

Western University
Indigenous Strategic Plan

Annual Progress Report

Fall 2020



Indigenous
Initiatives



Western



Land Acknowledgement

Western University is located on the traditional lands of the Anishinaabek, Haudenosaunee, Lūnaapéewak and Chonnocton (Neutral) peoples. The Huron-Wendat peoples also have a history of living in this territory. In the London area, there were Treaty 6 London Township, Treaty 7 Sombra Township, and Treaty 21 Longwoods. This land continues to be home to diverse Indigenous Peoples (First Nations, Métis and Inuit) whom we recognize as contemporary stewards of the land and vital contributors to our society. By recognizing First Nations peoples' relationships to land, we make explicit Indigenous Peoples' presence and rights to self-determination.



Contents

Foreword

- 3** Key Milestones on Western's Path Toward Indigenization
- 5** Message from President Alan Shepard and Provost Andrew Hrymak
- 7** Message from Candace Brunette-Debassige, Acting Vice-Provost and Associate Vice-President, Indigenous Initiatives
- 9** Our Strategic Priorities

Investing in Infrastructure, Students, Staff and Faculty

- 11** Office of Indigenous Initiatives
- 13** Indigenous Learning Space
- 15** Indigenous Students
- 17** Indigenous Faculty
- 19** Indigenous Research
- 21** Indigenous Curriculum and Learning

Engaging Indigenous Communities

- 23** Councils and Partnerships

Future Focus

- 25** Challenges
- 27** Moving Forward Together

Key Milestones on Western's Path Toward Indigenization

Indigenization is the process by which Indigenous ways of knowing, being, doing and relating are incorporated into all areas of the university, including: student affairs; teaching and learning; research and assessment; space planning; workforce planning; governance, policies and decision-making.

At Western, Indigenization is guided by the "4 Rs" approach of scholars Verna Kirkness and Ray Barnhart*: respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility for Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous ways of knowing.

*First Nations and Higher Education: The Four R's - Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity, Responsibility

June 2018

Task Force on the Implementation of Western's ISP releases final report

Nov. 2017

Task Force on the Implementation of Western's ISP is assembled

Sept. 2017

Ayukwanaktiyohake, an Indigenous/ally community floor, is established in Delaware Hall residence

May 2018

Chantelle Richmond, associate professor in the department of geography, named Canada Research Chair in Indigenous Health and Environment

Research Western launches Head & Heart, a paid summer fellowship program for Indigenous undergraduate students

Nov. 2016

Approval of Western's first ISP

Interdisciplinary Initiative (IDI) in Applied Indigenous Scholarship launches, with a series of programs to build capacity to work with Indigenous communities

Jan. 2015

Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) releases 94 Calls to Action

Nov. 2014

Indigenous Strategic Initiatives Committee assembled to lead development of ISP

Jan. 2013

A series of talking circles spearheads an engagement process culminating in a call for Western to create its own Indigenous Strategic Plan (ISP)





July 2018

Faculty of Education partners with Six Nations Polytechnic to host Masters in Professional Educational Leadership in Indigenous Education

Oct. 2018

Indigenous Faculty Advisory Council established

May 2019

Indigenous Faculty Cluster hiring process begins

Former Education Library named as new site for an Indigenous Learning Space

Indigenous Student Centre partners with Thames Valley District School Board to create an Indigenous Academic Tutoring Program for high school students

Sept. 2018

Candace Brunette-Debassige appointed Special Advisor to the Provost (Indigenous Initiatives)

Jan. 2020

Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry appoints Danielle Alcock as Indigenous Lead

Mar. 2020

Established smudging policy for Western's campus

May 2020

Office of Indigenous Initiatives launched, led by Candace Brunette-Debassige, Acting Vice-Provost/Associate Vice-President (Indigenous Initiatives)

June 2020

Indigenous Learning Fund established to support projects advancing Western's Indigenous strategic priorities





A commitment to sustained action

I'm encouraged by the progress we've made to amplify Indigenous voices at Western—it's been heartening to see the changes happening across campus.

But I know there is much more work to be done.

And I'm committed to taking the actions needed to ensure progress continues.

To Western's Indigenous students, colleagues, and community partners, I want to say thank you.

Thank you for your patience, persistence, support, and guidance in helping the university become a better place for Indigenous Peoples to learn, work, and succeed.

Alan Shepard
President & Vice-Chancellor



An Indigenous voice at the leadership table

Changing the culture of a 140-year-old institution is challenging, time-consuming work, but real progress is being made at Western.

The university passed an historic milestone in 2020 with the creation of an Office of Indigenous Initiatives, to be led by a Vice-Provost & Associate Vice-President who will sit at the table as a key member of Western's senior leadership team.

We owe a debt of gratitude to Candace Brunette-Debassige for her leadership in helping Western reach this important milestone. Candace is not only serving in the acting role while we search for Western's first-ever Indigenous Vice-Provost & AVP, she also played an instrumental role in creating the new office while completing her PhD.

Indigenous voices are resonating across campus, and we are committed to strengthening Western's ties with Indigenous community partners throughout the region.

Andrew Hrymak
Provost & Vice-President (Academic)




More than Words

Wachay/Shekoli/Aanii/Koolamalsi/Greetings

I am pleased to present this report on Western's progress to date in implementing the university's first Indigenous Strategic Plan. Guided by eight broad strategic priorities, I am proud to share we are steadily moving beyond words and making real changes at our university. While we've made some significant progress, we recognize Western still has a long way to go.

It has been an honour working alongside committed colleagues across the university, broadening our approach to Indigenous education—moving from an Indigenous student services model toward a campus-wide approach encompassing proactive changes in our structure and leadership; policies and practices; teaching, learning and curriculum; research; and physical space planning.

Perhaps most exciting, and integral to creating sustainable long-term change in a complex institution like ours, has been the opportunity to establish the mandate of the role of the Vice-Provost/Associate Vice-President (Indigenous Initiatives) and to help create Western's new Office of Indigenous Initiatives (OII).



“This marks a big milestone for our institution. There’s now a team of people waking up every day thinking about how to do this work at all levels, across campus.”

The ongoing support of Western’s leadership, including its Board of Governors, Senate, President, and most notably, its Provosts, past and present, has been integral as we begin to realize our vision. We also could not have achieved these important milestones without the unwavering commitment and deep intergenerational passions of the small and growing Indigenous community we are fortunate to have at Western, along with the support of countless allies who continue to engage in the challenging reconciliatory work of transforming the academy.

To our various campus and community partners, my deep, heartfelt thanks for your trust, guidance and engagement in helping Western become more responsive to Indigenizing agendas, and in implementing Treaty responsibilities. You have played a crucial role in helping us advance Indigenous representation and inclusion, support Indigenous epistemologies and methodologies, and join Indigenous communities in their nation-building efforts. The trail we have started to lay down together will make the pathways of education much less challenging for the future generations of Indigenous Peoples who choose to study and work at Western.

Chi Meegwetch

Candace Brunette-Debassige

Acting Vice-Provost and Associate Vice-President (Indigenous Initiatives)



Our Strategic Priorities

Strengthen and build relationships with Indigenous communities

Nurture an inclusive campus culture that values Indigenous Peoples, perspectives and ways of knowing

Enhance Indigenous students' experiences

Achieve excellence in Indigenous research and scholarship

Excel in Indigenous teaching and learning

Indigenize Western's institutional practices and spaces

Become a university of choice for Indigenous students

Increase representation of Indigenous staff and faculty members





Indigenous
Initiatives

Office of Indigenous Initiatives

Responding to an urgent call from the Provost's Task Force on the Implementation of the Indigenous Strategic Plan (ISP), Western recently welcomed a new Indigenous voice to its leadership table.

The Vice-Provost and Associate Vice-President (Indigenous Initiatives) champions Western's commitment to increase an Indigenous presence across all levels of work, study and research through the new Office of Indigenous Initiatives.

The Office of Indigenous Initiatives and the Vice-Provost/Associate Vice-President (Indigenous Initiatives) leads the system-wide change required to advance truth and reconciliation efforts, achieve equitable outcomes for Indigenous Peoples and implement Western's Indigenous Strategic Plan.



Priority Areas

- Strategic planning and implementation
- Communications and reporting
- Community engagement
- Policy development and practice
- Space planning and management
- Curriculum and training development
- Student affairs, access and recruitment strategies
- Faculty and staff recruitment and retention strategies
- Research and scholarship strategies

Our Team



Candace Brunette-Debassige

Acting VP-AVP (Indigenous Initiatives) (Mushkego Cree, Treaty 9)



Paula Cornelius-Hedgepeth

Community Relations & Space Coordinator (Haudenosaunee, Oneida Nation of the Thames)



Sara Mai Chitty

Curriculum and Pedagogy Advisor (Anishinaabekwe, Alderville First Nation)



Indigenous Learning Space

Knowing Indigenous students engage and persist in learning environments where their Indigeneity is meaningfully reflected*, Western is creating an innovative Indigenous Learning Space. Consultations with Cree architect Wanda Dalla Costa and a community engagement process led to a design for a space rooted in Indigenous perspectives.

The Indigenous Learning Space will be a site for Indigenous learning, serving as a touchstone for gathering together in the spirit of Indigenization, decolonization and reconciliation.



Wanda Dalla Costa
Architect





Features:

- A distinctive circular structure with three levels of indoor space, including an open-concept gathering area, a second-level mezzanine and a lower-level teaching/learning space
- An outdoor classroom with ceremonial space, including an Indigenous food and medicine garden



Indigenous Students

Indigenous students often face complex barriers that are compounded when accessing universities, including: historical and ongoing expectations to assimilate into the university culture; limited access to K-12 and postsecondary environments; financial barriers linked to intergenerational poverty; geographic isolation; social and political barriers linked to ongoing colonialism and racism in the university.

To help reduce some of these obstacles, Western has expanded its Indigenous recruitment and financial aid initiatives in 2020-21.

- Appointed a new **Indigenous Financial Aid Coordinator**
- Established a **National Indigenous Scholarship Program** (three awards valued at \$50,000 each, based on academic excellence and meaningful contribution toward Indigenous communities)
- Expanded **Indigenous needs-based awards**
- Established a **five-year partnership with Indspire***, with a significant investment in Indigenous bursaries
- Created a **travel bursary for Indigenous students** in international exchange programs
- Piloted an **Indigenous student research travel grant**

*Indspire is a national Indigenous charity that invests in the education of Indigenous Peoples



Donna Noah
(Lunaapéexkweew),
Indigenous Financial
Aid Coordinator



Indigenous Faculty

Recognizing the vital role Indigenous scholars often play in Indigenizing the curriculum and research in universities, Western's Indigenous Strategic Plan called for an increase in Indigenous faculty members. In 2019-20, Western undertook an Indigenous faculty cluster hiring process. Since 2016, seven new Indigenous faculty members have joined Western in Law, Medicine, Education and Social Science.

Western Law

Western Law welcomed Mi'kmaw scholar, Frankie Young, PhD, in July 2019. Her research and teaching areas include Indigenous economic development and self-government, the legitimacy of Indigenous laws, trust law, banking and finance law, business law and secured property transactions.



“As an educator, I love to teach students about the first inhabitants and guardians of the land and resources in Canada and how Indigenous Peoples are a critical part of the fabric of the Canadian market economy.”

Frankie Young, PhD
Assistant Professor, Western Law



Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry

Danielle Alcock, PhD, an Anishanaabe kwe, and member of Chippewas of Rama First Nation, was appointed Indigenous Lead at the Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry in February 2020, where she is also an Assistant Professor in the Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics.

As a champion of the School's Indigenous Health Action Plan, Alcock is looking to achieve goals based on the TRC Calls to Action, specifically those related to health care education.

“My goal is to ensure Schulich Medicine & Dentistry is a space representative of First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities. I've enjoyed working with community partners to discover what that looks like, and fostering relationships that go well beyond just my role.”

Danielle Alcock, PhD
Indigenous Lead,
Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry






Indigenous Research

Canada Research Chair in Indigenous Health and Environment

Western has become the hub of a provincial network for Indigenous health training that is both culturally relevant and scientifically rigorous, thanks to the leadership of Anishinaabe scholar Chantelle Richmond, Canada Research Chair in Indigenous Health and Environment. She is part of a growing movement of academics and Indigenous community members examining how much of the research involving Indigenous communities is too narrowly focused, and does not consider the deeper and more complex situations facing many Indigenous communities.

Professor Richmond is chairing Western's Indigenous Research Sub-Committee in 2020-21, a body that will make several recommendations to advance capacity and the impact of Indigenous research at Western.



“I was feeling the gloom and doom of the stats around Indigenous Peoples having the poorest health of any population in Canada, but Professor Richmond helped me see how Indigenous research can be hopeful and helpful and how I can contribute.”

Vanessa Ambtman-Smith, PhD candidate, Geography, Trudeau and Vanier Scholar and a member of the Indigenous Research Lab

Head & Heart Indigenous Research Fellowship Program

For the past three years, Western has delivered a unique research program geared toward Indigenous students that strives, through an intergenerational network, to nurture a community and the next generation of Indigenous scholars.

As an example of the meaningful work undertaken by students in the program, past Head & Heart participant Kristen Longdo, BA'19, added a much-needed Indigenous dimension to a popular sociology textbook used by universities across Canada.

Chantelle Richmond, PhD

Canada Research Chair in
Health and Environment

“We cannot change the past,
but we can shape the future.
Young scholars are the future
and have the strength in their
voices to influence change in
society.”

Kristen Longdo, BA'19
Past participant, Head & Heart





Indigenous Curriculum and Learning

Western recognizes privileging Indigenous perspectives, methods of teaching and ways of knowing in curriculum and learning across disciplines is integral to Indigenousizing the university in meaningful ways, having a transformative impact on students.

Guide for Working with Indigenous Students

Created by a team of faculty, staff and students as members of the Interdisciplinary Initiative in Applied Indigenous Scholarship, this guide was designed in 2018 to help staff, faculty and administrators better understand the realities and needs of Indigenous learners in university settings.

Office of Indigenous Initiatives

In late 2019, the Office of Indigenous Initiatives (OII) appointed Sara Mai Chitty as Western's Indigenous Curriculum and Pedagogy Advisor to support faculty and staff members in including Indigenous perspectives in curriculum and learning.

Indigenous Learning Fund

This pilot program, created by the OII in 2020, invited proposals from faculties, units and student groups to help grow Indigenous teaching and learning at Western. The program drew nearly 20 submissions for one-time, single-year grants of up to \$7,500.

Faculty of Education

Mandatory for students enrolled in the Bachelor of Education program, *Aboriginal Education—Toward a Decolonizing Pedagogy for Teachers* examines the social, political, and historical contexts in which Aboriginal students receive schooling.



Faculty of Health Sciences, School of Nursing

Indigenous Health: The Influence of Policy and Practices provides students with the opportunity to critically examine and reflect on Indigenous health and health-care practices within historical, social, cultural and political contexts.

Western Law

In a reading and study course with Professor Frankie Young, students discuss critical legal issues that apply to Indigenous Peoples in Canada, including the long history of Indigenous legal traditions in the multi-jurisdictional jurisdiction of the country. Students explore whether the law has emancipatory effects for Indigenous Peoples or if it works to inhibit their rights and freedoms.

Faculty of Social Science

Through an *Introduction to Indigenous Studies*, Professor Diana Lewis presents a variety of contemporary Indigenous topics, from both academic and community perspectives. Students learn key terms, facts, events, issues, worldviews and lifestyles of Indigenous Peoples in Canada, and are introduced to current Indigenous scholarship, cultural experts, Elders and researchers.



- ▼ Professor Diana Lewis in a talking circle with students following a screening of *We Were Children*, a film about the impact of residential schools in Canada.





Councils and Partnerships

The Office of Indigenous Initiatives regularly engages with Indigenous communities through two dynamic committees in order to inspire and advance its work.

Indigenous Postsecondary Education Council

For more than two decades, Western has relied on its Indigenous Postsecondary Education Council as an ongoing mechanism through which to seek advice and engage Indigenous communities on university matters. Its diverse membership includes local First Nations representatives both within and beyond the campus community.





Indigenous Faculty Advisory Council

The Indigenous Faculty Advisory Council provides Indigenous faculty members a culturally safe space to meet regularly, experience a sense of community and discuss needs and challenges relevant to their success. The Council also offers guidance to the Office of Indigenous Initiatives in identifying, developing and delivering Indigenous strategies to support and advance Indigenous faculty members.

New Indigenous Community Partnerships

- Western became a signatory on Southern First Nations Secretariat's Postsecondary Education Collaborative Agreement in August 2020
- The Office of Indigenous Initiatives and Western Law joined Indigenous Works Luminary Charter Partnership in August 2020





Challenges

As Western makes progress toward achieving its Indigenous strategic goals, key challenges remain.

- The academic system is steeped in assumed Euro-Western disciplinary constructs and traditions that often need to shift in order to create equitable space for Indigenous Peoples, perspectives and ways of knowing to emerge.
- There is an ongoing and pressing need to attract and retain Indigenous scholars in specific disciplines within a highly competitive academic hiring context.
- The increased workload of Indigenization is often placed on a small number of Indigenous employees and units with limited time and resources. To achieve true progress, a shared responsibility across the university along with partnerships with Indigenous Initiatives is needed.





Moving Forward Together

Advancing transformative change is an ongoing, long-term process dependent on deep listening, critical reflection, relationships and sustainable systemic actions.

Our work at Western has only begun.

As we further our efforts to Indigenize all aspects of teaching and research, we will continue to actively engage our campus and community partners. Just as key allies—from local Indigenous communities and regional organizations to Indigenous students, faculty and staff—played an integral role in shaping the plan that brought us to this beginning stage, we will rely on the same collaborative spirit as we move toward deeper change.



With crucial leadership infrastructure now in place through the Office of Indigenous Initiatives and an incoming Vice-President/Associate Vice-President set to lead the next planning cycle of Western's Indigenous Strategic Plan, we look to move toward increased Indigenous research supports, curriculum development, student recruitment and faculty hiring.

We appreciate the support of all our partners and look forward to growing our relationships along with our progress.

Anushik Meegwetch Yaw:ko Thank You

e: indigenous@uwo.ca

indigenous.uwo.ca

Indigenous Iconography

This past year, the Office of Indigenous Initiatives commissioned three local and regional Indigenous artists/designers to create customized iconography for use in its communication materials, and as featured in this report.



Tsista Kennedy

Tsista Kennedy is a woodland-style artist from Beausoleil First Nation and Oneida Nation of the Thames. He received a 2018 Governor General's Award for his piece, "Seventh Fire Leadership" in 2018.



Walter Darr Sands

Walter Darr Sands is a filmmaker, photographer and visual artist from Walpole Island First Nation. He is an alumnus of Western and recipient of the 2016 Karl Nathan Staats Award for Contemporary Media.



Skydome



Eagle



Snapping Turtle



Thunderbird



Design de Plume

Design de Plume Inc. is an Indigenous-owned communication firm providing accessible, cultural services to First Nations, not-for-profits, governments and communities to help them articulate messages of change.



Lacrosse stick



Smudge



Indigenous
Initiatives

Western University
1151 Richmond Street
London, Ontario, Canada N6A 3K7
t. 519.661.4095
indigenous.uwo.ca