

INDIGENOUS STUDIES PROGRAM STRATEGIC FOUNDATIONS REPORT

Mobilizing for Success: A Roadmap

JUNE 2023 - Version I



Artwork: New Indigenous Studies mural honouring community voices on Western University campus.
The mural was designed by Mike Cywink in collaboration with students, staff and faculty.

Table of Contents

<i>Land and community acknowledgement</i>	2
<i>Who we are.</i>	3
<i>How the Strategic Foundations Report came together.</i>	3
<i>Up Front: Our Priorities</i>	4
<i>Key actions</i>	4
<i>At the heart of Western’s Indigenization: Indigenous research and pedagogy</i>	5
<i>What we do and where we are growing to</i>	6
Learning Streams.....	6
Enrollment.....	6
Faculty Complement	6
Where we are heading.....	7
<i>Collaborations and Relationships</i>	7
<i>Key findings from our Environmental Scan</i>	8
<i>Funding models for Indigenous Studies</i>	10
<i>Broad Brush Strokes: Key areas for development identified by ISP stakeholders.</i>	11
<i>Growth and Integrity of the Program</i>	13
<i>What our students say: “Students first – System Second!”</i>	13
What does Indigenous Studies mean to us?	13
How do we learn best?	13
What do we want?	13
<i>Beyond Broad Brush Strokes: Identified areas for action.</i>	15
Serving Students Circle.....	15
Serving Community Circle	16
Serving Indigenous Faculty, Research, and Scholarship	16
Curriculum Development	18
Continuous Quality Assurance	19
Culture and Values in Indigenous studies	20
<i>Members of the Indigenous Studies Program Strategic Planning Advisory Group</i>	22

Land and community acknowledgement

The Indigenous Studies Program at Western University is located on the traditional lands of the Anishinaabek, Haudenosaunee, Lūnaapéewak and Chonnonton Peoples, on lands connected with the London Township and Sombra Treaties of 1796 and the Dish with One Spoon Covenant Wampum. This land continues to be home to diverse Indigenous peoples whom we recognize as contemporary stewards of the land, the Indigenous Studies Program, and vital contributors of our society.

Who we are.

We are a growing interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral community made up of students, faculty, and staff who value local and global connections. We prioritize fostering community relationships. These are particularly crucial as we develop and transition the program into a larger academic unit.

The Indigenous Studies Program (ISP) at Western began in 2003 in the Department of Anthropology. The Program operated out of the Department until 2010, when it became a separate academic unit under the Faculties of Social Science, Arts and Humanities, and Health Sciences. Today, the Program is housed in the Faculty of Social Sciences, with growing linkages across other academic units and community organizations.

Our students are at the heart of our program, and we are strongly committed to offering a welcoming and inclusive environment that fosters a rich scholarly experience within a strong and close-knit learning community.

How the Strategic Foundations Report came together.

This Strategic Foundations report is intended to be used as a roadmap and building block towards the longer-term development of the ISP at Western. It is the result of widespread consultation with those who have a stake in the quality and life of the ISP. Behind this strategy are the voices of current students, alumni, university, and community leaders which have been gathered through a student-led focus group, 15 key informant interviews with community and university stakeholders, and a day-long Strategic Planning event held on April 27th 2023 which was attended by around 60 people from local Indigenous communities, local and regional Indigenous organizations, and academic units within Western, the affiliate University Colleges, and Fanshawe College. Finally, we have sought to broaden decision-makers' horizons through conducting an environmental scan of Indigenous Studies programs and academic units across Canada.

This process has been overseen by an Interdisciplinary Strategic Planning Advisory Group consisting of faculty and program staff within the Indigenous Studies Program as well as faculty from other departments within the Faculties of Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities, Education (Indigenous Education Program), and Law.

The challenges encountered by ISP to growth within a strongly westernized education system are substantial, requiring Indigenous-led solutions that are supported by allies at all levels of the institution. This *Strategic Foundations* document is intended to be read in the spirit of epistemological, relational, and structural reconciliation.

Up Front: Our Priorities

- Expanding and consolidating course offerings to be better positioned for growth and developing a reputation for excellence in undergraduate Indigenous community-based research training.
- Strengthening relationships with local Indigenous communities and organizations.
- Becoming a hub of interdisciplinary research and scholarly excellence in Indigenous Studies through, for example, closer alignment with Western's Indigenous Research Strategy, "Strengthening our relations" (see footnote 1).
- Creation of for-profit lifelong learning / professional development courses.
- Positioning for sustainable growth through expansion and consolidation into a larger academic unit

Key actions

- *To incorporate these priorities within an ISP academic plan*
- *The creation of a special central budget to maintain and grow the ISP*
- *The creation of a regular council with the Vice President Academic to represent matters pertaining to Indigenous academic development and scholarly activity¹*

¹ This Council could also involve other Indigenous scholarly entities such as the Indigenous Education Program.,



Students restore an Indigenous tallgrass prairie

At the heart of Western’s Indigenization: Indigenous research and pedagogy

As the key interdisciplinary hub of Indigenous research, scholarship, and teaching, the Indigenous Studies Program lies at the heart of Western’s Indigenization initiatives.² Successful Indigenization across the university requires that Indigenous scholars and Indigenous studies as a discipline are well positioned to provide this leadership. A significant part of ensuring the ISP can do this is supporting its scholarship and pedagogy through resourcing and strategic alliances, through for example closer alignment with Western’s Indigenous Research Strategy (championed by Dr Chantelle Richmond), and Indigenous Education, through supporting the ongoing sustainability of the Indigenous Learning Bundles Project (championed by Dr Candace Brunette) in collaboration

² See Western’s “Indigenous Strategic Plan” (2016) and also the recent Indigenous Research Strategy “Strengthening our Relations to grow the capacity and impact of Western’s Indigenous Research Environment” by the Indigenous Research Sub-Committee (2021). <https://indigenous.uwo.ca/initiatives/plan-reports.html>

with the Office for Indigenous Initiatives and the Centre for Teaching and Learning. Closer alignment with each of these initiatives and related resourcing will enable ISP to become a vital hub of research-intensive Indigenous scholarly and pedagogical activity, positioning the ISP as a place of intergenerational mentorship and the place Indigenous scholars want to be!

What we do and where we are growing to

Indigenous Studies has long been a revolutionary discipline. At Western, the program aspires to prepare Indigenous and non-Indigenous students for a life after graduation in which they can give back to their communities. It prepares students for a range of cross sectoral employment opportunities in government, health, education, social services, environmental sciences, and community-based organizations. The curriculum engages students in both critical and reflexive Indigenous pedagogies, so the student is always at the centre of the learning process.

The emphasis in the ISP is on regional languages, histories, and cultures as a curricular hub. The hub expands to focus on international Indigenous topics as students make their way through the program. At a broader level, courses in ISP explore a range of topics, including Indigenous histories, politics, knowledge systems, arts, social, and environmental systems.

Learning Streams: The expansion of our program offerings is focused on three distinct streams of learners:

1. Students enrolled in degree offerings at Western University who are undertaking a Major, Minor, or Honors Specialization in Indigenous Studies.
2. Students enrolled in other programs taking a course in within the Indigenous Studies as part of their Undergraduate Degree requirement.
3. Life-long learners from local Indigenous communities as well as those from all walks of life undertaking learning for personal reasons or as part of a professional requirement.

Enrollment in IS (Learning Stream One) varies typically between 40 – 60 students each year. In 2022 – 23, the program had 57 students who have either declared their intention to graduate with a Minor (n=29), Major (n=25), or Honours Specialization (n=3). Several students do not declare their intention to graduate in an IS module until they are nearing graduation, so the number of actual registered students does not reflect the number of students active in IS.

Faculty Complement: As a program, IS is restricted in the type of appointment faculty members may hold. There are currently one tenured, two tenure-track, and one limited term appointed faculty members in the ISP. An additional two faculty members, one tenure-track and the other a Canadian Research Chair Candidate will join in the summer of 2023 and winter 2024 respectively. All ISP faculty are joint appointments across the Departments of Geography and Environmental Studies, History, Gender, Sexuality and Women’s Studies, and Visual Arts.

Where we are heading: We are excited to announce the re-design of our program into four modular themes, or braids, that will come into effect in the 2024-2025 academic year. Forming the curriculum foundation of IS these are:

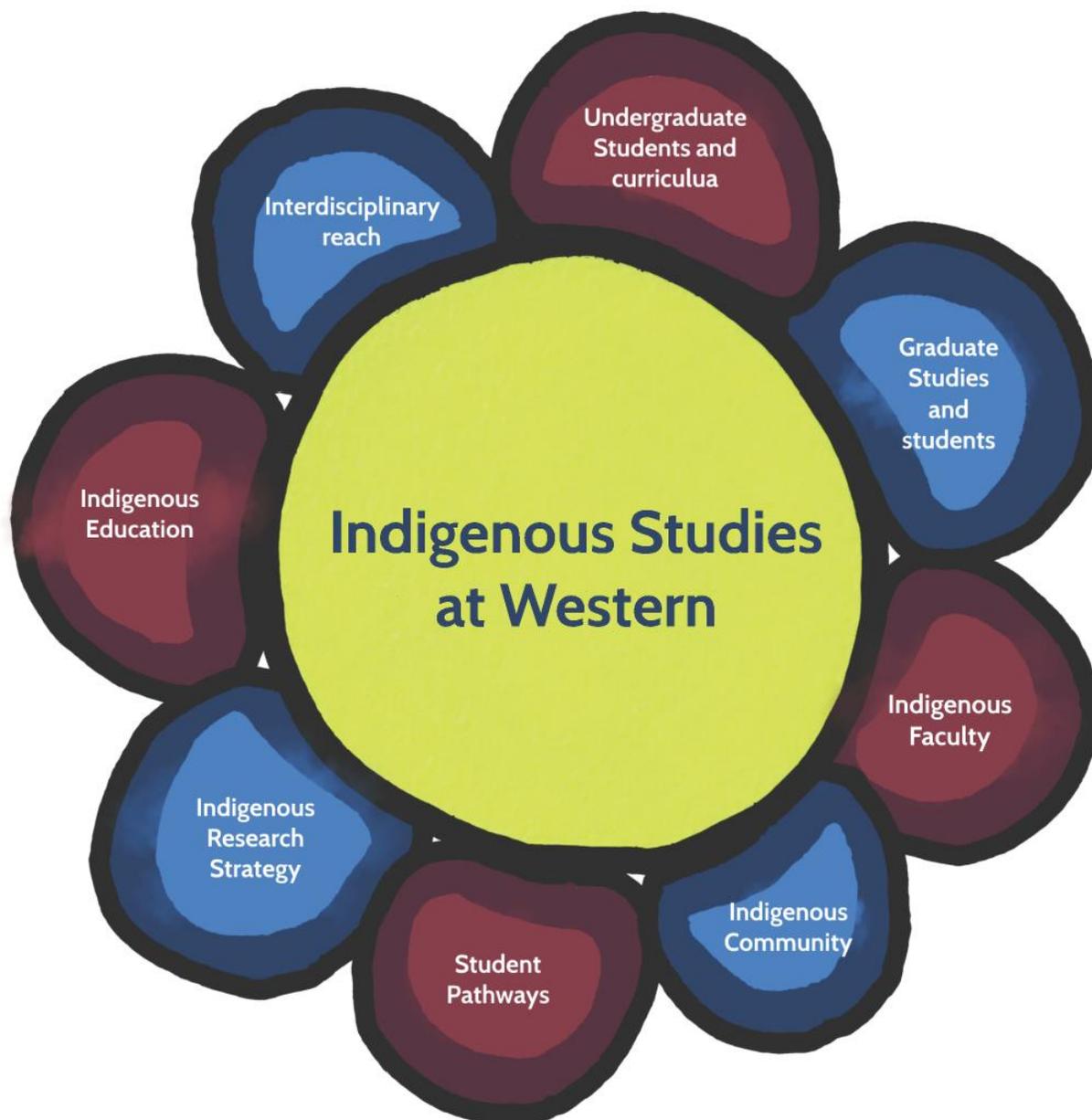
- *Language, Arts & Culture,*
- *Environment, Health & Well-being,*
- *Policy & Governance,*
- *Indigenous Methodologies.*

ISP students will be required to earn a specified number of credits in each module, and as they prepare for graduation, they will be required to take capstone credits in our fourth module, Indigenous Methodologies.

Making the most of our faculty's scholarly focus, this will create a clear and comprehensive path for students to complete their degree requirements in Indigenous Studies while providing an expansive educational journey.

Collaborations and Relationships

The path to growth and sustainability in Indigenous Studies requires healthy relationships and collaborations. ISP has developed a number of relationships within both academic and Indigenous communities. Each of these relationships provide opportunities for student and faculty mentorship while reciprocating needs and aspirations identified at the community-level. The diagram below, and the accompanying narrative ([LINK](#)), chart the ecosystem of existing and potential relationships and collaborations in Indigenous Studies.



Key findings from our Environmental Scan

Our environmental scan (available at <https://indigenoustudies.uwo.ca>) gathered self-reported data from the websites and publicly available reports from 25 Indigenous Studies units throughout Turtle Island³ to determine structure (e.g., faculty or department), resources (staffing levels, funding etc.), degree granting (i.e., graduate, undergraduate, professional) and unique offerings (such as mandatory Indigenous Studies courses). To provide a summary analysis of the potential

³ Five international universities (University of Auckland, University of Waikato, University of Buffalo, University of New Mexico, and the University of Arizona) were included in the initial scan with data from just the 25 Canadian universities drawn on in the report.

initiatives that may be of interest to Western's ISP strategic planning discussions, the second phase of the scan identified ten exemplary Indigenous Studies entities exhibiting the following characteristics:

1. High level entity structure, for example, faculty or department
2. Increased resources or support, for example senior administration roles specific to the entity and a high number of faculty associated with the entity
3. Advanced level/s of study, for example an undergraduate or graduate degree major in Indigenous Studies.

Of the ten exemplary entities, structures ranged from Faculty, Department, to Centre; with faculty members' either exclusive or main appointment within entities ranging from 17 (Faculty of Native Studies, University of Alberta) to 4 (Department of Indigenous Learning, Lakehead University). Our scan reveals that there is considerable initiative on the part of some universities to respond to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action through the advancement of Indigenous Studies academic programs. Within recent months in Ontario alone, McMaster University's Indigenous Studies Program has transitioned to Departmental status while the University of Ottawa have instigated an Institute of Indigenous Research and Studies.

Our scan reveals the following key findings:

- That Departmental or Faculty status are critical to enabling Indigenous Studies entities to be visible and more equal players at the table alongside other departments and faculties.
- **Faculty or Department status is an important factor in attracting and retaining Indigenous scholars, contributing to the growth and advancement of Indigenous scholarship, positioning the IS entity to be able to respond/support the needs of Indigenous communities.**
- A key factor in the success of the exemplary entities is having strong advocates at the Senior leadership level within their respective universities.
- That university-wide Indigenization strategies – whether through mandatory Indigenous studies courses for students or through the inclusion of Indigenous content in courses – need to be implemented in ways that support and advance the identified priorities of Indigenous Studies entities.
- Considerable opportunities may lie for the ISP at Western in the development of Indigenous Studies Degree Programs in the Bachelor of Sciences or Fine Arts streams.⁴

⁴ While throughout Canada there are now a considerable number of Bachelors of Arts (in Indigenous Studies), there are only 3 and 1 Bachelors of Science (Indigenous Studies) and Art (Indigenous Studies) respectively.



Students and faculty paint a mural outside the Indigenous Studies office

Funding models for Indigenous Studies

Traditional models for funding programs, departments and Faculties are not conducive to the growth of Indigenous Studies. “Normal” approaches scale funding in relation to the number of students enrolled in the program. Faculties at Western have these types of arrangements for determining their budgets. This involves corridors (number layers) that set minimums and maximums and some forms of transfer reductions if numbers of students in seats do not match expectations. Faculties, in turn, seek to increase student enrollment. Different Faculties at Western receive different amounts of financial transfers per student. At present, Social Sciences receive fewer dollars per capita than most other Faculties.

This funding model makes it difficult to properly fund Indigenous Studies for three reasons:

1. There are a lot of demands for the budget allocation in Social Science and Indigenous Studies (IS) does not have large enrollments that would justify higher spending. This means that Indigenous Studies is prevented from hiring more instructors and offering more courses until it attracts more student enrollment. However, the ISP cannot attract and effectively teach more students without more faculty and curricular development. As a result, Indigenous Studies is currently locked in a repeating cycle that is hindering its growth. It will be important to shift thinking on the funding of Indigenous Studies by

creating a special central budget to transfer to grow and maintain IS. This is justified by the second reason.

2. Indigenous Studies will attain its desired goal of building numbers, increasing recognition, and advancing quality and prestige by prompting senior leadership to realize that these goals are achievable with a special approach that addresses the unique situation vis-a-vis programming. Indigenous pedagogies prioritize land-based and community-based learning, which requires larger budgets and smaller class sizes. These educational experiences are deeply enriching and highly in demand, but they require funding commitments on the part of the university. Additionally, to enhance student experience, build proper links to local Indigenous communities, organizations and urban neighbors, faculty in the program must invest many hours over and above classroom and basic research time. There is a partnership-building component that has its own timetable and requires extra effort. The unique needs of Indigenous students, including the demands of navigating a westernized institution along with cultural, economic, and social barriers to education, mean there are increased hours of student contact required on the part of faculty. In short faculty in IS need reduced loads to free time for the specialized work of building research, related work in the community and quality time with Indigenous students to position them for success. That means increased hiring of both faculty and staff. These contingencies require special funding, not based on numbers, but based on the mission. Indigenous Studies should be the heart of Western's commitment to Indigenization and Reconciliation, and it therefore must be resourced accordingly.
3. A top quality, prestige program requires the specialized work described in point 2 above but there are also several interplays involved. Attracting top Indigenous scholars who can mentor students and publish high quality research is very difficult given the competitive situation in Canada. To be successful, we must offer a working environment that is attractive and reasonable. Any Indigenous scholar will explain that there is another dimension to the increased workload over and above work with students and the partnerships with the outside community, and that is the much higher service component. This includes the many requests to advise, sit on committees, help build programs and push the Indigenization project. We have to offer quality professors a working environment that takes all this into account and lightens loads. That requires alternate funding models.

Broad Brush Strokes: Key areas for development identified by ISP stakeholders.

- **Expanding and consolidating course offerings to be better positioned for growth including the creation of mutually beneficial partnerships with academic units to strengthen program development through reciprocated double major offerings and developing a reputation for excellence in Undergraduate Indigenous community-based research training.** We will increase the prominence of Indigenous Studies within Western's Undergraduate Degree content through for example creating an Honors B.A. in Indigenous

Studies. A distinguishing feature of this degree will be a specialty in Indigenous research (third and fourth years) that prepares students for grad school, the policy sector, the community sector etc. Located in proximity to several vital Indigenous communities and with faculty with strong connections to these communities, the ISP is well positioned to develop more courses in this regard. In a similar vein, discussions have begun with the Department of Earth Sciences to create a partnership with Indigenous Studies in the form of a double major in Environmental Science and Indigenous Studies. This will be done in a mutually beneficial way to ensure growth in ISP enrolments.

- **Strengthen community relations:** This will be achieved in a number of ways through an Indigenous research specialization that creates pathways for students to work with local Indigenous communities, micro-credentials available to Indigenous community members who wish to engage in life-long learning through Western's ISP, (for example Band Governance Skills), collaborating with Indigenous communities around language offerings, engagement of local traditional knowledge keepers and Elders in program activities and teaching, formation of an ISP steering group comprised of university and community representatives.
- **For Profit Lifelong learning/ professional development courses offered by the ISP:** There are a variety of courses that could channel money directly to ISP. Suggestions include "How to be a good ally course" or a revamping of the Winter schools (which through partnering with Indigenous communities and knowledge keepers, focus on developing understanding of Land-based learning and allyship skills in non-Indigenous faculty and staff) and even some of the course offerings at the 1000 level.
- **Becoming a hub of interdisciplinary scholarly excellence in Indigenous Studies:** The ISP is resourced to become a hub for interdisciplinary faculty engaged in Indigenous studies to support Indigenous research and pedagogical development. This would include a close alignment with the Western's Indigenous research strategy and associated resourcing to support research as well as fostering stronger relationships with the Faculty of Education's Indigenous Education Office as a unique hub of Indigenous expertise at Western. Given the potential engagement with other faculty members across the campus and the critical importance of including these voices, this raises the issue of where the ISP or the emerging larger academic Indigenous Studies unit would be best housed.
- **Develop a robust organizational structure to support growth.** This move will support the resourcing, programmatic growth, sovereignty, and integrity of Indigenous Studies as an academic unit. Possible organizational structures include and are not limited to: department, center, or institute. A transition in a timely manner to such a structure is imperative for growth, faculty retention and providing students with an optimum learning environment⁵.

⁵ A key means of facilitating this would be for the Provost, OII VP and VP Research to work on this with the ISP Director at the centre and other Indigenous leads to determine the best organizational structure to support growth.

Growth and Integrity of the Program

Maintaining the values, culture and integrity of the Indigenous Studies Program is critical to serving our students and local communities. This will require a well-organized and coherent approach to further prioritization of IS programmatic themes and future academic planning. Ongoing strategic development must be culturally, environmentally, economically, and relationally sustainable. It must enrich our learning environments and serve the unique needs of Indigenous students and non-Indigenous students while attending to the distinctiveness of the Program's three streams of Learners.

What our students say: "Students first – System Second!"

Coming clearly through from our discussions with students and community is the need for a radical re-orientation of the Indigenous studies program so that students and particularly Indigenous students come first, rather than the system!

In their own words:

What does Indigenous Studies mean to us? It means:

- PERSONAL EXPERIENCE
- RECONNECTING
- BUILDING COMMUNITY

How do we learn best?

- When our learning is prioritized
- When Indigenous Studies is recognized as multi-disciplinary and more land and community-based opportunities are available to us.
- When local community members teach community-based courses
- When local knowledges and tradition holders are recognized (and made available to us on the same level as academics who have earned their PhDs)
- A culturally sensitive, safe, and well-informed classroom environment
- Building class community and incorporating Indigenous methodologies to ensure this.

What do we want?

- All professors teaching subjects involving Indigenous content to be required to have diversity and inclusion training to foster safe and culturally sensitive environments
- More multi-disciplinary growth

- *More course offerings within the program to avoid the unnecessary stress of special permission requirements*
- *Hire more local Indigenous community members to facilitate courses that are centred around Indigenous knowledges and methodologies*
- *More and consistent recognition of Elders and Knowledge keepers as course instructors*

Summing Things Up: *“Western must make the necessary steps towards supporting Indigenous Peoples within the institution and true reconciliation more broadly”.*

Migwech, Yaw^ko, thank you from Olivia Thom and Chantel Jamieson on behalf of the ISP student Focus group.



Students enjoy a canoe trip during a community-based course

Beyond Broad Brush Strokes: Identified areas for action.

The mandate for the following action areas on themes is drawn directly from six key talking circles held at the community-university strategic planning event on April 27th at Wampum Learning Lodge.

Serving Students Circle

Two major themes were articulated within the Serving Students Talking Circle. The first relates to academic rigidity in relation to grading and evaluation which often runs counter to the relational and holistic approach that is taken within Indigenous Studies as a field. While it is essential to set students up for success in the rest of their academic career, it is recognized that courses within Indigenous Studies are heavily oriented towards shaping the individual and their role within society, especially with students who are Indigenous. Some participants discussed alternative methods of evaluation which are being tested within high schools such as creative outputs that are still informed by scholarship or a consideration of the material that is presented within the classroom. A current student who participated in the Talking Circle noted “it’s clear how much more confining and rigorous marking rubrics have become. They’re an administrative convenience, to buffer profs from appeals; and there are some students that like certainty [...] but this shows the university does not like you thinking outside the box. [...] There has to be a way to acknowledge creativity – creativity is currently not rewarded under the current rubric system.” As a key point, it was noted that *“there is a need for alternative approaches to evaluation, as students are currently forced into a single system that serves the university more than the student. Creative is stifled, and barriers to more holistic and relational learning opportunities are kept in place”*.

A second theme was the role of Indigenous Studies for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, noting any differences and any similarities to the approach taken or the end results. Firstly, it was recognized that high staff turnovers hurt mentorship opportunities, especially in relation to Indigenous faculty members, who often have additional responsibilities to support Indigenous students who are working their way through academia, often as first-generation post-secondary students. Non-Indigenous students benefit from Indigenous Studies by being presented with decolonized methodologies that could be implemented into other facets of society and their eventual workplaces. Indigenous students in the Talking Circle discussed concerns about having to apply their lived experience as a teaching resource for their fellow students or even their professor, not allowing them the same chance to strictly learn as their colleagues have. Indigenous students also mentioned that Indigenous Studies is more than an academic discipline – it is a way for them to situate themselves as people and to better comprehend their lived experiences to further instigate change within society. One remark was *“Indigenous Studies is where we feel safe, we see ourselves reflected in the curriculum, we can be authentically ourselves without having to fit a mold that we might otherwise have to across the university.”* It was recognized that Indigenous Studies cannot just be a department, but a community that focuses on the student holistically, not just their learning.

Priority areas:

- Provide alternative forms of evaluation which support holistic and relational learning.
- Take steps to preserve mentorship opportunities to Indigenous Students through preventing high faculty turnover.
- Ensure a safe and rich learning environment for Indigenous students through decolonizing pedagogies.

Serving Community Circle

Historically the ISP at Western has not been able to enjoy close relationships with Deshkan Ziibi's local Indigenous communities. Fortunately, members of our local Indigenous communities and other Indigenous peoples from other parts of Turtle Island and representatives from community-based organizations turned up for the day and had plenty of ideas to contribute about how the ISP at Western could better serve local Indigenous communities. Here are the priorities they identified:

Priority areas:

- Micro-credentials that would lead up to full degrees
 - For example, Bookkeeping is the basis for CPA;
 - Gain certain skills that would help you in your job and do your job better.
 - More flexible learning opportunities bringing community members to campus.
- Supporting youth already here or coming
 - Tuition, grants, Mini U, housing
 - Mental health supports; different/accessible pathways for Indigenous students
- Supporting and integrating community (bringing community in more)
 - Elder and Knowledge-Keepers
 - Compensating Indigenous Knowledge
 - More flexible entry points (micro-credentials, events, ceremonies, etc.)
 - Outreach to community
 - More support in community

Serving Indigenous Faculty, Research, and Scholarship

The members of this session noted the importance of recognizing that many scholars at Western may understand their research as informed by and/or participating in Indigenous studies scholarship even when they are not formally a part of the Indigenous Studies Program (ISP). As the Indigenous Studies Program grows in the future, it has the potential to serve as hub of connection for these scholars while also recognizing and supporting that Indigenous Studies at Western lives both inside and beyond the program itself. In this sense, the ISP might fruitfully consider itself as one of multiple hubs for Indigenous faculty research, teaching, and service across campus and work to build strong networks between and amongst these other hubs. Identifying those hubs

across campus and holding targeted discussions about how collaboration might occur would be one way of helping the ISP program to not have to work in isolation and to have the added support of Indigenous faculty from across the university.

One key example would be the already existing hub of Indigenous scholars situated in the Faculty of Education affiliated with the Office of Indigenous Education. Indigenous scholars in the Faculty of Education are ready and keen to work towards building strong bridges between ISP and Education, specifically with a view toward collaborating on an MA graduate program (between Indigenous Studies and Indigenous Education). Both Indigenous Education (IE) and Indigenous Studies (IS) have full-time faculty members to staff an MA program containing two streams with one in each of IE and IS (e.g., two compulsory intro courses; one or two methodology courses and electives shared between IE and IS). Indigenous Education has communicated readiness to collaborate and identified minimum enrolment concerns as a primary issue for going on its own. The new MA program has potential to produce graduate students who could work with faculty members (e.g., graduate student supervision, research assistants and/or Highly Qualified Personnel for Tri-Council applications). If successful, the MA could set the pathway for a later collaboration on a collaborative PhD program. Note: IE has several faculty members with training in IS (i.e., they hold undergraduate degrees in Indigenous Studies and/or have prior experience teaching IS courses)⁶.

Such collaborations could potentially also expand to arguments for sharing support staff across multiple hubs of Indigenous excellence across campus. Indigenous faculty at this session noted the need for Dedicated full-time staffing supports need to be created and made available for the sole function of supporting Indigenous faculty members on entry-level administrative labor (e.g., submitting travel receipts for online reimbursement and processing; completing ROLA submissions; assist with online input of TRI-Council applications, etc.). IS would likely need to establish a sharing agreement with other faculties/departments and perhaps the position(s) could be housed in the Office of Indigenous Initiatives.

Key priorities:

- ISP can strengthen itself by fostering strategic collaborations with other hubs of Indigenous research and teaching strength across campus. Identifying these hubs and initiating specific conversations about ways that ISP and those other hubs can collaborate would be helpful.
- ISP can in part work to address its chronic under-resourcing by building these relationships with other hubs and arguing together for dedicated administrative support staff, funding for faculty, and funding for an annual Indigenous faculty retreat.
- ISP needs to departmentalize to be able to grow.

⁶ The Faculty of Education has offered a longstanding Indigenous Masters Professional Educational Leadership Program (MPED) community-based since 2008. This program is not a research-intensive graduate program, and there is demand and value in building collaborations on research intensive graduate programming



Students learn from an Indigenous faculty member

Curriculum Development

The curriculum development talking circle was well-attended by participants at the April 27th Strategic Planning event. Nine participants took part in the hour-long discussion, and participants varied from members of the local Indigenous communities (Kettle and Stony Point, Munsee Delaware, Urban community in London), to university staff, faculty, and administration (Indigenous pedagogy and curriculum advisor, linguistics professor and Vice Provost Academics).

Each participant had an opportunity to speak, and the themes focused on two key areas: enhancing curriculum in Indigenous Studies and navigating university expectations while ensuring cultural safety. Both themes are interconnected, as the curriculum should present a safe pathway for Indigenous students pursuing their degree.

All participants agreed that the curriculum is the bedrock of any growth in the program. The discussion centred on revitalizing Indigenous languages through course offerings, and the unique nature of Indigenous Knowledge systems and realities should be at the core of IS curriculum.

Key priorities:

- IS should develop a curriculum that will prepare students for the world after graduation and prepares them to give back to their communities. This can be done by using local

community experiences as the hub Indigenous pedagogy and expand to international Indigenous experiences as students progress through their modules.

- Develop a curriculum that will form the foundation for growth as an academic unit. This can be achieved by enhancing curriculum to complement IS faculty strengths. IS curriculum development will simultaneously align with the modular streams: 1. Language, Arts & Culture, 2. Environment, Health & Wellness, 3. Policy & Governance, and 4. Indigenous Methodologies.
- Curriculum development should align with the strengths and areas of potential growth with other academic units at UWO. An example is focusing on Indigenous languages, a process that could align with Linguistics at UWO.

Continuous Quality Assurance

With respect to quality assurance for the Indigenous Studies Program, our circle discussions centered around the steps that could be taken to ensure that the ISP is serving students well in the long-term. The group reflected extensively on the experiences students have in the education system in general and what they had heard during the presentation from current ISP students earlier in the day. The group discussed the need to approach Indigenous studies from an anti-racist and anti-colonial perspective and that to do this it would be essential to secure the resources to properly train instructors (and ensure that there can be ongoing assessments of instructors as well as opportunities for lifelong learning/professional development).

We also heard about the importance of supporting different learning/teaching styles in the program. It was suggested that the ISP should support instructors to deliver course content in the most effective way possible (by, for example, encouraging flexibility, alternative assessments, new ways of teaching, and embracing Indigenous methodologies). In terms of long-term challenges, the group reflected on the possibility of ISP becoming a department. The group acknowledged this as a possibility but cautioned that this should be pursued in a way that does not undermine the integrity or values of the program. For example, what might the growth of the ISP mean in terms of class sizes, student/professor ratio, etc.

Key Priorities

- Long term funding for instructor training/education. Opportunities for lifelong learning/professional development is essential. Training should be continuous, long-term and involve ongoing and consistent assessment.
- Sufficient resources for teachers to allow course content to be delivered in unique ways.
- ISP should ensure that they increase the scale of the program in a way that maintains the integrity and values of Indigenous studies.

Culture and Values in Indigenous studies

The participant⁷ in this talking circle responded to the theme by saying that it all comes down to money. To provide students with culturally based education, educators need to bring in Elders and community members to provide cultural expertise outside of the knowledge and experiences that the full-time instructors do not carry. However, the participant indicated that there is currently poor institutional support and financial compensation mechanisms for adequate compensation of the kinds of cultural experts, such as Elders, Bead workers, etc. required to provide adequate culturally based education. The participant contended that, *“If someone is a Knowledge Keeper, we need to value them the same way we value a tenured professor; there shouldn’t be pushback to paying Knowledge Keepers what they’re worth.”* The complicated institutional mechanisms to financial compensation compromise the ability of Indigenous Studies to provide cultural-based learning opportunities. Additionally, the participant suggested that these kinds of financial barriers have negative consequences on providing Indigenous education rooted in culture and values. They state that the identity of Indigenous Studies is compromised because, *“we can’t build that identity without that financial support and support from Human Resources.”*

This inability to deliver community-based experts to augment the expertise of part and full-time instructors compromises Indigenous Studies Program’s ability to provide Indigenous Studies based learning.

The participant pointed out that students’ desire land-based education and alternative modes of education that prioritize and embody Indigenous culture. Learning on the land is more holistic; students want the learning they do on campus to emulate the learning they do outside the university, which is difficult because of the colonial structure of the university. Further, faculty, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous recognize the need provide these Indigenous Studies-based approaches to learning, which provides students and authentic Indigenous Studies experience to learning Indigenous knowledge. For students, it is about emersion inside the Indigenous worldviews, as well as Indigenous teaching methods and methodologies, that are uniquely housed within the Indigenous Studies program.

The participant notes that the Indigenous Studies program needs to work on grounding its identity within Indigeneity, Indigenous cultures, values, and ethics. The participant noted that for many years the Indigenous Studies program at Western has just floated around and felt ungrounded; by focusing on culture and values, we can give the program direction. The participant offered that visioning a three, five year and twenty-year plan might be advisable. They asked, *“What do we want Indigenous Studies to look like in 20 years?”* Creating a working group including the administration, faculty, community, and the students could offer valuable input from all sectors, so that they everyone is part of actions of seeing Indigenous studies grow.

⁷ This talking circle was attended by one participant. Therefore the session was more like a discussion between the facilitator and the participant, with a note taker present.

Key Priorities

- ISP to create a formal statement on the core cultural values and practices of the Program.
- Much stronger inclusion of Elders, cultural experts, land-based learning, and respect for cultural knowledge within the institution to facilitate culturally appropriate Indigenous education, and ensure a safe working environment for educators, staff, and students.

Members of the Indigenous Studies Program Strategic Planning Advisory Group

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Development of the Strategic Foundations report has been overseen by the Indigenous Studies Program Strategic Planning Advisory Group.



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