

POLICY 1.58 - Affirming Declarations of Indigenous Citizenship or Membership at Western University

Policy Category:	General
Subject:	Affirming Declarations of Indigenous Citizenship or Membership at Western University
Approving Authority:	Board of Governors
Responsible Officers:	Provost & Vice-President (Academic) Vice-Provost & Associate Vice-President (Indigenous Initiatives)
Responsible Offices:	Office of the Provost & Vice President (Academic) Office of Indigenous Initiatives
Related Procedures:	Procedure for Policy 1.58 - Affirming Declarations of Indigenous Citizenship or Membership at Western University
Related University Policies:	Employment Equity Policy Undergraduate Degree Admissions Appointment Procedures for Senior Academic and Administrative Officers of the University General Policy on Scholarships, Awards, Prizes
Effective Date:	June 26, 2025
Supersedes:	(New)

I. PURPOSE AND SCOPE

1. The purposes of this Policy are to demonstrate the University's respect for Indigenous communities and for Indigenous members of the University community by safeguarding against Indigenous ethnic fraud and ensuring that declarations of Indigenous citizenship or membership by members or prospective members of the University community are affirmed in accordance with this Policy and related Procedure. It is also to recognize the intangible benefits, including influence, authority and perspective, which are not measurable or physical, but which provide advantages reserved for Indigenous peoples.

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2. A key focus of the Policy and Procedure is to create an affirmation process that is informed and led by the local Indigenous communities and Indigenous faculty members, staff, librarians and archivists at the University.
3. This Policy applies to anyone who makes a declaration of Indigenous citizenship or membership that results in a material advantage at Western e.g. for admission, scholarships, bursaries, awards, recruiting/hiring, service opportunities, campus roles or any other opportunities or initiatives that are explicitly designated for Indigenous Peoples or where those with Indigenous citizenship or membership are given preference. This Policy also applies to faculty members, Graduate Teaching Assistants and post-doctoral scholars in non-Indigenous designated roles who hold a position of authority over, teach or supervise students or post-doctoral scholars and who declare Indigenous citizenship or membership in a manner that conveys influence, authority or perspective by virtue of their Indigenous citizenship or membership.
4. The Policy applies to prospective or current faculty, Graduate Teaching Assistants, staff, librarians, archivists, students, post-doctoral scholars, Indigenous Elders and Indigenous Knowledge Keepers.
5. This Policy contributes to a safe, inclusive, and diverse culture at the University and builds on the foundations established by *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action*, *The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP), *Towards Western at 150: Western University Strategic Plan* and Western's *Indigenous Strategic Plan*.

II. DEFINITIONS

Affirmation means a formal process of verification and acceptance of Indigenous citizenship or membership within a relational accountability framework informed by respect, relevance, reciprocity, responsibility¹, and relationality and refusal whereby claimants to Indigenous citizenship or membership are accountable to those communities who claim them.

A **“declaration” of Indigenous citizenship or membership** includes any written expression (e.g. resume/CV, application, identity documents, signature lines, website content, personal or academic narratives) or verbal expression (e.g. during an interview, pronouncements by a faculty member in lectures, public addresses or interviews) of Indigenous citizenship or membership in an Indigenous Nation, Indigenous ancestry or connection to Indigenous communities.

Indigenous is the term used for the purposes of this Policy in place of “Aboriginal” to refer to Peoples of First Nations, Métis, and/or Inuit ancestry, as per the *Canadian*

¹ Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2001. First Nations and Higher Education: The Four R's – Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity, Responsibility. In *Knowledge Across Cultures: A Contribution to Dialogue Among Civilizations*. R. Hayoe, and J. Pan. Hong Kong, eds., Comparative Education Research Centre, The University of Hong King.

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Constitution Act of 1982. The term Indigenous also includes global Indigenous peoples, as defined in the UNDRIP.

Indigenous Affirmation Advisory Committee (IAAC) means the committee described in this Policy and its related Procedure that is comprised of representatives from the local Indigenous communities, Indigenous faculty members, and/or Indigenous staff from the University, that is convened by the Office of Indigenous Initiatives (OII) at the University to affirm declarations of Indigenous citizenship or membership by self-identifying individuals in accordance with this Policy and its related Procedure.

Indigenous ethnic fraud refers to intentional false declarations of Indigenous citizenship or membership, Indigenous ancestry, and/ or intentional false claims to connections with Indigenous communities and lived experiences by non-Indigenous persons.

Indigenous citizenship or membership refers to the current status of being entitled to participate in the government and political life of an Indigenous Nation. Indigenous citizenship and membership codes may vary by community or Nation.²

Material advantage refers to any relational, professional, financial or tangible benefit including, but not limited to, any positions, service opportunities, campus roles, resources, scholarships, or grant funding specifically offered or designated for Indigenous Peoples at the University or where those with Indigenous citizenship or membership are given preference.

Relational positionality refers to how individuals situate their claim to Indigenous membership or citizenship in relation to intersecting social locations and complex power dynamics.

III. POLICY

1. This Policy applies to all declarations of Indigenous citizenship or membership that result in a material advantage at Western including declarations that are made within admission, selection, scholarship, hiring / recruitment or any other opportunities or initiatives that are explicitly designated for Indigenous Peoples or where those with Indigenous citizenship or membership are given preference. Such declarations must be affirmed by the IAAC in accordance with the **Procedure for Policy 1.58 Affirmation Declarations of Indigenous Citizenship or Membership**. This Policy and related Procedure also apply to faculty members, Graduate Teaching Assistants and post-doctoral scholars in non-Indigenous designated roles who hold a position of authority over, teach or supervise students or post-doctoral scholars and who declare Indigenous

² Adapted from the *Tri-Agency Policy on Indigenous Citizenship and Membership Affirmation* and the associated *Directive* published September 3, 2024.

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citizenship or membership in a manner that conveys influence, authority or perspective by virtue of their Indigenous citizenship or membership.

2. If this Policy applies, only individuals whose declarations of Indigenous citizenship or membership have been affirmed according to this Policy and Procedure will be eligible to move forward in the selection, admission, hiring, award or other applicable process or will be permitted to hold themselves out in the classroom or other learning environment as having Indigenous citizenship or membership in a manner that conveys influence, authority or perspective by virtue of their Indigenous citizenship or membership.
3. This Policy focuses on affirming claims to Indigenous citizenship or membership based on the principles of citizenship and membership recognized by the local Indigenous communities: the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation, Oneida of the Thames First Nation, and Munsee-Delaware Nation. These principles include a requirement for proof of lineal family connection in order to establish citizenship or membership in a First Nation. Ultimately, it is the Indigenous community who must claim the individual, versus an individual's claim to an Indigenous community. This relational approach respects the relevant and enduring ways of knowing and understanding each other within Indigenous communities, which further contributes to a sense of belonging within community spaces and connections.³
4. As such, this Policy places significant value on the process of *relational positionality* wherein cultural safety is afforded within processes that demonstrate lived experiences or speak to the circumstances of disconnection and/or reconnections. In recognizing that colonial structures have been a significant cause of familial and community disconnection, a broad array of approaches to demonstrating Indigenous citizenship or membership have been identified, as outlined in the associated Procedure.
5. This Policy will apply from its effective date to any new or renewed material advantage and to any new or renewed declaration of Indigenous citizenship or membership, within the meaning of the principles and processes set out in this Policy and associated Procedure, by faculty, Graduate Teaching Assistants, or post-doctoral scholars who hold a position of authority over, teach or supervise students or post-doctoral scholars.
6. Due to the evolving social-political nature and interpretation of this work, this Policy will be viewed as a living or dynamic document to be reviewed and

³ National Indigenous University Senior Leaders Association (NIUSLA) (2022). Indigenous voices on Indigenous Identity. Available at https://www.fnuniv.ca/wp-content/uploads/Indigenous-Voices-on-Indigenous-Identity_National-Indigenous-Identity-Forum_Report_March-22_June-22-FINAL.pdf; Canada (2024). What We Heard: A report from the Three Federal Research Funding Agencies' Ad Hoc Working Group on Indigenous Citizenship and Membership: <https://www.canada.ca/en/research-coordinating-committee/priorities/indigenous-research/2023/report-what-we-heard.html>

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updated as required and at least every three (3) years⁴ with support from the University's Indigenous Postsecondary Education Council (IPEC) and Indigenous members of the University community.

⁴ The University may opt to conduct its initial review of the Policy and Procedure two years following implementation to account for the changing landscape and initial experiences applying the Policy and Procedure.

Appendix 1

Background, Development of this Policy and Procedure, Guiding Principles and Acknowledgements

A. Background and Development of This Policy and Procedure

1. Indigenous Peoples are consistently underrepresented among faculty, staff, and student populations in postsecondary education institutions in Canada. This is a result of historical and ongoing colonial oppression which has created access barriers and institutional discrimination.
2. For the most part, the University has predominantly relied on unverified Indigenous self-identification processes when hiring and/or selecting Indigenous people for designated Indigenous roles, appointments, and initiatives or providing preference to Indigenous applicants/candidates for positions, admission, scholarships or other material advantages. However, due to growing instances of Indigenous ethnic fraud in the sector, additional measures are now required to safeguard University decision-making.
3. Unfortunately, the occurrence of Indigenous ethnic fraud is not new; it is a long-standing practice.⁵ Indigenous students, staff, and faculty at postsecondary education institutions across the country have long been advocating for institutional processes to safeguard against Indigenous ethnic fraud. Recently, there have been several high-profile instances of non-Indigenous individuals falsely claiming Indigenous citizenship and membership to access designated positions and initiatives reserved exclusively for Indigenous individuals. This practice perpetuates colonial violence against Indigenous people within and beyond postsecondary institutions in many ways with negative consequences, including:
 - Taking up space or accessing designated Indigenous roles and resources that are exclusively intended for Indigenous people;
 - Co-opting of Indigenous voices, and inappropriately using those voices to support personal advancement;⁶ and
 - Deepening the lack of trust in postsecondary education institutions among Indigenous people.

⁵ Wheeler, W. (November 15, 2021). Indigenous Identity Fraud in the Academy. University of Saskatchewan Faculty Association – Vox. Retrieved from <https://usaskfaculty.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Indigenous-Identity-Fraud-in-the-Academy.pdf?fbclid=IwAR3ER-dYSbfj37TZbX07PupouMiRVoaL9VrkxXdcFXwYBHCi6bW6mBwhRNs>

⁶ Tall Bear, K. (2021). Playing Indian Constitutes a Structural Form of Colonial Theft, and It Must be Tackled. Unsettle. Retrieved From <https://kimtallbear.substack.com/p/playing-indian-constitutes-a-structural?r=dv6ay>

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4. While safeguarding against Indigenous ethnic fraud is critically important, members of the Indigenous community at the University have signalled that the process of affirming Indigenous citizenship or membership must be permitted to continue to evolve in response to active conversations happening at political and community levels outside the university. Since these issues are complex and contentious, it is important to avoid the creation of affirmation processes that are too narrow and result in harm or negative outcomes for Indigenous people, such as:
 - Unintentionally fostering an unwelcoming or hostile environment for Indigenous individuals who experience diverse realities and expressions of Indigenous citizenship or membership (e.g. individuals who have been disenfranchised or had their connection to Indigenous community threatened or severed due to the impact of colonial violence);
 - Creating a divisive workplace and learning culture for Indigenous people who do not neatly fit into colonial categories/ standards;
 - Triggering and or re-triggering trauma among Indigenous People through the creation of policies/ processes that scrutinize, adjudicate, or determine Indigenous citizenship or membership; and
 - Excluding Indigenous people based on colonial and racial definitions and ideas about Indigeneity that discount those who have been disconnected/ disenfranchised from their ancestral Indigenous communities due to settler-colonization and systematic attempts to erase Indigenous peoples (e.g., Canada's Residential School system, the implementation of the Indian Act, or the 'Sixties Scoop').
5. The University, like many post-secondary education institutions in Canada, therefore, views it as important to move beyond the insufficient practice of relying solely on self-identification/self-declaration as a mechanism to determine Indigenous citizenship or membership.
6. The University commits to supporting local Indigenous communities and Indigenous members of the University community, including supporting work that eliminates instances of Indigenous ethnic fraud, which continue to cause much harm. The University is, therefore, supportive of acting and safeguarding against Indigenous ethnic fraud through the application of an Indigenous-led process to affirm declarations of Indigenous citizenship or membership that go beyond self-identification and incorporate approaches that are inclusive, safe, and supportive of the wide range of diversity experienced by Indigenous peoples.
7. The processes employed to inform the development of this Policy have been extensive and were premised upon the results of a comprehensive environmental scan, a review of existing policy within other post-secondary education institutions, and further refined upon direction received through robust consultation with representatives from the following local committees and units at the University:

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- the IPEC – providing direct feedback from local Indigenous communities and organizations;
- the Indigenous Faculty Advisory Council (IFAC);
- Indigenous staff at the University (*i.e.*, Office of Indigenous Initiatives, Indigenous Student Center, Wampum Learning Lodge, and others);
- members of the Executive team of the Indigenous Student Association.
- Western’s leaderships comprised of the Provost’s and the President’s teams
- Western’s Campus Council
- Joint Committee of UWOFA and the Office of Faculty Relations
- USC and SOGS Executive
- Senate Committee on University Planning
- Senior Policy and Operations Committee

B. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1. Drawing on input from Indigenous students, staff, faculty, and community partners at the University, several interconnected principles are identified to inform the affirmation process under this Policy and related Procedure:

Indigenous People provide leadership in affirming Indigenous citizenship or membership

- (a) Indigenous ethnic fraud is harmful, and postsecondary education institutions have a responsibility to safeguard against it. However, it is equally harmful for colonial institutions and non-Indigenous people to attempt to determine or scrutinize Indigenous citizenship or membership without the involvement of Indigenous peoples themselves. For the University, this means that Indigenous people must inform and lead the work to affirm Indigenous citizenship or membership under this Policy.

Criteria for affirmation

- (b) While every Indigenous Nation is sovereign and has the right to determine the requirements of its own citizenship or membership, the University – upon direction of its IPEC - will require that all declarations of Indigenous citizenship or membership at this institution must be affirmed in accordance with the ***Procedure for Policy 1.XX Affirmation Declarations of Indigenous Citizenship or Membership***.
- (c) Out of respect and in the spirit of reconciliation and relationship building with local Indigenous communities, the ***Procedure*** is based on the principles of citizenship and membership recognized by the local Indigenous communities: the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation, Oneida of the Thames First Nation, and Munsee-Delaware Nation which include a requirement for proof of lineal family connection in order to establish citizenship or membership in a First Nation.

Fostering a welcoming environment for a diversity of Indigenous identities

- (d) The University is actively working to foster an environment that is inclusive, safe, and supportive of a diversity of Indigenous peoples. This includes acknowledging individuals who claim to have been systematically disconnected from their ancestral Indigenous communities, families, cultures and languages, and lived experiences as a result of colonial policies. As such, opportunities for individuals who have been disenfranchised and are currently reconnecting to their Indigenous communities will be considered through the individual's statement of 'Relational Positionality' as per the ***Procedure***.

Creating culturally safe processes for individuals to declare their Indigenous citizenship or membership and share relational positionality

- (e) The University acknowledges that being asked to identify within a process of relational positionality and share about one's Indigenous citizenship or membership—including lineage and connection to community and culture—may be potentially triggering for some individuals, especially those who have and continue to be negatively impacted by colonial legislation (*i.e.*, the *Indian Act*). For this reason, the creation and maintenance of culturally safe processes for Indigenous claimants to share their relational positionality is vital.

Honouring Indigenous relational processes

- (f) Indigenous relational processes are informed by Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing within Indigenous communities instead of sole reliance upon the colonial definitions of Indigenous citizenship and membership (*i.e.*, such as current Indian Status cards). A process informed by relational accountability requires the individual to describe and demonstrate their connection and responsibilities to *All Our Relations* (everyone and everything), including ourselves, one another, the community(ies) who 'claim us', the organizations where we work, and, essentially, all of creation.⁷
- (g) Relational accountability is practiced by using the four Rs of community-based partnership research: Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity, and Responsibility⁸ and Relationality and Refusal, to inform the process of

⁷ Smith, L.T. (2012). *Decolonization Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. London, UK: Zed Books. (Originally published in 1999); Wilson, S. (2008). *Research Is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*. Fenwood Publishing: Halifax, NS Canada.

⁸ Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2001; Wilson, 2008. Although Community Based Participatory Research is often used in research contexts, it is being applied here because it is widely regarded as an enactment of relational accountability and is relevant to all forms of engagement. Western University is aware of a fifth R, "Relationships", which is being addressed through the overarching relational accountability guiding principle.

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affirming all declarations of Indigenous citizenship or membership at the University. Additional details are provided below:

- **Respect** is demonstrated by honouring Indigenous self-determination⁹ processes over self-identification, and by ensuring that individuals have safe spaces and opportunities to assert and have their Indigenous citizenship or membership affirmed as outlined in this Policy. While the interpretation of self-determination is unique to each Indigenous Nation, those determinations do not automatically apply to or impact or influence the definitions used by other Indigenous Nations elsewhere. Respect for the local Indigenous Nations is also observed through adherence to the approved modes of affirmation identified in the **Procedure**.
- **Relevance** is demonstrated by engaging individuals who declare Indigenous citizenship or membership and assert relevant lived experiences through a relational positionality established with Indigenous communities.
- **Reciprocity** is demonstrated through the work of the IAAC to ensure that Indigenous candidates observe all exchanges within the affirmation process in a respectful and “good way” – a way that honours the spirit and intent of Indigenous protocols and traditions.
- **Responsibility** is demonstrated when the University implements safeguards to protect against Indigenous ethnic fraud and the harms it causes to Indigenous communities and peoples. Care is also required to safeguard the personal information submitted by all individuals declaring Indigenous citizenship or membership, such as relational positionality statements and all supporting documentation. Responsibility is demonstrated within work to ensure that all selection processes are undertaken with great care and do not cause harm to anyone involved.
- **Relationality** is demonstrated within the care and commitment of observing and safeguarding the positive relational interactions of all beings in relation to their respectful interdependence with one another.
- **Refusal** is demonstrated when tolerance for harm and disrespect is not allowed. Refusal of unregulated access to Indigenous designated roles and initiatives, *etc.* helps to safeguard equitable access reserved for Indigenous peoples.

C. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

⁹ Self-determination refers to political status and the freedom to pursue economic, social, and cultural development – as per the *United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* - Article 4.

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1. The University acknowledges that it is located on the traditional lands of the Anishinaabek (Ah-nish-in-a-bek), Haudenosaunee (Ho-den-no-show-nee), and Lūnaapéewak (Len-ahpay- wuk) Nations, on lands connected with the London Township and Sombra Treaties of 1796 and the Dish with One Spoon Covenant Wampum. The University respects the longstanding relationships that Indigenous Nations have to this land, as they are the original caretakers.
2. The University acknowledges historical and ongoing injustices that Indigenous Peoples (First Nations, Métis and Inuit) endure in Canada, and accepts 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 as well as through University Policies such as this one.
3. The University acknowledges that the development of this Policy by members of the local Indigenous communities and the University community was, and continues to be, a process fraught with significant emotional labour. It is work that must be led by Indigenous Peoples themselves, and this responsibility has placed a significant burden on Indigenous students, scholars, and staff who are currently underrepresented at the University.
4. Gratitude is extended to all Indigenous Peoples (i.e., local Indigenous community members as well as Indigenous students, staff, and faculty members at the University) and allies who contributed to the development of this Policy especially as the content, context, and subject matter is emotionally difficult and retriggering. The critical insights and diverse perspectives obtained within the development of this Policy are reminders of the importance of dialogue and ongoing engagement, which are vital to inform this important work.