

Environment
Indigenous
Initiatives

UNIVERSITY OF
WATERLOO



FACULTY OF ENVIRONMENT

2024

Annual Report



Just getting started...

2024 has been a transformative year for the Faculty of Environment as we deepened our commitment to reconciliation and Indigenization.

Stepping into the new role in January, I learned rather quickly that there isn't any right way to initiate this work - I just had to get started. Beginning in the winter term, my focus was on building relationships with key stakeholders identified in the Faculty of Environment and elsewhere on campus. Once I established regular touch points with these colleagues, my next area of focus was on deepening my understanding of Indigenous knowledge systems, teaching practices, research methodologies, and their intersections with institutional structures. This learning process was essential to identifying where Indigenous content fits within existing frameworks and how to advocate for meaningful integration. I can say with great confidence that with each month that passed in the role, the importance of continuous learning, collaboration, and humility in this work became more and more evident.

Among my key achievements, I successfully launched the Environment Indigenous Initiatives Survey, gathering vital insights to guide our future efforts. Events such as the Harvesting Sweetgrass workshop and Walking the Path of Hope fireside chat offered spaces for dialogue and reflection. The Healing Forest initiative gained significant momentum in the latter half of the year, with the adoption of a tri-chair governance model and potential partnerships with other departments across the University, reflecting our values of shared leadership and inclusivity.

A personal highlight for me was attending the National Building Reconciliation Forum at Laurentian University in June. Over three days, I connected with others in similar roles across Canadian universities. Through panel discussions, workshops, and a special visit to Atikameksheng Anishnawbe First Nation, my confidence in this work grew. Being on Ojibway territory and among northern communities reminded me of the strength that comes from shared stories and time with Elders.

Looking ahead, my focus remains on listening, learning, and taking actionable steps toward building a more inclusive future. As I reflect on this year's milestones, I am filled with gratitude for the support of our community and optimism for what lies ahead.

Miigwech / Thank you!



Commitment

The Faculty of Environment strives to live the values of the University, and champion thinking differently, acting with purpose, and working together. Paying particular attention to environmental sustainability, interdisciplinarity, and Indigeneity, we're dedicated to fostering a deeper understanding of Indigenous perspectives and promoting reconciliation in the Faculty of Environment.

Mission

My mission is to create meaningful relationships with Indigenous communities, support Indigenous students, staff, faculty, and non-Indigenous allies, and ensure Indigenous worldviews and ways of knowing are integrated into the Faculty of Environment's work in teaching, learning, and research. Through collaboration, advocacy, and education, I aim to build a more inclusive community.

Function of Indigenous Initiatives

The Environment Indigenous Initiatives Manager leads and supports a variety of projects that promote Indigenization and reconciliation in the Faculty. My work includes assisting with the development of curricula that integrates Indigenous perspectives and knowledge, supporting research involving Indigenous communities, and organizing events that facilitate dialogue and learning.

FOCUS AREAS

SUPPORT FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING

Through collaboration with faculty, the Indigenous Initiatives Manager supports the development of courses that reflect the diverse experiences and histories of Indigenous peoples. This work ensures curriculum is inclusive, creating a deeper understanding and respect for Indigenous worldviews and ways of knowing among all students.

RESEARCH GUIDANCE

The Indigenous Initiatives Manager provides guidance to researchers by sharing best practices and resources for engaging with Indigenous communities developed by the Indigenous Research Team.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Indigenous Initiatives Manager is dedicated to building reciprocal, respectful, and meaningful relationships with Indigenous communities both on and off campus. By actively engaging in dialogue and collaboration, we're forging a stronger sense of community within the Faculty of Environment.

2024 at a glance



JANUARY

January 2, 2024

First day as Environment Indigenous Initiatives Manager

January 8, 2024

Joined Moccasin Identifier project team

January 18, 2024

Participated in Métis 101 course hosted by Office of Indigenous Relations (OIR)

Throughout January 2024

Met with various stakeholders from across the University

FEBRUARY

February 1, 2024

Met with Environment Student Society to understand their interest in Indigenous initiatives

February 8, 2024

Attended Arts Indigenous Speakers Series featuring Chelsea Vowel

February 10, 2024

Attended Trent University Elders' Gathering

February 2024

Established monthly meetings with Office of Research, Centre for Teaching Excellence, OIR, and Science Indigenous Initiatives

February 2024

Joined the National Indigenous Research Administrators (NIRA) group that meets monthly to discuss changes in Indigenous research

MARCH

March 6, 2024

Attended McMaster's Traditional Ecological Knowledge Summit

March 13, 2024

Worked with ENVigorate leadership on crafting personal territorial acknowledgements

March 15, 2024

Attended creation teachings with Frank Miller from Six Nations

March 18, 2024

Began work with Steffanie Scott and John Lewis on GEOG 426

March 20, 2024

Co-hosted ENVigorate workshop on territorial acknowledgements with Robin Jones from OIR

March 22, 2024

Participated in World Water Day featuring Autumn Peltier

March 25, 2024

Participated in workshop at Crowshield Lodge with ETIS department

APRIL

April 10, 2024

Attended End of Term Feast hosted by WISC and OIR

April 11, 2024

Began work on updating ENVS 131

April 17, 2024

Attended sweat lodge with the Faculty of Science leadership and Science Indigenous Initiatives Manager

April 18-19, 2024

Attended field trip to Hiawatha First Nation with Brendon Larson and Centre for Teaching Excellence

2024 at a glance



MAY

May 7, 2024
Joined Decolonizing & Establishing Payment Practices for Indigenous Community Members Project Working Group

May 10, 2024
Attended School of Planning meeting to present on Indigenous initiatives portfolio

May 16, 2024
Participated in CEE Indigenous Research Project in collaboration with University of Victoria

May 26, 2024
Attended workshop for Water Is Our Friend research project with School of Architecture

May 27, 2024
Attend KAIROS Blanket Exercise training

May 29, 2024
Participated in de-escalation training sponsored by OIR

JUNE

June 11, 2024
Participated in Indigenous People in the Workplace Instagram Series for CEE

June 25 - 27, 2024
Attended 2024 National Building Reconciliation Forum at Laurentian University in Sudbury

JULY

July 4, 2024
Joined the North Campus - Columbia Lake Teaching Lodge Project

July 8, 2024
Joined Faculty of Environment Brand Advisory Committee

July 9, 2024
Met with Geography and Aviation to discuss recruitment pathways for Indigenous students

July 18, 2024
Participated in Indigenous Wayfinding Workshop

July 22, 2024
Joined Healing Forest initiative

July 26, 2024
Attended End of Term Feast hosted by OIR and WISC

AUGUST

August 1, 2024
Hosted Moccasin Identifier team to confirm partnership package

2024 at a glance



SEPTEMBER

- September 1, 2024**
Launch of Indigenous Initiatives webpage on Environment website
- September 4, 2024**
Hosted Harvesting Sweetgrass workshop with Elder Myeengun Henry for first-year Environment students
- September 13, 2024**
Joined the University's Indigenous Relations Advisory Council
- September 23, 2024**
Attended PLAN 102 lecture to present on Indigenous storytelling
- September 27, 2024**
Spent an afternoon on Six Nations with Elder Peter Schuler
- September 30, 2024**
Launch of the Healing Forest Exhibit in Environment 2 curated by KI student Sophia Armstrong and Dr. Kelsey Leonard

OCTOBER

- October 1 - 31, 2024**
Launch of Environment Indigenous Initiatives Survey
- October 4, 2024**
Began working with ENBUS 402 students on analyzing survey results for capstone project
- October 10, 2024**
Attended KI lecture to hear presentations from students on how to amplify Indigenous events on campus
- October 15, 2024**
Attending ScotiaRISE Summit on Intentional Reconciliation
- October 28, 2024**
Attended ECDEV 602 lecture to present on crafting personalized territorial acknowledgements
- October 30, 2024**
Completed review of a chapter from Brendon Larson's new book
- October 31, 2024**
Dean's Office hosted Soup and Bannock at the Waterloo Indigenous Student Centre

NOVEMBER

- November 5, 2024**
Established the Healing Forest Indigenous Working Group and volunteered to be co-chair.
- November 9, 2024**
Volunteered for Fall Open House and was stationed at the Healing Forest Exhibit
- November 14, 2024**
Environment Indigenous Initiatives and the Waterloo Climate Institute co-hosted 'Walking the Path of Hope: Climate Anxiety and the Healing Forest' featuring Elder Myeengun Henry, Dr. Kelsey Leonard, and KI student, Sophia Armstrong.

DECEMBER

- December 13, 2024**
CANCELLED
Field Trip to Woodland Cultural Centre for faculty and staff. Student-facing staff will be prioritized.



Highlights of the year

These highlights showcase a foundational year of meaningful engagement, cultural learning, and impactful initiatives – setting the stage for continued growth and collaboration.

MAJOR EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES

HARVESTING SWEETGRASS WORKSHOP

As part of Orientation Week, we hosted a workshop on how to harvest sweetgrass with Elder Myeengun Henry. Attendees received a short sweetgrass braid to take home with them as part of their medicine bundle.

35

*First-year
students attended*

SOUP AND BANNOCK LUNCH

On Halloween, the Dean's Office hosted Soup and Bannock lunch in the Waterloo Indigenous Student Centre - which also included treats, a costume competition, and pumpkin carving competition. All the soups prepared by staff were enjoyed, leaving no leftovers.

60+

*Indigenous
students attended*

WALKING THE PATH OF HOPE: CLIMATE ANXIETY AND THE HEALING FOREST

In partnership with the Waterloo Climate Institute, we hosted a fireside chat between Elder Myeengun Henry and Dr. Kelsey Leonard that was moderated by KI student, Sophia Armstrong. The event was positively received with lots of interest in future events that feature multiple Indigenous viewpoints on climate change and Indigenous resilience.

80+

*Registered for
the event*

60

*Attended
the event*

Highlights of the year

COLLABORATIONS AND PARTNERSHIPS

MOCCASIN IDENTIFIER

Discussions with Moccasin Identifier began before my time in the role, but I joined the project in January to assist in finalizing a partnership agreement. With their business model in flux, we worked to secure an affordable partnership that honours their mission and supports the faculty's goal of building good relations with Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation.

HEALING FOREST CARE TEAM/WORKING GROUP

In 2022, the University of Waterloo urban forest was awarded the Healing Forest designation by the David Suzuki Foundation based on a proposal drafted by the Faculty of Environment Indigenous Curriculum Working Group. In 2024, the WAMPUM Lab drew attention to the Healing Forest through an interactive exhibit that was curated by KI student, Sophia Armstrong. In November 2024, the Healing Forest Indigenous Care Team/Working Group was formed to continue to advocate for ecological restoration of the space. I drafted the terms of reference and tri-chair governance model for the working group. In 2025, we hope to partner with the Sustainability Office on caring for that space.

WATERLOO CLIMATE INSTITUTE

In November, the Waterloo Climate Institute co-hosted an event with me as part of our joint efforts to support students and their wellbeing. We will be partnering again in 2025 on another Indigenous event featuring Deborah MacGregor in conversation with Heather Hall about Indigenous perspectives on climate change.

Highlights of the year

EDUCATION AND AWARENESS

INDIGENOUS INITIATIVES SURVEY

In February 2024, I collaborated with IAP to develop an online survey for the Faculty of Environment community. The survey aimed to assess understanding of reconciliation, Indigenous worldviews, and histories. The survey was live throughout October. To help me analyze the results, I'm partnering with a student group from ENBUS 401. Their insights will help shape the Faculty of Environment's Indigenous Initiatives Action Plan for 2025.

9%
survey response rate

45%
of respondents were undergraduate students

95%
completed surveys

TERRITORIAL ACKNOWLEDGMENT CONSULTATIONS

A key part of my role has been assisting faculty, staff, and students in creating personalized territorial acknowledgments, which has been a meaningful way to explore their personal histories and the treaties and territories they've called home.

5
consultations

GUEST LECTURES

During the fall term, I prepared two guest presentations. For PLAN 102, I presented on Indigenous Storytelling, incorporating a video featuring an Indigenous planner from British Columbia discussing her approach to planning from an Indigenous perspective. This presentation will inform the Indigenous Storytelling module I'm developing for ENVS 131.

Additionally, I was invited to present on crafting personalized territorial acknowledgments for ECDEV 602.

Impact and outcomes

STRENGTHENED COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

- Developed a greater sense of belonging and cultural understanding within the Faculty of Environment through consistent engagement.
- Built meaningful partnerships with Elders, Knowledge Keepers, Indigenous colleagues on campus, and a variety of departments across campus - amplifying Indigenous ways of knowing.

INCREASED AWARENESS AND PARTICIPATION

- Participation in events and programs exceeded expectations.
- Survey data revealed a keen interest in more programming and events on reconciliation and Indigenous ways of knowing among faculty, staff, and students.

INDIGENOUS INTEGRATION

- Created opportunities for experiential learning through workshops, guest lectures, and community events.
- Successfully brought an Indigenous perspective to two courses in the fall term: PLAN 102 and ECDEV 602.

Challenges and lessons learned

CHALLENGES

ENGAGEMENT GAPS

While overall interest in Indigenous worldviews was strong, deeper engagement with faculty, staff, and students remain a challenge.

RESOURCE LIMITATIONS

Striking a balance between the expectations of faculty, staff, and students and my own lived experience and understanding of Indigeneity was a recurring challenge but I am starting to settle into who I am and how I want to lead this portfolio.

SCHEDULING AND LOGISTICS

Some events, such as the Woodland Cultural Centre visit, had to be rescheduled due to unforeseen circumstances. Other initiatives, like the Moccasin Identifier partnership, took much longer than anticipated - highlighting the need for more flexible planning and time for relationship building.

LESSONS LEARNED

IMPORTANCE OF FLEXIBILITY

Adapting plans to accommodate changes was critical to maintaining momentum.

BUILDING CONFIDENCE

With no predefined roadmap for Indigenization and reconciliation, this year was spent deepening my understanding of Indigenous knowledge, teaching, and research to confidently identify where Indigenous content fits within institutional frameworks.

FOSTERING COLLABORATION

Continued collaboration with Indigenous and non-Indigenous partners strengthens the impact and authenticity of programming.

2025 Goals and Activities

As we move forward, I am excited to build on the momentum of the past year with several new and continued initiatives - the biggest of which is the development of the Faculty of Environment Reconciliation Action Plan.

FOCUS AREAS

SUPPORT FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Continue refining the online modules for ENVS 131, focusing on Indigenous storytelling and ways of being.
 - Begin curriculum work for ENVS 200, incorporating Indigenous perspectives into environmental stewardship and ecological restoration and conservation topics.
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RESEARCH GUIDANCE

- Continue to amplify the efforts of the Indigenous Research Team in the Office of Research.
 - Represent Indigenous perspectives and champion ethical research practices as a member of the newly created Environment Research Council.
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COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- Reschedule the Woodland Cultural Centre field trip for staff and students so they can engage with the history of Six Nations.
- Host a workshop at ENVigorate where members of the Environment community can create their own medicine bags. The workshop will also include teachings on traditional medicines and guidance on how to build a personal bundle.
- Continue to partner with the Waterloo Climate Institute on impactful events with the goal of continuing to raise awareness of Indigenous perspectives on the environment and climate change.
- Develop a co-curricular strategy to bring more Indigenous programming to Environment students.

Thank You Miigwech Nia:wen



This first year of Indigenous Initiatives in the Faculty of Environment would not have been possible without the collaboration and support of my incredible campus partners.

A heartfelt thank you to:

- Elder Myeengun Henry for always making time for our chats and for providing great advice when the way forward wasn't as clear.
- The Office of Indigenous Relations for your guidance and expertise.
- Faculty of Environment leadership for taking steps to support reconciliation. And for their trust and faith in me to take this on.
- The Faculty of Science Indigenous Initiatives Manager for being a great sounding board and helping me to navigate this uncharted territory with ease.
- The Office of Research Indigenous Research Team for welcoming me into their world and showing me the ropes in research.
- The Waterloo Climate Institute for co-hosting an impactful event that merged climate action with Indigenous knowledge.
- Faculty, staff, and students who reached out for a visit and came with ideas to mull over. I cherish those chats more than folks know.

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