



**McGill**

School of  
**Physical and Occupational Therapy**

**Occupational Therapy Program  
Indigenous-focused curriculum thread**

**2021-2022**



Members of the Mohawk Trail Longhouse in Kahnawá:ke with Occupational Therapy Faculty 2019

(Left to right) Shawn Stacey – Kanien'kehá:ka educator, Marie-Lyne Grenier, Karen Falcicchio, Hiba Zafran, Mohawk Elders Joe McGregor and Calvin Jacobs, Heather Lambert, Jessica Barudin-Indigenous Health Professions Program, and Mohawk Faith keeper Loretta Leborgne (in front).



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*McGill University is located in Tiohtià:ke – the Mohawk name for Montréal. We are grateful to live and learn on lands and waters that have long been cared for by the Haudenosaunee.*

## **Coordinator**

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<https://www.mcgill.ca/indig-health/about/our-team>

## **Background**

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission outlines Calls to Actions<sup>1</sup> (2015) for health care professionals and educational programs to engage in efforts for reconciliation in order to redress the inequities faced by Indigenous communities due to oppressive processes of colonization. Two salient actions for current and future occupational therapists are: 1) the inclusion of Indigenous histories and healing practices within the curriculum, and 2) the development of a critical understanding of cultural safety as a foundational relational and political skill. These principles are in alignment with social accountability in medicine and the 2016 focus on human rights in the World Federation of Occupational Therapists' *Minimum standards for the Education of Occupational Therapists*, the World Health Organization's Traditional Medicine strategy (2014-2023), the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, and the final report of McGill University's Provost's *Taskforce on Indigenous Studies and Education* (2017). The Indigenous-focused curriculum thread also aligns with the following national position statements by the Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists:

(2018) CAOT Position Statement: Occupational therapy and Indigenous peoples

<https://www.caot.ca/document/3700/O%20-%20OT%20and%20Aboriginal%20Health.pdf>

(2020) No silence in the face of inequality and injustice

<https://www.caot.ca/document/7299/No%20silence%20in%20the%20face%20of%20inequality%20and%20injustice.pdf>

## **Description**

There are ~90 hours of required content integrated across academic courses, through all years of our program, that foster foundational competencies and/or focus on Indigenous topics (~50). The Indigenous-specific topics are developed in partnership with, and led by, Indigenous educators and community facilitators. The thread includes foundational knowledge about anti-oppressive and intersectional approaches, colonial history and ongoing systemic racism in healthcare in Quebec and Canada, Cree worldviews of health (Nation focus may vary by year and speaker), trauma-informed cultural safety, limitations of Western-based models of practice, community development, Inuit understandings and approaches to resilience (Nation focus may vary by year and speaker), Mohawk traditional healing, and White supremacy in rehabilitation ideologies.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://trc.ca/assets/pdf/Calls\\_to\\_Action\\_English2.pdf](http://trc.ca/assets/pdf/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf)



Additionally, the OT program has established fieldwork collaborations with the Cree Bay St James territory. At the present time, non-Indigenous OTs on the Eeyou Istchee territory offer supervision and learning to interested students depending on availability. New teaching and learning fieldwork partnerships are in development with the Kateri Hospital located in Kahnawá:ke.

*Occupational Therapy Field Studies in Northern Quebec*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WidoAjRJPqk>

### **Objectives of the integrated Indigenous-focused curriculum thread**

Students graduating from the occupational therapy program will be able to:

- Acknowledge and actively interrogate their positionalities and influence in professional encounters
- Identify principles of, and demonstrate strategies for, trauma-informed, culturally safer and power-sharing relationships
- Value, respect and facilitate engagement in Indigenous modes of healing (Two-eyed seeing)
- Learn from the lived experiences and resiliencies of Indigenous individuals, families, communities and service providers in Quebec (Mohawk, Cree, and/or Inuit).
- Critically locate and analyse the social, political and historical roots of occupational, social and health injustices and inequities, and resulting rights violations, with and for a particular group/community
- Apply complex (ethical/political/narrative) reasoning to:
  - o Engage in partnerships and participate in multi-level changes, and,
  - o Address occupational rights violations through collaboratively designing occupation-based community and capacity-building with Indigenous communities, and other groups that are made vulnerable by systems of oppression

### **Partnerships and Pedagogy**

The curricular content and learning activities were developed based on an ongoing consultative process<sup>2</sup> that fostered partnering for what and how to teach Indigenous topics. The teaching and learning about Indigenous health and occupational therapy occurs in dialogue with Indigenous partners and the Indigenous Health Professions Program<sup>3</sup>. An Indigenous curricular workgroup determines objectives and activities in the OT program, with the input of Indigenous educators and facilitators. The content is intentionally threaded and integrated throughout the whole curriculum to provide a holistic understanding and engagement with Indigenous topics in

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<sup>2</sup> Zafran, H., Barudin, J., Saunders, S., & Kasperski, J. (2018). *Responding to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action: Laying a Foundation for Indigenous Partnerships and Topics*. Occupational Therapy Program, McGill University, Montréal, QC.

<https://escholarship.mcgill.ca/concern/papers/nc580r997?locale=en>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.mcgill.ca/indig-health/>



multiple ways. These include Indigenous ways of knowing – such as storytelling and place-based experiences, and a focus on transformative learning. Attention to Elder protocols, reciprocity and respect is valued and modelled. This curriculum is constantly evolving and expanding with our growing reflections, capacities and partners.

### Overview

The specific learning objectives, instructors, and content of the topics are aligned with the course within which they are located<sup>4</sup>. Students have multiple opportunities to practice critical reflexivity, advocacy and strengths-based approaches. Indigenous instructors may change dependent on their interest, availability and alongside evolving relationships with the OT program.

Year	Course	Topics	Examples of content	Course Contact
U1	<b>POTH-250</b>  <i>Intro to Professional Practice-2</i>	Intro to systems of oppression and Indigenous healthcare concerns	Effects of colonialism on the healthcare of Indigenous populations  Effects of white supremacy, stigma and racism on the health of Indigenous populations  Taking an intersectional lens at Indigenous health	<a href="mailto:marie-lyne.grenier@mcgill.ca">marie-lyne.grenier@mcgill.ca</a>
U2	<b>OCC-443</b>  <i>Constructing Mental Health</i>	Trauma-informed mental health	Politics of Historical Trauma  Mental health OT in northern communities  Intersectionality and mental health  Cultural case formulation in interviewing	<a href="mailto:hiba.zafran@mcgill.ca">hiba.zafran@mcgill.ca</a>

<sup>4</sup> For complete course outlines: <https://www.mcgill.ca/spot/programs/ot/curriculum>



Year	Course	Topics	Examples of content	Course Contact
Premasters	<b>POTH-563</b>  <i>Foundations of Professional Practice</i>	Systemic racism in healthcare	Colonial history and testimonial of Indigenous experiences in healthcare in Canada	<a href="mailto:susanne.mak@mcgill.ca">susanne.mak@mcgill.ca</a>
	<b>OCC-550</b>  <i>Enabling Human Occupation</i>	Indigenous worldviews of health and occupation	Culturally safe OT in Indigenous communities  KAIROS© Blanket exercise  Implications for understandings of occupation	<a href="mailto:cynthia.perlman@mcgill.ca">cynthia.perlman@mcgill.ca</a>
	<b>OCC-551</b>  <i>Psychosocial Practice in OT</i>	Narratives in the assessment process	Reasoning for understanding what matters for individuals and groups, including in simulation interviews	<a href="mailto:melissa.park@mcgill.ca">melissa.park@mcgill.ca</a>
	<b>OCC-548</b>  <i>Holistic Approaches in OT</i>	Indigenous approaches to healing	Grief and Historical Trauma in chronic conditions  Spirituality and traditional Mohawk healing – Longhouse experiential learning	<a href="mailto:heather.lambert@mcgill.ca">heather.lambert@mcgill.ca</a>





### Evaluation of learning

Evaluation of learning of Indigenous and anti-oppressive content within each course is collaboratively determined and scaffolded by the Indigenous curricular workgroup in dialogue with Indigenous educators who participate in the teaching. These include in-class reflective essays, formative interviewing at the simulation centre, reflexive argument building and debates in online dialogues, case-based assessments, grant writing projects, and oral exams.

### Resources for Anti-Oppressive Occupational Therapy

Students can join the *Occupational Therapy Indigenous Health Network* and access relevant readings and resources here: <https://www.caot.ca/site/pd/otn/otahn?nav=sidebar>

For core documents, position statements, policies, scientific and news articles on Indigenous health, explore the “curriculum” section developed for educators by the Indigenous Health Professions Program: <https://www.mcgill.ca/indig-health/>

*Occupational Therapy Now* – Open access special issue: Time for action: Occupational therapy responses to the TRC. July, 2019: [https://www.caot.ca/document/6761/July\\_OTNow\\_2019\\_test.pdf](https://www.caot.ca/document/6761/July_OTNow_2019_test.pdf)

For an overview of core Indigenous topics:

[https://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/constitution\\_act\\_1982\\_section\\_35/](https://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/constitution_act_1982_section_35/)

University of Saskatchewan Indigenous Studies Portal Research Tool:

<https://iportal.usask.ca/>

Introduction to Indigenous Health [webinar]

<https://www.mcgill.ca/indig-health/curriculum-development/webinar-introduction-indigenous-health-teaching/webinar-recording-introduction-indigenous-health-teaching>

National Collaborating Centre for Indigenous Health

<https://www.nccih.ca/en/>

### Instagram

@theacademicdiva

@otsofcolor\_

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### Podcasts

<https://www.cotad.org/ignite-series>

<http://www.occupiedpodcast.com/>