

TRC report brings communities together to change course

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Wednesday March 22, 2017

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Janice Hill, Director of Four Directions Aboriginal Student Centre, speaks with lecturer Nathan Brinklow during Tuesday's event marking the release of the Queen's Truth and Reconciliation Commission Task Force's final report. (Photo by Garrett Elliott)



Principal Daniel Woolf holds up a copy of the Queen's Truth and Reconciliation Commission Task Force's final report during Tuesday's event at the Agnes Etherington Art Centre. (Photo by Garrett Elliott)



Marlene Brant Castellano, Co-Chair of the Aboriginal Council at Queen's University, and Queen's Native Student Association President Lauren Winkler comment on the release of the Queen's Truth and Reconciliation Commission Task Force's final report. (Photo by Garrett Elliott)



Truth and Reconciliation Commission Task Force Co-Chairs Jill Scott, Vice-Provost (Teaching and Learning), and Mark Green, Professor (Civil Engineering), welcome guests to the event held at Agnes Etherington Art Centre. (Photo by Garrett Elliott)



Members of the Queen's community take part in a Haudenosaunee round dance at the event marking the release of the Queen's Truth and Reconciliation Commission Task Force's final report. (Photo by Garrett Elliott)



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Members of the Four Directions Women Singers – from left, Laura Maracle, Vanessa McCourt, and Melanie Howard – sing an Anishinaabe honour song during Tuesday's event. (Photo by Garrett Elliott)



Laura Maracle, Aboriginal Cultural Safety Coordinator at Four Directions Aboriginal Student Centre, speaks with Laurel Claus-Johnson of the Katarokwi Grandmothers Council during Tuesday's event. (Photo by Garrett Elliott)

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At a special reception Tuesday night to mark the unveiling of the Queen's Truth and Reconciliation (TRC) Task Force final report and recommendations, Principal Daniel Woolf told the crowd of students, staff, faculty, alumni, and local Indigenous community members that, "Today, our communities come together to change course."

"By taking steps to ensure that Indigenous histories are shared, by recognizing that we can all benefit from Indigenous knowledge, and by creating culturally validating learning environments, we can begin to reduce barriers to education and create a more welcoming, inclusive, and diverse university," said Principal Woolf.

The special event, held at the Agnes Etherington Art Centre, and the TRC report represent a significant milestone for Queen's and the local Indigenous communities, signalling a broad and sustained effort to build and improve relations, and to effect meaningful institutional change. The recommendations in the report span everything from hiring practices and programming, to research, community outreach, and the creation of Indigenous cultural spaces on campus. (More detailed list of recommendations below.)

Principal Woolf reiterated his commitment to fulfilling the recommendations in the task force's final report, and to illustrate that commitment, he announced that the university will be creating an Office of Indigenous Initiatives in the coming months – an announcement met by a loud round of applause from the audience.

"This is just one of the task force's many recommendations that I am committed to implementing across campus,

and because I believe that we are stronger together, I welcome the rest of the Queen's community to join me in that commitment," he said.

Principal Woolf also stated his commitment to the TRC recommendations in a [special Senate meeting](#) on March 7, where he acknowledged "Queen's own history as an institution that participated in a colonial tradition that caused great harm to Indigenous People."

'We are making history'

Bringing together Indigenous and non-Indigenous community members, Tuesday's event was hosted by TRC Task Force co-chairs Mark Green and Jill Scott and showcased the importance of ceremony – with a traditional Mohawk opening presented by [lecturer Nathan Brinklow](#), presentations by [Elder Marlene Brant Castellano and student Lauren Winkler](#), an Anishinaabe Honour Song performed by the Four Directions Women Singers, and to end the evening, a Haudenosaunee Round Dance, led by performers from Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory, that brought guests together in a huge circle, hands linked.

"Ceremony reminds us that what we do today is important, impacting the relationships and responsibilities that we carry forward, and woven into our memory as a community," said Dr. Brant Castellano, a member of the task force, Queen's alumna, and pioneer and champion of Indigenous rights and education.

"We are making history," Dr. Brant continued. "In creating the task force, Queen's has stepped up to ask of itself: What can we do to advance reconciliation? ... The task force has brought together voices from the Queen's community saying: We can do this. We have a responsibility to do this. The report is presented to the principal, who speaks on behalf of the university. In this ceremony, all who are present become witnesses to Queen's acknowledgement of past errors and commitment to walk together with Indigenous Peoples and others of good mind to restore and maintain a relationship of peace, friendship, and respect."

"I would like to thank you all here today because by being here, you are showing me that you acknowledge the truths of our past, that you stand in support of these recommendations, and that you will make a commitment to seeing the recommendations through"

~ Lauren Winkler

Lauren Winkler, student and president of the Queen's Native Student Association, as well as deputy commissioner of Indigenous affairs for the Alma Mater Society and member of the TRC Task Force, spoke about the experiences of Indigenous students and the challenges and racist encounters they face on Queen's campus.

"Our education system has failed and is failing to educate our students at the cost of Indigenous students. The university recognizes this – it's one of the truths in our truth and reconciliation process," said Ms. Winkler, who went on to thank Principal Woolf for his acknowledgements of the history of mistreatment of the Indigenous community and Queen's role in perpetuating the mistreatment.

"I would like to thank you all here today because by being here, you are showing me that you acknowledge the truths of our past, that you stand in support of these recommendations, and that you will make a commitment to seeing the recommendations through," said Ms. Winkler.

The TRC Task Force's final report, which includes reproductions of artwork included in the Indigenous art collection at the Agnes, outlines recommendations and timelines for implementation – in particular, the formation of an implementation team that will work with faculties, schools, and shared service units to expedite recommendations. The task force asks for five-year plans from the faculties, schools, and other units to be completed by fall 2017.
