

Laotsyá:n

The Messenger (On[^]yote'a:ka')

Enoondaajgaazad (Anishinaabemowin)
Peetaachiimuw (Lunaapeewak)



She:koli, Aanii, Koolamalsihmwa, Greetings.

Spring has finally arrived, and with it new growth—both in the natural world around us and on campus. At the Office of Indigenous Initiatives we welcome the change of seasons and the new directions that accompany it. After an exceptionally busy 2023, we are now focusing on key strategic initiatives for 2024 and the years that follow. In addition to developing a formal policy for Indigenous identification, we are revisiting the Office’s Indigenous Strategic Plan, to update it from its original 2016 iteration. Our work on recruiting Indigenous students and scholars to come to Western for their educational and professional careers continues. And we are preparing a detailed review of the Western campus for an Indigenized renaming policy that has been a longstanding ambition of OII. We look forward to sharing more of these initiatives as the year progresses, and we always welcome your input and contribution on how we can best implement them.

Table of Contents

Message from the VP-AVP	3
Eniigaanzijig • Pathfinders	
Dr. Valio Markkanen Indigenous Award.....	5
Global Connect.....	6
Thsisto:t^’ • Lighting the Fire	
Indigenous Identification Policy	7
EDI ID ² EALS Symposium.....	8
Building Reconciliation Forum: Paddle Exchange...	9
Kihtaachiimwiil • Storytelling	
Elder Spotlight.....	11
Mentor and Leader in Oneida Language	12
The Solar Eclipse: An Event Rich in Meaning	13
Astronomy Workshop	15
Wampum • News and Events	
Garden Awakening Ceremony	17
Celebrating This Year’s Indigenous Graduates	18
ReconciliACTION Wrapping Up for the Year	19
A Toolkit for Indigenous Allyship	19
Celebrating Pride at Western.....	20
Culture Nights: We Keep on Growing!.....	21
Tsi’ Twanakehle • Community	
ISA Hosts Annual Powwow	23
June 21: National Indigenous Peoples Day	24
White Corn: Now Entering Phase III	25



Even though success is evident, it is still important to pause and ensure that we ground ourselves to stay on task and focused on the work that really matters.

Message from the VP-AVP (Indigenous Initiatives)

Greetings to you all during this busy time of year, as we prepare to close out the semester. It's been another great year, with many accomplishments to celebrate! At the same time, it's important to note that the work required to achieve such accomplishments can be stressful, and I speak from experiences lived as a student, teacher, parent, co-worker, friend, partner, community member and leader. There have indeed been times in my own life when I've thrown my hands up in frustration and later come to realise that in those times, stress had managed to disconnect me from myself and my core needs.

I've been fortunate to have wise Elders in my life who have reminded me about the importance of being grounded and "living and walking in balance"—which are truths central to Indigenous knowledges and traditions. When grounded, people tend to be more focused and objective, and possess greater levels of self-awareness that help reveal why and how we react to certain situations. Being grounded means being tethered to positive, affirming, and centring self-truths that enable responses to your authentic self and needs. When we take the time to be grounded, we leverage the strength we need to realign our hearts and minds.

In my quiet time, I've reflected upon the many successes and challenges experienced within the Office of Indigenous Initiatives over the course of this academic year. As a team, and with support from a growing number of allies, Western is "advancing reconciliation with Indigenous peoples"—as per its institutional plan, Towards Western at 150, and this is cause for encouragement and celebration.

At a recent meeting of Western's Indigenous Postsecondary Education Council, we reviewed and reflected upon many significant the accomplishments in the work to advance Indigenous Initiative and reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. Of special note are the following:

- development of new award-winning courses and programs;
- significant growth in the number of Indigenous people who attend events on campus;
- new Indigenous faculty members, staff, students, and community partners;
- more collaboration with local Indigenous communities and organizations; and
- the growth of many new allies who are eager to support the work of advancing decolonization and Indigenization.

Even though success is evident, it is still important to pause and ensure that we ground ourselves to stay on task and focused on the work that really matters. On behalf of your friends and colleagues in OII, we wish you and yours all the very best for a safe and happy season ahead.

Miigwech,

Christy R. Bressette

(Neta Noo-Ke Kwe – Hard-Working Woman)

Dr. Valio Markkanen Indigenous Award of Excellence

Congratulations to this year's recipients of the Dr. Valio Markkanen Indigenous Award of Excellence: Alia Big George (graduate) and Nicholas Keller (undergraduate). The Markkanen Award is presented annually to an Indigenous undergraduate and graduate student from the Main Campus, based on academic excellence, contribution to Indigenous communities, and commitment to Western's campus community through engagement outside of the classroom.

We would like to salute Alia and Nicholas for their academic success and wish them the very best in their future endeavours.

This award was made possible through the generosity of Dr. Valio Markkanen, who was a well-loved medical doctor in both Canada and the USA. He passed away in 2008 in Windsor at the age of 95, and in his estate he left funds for the establishment of this award.



Global Connect: Western Indigenous Students Visit Costa Rica

International study is a great way to expand your horizons as a student, and one way of accessing it is through Western International's Global Connect program. Global Connect offers short-term, group learning opportunities abroad to Western undergraduates who are keen to explore the world. The program runs study tours to different countries during fall and winter reading weeks, as well as during the summer.

This year, Global Connect ran an Indigenous-themed study tour in Costa Rica. A small group of Indigenous Western undergraduate met with Costa Rican Indigenous communities, learned about their cultures and histories, and attended lectures about contemporary social and political life in the communities and the country as a whole. The study tour included learning about Indigenous foods and medicines, as well as the struggle for Indigenous rights.

The students reported a very positive experience in the program and OII is proud to have contributed to its success. We provided input to Global Connect in structuring the study break, by sharing Indigenous perspectives on respectful engagement with Indigenous communities and people, as well as on relationships with the land. For a more in-depth look at the Costa Rica visit, check out this [article from Western News](#).



Indigenous Identification Policy: A New Approach

When selecting candidates for designated Indigenous roles, appointments, and initiatives, Western has traditionally relied on unverified Indigenous self-identification processes. Recently, however, there have been several high-profile instances of non-Indigenous individuals falsely claiming Indigeneity to access positions and roles reserved exclusively for Indigenous individuals. Indigenous students, staff, and faculty at postsecondary institutions across the country have long been advocating for measures to protect against this type of ethnic fraud.

In response, the University has developed a new policy for affirming declarations of Indigeneity. The development of this policy grew out of a comprehensive environmental scan, a review of existing policy within other postsecondary education institutions, and consultation with representatives from the following local committees and units at Western:

- the Indigenous Postsecondary Education Committee (IPEC) – providing direct feedback from local Indigenous communities and organizations;
- the Indigenous Faculty Advisory Council (IFAC);
- Indigenous staff (i.e., Office of Indigenous Initiatives, Indigenous Student Centre, Wampum Learning Lodge, and others); and
- members of the Executive team of the Indigenous Student Association.

Implementing the Policy

To verify claims of Indigeneity made within relevant selection/hiring/recruitment processes, Western will refer all such claims to an ad hoc Indigenous Identity Advisory Committee (IIAC). Claims will require the following elements:

1. A statement of relational positionality, which includes a demonstration of lived experience and details outlining the applicants' lineal descent; and
2. Proof of membership in an Indigenous Nation claiming the applicant.

The foregoing is a very short summation of what is a complex and detailed process. Readers who would like to have a more comprehensive explanation of the policy are invited to review it once it is published on our website in the near future. Note that the policy is a living document, and we welcome input and feedback on this vital issue at any time.

EDI Office Hosts Leadership Symposium

At the end of this month, Western will be hosting the first ID²EALS Symposium, a gathering of EDI professionals from postsecondary institutions across the province. ID²EALS was started to help university communities develop and share best practices in advancing EDI at their respective institutions.

ID²EALS will run for three days, from May 22-24, and will feature concurrent sessions, workshops, and keynote presentations related to the advancement of EDID in Ontario postsecondary institutions. At press time there were 14 sessions available for participants to attend, covering topics ranging from data management to diversity mentorship.

While early registration has now closed, it is possible to still sign up to participate, with in-person registration accepted at the Symposium. The registration fee is \$400, and more information about ID²EALS, including how to register, can be found on the [ID²EALS home page](#).



Building Reconciliation Forum: Paddle Exchange

As hosts of Universities Canada's Building Reconciliation Forum 2023, one of our duties was to receive the canoe paddle passed to us by the previous hosts. It was our honour to hold it in trust before delivering it forward in 2024, and that occasion will soon be upon us. Laurentian University, host of **this year's iteration of the Forum in June**, is now gearing up for what will be another opportunity for the postsecondary community in Canada to share experiences and best practices in advancing Reconciliation in the academy.

To commemorate hosting the Forum, each holder of the paddle engraves part of it with artwork of their choosing. To represent our role in BRF 2023, we chose the artwork that was used in our communications materials—the stylized image of geese in flight. As a collective, geese flying together share leadership and workloads equally, maintaining a harmonious and common relationship with each other as they strive for a common goal. By imparting this message to the paddle, we hope that it will inspire future hosts of the Forum to uphold a relational approach to Reconciliation in the academy.

We are very proud to have continued the work of previous institutional hosts of the Forum, and we look forward to joining many of you again at Laurentian in June!



ELDER SPOTLIGHT

In each issue of *Laotsyá:n*, we spotlight teachings from local Indigenous Elders and Knowledge keepers. This month we would like to highlight Delphine Antone.



Mentor and Leader in Our Oneida Language Class

In this Spring edition of our Newsletter, we spotlight Delphine Antone, an important mentor for members of the Western community and beyond who are engaged in revitalizing Indigenous languages or just want to know more.

Delphine yesayats. Okwali ni yakotalot^ . Yeh^tiyosta yakos^noto. Kanatake tsi nu tys nakle. Onyata:aka Nu knu tiyotslo.

Delphine is Bear clan from the Oneida Nation and currently resides in London. She grew up learning Oneida as her first language, along with 11 siblings. Both parents spoke and taught the language to their children, and as a result, Delphine has been able to carry her language with her for her entire life.

This wasn't always easy. As an elementary student at Mt. Elgin Day School (the successor to the Mt. Elgin Residential School) in Chippewa of the Thames First Nation, Delphine was not allowed to speak Oneida. She and her younger sister would wait until recess and find a private spot to speak to each other in the language so they would not be punished.

Delphine is one of the few remaining fluent speakers of Oneida. She is also an active participant in the current Oneida Language Project, *Tetwatatya'taken^se'twawy^tehta:ne' Onyota'a:kaneha*, which features a class in the Oneida language hosted by the Wampum Learning Lodge. Delphine joined *Tetwatatya'taken^se'twawy^tehta:ne' Onyota'a:kaneha* in February 2024 as a fluent speaker support and mentor. She assists with lessons and listens to students as they learn to speak. Delphine loves helping with language learning, as it constitutes a vital element of Indigenous cultural continuity.

The Oneida Language

The Oneida language is part of the Iroquoian language family, a diverse group of languages of Indigenous Peoples located principally in the Great Lakes area. In addition to Oneida, the Iroquoian family includes Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga, Mohawk, Huron-Wyandot, Tuscarora, Erie and Laurentian, among others.

The two Iroquoian languages with the most native speakers are Mohawk and Cherokee. While many of the languages are endangered, efforts at language revitalization have been growing over the past decades. Syracuse University in upstate New York offers a program in Iroquois linguistics, and many institutions in Ontario, such as Six Nations Polytechnic, provide courses and certificates in Mohawk, Cayuga and other languages in the Iroquoian family.

The largest number of Oneida speakers live in the London area, principally in Oneida Nation of the Thames. The Nation's Oneida Language and Cultural Centre has developed [a website devoted to the Oneida language](#) where visitors can find a variety of resources, as well as listen to spoken Oneida. The website www.native-languages.org also has [a page dedicated to Oneida](#) that contains a wealth of language-related materials, including dictionaries, pronunciation guides, writing systems and linguistic information.

The Solar Eclipse: An Event Rich in Meaning

The recent solar eclipse of April 8 enthralled people across North America, but for many Indigenous people it was especially significant. The eclipse followed a path that covered the traditional lands of the Haudenosaunee from the Western door to the Eastern door. It served as a reminder of the beginning of the Haudenosaunee and the creation of the oldest democratic government, *Gaya•neñ•hsä•'gó•nah*, The Great Law of Peace, on Turtle Island—because the confederacy was created during a total solar eclipse.

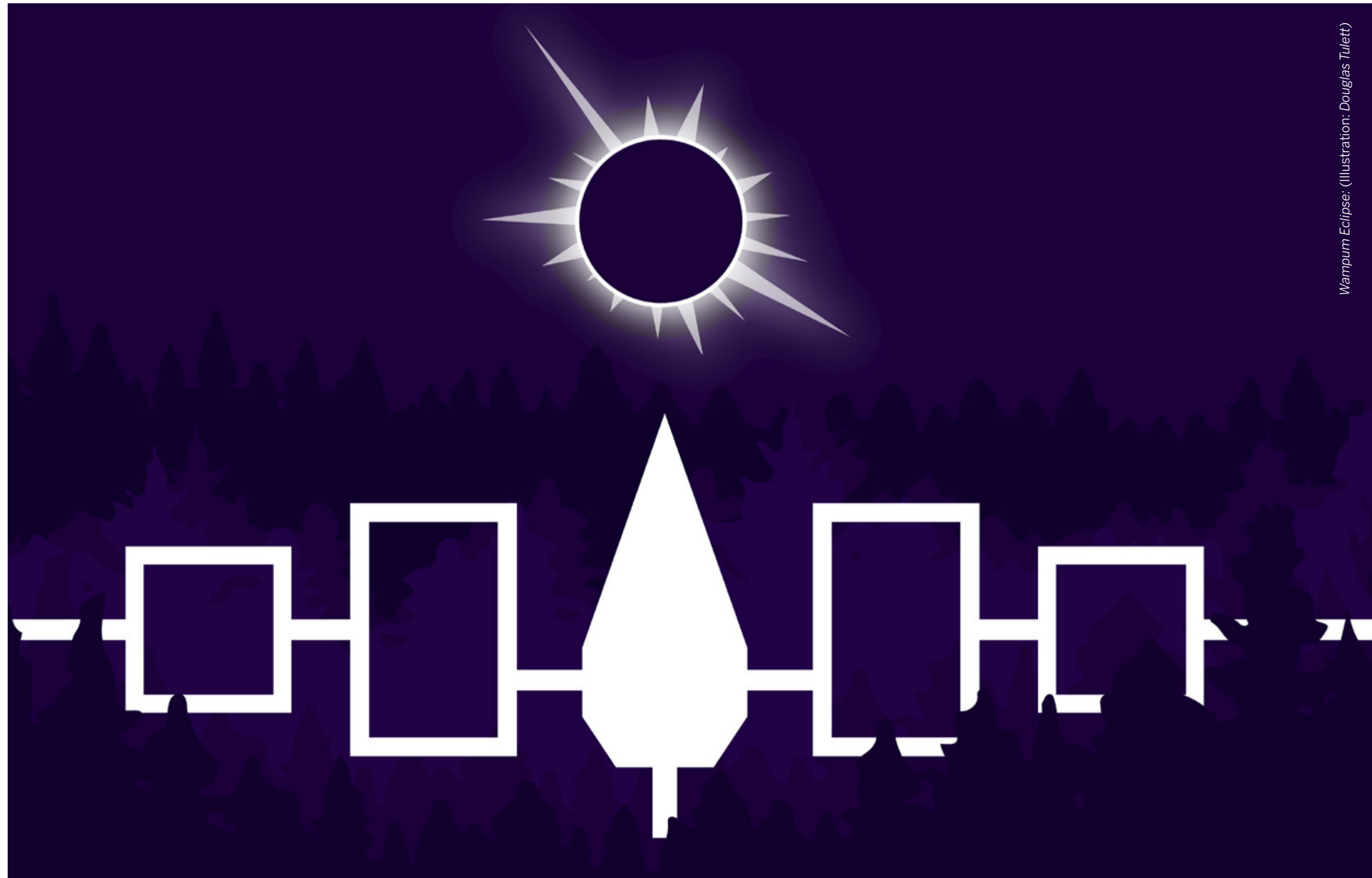
For many Indigenous people, the sun represents positive male energy, and the moon represents positive female energy. During an eclipse, the sun and the moon visit as family who have not seen each other in a long time. Some Indigenous language terms that are used to describe an eclipse:

Onyata:aka neha: *Tsyunhekwa* – they are crossing over each other; *Ut^hni^tahto* - the moon is hiding

Anishinaabemowin: *Giizis* – any celestial body that gives off light; *Giizis Anang* – the sun (the sun in a metaphoric context is often referred to as *Gimishoomisinaan*, “Our Grandfather,” Giver of Life)

Nookomis Dibik-Giizis, Grandmother Moon, is regarded as our principal *gekinoo'amaaged*, or teacher (she is often called *Gookomisinaan*, “Our Grandmother”); *Makadewaabikizi a'aw giizis* – there is an eclipse of the sun.

To learn more about the Great Law of Peace and the eclipse, check out [this article from Onandaga Nation](#).



Wampum Eclipse: (Illustration: Douglas Tulett)

Astronomy Workshop

In anticipation of the recent total solar eclipse, the Land-Based Learning Fund sponsored a workshop by Samantha Doxtator, a Haudenosaunee Astronomer and Star Knowledge Holder from Oneida Nation of the Thames. Held on March 20 as part of the Indigenous Community Craft Circle, the workshop invited students, their families, and community members to learn more about Indigenous astronomical knowledge—specifically highlighting Haudenosaunee Star Knowledge about the eclipse and Creation.

After sharing her knowledge, Samantha and her helpers guided attendees to create unique Night Sky and Star Constellation canvases to reflect their new understanding. Attendees expressed gratitude for the opportunity to learn how land-based learning should include traditional Sky and Star Stories, and for being able to apply their new knowledge in the art workshop.



Garden Awakening Ceremony

With the advent of spring, it's time to get back to gardening! As readers know, the Wampum Learning Lodge includes a wonderful garden adjacent to the building where we cultivate various medicines, plants and herbs. Each year, we hold a Garden Awakening Ceremony where we welcome the growth that takes place in Spring.

This year, we held the ceremony at the Lodge on April 29th at 10 a.m. The ceremony marks the start of the growing season and lets the garden know we will be tending to it for the duration of the summer.

We were delighted to welcome an enthusiastic group, and we provided seeds to every attendee for use in their own gardens at home. Happy gardening!



Celebrating This Year's Indigenous Graduates

On April 5, we came together at the Indigenous Student Centre's annual Indigenous Graduation Ceremony, to celebrate the Indigenous students at Western University who are graduating this year and give them a great send-off as they move on to new pathways. Staff, faculty, families and loved ones participated in supporting our grads and honouring their accomplishments in reaching this major milestone.

All graduates are gifted with a Western Indigenous Student Centre stole, which is colour-coded to correspond to the degree conferred. The stoles symbolize pride in their Indigenous heritage and can be worn during Western University Convocation ceremonies in February, June, or October.

Our hearts and spirits were bursting to see our students honoured alongside their loved ones. Thank you to all who contributed to making this very special day possible, and Con-GRAD-ulations!



ReconciliACTION Wrapping Up for the Year

Over the past year we have partnered with Atlohsa Family Healing Services to promote the ReconciliACTION speaker series, a joint initiative that aims to extend Reconciliation activities beyond National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. Our latest event in the series was held on March 19th and was dedicated to the theme of Reconciliation with the Land.

The event was a full-day affair, and the morning session began with a Water Walk along the Dëshkan Zibi, where the campus connects to the waterway. Led by Wasayzee Delerary, the Walk focused on our relationship with water in an environmental context. This was followed in the afternoon by a series of

events: Onyataaka seed songs with Yehawi Ninham, self-led Earth-related activities, and the Climate Café, which comprised conversational hubs set up with prompts to facilitate discussion. The entire day was an enriching opportunity for community members to connect with Mother Earth and other like-minded individuals with a view to healing our relationship with the environment.

We are grateful to our partner Atlohsa for their guidance and help in making the ReconciliACTION series a success. Our last ReconciliACTION event for the year will be held in May—check out our website for more details.

A Toolkit for Indigenous Allyship at Western University

Since its inception, OII has been dedicated to welcoming non-Indigenous people at Western to engage in advancing Indigenous initiatives on campus and beyond. We recognize that non-Indigenous people—no matter where they come from or what their background is—are valued as allies. When they work with us to achieve common goals in a spirit of mutual respect, everyone benefits. To encourage non-Indigenous members of the University community to join us in our work, we are developing an allyship toolkit that will be published soon.

Once completed, the toolkit will be available on our website, and we will distribute copies to stakeholders across campus. The toolkit is for everyone who works or studies at Western, and we aim to have it reach as many people as possible. As we are all Treaty People—regardless of race, religion, creed or background—everyone at Western who is not Indigenous is encouraged to engage with the toolkit as a starting point for developing positive, respectful relationship with Indigenous people. Look out for the toolkit on our website in the near future.

Celebrating Pride at Western

Pride 2024 is a reminder to reflect on the profound journey of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, from its roots in protest to the vibrant celebration it is today. Pride, at its core, is a testament to the resilience, bravery, and courage of those who paved the way for future generations, that we cherish today. The Pride Planning Committee, a collaborative effort of over 50+ dedicated members representing various departments, faculty, staff, and student groups at Western, is hosting a series of initiatives that honour Pride history and celebrate diversity.

Western's Pride opening ceremony and kickoff takes place on Monday, June 3rd, followed by the annual Pride Out at the Beach event on Wednesday, July 10th. The Planning Committee also invites everyone to march in London's 28th Annual Pride Parade on July 21st—and remember to mark your calendars for the Second Annual Western Fall Pride Parade in October (date TDB).

Everyone at Western can support the 2SLGBTQIA+ community through allyship that creates inclusive and welcoming space on campus. While Pride Month officially begins in June, the spirit of Pride is an ongoing celebration, both at Western and in the wider community. Join us as we honour our past, embrace our future, and celebrate a vibrant community that enriches the Western experience.

Culture Nights: We Keep on Growing!

Our bi-weekly Indigenous Community Crafting Circle expanded rapidly this year, and we've re-branded it as **Culture Nights**—an ongoing series of events that features three unique cultural programs for Indigenous and non-Indigenous community members to engage with each other in the Wampum Learning Lodge.

We've had great feedback about our Culture Nights, and in recognition we recently received new financing from **Western Sustainability's** new Western Sustainable Impact Fund (WSIF).

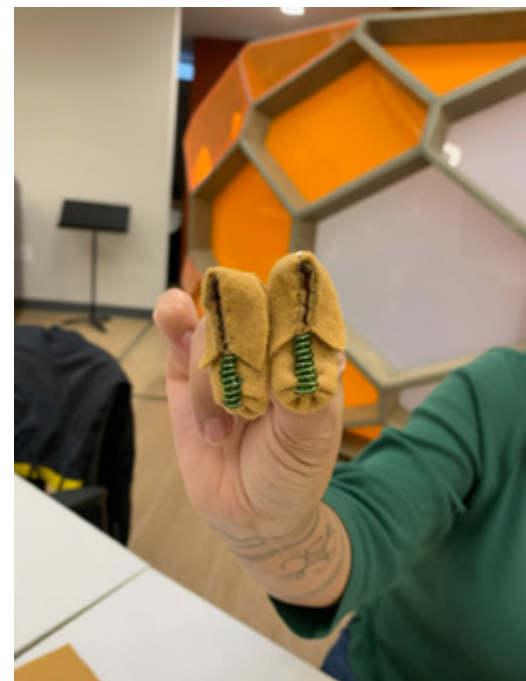
While directly addressing many of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Culture Nights was specifically acknowledged for:

- SDG 2 – Zero Hunger
- SDG 3 – Good Health & Wellbeing
- SDG 10 – Reduced Inequalities
- SDG 12 – Responsible Consumption & Production

This financing will help us develop Culture Nights further by allowing us to:

- Purchase bus tickets for community members to access campus
- Purchase sustainably harvested traditional crafting materials and healthy traditional foods for attendees and their families
- Hire Indigenous artisans to teach about sustainable harvesting, low-waste practices, and traditional crafts
- Support the creation of resources about traditional foods and sustainable practices
- Build a resource library for attendees of all Culture Nights programs
- Continue to act as a space for informal sharing about cultural lessons, experiences in Indigenous entrepreneurship, and building relationships across communities

With popularity growing, we have added two additional sessions on May 1 and May 15 before pausing for Western's Summer term. *Miigwech, anushiik, yaw^ko*, thank you to Western Sustainability for their support!



ISA Hosts Annual Powwow

On Saturday, May 4, the Indigenous Student Association hosted their 18th Annual Powwow. Due to popular demand, the Powwow was hosted in the University Community Centre's Mustang Lounge. This was a free-entry event that welcomed all students, employees, and surrounding community members who were interested in attending.

A Powwow is a cultural gathering of people from all Nations to socialize while highlighting traditional Indigenous arts, drumming, singing, and dancing. There were events throughout the day, including this year's Committee Specials: Men's vs Women's Fancy, Woodland, Potato Dance, and Spot Dances (with various prizes). Intertribal dances provided an opportunity for everyone to join in and embrace the spirit of Powwow.



June 21: National Indigenous Peoples Day

June 21 marks the summer solstice, and it has also been chosen as the date for National Indigenous Peoples Day. Over 40 years ago, the National Indian Brotherhood (now the Assembly of First Nations) called for the creation of National Aboriginal Solidarity Day, and in the 1990s this was followed by a call for a national holiday honouring Indigenous Peoples and cultures. In 1996, the first National Aboriginal Day was celebrated and this became an annual event. In 2017 it was re-named National Indigenous Peoples Day.

June is also National Indigenous History Month

The day will be an occasion for everyone on campus to reflect on Indigenous histories, identities, achievements, and aspirations. It also falls, appropriately, in National Indigenous History Month, which runs throughout June.

As we have done in past years, OII will celebrate with our 30-Day History Month Challenge, which will be featured on our website in May. The Challenge offers a separate activity or resource to engage with every day, helping you develop your understanding of Indigenous history.

Additional info is available here: [National Indigenous History Month](#). It is a very rich resource of links and websites related to Indigenous languages, cultures, art, history, and contemporary identity. Stay tuned to the OII website for more information in June.





White Corn: Now Entering Phase III

We are gearing up to move into the third phase of the White Corn Revitalization Project—and this is possibly the most important stage yet! The Project is a phased approach to bringing the important white corn crop back to the Oneida community. At present, many community members buy white corn from non-Indigenous farmers who lease local land, and the Project hopes to develop greater food sovereignty in the community with this crop. In addition, the Project will reinforce cultural teachings related to corn.

The previous phase comprised scientific research intended to better understand the cover crop needed to prevent weeds, as well as cross-pollination. In this third phase we will be examining the agricultural requirements for large-scale white corn farming. Farmers who are leasing their land, for example, may not have access to a tractor or seed-planting device, and the project will address such challenges. We are pleased by our progress, and excited to see how we can bring the crop back to those who most need it.

Laotsyá:n is published three times a year by the Office of Indigenous Initiatives at Western University. The views and opinions expressed by contributing writers do not necessarily reflect those of the University. If you would like to receive this newsletter regularly, please subscribe to *Laotsyá:n*. The current edition is also available on the OII website, along with archived editions.

Office of Indigenous Initiatives

The Office of Indigenous Initiatives leads system-wide change at Western University in order to advance Truth and Reconciliation efforts and achieve equitable outcomes for Indigenous Peoples. It plays a lead role in championing Indigenous strategic directions; building collaborative and community-engaged partnerships; and supporting campus partners in implementing Western's Indigenous Strategic Plan.



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