

2024-25

ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT

Western University
Office of Indigenous Initiatives



Land Acknowledgement

The Great Lakes region of Turtle Island is the ancestral lands of the Anishinabek, Haudenosaunee and Lunaapéewak Nations. Western University is located in Baketigweyaang (At the Side-Flow), now known as London, Ontario, alongside the Deshkan Ziiibiing (Thames River). This sacred life force flows through the heart of Southwestern Ontario, connecting our communities across the region. Western accepts responsibility as a public institution to contribute toward revealing and correcting miseducation, as well as renewing respectful relationships with Indigenous Peoples through our teaching, research and community service.

This region is connected to the following Wampum agreements: Gdoo naaganinaa (Dish with One Spoon Wampum) and the Kaswenta (Two Row Wampum); as well as the Nanfan Treaty of 1701 and the Treaty of Niagara (1764). The City of London occupies land via Indigenous-Crown Treaties, which include the London Township Treaty 6 (1796), Sombra Township Treaty 7 (1796) and the Longwoods Treaty 21 (1822).

The three First Nations communities in closest proximity to Western are:

- Deshkan Ziiibiing Anishinaabek (Chippewas of the Thames First Nation);
- Lunaapéewak (Munsee-Delaware Nation); and
- OnAyota'a:ka (Oneida Nation of the Thames)

By acknowledging the historical and contemporary relationships Indigenous Nations have with the land in the London area, Western affirms the ongoing presence of Indigenous Peoples on this land and their inherent rights to self-determination.

We encourage you to learn more about the lands that Western occupies.



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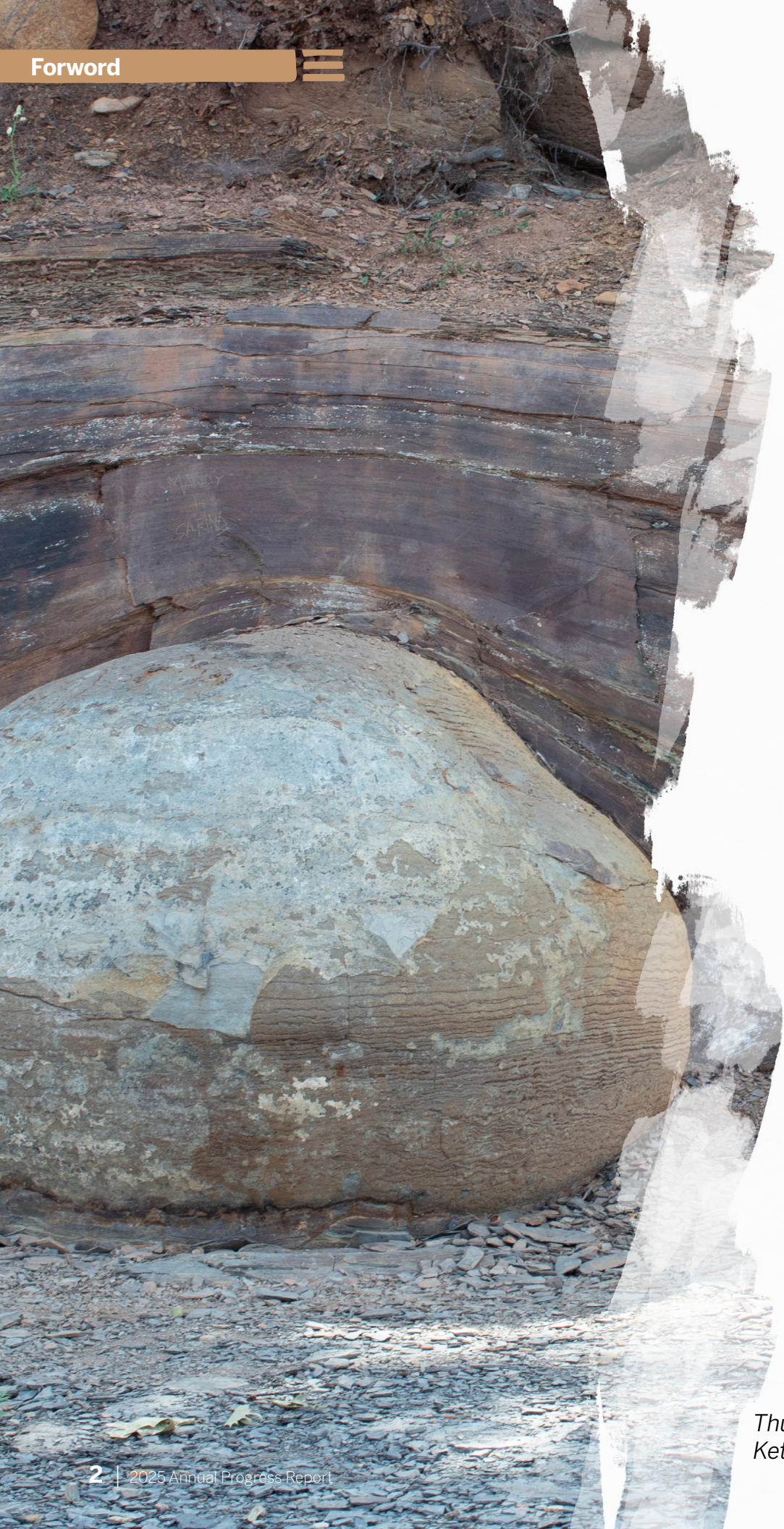
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Thunderbird Egg,
Kettle and Stony Point First Nation



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

It is important to acknowledge and thank everyone at Western for their contributions to advancing reconciliation with Indigenous communities. Guided by Indigenous teachings, Western is becoming a place where all people are acknowledged, celebrated, and supported.

Despite the many challenges that come with the work of decolonization and Indigenization, this year has been especially meaningful. We've made significant progress in advancing the goals of Western's Indigenous Strategic Plan and the reconciliation-focused commitments within Towards Western at 150, the university's institutional strategic plan.

Western continues to make steady progress in addressing the legacy of colonialism and its impacts on Indigenous Peoples and broader society. This work is unfolding across many areas—through innovative partnerships, policy development, governance, programming and curriculum, student experience, and faculty engagement.

While we celebrate these advancements, we also recognize that this is labour-intensive heart work. As one Elder wisely shared, the journey of healing from colonization is like finding our way out of the woods—it can take as long, or longer, to return as it did to get lost. This teaching reminds us that reconciliation is a long-term commitment. It requires not only addressing the harms of the past but also ensuring they are never repeated.

On behalf of the Office of Indigenous Initiatives and our growing community of allies across campus, we extend our gratitude to all our partners and collaborators. We invite everyone to walk with us in advancing truth and reconciliation—for equitable outcomes for Indigenous Peoples, and a just and inclusive future for all.

Kindest regards, and miigwech.

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



Message from the Director (Indigenous Engagement and Wampum Learning Lodge)

She:koli, Aanii, Koolamalsihmwa, Greetings.

I am honoured to serve as the inaugural Director of Indigenous Engagement and the Wampum Learning Lodge at Western University, a milestone that reflects Western's deepening commitment to Reconciliation.

The Wampum Learning Lodge is more than a building—it is a living, breathing space of cultural resurgence, learning and relationship-building. It is a place where Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing are honoured and shared with the entire campus and broader community.

As Director, I am committed to continuing the work of building relationships, strengthening community and advancing Indigenous excellence in education. This past year has been one of growth, celebration and meaningful progress. The opening of the Wampum Learning Lodge marked a historic milestone in our journey. It has quickly become a vibrant hub. This year, the Lodge has hosted over 100 educational and cultural events, welcomed more than 3,000 visitors and served as a space for ceremony, dialogue, and learning.

Looking ahead, our vision is to position the Wampum Learning Lodge as a leader in Indigenous education, research, and community engagement. Innovation, collaboration, and cultural resurgence will be at the heart of everything we do.

At the core of our work is the belief that education is a pathway to empowerment, healing, and transformation. The heart work of building relationships, between students, staff, faculty and communities, is what sustains us. Through these relationships, we create spaces of belonging, foster cultural pride, and nurture the next generation of Indigenous leaders.

To our students: you are the heart of our work. Your voices, dreams, and resilience inspire us every day.

To our community partners: thank you for walking with us. Your guidance and trust are the foundation of our shared journey.

Together, we will continue to build a future where Indigenous students, knowledge, and communities thrive at Western and beyond.

Nya:weh, Miigwech, Anushiik, Thank you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paula Cornelius-Hedgepeth'.

Paula Cornelius-Hedgepeth
Director, Indigenous Engagement and the Wampum Learning Lodge



Message from the Co-Chair of the Indigenous Postsecondary Education Council (IPEC)

Aaniin-Boozhoo,

I am pleased to share highlights of last year's achievements as Western University's Community Co-Chair of the Indigenous Postsecondary Education Council (IPEC). Together with the Office of Indigenous Initiatives, Western University continues to support Indigenous students, staff and faculty in meaningful ways.

IPEC remains an important platform for local Indigenous communities to inform and influence the university's policies and priorities. Since becoming Co-Chair in 2023, I have seen significant steps taken toward Truth and Reconciliation.

A key highlight of the year was the reappointment of Dr. Christy R. Bressette as Vice-Provost and Associate Vice-President (Indigenous Initiatives). Her leadership continues to guide Western University's path forward.

Several important initiatives were introduced and enhanced this past year, including:

1. A new policy to affirm declarations of Indigenous citizenship or membership;
2. The launch of The Guide to Indigenous Allyship at Western, offering guidance on respectful engagement and support;
3. The Guide to Indigenous Research at Western, which promotes ethical and culturally informed research practices; and
4. Continued collaboration with Indigenous communities, such as support for projects like the search at the Mt. Elgin Residential School site.

These developments reflect the shared commitment to Indigenous voices and community-led efforts. I'm encouraged by the direction we are heading and grateful to everyone involved in supporting this journey.

Miigwech for your continued dedication to reconciliation and Indigenous excellence at Western.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Debbie Dolson'.

Debbie Dolson
Post-Secondary Counsellor
Deshkan Ziibiing
Chippewas of the Thames First Nation
Gagige Gikinomaagoziwin Board of Education

Indigenous Strategic Plan Evaluation

Informed by the enduring impact of colonial forces on education – and guided by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007) and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action (2015) – Western University launched its Indigenous Strategic Plan (ISP) in 2016 to address both current and future educational needs. The plan remains responsive to evolving priorities for generations to come.

Progress across the eight thematic priority areas has reflected the institution’s capacity for awareness, engagement and transformation at each stage. As Western continues its journey toward Truth and Reconciliation, the ISP will evolve accordingly. The next iteration is expected to retain many of the original strategic priorities while incorporating new or more focused areas as needed.

This report provides a high-level overview of achievements to date and highlights opportunities for continued growth and impact.



01

Strengthen and build relationships with Indigenous communities

Achievements: Increased the number of Indigenous youth who visited campus; maintained programming for Indigenous male youth; created opportunities for all ages, focusing on arts and STEM; expanded off-campus language revitalization efforts; and transitioned Indigenous Post-Secondary Education Council meetings to in-community meetings.

Opportunities for Growth: Expand partnerships with Indigenous educational institutes and colleges; increase sponsorship of community events and programs; and grow the Indigenous Alumni Network for Western.

02

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

Achievements: Increased number of informal learning opportunities for all Western students, staff and faculty throughout the year; collaborative development of Anti-Indigenous Racism Module between OII and EDI; Indigenous Allyship Principles released to campus; increased experiential learning opportunities through annual programming at the Wampum Learning Lodge; increased opportunities for connections with Elders; and increased promotion of Indigenous students, staff, faculty and research on campus.

Opportunities for Growth: Update the Guide to Working with Indigenous Students; expand the ability to incorporate Elders into course content and delivery; support campus-wide cultural competency training for student-facing roles, such as Wellness and Well-being counsellors across campus.

03

Enhance Indigenous students’ experiences at Western

Achievements: Increased, regular presence of Elders and Knowledge Keepers at the Indigenous Student Centre and Wampum Learning Lodge; reserved spaces for Indigenous students to gather, meet, and study during exam seasons; increased engagement of the Indigenous Student Association across campus and into the London community; integration of Indigenous students’ family members into programming; increased programming for Indigenous students during the academic year; and surveyed Indigenous students on their wellness & well-being needs.

Opportunities for Growth: Support and grow academic transition programs for incoming Indigenous students; explore Indigenous student mentorship opportunities; grow Western’s Supporting Aboriginal Graduate Enhancement (SAGE) chapter; and continue to address persistent instances of racism and misinformation in Western classrooms.

04

Achieve excellence in Indigenous research and scholarship

Achievements: Establishment of the Indigenous Research Connections Series; increased coverage of Indigenous scholars and scholarship at Western; revised regulations to support Indigenous research at the graduate level; increased tracking of Indigenous research; and increased Indigenous research workshops for researchers at Western to better understand their responsibilities for meaningful community engagement.

Opportunities for Growth: Host an Indigenous Research Day to profile Indigenous Research at Western; include more Indigenous community members in the Head & Heart Indigenous Research Fellowship as Mentors; and create a webinar that educates Western scholars on conducting respectful and ethical research with Indigenous communities.

05

Excel in Indigenous teaching, learning and pedagogy

Achievements: Maatookiying gaa-miinigoowizing won a D2L Innovation Award in Teaching and Learning; increased learning opportunities for staff and faculty through the Wampum Learning Lodge; and hired an e-Learning Specialist to support the Indigenous Curriculum & Pedagogy Advisor.

Opportunities for Growth: Review the Maamwii Gzikewag: Indigenous Curriculum & Learning Report; grow the impact and quality assurance of the use of Indigenous Knowledge in course delivery; and create a clear inventory of Indigenous-related academic programs and courses offered at Western.

06

Indigenize Western’s institutional practices and spaces

Achievements: Completed repatriations to home communities; updated the Guidelines for Working with Indigenous Community Members; appointed a Director, Indigenous Engagement; offered specialized Indigenous-focused training to various units across campus; and developed regular teaching & learning program series at the Wampum Learning Lodge.

Opportunities for Growth: Support the awareness and engagement of Western’s Indigenous Postsecondary Education Council; increase the visibility of Indigenous languages across Western; and streamline a centralized website for Indigenous Initiatives (including the Indigenous Student Centre and Wampum Learning Lodge).

07

Become a university of choice for Indigenous students

Achievements: Overhauled the Indigenous Viewbook; targeted highlighting of Indigenous students, faculty across Western’s main channels; increased cultural programming for Indigenous students across campus; targeted communications about opportunities across campus; and focused recruitment strategy for local communities.

Opportunities for Growth: Increase offerings of academic programs identified as in demand by the local Indigenous communities; increase the acceptance rates of Indigenous applicants’ offers of admission; and survey Indigenous applicants on their admission offer decisions.

08

Increase Indigenous representation in staff and faculty members

Achievements: Increased permanent Indigenous staff and leadership positions at Western; and increased Indigenous presence across Western Communications channels.

Opportunities for Growth: Focus on increasing the retention rates of Indigenous staff and faculty; and increase Indigenous staff supports and opportunities across all units.

2024-25

MILESTONES ON THE ROAD TO INDIGENIZATION

Indigenous Students

The Office of Indigenous Initiatives centers Indigenous students for all our initiatives, with Western welcoming Indigenous students from across Turtle Island. Indigenous student enrollment continues to grow at Western, now nearly 700 across main and affiliate campuses – 90% of whom are enrolled full-time.

Student Support Services

The Indigenous Student Centre (ISC) team supports Indigenous students in a variety of ways during their time at Western:

- ▶ Academic counselling, guidance, and tutoring
- ▶ Coordinates the engagement of Elders to support Indigenous students
- ▶ Organization of cultural events across campus
- ▶ Sustaining a welcoming environment for our on-campus Indigenous community
- ▶ Facilitates peer-to-peer mentorship and leadership

The Indigenous Student Centre team comprises 9 staff members and is overseen by the new Director, Indigenous Engagement and VP/AVP (Indigenous Initiatives).

Enrollment and Admissions

Over the last five years, between the 2019-2020 and 2024-2025 academic years, applications from prospective Indigenous students showed a 50% increase and offers to prospective Indigenous students rose by 47%.

Financial Aid and Support

An Indigenous Financial Aid Coordinator assists Indigenous students in navigating financial resources. The National Indigenous Scholarship Program provides five awards of \$50,000 to incoming Indigenous

students based on academic excellence and community contributions. The Local First Nations Scholarship Program, awarded to Indigenous students associated with the London District Chiefs Council (LDCC), also recognizes academic excellence and community contributions. In the 2024-2025 academic year, 7 graduate students and 14 undergraduate students were awarded this scholarship.

Indigenous Circles of Support and Leadership Program (ICSLP)

Celebrating its eleventh year, ICSLP had 44 participants from both graduate and undergraduate levels. From feedback this year, 100% of participants reported positive experiences, highlighting emotional, cultural, and practical support from the program that empowered them to balance their academics, personal life, and work while being a Western student.

Graduation and Celebrations

At the end of the 2024-2025 academic year, 134 Indigenous students will graduate across all faculties and campuses. The Indigenous Graduation Ceremony saw its highest registration to date, with 44 students and over 180 relatives celebrating their achievements.



Indigenous Faculty

Western is the academic home to 15 Indigenous faculty members from diverse disciplines. These faculty members bring invaluable perspectives to their fields, enriching the learning environment and supporting community engagement and the integration of authentic Indigenous knowledges and perspectives. Profiles of our Indigenous faculty and their areas of expertise can be found on the Indigenous faculty page of the Office of Indigenous Initiatives (OII) website.

Promotions and Achievements

- This year, three of our Indigenous faculty members were promoted.
- **Dr. Chantelle Richmond** (Indigenous Studies/Geography and Environment) and **Dr. Lina Sunseri** (Indigenous Studies/Sociology) were among the first Indigenous faculty members to reach full professorship at Western, representing two historic promotions effective July 2024. Dr. Sunseri received this promotion during her transfer from Brescia University College to Western.
 - **Sally Kewayosh**, hired in Western's 2021 cluster hire for Indigenous faculty, was promoted to Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Information and Media Studies.

Farewells

- This year, we said farewell to three faculty members:
- Dr. Candace Brunette-Debassige
 - Dr. Brent Debassige
 - Dr. Tara Pride
- All of whom transferred to universities in their home territories. We wish them the best as they continue their journeys at their new institutions and honour their crucial contributions during their time at Western.



Administration

Western continues to advance impactful initiatives under its Indigenous Strategic Plan, reinforcing its commitment to celebrating Indigenous people and fostering an environment where they thrive academically, professionally and culturally.

Indigenous administrative positions are crucial to creating more inclusive, respectful and culturally responsive academic environments, thereby supporting the success and well-being of Indigenous students and community members.

New Roles and Appointments in the Office of Indigenous Initiatives

- This year, the Office of Indigenous Initiatives welcomed several new team members:
- Indigenous Communications Coordinator: Lauren September Poeta (Wiikwemkoong Unceded Territory) in the Office of Indigenous Initiatives
 - Elder-in-Residence: Betsy Waawaaskone Kechego (Deshkan Ziibiing) at the Wampum Learning Lodge
 - Manager, Indigenous Admissions and Enrollment: Arielle Bressette (Chippewas of Kettle and Stony Point) in the Indigenous Student Centre
 - Director, Indigenous Engagement and Wampum Learning Lodge: Paula Cornelius-Hedgepeth (Oneida Nation of the Thames) in the Office of Indigenous Initiatives
 - Indigenous Health and Wellness Promoter and Navigator: Melanie Akiwenzie-Lisk (Chippewas of Nawash), jointly welcomed by the Office of Indigenous Initiatives and the Wellness and Well-being team
 - E-Learning Specialist: Aamir Aman in the Office of Indigenous Initiatives
 - Vice-Provost/Associate Vice-President: Dr. Christy Bressette (Kettle and Stony Point First Nation) was re-appointed as the VP/AVP Indigenous Initiatives for five years

Administrative Growth Across Campus

- Across Western, we saw growth in administrative/ staff positions dedicated to the goals of Indigenousization and decolonization of the University:
- Indigenous Studies Program appointed Dr. Rick Fehr as Acting Director
 - Department of Visual Arts welcomed Theo Cuthand (Little Pine First Nation) as the third Indigenous Artist-in-Residence
 - Faculty of Science appointed Dr. Desmond Moser as Assistant Dean (Decolonization)
 - Faculty of Science welcomed Jessica Hay (Oneida Nation of the Thames) as their inaugural Environmental Science Indigenous Knowledge Connector
 - Schulich School of Medicine and Dentistry has engaged Dr. Elisa Levi (Chippewas of Nawash) as a Strategic Advisor to the Dean's Office on Indigenous initiatives



Policy and Procedure

In the past year, significant strides have been made in updating policies to better support Indigenous people by driving progress of the Indigenous Strategic Plan. These updates reflect our ongoing commitment to fostering inclusivity, respect and meaningful progress.

Guidelines for Working with Indigenous Community Members

In early 2024, the Office of Indigenous Initiatives updated the Guidelines for Working with Indigenous Community Members. These guidelines apply to Indigenous people who are engaged in activities at Western across faculties, on- or off-campus, including online spaces. These guidelines aim to facilitate the development of respectful and reciprocal relationships with Indigenous people by outlining relational and cultural protocols and promoting consistency in invitations and honoraria. The refreshed guidelines contain updates regarding minimum honoraria, in response to the rising cost of living, as well as strategies to help avoid tokenism.

Policy for Affirming Declarations of Indigenous Citizenship and Membership at Western University

For the last three years, the Office of Indigenous Initiatives (OII) has been working closely with Indigenous communities on campus and locally to replace the problematic practice of Indigenous self-identification. Through a collaborative process, the OII has developed a Policy and Procedure for Affirming Declarations of Indigenous Citizenship and Membership at Western University that will apply to all students, staff and faculty accessing a material advantage or designated position for an Indigenous position. The new Policy and Procedure is expected to enhance the integrity and inclusivity of our community. The policy is undergoing consultation across campus and is expected to be ratified by the Board of Governors later this summer.

Indigenous Allyship at Western

In September, the Office of Indigenous Initiatives released the Principles for Indigenous Allyship at Western. In April, a webpage for the Principles of Indigenous Allyship and the supporting resources was launched. The supporting resources and complete guidelines will be launched gradually.

Advancing Inclusive Excellence: EDIDA Strategic Plan

In December, a new strategic plan for equity, diversity, inclusion, decolonization and accessibility – Advancing Inclusive Excellence – launched at Western. This plan embodies Western's commitment to creating an equitable, diverse and inclusive community and campus for all, with principles of Indigenization and decolonization embedded in each of the five strategic priorities.

Revised Indigenous Honoraria Form

In February, OII and Western Research re-launched a revised Indigenous Honoraria Form to ensure fair and respectful compensation for Indigenous community members involved in campus activities, including research.

Increased Communications Presence

The campus community continues to see an increase of Indigenization, decolonization and Indigenous representation across campus. Western News stories throughout May 2024-April 2025 saw over a 70% increase in Indigenous content compared to the previous year. Western Communications also demonstrated its commitment to increasing Indigenous representation and visibility, including a Fall Student Feature with Nicholas Keller and the Campus Conversations with Sustainability Champions series featuring Mikooohns Peters. The significant increase in Indigenous content in Western Communications underscores our dedication to amplifying Indigenous voices and stories.



Teaching and Learning

Western University continues to prioritize innovative and inclusive teaching and learning practices, particularly through initiatives that support the advancement of Truth, reconciliation and justice through education in all disciplines.

Connecting for Climate Change Action Course

Connecting for Climate Change Action (C4CCA) is an award-winning course that combines Indigenous knowledge and Euro-Western science to educate and motivate action on climate change. Offered as a Geography and Environment credit or as a free, open course through Coursera, learners build an understanding of the science behind climate change and develop a profound understanding of their responsibilities and relationship with land and one another.

After three years, the C4CCA course has made the following impact:

- ▶ 450 Western students have taken it for credit towards their degrees
- ▶ 1660 learners accessed C4CCA through Coursera
- ▶ Averaged 100 active learners per day in Winter 2024 on Coursera
- ▶ 99% of learners reported they are likely to recommend C4CCA to others
- ▶ 93% of learners agree that they can contribute meaningfully to climate change justice and action

Four Seasons of Reconciliation Module

Since September 2022, the Four Seasons of Reconciliation modules, offered in partnership with Western Libraries, have engaged 366 participants across campus, promoting reconciliation and understanding.

Indigenous Teaching & Learning Series

Developed by Candace Brunette-Debassige, the Indigenous Teaching and Learning Series has garnered over 1,700 views, offering valuable insights into decolonizing pedagogy and enhancing Indigenous student experiences.

- ▶ Indigenous Teaching & Learning Online Series – Introduction (244 views)
- ▶ Module 1 – Decolonize the Academy (821 views)
- ▶ Module 2 - Toward a Decolonizing Pedagogy (624 views)
- ▶ Module 3 - Students, Indigeneity and Experience in Universities (105 views)

Maatookiiyng gaa-miinigoowiziying Project

In June 2024, Maatookiiyng gaa-miinigoowiziying (also known as Sharing Our Gifts) project was honoured with the 2024 D2L Innovation Award in Teaching and Learning, recognizing its innovative approach to student-centered education. This interdisciplinary initiative has profoundly impacted Western's campus by integrating Indigenous knowledge into course content.

The 18-person interdisciplinary team behind Maatookiiyng gaa-miinigoowiziying created ten 3-hour digital teaching bundles for Western instructors to embed in their course content. The bundles are created by seven Indigenous scholars and feature 14 local Indigenous knowledge holders sharing their insights and wisdom about specific Indigenous topics.

After three years, the Maatookiiyng project impacted Western's campus through:

- ▶ 242 instructors across Western faculties and affiliates registered to engage with the bundles

- ▶ 74 classes taught by 59 instructors incorporated the bundles' content
- ▶ 3,608 Western students enrolled in courses using the bundles' content
- ▶ 21 instructors joined the Community of Practice

The Office of Indigenous Initiatives is re-launching the learning bundles as updated e-Learning modules.

ReconciliACTION Speaker Series

The Wampum Learning Lodge has become a hub for educational outreach, hosting the popular ReconciliACTION Speaker Series in collaboration with Atlohsa Family Healing Services. This series has grown to serve over 100 attendees per session, fostering campus and community support and learning on topics of interest to London residents and those of the surrounding area.



Research

Western Research has significantly enhanced its support for Indigenous research through various initiatives aimed at fostering a more inclusive and supportive environment for Indigenous scholars, students, allied scholars and Indigenous community members.

ROLA Indigenous Research Question

A mandatory Indigenous research question has been added to Western’s Research On-Line Administration (ROLA). This allows Western Research to better support the needs of Indigenous researchers and track relevant data, such as the number of applications submitted, success rates and identifying who is conducting Indigenous research on campus.

Guidance Resources

Developed comprehensive guidance resources to clarify what constitutes Indigenous research and outline tri-agency obligations for Indigenous research engagement.

Non-Medical Research Ethics Board

Revised and launched new questions to better support the ethics application process. Additionally, an Indigenous community member role was created on the Non-Medical Research Ethics Board, with the first member successfully recruited.

Indigenous Research Workshops

Western Research and SGPS launched new workshops for supervisors to educate scholars about updated thesis regulations and responsibilities for meaningful Indigenous community engagement in research.

SGPS Thesis Regulations

Revised SGPS Thesis Regulations to better support Indigenous research.

Indigenous Research Connections Series

Speaker series launched featuring quarterly events showcasing Indigenous research at Western. These events are held at the Wampum Learning Lodge in partnership with the Office of Indigenous Initiatives, the Indigenous Faculty Advisory Council and Western Research.

Training for Research Administrators

Developed and hosted training sessions for Western research administrators to build competency and understanding in addressing barriers and racism for Indigenous community partners and scholars. The first training session was held in November.

Head & Heart Indigenous Research Fellowship Restructure

The Head and Heart Indigenous Research Fellowship (H&H) is now running as a two-year summer research program (May to July in each of two years). Geared towards Indigenous upper-year undergraduate students at Western, this Fellowship is

designed to support Indigenous student learning in preparation for graduate studies or work in an applied community-based research context.

- **First Year:** Fellows undertake in-person learning focused on research fundamentals, experiential and land-based learning, professional development, and explore the breadth of research programs and disciplines at Western.
- **Second year:** Fellows are paired with Western faculty supervisors from various disciplines to work on new or existing research projects. Fellows present their final research projects at the Head & Heart Indigenous Research Symposium.

In July 2024, we celebrated the first cohort graduating from the program’s restructuring.



Community Engagement

Western University remains committed to fostering strong community engagement through a variety of initiatives that support and celebrate Indigenous people, cultures and relationship-building.

The Wampum Learning Lodge has become a main hub for Indigenous-led and Indigenous-focused community engagement at Western and across the London area, having been the venue for over 100 educational, community and cultural opportunities in the last academic year, with over 3,000 visitors voluntarily signing in.

Annual Events

Annual social events, such as the Round Dance, Indigenous Winter Market and the Indigenous Students' Association's Pow Wow, continue to grow in popularity, attracting larger crowds and fostering a stronger sense of community. This December, the Indigenous Winter Market drew an estimated 600 attendees, significantly more than previous years, leading to many vendors selling out by the end of the day.

White Corn Resurgence Project

The White Corn Resurgence Project, partnered with Western's Master of Environment and Sustainability, is entering another year of revitalizing White Corn for the Oneida Nation of the Thames. The 2024 growing season provided valuable lessons on adapting traditional cultivation to climate change and soil health. Community relationship building was crucial to the project's success, with three Indigenous youth and a non-Indigenous environmental science student from Western employed to work on the project. Together, they cultivated 1300 pounds of White Corn, now in storage. Moving forward, the project will focus on successful harvests and creating a sustainable farm and market for White Corn, emphasizing sovereignty, food security and economic reconciliation.

Language Revitalization

We offer language learning opportunities in Onyota'a:kaneha (Oneida) and Anishinaabemowin (Ojibway), targeting students and alumni/community engagement. Mentorship is central to these programs, fostering relationships and community support for Indigenous students at Western. We focus on building strong language foundations, enabling students to become conversationalists and expand their vocabulary. This year, 22 Onyota'a:kaneha language learners were registered, and 8 monthly Anishinaabemowin sessions were offered at the Wampum Learning Lodge.

Repatriation of Ancestors and Artifacts

Repatriation of Indigenous artifacts and ancestors is crucial for higher education institutions like Western University, fostering respect, reconciliation and healing with Indigenous communities. This process acknowledges the cultural significance of these items, supports their rightful return and begins rebuilding trust with Indigenous communities. Guided by the Office of Indigenous Initiatives, Western University is actively engaged in repatriation efforts and has been working closely with Indigenous communities. Currently,

the Office of Indigenous Initiatives is working with Kettle and Stony Point First Nation and Western's Faculty of Science to return multiple kettles, also known as Thunderbird Eggs, this summer.

Youth Engagement

As youth are vital to our relationships with Indigenous communities and our collective future, we are dedicated to inspiring and empowering Indigenous youth. Our initiatives help students envision themselves in post-secondary education, nurturing their talents and exploring new possibilities for their future. The Office of Indigenous Initiatives has ongoing partnerships with local on-reserve schools and off-reserve school districts.

- Programming led by the Indigenous Student Centre has seen growing interest:
- ▶ Over 200 youth visited for ISC-guided campus tours
 - ▶ 64 youth registered for the Mini University summer camps
 - ▶ 172 youth registered for the Indigenous Track & Field Day



Highlighted Events from the Past Year

Western University hosted a variety of impactful events this past year, each contributing to the advancement of our Indigenous Strategic Plan and fostering a more inclusive campus environment. Among the numerous events that enriched our campus life, three stood out for their exceptional impact and engagement. These highlighted events brought our community together and significantly contributed to advancing key areas identified in our Indigenous Strategic Plan, fostering a more inclusive and supportive environment for Indigenous students, staff and faculty and demonstrating the impact of cross-disciplinary collaborations.

An Afternoon of Allyship

In September, the Western campus gathered for “An Afternoon of Allyship,” an event designed to educate and inspire the community on becoming allies to Indigenous people. The event featured two impactful talks:

This Afternoon of Allyship was organized by the Faculty of Social Science, with the School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies, the Indigenous Studies Program, the Society of Graduate Students (SOGS) and the Social Science Students Council.

An Afternoon of Allyship featured two impactful talks:

- ▶ Archaeologists Lisa Hodgetts and Ed Eastaugh spoke on “Archaeologists as Allies: Supporting Indigenous-led Searches at Former Indian Residential Schools” and the work they do with the Canadian Archaeological Association Working Group on Unmarked Graves, which received a 2024 Governor General’s Innovation Award.
- ▶ Geographer Katrina Moser spoke on “Allyship is a Journey, not a Destination” and the Connecting for Climate Change Action course, a collaboration of Indigenous and non-Indigenous colleagues.

Robin Wall Kimmerer Visit

In October, best-selling author and renowned Potawatomi scientist Robin Wall Kimmerer visited Western, engaging the community through a series of events including:

- ▶ A community breakfast at Wiigiwaaminaan Lodge with Atlohsa Family Healing Services
- ▶ A Harvest Lunch at the Wampum Learning Lodge for Indigenous and allied staff, students, and faculty
- ▶ A public lecture on “The Honourable Harvest: Indigenous Knowledge for Sustainability” at Centennial Hall
- ▶ A class visit to “A Field Course in Land Healing and Responsibility: Community-Based Research in Indigenous Studies,” a cross-listed course between Indigenous Studies and Geography and Environment

This multi-day visit was in collaboration with Atlohsa Family Healing Services and Western’s Office of Indigenous Initiatives, faculty of social science, faculty of science, Western Sustainability and Western Alumni.

Roots and Recognition

In October, the Men’s Varsity Lacrosse Game hosted “Roots and Reconciliation,” a special event honoring the Indigenous roots of lacrosse. This event educated attendees on lacrosse’s origins, the Moose Hide Campaign and featured a half-time performance by the Eagle Flight Singers, along with a free learn-to-play session with the women’s varsity lacrosse team.

The University Student Council, Western Mustangs and various campus groups organized this event.



Preparing for Opportunities Ahead

As we reflect on the past year's achievements, Western University remains steadfast in its commitment to fostering an inclusive and supportive environment for Indigenous students, staff and faculty. Our initiatives in policy and administration, teaching and learning, community engagement and student support have laid a strong foundation for continued progress. The success of our efforts highlights our dedication to cultural revitalization and community building.

Looking forward, we aim to expand these efforts, deepen our partnerships, and explore new avenues for growth. By embracing innovative approaches and strengthening our collaborative spirit, we are poised to continue advancing the goals of our Indigenous Strategic Plan and create lasting, positive change within our university community.

We want to thank all those who have partnered with us, especially the Elders and community members who have guided us during the year to advance this important work, and we look forward to another year of growth.

Miigwech. Yaw^ko. Anushiik. Thank you.

