To whom it may concern,

The Dalhousie Student Union (DSU) stands in full support of the work of the Indigenous Studies Major Curriculum Committee and Advisory Council and of the development of an Indigenous Studies major and honours program at Dalhousie University. We hope to see the Committee’s applications for funding to develop these programs approved. This program is a necessary addition to Dalhousie University’s campus. Because we live and learn on Turtle Island, we must remove the barriers preventing Indigenous People from teaching others about and exercising their way of life on their land.

Dalhousie University is located on ancestral, unsurrendered, and unceded Mi’kmaw territory. We recognize this truth in our Senate meetings, Board of Governors meetings, Induction, and Convocation ceremonies with land acknowledgments and yet we continue to leave this truth largely unexamined in our classrooms. An Indigenous major and honours program will allow our community and students to learn and understand what those acknowledgements truly mean. Until Dalhousie University develops content that rightfully teaches about Indigenous cultures these land acknowledgements, while a beautiful symbol, are largely not understood by our students. Stronger action and education are needed.

The Indigenous major and honours program would allow students from all over the world to be educated on Indigenous cultures, languages, and histories in the territory currently known as Canada; it would also give Indigenous students and teachers the ability to have their knowledge recognized by an academic institution.

Due to the intricacies involved with creating an Indigenous major and honours program in a colonized space, considerable time and consultation are required to ensure that course content and course delivery accurately and respectfully reflect the values, culture, history, and language of both specific Nations, Peoples or communities and of Indigenous peoples as a whole.
We want to emphasize that this program must be developed under the leadership of Indigenous teachers, scholars, and communities. Teaching, marking, and student experiences, in particular, may look different within this program than in other areas of Dalhousie University. It is necessary that qualified individuals who have a critical and deep understanding of the subject matter are hired to develop and teach this material. In hiring instructors for these programs, it is paramount that Dalhousie University recognize Indigenous ways of knowing and find ways to honour the wisdom and teachings of elders and knowledge-keepers who have not necessarily received post-secondary education.

Finally, special consideration must be given with respect for the different ways that Indigenous students and settler students participate in spaces introducing Indigenous content. Learning the important material that will be offered in this program will be a markedly different experience for these groups of students, and both mental health and pre-existing knowledge must be considered in developing course content.

We recognize that these issues are complex, and we are confident that the Indigenous Studies Major Curriculum Committee is equipped to solve these issues and develop this major and honours program. The Committee has the benefit of personal and professional experiences and the input of the Indigenous Studies Advisory Council. On top of these resources, the time and consultation required for the development of the Indigenous Major and Honours programs requires funding. It is for these reasons that we voice our support not only for the creation of the program, but also for adequate funding to support the development process.

We have the utmost faith that the Indigenous Studies Major Curriculum Committee is prepared to develop a comprehensive Indigenous major and honours program that will enrich Dalhousie’s community in new ways and reinforce the equity, diversity, and inclusion principles the University stands on. The student body is in support of this project.

Sincerely,

The Dalhousie Student Union Council
Madeleine Stinson, DSU President

Erica Seelemann, Vice President Academic & External

Hanna Stewart, Vice President Internal

Isa Wright, Vice President Finance & Operations

Jad Ghiz, Vice President Student Life

Fatima Beydoun, Board of Governors Representative
Aparna Mohan, Board of Governors Representative
Nik Isaac-Pictou, Indigenous Students Community Representative
Claudia Castillo-Prent, Black Students Community Representative
Isabela Paes de Mello de Camargo, International Students Community Representative
Drew Guyan, LGBTQ Students Community Representative
Kathrine Guevara, Women Students Community Representative
Zacharia Scinocca, Faculty of Dentistry Representative
William Luton, Faculty of Engineering Representative
Shane Isler, Faculty of Law Representative
Cameron Penny, Faculty of Medicine Representative
Sahl Zahoor, Faculty of Computer Science Representative