Winter brings a new year—and one that is full of promise for advancing Indigenous initiatives at Western. With the opening of the Wampum Learning Lodge (WLL) in the late fall, we have reached a major milestone in implementing our Indigenous Strategic Plan. The Lodge is a new home for Indigenous initiatives at Western. It is a place where everyone can gather and give full expression to Indigenous values and cultures, and where we can engage in the work of Truth and Reconciliation on campus. We have already begun hosting events at the Lodge, and we look forward to hosting many more as its programming enters full swing in 2023. If you haven’t already visited, make time to drop by and familiarize yourself with a dynamic new Indigenous space at Western.

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Not long ago, we celebrated the winter solstice on December 21st (the shortest day of the year) as the start of a reflective period that extends into the New Year. During this season we two-legged beings are encouraged to reconnect and pay close attention to the natural world as we reflect on the events and lessons of the past and the opportunities yet ahead.

Message from the VP-AVP (Indigenous Initiatives)

Mino Oshki Biboon (Happy New Year), to everyone!

Over the holidays, I recall a walk through a city park where I observed winter birds enjoying themselves and everything given to them by the Creator. Even though their day wasn’t easy as they searched for food and huddled closely together for warmth, I watched them take time to enjoy themselves, socialize, sing, and play as they chose to make the very best of what the day offered. The winged ones reminded me of the tremendous importance of being grateful and optimistic in all circumstances. They also reminded me to take heart in the fact that all difficult, dark, and hard times like winter last for only a season with the promise of springtime. I am grateful for those motivating life lessons shared with me by the birds, as they inspire us to likewise persevere in all circumstances while seeking out and enjoying the many gifts available to us all as we weather different seasons of life and work.

Upon reflection of the past year at Western, there have been both challenges and successes, as we as an institution have endeavoured to advance the work of Truth and Reconciliation through decolonization and Indigenization—by implementing the Indigenous Strategic Plan and Towards Western at 150. Together we have moved the needle forward toward systemic change, largely through education and greater awareness. As modeled by the birds, let us also take time to reflect upon and celebrate our successes and gifts as they inspire us in the future.

On behalf of the Office of Indigenous Initiatives, we want to thank you for your ongoing allyship and support in 2022, where we collaborated to achieve many significant accomplishments at Western, such as the launching of the new Wampum Learning Lodge and the provision of many transformative and responsive initiatives to further the work of Truth and Reconciliation across such areas as policy, curriculum, and planning.

We wish you and yours a New Year filled with success, great opportunities, and goals and dreams that are fulfilled in 2023.

Miigwech,
Christy R. Bressette
(Neta Noo-Ke Kwe – Hard-Working Woman)
Chantelle Richmond Named Fulbright Canada Research Chair

We are pleased to inform our readers that Chantelle Richmond, Associate Professor in the Department of Geography and Environment, was recently awarded the 2022 Fulbright Canada Research Chair in Social Sciences. She began her five-month tenure in this role in December at the University of Hawai’i Mānoa (UH Mānoa).

While at UH Mānoa, Chantelle will teach a graduate seminar on Indigenous health and celebrate the launch of her first book. She will also be undertaking research around the Anishinaabe concept of “gimiigiwemin,” or the sharing of gifts. These gifts can range from personal or community skills to knowledge and experience. Her focus will be on relationships with land exercised by Indigenous Hawai’ian people, continuing work she has undertaken for much of her career on Indigenous strategies of environmental repossession in Hawaii, Aotearoa (New Zealand) and Canada. While their geographic, cultural and political contexts are very different, Indigenous people in all three regions share common challenges in asserting their rights and controlling their relationship with the land.

OII joins everyone at Western in congratulating Dr. Richmond on her award and thanking her for the important work she is doing on behalf of everyone. For more information on her project, click here.

Candace Brunette-Debassige Recognized for Scholarship

The International Leadership Association (ILA), a global organization dedicated to the study of leadership theory and practice, recently honoured Western faculty member Candace Brunette-Debassige with an Outstanding Scholarship for Emerging Scholars award. The award is given for excellence in early-career scholarship that helps to advance the understanding of women in leadership. Candace was recognized by the ILA for “advancing the understanding of the challenges facing Indigenous women in higher education and working tirelessly to decolonize education so that Indigenous women can thrive and become the leaders they are meant to be within their own cultural values and practices”. We would like to extend our congratulations to Candace for her honour, and we look forward to her continued contributions to the decolonization of education at Western.

Dan and Mary Lou Smoke, Honorary Doctors of Law

Our warmest congratulations go out to Dan and Mary Lou Smoke, local Elders and great friends of OII, who were honoured at Western’s Fall Convocation with Honorary Doctor of Law degrees. Dan and Mary Lou are well known to the Western and London communities, having hosted Smoke Signals, Canada’s longest-running Indigenous radio program, for over three decades.

Smoke Signals began in the early 1990s on CHRW, Western’s campus radio station. It has been a constant source of insight and understanding for the Western community and beyond, serving to highlight Indigenous perspectives on a range of issues, and it continues to inspire loyal listeners who seek out Indigenous voices. The Smokes have donated more than 600 episodes of the program to an electronic archive that is currently under construction at the Faculty of Information and Media Studies.

Dan and Mary Lou are also a source of wisdom and guidance to OII, as we rely on them for leadership on various initiatives that OII leads on campus. Dan is a member of the Seneca Nation, Six Nations Grand River Territory, and Mary Lou is a member of the Ojibway Nation from Batchawana on Lake Superior.
Indigenous Student Centre Team Receives 2022 Award of Excellence

The Western Award of Excellence is a campus-wide accolade that is conferred upon staff who demonstrate exemplary service, creativity and innovation. We are delighted to advise our readers that in 2022 the team at the Indigenous Student Centre (ISC) was recognized for their hard work and contribution to student life with an Award. The team joined seven other employees who were named in December.

The ISC team was cited for their excellence in running a variety of initiatives, from mini-university and community- and land-based programming to initiatives that provide support and leadership to Indigenous students at Western. As one student quoted in the Award nomination said about the team, “I doubt I would have made it to my third year of studies. Their guidance, support, open ears and tutor support program played a huge part in my success.”

The critical importance of the ISC team was noted by the ISC’s Director, Amanda Myers. “The staff of ISC fulfill the dreams of our ancestors each day,” she said in response to the announcement of the Award. “They walk in pride and truth, knowing who they are holds value in this space of learning. This is the ultimate form of healing; this is the model for the Indigenous student that comes through the gates of Western. They find within the ISC a home, a family and a healthy way of living.”

Western will formally celebrate the 2022 recipients at a ceremony on Wednesday, February 8, 2023, at 11:30 a.m. in the Great Hall, Somerville House. To attend the ceremony please login to My Human Resources and go to “Training”. Select “Enroll in Internal Training Courses” then “Search by Course Number” – TWAE.
Aki-wayn-zih, Governor General’s Literary Award

Readers will recall from our Spring edition that we featured Indigenous London author Eli Baxter and his memoir, Aki-wayn-zih, A Person as Worthy as the Earth. We are delighted to share that Eli and his book were recently given the Governor General’s Literary Award for non-fiction for 2022.

Eli is a London resident who taught Anishinabemowin (the Ojibwe language) to people in Deshkan Zibiing (the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation) for two decades. He also created the Anishinaabe Language and Culture course at Western, where he taught for 17 years. Aki-wayn-zih recounts his childhood memories of living on the land in Treaty 9 territory, learning how to hunt, fish and trap. In recounting his life, Eli examines Indigenous teachings on history, science, philosophy, law and many other subjects, linking them all to language, the key to his culture. The book ranges from the ancient history of Indigenous people to Eli’s personal account of surviving the residential school system.

As the peer evaluation of his nomination stated, “Eli Baxter’s indelible memoir, Aki-wayn-zih, takes readers deep into Anishinaababay culture, language and history to reveal a rich and complex world, while showing how the link between language and land is crucial for survival and growth. At a time when he worries that the fires of Indigenous languages are going out, his simple and beautiful book, written across languages, cultures, and generations, radiates a radical kind of hope.” Our congratulations go out to Eli, and for those who would like to purchase Aki-wayn-zih, you can find it here.

Wampum Learning Lodge: Reaching a Milestone at Western

November marked an important stage on the way forward for Indigenous people at Western with the opening of the Wampum Learning Lodge (WLL). As many readers will know, we hosted a week’s worth of events and ceremonies to welcome members of the Western and local communities to the Lodge. The celebrations included Elders who led the naming process, as well as alumni, students, faculty and staff; and we honoured the Lodge with dances, drumming, ceremony and feasts.

We were very pleased with the high turnout for our many events. The opening of the Lodge represents an important commitment on the part of Western to fulfill the Indigenous Strategic Plan of 2016, which calls for an increase in Indigenous spaces on campus. As a space dedicated to Indigenous ways of knowing and being, the WLL will serve as the new focal point for Indigenization and decolonization at Western.

User Guidelines Put in Place

We welcome the entire Western community to join us at the Lodge in advancing decolonization and Indigenization at the University. To ensure the respectful use of the space, the Provost is implementing user guidelines developed by Indigenous people that will be observed when in the Lodge. The guidelines require users to complete an orientation tour of the building and a cultural education module. Details will be communicated shortly.
A Look at the
Wampum Learning Lodge

The Office of Indigenous Initiatives and Western have created an intercultural teaching, learning and gathering space that shares and centres Indigenous epistemologies and pedagogies. The purpose of the space is to facilitate and coordinate services and programming for the Indigenous community at Western, as well as the wider community at Western and the Deshkan Zibi territory. The space will serve as a touchstone for Indigenous Graduate and Undergraduate students, as well as faculty and staff. In addition, the space will exist to welcome on-campus Indigenous engagement and initiatives and seek to engage local Indigenous communities in partnership.

Background

In the context of increasing efforts to Indigenize Canadian universities, Western University launched an Indigenous Strategic Plan in 2016 outlining eight strategic priorities, including the need to create and expand on existing Indigenous spaces on-campus. After a community engagement process in 2018 led by Candace Brunette-Debassige, it was announced in July 2019 that the distinctive circular library at the John G. Althouse Faculty of Education Building would be repurposed into an Indigenous Learning Space.

The Vision

The Wampum Learning Lodge will act as:

• A home-place for Indigenous initiatives (e.g. Indigenous student groups and Indigenous programming);

• A venue that supports and advances Indigenous ways of knowing and Indigenous pedagogies across disciplines;

• A touchstone for Indigenous peoples and communities to engage with Western through ongoing community engagement and knowledge-mobilization activities;

• A place of connectivity among all people at Western who share a common interest in advancing Indigenization, decolonization, and reconciliation - fostering a sense of community around diversity.

Booking Space at the Lodge

Our intention is for the Lodge to be an open, welcoming place for all at Western, as well as in the wider community. Spaces within the Lodge are available for booking for any events and activities that involve Indigenous ways of knowing and being. Booking is done through the Office of Indigenous Initiatives, and can be done by completing our online booking form.
ELDER SPOTLIGHT

In each issue of Laotsyá:n, we spotlight teachings from local Indigenous Elders. This month we learn an important teaching about the change of seasons from Elder Bruce Elijah.

Bruce Elijah
Elder-in-Residence Program
Wampum Learning Lodge

Bruce Elijah was born into a traditional family and raised by his parents and grandparents in Oneida Nation, Southwold, Ontario. He is fluent in the Oneida language and has participated in traditional ceremonies his whole life. Bruce is part of the Wolf Clan and brings with him the knowledge and ability to work with traditional practices of the Haudenosaunee and other First Nations.

Bruce has held positions as chief seat warmer, and faith keeper for his clan. During those times he was actively involved with elders of the Haudenosaunee, learning from them.

He attended Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) business meetings from 1967 to the late 1990’s on international and domestic issues that affected indigenous communities.

In 1977, as an Oneida representative, he travelled to Geneva, Switzerland to the first gathering of Indigenous peoples seeking the protection of Indigenous rights and freedoms; he continued to travel to Europe for several years after as a spokesperson for Indigenous rights.

One of his primary interests was the traditional medicines and healing practices of not only the Haudenosaunee but other First Nations as well. More recently, he has been an active part of an alternative clinic in Southern California and in New Mexico. Here he has learned the importance of using a variety of wholistic medicinal practices.

Bruce Elijah is a traditional teacher, healer, and respected advocate for indigenous practices. Bruce will be available to Indigenous students, staff, and faculty, by providing one-on-one drop-in support on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9:00am-12:00pm.

If you require a specific time, please contact wampumlearninglodge@uwo.ca to book an appointment.
There are two times in the year that mark a special significance to many Indigenous Nations across Turtle Island: the winter and summer solstices, which fall on December 21st and June 21st, respectively. The winter solstice marks the shortest day of the year, after which the days begin to get longer. June 21st marks the longest day of the year, with the days that follow getting shorter.

In conversation with Laotsyá:n, Elder Bruce Elijah shared some of the significance, roles and responsibilities associated with the solstices. Each solstice indicates a time of either planning or doing. The winter solstice reminds us to begin planning for the seasons ahead, planting, harvesting and learning. The winter provides us with an opportunity to sit and learn from our elders and teachers. It is said that because we would have had more time to sit and learn in the winter, we are better able to remember more in the winter and learn quicker. The summer solstice is a time for being active and preparing for the seasons that will bring us into the long, cold nights. Harvest and food preparation would be at the top of community minds, with more daylight hours to complete work.

In a colonial concept, the dates of December 21st and June 21st are established as the days that signify the solstices. Traditionally, local Nations would have looked to the stars and the Star People to guide us in observing the solstices. What is popularly known as the Big Dipper would have been the constellation of stars that helped to determine the solstices. When the last star of the bucket points to the North Star, this indicates the winter solstice. When the handle of the Big Dipper points to the North Star, this is the summer solstice.

Solstice teachings help us be mindful of the Mind, Body and Spirit through the winter solstice and beyond. This is a time of rest, cleansing and purification. We sleep more and dream more. We are able to learn more in the winter through our dreams. In this clip from YouTube, Bruce shares more of his teachings about winter and the solstice.

The Solstice

From Bruce Elijah

Illustration by: Douglas Tulett

Biindigen Indigenous Learning Circle

Biindigen will be hosting another screening of the documentary N’Satung, from 12:00 – 2:00 p.m. on Monday, March 6 at the Wampum Learning Lodge. The film will be followed by a one-hour discussion period. N’Satung examines how Indigenous Peoples in the Great Lakes region have experienced education, and is centred on the Chippewas of Nawash Unceded First Nation community (also known as Neyaashiinigmiing, on the Bruce Peninsula), which is the home of Keesis Nadjiwon, Western alumnus and the film’s director. N’Satung was earlier screened at the Lodge in December.

Peetooteewiit

Peetooteewiit will kick off the New Year on January 18th with January Rogers, Indigenous Writer in Residence, screening their YouTube comedy series NDN’s On The Airwaves. Showcasing Indigenous life with a comedic twist, this is a Peetooteewiit not to be missed! At publication time we have not finalized the dates and topics for other Peetooteewiit episodes, but in the next few months we anticipate covering land-based learning, a sugar-bush experiential learning trip to Cape Croker, and aspects of climate justice.
OII Staffing Up for Growing Initiatives

Verlin James

Indigenous initiatives at Western continue to grow, and we are staffing up to meet the demands they involve. In November we hired Verlin James as event coordinator for the Universities Canada Building Reconciliation Forum. Western has been chosen to host the forum in June of this year, and planning has been underway for several months already. There will be a great deal to do both before and during the event, and Verlin will draw on his extensive experience in event planning to get it all done. Verlin is Anishinaabe from McDowell Lake First Nation and holds a Bachelor of Arts in Classical Studies from the University of Manitoba. He has extensive experience as a program coordinator and program specialist, working with the Carolinian Canada Coalition, AlterEden Bespoke Gardens and Landscape Design, NA-ME-RES, and KAIROS, among others.

Hallie Abram

We have also hired an administrative assistant and receptionist for the Wampum Learning Lodge. Hallie Abram joined us in December, and she has quickly made herself indispensable in the role. Hallie is a member of the Oneida Nation, and she is a familiar face at Western, having graduated with a bachelor’s degree in Indigenous Studies. She has significant experience working with the Indigenous community in London, and this will help us strengthen our links with Indigenous groups beyond the University. Hallie also helps to facilitate intercultural competency through KAIROS Blanket Exercises, which are an important educational tool in promoting understanding and Reconciliation at Western. When you are next at the Lodge, please make sure to stop at reception and say “Shekoli” (hello) to Hallie.

Leading Indigenous Initiatives at Western

On November 10, we hosted Western’s senior academic and administrative leadership in the Great Hall for the University’s Leaders’ Forum. The Forum is held three times a year, and provides an opportunity for leaders across Western to meet and discuss issues of high strategic importance to the University. The Forum was dedicated to Advancing Reconciliation, and served to underline Western’s engagement with Indigenous people and cultures outlined in Towards Western at 150. The event was designed and led by Dr. Christy R. Bressette and opened by Elder Bruce Elijah with the sharing of the traditional Thanksgiving address. After an inspiring presentation based upon her personal experiences as a student and outlining the practical benefits of furthering decolonial and Indigenized approaches to learning, Dr. Bressette moderated an expert panel discussion with professors Jeff Tennant and Candace Brunette-Debassige; Jody Noah, Co-Chair of Western’s Indigenous Post-Secondary Education Council; Nicholas Keller, of the Indigenous Student Association; and Kylie Bressette, Manager of Indigenous Admission and Enrolment. The event was a great success and OII continues to receive positive feedback.
Towards the end of the month, SAGE, the Indigenous Graduate Student Support Network, hosted Biidaaskonenjigewag, an Indigenous research symposium. Biidaaskonenjigewag means “they come with a light” in Anishnabemowin, and the symposium featured artists and speakers who highlighted the diverse gifts that knowledge keepers and scholars contribute to our communities.

These events were followed by our Indigenous Winter Market on December 3, and a screening of the film N’Satung on December 5. The Winter Market was the first major community event held at the Lodge, an opportunity for all to shop for the holiday season while supporting local Indigenous creators and artisans. It was a great success, and we look forward to hosting it again toward the end of the year. N’Satung is a documentary about Indigenous education in the Great Lakes region, and gives voice to Indigenous people of different backgrounds—including many faculty, students, alumni and staff from Western.

Undergraduate Head and Heart Projects Now Eligible for Additional Research Award

Great news for budding undergraduate Indigenous researchers: projects that you have undertaken for the Head and Heart Indigenous Research Fellowship are now eligible for the Western Libraries Undergraduate Research Awards (WLURAs). The first annual competition for these awards is now open, and if you have completed an undergraduate research project under Head and Heart you can apply. Simply follow the link above to submit your application for a chance to win $1,000 for your research.

Recipients of the Local First Nations Scholarship Program Recipients Announced

Western University’s Local First Nations Scholarship Program is designed to recognize excellence among First Nations students. Scholarships from the program are awarded to local First Nations students based on outstanding academic excellence, together with meaningful contributions they have made to First Nations communities. We are pleased to highlight here the 2022-23 recipients, and look forward to great things to come from them in the years ahead. Congratulations!
Local Indigenous Job Bank Launches

Oil is honoured to work in collaboration with the Southern First Nations Secretariat (SFNS) to advance both educational and employment related outcomes. Recently, SFNS announced the opening of its new, virtual Job Bank. This is a great resource for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous employers to connect with the local Indigenous talent pool. The Job Bank is part of a wider economic toolkit intended to boost the Indigenous economy, with a host of tools found on its website. In addition to posting or looking for jobs, users can surf the site’s local Indigenous business directory, get tips on starting up a local business, access resources for discounted group purchasing of goods and services, and much more.

Registration for employers is easy—just go the website link noted above and follow the links. You can also contact Kayla Martin, SFNS Communications Officer, at communications@sfns.on.ca. Kayla will happily post job opportunities on your behalf so that you can connect with local First Nations job candidates and help grow the Indigenous economy.

Next steps

Phases 2 and 3 of the White Corn Project are being further developed this year. The AAFC’s Three Sisters’ Garden at 1391 Sandford Street will be evolving to a medicine garden, with plants to be used for programming at the Wampum Learning Lodge. Last year’s garden lies dormant now but will come back to life with the arrival of spring.

We are currently at the stage of community consultation for the Community Food Forest, and we would like your input, ideas, and engagement. Please take a few minutes to fill out the relevant survey, found here, and stay tuned for updates on this project! Also, please note that we are always looking for seeds or propagated plant pups to help develop our own seed/plant catalogue.

Finally, we’re happy to inform you that the Phase 3 of the White Corn Farm begins on a smaller scale in community this spring. More details to come in our next edition of this newsletter.

White Corn Project Keeps Progressing

Our community harvest event on October 29th was a great success. The weather was sunny and welcoming, and our partners at Agriculture and Agri-food Canada (AAFC) have been amazing colleagues—growing both plants and relationships with us. We harvested a crop of 30 ears of corn, which now hang in the Wampum Learning Lodge for a six-month curing period. All the corn will be used for Corn Soup Lunches at the Lodge, with some kernels being saved for next year’s crop.

The White Corn Project is a reminder of the importance of food security, and in building purposeful gardens we bring community together to recover food sovereignty and security while working in harmony with the land. While gardening is labour-intensive, it provides an opportunity for personal growth when daily tasks are used as grounding or mindfulness exercises.

For example:
• Tending a plant in a garden is a good occasion to give thanks.
• Daily watering can be combined with breathing meditation.
• Seed sharing can build relationships with neighbours or other gardeners
• Learning one new plant species a day is a fun activity that can be enjoyed with family and can deepen your knowledge.

Attention Employers:

Looking to hire skilled First Nations employees? The SFNS Job Bank will connect you with members of local First Nations who are excited to bring their skills and experience to your business!

To get started, scan the QR code or visit www.sfnsgetset.com

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(on Ayote’a:k): where we live
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 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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