



2025-26

ADVANCING RECONCILIATION

Office of Indigenous Initiatives'
Annual Progress Report



Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that Western University is located on the traditional lands of the Anishinaabek, Haudenosaunee and the Lūnaapéewak, on lands connected with the Dish with One Spoon Covenant Wampum between the Anishinaabeg and Haudenosaunee and the London Township and Sombra Treaties of 1796.

With this, we respect the longstanding relationships that Indigenous Nations have to this land, as they are the original caretakers. We acknowledge historical and ongoing injustices that Indigenous Peoples (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 through our teaching, research and community service.





Contents

FOREWORD

02

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

03

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

04

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

05

Message from the Academic Co-Chair of the Indigenous Faculty Advisory Council

ISP EVALUATION

06

Indigenous Strategic Plan Evaluation

2025-26 MILESTONES

08

Indigenous Students

10

Indigenous Faculty

11

Strengthening Institutional Capacity

12

Policy and Procedure

14

Teaching and Learning

16

Research

18

Community Engagement

20

Highlighted Events from the Past Year



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

Mino giizhigad (It's a good day!),

Advancing reconciliation at Western University's Office of Indigenous Initiatives calls upon all members of the university community to engage meaningfully in the shared work of transforming our institution through decolonization, Indigenization and strengthened relationships with Indigenous Peoples. At its heart, this work is about realigning institutional practices with Indigenous rights, knowledge systems and community-defined priorities in ways that restore balance, deepen understanding and create more equitable and sustainable futures for generations to come.

Throughout the past year, the Office of Indigenous Initiatives (OII) has continued to advance this commitment through collaboration, relationship-building and institutional change grounded in Indigenous ways of knowing and being. The progress reflected in this report demonstrates that reconciliation is not the responsibility of one office alone, but a collective journey shaped through humility, reciprocity, accountability and action. I remain deeply grateful for the wisdom, guidance and generous counsel shared by Indigenous Ancestors, Elders, Leaders and Knowledge Keepers, whose teachings continue to shape and ground this work. I am equally encouraged by the growing number of Indigenous allies across the university community who are engaging meaningfully in the shared responsibility of advancing reconciliation.

Guided by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Calls to Action and informed by Indigenous allyship principles, Western continues to strengthen partnerships, embed accountability and support institutional change across the university. The accomplishments highlighted throughout this report reflect both meaningful progress and our shared responsibility to continue this work alongside Indigenous communities in respectful and enduring ways.

All My Relations,

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.

With immense gratitude, I reflect on a year of meaningful growth, continuity, and strengthened commitment within the Office of Indigenous Initiatives (OII) at Western University. Our work remains grounded in listening to Indigenous students, faculty, staff and the First Nations, Inuit, Métis and urban Indigenous communities we serve. These relationships guide our path and ensure our work remains responsive and accountable.

This year marked the successful completion of the first year of implementing the Declaration of Indigenous Citizenship and Membership Policy. This work was carried out with relationality, respect and compassion, recognizing that each individual's journey is unique. The policy serves as an important foundation to uphold, guide and protect the work of reconciliation across the institution, ensuring it is implemented with care, accountability and intention.

The Wampum Learning Lodge continues to flourish as a vibrant hub of cultural resurgence, dialogue and learning. Alongside this, OII has strengthened its capacity to better provide services, programming and opportunities for both the Western community and local and urban First Nations communities.

As Director of the Indigenous Student Centre (ISC), I am grateful to witness and support the continued growth of our student community. As numbers increase, the ISC team remains dedicated to creating safe, supportive spaces grounded in care and belonging. This year, building relationships across campus has been key, ensuring students are connected not only to the ISC, but to a wider network of supports that remain accessible as demand grows. Our students continue to inspire us through their resilience, leadership and commitment.

Western University continues to grow in its understanding of what true Reconciliation looks like and is taking meaningful steps to embody that learning each and every day. Together, we carry this work forward.

Nya:weh, Miigwech, Anushiik, Thank you.

Paula Cornelius-Hedgepeth

Director, Indigenous Engagement and the Wampum Learning Lodge



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

Boozhoo,

As Co-Chair of the Indigenous Post-Secondary Education Council (IPEC), I am honoured to reflect on another year of meaningful growth, collaboration and shared commitment to Indigenous student success at Western University.

This year, IPEC strengthened its engagement with Indigenous communities by hosting meetings within community spaces, creating opportunities for deeper relationship-building, shared learning and reciprocal dialogue. These gatherings reinforced the importance of meeting people where they are and grounding our work in community voices and experiences.

We were also encouraged by the expansion of Indigenous representation and membership within IPEC, including new partnerships with organizations such as London Health Sciences Centre. These relationships continue to strengthen our collective capacity to support Indigenous learners through collaboration, advocacy and leadership.

Together, we remain committed to advancing wholistic Indigenous student success through culturally grounded programming, leadership initiatives and opportunities that empower students academically, personally, spiritually and within community. The work ahead continues to inspire hope, responsibility and a shared vision for future generations.

Miigwech

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



Message from the Academic Co-Chair of the Indigenous Faculty Advisory Council

Boozhoo,

This has been a year of meaningful and foundational work for IFAC. As my term as Academic Co-Chair draws to a close on June 30th, I want to take a moment to celebrate what our community has built together.

At the heart of our efforts has been our Terms of Reference, a living document, accepted in January 2026, that continues to evolve as we articulate who we are, how we work and why this Council exists. These Terms reflect our members' collective wisdom and set a strong foundation for many years ahead.

Our Indigenous Research Connections series brought together remarkable scholars, including Drs. Jackson Leween TwoBears, Nicole Redvers and Renée Bédard, whose presentations enriched our intellectual community and celebrated the depth of Indigenous scholarship at Western. We have continued to advance the Indigenous Letter of Understanding, with valued support from our colleagues at UWOFA, ensuring that the commitments in our Collective Agreement translate into meaningful practice. And every first Monday, our Mentorship Coffee Hours have held space for Indigenous faculty at all career stages to connect, reflect and find goodness in one another's company.

This work matters because we matter, as scholars, as community members, as people. It has been an honour to serve alongside you.

Miigwetch!

Chantelle Richmond, PhD

Professor and Canada Research Chair in Indigenous Health and the Environment

Department of Geography and Environment & Indigenous Studies Program

Co-Chair, Indigenous Faculty Advisory Council, Western University

Indigenous Strategic Plan Evaluation

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.

Over the 2025–26 academic year, the Office of Indigenous Initiatives (OII) has continued to advance the ISP through a coordinated, institution-wide approach that supports sustainable and meaningful action across the university. Recognizing that Indigenous people remain underrepresented within the Western community while carrying a disproportionate share of the responsibility for advancing reconciliation, OII has focused on strengthening institutional capacity by equipping all faculty, staff and leadership with the tools, resources and frameworks necessary to support this work.

This approach has contributed to a shift from independent initiatives towards more integrated, systemic efforts aligned with the Calls to Action, ensuring our work remains responsive to evolving priorities for generations to come.

Key institutional developments, including the implementation of *Braiding Truth into Action: A Guide Towards Indigenous Allyship at Western University*, *Centering Indigenous Voices: A Guide Towards Allyship in Indigenous Research*, and *MAPP 1.58 - Affirming Declarations of Indigenous Citizenship or Membership at Western University*, have strengthened Western’s ability to engage in this work with greater clarity, consistency and accountability.

This work has been further advanced through Western’s collaboration with the Mastercard Foundation EleV (2025) initiative, enabling the university to expand community-informed education, research and training aligned with local Indigenous communities’ defined priorities.



01

Strengthen and build relationships with Indigenous communities

OII strengthened relationships with local and regional Indigenous communities through sustained engagement and collaboration. Collaboration with the Indigenous Postsecondary Education Council (IPEC) and the Southern First Nations Secretariat (SFNS) supported alignment with community-identified priorities. Initiatives such as the return of the Thunderbird Eggs (Kettles) reflect ongoing commitment to respectful, community-informed partnerships.

02

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

OII supported a more inclusive campus culture by advancing a shared understanding of Indigenous allyship through *Braiding Truth into Action*, alongside training, communications and campus-wide engagement.

Collaboration with campus partners increased participation in reconciliation-focused initiatives, including National Day for Truth and Reconciliation programming, and elevated Indigenous perspectives across institutional dialogue and practice.

03

Enhance Indigenous students' experiences at Western

OII enhanced Indigenous students' experiences through collaboration with campus partners to strengthen access pathways, support targeted programming and expand supports through investments such as the Mastercard Foundation EleV initiative.

Partnerships with Western have increased Indigenous student participation in STEM through initiatives such as the Indigenous Student STEM Access Program and target initiatives such as scholarships, internships, mentorship and curricular supports that promote access, retention and success.

04

Achieve excellence in Indigenous research and scholarship

OII supported advancement for Indigenous research and scholarship through collaboration with Western Research and academic units, including the release of Centering Indigenous Voices – a guide to more ethical, community-aligned research practices at Western.

Collaborative initiatives, such as the IFAC Research Connection series and the development of an Indigenous Research Advisory Circle, strengthened institutional capacity and coordination, with planning underway for a regional Indigenous Research Symposium.

05

Excel in Indigenous teaching, learning and pedagogy

OII advanced Indigenous teaching and learning outcomes through strategic collaboration with academic and support units in curriculum development, faculty engagement and expanded experiential and land-based learning opportunities.

Targeted efforts in STEM, including curricular review, Indigenous-informed pedagogy and dedicated advising, supported more inclusive learning environments, with planned microcredentials and community-informed training.

06

Indigenize Western's institutional practices and spaces

OII advanced the Indigenization of institutional practices and spaces through the development and implementation of the Indigenous Citizenship and Membership Affirmation Policy (MAPP 1.58), guided by local Indigenous Nations and supported by institutional resources and engagement.

Strategic collaboration across the university supported TRC-aligned accountability within academic processes and strengthened Indigenous presence on campus, including ongoing advancements within the Wampum Learning Lodge.

07

Become a university of choice for Indigenous students

OII strengthened Western's position as a university of choice for Indigenous students through coordinated recruitment, programming, and community engagement efforts. Partnerships and pathway initiatives, including expanded Indigenous STEM programming, supported increased access to high-demand fields and improved student outcomes.

National and international collaborations, including representation at the World Indigenous Peoples Conference on Education (WIPCE), enhanced Western's visibility and reputation in Indigenous education.

08

Increase Indigenous representation in staff and faculty members

OII supported the recruitment, retention, and advancement of Indigenous faculty and staff through collaboration with institutional partners. Efforts included strengthening mentorship, increasing Indigenous representation in governance and expanding professional development opportunities.

These initiatives contributed to a more supportive environment for Indigenous leadership and representation across the university.



MILESTONES

2025-26

Indigenous Students

The OII centers Indigenous students within all our initiatives, with Western welcoming Indigenous students from across Turtle Island. Enrollment numbers continue to grow across Western and affiliate campuses, now around 760 self-identified Indigenous students across main and affiliate campuses – 90% of whom are enrolled full-time.

Student Support Services

The Indigenous Student Centre (ISC) team, under the leadership of its Director, 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
- ▶ Organize learning events to support all students in learning about Indigenous history and cultures
- ▶ Offers space to gather and find a sense of belonging within the larger institution
- ▶ Facilitates meaningful cultural engagement and leadership development opportunities

Enrollment and Admissions

In 2025-26, Indigenous student interest continued to grow across Western University. At main campus, applications increased by

8.3% and applicants by 10.5%. At the affiliate campuses, applications increased by 60%, and applicants increased by 55%.

Financial Aid and Support

An Indigenous Financial Aid Coordinator supports Indigenous students in navigating financial resources and funding opportunities at Western University. During the 2025–2026 academic year, Western was pleased to administer both the National Indigenous Scholarship Program and the Local First Nations Scholarship Program, which recognize academic excellence, leadership and community contributions.

The National Indigenous Scholarship Program provides five awards valued at \$50,000 each. The Local First Nations Scholarship Program supports full- and part-time Indigenous students connected to the London District Chiefs Council, with awards of up to \$15,000.

Cultural Supports in the Indigenous Student Centre

Cultural supports in the Indigenous Student Centre continue to grow and evolve, including expanding to include regular, in-person appointments with an additional Knowledge Keeper one day each month. The ISC has also welcomed the return of a Visiting Auntie, who supports cultural and social programming for Indigenous students. In addition, the ISC has welcomed a Knowledge Keeper to provide group teaching sessions to support cultural learning and connection among Indigenous students.

Celebrating its 12th year, the Indigenous Circles of Support and Leadership Program was featured in Western News for its success and boasted record enrollment numbers. At the beginning of the school year, 70 graduate and undergraduate students were registered, with 50 students completing the program at the end of the academic year.

Graduation and Celebrations

This year, the Indigenous Graduation Ceremony saw the highest registration to date, with 47 Indigenous students and over 221 relatives celebrating their achievements at the end of March. At the end of the 2025-2026 academic year, 105 Indigenous students will graduate across all faculties and campuses.



Indigenous Faculty

Western is the academic home to 17 Indigenous faculty members with expertise spanning several diverse disciplines. Indigenous faculty members bring invaluable Indigenous perspectives to their teaching, research, and service, enriching the learning environment and advancing meaningful engagement with Indigenous communities. Their work supports the integration of authentic Indigenous knowledges and perspectives across the institution.

Profiles of Indigenous faculty members and their areas of expertise are available on the Indigenous faculty page of the Office of Indigenous Initiatives (OII) website.

Promotions and Achievements

This year, we welcomed two new Indigenous faculty members to Western:

- ▶ **Dr. Jennifer Komorowski** (*Oneida Nation of the Thames*) joined Western as an Assistant Professor, cross-appointed between the Indigenous Studies Program and Gender, Sexuality and Women’s Studies department.
- ▶ **Gabrielle Heil** (*Oneida Nation of the Thames*) joined as a Lecturer for the Arthur Labatt School of Nursing.

In addition, **Dr. Lina Sunseri** is transitioning to Academic Co-Chair of the Indigenous Faculty Advisory Council (IFAC). The OII extends our sincere gratitude to **Dr. Chantelle Richmond** for her previous leadership and years of service as Academic Co-Chair.

All IFAC members have completed *MAPP 1.58 Affirming Declarations of Indigenous Citizenship or Membership at Western University* policy process and have had their Indigenous citizenship or membership affirmed.



Strengthening Institutional Capacity

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

Indigenous administrative and staff positions play a critical role in creating more inclusive, respectful and culturally responsive academic environments. Their leadership and expertise support the success and well-being of Indigenous students, faculty, staff and community members across the institution.

New Roles and Appointments in the Office of Indigenous Initiatives

During the past year, the Office of Indigenous Initiatives strengthened its administrative capacity through the continued development of key roles supporting Indigenous students, communities and programming:

- ▶ Elder-in-Residence: **Mary Lou Smoke** (*Batchewana First Nation*) began serving as the Elder-in-Residence at the Wampum Learning Lodge, providing cultural guidance, support, and teachings to students, staff and faculty.
- ▶ Program Coordinator: **Kara Archibald** (*Moose Cree First Nation*) assumed a new two-year coordinator role to support the expansion and sustainability of the Head and Heart Indigenous Research Fellowship program, run by the Office of Indigenous Initiatives and Western Research.

Capacity Growth Across Campus

Across Western, there was continued growth in administrative/staff positions dedicated to the goals of Indigenization and decolonization of the University:

- ▶ Department of Visual Arts welcomed **Jodi Lynn Maracle** (*Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory*) as the fourth Indigenous Artist-in-Residence.
- ▶ Western Research welcomed **Leelle Derynck** as their Indigenous Research Facilitator, supporting Indigenous research priorities and partnerships.
- ▶ Faculty of Education welcomed **Candace Jamieson Barr** (*Six Nations of the Grand River*) as a Graduate Affairs Assistant supporting their Indigenous Education and Graduate Education offices.

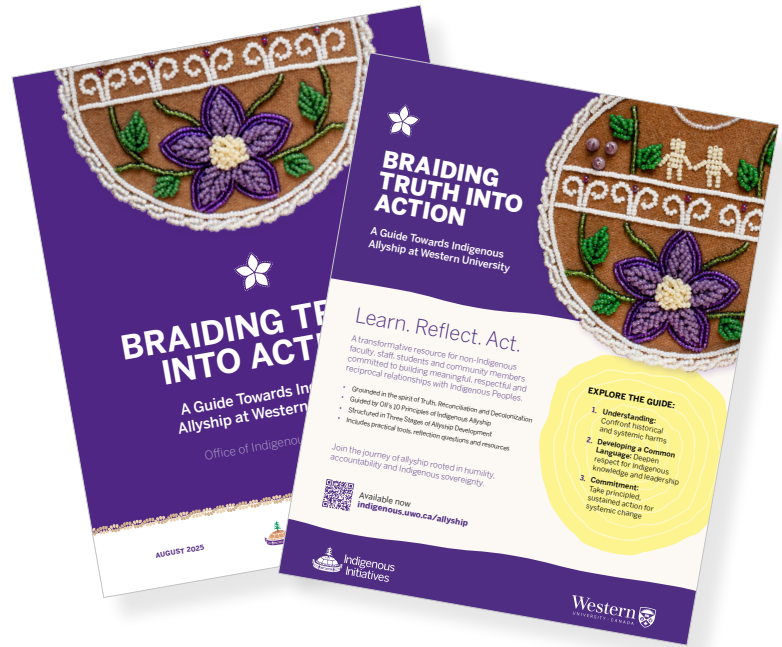


Policy and Procedure

Over the past year, Western has made significant strides in updating policies to better support Indigenous people and drive implementation of the Indigenous Strategic Plan. These initiatives reflect our ongoing commitment to fostering inclusivity, respect and meaningful action.

Braiding Truth Into Action: A Guide Towards Indigenous Allyship at Western

Launched in August 2025, *Braiding Truth Into Action* builds on the Principles of Indigenous Allyship released in 2024. The guide deepens the collective understanding of allyship among non-Indigenous faculty, staff, students, and community members through practical tools, teachings, and reflective opportunities. It supports the Western community in engaging with the ongoing work of Truth and Reconciliation by fostering informed, sustained, and relational approaches to collaboration with Indigenous people and communities.



Centering Indigenous Voices:

Created in partnership with the OII, Western Research launched *Centering Indigenous Voices* to support researchers at all levels in conducting research in allyship with Indigenous people, communities, and organizations. The guide responds to the urgent need for researchers to better respect Indigenous sovereignty, support community-led knowledge creation and engage in culturally grounded and ethically responsible research practices.





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

In June 2025, Western's Board of Governors ratified *MAPP 1.58 – Affirming Declarations of Indigenous Citizenship and/or Membership at Western University*. The policy and procedure apply to all situations in which there is a declaration of Indigenous membership or citizenship that is linked to a material advantage or intangible benefit, including access to scholarships/bursaries, job positions or admissions pathways designated for Indigenous people.

Since its implementation, the policy has been applied to over 700 declarations, with all Indigenous faculty and Elders now having their documentation affirmed. Throughout the year, numerous supplementary resources have been drafted to support various levels of the institution in consistently and respectfully applying the policy and procedure.

Procurement & Indigenous Vendors

Western's Procurement Services developed a process for identifying Indigenous business vendors to expedite payments and align practices with Western's Guidelines for Working with Indigenous Community Members. This work supports equitable economic participation and reflects Western's commitment to advancing reconciliation through ethical and respectful institutional practices.





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.

KAIROS Blanket Exercise

The KAIROS Blanket Exercise, an experiential learning tool that explores the historic and contemporary relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples in what we now call Canada, is offered at Western through a partnership between the OII and the Transition, Leadership, and Development department in Student Experience. Throughout the year, we hosted 3 KAIROS Blanket Exercises for 67 participants in total, all university staff.

4 Seasons of Reconciliation Module

Since September 2022, the 4 Seasons of Reconciliation module, offered in partnership with Western Libraries, has seen 501 participants enrolled across campus, promoting deeper understanding of reconciliation.

Maatookiiying gaa-miinigoowiziying (Sharing Our Gifts)

Maatookiiying gaa-miinigoowiziying also known as the Indigenous Learning Bundles project, is a digital curriculum resource designed to support Western University and Affiliate instructors in culturally and ethically responsive ways to integrate local Indigenous knowledges, perspectives and voices into their undergraduate and graduate level courses. Since migrating the learning bundles to OWL Brightspace, this academic year we have seen:

- ▶ 95 instructors registered to engage with the bundles
- ▶ 33 courses implemented one or more of the learning bundles
- ▶ 1,917 students enrolled in courses using the learning bundles

Guardians and Sustainability Program

Led by the Faculty of Science, 19 participants completed an intensive, one-month field school in land and water stewardship at sites within the territories of the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation, Oneida Nation of the Thames and Munsee-Delaware First Nation. Grounded in cultural and language teachings, the program included learning in environmental record-keeping, geolocation and mapping, soil and mineral identification, water quality monitoring, wetland and river species identification, flood mitigation, species at risk, traditional medicines and Indigenous agriculture.

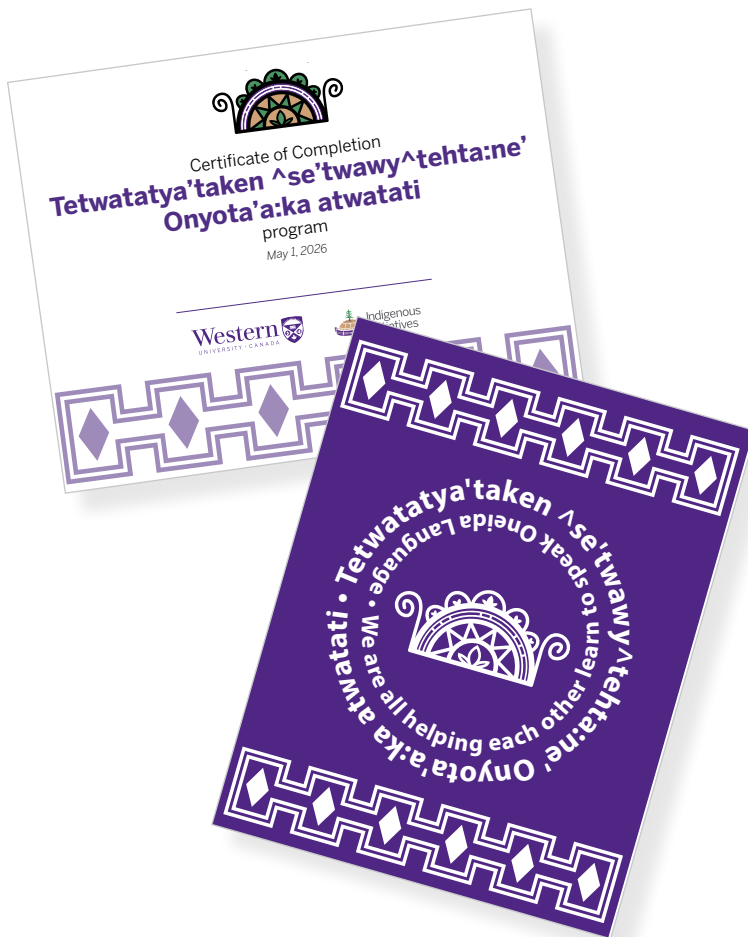


Participants earned a non-credit Certificate and E-Badge through Western Continuing Studies. The program was hosted by the Environmental Sciences Program (Science) and the Indigenous Studies Program (Social Science).



Indigenous Geographies Cluster

The Department of Geography and Environment is excited to announce the formation of an Indigenous Geographies Cluster, comprised of four Indigenous faculty members jointly appointed with the Indigenous Studies Program: Drs. Chantelle Richmond, Lewis Williams, Cortney Golkar-Dakin and Vanessa Ambtman Smith. This cluster represents Canada's largest Indigenous geography faculty group, with no comparable department nationally. Notably, the Indigenous Geographies cluster has designed two graduate-level courses focused on Decolonial Theory and Indigenous Research Methods. These courses position Western as a leading destination for training in Indigenous geographies, offering expertise in both decolonial theory and community-based methods, a unique offering within the country.



Language Revitalization

The Oneida Language Revitalization Program (November 2023 to December 2025) successfully engaged Indigenous students, alumni and Oneida Community members in weekly language instruction, mentorship and immersive cultural learning. Participants demonstrated increased Oneida language knowledge, strengthened cultural identity and deeper community connection. Notably, four students transitioned into teaching roles or language-related academic programs, reflecting the program's impact on leadership development and career pathways. Each successful participant obtained a certificate of completion from the Wampum Learning Lodge.

This program also initiated the process of creating a permanent Indigenous Language Library at the Wampum Learning Lodge, featuring Oneida, Anishinaabemowin, Lunaape, Cree and Michif languages.



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.

Aspiring Allies Research Connections

A new collaborative project was launched between Western Research, the OII, the Faculty of Science and the Faculty of Social Science. The series builds on the strong foundation of the Indigenous Research Connections, which are events that highlight and celebrate Indigenous research occurring at Western, and is designed to support those looking to engage in Indigenous research in ways that are respectful, ethical and grounded in relationship, reciprocity and accountability.



Indigenous Research Connections

Throughout the year, Western Research and the OII hosted the Indigenous Research Connections speaker series at the Wampum Learning Lodge, showcasing Indigenous research at Western. This past year, the series highlighted the research of Indigenous faculty members Drs. Danya Carroll, Jennifer Komorowski and Nicole Redvers, and featured the Head & Heart Research Symposium.

Through panels, workshops and conversations, the series brings together Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars from across disciplines. It also creates space to reflect on and learn how allies have addressed some of the challenges and tensions that can arise within academic environments when conducting Indigenous research.

The first installment of the series featured cultural teachings on tobacco ties and smudging from Elder Mary Lou Smoke, and a panel of non-Indigenous and Indigenous researchers, community leaders and partners from outside the university.





Head & Heart Indigenous Research Fellowship

In July, the second cohort of the Head & Heart Indigenous Research Fellowship graduated from the new structure that now spans across 2-summer seasons. A recent move towards a full-time, two-year Program Coordinator role is anticipated to enhance program stability and sustainability.

Updated Graduate and Postdoctoral Research Guidance

Western Research and SGPS have launched a new webpage providing guidance for graduate students and postdoctoral scholars undertaking Indigenous research. It outlines policies, procedures and resources to support students and researchers through their programs, support Indigenous graduate student needs and promote respectful, ethical and community-informed Indigenous research.



Indigenous Food Sovereignty Project

Dr. Richmond's Canadian Institutes of Health Research-funded project — *Planting Seeds for Urban Indigenous Food Sovereignty: Growing SOAHAC's Traditional Food Bag Program* — entered its second year of a five-year, \$1.895 million initiative launched in 2024. Led in partnership with Jocelyn Zurbrigg (Dietitian, Southwestern Ontario Aboriginal Health Access Center - SOAHAC), the project brings Indigenous food systems research and programming to Indigenous people living in the region. The project is supported by a team of coordinators, investigators, students and volunteers from both Western and SOAHAC. Most recently, Dr. Richmond was invited to address the Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry on April 30, 2026, delivering testimony on the determinants of Indigenous food insecurity, the urgent need for sustained federal investment in urban Indigenous health programming and the path toward Indigenous food sovereignty.





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.

Engagement at the Wampum Learning Lodge, Western's hub for Indigenous initiatives, continues to grow, with over 3,000 visitors and more than 100 events and initiatives aligned with the Lodge's mission and mandate each year. Through the Lodge, the OII offered over 300 hours of Indigenous learning opportunities to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous members of our campus and local communities.

Annual Events

Annual community events, including the Round Dance, Indigenous Winter Market and the Indigenous Students' Association's Pow Wow, continued to grow in participants and foster a stronger sense of community. In September, during Western's National Day for Truth and Reconciliation events, the Flag Raising Ceremony on Concrete Beach saw its highest level of engagement to date, reflecting our community's commitment to Truth and Reconciliation. This December, the Indigenous Winter Market drew another estimated 600 attendees to support local Indigenous artisans and entrepreneurs.

Increased Communications Presence

An increased social media presence for the Indigenous Student Centre and the Wampum Learning Lodge has created greater awareness and uptake of Indigenous initiatives on campus. This growth included a 92% increase in followers on the Wampum Learning Lodge Facebook page and a 190% increase in followers on the Indigenous Student Centre's TikTok account.

Bkejwanong Greenhouse Project

The Faculty of Science is working with Bkejwanong Unceded Territory, to establish a not-for-profit greenhouse that will support Indigenous food sovereignty for the Nation. This project responds to a community-identified

priority to repatriate their original foods as part of cultural revitalization. The greenhouse is envisioned as a community-driven educational and social enterprise rooted in sustainable Indigenous growing practices and community wellbeing. So far, Western has supported by assisting in the acquisition of greenhouse materials and constructing an access road and a foundation pad.

Archaeological Surveying and the Search for Missing Children

The Department of Anthropology has been working collaboratively with several First Nations on issues related to the search for missing children who disappeared at Residential Schools, as well as other community-led projects. This work includes providing archaeological and technological advice, supporting the development of project sites and ensuring that appropriate mitigation strategies are in place. In partnership with the Western Map Library, the Department of Anthropology is also developing a micro-credential on Geographic Information Systems (GIS) for local First Nations managers.

Orange Shirt Sales at the Bookstore

In partnership with the Dellelce Family Bookstore at Western, the OII hosted a design contest for Indigenous students and alumni to submit designs for new merchandise. The

winning design, by Indigenous student Kolbi Williams (Six Nations of the Grand River), was inspired by the teachings of the origin stories of Lacrosse. From the sales of orange shirts featuring Kolbi's design, all profits of \$3,690.87 have been donated to support Chippewas of the Thames' *Save the Barn* campaign to restore the last remaining building of the Mount Elgin residential school and create an interpretive museum.

Rematriation of Thunderbird Eggs

Working with Kettle and Stony Point First Nation, Western rematriated three Thunderbird Eggs, also known as kettles, and multiple fragmented pieces, from the Faculty of Science through the OII. After co-hosting a public education day at the Wampum Learning Lodge in late October, the rematriation ceremony to welcome the Thunderbird Eggs home took place in Kettle and Stony Point in early November, during Treaty Week.



White Corn Resurgence Project

During the past field season, the White Corn Revitalization Project hired one Master of Environment and Sustainability student from Western and one youth from the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation. The project continues to build partnerships with Oneida Nation of the Thames community members and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.



At the end of the growing season, 700lbs of Haudenosaunee White Corn were harvested, with 50lbs each being donated to the Oneida Cookhouse, the Oneida Log School, 13 Moons Land-Based Learning and Bubz – a nonprofit within the community. Remaining corn husks were repurposed as programming materials at the Wampum Learning Lodge.

Youth Engagement

We are dedicated to inspiring and empowering youth, helping them see themselves in post-secondary education by nurturing their talents and encouraging them to explore new possibilities for their future. The OII maintains ongoing partnerships with local First Nations schools and regional school boards to support Indigenous student engagement and success. Programming led by the Indigenous Student Centre has seen growing interest:

- ▶ Over 200 youth participated in ISC-guided campus tour days
- ▶ 91 youth registered for the Mini University summer camps
- ▶ 134 youth registered for the Indigenous Track & Field Day
- ▶ 78 Indigenous youth engaged through eight school visits at H.B. Beal and Banting through the Indigenous Academic Tutoring and Mentorship Program



Highlighted Events from the Past Year

Western University hosted a range of impactful events this past year that contributed to advancing the Indigenous Strategic Plan and strengthening relationships across campus and community. Among these, several events stood out for their depth of engagement, cross-campus collaboration and meaningful contributions towards fostering a more inclusive and supportive environment for Indigenous students, staff and faculty.

Riverfest

September marked Western's 4th annual Riverfest, co-organized by the Indigenous Students' Association, Indigenous Student Centre and Western Sustainability. Riverfest centres on building connections between the campus community and Deshkan Ziibi (Thames River), a waterway that links Western to the broader London community and to First Nations downstream, including Deshkan Ziibing Anishinabek (Chippewas of the Thames First Nation), Onyota'a:ka (Oneida Nation of the Thames) and Nalahii Lunaapewaak (Munsee-Delaware Nation).



Through land- and water-based learning, Riverfest supports students in developing a sense of belonging to the lands and waters upon which Western is situated. The event also fosters understanding of the importance of water protection and its deep connections to Indigenous communities.

Programming included the annual Indigenous Students' Association's Anishinaabe Water Walk and a Paint Night by the River, facilitated by Moses Lunham (Kettle and Stony Point First Nation).

The Path to Rematriation: The Thunderbird Eggs and Their Journeys Home

In October, Kettle and Stony Point First Nation, Western's Faculty of Science and the Office of Indigenous Initiatives co-hosted a public education event exploring the cultural, historical and geological significance of Thunderbird Eggs.



Featuring presentations from Indigenous Knowledge Keepers and Western faculty, the event centered Indigenous community voices and encouraged participants to deepen their understanding of the land, its histories and the relationships connected to these items and their journeys home.



Duncanson Lecture Series: Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *Theory of Water*

As part of the Robert and Patricia Duncanson Lecture Series, the Faculty of Arts and Humanities and the School for Advanced Studies in the Arts and Humanities (SASAH) hosted Dr. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson as the 2026 Duncanson Lecturer.



In *Theory of Water*, Simpson invited audiences to think alongside lakes, snow and ice, using story to create a decolonial space for reflection and collective imagining beyond the present moment.



Working closely with the OII, organizers created dedicated opportunities for Indigenous students, faculty and community members to engage with Simpson. These included a shared community lunch and participation in both the Indigenous Reading Group and Indigenous Writers' Circle.

Engagement included: :

- ▶ 35 participants at the Indigenous community lunch
- ▶ 220 attendees registered for the in-person lecture
- ▶ Over 200 virtual registrations
- ▶ 30 participants in the Reading and Writers' Circle gathering

The OII extends appreciation to the Faculty of Arts and Humanities and SASAH for their commitment to ensuring meaningful engagement opportunities for Indigenous students and community members throughout the visit.



Preparing for Opportunities Ahead

Over the past year, Western has continued to strengthen its commitment to supporting Indigenous students, staff and faculty. Through work in policy, teaching and learning, community engagement and student support, foundational progress has been made in advancing Truth and Reconciliation.

This progress includes stronger community partnerships, improved supports for student success, meaningful policy and systems change and continued cultural reclamation initiatives.

Looking ahead, Western will build on this momentum by expanding Indigenous student recruitment and support, strengthening land-based and community-led programming and continuing to advance systemic change across the institution.

We extend our sincere thanks to all who have supported this work, especially the Elders and community members whose guidance continues to shape these efforts.

Miigwech. Yaw[^]ko. Anushiik. Thank you.

