories, and teachings, but professors also drew on

international scholars and concepts, by including readings in the curriculum that were written by Indigenous peoples from other places. Sam also stated that their professors often brought in guest lecturers who provided new and alternative perspectives to their course topic which was very beneficial.

UW participants further stated that their program was connected to local Indigenous communities, creating numerous opportunities for students to interact with Indigenous peoples in the area, to participate in various activities in communities and engage with people in a meaningful way. Louise from UW brought up an immersive language course she took where she was able to be on the land and learn directly from Elders in a relaxed environment through workshops and songs. This course gave students the opportunity to learn outside the traditional lecture-based structure. This anti-colonial and transformative pedagogy is important to INDGST as it gives the discipline a distinct way to challenge the structure of western universities by including teaching methods more closely aligned to Indigenous ways of knowing and knowledge transmission. This dedication to transforming the institutional structures is important to INDGST as change is necessary for the discipline to grow. It exemplifies how INDGST as a discipline is challenging the norm and colonial view on education by creating opportunities for students to learn in different spaces and from people who don't necessarily have a degree and who you wouldn't see in a university program otherwise. As Peter Kulchyski writes, "[Indigenous Studies] challenges the institutional form of the very institutions that house it" (2000, 16). They teach students that learning can happen outside the institution and that teachings can come from people outside of the academic setting, reinforcing the description of INDGST as an anti-colonial discipline. According to their own alumni, the UW INDGST program clearly embodies all five goals of the discipline.

The INDGST MA program at UL is difficult to evaluate in relation to the goals of the discipline as the program does not offer any MA courses with Indigenous content. Clearly the stated goals of INDGST are only meant for their undergraduate program. The departmental goals of offering an international comparative approach, being dedicated to community-engaged scholarship and teaching students the importance of research meeting the needs and priorities of Indigenous peoples was not visible in their education. Even though the department states that they offer courses that engender a rigorous and respectful understanding of Indigenous peoples'

languages, knowledges, cultures, histories, politics, arts, intellectual traditions, and research methodologies (University of Lethbridge n.d.), participants did not experience any of this in their program. According to the two UL participants, all their courses were hosted by other departments, in a cohort of MA students from other disciplines. None of the coursework included any Indigenous perspectives, ideas, or topics at all, and none of their courses were taught by professors from the INDGST department. When I talked to both Leon and Ira, I was very perplexed and confused as to what made their MAs programs an INDGST program since none of their education included any INDGST courses. When I asked them, Ira thought about it for a second before he said “I really don’t know. I think it was certainly what you wanted to study.” He then went on to tell me that his supervisor was a faculty of the INDGST department, so he was able to explore Indigenous methodologies and theories for his thesis research and writing. It was not something he was taught in his coursework, rather, he had to teach himself with input from his supervisor. The goals of the discipline were only reflected in participants’ thesis projects. Both Leon and Ira gave me permission to share the topics of their research which were directly connected to their own communities and histories.

Leon did archival research for his thesis, focusing on the discourse on treaties and self-sufficiency between the 1969 Canadian federal government’s White Paper and the 1970 Indian Association of Alberta’s Red Paper. He chose a topic that centered Indigenous politics and historically important events that showed persistence, political assertions, and resistance from Indigenous peoples. His thesis was therefore very relevant to INDGST as it centered Indigenous peoples and explored a topic that is very important to Indigenous politics. Ira’s research reflected the goals of INDGST. Ira conducted research with his community, looking at how the government and industry who are interested in resource developments close to Indigenous territory can consult with Indigenous communities in an effective and efficient way that respects the Indigenous ties to the land. He stated that this research took longer than a regular two-year MA program as it was important for him to make sure he did it in a respectful way that would not harm his relations, the people he was doing research with. He also stated that during his thesis defense he acknowledged that this thesis was not written for the benefit of the university, rather it was written for the benefit of the community. He explained that his thesis was only necessary for the credentials he would receive as he does a lot of outward facing business for his community, meaning that he works with organizations outside his community who value

academic degrees. Elaine Coburn (2013) writes that Indigenous research is a form of resistance to the history of colonial domination, which still exist in the colonial structures of our society, including universities. Doing research for the community and not for the university, therefore, challenges the colonial understanding of universities and post-secondary education. This is another way students were pushing back at the colonial structure of universities and challenging the meaning of research.

Despite being able to shape their thesis around Indigenous topics, which met the INDGST goals of community benefits and Indigenous ways of knowing, neither Leon nor Ira had any INDGST courses, topics, or perspectives in their program. The INDGST program at UL therefore does not follow through on its description or goals at all. Surprisingly enough, both Ira and Leon stated that they were content with their MA program. This was because they were both mature students with careers outside of academia, who were content with being able to focus their thesis on topics of importance to them. They both also had an undergraduate degree in INDGST, so they had a foundational understanding of the discipline and had already studied Indigenous topics in academia previously. The INDGST MA program at UL therefore does not provide students with any distinct education that reflects the goals of the discipline. Rather, they have to seek out these qualities in their own thesis work.

At UNBC, the alumni I interviewed had different experiences, which may be because they were in the program at different times. Corbin, who graduated before the program made a switch to the cohort-structure it has today, was fairly pleased with his education. He stated that the program included Indigenous perspectives in the coursework, and that professors included perspectives on topics that were new and diverse to him. He specifically expressed a satisfaction with his methodology course and emphasized its importance in relation to his thesis work. He also stated that the program had a community-oriented focus. This was shown through courses that were taught outside the institution itself, including a course where they were learning about the canoe and its significance while building a canoe. Students also had to create a working relationship with an Indigenous organization through a mandatory field course in the program. To Corbin, the connections he created during his field course were long lasting and really improved his experience in the program and his ability to work on his thesis, as he ended up working with the organization for his research. This field course specifically emphasizes the last

three goals of the discipline: community benefits, Indigenous perspectives, and transformative. UNBC, therefore, had a strong sense of what INDGST is and did a good job of educating emerging scholars in the discipline in a way that aligned well with its goals. The overall positive experience and strong connection to the discipline's goals, however, changed as the structure of the MA program changed.

Yahlnaaw and Natalie both graduated from the FNS MA program at UNBC after it implemented its cohort structure. They did not have the same experience as Corbin. Yahlnaaw and Natalie expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of Indigenous perspectives in their coursework. They both gave an example of a course taught by a non-Indigenous professor who prioritized teaching western theories, only addressing Indigenous scholars in relation to how they used western theories in their own Indigenous research. There was, however, no content on Indigenous theories or knowledges that was rooted in Indigenous ways of knowing. The two UNBC participants were, therefore, very disappointed by the lack of Indigenous perspectives in their curriculum for this course. Despite this negative course experience, Natalie stated that she took other courses that focused on Indigenous perspectives and Indigenous ways of knowing. She specifically expressed a satisfaction with a course on Indigenous methodologies, which provided students with a good understanding of how to apply them to their own research. According to participants, the program provided Indigenous perspectives in courses taught by both Indigenous scholars and non-Indigenous scholars, but it also includes courses and professors who did not provide Indigenous perspectives. Duane Champagne argues that INDGST should not be exclusionary and that both Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars have something to add to the discipline, but it is crucial that all scholars put in the effort and follow the tenants of the discipline. He writes "this can come only with training, motivation, sensitivity, knowledge and study" (1996, 78). There is space for Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars in INDGST, but their approach to the discipline needs to reflect the discipline's goals, which some professors at UNBC failed to do, according to participants.

In addition to a lack of Indigenous focused curriculums, Yahlnaaw and Natalie also stated that their program did not create opportunities for students to connect with local Indigenous communities or engage with Indigenous peoples outside of academia as part of their program. This is surprising, considering the program description outlines courses taught in First Nations

communities, internships, and community-based research projects, none of which the two participants experienced. They both stated that their only chance to work with Indigenous peoples was when they were doing their individual thesis research, where they themselves created connections with their research community. Despite the disappointment in courses, Natalie did express gratitude towards her supervisor, who was very supportive and helpful when she started her research process. Yahlnaaw on the other hand struggled to find a supervisor that would support her research project and was left to her own devices, constantly debating whether it was worth completing her degree or not as she lacked support from the department. Their experiences with supervisors also influenced them both and explains why Yahlnaaw was more disappointed by her overall experience than Natalie was.

In recent years, the FNS program at UNBC has changed to align less with the goals of INDGST. Alumni do not blame the cohort-structure for their poor experiences, rather they emphasize a lack of faculty that teaches Indigenous perspectives and a lack of organized community engagement in the program. Corbin who graduated first found that his program met the departmental goals of autonomy (as all his courses were hosted by FNS department), Indigenous ways of knowing, community benefits, Indigenous perspectives and it was transformative. Natalie and Yahlnaaw, however, had mixed experiences. Their program had autonomy as the courses were hosted by the FNS department, but this was not always reflected in their experiences. Even though some courses taught them about Indigenous ways of knowing, community benefits, and Indigenous perspectives, other courses failed to do so.

Participants from three of the four universities shared experiences that show that the initial goals of INDGST are present in current INDGST MA programs, to varying degrees. UW had the only program that embodied all five goals of the discipline. UNBC used to embody all five goals, however, this has changed. Based on the experiences of more recent alumni, the program only encompassed four of the five discipline goals, albeit to a varying degree as some courses reflected Indigenous perspectives and Indigenous ways of knowing while others did not. UiT also had varying experiences where parts of the program reflected three of the discipline's goals, whereas other parts did not. UL, however, did not reflect any of the discipline's goals. Yet participants were able to create the connection to INDGST themselves through their individual

thesis work by centering Indigenous voices and focusing on topics that were significant to Indigenous communities and their histories.

There are some interesting parallels between how well alumni experiences met the discipline's goals and how well program goals met the discipline's goals. UW was the only program that met all five discipline goals, based on alumni experiences which coincides with their program goals that also met all five goals. UNBC is interesting because it used to encompass all five discipline goals, just like their program goals do, however, the recent changes in the program have impacted student experiences to only reflect four of the discipline's goals. UiT only met three of the discipline's goals based on alumni experiences, whereas their program goals met four. UL diverges completely from their program goals as the program encompasses four of the discipline's goals whereas participant experiences tell us that the program did not align with any of the discipline goals. Alumni had to seek it out for themselves during their thesis work. Where INDGST MA program goals met the discipline's goals, alumni were more likely to have experiences that met their expectations.

Analyzing alumni experiences in INDGST programs, reveals what works for students and what needs to be improved. INDGST alumni expected a program where all their required courses cover Indigenous topics from an Indigenous perspective, meaning that it includes course readings by Indigenous scholars, and present discussions and lectures on the topics from an Indigenous standpoint, rooted in Indigenous ways of knowing. Students also desired their programs to create opportunities for them to engage with communities and create connections with local Indigenous peoples. Further, INDGST alumni experiences demonstrate that there needs to be a balance of Indigenous faculty in INDGST programs. Where non-Indigenous faculty exist, they need to ensure that their courses are centered around Indigenous topics and creating space for Indigenous perspectives to be included. Alumni also desired to be in an autonomous INDGST program as chances were higher for their courses to be grounded in Indigenous ways of knowing if they were hosted in the discipline itself.

#### **5.4. Indigenous Studies in a Global Context – Comparing Norway and Canada**

Participants at all four universities had a range of experiences that differed both within each program and across all four programs. There were, however, some factors that were unique

to the program in Norway and some factors that could only be found in Canada. There were also a range of similarities between the countries, which informs our knowledge on INDGST in a global context.

A distinct difference between the program in Norway and the programs in Canada is in student demographics. In Chapter 4 the demographic profile of cohorts at each university was outlined. At UiT in Norway, all three participants agreed that there was a majority of international students. Both Leonora and Mille shared that their cohorts consisted entirely of international students. According to participants, this is partly due to the university's interest in international students as they advertise their programs widely. Norway also offers free tuition for domestic and international students alike (Wiers-Jenssen 2019) which makes the program more attractive. The program itself states that they aim to recruit students from all parts of the world to strengthen the comparative aspects of the program (UiT n.d.). Although one can only speculate as to why there is a majority of international students, as a Sámi person from Norway, I believe that one of the reasons few local people take this program is because it is not widely advertised for students in Norway. Growing up in a Norwegian school system, I had no idea INDGST existed as a discipline or that furthering your education on Indigenous topics was an option. I only discovered the existence of the discipline when I moved to the United States to complete a bachelor's degree, which was the first time I was introduced to INDGST. This may, therefore, be one reason for the lack of Sámi or even Norwegian students in the program at UiT. I also believe that many Sámi students, especially those who speak the language, rather seek out education at the Sámi College University as the entire institution is structured and run by Sámi people (Thingnes 2020). It also offers a variety of programs related to language and teaching of the Sámi language, at an undergraduate level, something UiT does not. As interesting as why there are so few Indigenous students, or even Norwegian students that choose to do the MA of INDGST at the UiT is, this topic is outside the scope of this study.

In the Canadian programs there were barely any international students. According to participants from UW, there were a few international students in their cohorts, however, majority of students were domestic students. UNBC and UL only had domestic students. UW did emphasize a global Indigenous focus in their program, which may account for some international



students. UNBC on the other hand only emphasized a local perspective in their program, making it more attractive to domestic students as the program focuses on the Canadian setting.

Another significant difference between student demographics in Norway and Canada is indigeneity. In Norway, few students were Indigenous. Neither Millie nor Yada from UiT had any Indigenous students in their cohort. At the Canadian universities, however, majority of students were Indigenous. Participants from UNBC stated that majority of their cohorts were local Indigenous students. Since UNBC emphasizes a focus on First Nations topics and perspectives, the high number of local Indigenous students is understandable as course topics were more relevant to them. UW also had a higher number of Indigenous students overall than the program in Norway. Since UL only admits students on an individual basis, little can be said for the cohorts as both my participants were the only INDGST students in their cohorts at the time, but the two UL participants were both local Indigenous students which was similar to students from UNBC. Ira said that there were some Indigenous students in his cohort, but he was not sure if they were doing their MA in INDGST or were students from a different discipline. If they were in INDGST, this speaks to the lack of community for graduate students in the INDGST program at UL.

Despite these differences, some similarities also exist. At UiT, UW and UNBC, majority of students were women. This is also reflected in the identity of participants as I interview seven women and four men. Research finds that there is a majority of Indigenous women who enter and complete higher education (Brayboy, Solyom and Castagno 2015; R.A. Malatest 2002; R.A. Malatest 2010; Roy 2004; Ross et.al. 2012), making it more likely to find women in INDGST programs as well. Malatest (2010) states that the majority of Indigenous women in post-secondary institutions are mature students with children, meaning that they have a higher level of responsibility outside of school as well. Walton et.al. (2020) further highlights this and states that there is a lack of affordable childcare and support for women, which creates further barriers for students to succeed. This is therefore more interesting, as Indigenous women continue to enter post-secondary at higher rates than their male counterparts.

Since INDGST is hosted in institutions that have historically excluded marginalized peoples and perspectives, the anti-colonial discipline does face some challenges within these

institutions. A similarity between Norway and Canada was alumni's ability to evaluate the colonial structures of universities, based on their experiences in their INDGST programs. In Norway, most of the challenges alumni faced were due to the multi-disciplinary structure of the program. According to Millie, SESAM could only suggest what the content of courses from other departments should cover. They had no control of how the courses were taught or who taught them. She further stated that the university itself had a lot of control over what happened in the program which limited the possibilities of what the INDGST program could look like. Alumni were, therefore, learning the challenges of moving between Indigenous and non-Indigenous learning and research as they had to re-adapt their approach to courses and coursework depending on the department and professor that taught each course. Heather Harris (2002) reflects on the paradox of Indigenous higher education, outlining how she, as an Indigenous educator, navigates the space between Indigenous teaching methods and western educational institutions. Harris (2002) lists the many things that challenge Indigenous learning in western institutions, including the notion of objectivity when approaching research, to learn in a classroom setting, the educational hierarchy and more. It is, therefore, challenging to fit INDGST within these colonial parameters as they limit the discipline's creative freedom to structure programs to align with the anti-colonial nature of the discipline. With a multi-disciplinary program, the structure is challenged even further as the program relies on several disciplines for courses, and as such, cannot ensure that all courses are grounded in Indigenous ways of knowing. The structure of the western university setting therefore challenges the INDGST program in Norway as it fails to allow students in INDGST to be immersed in Indigenous ways of knowing.

In Canada, similar challenges exist. Based on alumni reflections, these challenges are closely connected to the lack of funding that INDGST departments receive. At both UW and UNBC alumni stated that their departments were underfunded. At UW, MJ discussed the lack of funding in relation to extracurricular activities that the faculty wanted to organize for students to get them more involved in community work and to be more immersed in the Indigenous communities in the area. Sam also discussed a lack of funding in relation to research opportunities for students and how there were few ongoing projects in the department that students could join due to a lack of funding in the department. For Louise at UW, the lack of funding was more visible in relation to the department's hiring process. She gave the example of being asked to teach an undergraduate introductory course because they were struggling to find

someone to fill the position when she was only in the second semester of her first year in the program. Louise felt extremely underqualified and uncomfortable with this offer as she believed someone more qualified should be teaching that course. To her, this signified the struggles in the department, specifically in relation to pressures from the larger university. The course she had been asked to teach was a newly required course for all undergraduate students, which put a lot of pressure on the INDGST department as they suddenly had a huge influx of students seeking out courses in the discipline. Adam Gaudry and Danielle Lorenz write on the implementation of Indigenous content requirements in Canadian universities, stating that there was a concern among faculty that “additional administrative and teaching burdens would be placed on already overworked and under-resourced individuals,” (2018, 165) which is what Louise witnessed at UW. Since the faculty was not prepared, they did not have the capacity to take on this responsibility without new hires or more funding, which led to the issues trickling down to students who were considered as alternative replacements to accommodate this new requirement. It also impacted student learning as professors were visibly overworked, leaving little to no extra time to support students who were needing assistance to move through the MA program.

This lack of qualified professors is common in INDGST departments in Canada and was visible at UNBC as well. Natalie stated that there was a great turnover of professors while she was in the program, so the faculty was very small and not well resourced or supported. She suspected that since it was such a small program in Northern BC, it may be difficult to attract new professors. This is interesting as the department website states it has a great faculty (UNBC n.d.), yet the faculty was constantly changing. Natalie further explained that the department seemed to have issues retaining good Indigenous professors because professors in the department were overworked and underfunded. Yahlnaaw also witnessed this, stating that most professors coming into the department were non-Indigenous professors. She believed there was a lack of Indigenous applicants, partly because the program did not leave much room for bringing in Indigenous ways of learning, re-emphasizing her experience with the non-Indigenous theory professor, and potentially because of a lack of job security. She also stated that the lack of Indigenous professors may be because there are not enough Indigenous scholars overall who are eligible and willing to fill all these positions. Russell Thornton (1998, 102) writes “an acceptable Native American studies unit where less than half of the faculty is Native American is hard to imagine.” He continues to explain that there is space for non-Indigenous faculty who are “friends

of Native Americans [...] in the truest sense of the word” (102), meaning that they approach their position embodying the goals of the discipline. However, INDGST units should prioritize the space for Indigenous scholars.

Participants from UL said they struggled due to the lack of Indigenous perspectives in their coursework and the colonial framework they were being taught. This exemplifies scholars’ argument that culturally relevant curriculums are vital for student success (R.A. Malatest, 2010; Marroquín, 2020; Oxendine Taub and Cain 2020; Restoule et al., 2013; Walton et al, 2020). Due to the structure of the program, students at UL also felt lonely as they faced the challenge of being one of the few Indigenous students in their cohorts and lacked the relationality that students get through their cohorts when everyone is in the same program. They also lacked peers to discuss common ideas with. Further, Leon found it challenging to find scholarly resources related to their thesis subjects as these resources were not readily available.

There are both similarities and differences between the program in Norway and the programs in Canada. There is a majority of women in INDGST in both countries. Norway’s program attracts more non-Indigenous international students whereas Canada attracts more domestic Indigenous students. From interviews with alumni, we see that INDGST as a discipline faces challenges due to its position in western post-secondary institutions. It is, however, important to note that alumni may not know, or fully understand, the pressures and constraints that INDGST departments and programs experience structurally. Therefore, the challenges outlined in this section only reflect how alumni understood INDGST programs’ challenges in western post-secondary institutions and not necessarily the complete picture. As alumni experienced them, in both Norway and Canada these challenges are visible through the lack of Indigenous perspectives in some of their coursework. In Canada, this is also visible through the lack of support students receive from faculty due to them being overworked and underpaid, and the extra constraints that this may put on students.

## **5.5. Conclusion**

This study sought to explore what the expectations and experiences of alumni were in INDGST programs in Norway and Canada and elaborate on what this tells us about how INDGST programs operates in these countries. I have argued that the inconsistencies in the

quality, depth, and breadth of Indigenous Studies master's programs in Canada and Norway are problematic as student experiences do not match their expectations. Using semi-structured interviews and conversational method, this study has provided data on INDGST alumni experiences from four separate yet comparable INDGST programs in Norway and Canada. The data shows that alumni expected their programs to include: Indigenous focus and perspectives in their programs; organized options for community connections; Indigenous faculty, or non-Indigenous faculty who include Indigenous work, perspectives and ways of knowing in their courses and; intellectual challenges. Students at all four universities had varying experiences around these expectations, but majority stated that their expectations were not met.

Through an anti-colonial discursive framework, the analysis illustrates that UW and UNBC program goals embodied all goals of the discipline, whereas UiT and UL embodied four of the discipline's goals. Alumni experiences, however, show that only the INDGST MA program at UW provided an education that was grounded in the goals of the discipline. UNBC and UiT provided a range of experiences that aligned with the goals of the discipline, while simultaneously failing to provide these same experiences in other instances. Alumni experiences at UL did not reflect any INDGST goals. Even though alumni from UW agreed that the program met their expectations and that their experiences reflected the goals of the discipline, alumni still emphasized a strain on the department and on the students in the department because of the lack of support INDGST received from the university itself. UNBC alumni also witnessed similar challenges, while UiT and UL alumni experienced challenges due to the multi-disciplinary structure.

Alumni experiences demonstrate that the best practices in INDGST programs included: courses that cover Indigenous topics from an Indigenous perspective and that were grounded in Indigenous ways of knowing; opportunities for community engagement, and; faculty that were dedicated to providing an education that reflects the goals of the discipline. Based on these best practices, recommendations for INDGST programs are clear. INDGST programs need to provide courses that focus on Indigenous topics from Indigenous perspectives, meaning that it includes course readings by Indigenous scholars, and present discussions and lectures on the topics from an Indigenous standpoint, rooted in Indigenous ways of knowing. They should also provide opportunities for students to engage with communities and create connections to local

Indigenous peoples. Further, INDGST programs and departments should have a strong faculty base, meaning faculty who ensure that their courses are centered around Indigenous topics, creating space for Indigenous perspectives to be included, and are rooted in Indigenous ways of knowing. While this sample is small, it may reflect the experiences of the larger body of INDGST graduate students locally and globally, however, more research needs to be done with more INDGST MA alumni to gather more data to determine if the following analysis has a broader application.

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## Appendix A: Interview Questions

### **Interview Questions for Indigenous Studies Alumni**

Why did you choose to do your master's in Indigenous Studies?

Why did you choose to get your degree at your chosen university?

What expectations did you have before entering the program?

Did the available courses reflect your interests?

How did your coursework reflect Indigenous perspectives or worldviews?

Did your program have an experiential learning component, community service and or, land-based component(s)?

What kinds of support(s) did your program provide you and other MA students?

Did your MA prepare you for the work you are currently doing? Why, why not?

Did your plans for your future change as you went through the program? If so, how/why?

Did you have any guidance during your program, or as you were graduating concerning what you wanted to do afterwards?

Looking back, did your program meet your expectations (or not)? Please explain.

What did your cohort look like (Indigenous/gender/demographics)?

Now that you have finished your degree in Indigenous Studies, how would you describe or define the discipline?

Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience as an INDGST MA student?