

# Laotsyá:n

## The Messenger (On<sup>^</sup>yote'a:ka')

*Enoondaajgaazad (Anishinaabemowin)*

*Peetaachiimuw (Lūnaapéewak)*



## SHE:KOLI, AANII, KOOLAMALSIHMWA, GREETINGS.

And welcome to Laotsyá:n, the inaugural newsletter of the Office of Indigenous Initiatives (OII) at Western! The name Laotsyá:n means “Messenger” in On^yote’a:ka’ (which is known in English as Oneida). It symbolizes our role in raising awareness of Indigenous initiatives at Western and giving a voice to the Indigenous community on campus. **We will be publishing several times a year**, and we look forward to engaging with everyone at Western—Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike—as the university continues with the implementation of its Indigenous Strategic Plan. We hope that you will enjoy this first issue, and we look forward to hearing from you—students, faculty and staff—on how we can serve you as “the Messenger” of Indigenous experiences at Western.

**Ya:w^ . Ta:t na’ on^: , swatelistuti’ ka’ik^: Laotsya:n. Thank you, and until next time, enjoy The Messenger.**

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## Message from the VP-AVP

**She:koli, Aanii, Koolamalsihmwa, Hello.**

I sincerely hope this message finds you and your family well, safe, and enjoying this beautiful Spring season—a time for awakening, renewal, and the planting of seeds and ideas. We focus on the work to be done that will continue to provide for our mind, body and spirit.

**A**s the new Vice Provost – Associate Vice President for Indigenous Initiatives (VP-AVP II), please know that my thoughts are with you during this pandemic and time of personal sacrifice. As we weather this storm together, I am comforted and encouraged by the memory

of our collective ancestors, who also persevered amidst historical struggles to ensure that we would be able to live and enjoy today. Be assured that we will get through these times—especially by keeping in mind those future generations who are counting on us.

There are many people who

have successfully collaborated to envision and create the new role of VP-AVP and OII, specifically past and present Western students, alumni, staff, faculty, and leadership. *Yaw^'ko, Anushiik, Miigwech*, Thank you—to you all! Together as Indigenous Peoples and allies, within a renewed partnership, we have envisioned a new way forward for everyone’s benefit, informed by the persistence of Indigenous wisdom, sustainability, and global citizenship.

### ABOUT ME

I am an *Anishinaabe-kwe* (woman), parent, student, teacher,



**Together as Indigenous Peoples and allies we have envisioned a new way forward for everyone’s benefit, informed by the persistence of Indigenous wisdom, sustainability, and global citizenship.**

and community member of Kettle and Stoney Point First Nation in southwestern Ontario. My clan is Turtle and I come from a long line of educators. I am grateful to have been raised in the wisdom and traditions of my Elders, as this strength enabled me to persevere and become one of the first Indigenous women at Western University to earn a Ph.D. in Educational Studies.

For centuries, oppressive legislation and omissions in curriculum helped to perpetuate generations of ignorance about Indigenous Peoples and stifled ancient knowledge that would have protected us against the many daunting socio-political evils that confront us today. It has only been as recently as 2015, for example, that most Canadians have begun to learn from Canada’s *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* about the horrors, genocidal intentions, and lasting legacy of Indian Residential Schools in Canada.

To address these current ills at a community level, Western initiated its *Indigenous Strategic Plan* (ISP) in 2016. Together with broad support from the Western community, I am honoured to work to implement that Plan—by elevating Indigenous voices and agency, and by engaging all faculty, staff, students, and communities in advancing excellence in Indigenous research, education, and campus life, as per the ISP’s strategic directives. In support of enduring Indigenous knowledge and wisdom, OII will endeavour to inspire, transform, lead, and nurture collaborative and community-engaged partnerships in work to improve education for all.

As a leader, I am deeply

committed to helping people appreciate the sacred gift of life and therein our reciprocal responsibilities to one another as outlined in the traditional teachings of *Wisdom, Love, Respect, Bravery, Honesty, Humility, and Truth*. The opportunity to champion such critical work at Western University and therein help to reconcile with creation is very exciting!

### MOVING FORWARD

To ensure that we start our collective work in a respectful “good way,” I aspire to be an intentional and active listener and learner—mindful that the Creator gave us two ears and only one mouth so we would listen twice as much as we speak. Within this respectful way forward, and within a spirit of reconciliation, I anticipate that our collective work at Western will facilitate improvements for everyone today and for generations still ahead.

I am excited for the outcomes associated with implementing the ISP and championing strategic directions and measures in support of reconciliation through education and research. In closing, I invite you to reach out and connect with me to share your ideas, thoughts, and visions about Western’s sustainable vision forward, especially as the next iteration of its Strategic Plan is developed.

In unity,

**Christy R. Bressette**  
(*Neta Noo-Ke Kwe – Hard Working Woman*)



## About the Office of Indigenous Initiatives— Advancing Indigeneity at Western

**T**he Office of Indigenous Initiatives (OII) was created in May 2020, in response to the Provost’s Task Force on the Implementation of the Indigenous Strategic Plan (ISP). OII will lead the system-wide change required to advance truth and reconciliation efforts at Western, achieve equitable outcomes for Indigenous Peoples, and implement the ISP. Our role is to champion Indigenous strategic directions and build collaborative and community-engaged partnerships across the University. Above all, we aim to create a welcoming, supportive, culturally-safe environment on campus—one in which Indigenous languages and ways of knowing, being, and doing are respected and supported.

Perhaps the most important thing to know about us is that we are a collaborative group. We work with everyone at Western—students, faculty, staff—to

implement the ISP. That’s because we can’t do it all on our own. Advancing Indigeneity at Western is a collective effort, from integrating Indigenous perspectives into the curriculum to learning about our shared history. We’re here to help you, Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike, achieve a deeper understanding of Indigenous cultures and peoples by guiding, listening, and sharing our knowledge.

Don’t know where to start on the path to Indigenization? Get in touch! We’re located in the International and Graduate Affairs Building (IGAB), room 1N20, and when the pandemic is finally over we invite everyone to drop by and say hello. But in the meantime, feel free to email us. Our contact details, as well as a little about each of us, are shown on the next page. We look forward to hearing from you!



**Candace Brunette-Debassige**  
*Special Advisor to the Provost (Indigenous Initiatives)*

*Fort Albany First Nation*

I’m a newly graduated PhD in education at Western, researching Indigenous women administrators enacting Indigenizing policies in Canadian universities. I also teach a Becoming Educational Leaders course as part of Western’s Master of Professional Education (Aboriginal Educational Leadership) program. Previously, I was actively involved in the development of Western’s first Indigenous Strategic Plan as Director of Indigenous Services at Western.

*To contact Candace, please email [cbrune2@uwo.ca](mailto:cbrune2@uwo.ca).*



**Sara Mai Chitty**  
*Curriculum & Pedagogy Advisor*

*Alderville First Nation*

I am Michi Sagig Anishinaabekwe, an auntie, storyteller and rookie rollerskater, who has been working in teaching and education capacities since 2016. I write any chance I get, and seek to elevate Indigenous voices and perspectives through story across all my work. In my spare time you might catch me at a local music or art show, or ranting on social media.

*To contact Sara Mai, please email [saramai.chitty@uwo.ca](mailto:saramai.chitty@uwo.ca).*



**Paula Cornelius-Hedgepeth**  
*Community Relations & Indigenous Learning Space Coordinator*

*On’yote’a:ka’ Nation, Wolf Clan*

I have a Bachelor’s degree in History and Education, and am also a graduate of Western’s Master of Professional Education Program (Aboriginal Educational Leadership). Community is very important to me, and I greatly enjoy my role of creating spaces for Indigenous knowledge to be shared, experienced, and valued.

*To contact Paula, please email [phedgepe@uwo.ca](mailto:phedgepe@uwo.ca).*



**Amanda Myers**  
*Director, Indigenous Student Centre*

*Anishinaabe/ Métis Nation*

I recently completed my Master of Professional Education, focused on Indigenous Educational Leadership and Identity through Western and hosted by Six Nations Polytechnic. I have worked with the Indigenous Student Centre at Western over the past seven years, and I am a proud mother and auntie, visual artist, and goldsmith.

*To contact Amanda, please email [aaikens@uwo.ca](mailto:aaikens@uwo.ca).*



## About This Newsletter

We're delighted to welcome you to Laotsyá:n, the voice of Indigenous Peoples at Western. This is the place where you can learn about Indigenous life on campus, from upcoming events and people in the news, to academics and Indigenous life and culture. You'll notice that we have a bold design that evokes the traditions and visual heritage of Indigenous Peoples. There are five main sections in the newsletter, and they will recur in every edition. They are:

### Eniigaanzijig • Pathfinders

This is an Anishinaabemowin word that translates to "the ones who are leading" (On<sup>^</sup>yote'a:ka': Lonuthatli'hú:tu:; Lūnaapéewak: Kihkayuwak). We are taught that this role refers to those who were chosen for their knowledge of the roads. Since women were the stewards of the land, the fires, and the names, this role fell to the men of the community. Today our Eniigaanzijig are both men and women, and this section is all about people at Western who are making a difference: professors, students, artists, teachers, administrators, and staff who are advancing Indigeneity and helping to implement the ISP.

### Thsistó:t<sup>^</sup> • Lighting the Fire

This is the On<sup>^</sup>yote'a:ka' word for burning or lighting a fire and it literally means "to stand up the fire" (Anishinaabemowin: Shkodeke; Lūnaapéewak: Wulalohkeew). As in so many cultures around the world, fire holds a special significance for Indigenous Peoples. As a powerful source of energy, fire not only gives warmth, brings light, and cooks food, but it can also be used in the management and stewardship of land. This section will feature issues and ideas related to Indigenization at Western and beyond, including such areas as Truth and Reconciliation, anti-racism, and developments in Indigenous culture and politics.

### Kihtaachiimwiil • Storytelling

This is a Lūnaapéewak word meaning to tell or recount (On<sup>^</sup>yote'a:ka': Watwatathkala:tuhe'; Anishinaabemowin: Aadsooke). Storytelling lies at the heart of Indigenous oral traditions, and pre-colonial storytelling was an interactive affair. Everyone got a chance to tell a tale, and as the story built, an auntie or uncle, grandmother or grandfather, would share how they remembered it. There was no boundary to who got to add to the tale. In every edition, this section will showcase Indigenous Elders, knowledge keepers, and teachers sharing their wisdom. Themes will follow the rhythms of nature, notably the season that we are in and the gifts that the Creator provides within that season.

### Wampum • News and Events

This is originally a word from the Narragansett language meaning "white string of shell beads" (On<sup>^</sup>yote'a:ka': O'nekolha'; Anishinaabemowin: Chi-miigis apikan; Lūnaapéewak: Aanihkwaachiimuw). Narragansett is an Algonquian language, and even though it had different names (and meanings) in other languages, "wampum" became so widespread that it is now a term recognized even in English. Wampum were traditionally used in much of eastern North America, and served as ceremonial gifts, records of treaties and historical events, symbols of authority, and currency. The Wampum section of Laotsyá:n will keep you informed of news and events at Western and in the London area—both upcoming and recently occurred.

### Tsi' Twanakéhle' • Community:

In On<sup>^</sup>yote'a:ka' this word signifies "where we live," (Anishinaabemowin: Edniziying; Lūnaapéewak: Maawehleewak), and comprises geographic, temporal, and static ways of life in its meaning. In Indigenous ways of knowing and being, community is an essential component of life: it takes a community to support each other, work together, and raise each other up. This section of our newsletter will keep you in touch with the Indigenous community at Western and beyond.

**Thank you, Yaw<sup>^</sup>ko, Miigwech, Anushiik to our Language Keepers:**

On<sup>^</sup>yote'a:ka' (Oneida)  
Matt Ireland

Anishinaabemowin (Ojibwe)  
Monty McGahey II

Lūnaapéewak (Delaware)  
Karen Mosko



## AN INDIGENOUS VOICE ON THE EDI-D ADVISORY COUNCIL

In March of this year, Western created its first-ever Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Decolonization (EDI-D) Advisory Council, a new venue where Indigenous voices can be heard and Indigenous issues at the university can be addressed. The Council comprises eight members, including our own Candace Brunette-Debassige, Special Advisor to the Provost (Indigenous Initiatives).

Candace is well-positioned to serve on the Council, as she has an intimate knowledge of Indigenous issues at Western and can bring an Indigenous perspective to EDI-D. She has served as the Director of Indigenous Services and recently completed her PhD in Education. Congratulations, Candace, and thank you for taking on another role in advancing Indigeneity at the University!

**Eniigaanzijig • Pathfinders**  
(Anishinaabemowin): the ones who are leading

## NEW INDIGENOUS FACULTY HIRES

Four new Indigenous scholars will be joining Western this year in the faculties of Information & Media Studies, Social Science, and Education.



**Sally Kewayosh** graduated from Western in 2004 with a degree in Film Studies, followed by an MFA in Film Production from The Tisch School of the Arts, New York University. Sally is originally from Bkejwanong Territory (Walpole Island First Nation), southwest of London, and has lengthy experience telling Indigenous stories visually, most notably as a producer and director of films. She will be teaching the process of making films, from screenwriting to production, as well as imparting her insights about the film industry as a whole. Her addition to the Faculty brings an Indigenous voice in the area of film making and film studies, and will encourage Indigenous students to find their own voices and tell their own stories.



**Sofia Locklear** is a member of the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina and also has roots in Kenora, Ontario. She holds a doctorate in sociology from the University of New Mexico, and combines expertise in race and the racialization of Indigenous people with a background in health research—most notably Indigenous evaluation methodologies and social determinants of health. Of particular note as we continue to battle the Covid-19 pandemic is Sofia's experience working with the Urban Indian Health Institute, one of 12 tribal epidemiology centres in the United States and the only one serving Indigenous Peoples across that country. Starting in September, Sofia will be teaching courses related to Indigenous perspectives in the media, methodologies of decolonization, and whiteness studies.



**Cody Groat**, a Kanyen'kehaka citizen and band member of the Six Nations of the Grand River, is joining Western on July 1 in the Indigenous Studies Program and History Department. Cody's area of interest is the preservation and revitalization of Indigenous cultural heritage at various levels—provincial, federal, and international. He is especially interested in how Indigenous cultural heritage has been commemorated in Canada by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board over the past century. Cody is also the President of the Indigenous Heritage Circle, an Indigenous-led organization founded in 2016 to advance the cultural heritage of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples, and he will bring a welcome cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary perspective to teaching at Western.



**Candace Brunette-Debassige** is a Mushkego Cree iskwew scholar originally from Peetabeck Treaty 9 Territory. She is an Assistant Professor in Critical Policy, Equity, and Leadership Studies in the Faculty of Education at Western University. Her research centres on advancing the liberatory needs of Indigenous Peoples in Euro-Western colonial educational spaces. Beyond her scholarship, Candace brings extensive leadership experience in Indigenous education at the K-12 and postsecondary levels. She was the first Indigenous Education Advisor for the Thames Valley District School Board from 2009 to 2012, and was the Director of Indigenous Student Services at Western from 2012 to 2017. At Western, she also served as Acting Vice Provost/ Associate Vice President for the Office of Indigenous Initiatives, and Special Advisor to the Provost, from 2018 to 2021.

## INDIGENOUS ELDERS AT WESTERN

Did you know that you can invite Indigenous Elders into your area of the University? OII has launched a Visiting Elders and Community Teachers Program that allows members of the Western community to invite an Indigenous Elder to classes, meetings, groups, and gatherings of any kind. Elders are respected members of Indigenous nations who can share Indigenous ways of knowing and teach others about Indigenous history, culture, and beliefs. They are ready to speak at conferences, participate in classroom discussions, join committees, and even undertake thesis examinations. We're highlighting three Elders who know Western well and are eager for opportunities to contribute to a better understanding of Indigeneity at the Western.

A guideline for working with Indigenous community members can be found at [indigenous.uwo.ca/initiatives/docs/working-indigenous-community.pdf](https://indigenous.uwo.ca/initiatives/docs/working-indigenous-community.pdf).



### Elder Myrna Kicknosway

Myrna is from Walpole Island, Bkejwanong Territory. She has over a decade of experience working as an Elder with Western, at both the Indigenous Student Centre and the Indigenous Postsecondary Education Council. She is available for one-on-one and group meetings, and is enthusiastic about transmitting Indigenous ways of knowing to a new generation.



### Elder Dan Smoke

Dan is from Seneca Nation, and he draws on knowledge from many different Indigenous traditions. He is an Adjunct Professor at Western and has consulted with numerous agencies and postsecondary institutions in Ontario on such areas as cultural competency and ceremonial protocols. He has also worked with many different school boards, imparting an understanding of Indigenous Peoples and cultures to youth across Ontario.



### Elder Mary Lou Smoke

A member of the Ojibway Nation, Mary Lou has music in her blood: she is a talented singer, guitarist, and traditional drummer, and she is always ready to share her artistic abilities with others. She has served as a consulting Elder for public school boards, postsecondary institutions, and other organizations, and is dedicated to bridging cultural divisions by educating others in cultural competency and ceremonial protocols.



If you would like to invite an Indigenous Elder to teach your class, group, or organization about Indigenous culture and perspectives, don't hesitate to get in touch!

You can email Paula Hedgepeth at [phedgepe@uwo.ca](mailto:phedgepe@uwo.ca), or visit the OII website at [www.indigenous.uwo.ca](http://www.indigenous.uwo.ca) to learn more. Elders are accessible and always ready to promote cultural understanding and sharing.

*Lighting the Fire* is the section of our newsletter dedicated to issues surrounding decolonization and unlearning, both at Western and in the wider community. From Truth and Reconciliation in Canada, to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), the challenges of Indigenization are many and complex. This is where we take on some of these big issues, highlighting the need for everyone at Western—Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike—to reflect on our history and what we need to do to forge ahead.

## INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE REVITALIZATION REPORT

Did you know that there are 70 different Indigenous languages in Canada? It's true—there are numerous languages spoken in various parts of the country, grouped into 12 distinct language families. Unfortunately, many are under threat, which is why the Government of Canada passed the Indigenous Languages Act in 2019. Its aim is to protect Indigenous languages, by promoting their use and revitalizing those that are most at risk.

Western is playing its part in this vital undertaking. In 2016, Western's ISP included the enhancement of Indigenous languages programming as a priority, with a focus on local Indigenous languages. This step



**The funding will help Western develop three Indigenous language courses for offer in the fall, under the auspices of an Indigenous Language Strategy and Action Plan.**

was welcomed by Indigenous students and the London District Chiefs Council, who underlined in 2019 that Western had a role to play in language revitalization through its Indigenous language offerings. Last year the University followed through in this process by hiring an Indigenous consulting service to draft a report assessing local language needs and providing an action plan for Western to implement.

Drawing on input from stakeholders within Western and in the local community, the recently submitted report outlines a path forward for Western in enhancing its Indigenous languages programme—in particular, by focusing

on support for Anishinaabemowin, On'yote'a:ka', and Lūnaapéewak language recovery and maintenance. And this undertaking recently received a great shot in the arm through eCampus Ontario's Virtual Learning Strategy, where Western was awarded \$1 million for 10 initiatives, including our Indigenous languages revitalization drive! The funding will help Western develop three Indigenous language courses for offer in the fall, under the auspices of an Indigenous Language Strategy and Action Plan. Of special note is that these courses will be offered to local Indigenous community members at a discounted rate.

## DECOLONIZATION: A VITAL COMPONENT OF EQUITY AT WESTERN

As noted in *Eniigaanzijig* (Pathfinders) above, Western recently created its first-ever Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Decolonization Advisory Council. The role of the Council is to advance anti-racism and inclusion at the University through such initiatives as collecting data, measuring progress, and raising awareness across campus. The Council builds on work undertaken in the wake of Western's Anti-Racism Working Group, which was struck in 2019 and whose final report was completed in 2020. This work includes a series of EDI webinars during the current academic year that featured a range of topics in anti-racism and inclusion, three of which were of special

relevance for the Indigenous community:

- "Indigenizing the Academy: Unravelling Key Concepts of Decolonization, Indigenization and Reconciliation," with Marie Battiste from the University of Saskatchewan;
- "Racial Violence and Settler Colonialism," with Sherene Razack from UCLA; and
- "Embedding Anti-Racism and Decolonization in University Approaches to EDI," with Malinda S. Smith of the University of Calgary and Sheila Cote-Meek of York University.

Readers will note the inclusion of "Decolonization" in the Council's mandate—a term that is often absent

from the conversation about diversity. Its addition came at the request of OII, through a memo to the Provost and Vice President (Academic) in April that highlighted the need for recognizing decolonization as an additional element in advancing equity. In particular, it articulates the fundamental truth that the status of Indigenous Peoples has arisen from a long process of colonization, and that the history of Indigenous Peoples is distinct from that of other equity-seeking groups. By striving for decolonization—alongside equity, diversity, and inclusion—at Western, OII aims to steer our university towards strategies for change that recognize the unique needs of different groups.

## 30 WAYS IN 30 DAYS! (TO ADVANCE INDIGENIZATION)

June is Indigenous History Month, and this is a perfect opportunity to come together, learn about Indigenous history, and celebrate our collective achievements and identities. As part of the celebration, *Biindigen* (Western's Indigenous Learning Circle) has developed a calendar of Indigenous-themed activities, events, challenges, and learning opportunities. There's one for every day of the month, so we've named it **30 Ways in 30 Days** for you to engage, and spread the word at Western about Indigenous Peoples. The calendar can be found [here](#).





Illustration by Jim Oskineegish

## INDIGENOUS VOICES SERIES

OII hosts an ongoing program of Indigenous storytelling throughout the year. We invite Indigenous Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and Teachers to share their wisdom with the wider Western community, and to transmit Indigenous ways of knowing and being to a new generation.

The Series focuses on a different theme each month, often following the cycle of the moon—what season we are in, the gifts the Creator provides in that season, events that occur at particular times of the year.

Our theme for March was

Water and our relationship to it—dovetailing with World Water Day on the 22nd of that month; and in April we highlighted storytelling through art, with four Zoom presentations from Indigenous artists discussing the creative process. In May we featured Kanina

Terry on Food Sovereignty, and in June we will turn our attention to Indigenous Awareness Month.

Follow [Westernu\\_indigenous](#) on InstaGram, as well as the OII website, for updates and information.

Storytelling is vital to Indigenous cultures. Much more than simply a form of entertainment or social engagement, the telling of stories in Indigenous traditions is a way to preserve memory, teach history, transmit values, and express spiritual beliefs. Storytelling can take place in many different ways, such as orally, through drumming, by showing pictographs, or singing, and is most often performed by the Elders of society. There are many opportunities at Western to benefit from the Indigenous tradition of storytelling.



## MBWAACH'IDIWAG PODCAST

Podcasting has taken off in recent years, and OII is also riding the wave with *Mbwaach'idiwag*, our own regular podcast series. *Mbwaach'idiwag* is an Anishinaabe term meaning “they visit with each other,” and describes a tradition of relational pedagogy embodied in the exchange of knowledge that occurs when visiting. The series is hosted by Sara Mai Chitty, Curriculum & Pedagogy Advisor at OII. Its inaugural episode was launched on December 1, 2020, and it’s a great way to connect with Indigenous themes and issues—especially if, like so many of us, you’ve come to rely on podcasts to help you through the trials of the pandemic. You can listen to the first episode [here](#) if you’d like to get a taste of what the series is all about; or you can go to the *Mbwaach'idiwag* home page [here](#), where you can learn more about the series and download all episodes. We look forward to sharing our stories with you!



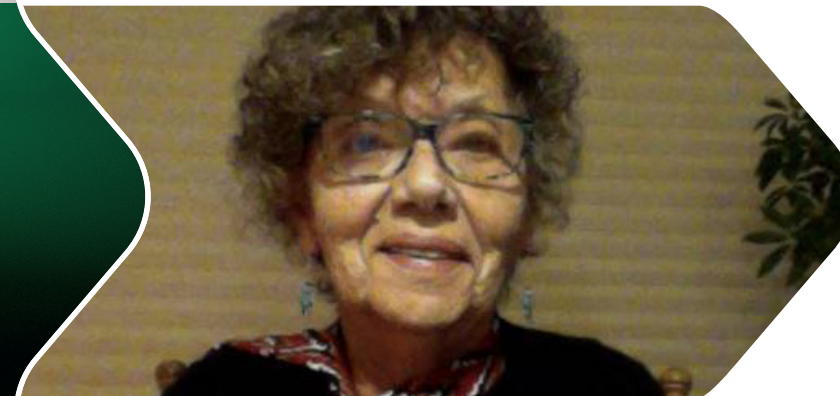
## SMOKE SIGNALS

Mary Lou and Dan Smoke are two local Indigenous Elders well known to the Western community. And while they’re always ready to serve as visiting Elders in various settings at Western, you don’t have to wait for them to come to you to hear their knowledge. You can actually bring them into your own home, because they’re on the radio! Every Sunday between 6:30 p.m. and 8:00 p.m., Dan and Mary Lou host a regular broadcast on Radio Western called *Smoke Signals*. Since 1990, the show has been dedicated to the exploration of Indigenous themes and is a great way to connect with the Indigenous community at Western and wind down your week. Radio Western is at 94.9 FM locally, and the web page for *Smoke Signals* is [here](#).



# ELDER SPOTLIGHT

In each issue of Laotsyá:n, we spotlight the teachings from a local Elder. In this edition, Laotsyá:n shares teachings presented by **Gloria Thomson.**



*Gloria Thomson is a proud Métis woman with roots in the Northwest Manitoba region.*

*For the past two years, she has served as Senator for the Thames Blue Water Métis Council here in London, and attended various workshops through the Métis Nation of Ontario (MNO) as well as their Annual General Assemblies. Over the past year she has been teaching “T'ai Chi for Diabetes” for Métis citizens, online as well as through the MNO. For the past five years, she has served as a facilitator for the Kairos Blanket Exercise, and with that group she is now presenting “Métis Teachings” for their online “Teaching and Sharing Circles” for the general public. She is also serving as an Elder for the Indigenous Student Centre and looking forward to connecting with Métis students.*

*Gloria has two grown daughters, and one granddaughter still growing up.*

## A MÉTIS TEACHING

**T**awnshee, Greetings in the Michif language; I am humbled and honoured to be asked to participate in this inaugural edition of your Newsletter. To those of you who are self-identifying as Métis, and who have some knowledge of our history and culture, I ask you to bear with me; I would like to introduce the symbol of our nation, the beautiful Métis sash, and you probably already know about it. To the rest of you dear readers, you have no doubt seen us sporting these colourful sashes, and wondered about its significance.

The Métis sash was previously known as the l'Assomption sash, named after the town of l'Assomption in Quebec, where it was produced by local finger-weavers. It became the favourite garb of our ancestors, the Voyageurs, many of whom hailed from Trois-Rivières in Quebec. Because the canoes they travelled in were already filled with trade goods and paddlers, they were limited in the

amount of personal belongings they could bring on the voyage. The sash was tied around the waist as a belt to keep a coat or jacket closed. It was also a pocket for pipe, tobacco, first-aid kit, bone sewing needles and perhaps mementos of the family they were leaving behind. It served as a tourniquet for injuries or to wrap a broken bone (the journey to the Northwest through the Canadian waterways and portages was a dangerous endeavour, as you can well imagine). The fringes on either end could be used as thread to mend a rip in clothing or, if need be, to stitch up a serious cut. It was also a wash cloth and a towel, or a saddle blanket on the buffalo hunt. Because it was traditionally 12 feet long, it was a very strong and handy rope to tie the bundles on their backs during portages.

The sash has become a treasured national symbol of the Métis people—it ties us firmly to our ancestors, and we proudly wear it at formal meetings and social gatherings.

## WESTERN'S INDIGENOUS STRATEGIC PLAN—HOW ARE WE DOING?

Western's Indigenous Strategic Plan was completed in November of 2016, and since then the University has been working on implementing it across Western. Every year, it releases an Annual Progress Report, the latest of which was published in the fall of 2020. The Report highlights events that occur throughout the year, as summarized within the circles to the right.

Western is moving ahead with the creation of an **Indigenous Learning Space** that will serve as a location for learning and gathering together. The design for the Space embodies Indigenous perspectives and has been undertaken in consultation with Cree architect Wanda Dalla Costa and after a community engagement process. (See more information on page 20.)

The University has expanded its support for Indigenous recruitment and financial aid through a number of initiatives, notably with the establishment of a **National Indigenous Scholarship Program**.

In the previous academic year, the University launched an **Indigenous faculty cluster hiring initiative**, building on earlier efforts at Indigenous recruitment. Since 2016, seven Indigenous faculty members have joined the University in Law, Medicine, Education, and Social Science.

Western also supports Indigenous research in a number of areas, and it is taking a leading role in a provincial network for Indigenous health training. In addition, it has formalized research initiatives geared towards Indigenous students through its **Head & Heart Indigenous Research Fellowship Program**.

In the area of Curriculum and Learning, the University has taken several steps forward in integrating Indigenous perspectives over the past few years: the establishment of **OII**; the creation of a **Guide for Working with Indigenous Students**; the launch of an **Indigenous learning Fund**, spearheaded by OII; and the introduction of **Indigenous perspectives** in courses in such areas as Law, Education, Health Sciences, and Social Science.

Western has also engaged in the wider community beyond the University. In August of 2020, Western became a signatory to **Southern First Nations Secretariat's Postsecondary Education Collaborative Agreement**, and OII and Western Law joined the Indigenous **Works Luminary Charter Partnership**.

For a more in-depth look at Western's progress in Indigenization, click on the [2020 Annual Progress Report here](#).



## INDIGENOUS LEARNING SPACE OPENING NEXT YEAR!

The John G. Althouse Faculty of Education Building will soon be the site of an exciting new venue on campus: the Indigenous Learning Space. For those who don't know the building, it houses an unusual circular library, and work is underway to repurpose the library into the Indigenous Learning Space. The drawings and artwork depicting the envisioned Space are truly inspiring, and OII is looking forward to its opening with anticipation. The Space will join the existing Indigenous Student Centre in the Western Student Services building as a place on campus with an Indigenous focus. In addition to the indoor venue, the site will also host Western's Indigenous Food and Medicine Garden and an outdoor classroom with a ceremonial space. For more information, click on the Centre's homepage [here](#).



Renderings courtesy of Tawaw Architecture Collective Inc.





# CONGRATULATIONS, GRADUATES!



Once again, Covid-19 prevented us from gathering together for 2021 graduation ceremonies—but it didn't prevent us from celebrating online! On May 7, the Indigenous Student Centre continued its work of supporting our students and keeping their spirits up by conducting a Virtual Graduation Ceremony. Hosted on Zoom and livestreamed through Facebook, the Ceremony was opened by Elder Myrna Kicknosway and featured addresses from several dignitaries, including President Alan Shepard and Keynote Speaker Bimadoshka Pucan, assistant professor in History and at the School of Public Affairs at Concordia University in Montreal. Our crop of newly minted graduates, together with family members, enjoyed a lively event that honoured their hard work and accomplishment while at Western. As has been the custom over the years, every graduating Indigenous student received a distinctive stole to show their attachment to Western and signal their Indigenous pride.



**When you arrive we are so happy, so excited to meet you, to welcome you, the same way that we would welcome a new family member into our family because that's how we think of you and that's how we take care of you while you're here, as family.**

**Amanda Myers**  
Director, Indigenous Student Centre

## INDIGENOUS POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION COUNCIL MEETING THIS SUMMER

In support of the implementation of the ISP, the University relies on the Indigenous Postsecondary Education Council (IPEC) as a sounding board and formal advisory body on all matters related to Indigenous education at Western. IPEC's role is to provide input into such areas as long-term planning, student services, employment relations, academic programming, and research as they relate to Indigenous communities. In addition to enhancing the experience of Indigenous students at Western and nurturing an inclusive culture that incorporates Indigenous ways of knowing, IPEC aims to help Western become a university of choice for Indigenous students.

IPEC meets at least four times a year, and its next session is on July 8. As has been the case over the past year, this meeting will be virtual, and we are delighted to announce that it will be co-hosted by a local First Nation. OII has partnered with Caldwell First Nation, Anishinaabe who are known as *The People of the Lake* and belong to the Three Fires Confederacy. The session is an internal Western meeting, but it will be open to members of Caldwell First Nation, with the aim of building partnerships between Western and local Indigenous communities.

## INDIGENOUS ALUMNI: CONNECTIONS FOR A LIFETIME



The bonds we form at Western last a lifetime, and can play an important role in so many facets of our lives, both personal and professional. Indigenous students and alumni now have a new avenue for forging and sustaining those bonds with the recent establishment of a new Indigenous Alumni Chapter in partnership with Western Alumni! The group will foster an Indigenous network of alumni to build stronger networks with one another, with Indigenous students, and the broader Western community.

As a member of the Indigenous Alumni Chapter, you will have the opportunity to meet and connect with other Indigenous alumni, establish valuable business and career connections, and even mentor young Indigenous graduates as they embark on their careers. To get started, please fill out the Chapter's interest form, specifying your interest in the Indigenous Alumni Chapter. You'll be added to the mailing list and will start receiving updates and event information. The Chapter is also always open to those who would like to volunteer and help out, so please let them know if that's something of interest to you.

Visit [alumni.westernu.ca/form/chapter-interest/](https://alumni.westernu.ca/form/chapter-interest/) to learn more.

Laotsyá:n is published four 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 Western University. To subscribe to Laotsyá:n, please click [here](#). 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.



Indigenous  
Initiatives



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