

A Record of Solidarity in the X University Campaign



by a group of XU Master of Arts, Immigration, and Settlement Studies Students (Cohort of 2020-2021)

In May 2021, as the resistance to X University's name (formerly Ryerson University), began to re-emerge, Indigenous students launched a campaign calling on students, faculty, administration and the community generally, to "remove the university's current name from our email signatures, CVs, and other professional communications and replace it with an X." The X represented a signature under duress (a reference to some early treaty signatures), a blank space waiting to be filled, or a general symbol of resistance. In the months that followed the campaign was taken up with thousands of supporters and helped push the university to announce a name change process.

One group of supporters were graduate students. But as they prepared to submit their major papers in the Fall of 2021, they encountered an administration that refused to accept their work (and by extension refused to allow them to graduate), if they used "X University." While the students had no choice but to revert to "Ryerson"; they decided to collectively draft an "X University Acknowledgment" to include with their papers.

They have shared that acknowledgment with Yellowhead and since they have now graduated, we are publishing this record of solidarity.

X UNIVERSITY ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This has been a year of reckoning and action for our university. In our classes, we have discussed the harm caused to Indigenous students, faculty, and communities through our commemoration of Egerton Ryerson, an architect of Canada's residential school systems, and the ideology of settler colonialism that we as settlers maintain in upholding his name.

On his commemoration, there has been clear direction and action provided by the university community, from grassroots Indigenous student organizations like @wreckconciliation_x_university, the Indigenous-led research centre Yellowhead Institute,¹ and the University's Standing Strong Task Force (Mash Koh Wee Kah Pooh Win).² The central message advocated by these groups is unanimous: Ryerson must go. On August 26th 2021 X University pledged to change its name in consultation with its community.

Yet, upon submitting our major research papers, students were informed that we must acknowledge Ryerson. This instruction contravenes the spirit of the advocacy and actions that have taken place. It is disheartening given the emphasis that our program, its faculty and students have placed on recognizing and confronting the embeddedness and naturalization of settler colonialism in our institutions and in our ways of thinking and being.

In writing this acknowledgment, our aim is to hold ourselves and X University accountable for our readers, so you are informed of the Indigenous-led collective action that has occurred, and the University's insistence that Ryerson continue to be commemorated. We refuse to leave unacknowledged the emotional and physical labour Indigenous students, academics, and organizers have spent in leading efforts to literally and institutionally topple Ryerson.

We understand that beyond this acknowledgment, there is concrete action we must take as individuals towards reconciliation and Indigenous resurgence in our personal and professional lives.

Please accept this collective letter as a collective pledge on our part, a promise to embody this understanding into our everyday lives, and to name and confront settler colonialism within our institutions, communities, and our own persons.

We, the undersigned, sign this letter in protest of the requirement that Ryerson's name be commemorated through our research.

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FOOTNOTES

¹Indigenous Students from X University, "Introducing X University: An Open Letter To The Community From Indigenous Students," Yellowhead Institute, May 11, 2021. <https://yellowheadinstitute.org/2021/05/11/welcome-to-x-university-an-open-letter-to-the-community-from-indigenous-students/>

²"Standing Strong Task Force Report & Recommendations: Acknowledging the past, learning from the present, looking to the future." Standing Strong Task Force / Mash Koh Wee Kah Pooh Win, August 18, 2021. https://www.ryerson.ca/content/dam/next-chapter/Report/SSTF-report-and-recommendations-Aug_24_FINAL.pdf

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