

# Non-Indigenous professor gets go-ahead to teach MSVU's residential schools course

THE CANADIAN PRESS

Last Updated May 15, 2018 - 6:32pm

<http://thechronicleherald.ca/novascotia/1570892-non-indigenous-professor-gets-go-ahead-to-teach-msvus-residential-schools-course>

HALIFAX — A non-Aboriginal history professor has been given the green light to teach a residential schools course at Mount Saint Vincent University, despite objections from some who say the course should be the purview of Indigenous academics.

The Halifax school says a meeting was held Tuesday at the request of Dr. Martha Walls, who developed the course. The discussion included history department leaders, faculty, school administration and the senior adviser to the president on Aboriginal affairs.

“Dr. Walls has the support of Indigenous and non-Indigenous faculty and administration at the Mount, to teach the course regarding residential schools,” the university said in a statement after the meeting.

“Indigenous faculty and staff at the Mount believe that true allies committed to honest reconciliation — like Dr. Walls — must be engaged in sharing knowledge of First Nations/Canadian history in order to reach all those in education who should be reached with this important information.”

The Mount said there was a thoughtful discussion Tuesday over concerns raised on social media.

Last week, critics said the decision to assign a “settler scholar” to teach the course was a kind of historical appropriation and reinforcement of the systemic oppression of First Nations.

“Consistent with her usual practice, and as was originally planned, Dr. Walls’ curriculum will prioritize first voices, Indigenous narratives, firsthand accounts and primary sources,” said the statement.

“This is an approach that is consistent with academic inquiry that often reaches beyond one’s own community or identity.”

The statement called truth and reconciliation a partnership and said it requires “complex and sometimes challenging discussions.”

“Critique, discussion, and reflection are at the heart of academic inquiry and are foundational to research and teaching. In keeping with our commitment to academic freedom, today’s meeting represents our responsibility as an academic institution to take up difficult questions.”

The university said it recognizes the consequences of colonization and is committed to continued work with partners inside and outside the school and will continue to “strongly support” Indigenous students and communities, including increasing the number of Indigenous faculty in the university.

The meeting came a day after a group of Canadian professors spoke out against the university’s handling of the controversy.

The Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship said a professor's race or ethnicity should not be a consideration when assigning a course and it chided Mount Saint Vincent for holding the meeting, saying it would undercut university collegiality and academic integrity.

Society president Mark Mercer said it was also up to the Mount's history department to consider a professor's expertise and perspectives — matters he said should be judged on academic grounds alone.

But critics maintain only Indigenous Peoples have the lived experience to understand the complex and cumulative ways they've been discriminated against, and that they should teach their own history.

In the midst of the criticism, Walls received support from Sherry Pictou, a women's studies professor at the university who is Mi'kmaq.

Pictou said she had "full confidence" in Walls as both as a historian and an ally to the Indigenous community.

According to findings by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, more than 150,000 First Nations, Metis, and Inuit children were often taken from their families by force to attend government residential schools, where at least 6,000 died from malnutrition, disease and widespread abuse.

About 7,000 survivors testified before the commission and related graphic details of rampant sexual and physical abuse at the schools.