

# Reconciliation and Indigenous Initiatives at Ontario Tech University: Status Report

## Spring 2020 to Fall 2022

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## Introduction

This *Status Report* provides an update on the activities of the President's Indigenous Reconciliation Task Force, its various working groups, and other Indigenous initiatives and activities that took place at Ontario Tech University between Spring 2020 through to Fall 2022. These activities ranged from continuations of work described in the previous status update ([Presidents' Indigenous Reconciliation Task Force Status Report](#) (R. Ariss, May 6, 2020)) to the launch of two new working groups (Communications and Governance), along with the activities of some other units within the university. This work is informed by the guiding principles outlined in the September 2020 [President's Indigenous Reconciliation Task Force Strategic Plan](#).

## Executive Summary

As articulated in the previous *Status Report*, the Task Force continues to consult with the Indigenous Education Advisory Circle to identify strategies (both new and ongoing) that will help advance Ontario Tech University's responses to the [Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action](#). However, the Task Force composition has undergone significant change since it was originally established; we welcomed many new members, but also felt the loss of several key departures during this period. Given this turnover in membership, consideration should be given to ensuring that all members once again arrive at a shared understanding of both the truth of "Truth and Reconciliation," as well as what reconciliation actually means. In other words, we want to ensure that our work is infused with a sense of urgency and commitment. Recommendations to explore similar activities as were undertaken previously (such as a retreat, keynote speakers, etc.) may follow.

## Transitions

As noted above, the Task Force witnessed many comings and goings amongst its members. In January 2021, *Rachel Ariss* stepped down as co-chair of the Task Force and Indigenous Education Advisory Circle (IEAC) and *Catherine Davidson* stepped into that role, continuing to work with co-chair *Greer Atkinson*. In September 2021, Greer announced that she would be taking on a new role and leaving the Task Force and IEAC. Members were grateful to learn shortly thereafter that the inaugural co-chair, *Art Beaver*, had offered to return to help steer the Task Force's efforts until a new Indigenous co-chair could be identified. Art's characteristic generosity of spirit melded with strongly held opinions firmly delivered invigorated the members. His untimely death a few short months later was felt deeply by all members of the community. As of October 1, 2022, *Julie Pigeon* became the new community-based co-chair to join new university-based co-chair, *Alyson King*, who assumed that role on July 1, 2022.

The Indigenous Education and Cultural Services (IECS) team lost two key members of its staff, including Knowledge Keeper, *Rick Bourque*. This news is perhaps not surprising when considering the heavy burden that is borne on the shoulders of a small few. These departures reflect similar patterns witnessed in higher education across the country. These are critical

vacancies that will be filled as continued advocacy for expanded Indigenous presence amongst students, staff and faculty lies at the heart of at least two of the Task Force working groups. Progress is being made in this regard with postings for an Indigenous Programming Facilitator. The University is indebted to all the IECS staff for their many contributions and sharing of their wisdom and knowledge.

In 2020, the Indigenous Education Advisory Circle advised that the Indigenous Community Engagement Coordinator position will be critical in ensuring meaningful relationship building with community. That position resulted in the successful recruitment of *Alyssa McLeod* who has made great strides in connecting with potential students at community-oriented and school-based events. In addition, *Kaitlyn Watson*, a Faculty Development Officer with the Teaching and Learning Centre, who has a focus on equity, decolonization, and reconciliation, has joined the Task Force and developed a Community of Practice for instructors and other members of the university community interested in learning how to integrate Indigenous content into their courses and activities.

## **Meetings**

The Task Force met on the following dates, while working groups met frequently in between the full meetings: March 12, 2020, May 27, 2020, June 29, 2020, November 4, 2020, April 27, 2021, June 22, 2021, September 21, 2021, March 2, 2022. During these meetings, good progress has been made towards achieving the goals outlined in the President's Indigenous Reconciliation Task Force Strategic Plan (Sept. 2020). Over the upcoming academic year, the PIRTF will transition to being a Standing Committee under the Provost's office. Proposed Terms of Reference for the new Standing Committee were developed by the Governance working group. As the Task Force transitions to a Standing Committee, meetings will occur quarterly (unless urgent matters arise).

## **Significant institutional accomplishments**

In the President's Indigenous Reconciliation Task Force Strategic Plan (September 2020), five priority areas were listed. Progress continues to be made to meet goals within those areas. As outlined in the previous status report, five working groups were established to advance the goals outlined in the Strategic Plan. The working groups are: Visual and Artistic Representation; Indigenous Student Presence on Campus; Training for Staff and Faculty; Increasing Indigenous Staff and Faculty Presence on Campus; Inclusion of Indigenous Topics, Perspectives and Ways of Knowing across Curricula. Two new working groups were formed in 2021 to assist with new needs: Governance and Communications. The following information is organized around the goals articulated in the strategic plan, plus two new areas.

## **Visual and artistic representation that acknowledges and celebrates Indigenous cultures is embedded and integrated throughout the university's built and online environment**

Very good progress has been made to bring in visual and artistic representation that acknowledges and celebrates Indigenous cultures across the university.

1. The naming of the newest building on campus, Shawenjigewining (pronounced: "*zha-wen-ji-GEH'-win-ing*") Hall, <https://ontariotechu.ca/about/campus-buildings/north-oshawa/shawenjigewining-hall.php>. A building naming ceremony, led by Elder Dorothy, was held June 29, 2021. Rick Bourque and Dorothy Taylor explain the origins of the name Shawenjigewining (the place of kindness) in [this video](#). Shawenjigewining is an Anishinaabe word meaning the 'place of kindness'. The name was first determined by Dorothy Taylor, a Mississauga Anishinaabe Elder from Curve Lake First Nation and Rick Bourque, Traditional Knowledge Keeper at Ontario Tech. While conducting a Sweat Lodge ceremony, Bourque had a vision of a deer and arrows crossed. He later shared the vision with Elder Taylor who interpreted the vision and the name Shawenjigewining, a place of kindness and friendship, was revealed."
2. Completion of a new space for Mukwa's Den in Shawenjigewining Hall. Mukwa's Den is an Indigenous space that provides a "home away from home for Indigenous students, and space for all students to connect and learn from Indigenous culture and resources."
3. Inside Mukwa's Den and Shawenjigewining Hall are several installations of Indigenous art. Three loon quilts made by Alice Williams were purchased and installed in Mukwa's Den. In addition, a Birch tree film has been added to the windows in Mukwa's Den and a mural has been installed near Mukwa's Den. (See Appendix A for images.)
4. Dreamcatchers were created by Rick Bourque for the Library (see the video Gifts of the Dreamcatcher, by Rick Bourque, 2020, [Click to view](#). The video is only available to members of Ontario Tech University).
5. The FSSH has purchased Indigenous art to be hung in the newly renovated Charles Hall at the downtown campus. Art was selected by working group members Jill Thompson, Rachel Ariss and Alyson King. (See Appendix B for images.)
6. Several pieces of art by Indigenous artists were donated to the university by Bonnie Greer, Cobourg, ON. The cost for reframing these pieces was covered by the budget allocation for visual representation. (See Appendix B for images.)
7. Work continues with regards to the installation of a canoe that will be displayed in Shawenjigewining Hall and the university's plans for the Moccasin Identifier project on campus. The University is also represented on the Durham Region's Moccasin Identifier project initiative by task force members Jill Thompson, Alyssa McLeod, and Catherine Davidson.

## **A post-secondary experience and education at Ontario Tech University that is desirable, accessible and attainable for Indigenous learners.**

1. Alyssa McLeod, Indigenous Community Engagement Coordinator, was welcomed to the Task Force in April 2021. She has been engaged in School Board and Community Outreach as well as recruitment activities, such as:

- a. Pathway Information Session (collaboration with partner post-secondary institutions, such as Durham College and Trent University).
  - b. Lunch and Learn sessions with Indigenous Student Circles within Durham District and Durham Catholic School Boards.
  - c. Webinars and Information session for Indigenous Prospective Students and Guidance counsellors in collaboration with the Office of the Registrar as well as partner school districts, such as Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board and Durham District School Boards.
    - i. Conversion Calls as part of the recruitment cycle for 2023-2024 Indigenous Student leads/prospective students
    - ii. There was an increase in Indigenous applications for 2022-23; six of which were through the Indigenous Admissions Consideration.
  - d. Facilitating connections between Ontario Tech Engineering Outreach and Connected North to offer workshops to northern remote communities.
  - e. Language workshop facilitation for internal Ontario Tech initiatives, such as the SHAD program, which welcomed over 50 high-school students to participate in unique learning experiences in STEM, as well as Turtle Island Camp offered through continuous learning.
  - f. Participating in the Aboriginal Post-Secondary Information Program Fall Tour (2022) including regions within the Williams Treaties territory, communities with significant Indigenous population as well as communities that Ontario Tech has received applications from in the past: Greater Toronto Area, Six Nations; Eastern Ontario; North Bay, Pembroke and Renfrew County District, as well as Orillia.
  - g. Responding to inquiries and participating in events relating to career and/or education fairs in First Nation communities and/or local school boards (Curve Lake First Nation; Durham Catholic District School Board).
  - h. Coordinating and collaborating with Faculties across the university to host and welcome First Nation, Métis and Inuit youth for campus tours and campus visits (Moose Cree First Nation; Durham District School Boards).
  - i. Increasing presence at local community events such as Pow-wows and Métis Heritage Celebration by sponsoring and/or setting up info booths to raise awareness of community-based programming and educational pathways through Ontario Tech. Participation from IECS to support and create learning opportunities for the Age-Friendly committee.
2. Active involvement and participation in community advisory circles with Durham District School Boards, Durham Region Aboriginal Advisory Circle, Bawaajigewin Aboriginal Community Circle, and Ontario Power Generation's Centre For Canadian Nuclear Sustainability.
  3. Creation and launch of the Indigenous Studies Minor program.

## **Ontario Tech University has a sustainable capacity to increase awareness and understanding related to Indigenous peoples and their histories across the entire campus community**

1. The pilot of the *4 Seasons of Reconciliation* went well and is now available for all faculty and staff in the university. Over 300 staff have undertaken the training to date.
2. Creation of a Community of Practice (CoP) for all members of the university to discuss and support efforts to Indigenize higher education. Organized and led by Dr. Kaitlyn Watson (Teaching & Learning Centre), the CoP has had one retreat and has held regular meetings with guest speakers and discussions. Approximately 20 people have been in regular attendance.
3. On February 14, 2022, the joint Ontario Tech/Durham College book club read the *Highway of Tears* as part of the ReDress/MMIWG2S+ memorial. There would have been a march if this event had taken place in-person, but instead this was held online. There was a guest speaker and the book club was launched with 43 people in attendance. The book club, Bannock & Books, is facilitated by the IECS in partnership with Durham College. Three additional book club meetings and sharing circles have been held: *21 Things You May Not Know About the Indian Act* by Bob Joseph; *Beyond the Orange Shirt Story* by Phyllis Webstad; and, *Unreconciled: Family, Truth, and Indigenous Resistance* by Jesse Wenthe.
4. Land Acknowledgement training video with Kim Wheatley: <https://studentlife.ontariotechu.ca/services/community/indigenous/land-acknowledgement/> . This project is ongoing.
5. National Day of Truth & Reconciliation and Orange Shirt Day (Sept. 30).
  - a. In 2021, a series of events included the screening of *Indian Horse* in the DC Global Classroom (and an option to view online) with a sharing circle following. Kaitlyn Watson held the inaugural Community of Practice meeting with approximately 65 attendees. Throughout the week, members of the university community were asked to write how they plan to work towards to reconciliation on tiny orange shirts cut outs.
  - b. In 2022, a week of events occurred, including:
    - i. Dr. Peter Bryce exhibit at the north campus Library, with Dr. Amber DVA Johnson as the guest speaker for the opening session;
    - ii. A virtual tour of the Mohawk Institute, one residential school that operated from 1831-1970 in Brantford, Ontario;
    - iii. The Project of Heart, with Mary Kelly speaking about her experiences at the Fort Frances residential school and Nancy Hamer-Strahl running the workshop;
    - iv. Special session for Indigenous students only at Shawenjigewining Hall;
    - v. Discussion of how settlers can think about reconciliation within Ontario Tech University and next steps.
6. Dr. Deborah McGregor (Canada Research Chair on Indigenous Environmental Justice) gave a talk about “Earth-based Reconciliation for Planetary Well Being” (FSSH Dean’s Public Lecture series, Oct. 18, 2022).

7. The IECS was a co-sponsor of the Indigenous Creative Arts Showcase at the Robert McLaughlin Gallery (Oct. 27, 2022), in partnership with Durham Region Public Libraries, the Region of Durham, Durham College, the DCSA, DDSB and DDCSB; 250 people attended the event.
8. Treaties Recognition Week (November)
  - a. In 2020, events included a virtual discussion on treaty-making in Canada called As Long as the Sun Shines and the Rivers Flow. Chief Kelly LaRocca, Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation, and Chief Dave Mowat, Alderville First Nation, discussed the history of treaty-making and recent renegotiation of treaties covering the lands where Ontario Tech University is situated.
  - b. In 2022, a Moccasin Identifier Project event was held, as part of Treaties Recognition Week, on November 8, 2022. Dr. Carolyn King, former Chief of the Credit First Nation, and current Chief Dave Mowat of Alderville First Nation, discussed the significant cultural historic sites and the ancestral presence of First Nations, Métis, and Indigenous communities. This was followed by an opportunity to participate in the stenciling of moccasins outside the library.

**Ontario Tech University is an employer and scholarly community of choice for Indigenous staff and faculty, including adjunct and sessional faculty.**

1. Alyssa McLeod, Indigenous Community Engagement Coordinator, was welcomed to the Task Force in April 2021. She is based in the Indigenous Education and Cultural Services in Student Life, and partners with colleagues across the university on outreach and recruitment activities.
2. A search for an Indigenous Programming Facilitator is underway.
3. A search for a new Indigenous tenure-track faculty member to support the newly created Indigenous Studies Minor began in Fall 2022. The IECS is consulting on the hiring process.
4. The Indigenous Studies Dissertation Completion Fellowship is continuing. In 2023, the Fellow will offer a new Indigenous studies course from the Minor program in addition to an introductory first year course on Indigenous studies. The current Fellow is Malinda Gray (2021-2023).
5. An effort to attract an Indigenous scholar for a Canada Research Chair in Green Criminology was not successful.
6. The IECS is developing several Indigenous workshops for the Human Resources professional development catalogue.

**An academic culture that is committed to fulfilling the TRC Calls to Action, particularly through enhancing curricula.**

1. The Indigenous Studies Minor program was created by a cross-university committee (chaired by Alyson King) and approved by Academic Council in Winter 2022. Courses will begin in Fall 2022.

2. The Indigenous Studies Dissertation Completion Fellowship has continued. In Winter 2023, the fellow will offer a new Indigenous studies course from the Minor program in addition to an introductory first-year course on Indigenous studies
3. In the Fall and Winter sessions of each year, the IECS staff host a Visiting Elder or Knowledge Keeper to visit classrooms, meet with the university community, and share their knowledge.
4. The IEAC has continued with a consultation protocol to inform and guide the Ontario Tech community to help ensure that Indigenous community members have a role in decision-making and that the Ontario Tech community builds relationships.
5. The Faculty of Engineering and Applied Science (FEAS) has added two Indigenous modules to their first year ENGR 1015U: Introduction to Engineering course. The modules will cover an introduction to Indigenous histories in Canada and the responsibility of engineers to consult and work with Indigenous peoples. This is a core course taken by all FEAS students.

### **Communications**

1. The communications working group was tasked with creating a hub-style web presence that brings together the disparate webpages related to Indigenization within the university and the PIRTF in one place.

### **Governance**

1. The main task for the Governance working group has been to create the Terms of Reference for the Standing Committee that will replace the PIRTF. These are still under discussion before being finalized.

### **Challenges and Opportunities**

The Task Force will continue to support initiatives across the university. The IEAC and the Task Force will be developing an updated strategic plan. In order to be prepared for increases in Indigenous students, staff and faculty, intentional and thoughtful supports will need to be developed and improved. For example, thought must be given to whether or not adjustments to research supports and the tenure process will be needed with the hiring of a new tenure-track faculty member. Additionally, the Office of Research Services has noted a need for consultation and guidance on the research ethics process related to Indigenous research, partnerships and engagement with Indigenous communities, and other related activities. Other needs will become apparent as we move forward with Indigenous reconciliation and decolonizing efforts across the university.

As the Task Force moves through its transition to a Standing Committee, it will work to identify a streamlined structure whereby the core membership can benefit from the formation of offshoot working groups who will feed into the core committee. Similarly, Committee members can regularly consult with stakeholders (such as Research, Advancement, Office of Campus Infrastructure and Sustainability (OCIS)) as needed. The intent here is to ensure the Committee

works effectively with optimal representation while still benefitting from offshoot working groups' work – possibly a hub and spoke model. It is anticipated that the specifics of this new approach could be articulated and fleshed out in an upcoming retreat.

## **Acknowledgements**

As in previous years, the Indigenous Education and Cultural Services (IECS) staff members have continued to undertake much of the reconciliation work at Ontario Tech as part of their overarching mandate to support Indigenous students. Chi-Miigwetch to Jill Thompson, Alyssa McLeod, Rick Bourque, and their Director Sarah Rasile. Thank you to Anita Krupa for her ongoing administrative support of the Task Force and IEAC, and to all the members of the two groups. None of the work accomplished in the past, and in future, could be accomplished without the commitment and hard work of all the members.

*Alyson King (incoming co-chair) and Catherine Davidson (outgoing co-chair)*  
*President's Indigenous Reconciliation Task Force*  
*November 21, 2022*

## **Appendix A: Task Force and IEAC members**

### **Task Force membership (as of November 2020)**

Elder Shirley Williams	Krista Hester
Greer Atkinson (co-chair)	Lori Livingston (Provost)Theresa Miedema
Rachel Ariss (co-chair)	Tom McMorrow
Rick Bourque	Ryan Laurie
Carol Ducharme	Wesley Crichlow
Sarah Rasile	Mary-Anne Hoggarth
Catherine Davidson	Susan Forbes
Keeshia Barksdale	Anita Krupa
Jill Thompson	Shannon Bracken
Alena Shah	Colin Maracle

### **PIRTF Members (2022)**

Elder Shirley Williams	Meagan Muscat
Art Beaver (co-chair until his untimely death on April 16, 2022)	Rachel Ariss
Catherine Davidson (outgoing co-chair)	Rachel Radyk
Alyson King (co-chair as of July 2022)	Rebecca Maynard
Julie Pigeon (co-chair as of Oct. 2022)	Sarah Rasile
Alyssa Mcleod	Shannon Bracken
Anita Krupa	Stephanie Callahan
Jennifer Topping	Susan Forbes
Jill Thompson	Sylvia Lin
Kaitlyn Watson	Theresa Miedema
Keeshia Barksdale	Thomas McMorrow
Kelly Grenier	Toba Bryant
Lori Livingston (Provost)	Wesley Crichlow

### **Indigenous Education Advisory Circle membership (as of July 2022)**

*Elder Dorothy Taylor*

*Circle representatives:* James McKinnon, Jennifer Henderson, Julie Pigeon, Lisa George, Nancy Hamer-Strahl, Paul Zamiskis, Ryan Laurie (alumni), Rachel Radyk (alumni)

*Ontario Tech representatives:* Alyssa McLeod, Jill Thompson, Lori Livingston, Rachel Ariss, Rick Bourque, Sarah Rasile, Stephanie Callahan

*Co-Chairs:* Art Beaver (co-chair until his untimely death on April 16, 2022), Catherine Davidson (outgoing co-chair), Julie Pigeon (incoming co-chair), Alyson King (incoming co-chair)

*Administrative Support:* Anita Krupa

## Appendix B: Examples of visual and artistic representation on campus

### Art in Shawenjigewining Hall and Mukwa's Den



Three loon quilts made by [Alice Williams](#) were purchased and installed in Mukwa's Den.



Birch tree silhouette film on Mukwa's Den window.



Moccasin Identifier Project (ongoing)



Signage for Shawenjigewining Hall



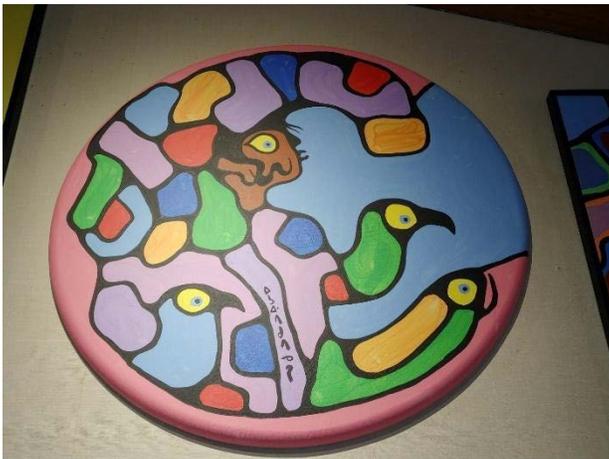
Mural outside Mukwa's Den

**Art in the Ontario Tech Library**



Owl dreamcatcher by Rick Bourque

**Art purchased by the Faculty of Social Science & Humanities for Charles Hall**



**Norval Morrisseau, Child  
Headdress (round)**



**Maxine Noel, Wolf Guardians**



**Freddy Taylor, Disturbance**



**Freddy Taylor, Paddle**



**Rick Beaver, There is  
Light In All Things**



**David Beaucage Johnson,  
Freedom**



## **2 Dreamcatchers**

Art donated by Bonnie Greer, Cobourg, ON



**Ken Mowatt, Weget's Wife** - Limited Edition Print (Edition of 50) (1976)



**Noah Sainnawap (1954-2005)**





**Daphne Odjig (1919-2016)**



**Beaded purse on deer hide. Artist unknown**