

Indigenous Advisory Circle

Minutes of the Meeting of January 9, 2023

10:00 a.m. by Zoom

Present: Brad Regehr, Brenda Simpson, Jean Becker, Savannah Seaton, Rick Myers

1. Opening

Brenda opened the meeting at 10:12 with words of welcome and a circle of introductions and personal updates. Jean provided an opening prayer.

2. Agenda and Minutes

The minutes of the June 2022 meeting and the agenda were approved as circulated.

3. Director's Report

The full text of the report is included at the end of the minutes.

4. Principal's Report

Rick reported on three items.

- The College is proceeding with a full-time tenure-track appointment in Indigenous Studies.
- The start of the Indigenous Entrepreneurship Diploma program has been deferred to September 2023. We currently have seven colleges committed to participating and two others considering it. We are also going to run a special cohort for Oshki Wenjat in Thunder Bay, an Indigenous college for students from the fly-in communities of Northern Ontario.
- The *Trading Post* entrepreneurship incubator is now fully staffed. We have a director, a program manager and a support person in place.

5. Terms of Reference

The terms of reference were last updated in 2017. Rick noted that much has changed since then in that UW is now very active in the realm of Indigenization and has established the Indigenous Relations Office with an advisory circle of its own.

Savannah expressed the view that it would be wise to focus on the mission of the WISC, which prioritizes the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual well-being of students. An effective advisory circle should have members who can contribute expertise in these diverse areas.

The current terms of reference stipulate that there is no compensation for participation in the IAC. Rick indicated that he had no objection to providing for honorariums if that is consistent with practice elsewhere. Jean will follow up through COU to determine what practice is elsewhere.

Brad suggested that the language in the section on membership should include a reference to alumni.

Brenda wondered if it would make sense to ask a couple of people to work on some draft revisions and present them to the group at the next meeting. It was agreed that Savannah would draft something in consultation with other members.

Savannah suggested that we should have longer terms for elders (perhaps three years) and shorter terms for students (one year).

The current terms of reference suggested that appointments are made by the Principal in consultation with the President of the University of Waterloo. Jean suggested that it was no longer necessary to involve the President in these appointments.

6. Membership

One basic question is whether we are looking for members who are local and can actually come to the WISC or members who might (like Brad) be located quite far away and would join in only via Zoom. It was agreed that it would be good to have a mixture.

It was agreed that there would be value in having IAC members who had themselves been students who made use of the WISC

Those present suggested a number of potential new members for the IAC. Because these minutes are public, those names will be kept in a confidential file.

7. Adjournment

The meeting concluded at 11:50 am.

Minutes by Rick

Waterloo Indigenous Student Centre
United College, University of Waterloo
Indigenous Advisory Circle
Director's Report

January 9, 2023

1. Director Self-Introduction / Positionality
2. 19th annual WISC Pow Wow
3. Indigenous Student Circle (ISC) Skills Development Projects
4. Staff Updates
5. Wiisniida Fall Feast

1. Director Self-Introduction / Positionality

I would like to start by introducing myself to the members of the IAC who I have not had the opportunity to get to know yet. I am a visitor to these historical and traditional territories of the local Indigenous Peoples, including the Attawandron (Neutral), Anishinaabeg, and Haudenosaunee Peoples. My registered Indian status is with my late maternal grandfather's community, Waywayseecappo First Nation in Manitoba. My grandfather was forced to attend Birtle residential school until the last time he ran away and managed to find underage labour work. As a teenage residential school dropout, he met my late maternal grandmother from Keeseekoowenin First Nation at a local hockey tournament that he was playing in. My grandmother was considered a half-breed and was able to avoid residential school. They went on to have many children who were all subsequently removed as part of the sixties' scoop government program. They were placed in different non-Indigenous foster homes, some names changed and some illegally adopted out to the United States. My mother ran away from the abusive foster homes and raised herself in a street entrenched lifestyle in the heart of Winnipeg – this is where and when I was born. My mother promptly tried to change her lifestyle for the sake of us kids and so she moved us to Vancouver Island in BC. Within weeks, my sister and I were removed as part of the so-called final years of the sixties' scoop. I was a nine-month-old Plains Ojibway half-breed baby removed and placed in a non-indigenous home until the government finally returned me to my mother at nearly 6 years old, only after she was common-law and expecting a baby with a European man. My mother, her mother and her siblings were reunited in 1993 through the Unsolved Mysteries television show. To this day, I do not know my father, so my indigeneity is really all I knew and continue to know. My understanding of my Indigenous identity grew immensely at that time, but with that change came a lot of pain, anger, and confusion. I left that broken home at 15 years old and tried not to look back. Off I went to live a better life and found myself widowed and expecting a baby at 18 years old. This stage of my life inspired me to seek higher education. I completed a BBA in management, with honours, through which I gained a wealth of international experience. Following was nearly a decade of a diverse range of reconciliation-focused roles in all levels of government, non-profits, and private sectors. I became exhausted of the Groundhog Day experience of poor attitudes towards reconciliation-based change, stalling growth and flourishing of the movement. In search of an academic solution to my frustrations, I sought a master's degree in Industrial-Organizational Psychology and found myself a decent package to land here in 2019 at the University of Waterloo. With the pandemic and the state of reconciliation in the field of I-O Psych, I had quite a terrible and delayed experience. I found platforms to amplify my concerns and sure enough with time, the tides started to shift. I began to see incremental change and felt a renewed sense of hope with my work and the willingness of the community to embrace reconciliation locally. The position at WISC came to my attention and with some careful consideration, I came to realize what a great fit this place actually is for me and my family. A few years ago, I adopted my two nieces from six years in the foster care system as well as two rez dog rescues. I have come to call Waterloo my home and I am thrilled about the work I get to do with WISC and the community here. This place matters deeply to me as I know first-hand what it can feel like to be invisible here, as well as what it can feel like to belong here. If Indigenous students, staff, and faculty feel like they belong here in this community, then we are doing a good job. This is just the tip of the iceberg, but hopefully it sparks some excitement about the passion I bring to the role and the vision I hope we can achieve together as a community.

2. 19th annual WISC Pow Wow

The 19th annual WISC Pow Wow was held on September 24th at Waterloo Park. I began the role of Director on September 1st, so I hit the ground running. Prior to my arrival, Christina Restoule was hired as the Pow Wow Coordinator. I have known Christina since 2019 and had a good working relationship with her prior, so that provided reassurance that all would be well in her hands. She is very experienced with running Pow Wows through her personal life, as well as the Conestoga Pow Wow. We had great weather and an amazing turnout! Overall, the event was a success. Of course, there were some minor bumps in the road, as is expected – many of which we are working to iron out for the big 20th WISC Pow Wow. For the upcoming year, we are planning to bring it back to its original location, on-campus. We are exploring the possibility of hosting at the new big indoor soccer fieldhouse, potentially changing the date, as well, we are working with Campus Food Services on Indigenous food options. We will likely partner with the Office of Indigenous Relations as our relationship and work is really flourishing with them. We are at the early stages of planning, and we are looking forward to an exceptional Pow Wow for the big 20-year celebration.

3. Indigenous Student Circle (ISC) Skills Development Projects

The ISC Skills Development Projects was something that sprung out of my experience coming on board with WISC at a time when there were no other WISC staff. I quickly made new relations with the Indigenous students and hired several as part-time office assistants. I learned through that process that many of them required considerable training in the areas I was seeking support. The students were keen to learn, making the time with them quite precious, yet demanding. I could see their sense of belonging grow in the short time they were working at WISC. Many of them began to come out of their shells and bond with me as well as the other students. The community began to feel like a little WISC family and there was a really wonderful sense of community and positive energy at the soup lunches right off-the-bat. The ideas that each of the students brought to our weekly check-in meetings were very creative and quite impressive. There was a natural opportunity to provide a program where we could offer students a platform, space, and flexibility to develop and execute projects of their choice, catered to their individual skills development and capacity building needs. The students prepared project proposals in October, and each took their turn to present in a format of their choosing at our weekly meeting. After they presented, as a group we conducted a SWOT analysis for the student/team to consider – they would then revise aspects of their project to bring back to the group the following week for further discussion, as necessary. From there, they were off and running. We currently have four active students ongoing from the fall term into the winter term. Two more students are preparing their proposals to begin working in the winter term. We hope to support these projects through NPAAMB funding. Also, we received a generous donation of approximately \$7,500 to this initiative. I am exploring creative ways to utilize the funds for the benefit of these students. We may create a pitch-style competition, though we would design it so that everyone wins in the end. Look out for spotlights on these students and their projects in our WISC monthly newsletter set for inaugural release this month.

4. Staff Updates

I am beyond thrilled to report that Emma Smith was hired on October 4th as the new WISC Program Coordinator. Emma is Anishinaabe from Walpole Island First Nation. She graduated in Fine Arts from the University of Waterloo in 2018 and is finishing her masters in Indigenous History here as well. Emma's research focuses on Indigenous beadwork during the Fur Trade. Emma has worked with and continues to be an active KW Indigenous community member for close to a decade. She is a producer, curator, artist, and community organizer. Since the start, Emma has shown a tremendous dedication to the new vision of centering all that WISC does around Indigenous students' wholistic well-being and academic needs, whether that be physical, mental, emotional, and/or spiritual. Her dog Portobello (Porto for short) is also fitting in nicely to her office and with the students.

6. **Wiisniida Fall Feast**

We partnered with the Office of Indigenous Relations for the end-of-term feast. We coined the event Wiisniida. The partnership enabled us to open the registration to not only include Indigenous students, but also Indigenous staff and faculty, as well as their plus one invite. Not to mention, the partnership was a beautiful witnessing to the community of the relationship WISC carries and seeks to develop further with main campus through the OIR. It was a true Indigenous feast! The meal was buffet-style catering by campus food services. Due to size, the event was held on main campus at Fed Hall. WISC and OIR shared all costs equally including WStore gift cards for Indigenous students and acknowledgement gifts to our partners and special guest Elders. Everyone and their guest were asked to bring a \$20 gift for a huge gift exchange, which really was lovely to see unfold – everyone had a smiling face. We set up a photo booth with props and a United College staff volunteered their time as photographer for the event. There were some heartfelt speeches with proper opening and closing words from Elder Myeengun Henry. We were so engaged with one another, having a great time with a true sense of an Indigenous community feast, that no one realized there was a snowstorm plowing down outside. Thankfully, everyone got home safe, albeit some very late. Wiisniida was a huge success, and we are already looking forward to the next time we can feast together.

All my relations,

Savanah