

Extracting Northern Knowledge: Tracing the History of Post-Secondary Education in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut

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Abstract: This article traces the historical development of post-secondary education in the Western and Eastern Arctic from the end of the Second World War to the late 1980s and explores the role that southern Canadian universities have played in carrying out the socio-economic goals of nation building in the North. Writing from an interdisciplinary perspective, I argue that the history of higher education in the North should be situated within the context of settler colonialism, Canadian nationalism, resource extraction, and the struggle for Indigenous self-determination. The debate around a “bricks and mortar” northern university is ongoing, and this article brings attention to the questions and concerns of the past in order to inform present and future dialogue around post-secondary education in the North.

The idea of establishing a public university north of the sixtieth parallel in Canada has lingered in public discourse for decades. Although attempts have been made to begin such a project, Canada remains the only circumpolar nation without a university in the region. Southern Canadian post-secondary institutions have had, however, a long presence in the North through their involvement in extracting both knowledge and resources. In this article I take an interdisciplinary approach to understanding the history of post-secondary education in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut. As centres for multiple academic disciplines, universities influence the culture and economy of their cities, regions, provinces, and countries in a variety of ways. Analyzing post-secondary education from a perspective that reaches across disciplinary borders is an effective way to breakdown its complex

cultural, political, and economic roles and influences. Drawing upon the fields of political economy, critical Canadian studies, and history, I view the earliest visions for higher education in the North within the context of settler¹ Canadian nationalism, resource extraction, the expansion of higher education in southern Canada, and the struggle for Indigenous self-determination. In *To Know Ourselves: The Report of the Commission on Canadian Studies*, also known as the Symons Report, northern studies were seen as essential for the future of scholarship in Canada (1975, p. 90). In this article I suggest that “to know ourselves” we must look at the ways in which southern involvement in northern higher education was pursued largely by and for the benefit of the south. I argue that universities have played a central role in carrying out the socio-economic goals of nation building in the North—a role that has, in many instances, run counter to the goals of Indigenous self-determination.

In any discussion of education and Indigenous peoples in the North, Zebedee Nungak’s term “Qallunology” (the study of white people) is instructive. Derek Rasmussen explains that the “primary purpose of Qallunology is to get white folks to examine and change their own destructive behaviour. Qallunology punctures the compassionate myth of the Rescuers...” (2001, p. 85). Rather than view southern involvement in northern post-secondary education as an exercise in benevolence, this article examines how post-secondary education in the North has been shaped by a national fixation with the North and the nation’s political-economic imperatives. Yet, my research also demonstrates that post-secondary education debates in the North occurred alongside and within struggles for Indigenous self-determination.

This article argues for a renewed critical focus on both the past and present of post-secondary education in the North. My objective in this exploratory piece is to begin to articulate a critical interdisciplinary framework for conceptualizing post-secondary education in the North with the hope that it may generate further scholarship. We must ask: How has knowledge extraction worked either in the service of or against an imagined concept of the North? Have universities and researchers facilitated the dispossession of Indigenous territories and the extraction of staple resources? What structures of power have been established and/or reinforced by southern scholarly objectives? I provide some preliminary comment on these questions in an effort to prompt further inquiry and study.

The subject of Indigenous education in the three territories and northern Quebec has received increasing attention from academics and policy groups (Darnell & Hoem, 1996; Vick-Westgate, 2002; Poelzer, 2007, 2009; Abele & Graham, 2010; Abele & Seidle, 2010; Walter and Duncan Gordon

Foundation, 2010; Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2011). Heather McGregor (2010) has contributed an important look at the history of northern education in the book *Inuit Education and Schools in the Eastern Arctic*. With regard to the history of northern post-secondary education, Aron Senkpiel (2007) and Amanda Graham (2007) have written extensively, though not exhaustively, on the subject as it pertains to the Yukon. Graham's thesis on the University of Canada North (2000) is an important look into one of the more prominent iterations of a northern university. Nevertheless, Graham's work is a solitary one. In the edited volume *Higher Education across the Circumpolar North*, Geoffrey Weller's chapter on Canada speaks only to higher education within the Provincial North (2002). A history of post-secondary education and, in particular, the northern university concept within the Northwest Territories (and later Nunavut) is sorely lacking. Given the limited amount of scholarship, my intention here is to offer an article that juxtaposes original research with key secondary sources in an effort to contextualize the subject within historical and contemporary structural and ideological processes. By beginning in an exploratory way, my goal is to provide a launching point for further research pertaining to the history of higher education in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut.

In the postwar period, Canadian universities expanded to meet the needs of the baby boom generation, and sought greater funding and direction from the federal government (Cameron, 1991). During the 1960s and 1970s, many of these universities looked North in order to realize their research potential. At the same time, the Canadian government embarked upon a renewed national project to assert sovereignty over northern territory and resources. The political organization of Inuit, First Nations, and Métis peoples in the North during the 1970s and 1980s did not halt the southern research agenda. However, it did require southern institutions to reflect upon their role within higher education in the North. This article proceeds with this approximate timeline in mind, beginning with the postwar years and the escalation of the federal government's interest in both northern development and southern post-secondary education. I conclude with the inception of the Northwest Territories' post-secondary education system during the 1980s. First, I discuss how the "North" has been constructed in Canada's national imaginary.

Northward Looking: National Imaginings of the North

The definition of "North" in Canadian nationalist discourse is dynamic. In the decades following Confederation, the idea of Canada as North played a political and cultural role (Berger, 1970), but the Arctic, or for that matter anywhere North of 60, remained largely unknown to most in the Dominion

of Canada (Woodcock, 1970). Yet, the North is not simply a geographic space. To understand it within the context of nation, we must understand how it has driven nationalist fantasies, desires for territorial expansion, and programs of resource extraction (Mackey, 2000).² It was not until the Second World War that Canadian images of the Arctic changed from a place of the sublime or monstrous to a place available for cultural and economic expansion (Atwood, 1972; Hamelin, 1978; Evenden, 1998). The Mackenzie Valley Gas Pipeline Inquiry (1974–77) brought Canada’s colonial pursuits in the North into the national consciousness and sparked debate over the settlement of treaties, conservation, and resource extraction (Mowat, 1967, 1976; Watkins, 1977; Canada, 1977; Abele, 2014). More recently, as the North warms due to climate change, a global struggle for resources and territory is taking place. It is within this context that the trope of Canada as North has been renewed. Jeff Ruhl notes that the pervasiveness of the inukshuk in southern Canada during the twenty-first century recalls Canadian attempts to claim and appropriate the North:

the iconification of the inukshuk was and is occurring at a time when increasing international attention is becoming focused on the question of Arctic ownership ... This symbol of Inuit culture, found originally in the Arctic, is applied through the form of the nationalized inukshuk (the stone man), to the overarching concept of its essential Canadian-ness, and therefore, by extension, to the essential Canadian-ness of the Arctic. (2008, p. 112)

The inukshuk is but one of the latest elements of an “icy white nationalism” (Mackey, 2000) that has continued to employ northern symbolism and imagery to portray the territory, climate, and culture of the North as the embodiment of a settler Canadian national identity. As an ongoing process, settler colonialism continually works to dispossess and legitimize access to Indigenous territories (Barker, 2009; Simpson, 2011; Mackey, 2014; Black & Murphy, in press). The point here is that the concept of the “North” is foundational to settler colonialism’s physical and imagined claims to Indigenous territories. Like prime ministers before him, Stephen Harper has repeatedly reinforced these national claims, declaring that “it is the North that truly defines us as Canadians, and it is the North that truly is Canada’s call to greatness” (Harper, 2013, p. 20). I provide this brief overview to demonstrate that these national imaginings are linked to a settler colonialism that views the North as a space of national fantasy and fulfilment. As a settler state, Canada is involved in an ongoing process of defining an image of the North that suits national objectives. To reveal the ways that southern universities

and researchers have contributed to settler colonialism's claims to the North, this process must be accounted for in analyses of northern higher education.

The Federal Government and Post-Secondary Education

In *A History of Higher Education in Canada 1663–1960*, Robin S. Harris (1976) documents the federal government's increasingly prominent role in funding higher education and research following the end of the Second World War. Federal intervention in post-secondary education initially stemmed from the need to educate and reintegrate veterans; however, it quickly developed into a much larger endeavour. Although education is a provincial and territorial jurisdiction, the 1951 recommendations of the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters, and Sciences (also known as the Massey Commission) encouraged the federal government to significantly increase its responsibility for university education (Canada, 1951, p. 134). As Harris notes, it is important to understand that this expansion was general rather than strategic (1976, p. 487). This lack of direction was not unique to education policy; prior to the Second World War, responsibility for the North was spread across several departments and agencies (Abele & Dosman, 1981, p. 430). The need for the political and economic coordination of northern development was recognized in the postwar era with the creation of the Advisory Committee on Northern Development (ACND) in 1948 and the Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources (DNANR) in 1953.

The connection between resource extraction and the Arctic in the postwar era is illustrated by federal civil servant Hugh Keenleyside who acted as both the Deputy Minister of Mines and Resources *and* Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Arctic Research. In 1949, Keenleyside "wrote to Canadian universities calling for all those interested in any facet of northern studies to contact the National Research Council, the Arctic Institute, the Canadian Geographic Society, or the Defence Research Board" (Grant, 1988, p. 209). By 1960, the NRC, Defence Research Board, Department of National Health and Welfare, Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation, Atomic Energy Control Board, and the federal departments of agriculture, fisheries, forestry, mines and technical surveys, and veterans affairs distributed \$15 million to universities for graduate studies and research, overwhelmingly in the areas of natural science, defence, and industrial innovation (Harris, 1976, p. 566; Hurtubise & Rowat, 1970, pp. 163–164). In 1955, DNANR created an Education Division to develop curriculum and continue the implementation of a "hostel plus school" initiative that relocated children to settlements for schooling at existing residential schools and, later, federal day schools (Robertson, 2000, pp. 142–143). The federal government's first formalized

education system in the North was based on imported curricula from Alberta and Ontario and taught entirely in the English language (McGregor, 2010, p. 72). Prior to DNANR's intervention, schooling occurred in church schools, operated by a variety of religious denominations located in the North (Abel, 2005, p. 113; Truth and Reconciliation, 2012, p. 13).

As the federal government began to encourage university research in the North and develop its territorial education policy, the re-election of John Diefenbaker's Progressive Conservative government in 1958 launched the prime minister's "Northern Vision." A central component of Diefenbaker's election, the "vision" sought to reignite Canada's northern potential. Diefenbaker looked to the economic development of the North to foster nationalist fervour, particularly through scientific research and resource exploitation (Powell, 2008). As part of this vision, the Northern Scientific Training Grants Program (NTSP) was created in 1961 "to encourage Canadian universities to participate in training northern specialists to meet national needs" (Canadian Polar Commission, 2014,). Coupled with the Massey Commission's recommendation for increased federal intervention in post-secondary education, the NSTP and Diefenbaker's rhetoric of sovereignty and nation building signalled to Canadian researchers and universities that the North had become the new research frontier (Powell, 2008, pp. 635–636). To meet the "national needs" of economic development and territorial claims, researchers were encouraged to deploy to the North.

As the "Northern Vision" advanced, the 1962 Royal Commission on Government Organization, also known as the Glassco Commission, argued for much greater investment and coordination within the areas of northern affairs and scientific research. The commission argued that if a devolution of authority from the federal government to the territories was to proceed and, in turn, natural resources were to be exploited, "it must remain the task of the Department of Northern Affairs to develop the northern peoples—by its education and vocational training programmes—to the point where a labour force emerges that is similar in character to that found in the south" (Canada, 1962, p. 174). I point to Massey, Glassco, and Diefenbaker to develop a general understanding of the role that the federal government has played in directing university research and education in the North. As southern researchers converged on the North at the close of the 1950s, it was seen as essential that northerners, particularly Indigenous northerners, be educated to participate in the extraction to follow. The Glassco commission viewed research and education as vital aspects of northern development and urged stronger links with universities (Canada, 1962, pp. 229–230). Diefenbaker pledged his full support for its recommendations (Rowat, 1963, p. 204) and

the expansion of research and educational programming continued; for the fiscal year 1965-1966, federal expenditures on research surged to \$41.4 million (Cameron, 1991, p. 118). Nevertheless, university researchers and federal scientists operated within multiple universities in every province in a variety of fields and projects. In his book *Northern Realities: The Future of Northern Development in Canada* (1970), Jim Lotz, a former researcher with the Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources, argued for the creation of a northern university so that, in part, a cohesive strategy for northern research could emerge:

For years now, highly trained scientists have been going north to study the land and the people. In any summer there will be several hundred specialists, technicians and scientists wandering all over the Territories. But the approach is fragmented. There is no co-ordination, in the field or back in Ottawa or at the universities. (p. 240)

Lotz's assessment that scientists were "wandering all over" does not seem to be an exaggeration. By 1975, at least thirty-nine southern universities offered northern research classes or programs, evidence of the rapidly expanding interest in the North by government and universities alike (Koenig & Caillol, 1975, p. 231).

It is important to view the actions of the federal government and southern universities through a political economic lens. In his application of Innis' "staples" approach to the North, Mel Watkins argues that "[t]he history of Canada ... is a succession of staple exports from successive geographic frontiers to serve the needs of more advanced industrial areas" (Watkins, 2006, p. 54). To develop the resource wealth of the North, for the benefit of the south, an educated labour force and scientific research were foundational (Abele, 2009, p. 28).³ Moreover, the 1960s were the golden age for federal departments responsible for northern affairs—an undertaking that also required the growth of post-secondary education—their bureaucratic ascent largely driven by the pursuit of economic growth through the extraction of staple resources (Abele, 2009, p. 28). As the newest hinterland in Canada's staple economy, both resources and knowledge were extracted for the benefit of the settler Canadian metropole.

The point here is that the expansion of higher education in the south and nationalist visions for development in the North are intertwined and their entanglement demands reflection on the role of universities in the expansion of Canadian cultural and economic dominance in the North. For example,

there are several questions that arise: Who in the North would be educated and for what purposes? To what extent were universities competing for involvement in the North? Who would gain from research projects and from resource extraction? In the sections that follow, I touch upon the ways in which an influx of researchers in the North, driven by expansion of the southern academy, the creation of the University of Canada North, and the potential for resource riches, thrust post-secondary education onto the agendas of emerging Indigenous organizations. Northern peoples and their supporters demanded consideration of how skills training and knowledge production would factor into self-determination and the potential future of a post-secondary education system in the North.

Research, Resources, and the Wage Economy

In 1960, the Indian Eskimo Association (IEA) formed out of a standing committee of the Canadian Association for Adult Education (CAAE). The IEA was not an exclusively Indigenous organization as it was national in scope with membership open to all Canadians. Organizations such as IEA and the Saskatchewan based Society for Indian and Northern Education (SINE) undertook much advocacy work in the area of Indigenous education during the 1960s. The SINE journal *Northian*, published by the Saskatchewan Teacher's Federation, was a source of discussion for northern education throughout the 1960s and 1970s.

As a result of the 1966 report of the Advisory Commission on the Development of Government in the Northwest Territories, also known as the Carrothers Commission, the federal government began a first wave of devolution by transferring certain administrative controls, including education, to the Northwest Territories government. In response to the findings of the Carrothers Commission, Walter O. Kupsch, James Hammersmith, and Tom Butters highlighted the importance of the commission's recommendation "that the Territorial Government institute a crash program of university education for selected Indians, Metis and Eskimos" (1967, p. 6–7). Butters, who in 1970 would be elected MLA for the Western Arctic, reinforced the need for the creation of an Education Commission and was explicit in his statement of why this was important: "The education system of the territories took form and evolved in a vacuum. THE EXISTING EDUCATION SYSTEM IS A SOUTHERN CONCEPT IMPOSED ON THE NORTH WITH MINOR ADJUSTMENTS" (Kupsch, Hammersmith & Butters, 1967, p. 9; emphasis in original). Though the commission had put forward its recommendations, there was clearly concern about the direction of education in the North. In a 1968 volume of the *Northian*, IEA President

Martin O'Connell (who was not Indigenous) recommended to the federal government that "an Indian College or centre for popular education be established ... and that Chairs in Indian culture and research be established at major Canadian universities" (p. 21). O'Connell's demands for "popular" or college level post-secondary education initiatives and the suggestion of a "crash program" for selected Indigenous peoples demonstrate the hierarchical approach to education taken at this time. Universities and settlers would undertake research and teaching while Indigenous peoples would be provided with opportunities to learn from them. Such a top-down process reproduces colonial paradigms in which Indigenous peoples are not producers but recipients of knowledge. Nevertheless, the above comments reveal a growing concern among Indigenous peoples and their supporters over a lack of opportunities for Indigenous involvement in higher education.

Writing in a 1967 volume of the *Northian*, Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development Arthur Laing reiterated the federal perspective on northern education that had been developed and put in place by his predecessors. Laing's interest was in establishing "northern outposts of university departments so that *interested students might spend some part of their study time in the North*, learning to work with and under northern conditions" (1967, p. 36; emphasis added). In Laing's view, university courses in the North would allow southern students to better understand the environment their research was occurring in. For those who already lived and worked in the North, Laing suggested the creation of a correspondence degree that "would assist many who work in the North to put their time to the best possible use ... many Canadians in remote areas would seize the opportunity of working to improve themselves" (Laing, 1967, p. 36). A distinction between northern university courses for southern Canadians and correspondence degrees for Northerners reveals the paternal and colonial understanding that post-secondary education in the North should be second to participation in the labour force—the national imperative of research and scientific initiatives were to be left to southern interests. As Erin Freeland Ballantyne argues, an "ongoing trend in Indigenous and Northern settler education since its earliest colonial intrusion has been to train Indigenous bodies to serve the needs of industry" (2014, p. 77). The distinction between supporting southern research and educating a workforce must be seen in the context of aiding extractive industries.

According to Greg Poelzer, in 1968 the Northwest Territories, along with the federal Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, partnered with an external college to offer community-based adult education and a course in heavy equipment operation (2009, p. 433). One year later,

the Adult Vocational Training Centre (AVTC) was established in Fort Smith (NWT, 1987, p. 15). The 1968 discovery of a large oil field at Prudhoe Bay, Alaska fueled the growing interest in northern resource development and led to the encouragement of vocational training by all levels of government (Abel, 2005, pp. 242–244). By 1970, responsibility for education was transferred and the Northwest Territories Department of Education was created. Though a territorial education system was beginning to take shape, the few northerners who sought post-secondary opportunities had no choice but to look outside of the two territories. Education initiatives in the North were primarily focused on Indigenous northerners gaining entry into the wage economy (Abel, 2005, p. 242; Kennedy Dalseg, 2015).

By the 1970s, the discovery of oil and a proposal by American corporate interests to build a natural gas pipeline through the Mackenzie Valley revealed an ideological rift in Canada's nationalist imaginings of the North. Left-nationalist thinkers such as Mel Watkins (1977) and Kari Levitt (1970) argued that the economic sovereignty of Canada was under threat from direct American investment:

In terms of the applicant, Arctic Gas clearly serves, first and foremost, the American interest, since it wishes to transport natural gas from one part of the United States to another part of the United States ... A significant dimension of the choice, then, is choosing between the interests of non-Canadians and the interests of aboriginal people who are Canadians; it is the essence of the nature of the nation-state that it should be biased in favour of its own citizenry. (Watkins, 2006, p. 68)

For Left-nationalists, foreign investment in northern resources was seen as a threat to Canada's national potential and sovereignty. It was reasoned that if a staples economy were to be developed, Canadian companies should do so for the benefit of all Canadians. In this instance, Indigenous peoples were seen as being included in the Canadian identity—a position that posits the North and its inhabitants as belonging to the settler nation. As I discuss below, a zenith of nationalist thinking about the connection between northern resource extraction and post-secondary education is best represented in the emergence of the Mid-Canada Development Corridor and the University of Canada North.

Around 1967, retired major-general and political figure Richard Rohmer began to pursue the concept of a "development corridor" in Canada's boreal forest region. Rohmer, a vociferous promoter of nation building, engaged

planners and engineers to assist in creating a vision for Canada's boreal belt that would see it "filled with transportation, urbanization, industrialization, and population" (2004, p. 341). After drafting a preliminary report, two sessions of the Mid-Canada Development Conference were held in 1969 and 1970. The results of the conference were compiled by Rohmer and published in a book titled *The Green North* (1970). The nationalist economic vision of the Mid-Canada Conference is captured in some of the chapter titles from Rohmer's book: "Will Canada be Canadian?"; "One million square miles of wealth"; and "A new national purpose" (1970, p. 1). The Mid-Canada Development concept was Rohmer's attempt to create an advanced industrial nation, free from dependency on foreign investment in staples extraction, in the hinterland of the boreal forest. In the context of the Cold War and American investment, Rohmer understood the development of middle and northern Canada to be of strategic importance in retaining Canadian identity and sovereignty (1970, 1973). Nationalist visions that understood the North in this way were likely to conflict with Indigenous efforts to determine the future of their own territories. Scientific research in the North was one of the ways in which Canadian claims to Indigenous lands and resources were facilitated (Adams, 2007; Powell, 2008). For Richard Rohmer, the concept of a northern university would come to symbolize the ultimate potential of a new Canadian society.

According to Amanda Graham, Rohmer was inspired to create a northern university during a trip to the Northwest Territories during which he read Jim Lotz's book *Northern Realities* (2000, p. 35). Lotz argued that a northern university should not be "rammed down the throats of northerners" (1970, p. 246) and his concept of a northern university centred on harnessing the development potential of the North to create a "sense of national purpose" (1970, p. 248). Lotz envisioned a northern university as part of a national project, as did Rohmer. Yet, Rohmer also viewed such an institution as central to the creation of his "development corridor" and he hastily drew up an organizational memo for the university concept. Graham has extensively documented the life of the University of Canada North (UCN) and many of the details of its existence need not be repeated here. However, there are a few elements of the UCN's formation that provide context for the growing interest in northern research and post-secondary education during the 1970s.

The University of Canada North became a legal corporation in 1971 and its incorporation arrived as northern Indigenous peoples were organizing into politically-minded groups such as the Committee for Original People's Entitlement (COPE), the Indian Brotherhood of the Northwest Territories (later the Dene Nation), and Inuit Tapirisat of Canada (ITC; now Inuit Tapiriit

Kanatami).⁴ Facing opposition and a disorganized vision, the University of Canada North managed to create an administrative structure and form several committees out of its Yukon division; however it never materialized into a “bricks and mortar” university (Graham, 2000, p. 52). Nevertheless, the imminent idea of a northern university acted as a catalyst for the serious consideration of post-secondary education and research in the North. The idea that a northern university was imminent drew great interest from northern peoples, as well as southern universities and researchers, and also brought into question the future of already existing northern studies programs and research projects.

In 1970, the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC) received a report back from its Commission on the University and the Canadian North. From this report the AUCC resolved to hold a conference the following year in order to formulate the future of higher education initiatives in the North (Koenig & Caillol, 1975, p. 2). Unfortunately, the scheduling of the conference overlapped with the University of Canada North’s Concepts Conference of November 1971. The AUCC did not wish to duplicate efforts and thus cancelled its conference and encouraged members to attend the UCN event in Inuvik (Koenig & Caillol, 1975, p. 3).

In November 1971, James Arvaluk participated in the UCN Concepts Conference as the Director of Inuit Tapirisat of Canada in Iqaluit. At the conference he “explained how the informal Eskimo University at Frobisher Bay (Iqaluit) met two to three times a week in a borrowed building” (Graham, 2000, p. 77). Arvaluk was also a participant at an April 1971 Association of Universities and Colleges Canada (AUCC) conference. Arvaluk became a key advocate for Indigenous perspectives on university education. In his autobiography, *That’s My Vision*, Arvaluk speaks of a university in the North:

We talked about [having an Inuit university] in 1970; Jonah Kelly, Ann Hanson, Marcel Fortier, Mary Cousins, Abe Okpik, and I. We talked about creating a university. Not only was it difficult, it was not acceptable at the time. I think if we had had more cooperation from the federal government we could have worked with McGill or the University of Ottawa to start something; to have a campus or at least a course on Inuit Studies. (McDermott, 2007, p. 124)

Arvaluk’s recollection of discussions about an Inuit university, as well as his participation in the aforementioned conferences, further demonstrates the extent to which Indigenous northerners were engaged with advancing their goals for post-secondary education.⁵

Southern Universities: Northern Research and Post-Secondary Education

The proceedings of the Third Canadian Northern Conference of May 1970 make no mention of establishing a northern university. Many of the papers were subsidized by the federal Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and the list of research groups presenting reveals the rapidly growing interest southern universities had in the North (Hamelin & Cailleux, 1970, p. vii):

- Arctic Institute of North America (Montreal)
- Centre d'Etudes Nordiques (Laval)
- Boreal Institute (University of Alberta)
- Committee on Arctic and Subarctic Research (University of Toronto)
- The President's Committee on Northern Area Studies (Lakehead University)
- Committee on Arctic and Alpine Research (University of British Columbia)
- Groupe de Recherches Nordiques (Université de Montreal)
- Institute for Northern Studies (University of Saskatchewan)
- McGill Committee for Northern Research
- Northern Studies Committee (University of Manitoba).

The conference was a forum for universities and governments to provide updates on their research initiatives and program directives. Walter O. Kupsch, professor and director of the University of Saskatchewan's Institute for Northern Studies, explained his institute's mandate to conference participants: "Our aim then is to educate Canadians about northern matters. Of course, most of our audience is close at hand: students and staff at the University, the general public of Saskatoon and the Province of Saskatchewan" (Hamelin & Cailleux, 1970, p. 55). In addressing the recommendations of the Carrothers Commission, Kupsch had argued for condensed university education for selected Indigenous northerners, yet his "audience" for northern research findings was the south (Kupsch et al., 1967, pp. 6-7). Northern research initiatives were, in part, a way to demonstrate a national vision and the value of university priorities to southern Canadians.

In 1972, the AUCC, the national organization for post-secondary institutions in Canada, launched a two-phase study of the "present and future role of universities in the fields of research and higher education focused on northern Canada" (Koenig & Caillol, 1975, pp. 3-4). The first phase of the AUCC's investigation was conducted in 1973 by Kupsch and Maryse Caillol. The study resulted in an inventory of northern programs and research initiatives and led to the publication of the second phase by Del

M. Koenig and Caillol in 1975. Phase two, titled *Northern People and Higher Education: Realities and Possibilities*, explored what southern universities were doing in the North, but also what they were prepared to do in addition (Koenig & Caillol, 1975, p. 4). Just before the second phase of the study was to begin, it was decided that researchers should seek out the opinion of northerners on the subject of higher education (Koenig & Caillol, 1975, p. 4). This afterthought is a revealing moment that demonstrates the priority given to southern perspectives.

The second phase of the study conducted interviews with various groups and individuals, including parents, high-school students, missionaries, education officials, teachers, university students, and Indigenous leaders. The AUCC was attempting to determine the future role of its members (southern universities and colleges) in the North and a part of this included understanding which university courses would appeal to students there. The courses most often suggested by interviewees were vocational training, social work, adult education, teacher training, mineralogy, and business management (Koenig & Caillol, 1975, p. 145). These course suggestions reflect the fledgling nature of the education and governance systems in the North during the 1970s and provide insight into the direction of the northern economy. This state of becoming is reflected in the study's conclusion:

Within the university community there are few people at any level who readily agree on such basic issues as: the goals of university involvement in northern higher education; the primary allegiance of universities; northern research priorities; job orientation or general education in class content. Similarly, there is among northern people, a whole continuum of opinions concerning expectations for higher education, the relevancy of curricula, the importance of retaining language and culture, and the ultimate relationship between northern and southern people. (Koenig & Caillol, 1975, p. 203)

The AUCC reports reveal a concerted effort to reflect upon its members' research pursuits and understand the potential for southern universities to offer education in the North. It appears that the emergence of the UCN compelled southern universities to reconsider their place in the North. The 1975 Symons Report (p. 67) recommended the development of one or two community colleges in the North and the AUCC report from that same year recommended that the organization work to create "a co-ordinating agency for all universities and other post-secondary institutions involved in northern activities" (Koenig & Caillol, p. 212). Realizing the need for such a

coordinating body, the Association of Canadian Universities for Northern Studies (ACUNS) was formed in 1978 and held its first conference in Chicoutimi, Québec that same year. In his report to the conference, ACUNS President John K. Stager highlighted the importance of an organization that could “share in the formulation of national and local policies concerning the North, its long-term planning, forms of administration, *the use made of its resources and the welfare of its northern residents*” (Lloyd, 1978, p. 4; emphasis added). Again, Stager’s comments illustrate the top-down approach to northern studies—the welfare of northern residents would be studied while national and local planning for resource extraction could take place. The conference concluded with several recommendations to support a northern university (Lloyd, 1978, pp. 27, 29, 38).

The emergence of the ACUNS and the findings of the AUCC and Symons Report are indicative of the importance the North played in shaping the direction of southern university priorities during the 1970s (Adams, 1976). Much like the UCN and many other northern-focused research projects, the ACUNS and the Symons Report sought to guide the priorities of nation building in the rapidly developing area of post-secondary education in the North. Given the political organization of Indigenous peoples and the increasingly politically divisive policies of extraction in the North, southern institutions were forced to reflect on their undertakings in the North. This, however, does not mean that southern universities were ready to relinquish their presence in the North. For the Northwest Territories, the prospect of knowledge about the North being guided by outside individuals and organizations caused the territorial government and Indigenous groups to react in varying degrees.

The Science Council of Canada

A 1971 motion to the Council of the Northwest Territories by member Dr. Louis E. Hamelin, founder of the Centre for Northern Studies (CEN; Centre d’études Nordiques) at Université Laval in 1961, cited the imminence of a northern university project coming “from outside” as part of a justification for creating a science council in the territory (NWT, 1971, p. 302–303). The motion, seconded by Tom Butters, moved that a position paper be prepared on the feasibility of a science council that would track research projects in the territory and advise the government on scientific matters (Winklearr, 1990, p. 11). Hamelin spoke to the motion out of concern for the territory’s developing independence:

Knowing better the research situation made by the scientists coming from outside the Territories, this government could try to avoid duplication of efforts ... So this government, instead of being a colony, as it is still the case from the research point of view, could have a leading voice. This goes along with the general development of these Territories towards a greater economy. (NWT, 1971, p. 303)

With the NWT left out of the formation of the UCN, Hamelin's motion is instructive of the uncertain direction of post-secondary education in the North.⁶ It is within this context that the Science Council of Canada, a federal advisory board founded in 1966, was also provoked to consider how a northern university might benefit federal scientific research.

Federal leaders and departments showed little interest in Richard Rohmer's concept for a northern university (Graham, 2000, p. 118). Nevertheless, the federal Science Council of Canada, formed in 1966, became an advocate for a particular vision of a northern university. In *Northward Looking: A Strategy and a Science Policy for Northern Development* (1977), the Science Council viewed the creation of a university as one of several initiatives that would contribute to a strategy of mixed development in the North (p. 56). Situated within a framework of finding solutions to "northern problems," the Science Council recommended that universities expand their role in the North and that a University of the North be created (1977, pp. 56–57). The council's suggestions for structure and curriculum reflect the recurring themes of resource development, scientific research, and nation building. The council believed that a

... university should concentrate on areas such as resource management and systematizing resource inventories ... Native peoples should play a central role in the choice of research topics and in undertaking research. Native northerners should be given every opportunity to gain experience by working with pre-eminent scholars. (Science Council, 1977, p. 57)

In this document, the Science Council reinforces a hierarchical and paternal approach to research and post-secondary education in the North. In their opinion, the university would require federal funding and, at first, consist of mainly graduate students from southern Canada; all northerners who wished to have "reliable information of northern relevance" would eventually be enrolled (Science Council, 1977, p. 58).

One year after the Science Council's report, its Committee on Northern Development conceived of a Northern Resource Centre as a predecessor to

a northern university. The five-person committee, which included Walter O. Kupsch, suggested that researchers at the centre would be able to “impart to these Northerners some of their knowledge about northern resources ... it would be an institution all Canadians could be proud of” (Science Council, 1978, p. 8). The idea that a northern university would be something Canadians could take pride in is reflective of the connection between northern research and the national imagination. Although the Science Council saw the sharing of knowledge with northerners as important, knowledge of, and thus claims to, land and resources were the primary objective of the Northern Resource Centre.

The Science Council of Canada’s journal *Agenda* continued to bring attention to the “University of the North” debate. In 1979, the journal published an article featuring the Chairman of the NWT Science Advisory Board, Omond Solandt, titled “University of the North” (Gauvin, 1979). Solandt, former chair of the Defence Research Board (DRB)—an organization heavily involved in northern research—supported a University of the North but rejected the imposition of a southern model (Gauvin, 1979, p. 2). Soldant suggested that educational attainment below the post-secondary level was still too low to justify the creation of a university, but supported the creation of a junior college, “probably at Yellowknife, saying that it would require much less in the way of social and cultural adjustment” (Gauvin, 1979, p. 2–3). As the first chair of the DRB and the chair of the NWT Science Advisory Board, Soldant’s presence in the North is indicative of close connections between national sovereignty, scientific research, and higher education (Turner, 2012). Given Soldant’s reservations about a northern university, the article promoted the Northern Resource Centre as the ideal precursor to a post-secondary system. *Agenda* also sought comment from Richard Rohmer who, by 1979, had not given up on the University of Canada North.

Rohmer’s early excitement about the UCN project had dwindled as the university failed to materialize. In his interview with *Agenda*, Rohmer’s thoughts on a northern university had shifted—he now argued for a *national* university focused on Arctic science. When asked about claims that the UCN would not serve the needs of “native northerners” Rohmer retreated from previous assertions that Indigenous peoples would be central to the UCN: “[native post-secondary education] belongs exclusively to the Northwest Territory government. There is a clear need for a community college type of institution which can cater to the needs of the people of the Northwest Territories ... [a college and university are] two absolutely different things. I think you can do both” (Gauvin, 1979, p. 5). It would seem that the political organization of Indigenous peoples had given Rohmer pause to consider

post-secondary in the North as being divided into national and Indigenous institutions. Rohmer believed that intervention and leadership on the part of the prime minister was the only way a university in the North would be built (Gauvin, 1979, p. 5).

Research projects and northern studies programs were closely connected to the nation building exercise through security, sovereignty, and resource development activities. Throughout these various conceptualizations of higher education in the North, the difficulties associated with creating a university shifted the focus to creating colleges with the hopes of educating northerners, and in particular Indigenous peoples, so that they might participate in the economic development of the territory.

Learning: Tradition and Change

While federal advisory boards and southern universities debated a northern university's potential to produce knowledge and improve Indigenous welfare, alternatives to the southern system were being discussed and experimented with by Indigenous leaders and their supporters (McDermott, 2007; Cruikshank, 1974, p. 163). Interpretations of the northern university and higher education that ran counter to or questioned the promotion of scientific research, northern resource development, and economic participation challenged the power dynamics that tended to view southern research as paramount. Some academics also began to place value on local collaboration and traditional knowledge (Cruikshank, 1974, p. 166). Still, the territorial government remained focused largely on primary and secondary education, as well as vocational training. This relative inattention to post-secondary changed in 1979 when, during the first session of the NWT Assembly's ninth session, newly elected representative Tagak Curley, a founder of Inuit Tapirisat of Canada, put forward a motion to create a Special Committee on Education.

This motion would eventually lead to the creation of the 1982 landmark report on territorial education, *Learning: Tradition and Change in the Northwest Territories*. In May 1981 the territorial government declared the Adult Vocational Training Centre at Fort Smith a college and named it Thebacha College (NWT, 1987, p. 1). The move to a college anticipated recommendations from the Special Committee on Education that sought to implement a territorial college structure with small campuses across the region (NWT, 1987, p. 1).

Learning: Tradition and Change in the Northwest Territories explicitly spoke against jumping into the creation of a territorial university (NWT, 1982, p.

133). Though the report noted that asking students to leave the territory for university education was not ideal, it cautioned against establishing a university simply in order to have a standard system of education that was exactly the same as systems elsewhere (NWT, 1982, p. 133). *Learning: Tradition and Change* also bolstered the connection between higher education and resource development: “only by training to secure work with these developments can the Government of the Northwest Territories assure its citizens of opportunities for employment in the wage economy” (NWT, 1982, p. 134). Integration into the wage economy was a primary objective and most members of the territorial government appear to have agreed with this recommendation (NWT, 1982, p. 308). However, in debating the committee’s report, the exact structure of the new Arctic College was the source of some conflict and revealed the split between the Eastern and Western Arctic.

In November 1982, the Committee of the Whole of the Legislative Assembly debated the *Learning: Tradition and Change* report. While some politicians viewed the Thebacha campus a sufficient starting point for an Arctic college, the complexities of distance and cultural difference demanded deviation from the status quo. Member Dennis Patterson articulated the need for campuses that reflected regional difference and traditional knowledge:

I think there is some talk alive and well in the Eastern Arctic, for example, about establishing a cultural university, or a university museum complex as has been proposed by the Inuit Cultural Institute, or a folk school along the Greenland model, whereby people would be able to take training in areas that might not lead to university or technical institutes in southern Canada. (1982, p. 306)

Patterson’s mention of a “folk” or “cultural” university reiterated Indigenous demands for a university that would have little resemblance to a model rooted in southern political-economic goals. Recommendation number twelve of the committee, the creation of an Arctic College, was passed by the Legislative Assembly in 1982. In 1986, Arctic College was made a corporate entity, at arm’s length from the government, through the Arctic College Act (Aurora College, 2006, p. 9).

The geographic disparities of the Northwest Territories and the cultural characteristics of higher education in the Eastern and Western Arctic have often been points of contention. Thus, it was expected that Arctic College would eventually separate into two entities, which it did in 1994.⁷ Aurora College officially came into being on January 1, 1995 and is today the main

provider of public post-secondary education in the Northwest Territories; Nunavut Arctic College provides programming to the peoples of Nunavut.

Tracing Higher Education in the North

In this article, I have explored some of the historical patterns of approaches to post-secondary education in the North. Following the end of the Second World War, the expansion of the post-secondary education system in southern Canada coincided with the expansion of national fixation with the North. University research was driven by the national priorities of sovereignty and the extractive economy. Knowledge, too, was extracted for the benefit of southern universities and the national project of settler colonialism. When the federal government and universities did focus on providing higher education in the North it was frequently done in a top-down manner. Scientific development was seen as the purview of southern Canadians, while basic education and vocational training would help “better” the northern population and prepare them for the wage economy.

As Indigenous peoples organized politically, they became further engaged with determining the future of education in the Eastern and Western Arctic, causing southern institutions and actors to rethink their approach to northern studies. In making explicit the links between political-economic imperatives, knowledge creation, and the national imagination, I have argued that the history of northern post-secondary education must be understood within this context. A failure to do so would be to overlook the longstanding and dominant role that Canadian universities have played in assisting settler colonialism in Canada.

There is a growing movement by Indigenous peoples in the North to throw off the traditional western model of higher education. In the Northwest Territories, the Dechinta Centre for Research and Learning (formerly the Northern University Field School and Blachford Trust Initiative) “offers uniquely Northern and Indigenous course offerings—courses taught by Northern leaders, about the Northern context, with an agenda set by Northerners ...” (“What Dechinta Offers,” 2014). Community and land-based approaches are an important rejection of the settler Canadian approach to higher education (Ballantyne, 2014). As the territorial North works towards the creation of a public university or universities, we must ask what role, if any, should there be for southern involvement in a northern university?

The personalities, organizations, and narratives that have figured in northern higher education deserve greater attention. I have touched upon several of them here with the hope that settler Canadian researchers and

institutions can begin to look inward *to know ourselves* and our role in settler colonialism. Whatever structure a northern university may take, we must be cautious of projects that view university education in the North as simply an opportunity for nation building or the expansion of southern knowledge systems; the debates and discussions of the past deserve much greater study and reflection as we look to the future.

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Notes

1. The term settler is used here to refer to non-Indigenous peoples who occupy and/or control lands that have been taken from Indigenous peoples.
2. While this article is primarily concerned with English Canadian nationalism, the North has also been an essential element of Quebec nation building, as evidenced by the 2011 launch of Le Plan Nord (Duhaime et al., 2013).
3. It is important to note that the evolution of vocational and trades education is woven into the northern university story. The formalization and incorporation of trades and vocational training into the education system has received limited but increasing attention. See, for example, Young and McDermott, 1988 and Kennedy Dalseg, 2015.
4. The Indian Brotherhood of the Northwest Territories was formed in 1969 in response to the federal “White Paper” and the proposed Mackenzie Valley pipeline. COPE was formed in early 1970 to represent the interests of Indigenous peoples in the Western Arctic after the discovery of oil in the region. ITC was founded in 1971 to represent the national interests of Inuit.
5. There is also an interesting geographic dimension to Arvaluk’s participation in these education discussions. While Rohmer and the UCN founders advocated for a university from the Mackenzie Delta, Arvaluk and others in the Eastern Arctic were having their own conversations about higher education. Although the Carrothers Commission had not recommended the immediate division of the Northwest Territories into eastern and western segments, the cultural difference and geographic distance between Inuit, Inuvialuit, and First Nations would play an important role in post-secondary education debates.

6. As a result of Dr. Hamelin's motion, the Science Advisory Board was established in 1975. From 1976–1984 the board's vice-chair was Walter O. Kupsch. The Science Advisory Board is different from the Science Institute of the Northwest Territories, which was created by the NWT Legislative Assembly in 1984. In 1995 the Institute was divided and merged with Nunavut Arctic College and Aurora College (Aurora Research Institute, 2011, p. 3).
7. The 1982 plebiscite on the division of the Northwest Territories demonstrated that northern residents overwhelmingly favoured the creation of a new territory in the east (Abele & Dickerson, 1985, p. 2). The division of Arctic College into Aurora and Nunavut Arctic Colleges was one part of the long journey toward self-determination.

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