

2022-23 ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT

Western University
Office of Indigenous Initiatives



Land Acknowledgement

Western University is located on the territories of the Anishinaabek, Haudenosaunee, Lūnaapéewak and Chonnonton Nations. The Huron-Wendat Nation also has connections to this territory. London and surrounding area is covered by Treaty 6 London Township, Treaty 7 Sombra Township, and Treaty 21 Longwoods. This land is home to diverse Indigenous Peoples (First Nations, Métis, and Inuit) whom we must restore as contemporary stewards of the land; by recognizing their relationships to land, we make explicit Indigenous Peoples’ presence and rights to self-determination. This report is one of many initiatives establishing ongoing responsibility and accountability to Indigenous Peoples.



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Message from the Vice-Provost and Associate Vice-President (Indigenous Initiatives)

She:koli, Aanii, Koolamalsihmwa, Greetings.

I am delighted to share our Annual Progress Report for 2022-23—a truly memorable year for Indigenous Initiatives at Western. This year was marked by a historic signpost on the journey towards Truth and Reconciliation, as we opened the Wampum Learning Lodge (WLL). The Lodge is the new home for Indigenous people at Western, and it will serve as the centre for Indigenous initiatives on campus for generations to come. The result of years of planning and consultation, the WLL embodies a commitment to elevate Indigenous voices and presence at Western and bring Indigenous ways of knowing and being to the entire University.

While the opening of the WLL has been monumental, we’re also pleased to highlight the numerous additional initiatives led by the Office of Indigenous Initiatives (OII) this past year.

Most notable among these was Universities Canada’s eighth annual Building Reconciliation Forum, which we hosted in June of 2023. This was the largest event of its kind ever held at Western, and it was a resounding success! It was planned and executed alongside our regular operations, through which we provide leadership to the University in both the administrative and academic fields; engage with students, staff, and faculty in integrating Indigenous worldviews into the curriculum; and collaborate with Indigenous communities and organizations in the greater London community to amplify Indigenous initiatives and perspectives.

The result of our efforts is an enhanced Indigenous presence at Western, as well as a greater engagement by the University with Indigenous Peoples in Canada. This is a positive development that benefits everyone. By elevating Indigenous worldviews and giving voice to Indigenous people, Western is widening the intellectual and cultural horizons of its many partners. Doing so not only fulfills the mission of the University, but also advances the broader goal of our society to facilitate Truth and Reconciliation.

Yours in unity, service and Reconciliation,

Christy R. Bressette
Vice-Provost and Associate Vice-President
(Indigenous Initiatives)



2022-23

MILESTONES ON THE ROAD TO INDIGENIZATION

Indigenous Students

Indigenous student enrolment at Western stood at 661 in the fall of 2021 and 665 in the winter of 2022. The vast majority of students—over 85%—were enrolled on a full-time basis. These students are the lifeblood of the Indigenous experience at Western and they form the central focus of our initiatives.

The delivery of Indigenous student-focused initiatives rests principally with the Indigenous Student Centre (ISC). The ISC comprises 13 staff members and works closely with Indigenous students through the University Student Council's Indigenous Relations Coordinator; the Indigenous Students Association and its Executive Council; and the Supporting Aboriginal Graduate Enhancement Coordinator (SAGE).

The ISC team also supports Indigenous students in a variety of other ways during their tenure at Western. It provides academic counselling, guidance and tutoring; coordinates the engagement of Elders as important pathfinders for students on their learning journey; organizes cultural events and sustains an Indigenous cultural infrastructure that creates a welcoming environment for students; and facilitates peer-to-peer mentorship and leadership that instills a sense of community for Indigenous students while preparing them for engagement with the wider world when they graduate from the University.

The ISC also helps to coordinate financial supports and employment opportunities that help ease the financial burden on Indigenous students and their families. A Financial Aid Coordinator in the Centre assists students in navigating access to the various financial resources that are available to Indigenous students. These include the National Indigenous Scholarship Program, for incoming Indigenous students who plan on attending Western University's main campus; and the Local First Nations Scholarship Program, for First Nations

students from local territories. The former provides two scholarships for students applying from high school and one for a student applying from a post-secondary institution, all valued at \$50,000 each; the latter consists of a bursary of up to \$15,000 for full-time students and up to \$9,000 for part-time students. Both programs are managed together with Western's Office of the Registrar.

Like OII, the ISC's focus is not limited to operations within Western, as an important element of its work is engagement with Indigenous people and communities and facilitating improved relationships with the University. The ISC undertakes regular outreach initiatives with Indigenous youth and communities across Ontario, and employs an Indigenous Recruitment Coordinator to encourage Indigenous students to choose Western for their postsecondary education.

This past year we bade farewell to Amanda Myers, who had been ISC Director since 2019. We will miss Amanda's dedication, energy and hard work, and we are very grateful to her for the stellar contribution she made to the lives of Indigenous students during her tenure at Western. Recruitment of a new Director is a top priority.

Faculty

An important element of OII’s mandate is the transformation of education through the decolonization and Indigenization of the University. This work is undertaken at the academic level by our faculty, with assistance from OII in the form of a variety of educational supports. Faculty are increasingly recognizing that Indigenous Elders are a key resource in educating students about Indigenous worldviews, and we facilitate connections with Elders so that their knowledge can be brought into the classroom. This cultural outreach is complemented by the efforts of OII’s full-time Curriculum and Pedagogy Advisor, who provides faculty with guidance and resources that help them integrate Indigenous worldviews into their curricula. We also conduct the KAIROS Blanket Exercise for faculty, as a means of deepening their understanding of Indigenous history on Turtle Island.

As part of its strategic planning, Western has made hiring of new Indigenous faculty a priority. The University initiated a faculty cluster-hiring process three years ago, and this process continued in 2022-23 with the announcement of two new Indigenous hires. In the fall of 2022, the new faculty were welcomed to the University with a special orientation session dedicated to Black and Indigenous faculty members and hosted jointly with the Office of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion. The growing complement of Indigenous faculty at Western ensures increasing prominence for Indigenous voices and experiences, which in turn enrich students’ understanding of Indigenous ways of knowing and being. A full list of Indigenous faculty at Western can be found on the faculty page of the [OII website](#). Their background, expertise and areas of interest significantly help to advance Indigenous perspectives and worldviews in academic discourse at Western.

Indigenous Faculty joining Western in 2024



Tara Pride
Assistant Professor,
School of Occupational Therapy



Jackson 2bears
Associate Professor, Visual Arts and
Indigenous Studies
Canada Research Chair (Tier 1) in
Indigenous Arts Research & Technology
Director of the Onkwehonwe Research
Environment (ORE)

Administration, Policy, and Infrastructure

Opening of the Wampum Learning Lodge

The centrepiece of our initiatives in 2022-23 was the launch of the **Wampum Learning Lodge (WLL)**. Beginning on November 7, we held a week-long opening that featured a variety of events welcoming different groups to the space. The opening was a resounding success, and represented the most concrete affirmation by Western to date of its commitment to Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples. The Lodge is now well established in its role as a central hub for Indigenous people at the University, and its use is governed by guidelines developed by OII to ensure that it serves as a space that will advance Reconciliation, decolonization, and Indigenization.

Growing our Truth and Reconciliation Strategy

The WLL arose out of a recommendation in Western’s Indigenous Strategic Plan (ISP) to increase the number of Indigenous spaces at the University. The Plan remains our guiding blueprint, and during the past year we launched an internal process to inform its official update and forge stronger connections with the University’s new strategic plan, **Towards Western at 150**. The next iteration of the Plan will draw on feedback gathered from students, staff and community to further develop our path towards decolonization and Indigenization.

The ongoing update to the ISP will be complemented by other initiatives surrounding policy and administration. We deepened our relationship with the newly formed Office of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion EDI. The leaders of the OII and EDI offices co-chair Western’s EDI Central Working Group, with a goal to sharing knowledge and wise practices across Western’s faculties, administrative units, and student organizations to promote equity, anti-racism, and accountability, and to advance the work of Truth and Reconciliation.

Most notably, we provided significant support to inform all aspects of Western’s Equity Census (2022). The census helped further awareness of the importance of Indigenous perspectives in the development of equity policies and educational resources for the benefit of everyone at the University.

We continued to consult with the University on hiring policies designed to bring more Indigenous faculty to Western, and represented Indigenous interests on Senate subcommittees. We also hosted the University’s annual leadership forum in November, which focused on Indigenization and decolonization and featured a panel discussion on Reconciliation in a university context.

Within OII, we added two Career Boost Project Associate positions to our staff complement—temporary hires of two years each, drawn from a pool of recent Western graduates seeking to gain valuable work experience and contribute to the Western community. These new colleagues, together with a new Administrative Assistant at the Wampum Learning Lodge, have been an invaluable addition to the OII team. We also hired a graphic designer in the second half of the 2022 to meet our growing communications demands.



Curriculum, Academics and Research

A central component of our undertaking to share Indigenous worldviews and ways of knowing and being with the entire Western campus is the Indigenization of the curriculum. This is an ongoing project that OII has made a leading priority, and which we have delivered by making a wide range of teaching and learning resources available to the Western community. These include **Maatoo-kiiying Gaa-miinigoo-wiziying (Sharing Our Gifts)**, an Indigenous Online Learning Bundles project launched in 2022 that can help guide teaching and conversation around Indigenous worldviews; *The Path*, a five-module learning program on Indigenous issues; *4 Seasons of Reconciliation*, an online, 10-module program developed by First Nations University of Canada; an Indigenous Teaching and Learning Series, developed jointly with the Centre for Teaching and Learning; and *Connecting for Climate Change Action*, a course that incorporates Indigenous worldviews into teaching about climate, and that is offered through the Department of Geography and Environment and online to the general public.

- ▶ We are also advancing the Indigenization of the curriculum through **Memegwaan**, Western's new Indigenous Learning Honour. Created in 2022 in response to a recommendation of **Maamwi Gzikewag: Indigenous Curriculum & Learning Report**, the Honour provides formal recognition on the transcripts of students who undertake a required number of Indigenous curricular and extracurricular activities during their time at Western. In addition to furthering Reconciliation in the University, the Honour will signal to employers that a graduate is prepared to engage with and meet the needs of Indigenous Peoples both in Canada and globally.
- ▶ We also work closely with other branches of the University to deliver our programs. In 2022, we successfully applied for funding from Western's Parr Centre for Thriving to develop two ground-breaking initiatives that will enhance the Indigenous student experience at the University: a land-based learning project, and a visiting Aunties and Uncles program. In addition, we helped to promote an Indigenous postdoctoral fellowship through Western Research, and collaborated with Western Libraries on the management of Indigenous collections.
- ▶ Our flagship research Indigenous research initiative is the **Head and Heart Indigenous Research Fellowship**. The Fellowship offers Indigenous undergraduate and graduate students the opportunity to engage in academic research and engage with each other for mutual education and support through the program. This year's cohort comprised 33 Fellows (22 undergraduate, nine graduate and two medical students) who were supported by 31 mentors. The original number of 15 was expanded significantly thanks to the collaborative efforts from several deans, faculty members and the Provost's Office. For many, participation in Head and Heart was the first time they experienced aspects of Indigenization and decolonization at the University. Both Fellows and mentors learned about and improved their knowledge of Indigenous research and pedagogies, and undergraduates received preparation for future graduate studies. Research outputs from this year's cohort can be viewed online via the **Scholarship@Western portal**.

Campus and Community

In June of 2022, we established an Indigenous Elders Council that will help guide OII and the University in the process of decolonization and Indigenization. As the redesign of the new Indigenous learning space neared completion, we invited the Council to lead us in giving it a name. The Elders were instrumental in this process, and we arrived at the "Wampum Learning Lodge" as the name that best embodied the commitment to Reconciliation and Indigenization that the space represents. We also adopted the Elders' recommendation to assign an Anishinabemowin, Oneida, and Lenape name (the three main Indigenous languages in the region) to each of the three levels, respectively, of the Lodge.

Local Indigenous organizations and community members also played a major role in framing the mandate and operation of the Lodge, notably through the its Steering Committee, established in January of 2022. The role of community was highlighted during the launch of the Lodge in November, when Elders were given a place of honour in the opening ceremony and throughout the week of ongoing celebrations. The Lodge is now available to community groups and organizations who wish to book space, and we look forward to Indigenous people in the surrounding area viewing the Lodge as another space where Indigenous voices and cultures are given full expression.

In furthering the work to advance relationships and deeper connections with Indigenous communities, the OII is excited to highlight several community-based and collaborative projects, such as, the Medicine Garden at the Lodge; the White Corn Revitalization Farm project undertaken in association with Western's Master of Environmental Sustainability Program; and the development of an Urban Three-Sisters' garden, developed in partnership with Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, to help advance Indigenous food sovereignty.



Widening our Communications Reach

Our deepening engagement with Indigenous communities and organizations, as well as the increase in Indigenous initiatives occasioned by the opening of the Lodge, requires us to communicate with partners more widely and more often. To meet our needs, we established an OII account on Twitter, and followed this up with accounts on Facebook and Instagram for the Wampum Learning Lodge. We now have an active social media presence dedicated to Indigenous initiatives, and these are an important element in raising Indigenous voices at Western.

Our social media engagement is a welcome addition to our quarterly newsletter, *Laotsyá:n*, which will soon enter its third year of publication. The newsletter has proven to be a highly successful vehicle for communicating the work of OII on campus and engaging with the Western community, and neatly complements the **weekly newsletter of the Indigenous Student Centre**. We launched a new website for the WLL, and began a revamp of the OII website to reflect the many changes OII has undergone since it was first published.

Finally, we launched an **Indigenous Alumni chapter** in June via the Western Alumni website. This new chapter will help us cultivate relationships with Indigenous graduates and develop a greater sense of belonging for Indigenous people upon graduation from their programs.

Ongoing Engagement and Special Events

OII works closely with other Indigenous groups on campus to advance Indigenous interests. We draw on the Indigenous Faculty Advisory Council (IFAC) for guidance on many issues, and rely on the Indigenous Postsecondary Education Council (IPEC) for advice on questions relating to Indigeneity and education. IPEC includes Indigenous voices from outside the University, and is thus a vital body for ensuring that our strategy and initiatives are relevant and responsive to Indigenous community interests. We also coordinate our efforts with the Indigenous Languages Advisory Group (ILAG), which leads the drive to revitalize Indigenous languages at Western; and we work with the Indigenous alumni chapter to involve graduates of the University with Indigenous life on campus.

Of special note this year was the eighth annual Universities Canada Building Reconciliation Forum, which we hosted in June 2023. We welcomed over 400 delegates from across the country to the Forum, which featured two days of presentations and a pre-Forum day dedicated to highlighting local Indigenous organizations and communities. The centrepiece of the day was visits to two local Indigenous communities, Chippewa of the Thames First Nation and Oneida of the Thames First Nation. Forum delegates were graciously welcomed into the communities, and enjoyed tours, cultural and historical presentations, and a feast. The Forum was the largest event of its kind ever hosted by Western, and represented an important landmark on the road to Reconciliation at the University.

In addition, we host ongoing events throughout the year. Every June we observe National Indigenous Peoples Day and National Indigenous History Month, which we use as an occasion for teaching by launching a 30-day Indigenous history challenge online. On September 30 we again observed Orange Shirt Day and National Day for Truth and Reconciliation (NDTR). We were gratified by the extensive participation shown by allied groups across Western, and we also partnered with Atlohsa Family Healing Services in programming for the day.

Ongoing educational programming focusing on Indigenous cultures and histories continued in 2022-23, including:

- the **KAIROS Blanket Exercise**, which took place this year in person for the first time since 2020;
- workshops on such topics as Land Acknowledgements, Decolonizing the Online Classroom, Cultural Humility, and Indigenous Pedagogical Approaches to Curriculum;
- the extension of the tenure of Western's first Indigenous Artist-In-Residence, and the appointment of an Indigenous Writer-In-Residence for 2022-23;
- **Peetooteewiit**, a regular speaker series hosting Indigenous Elders, Knowledge Keepers, teachers and community members who have agreed to share their wisdom with the Western community;
- **Mbwaach'idiwag**, a podcast series devoted to Indigenous cultures and ideas; and
- **Biindigen**, Western's Indigenous Learning Circle, which offers participants avenues into Indigenous worldviews.



Indigenous Communities

It has made the cultivation and strengthening of relationships with Indigenous communities a top priority. Many of our initiatives rely on Indigenous Elders, Knowledge Keepers and external organizations for insight and direction, and we make every effort to include Indigenous communities in our consultations. A notable example of this was the contributions made by Indigenous communities to the development of the Wampum Learning Lodge over several years, culminating in the choice of the Lodge’s name.

In December of 2022 we held a winter holiday market at the Lodge that welcomed Indigenous vendors from the Greater London Area, our first major event after its opening in November. We anticipate that the Lodge will now provide expanded opportunities to deepen our engagement with surrounding communities — as exemplified by our hosting of the Building Reconciliation Forum 2023, which featured a day of visits and cultural sharing with local Indigenous Nations.

We also cultivate relationships with local communities through our Mini-University Program. This program is led by the Indigenous Student Centre and gives Indigenous youth who are considering postsecondary education an opportunity to gain familiarity with what they can expect as Indigenous students at the University, as well as to learn what Western can offer them as Indigenous students.



Preparing for Opportunities Ahead

While Western has made considerable progress in implementing the Indigenous Strategic Plan, many more opportunities to advance the work of Truth and Reconciliation through decolonization and Indigenization remain, especially by growing allyship. Increased hiring of Indigenous faculty and staff using a focused recruitment strategy will help achieve this goal, but more needs to be done to support non-Indigenous members of the community to support the educational and academic work that decolonization requires. OII will prioritize action toward this in the coming year.

We would like to thank all those who have partnered with us during the year to advance this important work, and we look forward to another year of growth.

Anushik, Miigwech, Yaw:ko. Thank you.

