

Laotsyá:n

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

*Enoondaajgaazad (Anishinaabemowin)
Peetaachiimuw (Lunaapeewak)*



She:koli, Aanii, Koolamalsihmwa, Greetings.

Welcome to the New Year. The past year was a significant one for OII, marked by two major milestones: the first anniversary of the Wampum Learning Lodge, and Western's hosting of the Building Reconciliation Forum 2023. The Lodge is now a well-established and recognized presence on campus, and is fulfilling its role as the hub of Indigenous life at Western. The Forum brought together scholars, students, administrators and community members to share their knowledge and insight around themes of Reconciliation, Indigenization and inclusivity in the academy. Together, these two events gave concrete expression to Western's commitment to advancing Indigenous initiatives and building new, stronger relationships with Indigenous people. They are an inspiration to us, and we will take the energy they provided to continue our journey in 2024.

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Message from the VP-AVP (Indigenous Initiatives)

Mino Oshki Biboon (Happy New Year), to everyone! When I grew up on Kettle and Stony Point First Nation, on the shores of Lake Huron, the winters were cold and ferocious. We frequently lost our electricity during storms, and many members of extended family households had to go stay with Grampa (*Mishoomis*) because he was the only one who had heat from woodfire. On one of those stormy nights, I recall him telling all of us grandkids—excitedly huddled together in his living room, all covered up with blankets—that Wintertime is a special time for telling stories. This was especially true when the snow is on the ground, because then you know that certain animals and spirits whom you are talking about are hibernating and can't hear you.

Mishoomis then went on to share with us a story about Nanabush the trickster and the first Give-Away. Nanabush was greedy and

bragged about the stockpile of food in his Lodge while many animals were starving during the Winter. But then, moved by compassion and respect for others, Nanabush decided to set out many gifts and food items for those in need. This became the first Give-Away, and the ceremony continues today. By giving possessions or gifts to others, the giver is released from the dangerous hold of selfishness, and thereby creates a natural balance and pathway to personal self-growth.

It wasn't until I was much older that I became aware of how valuable and edutaining these stories told by *Mishoomis* were. They provided essential teachings for those who were ready to listen. Likewise, Indigenous ceremonies and practices continue to hold valuable life lessons for everyone. For example, I think about all the valuable supports and resources that have been developed by the **Office of Indigenous Initiatives** and then shared openly with everyone at Western. They are valuable gifts given freely to help teach, inform, and support anyone in need—and they can be found on our newly re-designed website.

I encourage everyone to enjoy this special time of year for storytelling, and make time to learn, give, receive, and respect one another – which is a significant part of the Winter season.

All the best for 2024. *Miigwech*,

Christy R. Bressette

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



The Meeting Tree (Photo: Scott Parent)

Welcome to our New Indigenous Faculty

Oll would like to extend a warm welcome to new Indigenous faculty who have just joined Western.

Tara Pride

Dr. Tara Pride has joined Western as an assistant professor in the School of Occupational Therapy. Dr. Pride is of mixed Mi'kmaw and settler ancestry and is a member of Sipekne'katik First Nation. She holds a BSc and an MSc in Occupational Therapy from Dalhousie University, and a PhD from Dalhousie's Faculty of Health. Her PhD research explores the experiences of Indigenous occupational therapists and the need to create an Indigenous Community of Practice within the profession. She is working alongside Indigenous occupational therapists from across the country to achieve this, and her research at Western will explore Indigenous mentorship in occupational therapy and the health sciences broadly.



Tékeniyáhsen Ohkwá:ri (Jackson 2bears)

Tékeniyáhsen Ohkwá:ri (Jackson 2bears) has been appointed as Associate Professor in Visual Arts and Indigenous Studies and begins his teaching duties this month. 2bears is a Kanien'kehaka (Mohawk) multimedia installation/performance artist and cultural theorist from Six Nations and Tyendinaga. He has an extensive resume of exhibitions in galleries and museums across Turtle Island, as well as overseas.

His artistic undertakings include Beat Nation [Live], a First Nations artist collective that combines hip hop, live music and digital technology to showcase Indigenous cultural perspectives; Noxious Sector, a communal forum that promotes interdisciplinary artistic practice and creative expression; and co-direction of 2RO Media, an artists' collective based in Ohsweken, Six Nations of the Grand River. 2RO MEDIA produces a range of artistic events and performances that advance Indigenous cultures and language revitalization through community engagement.

Before joining Western, 2bears taught at the University of Victoria and the University of Lethbridge. He holds advanced degrees in art, art history and interdisciplinary studies.

Oll is delighted to welcome Tara and Tékeniyáhsen to Western, and we look forward to their contributions in bringing Indigenous perspectives to our campus.



Revitalizing our Languages

This year sees the launch of an exciting new Indigenous project at Western: the Alumni Mentorship and Language Revitalization Program. The Program is supported by Western's **Parr Centre for Thriving**, a new entity on campus dedicated to student mental health and well-being, particularly among first-year undergraduates.

The Program is designed to support Indigenous undergraduates as they adapt to university life, by connecting them to Indigenous community, languages, culture and mental well-being support through mentorship and relationship. Starting in February, this program will be led by the Wampum Learning Lodge and supported by OII and the Indigenous Student Centre, in partnership with Oneida Nation of the Thames community and its Employment and Training Centre.

Essential features of the program include the mentorship of Indigenous students at Western by Indigenous alumni. Students, alumni, and community will immerse themselves in language learning to strengthen their connection to both culture and identity. Together, these two gifts will help advance cultural revitalization and reclamation for the benefit of future generations, and move Western further along on the path to Reconciliation.

Language is the essential foundation of cultural awareness and reconnection to Indigenous tradition and heritage. The aim of the language revitalization program is to help Indigenous students integrate Indigenous language skills into their everyday lives, ideally launching a journey of lifelong learning and reclamation. Stay tuned for updates as our first cohort of undergraduates start on the path.

Tricky Grounds: Book Launch at the Lodge



On January 23, the Wampum Learning Lodge hosted a book launch for Dr. Candace Brunette-Debassige, Assistant Professor of Education at Western. Her new book, *Tricky Grounds: Indigenous Women's Experiences in Canadian University Administration*, is published by University of Regina Press, and is a reflection on the process of administrative decolonization in the postsecondary milieu.

Sales for the book began on January 20, and copies can be obtained online through Indigo, Barnes & Noble and Amazon. OII joined together with the Faculty of Education to sponsor the launch, which included a reading and discussion session afterwards. The event was an intimate and interesting look at the inner workings of our universities, and served as a great way to inaugurate another year of Indigenous events at the Lodge.

Learning with the Land: Connecting Students to Indigenous Culture

Indigenous knowledges and pedagogy are rooted in the land, and our Land-Based Cultural Programming initiative addresses gaps in the current Indigenous student experience. Funded by the Parr Centre for Thriving, the program supports Indigenous students' holistic wellbeing through their endeavours in (re)connecting with the land, while also promoting the formal recognition of Indigenous land-based learning as a viable mode of learning in post-secondary educational institutions.

The funding from the Parr Centre has two streams: financial support for programming offered off-campus in Indigenous community spaces and on-campus by the Wampum Learning Lodge; and funding for Indigenous students who identify learning opportunities that are relevant or of interest to them, offered in First Nations (such as their home communities) or through urban community organizations.

Euro-Western educational institutions have separated Indigenous people from traditional sources of learning and wellbeing in the land and their Nations' territories, undermining Indigenous educational sovereignty. Decolonizing education and ensuring Indigenous students' thriving in educational institutions requires us to overcome this separation by reinstating and strengthening Indigenous people's relationships to, and learning from, the land as a valued form of education.

One of the central elements of the program is the recognition that a connection to land embodies much more than just physical presence; it also encompasses different facets of self, family, community, ancestry, and future generations. By reinstating Indigenous people's relationships to the land, the program provides a bridge between the academic world and their home communities. Overall, responses to the program have been highly favourable, with students reporting a significantly positive impact on their wellbeing.

Our hope is to build the capacity for all students, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, to strengthen relationships to the land and local First Nations communities and cultures through land-based learning. Indigenous students interested in accessing the programming can email indigenousinitiatives@uwo.ca

“I came away feeling refreshed and “full” in ways that I didn’t realize I needed. It was like visiting a favourite cousin who helps take your mind off your pressures.”

“My son and I got to learn together through the teachings shared as a whole group...We got to talk with each other about what land means to our communities now and how to be in better relationship with land.”

Upcoming Cultural Programming

- Ash basket workshop
- Maple sap teachings and syrup boiling
- Fishing and harvesting
- Opportunities to attend 13 Moons Landbased Learning Camp
- Tipi teachings
- Ash splint harvesting for basket weaving
- Hide camp
- Community garden at the Wampum Learning Lodge

“I’ve been wanting to learn these skills for such a long time, and I appreciate the knowledge I’ve gained. I didn’t expect it to impact my mental wellbeing as much as it did. It was genuine happiness and enjoyment while learning on the land.”



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 Betsy Kechego.

Betsy Kechego

*B*oozhoo, Aaniin kina weya Betsy Kechego n'diznikaaz. Deshkan Ziibiing n'doonjiba. Aajijaak n'dodem. Gaashkanaabagwe NiimidwinOgiimaakwe. Midewinkwe. Anishinaabekwe n'daaw. Gchi-Miigwech and gchichinendam ngiimaajtaayaang anokii maapii Waapum gamik.

Hello, and Greetings. In the introduction above I have shared who I am and where I come from, in my own language. My name is Betsy Kechego . I am from Chippewa of the Thames First Nation/Antler River. I am from the Crane Clan, Sundance Chief and belong to Midewin Lodge. I am happy to start working in the Wampum Learning Lodge as the Elder-in-Residence.

I am a social worker, teacher, and personal support worker. I have taught in Bkwejwanong and Antler River Elementary as Language Immersion Teacher for the later part of my teaching career.

Earlier in my life, being a social worker and support worker showed me a lot of how supporting families and being in community makes the work more rewarding. It makes me happy to know that helpers exist and provide support in some of the hardest places for human beings to exist.

I am grateful and thankful for our Ancestors who have shared our *Mnidoowaadziwin-ge Anishinaabe Aadsowin*. I am incredibly happy to have joined the Wampum Learning Lodge and look forward to being part of the Lodge team.

Weweni. Miigwech.

Elder-in-Residence

Our Elder-in-Residence program is a well-established initiative that is integral to the wellbeing of our Indigenous students, staff, and faculty. It provides a formal framework through which Indigenous people on campus can access the wisdom and insight of community Elders, as well as connect with their cultures and languages. This kind of culturally responsive support helps to enhance the learning and work experience of Indigenous people at Western.

During the last academic year, we welcomed Elder Bruce Elijah into the role of Elder-in-Residence, and we are enormously appreciative of the care and guidance he provided. With the New Year, Bruce passes his responsibilities on to Betsy Kehego, who is Anishinaabe-kwe from Chippewa of the Thames First Nation. We welcome Betsy and look forward to the cultural support and insight she will provide.

Betsy is also affiliated with the Deshkan Zibi Round House project, a fundraising initiative that has been launched to bring a traditional round house to her local community. The addition of a round house in the area will be an important symbol of cultural reclamation, and will also be an inspiration to Indigenous people at Western. To book a meeting with Betsy, please connect with the Wampum Learning Lodge's Administrative Assistant, [Hallie Abram](#).

Peetooteewiit Welcomes our Alumni



As readers of this Newsletter know, *Peetooteewiit* programming was on hold for a few months, as we reformatted the initiative to serve the Western community better. Formerly known as our Indigenous Voices series, *Peetooteewiit* takes its name from a Lunaapéewak word meaning “come and visit.” Its aim is to provide a platform for highlighting diverse Indigenous voices and experiences for the Western community.

We're pleased to announce that we have now developed a new approach for *Peetooteewiit* that will make access to its many cultural riches easier for everyone. Beginning in February, *Peetooteewiit* will be delivered in an exclusively virtual format and will showcase storytelling by members of Western's Indigenous Alumni Chapter. And for content, we welcome input from everyone at the University! If you have a topic of interest that you would like to see featured, or know of an Indigenous alumnus or alumna who would make a great guest, please don't hesitate to get in touch with us at the Wampum Learning Lodge.

We'd also like to ask any Indigenous alumni from Western to reach out and join the [Indigenous Alumni Chapter](#) so that we can stay in touch with you and let you know about all the events and initiatives at the Wampum Learning Lodge that are of interest to you. And remember to check out the [Lodge website](#) in February for our re-launch of *Peetooteewiit*.



The Wampum Learning Lodge: A Year to Remember

This past November we observed an important milestone: the one-year anniversary of the Wampum Learning Lodge! In keeping with the extensive opening celebration in November of 2022, we again hosted a range of events that showcased the vital role the Lodge now plays in the work of decolonization and indigenization at Western.

The Lodge takes its name from the wampum, which is a quahog shell found on the northeastern coast of Turtle Island, and which was traditionally used to create wampum belts. We also have a student wampum belt on display in the Lodge.



On November 7th, Kanahsohon Kevin Deer delivered a lecture on wampum agreements and their significance for everyone in Canada, as treaty people. He was joined later in the day by Martin Powless from Oneida Nation of the Thames, who shared additional insight and displayed 12 different wampum iterations, explaining the fascinating process of how wampum belts are created.

A moving highlight of Martin's presentation was the wampum belt he made for his partner to commemorate their 35th wedding anniversary. That sharing helped to demonstrate how wampum belts are not restricted to agreements between groups or nations, but also hold significance and meaning for individuals and their relationships.



On November 8th, we held a ceremony to observe Indigenous Veterans Day, which precedes Remembrance Day on November 11th. The ceremony was our way of paying respect to Indigenous people who have served in the armed forces, and it included hand-drum songs to honour our veterans, and a 21-gun salute replicated through hand drum beats. We were proud to host this ceremony, especially since two of the veterans in attendance are current students at Western.

On November 9th we hosted a white corn braiding event that welcomed community members, and then we ended the week on November 10th with a feast and round dance social that featured 15 hand drummers. The dance was a wonderful, joyous end to a memorable week, and we say a very heartfelt *Anushik*, *Yaw^ko* and *Miigwech* to everyone who gathered to help make the celebration so special.



Indigenous Graduation—April 5th

Just a quick reminder for undergraduate seniors and graduate students completing their degrees: Indigenous graduation will be held this year on **April 5th**. Mark the date and remember to tell family and friends. As in past years, this will be an opportunity to celebrate personal achievement and share an important milestone with your loved ones. And remember to tell them to bring their cameras!

Culture Nights Taking Root at the Lodge

The Fitness Beat



One of the mandates of the Wampum Learning Lodge is to provide a wide range of cultural programming that brings Indigenous ways of knowing and being to campus. Since its opening, we have been meeting that mandate by steadily building regular programs and events that showcase many aspects of Indigenous cultures. One of our most popular new features is powwow fitness nights.

The benefits of Pow wow fitness are numerous, such as providing a venue and opportunity for people of all fitness levels to learn more about traditional Indigenous dance, and work on specific muscle groups needed when dancing pow wow. Participants are taught basic steps and learn to dance on beat! Everyone gets a good workout, at their own pace. If you're looking to get in shape for 2024 and sharpen your pow wow moves, bookmark the Lodge's Programs and Events page.

Crafting Identity



Another major draw at the Lodge is Indigenous crafting, especially beading. We have hosted crafting sessions that bring in eager crafters who want to learn new techniques or build on their existing expertise. Beadwork is especially popular, and on some nights we've had artists painting alongside others who are beading, with the more experienced sharing tips with newbies like Aunties or siblings bantering around the kitchen table.

Most recently, Indigenous Artist-in-Residence Leith Mahkewa joined us and taught the Haudenosaunee raised beadwork style. In addition to being able to draw on Leith's extensive experience as an artist, participants learned a new technique that they can now draw on in their future beading endeavours.

Reclaiming and strengthening Indigenous cultural identity is the intention behind a new culture night event that will debut shortly: men's drumming. We will be hosting a men's drum circle every other week, as a way for the Lodge to make space for Indigenous men seeking to reconnect with their cultures. By learning singing skills and drum technique, attendees will deepen their understanding of Indigenous traditions and be able to form personal and cultural bonds with other Indigenous men on campus.

A Wonderful Winter Market

On December 2nd, 2023, we hosted our second annual Indigenous Winter Market, and it was a great success! The WLL provided a venue for Indigenous creators, artisans, and entrepreneurs to showcase their wares, and provided an opportunity for everyone at Western to shop for the holiday season and acquire gifts that are truly one-of-a-kind. We were thrilled to welcome even more vendors than last year. The event was a wonderful opportunity to bring all people together to celebrate and support Indigenous community and commerce.

The event appealed to a broad array of participants, and people of all ages enjoyed spending time with each other at the colouring table. We've included some photos of the Market, and we would like to thank everyone who participated—vendors and shoppers alike! Our hope is that we will be able to host an even bigger market next year, as we lend support to Indigenous small businesses and entrepreneurs in the local community.



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White Corn Phase III

As readers of this Newsletter know, OII's White Corn Revitalization Project is an initiative that is very close to our hearts. A long-term undertaking to restore food sovereignty to local Indigenous communities, the Project is a joint enterprise of OII and Agriculture and Agri-food Canada. During our first-anniversary celebrations for the Wampum Learning Lodge, we welcomed community members to join us in braiding and storing our latest crop, harvested in the fall. The handiwork that came out of that celebratory event can be seen now in the Lodge, with braids marking the cardinal directions in the Lodge's dome.

We are currently in Phase III of the project, which will comprise five phases. At present, the land is in hibernation and resting in preparation for a new growing season. However, that doesn't mean we're sleeping too! Legwork and administrative tasks keep us busy, as we are meet to plan and prepare in anticipation of the next phase, which begins in April.



Imagine Build

As we noted in our last edition, Imagine Build, a nonprofit located in Oneida of the Thames territory, launched a "Blitz Build" in October. Imagine Build was founded in 2021, and is dedicated to providing affordable housing for local families. It developed the idea of lightning-fast construction of new houses as a way of galvanizing the community around a fun and exciting project. The October Blitz took place towards the end of the month and was a great success. As reported in the *London Free Press*, the Blitz marshalled hundreds of volunteers to put up an entirely new home in just three days.

This latest addition to the local housing stock is part of a four-home campaign that Imagine Build is currently undertaking. Its wider aim, however, is much larger: to use this initiative to build momentum in addressing long-term housing pressures in the community.

For more information about the Blitz and Imagine's future plans, check out this article from the [London Free Press](#).



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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.



Indigenous
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