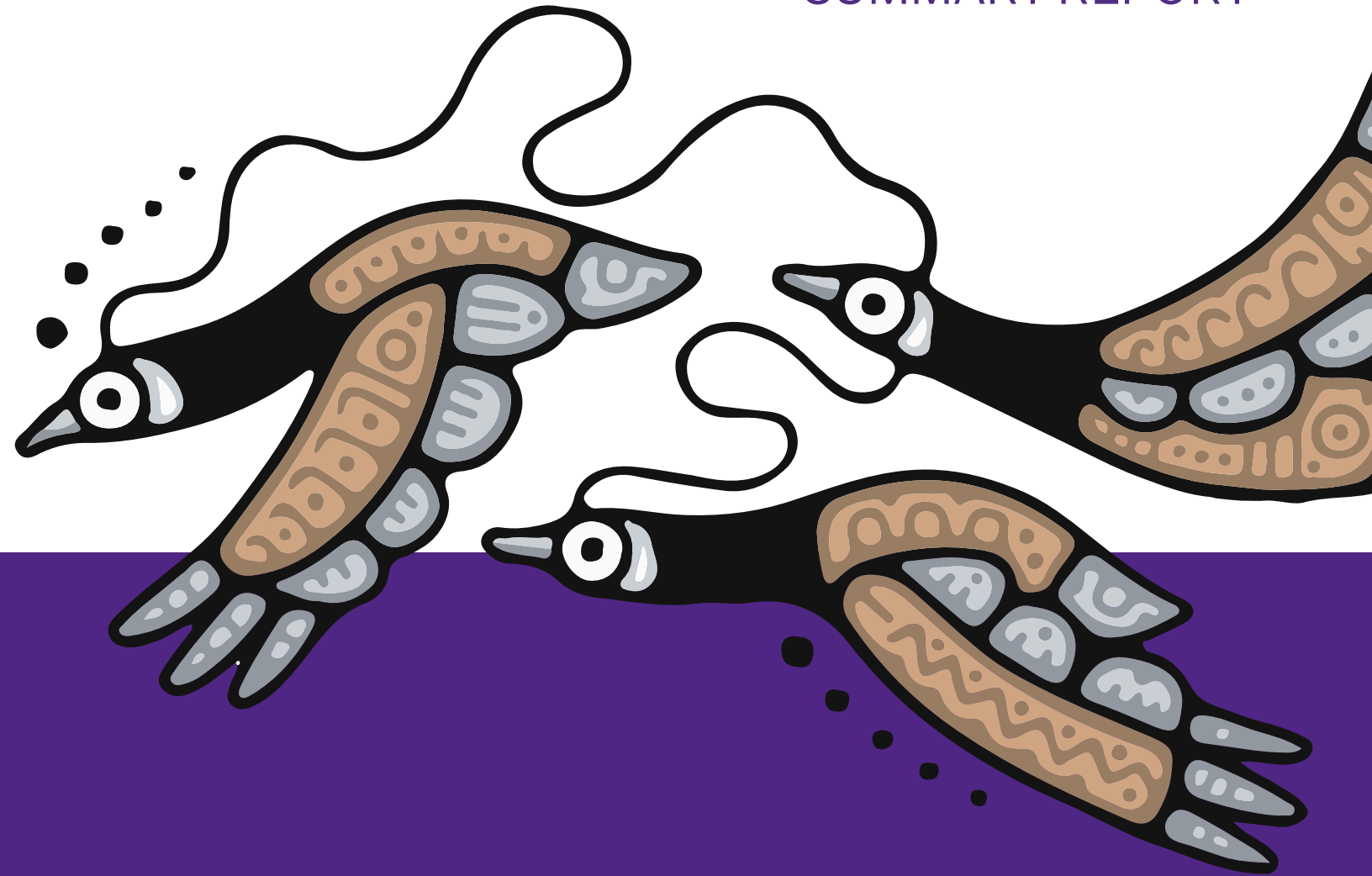
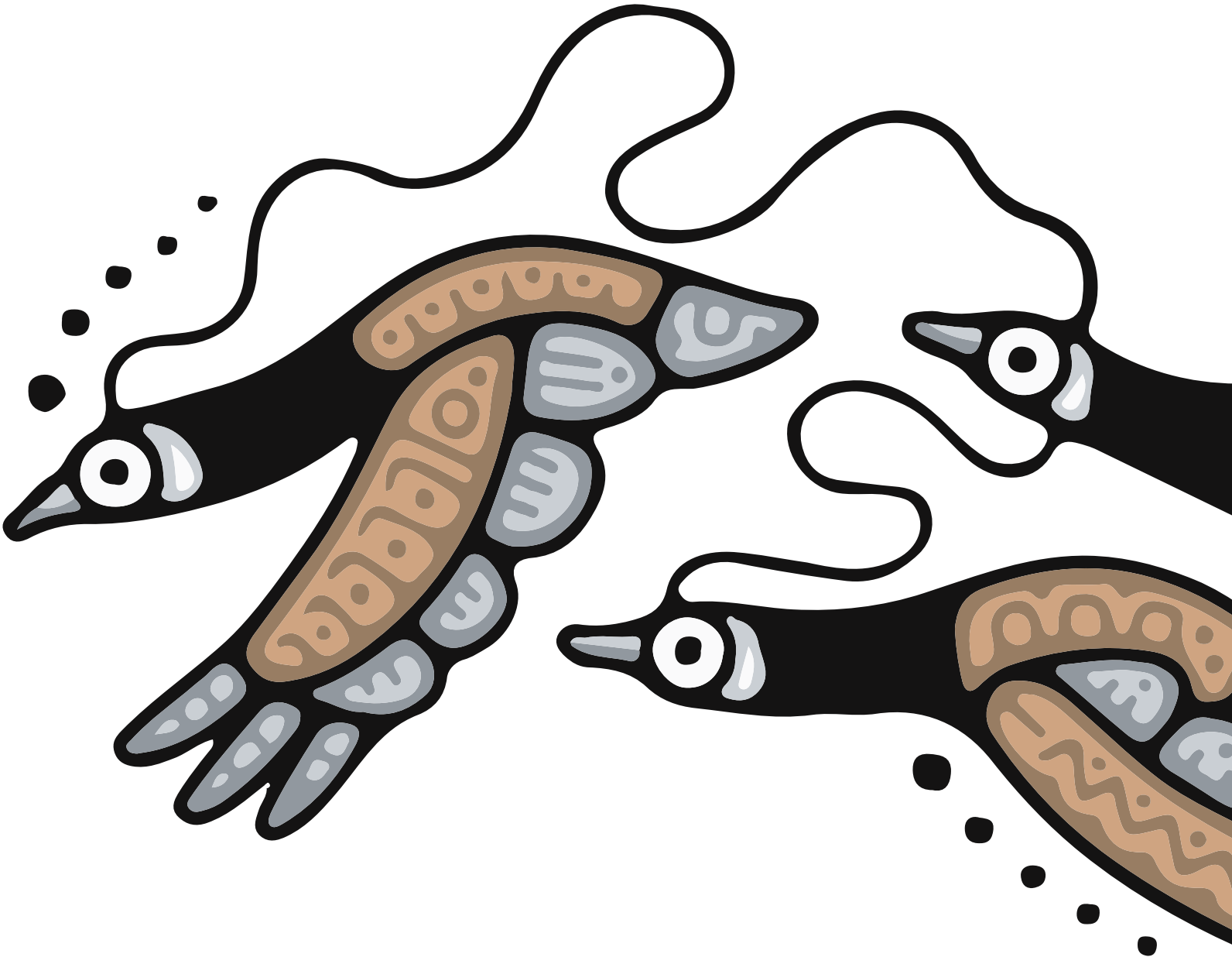


Building Reconciliation Forum 2023

SUMMARY REPORT







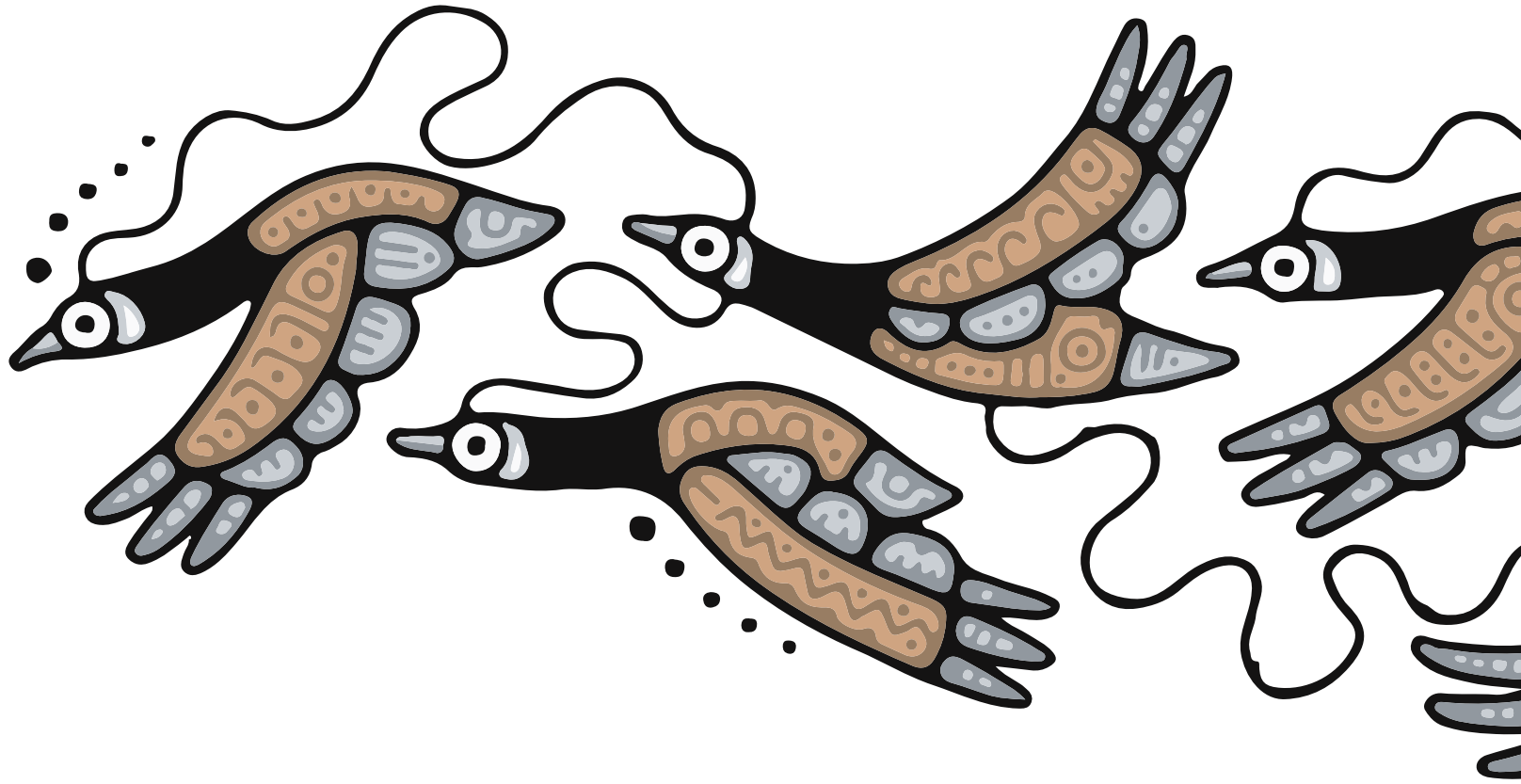


BUILDING RECONCILIATION **FORUM** 2023

*EDUCATION FOR RECONCILIATION:
REBUILDING STRONGER AND WITH INTENTIONALITY*

Theme and Subthemes

The theme for the 2023 Forum was *Education for Reconciliation: Rebuilding Stronger and with Intentionality*. It was chosen to reflect the need for rebuilding after the disruption caused by the pandemic, which slowed and sometimes even halted numerous initiatives within the academy. The theme intended to highlight that the work for Truth and Reconciliation in postsecondary institutions is an ongoing project that requires constant attention and effort. It was further divided into four subthemes, which are outlined on the following pages.



STORY ABOUT THE ARTWORK

The image of the geese in flight profiled in this report is borrowed from a report at Western University entitled *Maamwi Gizekewag*, which is Anishinabemowin for “geese flying together.” Outlining approaches to leading change in Indigenous Curriculum and Learning at Western, the report’s name was inspired by the collaborative and intentional approach of geese in flight.

Seneca Elder Dan Smoke, a long-time friend of Western University, instructs us to learn from the example of geese when they undertake difficult journeys. In doing so, they fly together in a V-formation. As a collective, the flock benefits from a vortex with different geese taking the lead position of the V at different times, thereby sharing the heaviest workload equally. Geese, however, do not only move in relation to each other; they move in relation to the land and the cosmos, flying during specific periods of the lunar cycle, and staying forever connected to the land and place.

In the image of the geese in flight, created by Ojibwe and Oneida artist Tsista Kennedy, we observe how Indigenous ways of knowing and being and doing, which are inherently relational and land-based, are essential to inform a collaborative and shared approach to furthering the work of Truth and Reconciliation. This same spirit of shared responsibility underscored Western’s collaborative approach in hosting the Building Reconciliation Forum.



ELDER DAN SMOKE

Dan is from Seneca Nation, and he draws on knowledge from many different Indigenous traditions. He is an Adjunct Professor at Western and has consulted with numerous agencies and postsecondary institutions in Ontario on such areas as cultural competency and ceremonial protocols. He has also worked with many different school boards, imparting an understanding of Indigenous Peoples and cultures to youth across Ontario. Dan is a recipient of an Honorary Doctorate of Laws from Western University.

Western is located on the ancestral and Treaty lands of the Anishinaabek, Haudenosaunee, Lūnaapéewak, and Attawandaron (sometimes referred to as Chonnonton or Neutral Nation), on lands connected with the London Township and Sombra Treaties of 1796, predated by the Dish with One Spoon Covenant Wampum. Western University acknowledges historical and ongoing injustices that First Nations, Métis and Inuit endure in Canada, and we accept responsibility as a public institution to contribute toward revealing and correcting miseducation, as well as renewing respectful relationships with Indigenous communities and Peoples through our teaching, research and community service.





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WELCOME MESSAGES

CHRISTY R. BRESSETTE

Vice-Provost & Associate Vice-President
(Indigenous Initiatives)

Co-Chair, Indigenous Postsecondary Education
Council (IPEC) Western University

It was a great privilege and honour to host the national Building Reconciliation Forum at Western University this year. Not only is the work to advance Reconciliation with Indigenous communities an essential part of Western's institutional mandate, but it is also everyone's responsibility, as we are all 'Treaty people'. The Forum provided a significant opportunity to convene people and provide Indigenous-led opportunities, insight, and direction to advance the work of Reconciliation through education, discussion, learning and unlearning, and encouragement.

It is important to again acknowledge and thank everyone who contributed to this beautiful and healing collaboration, especially members of the local Indigenous communities and organizations; Indigenous students, staff, faculty members at Western; the University's Indigenous Postsecondary Education Council; and members of our planning committees.

Miigwech also to Western's leadership team and our growing number of allies for helping to keep this work a priority. The foundations we laid at the Forum continue to have positive impact on several fronts, both institutionally and within our larger society.

This report is intended to serve as a helpful summary resource to inspire and encourage the work of Truth and Reconciliation within postsecondary environments and beyond.

Yours in unity,

Christy R. Bressette





JODY NOAH

Southern First Nations Secretariat
Co-Chair, Indigenous Postsecondary Education
Council (IPEC) Western University

On behalf of IPEC, I would like to acknowledge the hard work of everyone who helped organize the Building Reconciliation Forum 2023, and thank all those who presented, participated and attended.

The Forum served as an excellent venue for highlighting the ongoing work that is occurring at postsecondary institutions around the country in building bridges and mutual understanding. While the road ahead of us is long, the work we accomplished at the Forum is moving us forward, and this report will help to further that important work. It is my sincerest hope that we will all take the insights gained at the Forum and put them to good use in advancing Reconciliation in the academy, now and in the future.

Anushiik,

Jody Noah

SPECIAL RECOGNITION



CHI-MIIGWECH/YAW^KO/ANUSHIIK/ THANK YOU

Hosting the national forum was only possible through the help of many people working closely and collaboratively together. Western and OII were fortunate for an abundance of help from talented experts, dedicated staff, enthusiastic volunteers, and dedicated partners. We wholeheartedly acknowledge and thank everyone who contributed and helped to make the Building Reconciliation Forum a great success.

Specifically, we acknowledge the leadership and guidance of our Indigenous partners and collaborators who are appropriately leading the work of Truth and Reconciliation—in particular members and leadership of local Indigenous communities and organizations, (Chippewas of the Thames First Nation (COTTFN), Oneida Nation of the Thames, Munsee-Delaware Nation) for their ongoing support. Their presence, leadership, and guidance at every step of the way ensured the success of the event.

We also would like to thank:

- Candice Elijah, Maryanne Kecheogo, and the Oneida Log School staff, as well as Great Hall Catering at Western and the entire Ontario Hall dining team for the event's amazing food and hospitality;
- Indigenous musicians Murray Porter (Six Nations) and Genevieve Fisher (COTTFN) for the music concert that helped to celebrate Western's commitment to advancing reconciliation with Indigenous peoples;
- the Indigenous Postsecondary Education Council (IPEC) at Western;
- the many staff, students, faculty and Indigenous community members at Western and its affiliates colleges, especially Liz Akiwenzie, Maryanne Kecheogo, Gloria Thomson, Leon Shipman, Phoenix McDougall, Arbor Morris, Mike Hopkins Sr., and Mike Cywink;
- the Faculty of Education;
- volunteers;
- members of the several planning committees;
- Western's Conference Services, with significant support from Cliff Fielder and Myeng-Jin Lee;
- TAP Resources;
- Verlin James;
- 2023 Head and Heart Indigenous Research Fellows at Western;
- Emma Richard; and
- Western's communications team.

COMMUNITY DAY

COMMUNITY VISITS

June 26 was designated as a community day, as Reconciliation requires recognizing the vital role that Indigenous communities play in bringing Indigenous ways of knowing and being to the academy. It featured the launch of the Forum's three-day Indigenous Vendors Market and the showcase of local Indigenous community organizations through information booths hosted in the Wampum Learning Lodge.

The highlight was the choice to visit one of two local Indigenous communities. One of the two hosts were the Deshkaan Ziibing Anishinaabeg, also known as Chippewa of the Thames First Nation, an Ojibway community of 3,331 hectares of unceded land approximately 30 kilometres outside of London. Visitors took a tour of the former Mount Elgin Indian Industrial School site and received an introduction to the "Save the Barn" campaign. This local initiative aims to preserve the last remaining structure of the school, a barn where many former students carved their names into its walls. Additionally, presentations were given on Anishinaabeg culture, language, and heritage, with emphasis on local treaties and history, at the Community Centre; and a feast was shared, together with a song and dance demonstration by the Chippewa community youth dance group.

The second community that hosted were the Onyota'a:ká, People of the Standing Stone, also known as the Oneida Nation of the Thames, located approximately 25 kilometres outside of London, Ontario. Our visit included an overview of Oneida history, lands, and language; a tour of the community; a stop at BUB'Z Drop-in and Soup Kitchen, a community non-profit that aims to provide food security and food sovereignty; presentations from Elders at the Longhouse; and a feast prepared by Clan mothers and helpers.

Western University is deeply grateful to the local Nations for their hospitality, and many respondents to our post-event feedback survey rated the visits as the highlight of the Forum.





COMMUNITY DAY



COMMUNITY DAY



FORUM WITNESSES

HEAD & HEART INDIGENOUS RESEARCH FELLOWS

The Head and Heart Indigenous Research Fellowship program (H&H) is a two-year summer research programme at Western geared toward Indigenous upper-year undergraduate students. This Fellowship prepares students to undertake research at the graduate level and/or in an applied community-based research context. During the Forum, H&H Fellows, together with the program facilitators, were invited to act as official witnesses and observe all keynote speeches and presentations, with the aim of summarizing what they heard in plenary sessions at the end of each day. The witnesses were:

H&H FELLOWS

Courteney Morris

Métis Nation

Sociology and Indigenous Studies

Courteney is a Métis mother of three who has returned to school as a mature student. She joined the H&H Fellowship with the aspiration of becoming a professor. She strongly believes in social justice and equality among all people.

Danual De Leary

Chippewa of the Thames First Nation

Sociology and Indigenous Studies

Danual De Leary was born and raised in London, Ontario and is Anishinaabe from Chippewas of the Thames Deshkan Ziibi, Loon Clan. A graduate of Fanshawe College, Danual is currently in his third year of undergraduate studies at Western. As an H&H Research Fellow, he aims to share his educational experiences with others.

Shana Elijah

Oneida Nation of the Thames

Art History and Studio Art

Shana is from Oneida Nation of the Thames. She is a talented Bear clan woman who supports her family as a hand poke tattooing practitioner and through many other art mediums. Shana brings her artistic vibrancy to H&H with the goal of being able to participate in Indigenous language research.

Janessa French

Chippewa of the Thames First Nation

Nursing

Janessa is a dedicated student from Chippewas of the Thames First Nation. As an independent Bear clan woman she often cares for others and has spent her summer with H&H expanding her knowledge of medicines. Always welcoming to those around her, Janessa walks with the courage of her ancestors while pursuing her dream of becoming a nurse.



Tyanna Soucy

Atikameksheng Anishnawbek Nation

Criminology and Sociology

Tyanna is Bear clan from Atikameksheng Anishnawbek First Nation. She entered the H&H Fellowship with a passion for integrating policing with Indigenous knowledge. Tyanna fights for equity and diversity in women's sports, with a focus on women's wrestling.



Cadence Harrison

Métis Nation

Genetics

Cadence is Métis with Algonquin French Canadian heritage. She has a deep love for her grandmother that motivates her to continuously connect with her Indigeneity. Her knowledge of genetics and gratitude for Indigenous teachings led her to the H&H Fellowship. Since starting her research journey, Cadence has found a new appreciation for medicines, language and ceremony.



Velma Noah

Delaware Nation/Moravian of the Thames

Indigenous Studies

Velma has an appreciation for lifelong learning and an entrepreneurial spirit which has led her back to Western after a successful career as a language teacher. Velma has a fervent passion for language revitalization and plans to obtain her Ph.D. while ensuring that her language doesn't end with the last fluent speaker in her community.



H&H PROGRAM FACILITATORS

Katie Big-Canoe

Chippewas of Georgina Island First Nation

Indigenous Research Officer, Western Research

Katie Big-Canoe is Anishinaabe from the Chippewas of Georgina Island First Nation. As Western's Indigenous Research Officer, she works in collaboration with the Western community to advance the respectful inclusion of, and capacity for, Indigenous research, methods, data and research involving Indigenous people, communities and organizations.



Wanda King

Akwesasne

Education - Curriculum Studies

Wanda is a great grandmother of four from Akwesasne First Nation. She is a strong Bear clan woman who has dedicated her heart and soul to implementing Indigenous knowledge in Ontario science and technology curriculum. As the H&H co-ordinator, Wanda has shown great responsibility in leading her group of Fellows down a path of heartfelt learning activities this summer.



Theme 1

Indigenous Knowledge as a Framework for Reconciliation and Education Sovereignty

Keynote Speakers

Dr. Brent Debassige (M'Chigeeng First Nation), Associate Professor, Faculty of Education, Western University

Lesley White-Eye (Chippewa of the Thames First Nation), Governance Director at First Nations with Schools Collective

Indigenous Knowledge, reconciliation, and education sovereignty are deeply complex and contested concepts. In postsecondary environments, transformational change is needed and best served by those individuals who are involved, engaged, and have experience in both institutions and in Indigenous communities. Transformational change in universities should mobilize Indigenous futurities, make space for anti-oppressive critiques and Indigenous knowledges, and value Indigenous social and cultural capital while re/imagining, planning, and forging a way forward for Indigenous self-determination in and outside the institution.



Forum Witnesses' Summary of Learnings

The salient element in the discussions about this theme was the critical importance of healthy and reciprocal relationships in fostering improved outcomes around Reconciliation. Forum speakers emphasized that only through the development of respectful and informed relationships can people understand the gaps, challenges, and opportunities associated with work towards Reconciliation. The following are examples of practices that have proven to be particularly helpful in growing positive relationships with Indigenous peoples (i.e., communities and organizations) in and associated with postsecondary education:

- making space for the respectful observance of ceremony, such as the ceremony of visiting;
- understanding and supporting the expressed needs of local Indigenous communities and organizations, and not just institutional ones;
- recognizing and making space for Indigenous ways of knowing and being;
- understanding, acknowledging, and addressing the historical and contemporary challenges that affect the interaction of diverse groups (this is the 'Truth' part of the work of Truth and Reconciliation);
- supporting Indigenous people in growing safe and thriving communities within postsecondary institutions;
- facilitating the meaningful engagement of Indigenous people in the development of projects and meeting agendas;
- listening and learning with an open mind and open heart, together with humility and understanding;
- being open to learning, understanding, and communicating from the wisdom of Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies, versus reliance on a script with pre-established notions and goals in mind; and
- the importance of leaders, especially senior administrators, supporting, attending, and participating in events that are important to Indigenous peoples.

Theme 1



Theme 2



Theme 2

Moving forward towards the Next Seven Generations: Innovations and Resiliencies

Keynote Speaker

Dr. Chantelle Richmond (Denínu Kúé First Nation), Associate Professor,
Geography & Indigenous Studies, Canada Research Chair, Western University

Doing research that honours the next seven generations requires a relational approach that helps us remember where we came from, while at the same time offering new spaces of belonging. Dr. Richmond's keynote discussed the importance of relationship, remembering, and belonging - in support of Indigenous healing and wellness. Drawing upon examples of her own community-engaged research, Chantelle shared how she successfully integrates these principles meaningfully into her research, and also how this active approach to addressing community needs is critically important in supporting the growth of healthy Indigenous communities as members of sovereign Nations.



Forum Witnesses' Summary of Learnings

Forum presentations on this theme focused on the importance of forward and sustainable thinking to safeguard the present and future generations of all living things. Essentially, every thought and action considered by the human race for today must also be mindful of its potential impact on the next seven generations. Forum attendees were also reminded that 'looking back' through critical reflection is just as important as looking ahead when planning for a sustainable and healthy future because the exercise of looking back to orient our path forward is an essential step in the work to reclaim and reinvigorate Indigenous languages, cultures, and ways of knowing and being. Taking stock of and reorienting of our current situation/landscape is work prescribed within the **Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada** and the **United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)**.

In relation to Theme 2, Forum presenters shared examples that demonstrated and emphasized how active cultural and linguistic reclamation for Indigenous peoples is occurring in postsecondary education institutions across Turtle Island. The importance of the work of decolonization and Indigenization is growing within educational institutions, and much of this work is being led by Indigenous people themselves. The next step in this work is focusing on growing non-Indigenous allyship to help ease the pressure and share responsibility that Indigenous people have been shouldering. The Building Reconciliation Forum provided a safe and inspirational place where the practices outlined below could be shared to motivate and inspire action:

- Indigenous values and teachings (e.g., the Seven Grandfather Teachings: Wisdom, Love, Respect, Bravery, Honesty, Humility, and Truth) provide both relevant and enduring guidance to inform the brave approaches needed to undo, as well as heal and recover from, oppressive and colonial forces experienced by Indigenous peoples.
- The work to establish and maintain decolonization and Indigenization as a priority within postsecondary education institutions requires dedicated, comprehensive, and equitable levels of resourcing, especially to help address curricular reform and student housing.
- Resiliency is a lesson that accompanies a respectful and reciprocal relationship with the land.

Witnesses also remarked on how inspiring it was to observe how Indigenous pedagogies and epistemologies (ways of knowing and being) are successfully being integrated into the curriculum, in such areas as science and technology, and how developing Indigenous curriculum resources (e.g., **Western's Learning Bundles**) can help to advance academic insight and provide supports for allies. Student witnesses shared how seeing Indigenization actively occurring within postsecondary institutions helped them experience a greater sense of belonging within the academy.

Theme 3

Indigenous Initiatives & Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, Decolonization, and Indigenization

Keynote Speaker

Dr. Candace Brunette-Debassige (Petabeck First Nation), Assistant Professor, Faculty of Education, and Teaching Fellow, Western University

The Trickiness of Institutional-Indigenization Work in Canadian Universities

This keynote address, *The Trickiness of Institutional-Indigenization Work in Canadian Universities*, explored some of the deeper structural and ideological issues that limit institutional-Indigenization work in Canadian universities, with a particular focus on the lived experiences of Indigenous administrators striving to advance Indigenous educational sovereignty.



Forum Witnesses' Summary of Learnings

Witnesses identified recurring themes, such as the need for adequate time, resources, environments (i.e., spaces) to fully understand challenges, and learn and relearn about Indigeneity.

Another prominent theme was understanding the great burden placed upon the shoulders of Indigenous people to lead and advance the work of decolonization and Indigenization with the academy. Forum participants were interested to understand the rationale for this, and it was discerned that Indigenous people are motivated to strive for decolonization so that their children and grandchildren can attend postsecondary institutions without worrying about being harmed. Additional sentiments shared by the witnesses included:

- postsecondary education needs Indigenous people in roles and office of authority to leverage change;
- non-Indigenous faculty are not always equipped to teach Indigenous worldviews or knowledge in their classes, therefore resources and opportunities must be made available;
- diversity and equity training in our education systems is often inadequate and Indigenous initiatives are regularly conflated with it when, in fact, treaty rights make them an entirely separate entity. Educating all stakeholders and partners within postsecondary education about Indigenous histories and realities would be helpful in advancing Reconciliation.

Finally, some presentations focused on the need to provide physical spaces and learning environments, such as the Wampum Learning Lodge, where Indigenous people feel welcomed and supported, and where they can openly engage in cultural practices like smudging and ceremony.

Theme 3



Theme 4



Theme 4

Indigenous Knowledges and Sustainable Development

Keynote Speaker

Dr. Lewis Williams (Tauranga Moana, Aotearoa), Associate Professor, Indigenous Studies & Geography, and Acting Director of Indigenous Studies, Western University

Indigenous environmental philosophy and the ethical remembering of who we are.

Foregrounding the Maori concept of *whakapapa*—knowing your place in the universe— this presentation focused on four existential threats facing humanity today: climate and cultural-ecological crisis, growing wealth and power disparities, unprecedented human and inter-species displacement, and the erasure of Indigenous knowledges and lifeways. It also outlined three decolonial, regenerative place-based strategies for healing planet and people.

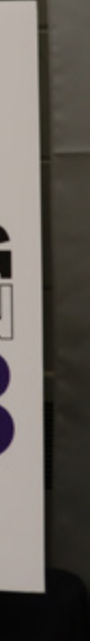


Forum Witnesses' Summary of Learnings

The final theme evoked discussions surrounding the integration of Indigenous knowledge into curriculum. An important part of this is the recognition of different worldviews, and the challenges involved in sustaining Indigenous knowledge systems. Some institutions have undertaken formal initiatives to integrate Indigenous knowledge into the curriculum, and this requires support for non-Indigenous faculty who are engaging as informed allies

Some presentations also noted that embracing Indigenous knowledges was an important step towards decolonization and sustainability, but that this can't be achieved simply with a single course in university—it is a long-term process, and it needs to be undertaken by those who will go on to have great influence in society, such as teachers, lawmakers and those who run educational institutions. It was also felt that more allies needed to be present at such events as the Forum, as the involvement of allies, as prescribed by Indigenous people, is welcome and needed.





MOVING FORWARD

FORUM FEEDBACK

Western conducted a short survey after the Forum and learned that the entire event was highly rated by participants. While most attendees to the Forum were local to the London area, a large number came from across the country. The key findings were as follows:

- 94% of respondents were satisfied with the presentations (*Figure A*)
- 94% reported that the Forum advanced their understanding of Reconciliation in postsecondary education (*Figure B*)
- More than two-thirds of respondents indicated that the number of presentations was just right.
- The Vendors Market and Evening Concert were the most popular events of the Forum.
- On a scale of 1-10, the average likelihood of recommending the Forum was 8.6. (*Figure C*)

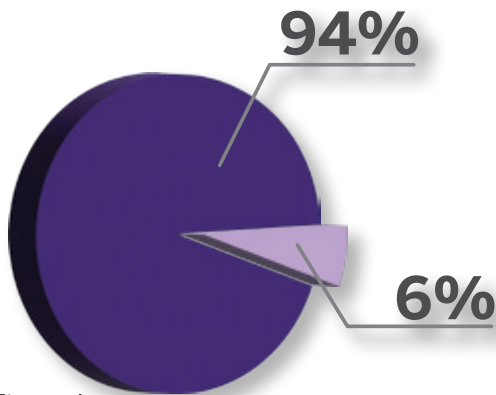


Figure A

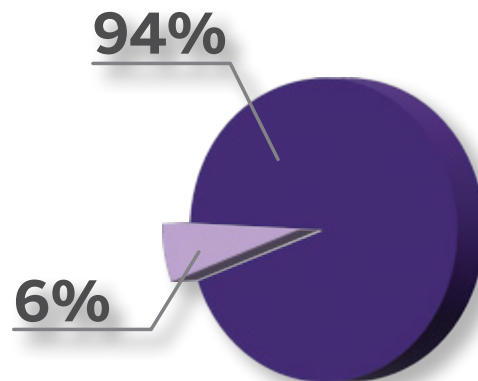


Figure B



Figure C



CALLS TO ACTION

Three Calls to Action arising out of the Forum were identified, based on presentations, discussions, observations, and survey feedback from Forum participants, as well as the summations provided by the Forum Witnesses.

1. Greater involvement of university leaders

While Indigenous people are needed to inform and lead the work of decolonization and Indigenization, they cannot be expected to shoulder the burden of that tremendous responsibility alone. We are all Treaty people, and as a consequence Truth and Reconciliation involves everyone.

While Indigenous leaders provide guidance and direction to inform the decolonization and Indigenization of postsecondary institutions, every leader is charged with responsibility to make and keep the work of Truth and Reconciliation a daily priority.

2. Accountability in response to the TRC's Calls to Action

All leaders, especially senior leaders and administrators, must actively support and advance the work of Truth and Reconciliation within each of their areas of direct influence and responsibility. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action (CTAs) identify clear actions where the education sector can respond immediately.

In the spirit of transparency and accountability, all faculties, support units, and administrative offices should report annually on their progress in implementing relevant CTAs. Action and response to the challenges and obligations of Reconciliation should not be restricted to the institutional level—they can also be effected at a personal and individual level within postsecondary institutions.

3. Respectful and ongoing engagement of Indigenous peoples

For the work of Reconciliation to occur, there needs to be robust, relevant, respectful, and meaningful engagement and collaboration with Indigenous peoples, especially Elders and Knowledge Keepers, who work outside the academy. This recommendation aligns with calls for greater representation of Indigenous people in senior leadership roles within all postsecondary institutions.

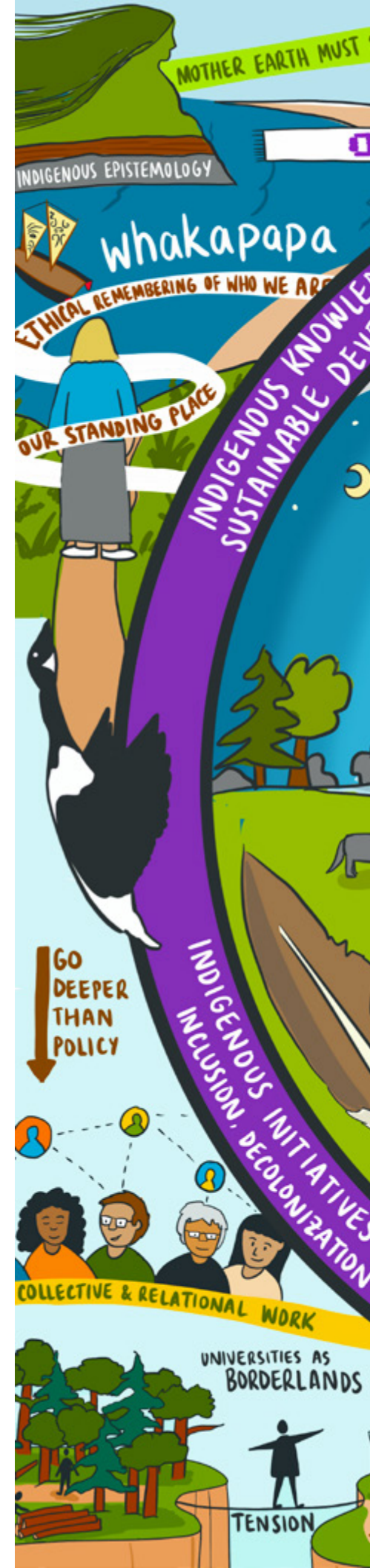


BUILDING THE CHAIN OF CONNECTION

The work of Truth and Reconciliation is demanding and requires a lasting commitment. It is for that reason that the Building Reconciliation Forum is held every year. Only through ongoing education and the exploration of new ideas promising practices can universities find their way to true Reconciliation in the classroom and beyond.

The continuity of the Forum is embodied in the transmission of ceremonial objects between Forum hosts from one year to the next. At the 2023 Forum, Western received two such items: a hand-carved canoe paddle and a pair of moccasins to honour and safeguard until the time comes to pass these along to the next host in 2024. These were delivered to Western by Algonquin University and Université Laval/ Université du Québec, who were the hosts of the 2019 and 2021 Forums, respectively.

The paddle was partially decorated by the past hosts, with space for future hosts to add artwork representing their ongoing commitment to Reconciliation. Oll is currently consulting with Elders, community, staff and faculty to determine what Western's contribution will look like.



BE THE BEDROCK OF OUR PARADIGMS

IT LIVES IN OUR HEARTS

our land is teacher

TRUST THE PEOPLE

EDGES & DEVELOPMENT

INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE AS A FRAMEWORK FOR RECONCILIATION & EDUCATION SOVEREIGNTY

HOW WILL YOU WALK SOFTLY ALONGSIDE US?

FEED THE SPIRIT

FIRST

AGENCY WITHIN THE ACADEMY

MOVING FORWARD TOWARDS THE NEXT SEVEN GENERATIONS: INNOVATIONS & RESILIENCIES

REMEMBERING WHO WE ARE

BRING YOUR WAYS

REMEMBER YOUR HELPERS

CREATING SPACES OF BELONGING





