Moving Beyond Indigenous Self-Identification at Canadian Post-Secondaries

Summary Report

2023 National Indigenous Citizenship Forum

FIRST NATIONS UNIVERSITY OF CANADA

NIUSLA
NATIONAL INDIGENOUS UNIVERSITY SENIOR LEADERS' ASSOCIATION

Moving Beyond Indigenous Self-Identification at Canadian Post-Secondaries: Summary Report

of 2023 National Indigenous Citizenship Forum

March 21–22, 2023 Regina, Saskatchewan

oskana ka-asastēki

Treaty 4 Territory, the land of the Cree, Saulteaux, Dakota, Lakota, Nakoda, and homeland of the Métis Nation

Co-Hosted by:

FIRST NATIONS UNIVERSITY OF CANADA

The First Nations University of Canada (FNUniv) allows students of all nations to learn in an environment of First Nations cultures and values. Our university is a special place of learning where we recognize the spiritual power of knowledge and where Indigenous knowledges, ways of being, knowing, and doing are respected and promoted.

NIUSLA
NATIONAL INDIGENOUS UNIVERSITY SENIOR LEADERS' ASSOCIATION

The National Indigenous University Senior Leaders' Association (NIUSLA) exists to unite Indigenous senior university leaders from across Canada, supporting the advancement of Indigenous priorities and leadership within higher education.

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Message from Dr. Jacqueline Ottmann

President, FNUniv

Following the success of the inaugural Indigenous Identity Forum in 2022, FNUniv and NIUSLA were honoured to host the 2nd National Indigenous Citizenship Forum: *Moving Beyond Indigenous Self-identification at Canadian Post-secondaries* on March 21–22, 2023. Held in Treaty 4 Territory at the Hotel Saskatchewan in Regina, and online, this Indigenous-only space was dedicated to continuing essential discussions on wise practices for validating citizenship for Indigenous-specific opportunities in academic institutions.

The Forums brought together leaders, educators, Elders, graduate students and community members to navigate these complex issues with care, respect, and a willingness to learn from each other. The stories, collective wisdom and feedback shared will serve as a roadmap as we develop frameworks and implement policies across the nation that respect Indigenous citizenship and identity.

I extend my deepest gratitude to the Knowledge Keepers, Elders, and participants that attended and those that courageously shared their experiences and insights.

While challenges remain, our resolve and united stance will lead us forward. By learning from mistakes and fostering collaboration, transparency, and respect, we can ensure post-secondary institutions become spaces where Indigenous students, staff, and faculty thrive.

I look forward to continuing this vital work together.

ni-gichi naennimak ni-tiniwaymahgunuk / In honour of all my relatives.

Mizowaykomiguk paypomwayotung

Dr. Jacqueline Ottmann

About the Forum

Co-hosted by the First Nations University of Canada (FNUniv) and the National Indigenous University Senior Leaders' Association (NIUSLA), the 2023 National Indigenous Citizenship Forum brought together 285 Indigenous Elders, Knowledge Keepers, scholars, staff, and students from Canada and the United States in a hybrid format. This second annual Indigenous-only event focused on validating Indigenous identity for opportunities within Canadian post-secondary institutions.

Amid rising concerns over Indigenous identity fraud, the Forum provided a safe space for candid discussions, sharing experiences, and developing frameworks, principles, and guidelines to ensure Indigenous-specific opportunities benefit Indigenous peoples.

The dialogue which began at the previous year's Forum opened a space for academic institutions and this two-day gathering was held in an Indigenous only space designed to create a safe place to continue the conversation and featured panel discussions, keynote addresses, and intimate conversation circles, fostering collaboration to address critical issues in the era of Truth and Reconciliation and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

WANISKA!

Cree and Saulteaux - wake up

It is time to wake post-secondary institutions and collectively self-determine our Indigenous futures in postsecondary institutions and beyond.

It is time to awaken to our languages and knowledges, awaken to the land and stories of our ancestors and their visions for our thriving, sovereign, self-determined nations.

Collectively, Indigenous peoples will develop wise practices and provide pathways forward for postsecondary institutions grappling with issues of identity fraud to ensure academic opportunities intended for Indigenous peoples are reserved for Indigenous peoples.

Our Indigenous philosophies and teachings will guide a way forward because they are as applicable today as they were hundreds of years ago.

The Discussions

The Forum aimed to share and explore ways to move forward rather than prescribe solutions, focusing on recommendations and wise practices for Indigenous-specific opportunities in post-secondary institutions. By addressing false claims of Indigenous identity, keynote speakers and panelists offered insights and strategies to ensure dedicated resources benefit actual Indigenous peoples rather than fraudsters. These discussions are intended to guide post-secondary organizations and inform future practices.

Where Could We Go from Here?

Insights and Recommendations:

Michelle Cyca: Engage with media to effectively share stories. Provide journalists with the pertinent contextual information and prepare through media training to ensure clarity and accuracy in public communication.

Trina Roache: Treat media inquiries as opportunities to guide the narrative and connect journalists with the right sources. Recognize that these stories extend beyond academia and prepare for the discomfort of addressing them publicly.

Jean Teillet: Rely on truth and honesty when addressing identity claims. Require applicants—students, faculty, and staff—to sign declarations affirming the truth of their statements, with clear repercussions for dishonesty, including termination if necessary.

Keynote speakers and panelists were asked to address the questions:

> "If you were to create recommendations, what would these be?"
>
> "If there were a set of principles that should be considered, what would these be?"

Dr. Kim TallBear: Incorporate community affiliation requirements into scholarship, admission, and job applications to strengthen Indigenous representation. Universities must establish committees to vet identity claims and foster open conversations about Indigenous identity and citizenship, avoiding silence or resistance.

Dr. Jeffrey Ansloos: Use restorative justice to hold individuals accountable, requiring them to confront the harm caused by deception. Address concerns collectively as a community to avoid isolating individuals and mitigate backlash.

Dr. Adam Murry: Support institutions in navigating the emotional, spiritual, and institutional impacts of identity fraud. Balance the need to protect and reprimand, viewing harm done by Indigenous identity theft as an injury that requires institutional healing and recovery.

Elder Wanosts'a7 Lorna Williams: These conversations must take place in our communities, guided by Elders and rooted in the stories, songs, and knowledge of our people. These traditions teach us about generosity, kindness, and resilience, fostering connectivity, inclusion, and relationship-building. Indigenous leaders, such as Vice-Provosts and Provosts, bear immense pressure negotiating between two worlds and must be supported amid widespread anger, resentment, and pain.

Elder Joseph Naytowhow: Elders must remain vigilant and avoid complicity in harmful practices. Consulting with other Elders and exercising caution in challenging situations is essential.

Elder Reepa Evic-Carlton: This is a difficult topic, but we must remember who we are and draw strength from the teachings of our Elders to move forward.

Manon Tremblay: In Quebec, targeted positions for specific populations cannot be explicitly defined, so Indigenous roles must be framed carefully. False identity claims should be addressed as fraud—misrepresentation for personal gain—not merely identity misrepresentation.

Keisha Erwin (wapahkesis): Discussions on identity fraud must include legitimate Afro-Indigenous voices to address the intersections of race and nationhood. Mixed-race individuals are no less Indigenous, and normalizing this understanding is crucial.

Elder Maria Campbell: Lateral violence within universities must be addressed openly. Focusing solely on "pretendians" diverts attention from the harm we do to each other. Unity is needed to address systemic issues rather than fighting among ourselves. "We have to be respectful of opposing sides, sit down together and talk."

Rylan McCallum: Fraudulent individuals are often manipulative and strategic. Institutions should require all Indigenous students and faculty to sign declarations of honesty about their identity and hold individuals accountable for misrepresentation.

Natasha MacDonald: Fraud matters because it undermines authentic Indigenous representation. Institutions must enact top-down policy changes to demonstrate their commitment to reconciliation and genuine Indigenous recruitment. Public fraud cases should involve talking circles where individuals can explain discrepancies in their credentials, fostering accountability through respectful dialogue.

Conversation Circles and Online Survey

Forum participants shared recommendations and principles to help post-secondary institutions address false claims of Indigenous citizenship.

Key Recommendations

Policies:

- Develop policies that go beyond self-identification.
- Establish practices for validating Indigenous identity and addressing fraudulent claims.

Principles:

- Embed honesty, integrity, and accountability in hiring practices, guided by the Cree concept of *tapwewin*—living truthfully and authentically.

Decolonization:

- Use circle and ceremony in hiring processes to respectfully explore candidates' Indigeneity.

Presentations:

- Require candidates to present on their connection to community, family, roots, and traditions.

Elders:

- Involve Elders in assessing candidates' ties to land, community, and kinship.

Verification:

- Obtain applicants' written consent to verify their community affiliations and citizenship.

Community Engagement:

- Build relationships with nearby Indigenous communities to assist in identity validation.

Protections:

- Strengthen protections for whistleblowers reporting potential fraud.

Investigations:

- Ensure investigation processes are fair, transparent, evidence-based, and confidential.

Committees:

- Form advisory committees with Elders, Indigenous community members, and colleagues to guide investigations and minimize harm to whistleblowers that are bringing cases of pretendianism forward.

Training:

- Train hiring teams and review committees with external Indigenous experts. Ensure leaders engage in professional development, with discomfort recognized as part of the learning process.

Bargaining Units:

- Work with unions to amend collective agreements to support these processes.

Leadership:

- Hire respected Indigenous leaders at all levels and promote cluster hires to provide peer support.

Shared Resources:

- Create national repositories of best practices and legitimate Indigenous organizations for guidance and identity verification.

Donors:

- Encourage donations to fund Indigenous-specific scholarships, cultural spaces, student centers, and language labs.

Opening Remarks

Harvey Thunderchild from the University of Saskatchewan began the Forum with heartfelt opening comments, an honour song, and a prayer. His song was a gift to the attendees, welcoming the morning and offering strength and guidance for the day's unfolding discussions and reflections.

Denise Baxter, Vice-Provost of Indigenous Initiatives at Lakehead University, brought greetings from Treaty 9, Anishinabek Territory, extending warm hospitality **on behalf of NIUSLA**. She expressed gratitude for the privilege of co-hosting the Forum in 2022 and 2023 and provided a thoughtful overview of its purpose. The planning committee had engaged in deep, critical conversations about moving beyond the "self-identification box-checking" approach while avoiding the pitfalls of identity policing.

Dr. Jacqueline Ottmann opened her remarks in Nakawe (Saulteaux), introducing herself as a member of Fishing Lake First Nation in Treaty 4 territory. Speaking on behalf of the **First Nations University of Canada**, she acknowledged the spiritual guidance of Elders who conducted the morning pipe ceremony, which provided continuity throughout the Forum. Dr. Ottmann emphasized the necessity of keeping the Forum contained to Indigenous people in the post-secondary sector, honouring the diversity of Indigenous peoples and their unique ways of addressing cultural credentials.

Dr. Ottmann highlighted that addressing identity validation is uncharted and complex territory and requires forging new paths with courage and creativity, embracing the uncertainty and discomfort that come with transformative change. Ottmann also reminded the participants that Indigenous peoples have been asking each other 'Who are you?', 'Where do you come?' and 'Who are your people?' for hundreds and perhaps thousands of years. Questions like these initiate relationship and positionality.

To guide the Forum's exploration, participants were invited to consider two key questions:

1. If you were to create recommendations, what would these be?
2. What principles should be considered as foundational?

The spirit of *wâhkôhtowin*—emphasizing interconnectivity and all our relations—served as a guiding principle, reminding everyone of their shared responsibilities and mutual ties. She drew inspiration from Pueblo scholar Gregory Cajete, who observed, *"the child of chaos and order is creativity."*

In summary, the opening remarks set the tone with relationality, respect, and shared purpose. Noting that complex issues require creative responses and invited participants to contribute meaningfully to this vital and evolving conversation.

Conversation Circles

Forum participants engaged in smaller in-person and virtual conversation circles, offering spaces for more intimate and candid dialogue. To encourage openness and honesty, these discussions were not digitally recorded. Each circle was facilitated by a NIUSLA member, with key insights documented by student note-takers.

What challenges have been encountered in the shift from self-identification to other validation processes?

- **Complexity in Incorporation**: Integrating identity validation practices is complex due to intersections with human rights legislation, collective agreements, and administrative policies.
- **Lack of Support**: Gaining support from human resource departments, deans, and senior leadership in post-secondary institutions can be difficult.
- **Exposure of False Claims of Indigenous identity**: The exposure of individuals falsely claiming Indigenous identity can cause shock, disbelief, sadness and grief, creating tension between faculty and administration, profoundly impacting colleagues and students and causing harm in the community.
- **Diverse Validation Practices**: Some universities rely on self-identification, while others require status cards, which have their own issues, such as historical gender discrimination (Bill C-31).
- **Hesitancy and Trauma**: There is hesitancy to delve into identity validation due to fears of lateral violence and the traumatic nature of the verification process.
- **Non-Indigenous Administrators**: Non-Indigenous administrators may be uncomfortable implementing policies recommended by Indigenous people.
- **False Identity Cards**: The availability of false Indigenous identity cards from illegitimate organizations complicates the validation process.
- **Geographic Challenges**: Verifying identity claims is particularly challenging in areas that are not the homeland of Métis and Inuit peoples.
- **Gender Discrimination and Colonial Laws**: Historical gender discriminatory practices and colonial laws have resulted in lost connections to community and traditional practices.
- **Recognition of Elders and Knowledge Keepers**: Identifying individuals falsely claiming to be Elders or Traditional Knowledge Keepers is challenging. In some cases, pretendians may gain the support from Elders and Traditional Knowledge Holders.
- **International Claims**: Individuals from other countries identifying as Indigenous but having no connections to Canada present additional complexities.

What are some successes?

Beyond Self-Identification:

- Policies involving Indigenous Nations to verify identity shift focus from "who do you claim?" to "who claims you?"
- Practices discouraging false claims of Indigenous identity have been anecdotally effective.

Policy and Process Improvements:

- Unions engaged to amend collective agreements.
- Creation of verification processes and whistleblowing policies at some institutions.

Role of Elders and Indigenous Advisors:

- Elders and Indigenous advisors assist in addressing complex issues and developing respectful policies of Indigenous citizenship.
- Engaging Indigenous communities in vetting candidates is emerging as a wise practice.

Validation Through Community Involvement:

- Indigenous communities respectfully facilitate validation of candidates' ancestral stories.
- Examples include:
    - PowerPoint presentations by candidates about their family orientation, roots, and traditions, positively received.
    - Acceptance of oral testimony from community members and applicants about family and community origins.

How have university systems and structures changed to support First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples citizenship processes?

Systemic Changes:

- Creation of in-house Elder positions and hiring Indigenous people into leadership roles.
- Availability of Elders, Traditional Knowledge Keepers, and Indigenous therapists for students, staff, and faculty.
- Inclusion of Indigenous awareness training for senior administrators.
- Incorporation of Indigenous-specific goals in strategic and academic plans.

Indigenization and Decolonization Efforts:

- Restructuring classroom dynamics to reflect diverse perspectives.
- Providing equity seats for Indigenous students and diversifying hiring practices.
- Developing culturally-relevant curriculum and pedagogy.

Support for Indigenous Students:

- Cultural supports such as Indigenous advisors and department-specific resources.
- In-person support mechanisms and safer, Indigenized spaces on campuses.
- Advocacy for Indigenous-specific scholarships, student centers, and cultural spaces.

Cultural and Community Engagement:

- Faculty and staff engage with Elders and Traditional Knowledge Keepers to address identity-related issues.
- Efforts to respectfully assess candidates' Indigenous identity.

Representation and HR Practices:

- Increasing Indigenous representation on governing boards, senates, faculties, and staff.
- Hiring practices aimed at recruiting Indigenous individuals.
- Collective agreements that allocate time for practicing cultural ceremonies and events.

Progress and Impact:

- Universities are seeing more services, supports, and strategic frameworks dedicated to Indigenous priorities.
- These efforts contribute to a welcoming, safe, and culturally respectful environment for Indigenous students and staff.

What Indigenous traditional and community practices for citizenship have been used within universities for Indigenous citizenship validation? What roles have Elders and community members had in determining the path forward?

While direct application of traditional practices to university validation processes is still evolving, involving Elders and other Indigenous peoples is critical to creating culturally respectful and effective systems.

Involvement of Elders and Community Members:

- Establishment of Elders' Circles or committees comprised of local community leaders and members with influence on policies, practices, and decision-making.
- Direct interaction between Elders' Circles or committees comprised of local community leaders and members and senior administration enhances effectiveness.
- Engagement of Elders' Circles or committees comprised of local community leaders and members in identity verification ensures respect and positive outcomes for universities, candidates, and communities.

Challenges in Elder Engagement:

- Small numbers of Elders are often relied upon, leading to potential overextension and burnout.
- Balancing their presence on campus with addressing urgent matters may detract from student-focused roles.

Are false claims of Indigenous citizenship affecting other sectors?

False claims are not limited to universities but affect all sectors, including corporate and professional industries. Some sectors incentivize self-identification to meet Indigenous employment targets, complicating verification processes. False claims risk damaging the reputation of industries, academia, and professional sectors collectively. Yes, this is just the "tip of the iceberg."

How can institutions identify authentic Indigenous communities?

Universities should proceed cautiously as it is not their role to identify or validate the authenticity of Indigenous communities. In the future, the aim is for a system where Indigenous Nations assert self-determination and manage their own vetting and verification processes within all contexts. This is the current standard with the Métis Nation --Saskatchewan.

Verification Tools and Challenges:

- **Legitimate Identification Cards:**
  - First Nation status cards, Métis citizenship cards, and Inuit beneficiary cards are initial verification tools.
  - Issues with historical inequities under the Indian Act, e.g., non-Indigenous women gaining status through marriage before Bill C-31 and First Nations women losing status after marrying a non-Indigenous man.
- **Fake Organizations:**
  - An increasing number of illegitimate entities issue fake membership cards for First Nations and Métis.
  - Identifying these requires deep knowledge of Indigenous politics; relationships with Indigenous peoples and communities, or extensive research.

- No formal national list exists to track fake organizations, and the problem is growing.

Community Involvement:

- **Engaging Local Indigenous Communities:**
  - Institutions can connect with nearby, recognized Indigenous communities for assistance in verifying claims.
  - Established Métis organizations and First Nations bands have reliable registry systems.

Complexities and Considerations:

- **Diverse Indigenous Experiences:**
  - Some communities acknowledged by Indigenous Nations are not federally recognized.
  - Multi-generational urban Indigenous people may lack recent ties to specific Nations or communities.
- **Role of Institutions:**
  - Non-Indigenous allies are encouraged to hold others accountable for fraudulent claims.

What is the vision for Indigenous peoples within post-secondary institutions?

The vision for Indigenous peoples within post-secondary institutions must be developed by Indigenous peoples and communities. Goals should be strength based, recognizing the sophistication of Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing, address historical and current injustices and systemic racism, provide Indigenous youth with choices and ensure they receive the necessary supports to thrive.

- **Relationships and reciprocity**
  - Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff collaboration is essential for meaningful systemic change.
  - More mentors, advisors, and cultural supports enables success for Indigenous students, faculty, and staff.
  - Create teams focused on driving institutional change that supports Indigenous students, faculty, and staff.
  - It is recognized that relationships and reciprocity are prioritized over traditional recruitment methods.
- **Culturally Relevant**
  - **Education:** Culturally-informed and culturally strong teaching programs and pedagogies benefit Indigenous students.
  - **Safe Spaces:** Investments in inclusive and culturally safe environments foster a sense of belonging for Indigenous students, faculty, and staff.
  - **Traditional Knowledge:** Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing from Indigenous communities ensure inclusivity and authenticity, and demonstrate appreciation.
- **Representation and Leadership:**
  - Indigenous representation across all levels of the academy, particularly in leadership roles with real influence.

What is the best approach to take if someone has falsely claimed Indigenous identity?

False identity claims are intentional fraud for personal gain, requiring serious and thorough investigation. The process is emotionally charged on all involved and affects the individual's income, career, and reputation, as well as posing potential legal risks.

- **Guiding Principles:**
    - No single "best" approach; the process is complex and should not be taken lightly.
    - Start with concern and kindness to encourage dialogue and avoid lateral violence or the spreading of rumours.
- **Initial Steps:**
    - Open a conversation directly with the individual to learn and discuss their story, community connections, lived experiences, and kinship networks.
    - Recognize the difference between those fraudulently manufacturing an identity and those genuinely seeking their roots and family connections.
    - Advise them to investigate their identity through legitimate Indigenous organizations.
- **Investigation Process:**
    - If a formal investigation is necessary, the individual should be placed on leave or reassigned until the process concludes.
    - Engaging external parties for investigations is an option but avoid non-Indigenous consultants without credible expertise.
    - Indigenous faculty and administration should not be burdened with the responsibility of unmasking claims.

What wording should be included in job postings to ensure that only Indigenous people are hired for Indigenous designated jobs?

Use language that ensures clarity, transparency, and respect for Indigenous identity and citizenship while deterring fraudulent claims.

- "Qualified Indigenous candidates will be required to consent to verification of their Indigenous identity/citizenship/membership in alignment with our authentication processes, similar to verifying academic credentials or professional experience."
- "Cultural knowledge and extensive traditional knowledge are essential requirements for this role."
- "Strong connections to Indigenous communities are a key qualification."
- "Preference will be given to qualified Indigenous candidates."
- "Applicants must demonstrate an understanding of Indigenous worldviews, cultural values, and practices."

Interview and Verification Processes:

- Interviews may include discussions about the applicant's origins, relationship with Elders, community connections and may involve participation by Indigenous community members.
- Proof of Indigenous citizenship or membership by a recognized Indigenous Nation or organization may be required.
- Fraudulent claims of Indigenous identity will have serious consequences, which may include withdrawal of offers or termination of employment.
- Successful candidates will be required to sign a declaration of Indigenous citizenship upon accepting an offer.

These statements and postings must consider human rights legislation, collective agreements with unions, and university policies.

What processes can be implemented to protect or minimize harm to individuals who bring forward cases of fraudulent claims to Indigeneity?

Strengthen and Communicate Whistleblower Policies:

- Clearly communicate strengthened whistleblower protection policies across the institution for those that bring fraudulent Indigenous identity cases to the forefront.
- Ensure that protections are systematic and not limited to specific departments.

Confidentiality and Anonymity:

- Implement processes that protect the confidentiality and anonymity of individuals who bring forward allegations.
- Avoid publicizing the identity of whistleblowers to prevent harassment or retaliation.

Fair and Transparent Investigations:

- Conduct thorough, fair, and evidence-based investigations for each claim.
- Use clearly defined investigative steps to ensure consistency and impartiality.

Supportive Investigative Committees:

- Establish committees that include Elders, Indigenous community members, and Indigenous colleagues to guide investigations.
- Ensure these committees are trained in trauma-informed approaches to minimize harm to all parties involved.

Incorporating Questions and Principles in Hiring Policies and Processes for Indigenous-Specific Roles

There was unanimous agreement that recruitment of candidates for Indigenous-specific opportunities should include a line of inquiry that goes beyond self-identification.

1. **Guiding Principles for Hiring:**
    - **Honesty and Integrity:** hiring processes based on truth, self-awareness, and accountability.
    - **Due Diligence:** Place responsibility on hiring systems to verify claims, ensuring thorough and respectful scrutiny of candidates.
    - **Respect and Reciprocity:** Create processes that foster respectful dialogue and prioritize relationships over transactional interactions.
    - **Inclusivity:** Design culturally safe spaces and practices to attract genuine Indigenous candidates while deterring fraudulent claims.
2. **Action up front prevents or mitigates confrontation after the fact.**
    - Require candidates to consent to verification of Indigenous identity, similar to validating academic credentials and work experience.
    - Include signed agreements for identity validation as part of the hiring process.
    - Ensure identity verification processes involve Indigenous-led systems and respected Indigenous community organizations.
    - Clearly state in job postings that positions require proof of Indigenous citizenship or recognition by a legitimate community or Nation.
    - Emphasize cultural knowledge, community connections, and lived Indigenous experience as essential criteria.

3. **Selection Committees:**
    - Ensure Indigenous representation in hiring committees to guide culturally informed discussions.
    - Allow Indigenous members to engage in conversations that explore candidates' authenticity and lived experiences.
4. **Interview Practices:**
    - Incorporate questions about connections to communities, knowledge of traditions, lived experiences and relationships with Elders and community members.
    - Use creative formats, such as asking candidates to prepare a PowerPoint presentation detailing their family orientation, cultural roots, and traditional knowledge.
5. **Recommended Questions for Recruitment:**
    - "How do you obtain membership with your Nation or Indigenous community?"
    - "What does being Indigenous mean to you?"
    - "Can you share your community connections, lived experiences, and how these shape your identity as an Indigenous person?"

Witnessing: Reflections from the 2022 Forum

The 2023 Forum began with reflections from Witnesses of the 2022 gathering, who spent the past year sharing knowledge within their communities about Indigenous identity and citizenship. Witnessing, an ancient practice in Blackfoot and other Indigenous cultures, preserves and transfers truth while ensuring transparency and cultural continuity.

dr. linda manyguns

associate vice-president, Indigenization and decolonization

Mount Royal University

dr. linda manyguns of Mount Royal University shared her experience as a 2022 Witness, emphasizing the role of witnessing in honouring and protecting knowledge: *"Witnesses, in understanding who holds that knowledge, have been critical in bringing back our ceremonies and cultural knowledge essential to putting the pieces back together after the colonial restructuring of our knowledge."*

Witnesses observe and reflect from their unique cultural perspectives, capturing the truths shared in talking circles while fostering respect, trust, and collective problem-solving. The practice reconnects participants with ancestral ways of communicating, creating a sacred space to navigate cultural differences and address shared challenges. As dr. manyguns noted, *"We apply that collective decision-making which is capable of solving the complex problems that we face. In navigating our cultural ways, we honour our ancestors."*

The 2023 Witnesses continued this tradition, observing the events and conversations to capture the larger meaning of truth, shared being, and the love of Indigenous cultures.

Dr. Lynn Lavallee

Professor and Strategic Lead, Indigenous Resurgence in the Faculty of Community Services, Toronto Metropolitan University

Dr. Lynn Lavallee reflected on her role as a Witness at last year's inaugural forum, emphasizing the profound responsibility that comes with being a keeper of history. *"We are called to be the keepers of history for an important historic event. We witness, promote, facilitate, and carry the knowledge forward when we return home."* However, her commitment to sharing that knowledge led to professional challenges. At her institution, she faced a disciplinary response from a senior administrator, who demanded that all future correspondence involve her Dean and Director.

Her reflections extended beyond her personal experience to address the broader issue of cultural fraud and the systemic failures that perpetuate it. Using the iceberg metaphor, Lavallee highlighted the stark divide between what is visible and what lies hidden. *"The 'seen' harms, exposed by investigative journalism, are just*

the tip of the iceberg. Below the surface lies the 'unseen'—shameful acts by pretendians, institutions, and unions that operate under the veil of secrecy, cloaked as confidentiality."

Investigative journalism, Lavallee shared, has played a critical role in holding institutions accountable. However, institutions often respond only when faced with public exposure. She pointed out: *"What we see are institutional responses born of pressure, not integrity. And while the harms of pretendianism are starting to reach beyond our small circles of support, much of it remains hidden."*

Lavallee drew on her own experience addressing this issue at the 2017 Building Reconciliation Forum, where she spoke to 350 attendees about Indigenous identity and cultural fraud. *"This was post-Boyden but pre-Bourassa and Latimer,"* she recalled, referencing high-profile cases of cultural fraud. While she spoke about the importance of allowing space for genuine reconnection, she also addressed those who were knowingly lying about their identity. When asked how to handle such situations, she admitted being stumped. Her initial response was that *"spirit will take care of it,"* a reflection she later acknowledged as insufficient. *"What I should have said,"* she clarified, *"is that they will be investigated and fired if they're deemed to be lying to gain position and opportunity."*

Lavallee critiqued institutions and professional associations for their inaction and complicity. *"Professional associations cite their ethical standards but protect whiteness and pretendians instead of holding them accountable. Some of the most damaging pretendians have built entire careers on lies, and they remain untouchable unless they gain national attention."* She noted the disproportionate harm inflicted on Indigenous faculty, staff, and students by those protected within institutional frameworks. *"The unseen pretendians are mobilized, defended by anti-Indigenous colonial policies within institutions and unions. These policies protect fraudsters while silencing Indigenous people under the guise of confidentiality."*

She also expressed deep frustration with superficial reconciliation efforts, stating: *"Token land acknowledgments matter, but the harms to Indigenous people in the academy don't. Institutions prioritize the optics of reconciliation while allowing fraudsters to continue causing harm. When I hear a land acknowledgment from senior administrators who protect pretendians, I feel empty."*

Lavallee underscored the dangers of speaking out, describing it as a career death sentence. *"To express the impact pretendians have on you, to feel anger, sadness, or betrayal—it's a professional death sentence. But if I don't speak now, if we don't speak now, what does that mean for the next generation?"* She called attention to the harms inflicted on Indigenous graduate students supervised by fraudsters and the enduring influence of pretendians on academic curricula.

Her call to action was resolute: *"We are unable to speak because there will be sanctions. That is the reality. But maybe it's time for a class action lawsuit. We need to reclaim our voices, not just for ourselves, but for the future."* Lavallee concluded with a powerful acknowledgment of the ongoing struggle: *"I can't be me anymore if I stay silent. Miigwech. Merci."*

Her words serve as a rallying cry for collective action, urging institutions, individuals, and communities to confront cultural fraud and its far-reaching impacts with courage and accountability.

Moses Gordon

PhD student, University of Regina

Moses Gordon expressed his gratitude for being selected as a witness at the 2022 conference, describing the experience as both an honour and a humbling opportunity to engage in dialogue with passionate Indigenous scholars and community members. He reflected on the key themes and challenges discussed during the event, offering insights into how these might inform future efforts.

A central focus of the discussions was the importance of identity and connection to place. One Elder shared that "the closest word to identity translates to where you come from," underscoring the deep ties between identity, language, and place. The conversations also highlighted the significance of relationships, cultural values, and grounding work in ceremony, all of which were seen as essential to framing Indigenous perspectives within institutional policies.

Gordon noted the recurring challenge of Indigenous research and institutional Indigenization, which often places a disproportionate burden on Indigenous faculty and staff. He emphasized a common frustration shared during the conference: "*Our personal sacrifices must be recognized, and we must ensure our values are embedded in institutional policies without tokenizing Indigenous labour.*" Bridging the gap between academia and community was another priority, with participants stressing the importance of Elders' councils and embedding community voices into institutional governance structures.

The inadequacy of Western frameworks, such as equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI), in addressing the collective concerns of Indigenous Nations was another critical issue. Discussions pointed to the need for approaches rooted in collective rights, such as those articulated in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). While recognizing the challenges posed by under-resourced communities and localized differences, participants identified opportunities for national-level collaborations to foster unity and solidarity.

Gordon concluded by emphasizing the potential of national gatherings like this one can serve as nation-building exercises to increase unity and solidarity across diverse groups and enabling Indigenous communities to address shared challenges and advance as sovereign Nations.

Dr. Dustin Louie

Associate Professor and Director of NITEP, University of British Columbia

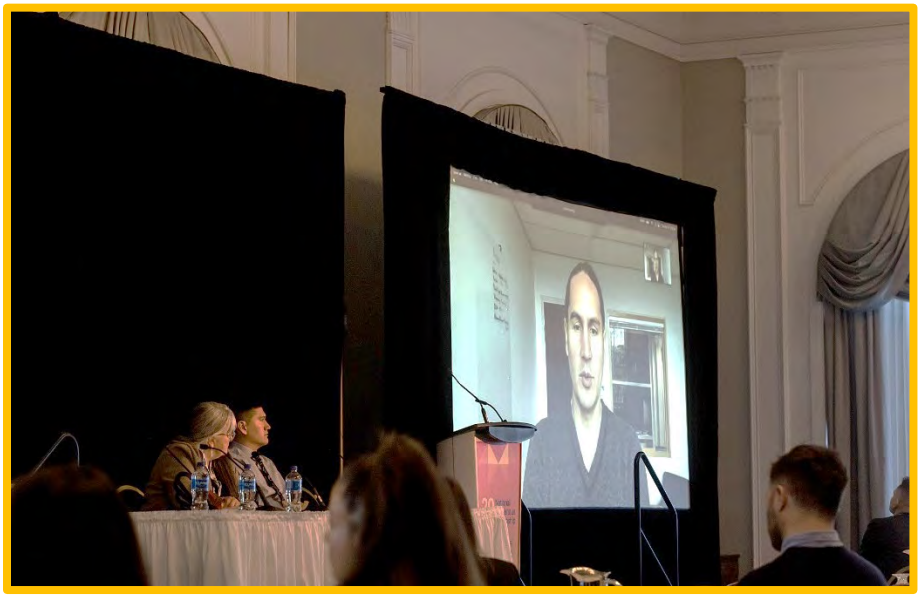
Dr. Dustin Louie shared his reflections on the role of a witness, an honour deeply connected to his scholarship and community teachings. Drawing from three sources—his own Frog Clan from Nee Tahi Buhn and the Dakelh people of Northern British Columbia, Musqueam territory, and Ktunaxa territory—he highlighted the significance of witnessing as an act that involves both heart and mind.

From his community, Dr. Louie explained that witnessing is sacred, requiring ceremony, gratitude, and appreciation. The ceremony is sacred. He emphasized that "*listening with our emotions and hearts, not just analytically,*" allows us to fully understand and honour others' experiences. He noted that last year's forum was about Indigenous folks taking back control of identity and what it means to be Indigenous in this place. Dr. Louie stated that this was an incredibly important thing for us.

Louie spoke to the importance of land acknowledgments. He also shared a teaching from Musqueam territory, where a student explained that holding a paddle upright symbolizes coming in peace. This resonated with the need for care and safety in approaching challenging conversations.

The last teaching comes from an Elder from Ktunaxa territory who reminded him that knowledge gained in moments like these should extend beyond them. As the Elder taught, "What we learn in this moment should not just remain in this moment." The ideas we develop together are things we need to carry into our own lives. Dr. Louie reflected on the responsibility to carry forward these teachings and continue supporting Indigenous voices reclaiming their identity.

It is so important to take time and do things properly without rushing and in a good way. Dr. Louie expressed his gratitude for the opportunity to witness and engage with passionate individuals, looking forward to contributing further in the days ahead.



Journalism Perspectives on Identity Fraud

The panel explored journalism's role in investigating, reporting, and addressing identity fraud, emphasizing the need for support and understanding. Panelists discussed how journalists, especially non-Indigenous ones, can contribute positively through trauma-informed reporting that educates the public. However, they cautioned that unprepared or irresponsible reporting risks causing further harm.

Moderator: **Dr. Christy Bressette,** Vice-Provost and Associate Vice-President (Indigenous Initiatives), Western University

Panelists: **Michelle Cyca,** Freelance Journalist & Editor

Trina Roache, Rogers Chair in Journalism, University of King's College

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Q: Please share some of your highlights relating to your experiences in journalism that help us to understand the magnitude of this problem.

Michelle Cyca shared her experience reporting on Indigenous identity fraud, shaped by being in an institution where a case was unfolding. She reflected on how this deepened her understanding of the impact on Indigenous people in academia and the ways institutional structures are often inhospitable to Indigenous practices of identity affirmation or open dialogue on this topic.

"I saw how vulnerable Indigenous people are when speaking about their experiences or questioning power within systems that are designed to serve themselves, not Indigenous communities," she explained. She also highlighted the challenge of not being able to ask fundamental questions like, *"Where do you come from, and who are your people?"* in these settings.

Navigating two worlds and the dual responsibilities to our communities, identities, and Nations alongside the demands of the institutions where we work makes the issue deeply complex. For Cyca, the role of journalism in these cases is to help identify how these systems fail Indigenous people and to educate the public, especially non-Indigenous people, about the prevalence and damage of identity fraud.

Trina Roache emphasized that Indigenous identity fraud is a problem stemming from Canadian policies and actions, which significantly impacts Indigenous people and should be framed accordingly. Drawing from her experience with APTN since 2001, Roache reflected on personal and professional connections and relationships that are created by the asking of family and community connections.

She cited the complexity of reporting on high-profile cases like Joseph Boyden, which required thorough research and sensitive handling. Roache has also explored the intricate issues surrounding Indigenous identity, citizenship and gender discrimination shaped by colonial legislations like the Indian Act and the Sixties Scoop policies.

Q: From a journalist's perspective what are the concerns related to reporting on Indigenous fraud in relation to how it is done, the impact, and the role of journalists?

Journalists covering Indigenous identity fraud face ethical challenges, practical obstacles, and systemic complexities that require careful navigation. Michelle Cyca underscored the responsibility to approach these stories with intent, ensuring they support rather than harm those involved. Individuals who bring forward cases of identity fraud often risk their reputations, careers, and safety, particularly within academia, where such allegations can jeopardize opportunities and create vulnerabilities. Cyca stressed the importance of transparency with sources, explaining how journalists' words may be used and ensuring that everyone should understand the risks and outcomes. She also emphasized the broader context of systemic factors, noting that "stories that take down individuals one by one for their transgressions are not going to solve the problem of identity fraud." Instead, these cases reflect deeper issues rooted in settler colonialism and institutional structures that facilitate and obscure fraudulent claims.

Trina Roache highlighted the immense time and resources required for investigative stories on identity fraud, especially in under-resourced Indigenous and mainstream newsrooms. Indigenous journalists are often expected to act as pan-Indigenous experts, a role that is both unrealistic and unfair, given the diversity of Indigenous Nations and contexts. Roache stressed the importance of moving beyond simplistic narratives where Indigenous people are portrayed as victims while non-Indigenous experts provide solutions. Instead, she advocated for centering the voices of Indigenous experts and community members who bring deep understanding and agency to these issues.

Both Cyca and Roache called for more nuanced reporting that goes beyond the individuals accused of fraud to examine the larger systemic and colonial structures that perpetuate these issues. They also emphasized the need for ethical care in managing expectations and following up on the broader impacts of identity fraud, ensuring stories are not only accurate but also meaningful and respectful.

Q: How can intentionality and integrity in journalism be leveraged to help address these issues. How can we use recording media to help address these issues?

Intentionality and integrity in journalism are essential for addressing the complexities of Indigenous identity fraud. Michelle Cyca emphasized the need for thorough and careful reporting, noting, ***"There is so much complexity. The biggest fear... is making a mistake that does more harm."*** She highlighted how long-form journalism provides the necessary space to explore issues deeply, such as family and community

> *"I always avoid saying Indigenous issues because that denotes that Indigenous people always have problems. So, we cover Indigenous stories and communities and people."*

connections, but it requires significant resources. Her 8,000-word feature story on Indigenous identity fraud in Macleans' magazine gave the space to discuss family and community connections and protocols. Cyca encouraged people to engage with media and provide the context needed to ensure stories are told with accuracy and care.

Trina Roache underscored the journalist's role in truth-telling and shedding light on uncomfortable realities. She stated, ***"Media must ensure that the narrative is that this is a Canadian or American issue that impacts Indigenous people."*** Roache stressed the importance of fairness, balance, and accuracy, while recognizing the challenges of these stories. She advised that those approached by journalists see it as an opportunity to guide the narrative and point to the right sources, ensuring the story reflects the issue's complexity and broader implications.

Q: What does trauma-informed reporting look like and why is it important in these matters?

Trauma-informed reporting is essential in sensitive cases like Indigenous identity fraud to ensure the safety and dignity of those involved. Michelle Cyca emphasized the importance of building trust, understanding the full story, and respecting boundaries. She noted, *"It's not anyone's obligation to put themselves on the line, especially younger scholars or students,"* and stressed the need for journalists to avoid pressuring individuals into participation if it compromises their safety.

Trina Roache highlighted practical aspects of trauma-informed practices, such as allowing interviewees to have a support person, following up, and ensuring transparency in the reporting process. She added, *"You can offer people a real understanding of the impact of the story and pull back the curtain on the process."* Despite

newsroom constraints, Roache underscored the importance of collaboration, nuance, and maintaining journalistic independence while being considerate of the individuals and communities affected.

Q: What would you share with leaders who are asked to speak to these issues?

When engaging with the media, Indigenous leaders should be prepared and proactive. Michelle Cyca advised media training for all, and emphasized the importance of not feeling pressured to answer questions without the proper information. Trina Roache echoed these tips, stressing the importance of understanding if a conversation is on or off the record and seeking clarification.

Media Tips for Indigenous Leaders on Citizenship Concerns

Prepare and Set Boundaries for Media Engagement:

- Invest in media training to understand how to effectively communicate.
- Know how to respond to questions and avoid answering if you're uncertain.
- Ensure you understand if the conversation is on or off the record.
- Ask for clarification on any questions or topics that may be unclear.

Be Transparent, but Move at Your Own Pace:

- Be honest and transparent, but don't feel pressured to meet reporters' deadlines.
- You have the right to take time before responding, ensuring comfort and accuracy.

Do Your Research on the Reporter:

- Look up the reporter's past work and the outlet they represent to understand their style and intentions.
- Evaluate their approach to similar stories to assess how they might handle your situation.

Be Proactive in Maintaining Control of Your Story:

- Feel free to ask the reporter questions as well to ensure trust and transparency.
- If necessary, request to review portions of the interview for accuracy before publication.

Take Time to Build Trust and Rapport:

- Build a relationship with the reporter to ensure they understand your perspective and can communicate your message effectively.
- Have the reporter's contact information for follow-up on any inaccuracies or misrepresentation.
- Approach interviews as a two-way street where you can also share your concerns or ask about their approach.

Understand the Impact and Implications:

- Be aware that your words and actions can have far-reaching consequences, particularly in sensitive issues like identity fraud.
- Anticipate how the story may impact your community and consider the wider implications before engaging.

Q: What are the distinguishing investigative skills of CBC reporter Geoff Leo that essentially broke the story of Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond?

Michelle Cyca:

> Geoff Leo's investigative reporting on Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond exemplified months of meticulous research and investigation, involving extensive government documentation and interviews with people from Norway House First Nation. The work also relied on a skilled team, including fact-checkers, legal experts, and editors, to ensure accuracy and credibility. These stories are inherently complex, requiring careful consideration of how readers will interpret and understand the material within the constraints of the reporting format.

Trina Roache:

> Breaking such stories involves creating a detailed "paper trail" through comprehensive research and verification. Reporting for a broad Canadian audience, like CBC's readership, often requires significant explanation about nuances of Indigenous identity, First Nations status, and colonial systems, which are frequently misunderstood or oversimplified. While Indigenous readers may identify missing context, non-Indigenous readers might struggle to grasp the full complexities without sufficient background information.

Q: What is the role of institutions in reporting on fraudulent Indigenous identity issues?

Institutions and media, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, play critical roles in addressing fraudulent claims of Indigenous identity. Allyship is key: "The non-Indigenous world has a lot of their own work to do." Institutions must acknowledge their complicity in enabling identity fraud and the harm caused. Cyca expressed disappointment with institutional responses: "I didn't see anything from that institution that felt like an acknowledgment of harm. It is really powerful to acknowledge that you made a mistake." She advocated for leaders to apologize, listen to those harmed, and consider reparations, emphasizing that scholarships or increased opportunities are insufficient without addressing the harm.

Trina Roache emphasized that journalism, as a western institution, faces challenges in adapting to Indigenous perspectives. Roache questioned: "How much is it changing that institution, or do we have to change to fit the institution?" Institutions move slowly but must demonstrate meaningful action rather than doing nothing, especially when engaging with media and addressing systemic issues.

Q: Is there a possibility of doing a big media story that collates the institutional response, not just in the academy but in government and other institutions. A story that is not focused on exposing a single individual but which services to have a better scope and understanding of how institutions have created this problem and how they are dealing with it?

Institutional policies like self-identification are insufficient and widely misused. Cyca highlighted the need for expert consultation to clarify systemic implications: "Self-identification alone is not sufficient, but this is still used by the majority of public institutions." Fraudulent claims connect to broader colonial practices of erasure and undermining Indigenous sovereignty. She emphasized the systemic impact: "How do cumulative effects lead to a systematic erasure of Indigenous rights and self-determination?"

Public attention grows as such cases multiply, raising the question, "Why does this keep happening?" Tina Roache advised that diverse media platforms, including podcasts, enable deeper, collaborative journalism. She advocated for collaboration between Indigenous and non-Indigenous journalists for well-rounded reporting: "There are lots of opportunities for journalists to collaborate and share data." Long-term media engagement can support thorough storytelling and amplify understanding of these complex issues.

Legal Perspectives on Indigenous Citizenship in the Academy

Jean Teillet

Senior Counsel with Pape Salter Teillet LLP and specializes in Indigenous rights law.

Jean has long been engaged in negotiations and litigation with provincial and federal governments concerning Métis and First Nation land rights, harvesting rights and self-government.

Jean Teillet, a descendant of Louis Riel and a prominent lawyer, has provided significant insights into Indigenous identity fraud and the broader legal and systemic issues that surround it. Her independent investigation for the University of Saskatchewan, initially focused on Dr. Carrie Bourassa, evolved into a broader exploration of the complexities of identity, citizenship, and self-determination within Indigenous contexts. Teillet's work underscores the need for a nuanced, respectful, and culturally rooted approach, grounded in respect for Indigenous ways of knowing and self-determination, particularly in academic and institutional settings.

Addressing Identity Fraud with Care

Teillet emphasized that identity fraud is a harmful act but distinct from more severe crimes. She noted, "It's something we have to approach with understanding... it touches innocent people in very hurtful ways." She rejected the term "pretendian," arguing that it trivializes the harm caused by identity fraud, saying, "It conveys the idea that this is harmless, but it is anything but harmless." Instead, she called for empathetic and thoughtful approaches to addressing fraud.

Teillet also highlighted the systemic legal and historical complexities exacerbated by Canadian laws and court decisions, noting that these have created a "multiple, complicated, multi-layered problem."

A key theme in Teillet's work is the distinction between identity and citizenship, with an emphasis on Indigenous perspectives over Western frameworks. Indigenous identity, she explains, is relational and rooted in family and geography. **Questions like "Who are your people?" and "Where are you from?" highlight connections to community and family rather than individualistic analyses.**

Citizenship, by contrast, focuses on current relationships. Teillet stresses the importance of present-day ties to the community, asking, "Who are your people now? Who is your grandmother? Who are your aunties and uncles?" This relational approach contrasts with Western practices that often prioritize distant ancestry tracing over present-day ties and active participation in the community.

The Right to Self-Determination

Indigenous Nations have the inherent right to define their own membership based on their customs and traditions. Section 9 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) affirms an individuals' right to belong to an Indigenous community according to its customs. Canada's adoption of

the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* requires Canadian laws to align with these principles. However, colonial frameworks like the *Indian Act* and the *Daniels* decision undermine Indigenous self-determination by imposing external authority over status and membership.

Section 33 of the UN Declaration underscores the right of Indigenous Nations to determine their membership, emphasizing sovereignty over imposed frameworks. Each Nation's unique rules for membership make universal approaches insufficient. Outsiders must respect these diverse practices and avoid imposing definitions or criteria on Indigenous Nations.

UNDRIP provides a framework for addressing these issues:

- Section 33 affirms the right of Indigenous peoples to determine their own membership and identity based on their customs and traditions.
- Nations must reclaim authority over membership decisions, free from external interference.

Legal Frameworks and Their Implications

Teillet critiqued Canadian legal structures, such as the *Indian Act* and the *Daniels* decision, for undermining Indigenous self-determination. The *Indian Act*'s removal of the 1951 cutoff date now allows reinstatement of individuals whose ancestry can be traced as far back as 1869. While this broadens criteria, it raises questions about its impact on Indigenous identity and membership.

In contrast, the *Daniels* decision conflates non-status Indians with Métis, ignoring the necessity of community acceptance—a cornerstone of Section 35 rights. Teillet described this ruling as fundamentally flawed, as it undermines the essential right to self-determination.

Currently, four conflicting approaches to Indigenous identification exist:

1. **Nation-determined membership**: The ideal scenario where Nations define their own membership.
2. **Indian Act criteria**: A bureaucratic system expanded to include ancestors enfranchised as far back as 1869.
3. **Daniels Métis definition**: A flawed interpretation conflating non-status Indians and Métis, ignoring community acceptance.
4. **Definition of non-status Indians**: An overly broad and vague category.

These irreconcilable systems complicate identity recognition and create challenges for institutions, including universities, in addressing Indigenous membership issues.

Legal structures like the *Indian Act* and interpretations of the *Daniels* decision present significant challenges to Indigenous self-determination:

- **Multiplicity of Membership Rules:** Each Nation has unique rules, such as membership renewal clauses or the Métis Nation's definition. This diversity makes universal solutions unworkable.
- **Historical Claims and Current Ties:** Claims to Indigenous identity based on ancestors from centuries ago often lack meaningful connection to present-day communities. Nations must decide how to balance historical continuity with current relationships.
- **Misrepresentation and Fraud:** Fraudulent claims harm Indigenous communities by diverting resources and undermining trust. Fraudsters often construct false identities intentionally over decades to gain access to prestige, jobs, or grants.

Distinction Between Identity and Membership

Identity relates to personal connection and heritage, while membership involves formal recognition by a Nation. Membership carries legal, social, and cultural implications, and decisions about it must be rooted in the collective agreements of Nations. This reinforces the sovereignty of Indigenous communities to manage their own affairs.

Membership is more than a designation; it carries reciprocal responsibilities. Members are expected to contribute to the well-being of their Nation and uphold its traditions and values. Policies should emphasize these obligations, fostering stronger and more connected communities.

Academic and Institutional Implications

- Institutions have a responsibility to respect Indigenous self-determination when developing hiring and recognition practices. Dr. Leroy Littlebear at the University of Lethbridge is developing a seven-stage approach to hiring professors, as an example. This process evaluates candidates' community-based knowledge alongside academic credentials, ensuring that those teaching Indigenous subjects have meaningful connections to Indigenous communities.
- Teillet suggested implementing declarations of truth for faculty, staff, and students to ensure honesty in identity claims. These signed declarations, coupled with accountability measures, provide institutions with a foundation for investigating and addressing misrepresentation – with consequences.

Elders and Knowledge Keepers play a crucial role in validating membership through oral histories and community ties. Their involvement ensures cultural authenticity and relational accountability, reinforcing the integrity of membership decisions.

Teillet recommended clear and transparent policies for addressing these challenges while supporting individuals reconnecting with their heritage after displacement, such as Sixties Scoop survivors.

Kim TallBear

Professor and Canada Research Chair in Indigenous Peoples, Technoscience, and Society in the Faculty of Native Studies

University of Alberta.

Indigenous Citizenship in The Academy: One Year Later

Kim TallBear (Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate) (she/her) presented on the pressing issue of Indigenous identity fraud and its implications for Native sovereignty, cultural integrity, and governance structures. Drawing on insights from Dr. Jessica Kolopenuk of the University of Alberta, the speaker examined the complex dynamics surrounding "white-coded natives," identity insecurity, and the harmful conflation of legitimate reconnection with blatant fraud. Dr. Kolopenuk emphasizes the need for white-coded natives to confront their privilege and avoid centering their insecurities at the expense of Indigenous women and communities. Instead, they should model relational accountability and learn from Indigenous women's leadership in navigating questions of identity and belonging.

TallBear addressed how false claims to Indigenous ancestry—whether through fabricated connections or misused concepts like ceremonial adoption—pose significant challenges to Native sovereignty. **Ceremonial adoption of non-Indigenous people does not lead to citizenship.** Fraudulent claims often exploit vague terminology, such as "Indigenous," to blur the distinction between genuine kinship and appropriation. This misuse undermines the collective belonging and governance structures central to Indigenous Nations. TallBear critiqued the individualistic framing of identity prevalent in settler discourse, advocating instead for language that emphasizes relationality, community, and Nation-based affiliation.

A critical reflection on the year after the inaugural *National Indigenous Identity Forum* highlighted the clarity gained regarding identity fraud's multigenerational consequences. She explained how race-shifters' biological connections to Native people through marriage and children entangle communities in deception, gained through relationships. This entanglement requires a nuanced understanding of the difference between genuine kinship ties and the disingenuous narratives of cultural adoption often leveraged to obscure fraud.

She explored the limitations of current institutional responses to Indigenous identity fraud. TallBear critiqued universities, publishers, and arts organizations for their complicity in enabling fraud until public pressure exposes them. Instead, Tribal governments and Indigenous governance bodies must take proactive roles,

using their sovereignty to establish processes for identifying and addressing fraudulent claims. These efforts should include press releases, local media coordination, and policy interventions to safeguard resources, ancestral remains, and governance rights.

There is an urgent need to reexamine terms like “Indigenous” and “identity” within academic, governmental, and public discourse. The term "Indigenous," while useful for global solidarity, has been co-opted in ways that dilute its meaning and enable appropriation. This dynamic mirrors historical patterns of settler colonialism, where narratives of suffering and abuse were used to justify land theft and erasure of Indigenous governance. TallBear called for more precise language that resists settler misappropriation and reinforces belonging to specific, **living Nations**.

There is a need for collective action and systemic change to combat Indigenous identity fraud. This involves not only the continued efforts of Indigenous women and investigative reporters but also significant institutional accountability. Tribal governments and organizations must demand structural reforms to protect Native sovereignty and ensure the safety of legitimate Indigenous peoples in academic and public spaces. By reclaiming and defending the integrity of Indigenous governance and kinship, communities can counteract the pervasive threats posed by fraudulent identity claims.

Addressing Indigenous Identity Fraud in Universities

- Implement clear requirements for proof of community affiliation on scholarship, research, admission, and job applications.
- Communicate openly about the importance of this policy to demonstrate a commitment to Indigenous integrity.
- Create committees dedicated to verifying Indigenous identity claims among faculty, staff, and students.
- Engage in these conversations actively and avoid silence or inaction, as this is not a sustainable approach.
- Utilize extensive networks across Indigenous communities in Canada, the U.S., and globally to vet identity claims effectively. Trust in the generosity, care, and nuance within Indigenous communities to approach this work with integrity and inclusivity.
- Recognize that systemic policy changes will be slow but essential for long-term solutions.
- Work closely with university legal teams to address potential legal implications and ensure compliance throughout the process.

These measures can make actual First Nation, Métis, and Inuit individuals feel safer and more encouraged to apply, increasing the number and robustness of Indigenous applicants. By addressing these issues assertively and transparently, universities can create a more inclusive and supportive environment for Indigenous students, staff, and faculty while protecting the integrity of Indigenous identities.

The Psychology of False Claims to Identity

Dr. Alex Wilson

Professor & Academic Director, the Aboriginal Education Research Centre, University of Saskatchewan

Dr. Alex Wilson, a member of Opaskwayak Cree Nation, is trained in relational psychology with a background in clinical practice, Dr. Wilson's work primarily focuses on research, pedagogy, and land-based practices.

In her presentation, Dr. Wilson outlined four key points: the fundamentals of Indigenous psychology, the disconnections experienced by Indigenous peoples, the implications of these disconnections, and the ways these issues manifest in society.

From an Indigenous perspective, Dr. Wilson explained, psychology is rooted in the understanding of psyche, which is not synonymous with the English concept of the "soul" but rather "spirit" (*ahcahk* in Cree). This term also translates to "star," underscoring an inherent connection to the universe. Indigenous psychology conceptualizes the self, not in relation to others, but *as* relationality itself, emphasizing accountability and interconnectedness—a paradigm markedly distinct from Western psychology.

Dr. Wilson identified disconnection as a legacy of colonialism, which severed ties to land-based knowledge systems—a phenomenon she referred to as epistemicide. Today, this disconnection is evident in the superficial portrayal of Indigenous identities in online spaces, where complex, lived identities are often reduced to surface-level expressions. This reduction, described as the "tip of the iceberg" view, not only erodes the depth of Indigenous identity but also creates opportunities for non-Indigenous individuals to falsely claim these identities.

The implications of this disconnection are profound, encompassing a national mental health crisis, a global climate crisis, and the commodification of Indigenous identity. Within the Two Spirit community, Dr. Wilson highlighted how hyper-articulated identities and "pretendian" phenomena distort and exploit the authenticity of Two Spirit experiences. Two Spirit identity, deeply spiritual and rooted in cosmology and relational accountability, is particularly vulnerable to such misrepresentations. Two Spirit pretendians haven't garnered the same kind of national attention from academics and community, but their impact have contributed to the meaning of the term Two Spirit and to the movement itself, to the research agenda, and the trajectory of research.

Dr. Wilson concluded her remarks by emphasizing the need for awareness of these pervasive issues and their broader impacts, leaving the audience with a reflection from Eckhart Tolle: *Reincarnation doesn't help you if, in your next incarnation, you still don't know who you are.*

Dr. Jeffrey Ansloos

Associate Professor and Canada Research Chair, University of Toronto

Dr. Jeffrey Ansloos, a citizen of Fisher River Cree Nation in Manitoba and currently speaking from Whadjuk territory in Perth, Australia, discussed his work at the intersections of Indigenous studies, education, health, and social policy. While a psychologist by training, Dr. Ansloos focuses on broader systemic issues, including Indigenous identity and academic fraud.

Dr. Ansloos described Indigenous identity fraud as a multifaceted issue driven by structural forces such as colonialism, racism, capitalism, and systemic inequality. He drew on psychological theories to explain the motivations behind such behavior, ranging from personal insecurity or a desire for acceptance to a pathological pursuit of control or self-importance, often associated with narcissism.

Historically, Indigenous scholars have created spaces of hospitality and inclusion within academia. However, Dr. Ansloos noted that these spaces are sometimes exploited by individuals seeking to extract resources or a sense of belonging. This exploitation contrasts sharply with the lived experiences of Indigenous peoples who endure genuine alienation due to colonial disruptions, such as the Sixties Scoop or residential schools.

Individuals that fraudulently claim Indigenous identity and citizenship often construct elaborate personal narratives that they come to truly believe, making their exposure complex and emotionally fraught. While they may experience grief or loss upon confrontation, their actions remain rooted in deception and exploitation, reflecting a lack of empathy for Indigenous communities.

Dr. Ansloos emphasized the importance of addressing these behaviours with empathy while simultaneously protecting Indigenous identities and the spaces built by Indigenous scholars.

Dr. Adam Murry

Assistant Professor, University of Calgary

Dr. Adam Murry comes from a diverse heritage, with his mother's family emigrating from Ukraine to the United States over a century ago, and his father's lineage including Irish, through his paternal grandfather, and Apache, through his paternal grandmother. His upbringing and connections to Indigenous advocacy shaped his path. Although trained in industrial-organizational psychology, which focuses on consulting with organizations, Dr. Murry has applied his research skills to areas such as health, education, and substance use. He acknowledged that Indigenous identity fraud is not his primary area of expertise, but he recognized its importance as a topic requiring greater understanding and action.

Dr. Murry examined the motivations behind false identity claims, explaining that while his clinical colleagues may be better equipped to assess individual cases, certain psychological factors often play a role. Drawing on theories from the field, he suggested that individuals might craft false identities to seek validation, authority, sympathy, or a sense of belonging. Some do so for professional gain or to bolster their work's credibility, while

others may be driven by unresolved emotional conflicts or low self-esteem. These behaviors often stem from early experiences of disapproval, where individuals begin shaping "false selves" to compensate for perceived inadequacies.

False identity claims, particularly in Indigenous contexts, have ripple effects that can retraumatize those with complex or mixed ethnic identities. Dr. Murry stressed the distinction between complex identities and outright fraudulent ones, noting that the latter are often tied to systemic issues such as white privilege infiltrating Indigenous spaces. He highlighted the need for safeguards to verify identities within institutions, especially in hiring, promotions, recognitions, and grant funding.

Dr. Murry also touched on cognitive dissonance, where individuals' thoughts and behaviours conflict, leading to actions aimed at reconciling those discrepancies. He called for systemic solutions to address Indigenous identity fraud, emphasizing that universities and other institutions must create processes to protect Indigenous spaces from being co-opted by those making false claims.

Panel Q&A

Q: What is the psychology behind the protectors of these people falsely claiming Indigenous identity?

> **Dr. Ansloos:** Protectors often have vested interests, benefiting from the narrative of authenticity tied to the fraud. Universities, for instance, may defend frauds to protect equity targets and funding tied to Indigenous representation. These defenses are often rooted in self-interest and tend to disappear when they are no longer beneficial.
>
> **Dr. Wilson**: Relational factors also play a role. Many fraudsters come from marginalized groups seeking connection or validation. Protectors may have personal ties to these individuals or the broader narrative, even if the relationship is dysfunctional, doubling down on support to maintain these connections.

Q: How does a lack of rightful claims to land figure into the psychology and performance of identity fraud?

> **Dr. Wilson:** The intrusion of neoliberalism, resource extraction, and curriculum awards all play a part. Often, it is just replicating colonialism outside.
>
> **Dr. Ansloos:** In the absence of real relationships to land, people may create mythical narratives rooted in racist and tokenizing depictions of Indigenous land-based relationships, often influenced by Hollywood or Victorian fiction.

Q: What is the link between the ability to claim you are an Indigenous person and the ability to have others believe that? What is the link between epistemic justice and Indigenous identity fraud?

> **Dr. Wilson:** Epistemicide, the severing of intergenerational knowledge tied to land, allows fraudsters to fabricate or invent knowledge that lacks authentic transmission through Indigenous lineage.

Dr. Murry: Institutional failure to act creates an environment where superficial markers like "beads and feathers" are enough. This can be seen as collusion, even if unintentional, to maintain institutional productivity.

Q: Can you explain more about the psychology of fraudsters who are exposed and then double down?

Dr. Ansloos: Fraudsters double down out of self-preservation, driven by a fear-based response rather than empathy. It reflects a lack of moral responsibility and focuses on perceived threats to themselves rather than the harm they've caused.

Dr. Wilson: Reactions to fraudsters vary by gender and identity. Women committing identity fraud often face a different public response, reflecting gender and queer dynamics in how fraud is perceived.

Q: Are there any models for people to accept the harm they have done? What should the community be doing to hold people accountable and move them past the point of shame to some kind of healing?

Dr. Ansloos: This is not the primary work of Indigenous scholars, who are focused on community dignity and justice. Accountability requires structured restorative justice, including truth-telling and reparations. Fraudsters must face the painful reality of their deception, but devoting energy to them should not detract from pressing community needs like access to clean water.

Q: When fraudsters make it about themselves and depict whistleblowers as the villains, and institutions become violent, isn't that further harm?

Dr. Wilson: Institutions are complicit when they fail to defend Indigenous faculty, staff, and students. Their inaction reinforces psychological and systemic violence.

Dr. Ansloos: Institutions prioritize protecting their interests, often under neoliberal governance. They may even discourage Indigenous faculty from raising concerns. Collective action is crucial in raising issues about individuals.

Q: How do post-secondary institutions support each other in dealing with the emotional, spiritual, and institutional violence related to identity fraud? Is there a way to address this collectively?

Dr. Murry: Institutions must balance protection and accountability while addressing the broader harm caused by identity fraud. Healing requires understanding the injuries inflicted and creating pathways to collective recovery.

Q: Do you think we need to talk about the gaslighting and the violence that can happen when fraudsters make the whistleblowers out to be the bad ones?

Dr. Wilson: Institutions are complicit when they fail to defend actual Indigenous faculty, staff, and students, reinforcing violence through inaction.

Dr. Ansloos: Policies meant to allow whistleblowing can sometimes be weaponized against those raising concerns. Ultimately, institutions focus on self-preservation rather than defending Indigenous rights.

Elders' Panel: Creating Space for Truth and Healing

Elder Reepa Evic-Carleton shared her personal story and reflections on Indigenous resilience, healing, and traditional wisdom. Born on her ancestral land during the dark season of winter, her early life revolved around the warmth and light of the qulliq, symbolizing harmony and security. However, her family was forcibly relocated from their home when she was five, a traumatic event that shaped her identity and connection to her people's history. Although too young to recall the relocation fully, she learned from her Elders and family members about its profound impact, often revisiting the place where she was born to reconnect and reflect.

Elder Reepa spoke about *maligait*, the natural laws her people followed, which govern relationships with others and the environment. These principles emphasize working for the common good, respecting all living things, maintaining balance, and planning for the future. She highlighted the importance of incorporating these laws into contemporary discussions to address harms and build healthier communities. Living a good life is about being healthy in a holistic way in ourselves, in our families, and in our communities, and in relation to our natural world.

She emphasized the need for healing within Indigenous communities, acknowledging the deep changes and challenges her people have faced. Healing, she noted, requires introspection, effort, and embracing messiness, but it ultimately leads to personal and collective growth. Elder Reepa called on everyone to engage in this journey, emphasizing the value of striving for a good life defined by holistic health, respect, and celebration.

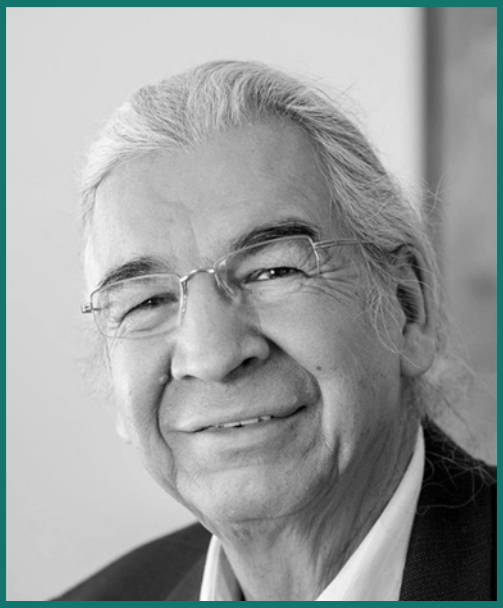
ELDER REEPA EVIC-CARLETON

Reepa Evic-Carleton, originally from Cumberland Sound, Nunavut, and later Pangnirtung, has extensive experience supporting Inuit communities. Currently, she works as a therapist at the Inuuqatigiit Centre in Ottawa, facilitating parenting programs and healing circles for mothers.

ELDER JOSEPH NAYTOWHOW

Elder Joseph Naytowhow, an award-winning Plains/Woodland nehiyaw (Cree) artist from Sturgeon Lake First Nation, is renowned for his storytelling, music, and cultural teachings. With over 35 years of experience, he is a sought-after speaker, performer, facilitator, and educator, sharing his wisdom locally, regionally, and internationally.

A longtime Saskatoon resident, Joseph has served as a cultural advisor to institutions, including the Indian Teacher Education Program and various universities. He holds a Bachelor of Education from ITEP and currently serves as Emerging Elder/Cultural Advisor at the University of Saskatchewan's College of Law. Joseph is known for his generosity, humour, and coyote trickster spirit in sharing his creative and cultural knowledge.



Elder Joseph Naytowhow shared insights into identity, the complexity of cultural disconnection, and the power of traditional stories. He reflected on his journey of colonization that began at the age of five and how reclaiming language and stories became essential to his understanding of self. Now at 70 years old, his name translates to *On a Good Day, He Walks*, signifying his ongoing path of self-discovery. He noted that the journey to fully find oneself is never complete.

Central to his reflections was the importance of storytelling. Elder Joseph recounted the story of a man who wanted to become a white buffalo. Through trials, mistakes, and lessons taught by the buffalo herd and their chief, the man learned about the challenges and responsibilities of living a life not meant for him. Ultimately, he returned to his human form, carrying with him a deeper respect for the buffalo and the importance of reciprocity. The story, he explained, demonstrates the interconnection between beings and the lessons inherent in the choices we make.

Addressing those who seek to appropriate Indigenous identity, Elder Joseph talked about the magnetism of the spiritual, philosophical, and physical richness of Indigenous knowledge, stories, songs, and teachings. He acknowledged the allure of this wealth but cautioned against taking without understanding or engaging in respectful reciprocal practices. He likened this appropriation to his own internalized belief that European culture was superior—a belief he had to unlearn to reconnect with his true self.

Elder Joseph affirmed his enduring connection to the land, which welcomes him every day. He concluded with a powerful statement of self-awareness: "I know who I am." His reflections highlighted the enduring process of healing, the sacredness of truth, and the respect owed to Indigenous knowledges and ways of being.

Elder Wanosts'a7 Lorna Williams began her reflections with a warm acknowledgment of the land, its ancestors, and the complexity of discussing identity fraud and disconnection. She shared wisdom from a life deeply intertwined with her people's teachings, emphasizing the importance of stories, relationships, and community in navigating challenging topics.

Reflecting on displacement, Elder Lorna noted how colonial policies, and systemic practices have uprooted Indigenous peoples from their lands and identities. She shared a personal story of her father's limitations as a Native man in Vancouver and how an aunt pretended to be Italian to gain access to spaces denied to Indigenous people. These actions, while painful, were survival mechanisms in a world that marginalizes Indigenous people.

As an educator, Elder Lorna described her efforts to bring Indigenous ways of knowing into university settings. Through her course *Learning and Teaching in the Indigenous World*, she created opportunities for students to experience Indigenous teachings and relationships with the land. Activities included guided outdoor experiences where students learned to see the earth and its gifts differently, through heightened awareness, fostering respect, a sense of connection and belonging.

She highlighted the profound impact this work had on students, particularly those who had been disconnected from their Indigenous roots through adoption. Their emotional responses underscored the transformative power of reconnection and the possibility of healing.

Elder Lorna offered a cautionary note on the discussion of identity fraud. While addressing the issue, it is essential to consider those who have been disconnected from their communities due to colonization. She stressed that conversations about identity must take place within communities, guided by Elders, stories, and teachings that emphasize generosity, kindness, and resilience.

She shared a prophecy about Indigenous teachings becoming crucial for guiding newcomers when the time is

ELDER WANOSTS'A7 LORNA WILLIAMS

Dr. Lorna Wanosts'a7 Williams, Professor Emerita of Indigenous Education at the University of Victoria and former Canada Research Chair in Education and Linguistics, has dedicated her life to advancing Indigenous education and language revitalization. A survivor of Indian Day School and St. Joseph's Mission residential school, where she lost her Lil'wat language, Lorna later relearned it with the help of community Elders and became an interpreter for them. She co-developed a writing system for Lil'wat and co-authored its first curriculum and learning resources, which are still in use today.

Lorna played a pivotal role in opening Mount Currie's band-controlled school in 1973, the second of its kind in Canada. At UVic, she led the creation of Bachelor's and Master's programs in Indigenous Language Revitalization and a Master's in Counseling in Indigenous Communities.

right—a moment signaled by significant signs like the eagle landing on the moon. These stories, she said, offer vital lessons for reshaping institutions and creating spaces of inclusion, connectivity, and shared wisdom.

In closing, Elder Lorna urged communities not to be distracted by the actions of a few who falsely claim Indigenous identity. Instead, she called for a focus on the collective work of rebuilding, learning from stories, and fostering relationships rooted in respect and reciprocity. Her reflections underscored the power of Indigenous knowledges in addressing the challenges of identity and belonging.

Q: What do we do when those who are pretending to be Indigenous utilize and weaponize Elders against us? From your view as Elders and Knowledge Keepers, what do we do when those we hold in high regard will not listen to us because they are paid by the University?

Elder Joseph Naytowhow:

Elders can get into positions where they are complicit. It is important to talk with other Elders and to be cautious in situations. When someone has something invested, they will do what they can to avert any opposition. One way is to stay away from this.

Elder Reepa Evic-Carleton:

This is a hard topic. We have to keep reminding ourselves who we are and to keep moving forward. Remember the teachings of our Elders.

Elder Wanosts'a7 Lorna Williams:

When the Bourassa issue came up there were few people at universities who were taking active roles. This is a good example of what happens to Elders. There is a long way to go. There is lots of anger, resentment, and pain.

Summary: Kitchen Table Conversation

How Do We Care for Each Other?

The panel explored the effects of false identity claims within Indigenous communities, presenting the perspectives of a former student, graduate student, community member, and Elder. These stories emphasized the impact of systemic disconnection, challenges in academia, and the importance of fostering authentic Indigenous representation and support.

Lori Campbell, a former student of a fraudster, shared her journey of rediscovering her Indigeneity after being apprehended as a child and raised in a non-Indigenous, upper-middle-class family. Though financially privileged, she lacked cultural connection and understanding of her identity, leading to anger and confusion. Her academic journey began with basketball as her "gateway drug" to university and deepened after discovering the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College (SIFC), now the First Nations University of Canada.

Through Indigenous Studies, she learned about herself and the collective experience of other "Sixties Scoop" survivors. However, her Master's program brought challenges, particularly under the mentorship of Carrie Bourassa, later exposed as a pretendian. Campbell reflected: *"I've obviously questioned my work, about who is developing our curriculum, and whose research we are reinforcing."*

Despite her struggles, she completed her Master's thesis defense, supported by Indigenous scholars like Dr. Shauneen Pete and Dr. Alex Wilson, calling it a "beautiful experience."

Now pursuing her PhD, Campbell emphasized the importance of Indigenous faculty and research in academia. She explained: *"About 95% of my scholarship is Indigenous people, mostly women… It's really important that we are reinforcing and building on our own Indigenous work."*

She advocated for universities to become communities of support for Indigenous students, where they can find connection and learn about their identity: *"I want us to ensure that universities remain a place where our young people… feel like there's a community on campus of aunties, uncles, Two Spirit, and older."*

Campbell's story highlights the necessity of authentic Indigenous representation in academic mentorship, the challenges of disconnection, and the transformative power of cultural reconnection.

Manon Tremblay, a community member from Muskeg Lake Cree Nation, shared her perspective on the unique dynamics of false Indigenous identity claims in Quebec. Having navigated both French and English educational systems, she discussed how "pretendianism" manifests differently in Quebec compared to other regions in Canada.

Tremblay explained a collective myth pervasive in Quebec, where many individuals claim to have Indigenous ancestry, often referring to a distant "great-grandmother" with little evidence. This phenomenon, which she

termed "Indian blood syndrome," is similar to the "Cherokee syndrome" in the United States. She noted: *"In Quebec, you cannot go anywhere without someone claiming they have Indian blood. It is a collective myth... as it makes them sound interesting or more exotic."*

Additionally, she highlighted the proliferation of fake Métis groups in Quebec, driven by misinterpretations of the term "Métisse," which in French refers broadly to mixed heritage, rather than ties to the Métis Nation. These false claims are often based on a single ancestor from the 17th century, who may not have been Indigenous at all.

Tremblay addressed the racism faced by Indigenous people in Quebec, both subtle and overt. Growing up, families often avoided discussing their Indigenous identity to evade prejudice. She described personal experiences of being judged on her appearance: *"Colleagues identified me as the new Indigenous person, but my name did not sound very Indigenous. A colleague was so enthusiastic about how another student was 'more Indigenous than me' based on his appearance."*

This systemic racism is compounded by Quebec's lack of employment equity policies that explicitly target Indigenous candidates. Tremblay noted that false claims of Indigenous identity are often framed as fraud or academic dishonesty when exposed.

Tremblay criticized how pretendians misuse their false identity for personal gain, citing examples like Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond, who fabricated various academic achievements alongside her Indigenous identity. She emphasized the need to view such cases through a lens of dishonesty and questioned the broader implications: *"If they are lying about this, then what else are they lying about?"*

She praised some universities for quietly addressing the issue but highlighted the cultural challenges, especially in French media, which often downplays the seriousness of self-Indigenizing: *"They do not see the problem with self-Indigenizing because, after all, they all have Indian blood."*

Keisha Erwin (wapahkesis): "I am a graduate student at the University of Saskatchewan. On my mom's side I am part of the African diaspora. My mother was born and raised in Jamaica. Her ancestors got there via the transatlantic slave trade. She came to what we currently know as Canada today at the age of 17. On my dad's side, I'm Woodland Cree and a member of the Lac La Ronge Indian Band. My dad was part of the Sixties Scoop. I grew up very disconnected as my dad was put into foster care at the age of four, adopted by a non-Indigenous, white, settler family at the age of nine, and they moved him to Southern Ontario. That is where my parents met."

Keisha's narrative highlighted the complex intersections of race, identity, and nationhood, particularly for individuals navigating dual identities in contexts shaped by colonial histories and ongoing systemic biases. They emphasized the importance of nationhood over race in Indigenous identity, challenging the merging of physical appearance with cultural or legal belonging. Their assertion that their Woodland Cree identity stems from their family, community, and obligations, not merely their appearance, underscored the distinction between Indigeneity as a matter of nationhood versus a racial construct.

They differentiated the genuine process of reconnection for those who have been forcibly disconnected (like Sixties Scoop survivors) from false claims of Indigeneity. Keisha stressed that pretendians often mimic

narratives of disconnection and trauma, creating challenges for those legitimately seeking to reconnect with their communities and cultures.

Keisha's lived experience revealed that phenotypically Black Indigenous individuals face heightened scrutiny and racialized gatekeeping, which stems from colonial constructs of race. Their insights showed how Blackness can be seen as "contaminating," while whiteness is normalized, creating inequities in how mixed Indigenous identities are perceived and validated.

Experiences of invalidation in Indigenous spaces—such as being dismissed by Elders or community members—can discourage individuals like Keisha and younger generations of Black-Native people from embracing or exploring their Indigenous identity. This harms efforts at reconnection and perpetuates internalized doubts about belonging. They called for more inclusion of legitimate Afro-Indigenous voices in discussions about identity, particularly around pretendianism. They stressed the need to address the intersections of race and nationhood and to normalize that mixed-race Indigenous people are no less valid or connected to their communities.

Keisha's experiences within academic and cultural institutions highlight systemic failures in supporting diverse Indigenous identities. Their story illustrated how institutions often reinforce colonial narratives by prioritizing surface-level Indigeneity over deeper, community-based connections. They advocated for creating supportive environments for mixed Indigenous youth, challenging colonial constructs that separate Indigeneity from Blackness, and fostering understanding of how these identities intersect uniquely in Canada compared to the U.S.

Keisha's perspective is a compelling reminder of the need to unpack the nuances of identity in decolonization work and to create inclusive spaces that honour the diverse realities of Indigenous peoples.

Elder Maria Campbell's reflections provide a deeply personal and historical lens into the experiences of Métis people, their histories, and the challenges they continue to face within colonial systems, including academia.

Elder Maria articulated the unique position of Métis people, living "in two worlds" and navigating the intersection of Indigenous and settler cultures. She emphasized the linguistic and cultural diversity of her upbringing, where multiple languages like Cree, Cree/Michif, Saulteaux, and Dene coexisted. Her storytelling underscored the erasure and marginalization of Métis communities, particularly through displacement. She told a compelling story of Prince Albert National Park that was once home to her great-grandmother and her family before Treaty was signed. Grey Owl, an Englishman posing as an Indigenous person, became a prominent advocate for making the area a national park. Despite being a fraud who falsely claimed to be Anishinaabe and pretended to speak Cree, his voice was influential, while the true stories of the people displaced were ignored. Grey Owl, an alcoholic, became a celebrated folk hero, with his name immortalized in the park, while the burial grounds of the original inhabitants remain unacknowledged.

Elder Maria celebrated the resilience and leadership of Métis women, particularly her great-grandmother and grandmother, who were instrumental in maintaining cultural practices and protecting families in the absence of external authorities like priests or Indian agents. She also critiqued how colonial systems, such as the church and patriarchal norms, disrupted these traditional roles, citing historical accounts of Jesuits targeting women for conversion and introducing gendered violence.

Despite her lack of formal education beyond grade seven, Campbell became a professor, writer, and cultural educator. Her journey challenges conventional ideas about credentials and underscores the value of lived experience and Indigenous knowledge systems. She critiques the academy for failing to center Indigenous histories and for relying on curricula developed by non-Indigenous individuals, which perpetuate erasure and misrepresentation.

Elder Maria also raised a pressing concern about lateral violence within Indigenous communities, especially in academic settings. She called for open dialogue and unity to address internal conflicts that hinder collective progress.

Her reflections on "pretendians" and identity fraud extend beyond individuals, focusing on the broader consequences for families and future generations. Elder Maria stressed the importance of Elders in guiding youth and preserving cultural continuity. She criticized tokenism, where institutions selectively engage Elders without genuine respect or inclusion. Her reflections on the importance of language underscored its power to connect people with their heritage. She advocated for small but meaningful efforts, such as learning and understanding one word daily.

Despite her critique of institutions and the enduring pain caused by colonization, Elder Maria held hope for future generations. She emphasized the responsibility of Elders to create a better inheritance for children, free of fear and shame. Her call for conversations, storytelling, and the use of ceremony as tools for healing and community building offered a pathway toward change and to ensure a more just and inclusive future for the next seven generations.

Witnesses: Student Voices

To center the voices of Indigenous youth, four graduate students took on the role of witnesses during the 2nd Forum. Over the two days, they attentively observed presentations and discussions, and moved freely among the breakout session conversation circles, listening for key themes and thought-provoking ideas.

At the forum's conclusion, the four Indigenous student witnesses shared their reflections, offering a retelling and interpretation of what they felt, saw, and heard.

Rylan McCallum

MSc. Student, Faculty of Medicine, University of British Columbia
Métis, Anishinaabe, and Scottish; member of the Manitoba Métis Federation

I am new to being a witness and acknowledge it as an important role. Witnessing goes beyond seeing and hearing—it's about understanding, carrying knowledge, and sharing it responsibly. Today, I'll share my perspective, which is unique but not universal. At the start of the conference, Dr. Ottmann said something that resonated with me: we're going to make mistakes in the policies we create, but the key is to learn from them and move forward.

Last year's witnesses spoke about the awkwardness of navigating cultural spaces we've never been in before. We need to embrace that discomfort and not shy away from it if we're to find solutions. Indigenous ways of knowing and being, carried by all members of our communities—whether Elders, families, or students—are vital in shaping these discussions. This is why Indigenous people must have the final say on issues affecting us. For example, having Elders and community members involved in institutional hiring and policy-making was suggested as a meaningful step forward.

However, there's no single solution. Every community across Canada must develop approaches that work for them, but we can still collaborate nationally to guide institutions willing to engage. Progress will be slow, and this process may be frustrating, but it's essential to avoid causing more harm than good. Forums like this are an important start, but they must continue, with other witnesses sharing their knowledge.

I've heard concerns that it's too soon to bring non-Indigenous voices into these spaces because they're not yet safe for all Indigenous participants. This work is hard, particularly for those speaking out. **I've noticed that Indigenous women are often the ones calling out fraudulent behavior, but we need Indigenous men to step up too.** Fraud at the highest levels of academia, law, and government—where individuals falsely claim Indigenous identity to secure significant funding and prestigious positions—harms students, staff, and the broader community. Accountability measures are needed, including verifying citizenship and identity for those in leadership roles.

As an Indigenous student in medicine, I'm required to prove my citizenship for awards and bursaries. Yet, individuals leading high-profile Indigenous-focused initiatives often

don't face the same scrutiny. This double standard is damaging. Fraudulent claims don't just harm those directly affected—they have lasting impacts even after the perpetrators are called out.

In my graduate work, I've seen how these issues ripple through our institutions. For example, the *In Plain Sight* report, authored by Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond, is the only major report on racism in BC healthcare. While real Indigenous contributors shaped it, her false claims overshadow their work. This undermines trust and safety, particularly for Indigenous graduate students navigating these spaces.

Finally, I want to acknowledge the critical role of non-tenured Indigenous staff, who often drive meaningful change despite job insecurity. Their efforts have made universities safer for students like me, but they shouldn't have to risk their livelihoods to do so. We must support them as we continue this work together.

Natasha MacDonald

Ph.D. Student, department of Education, Concordia University
I am from Kuujjuarapik in Nunavik, Arctic Quebec, but currently live in Montreal.

Kuujjuarapik is unique as the only Nunavik community where Cree and Inuit share the same land. My perspective comes from my lived experiences, not as a representative of all Inuit. I am pursuing a PhD in intercultural communication at Concordia University, where I'm the only Indigenous student in my cohort. Growing up with an Inuk mother and a non-Inuit father from New Brunswick, I've navigated two worlds, learning to mediate and find meaning between them.

My career spans over 20 years in roles within Inuit and Indigenous organizations, including human resources and sustainable employment. These experiences, along with my time as senior director at ITK, have shaped my problem-solving lens as I approached my role as a witness.

Witnessing, in our culture, is about observing, listening, and learning from Elders. Themes that stood out during the Forum were connectivity—our relationships to land, family, and each other—and the need for systemic change. Elder Maria Campbell's question, "Where is your umbilical cord tied to?" highlighted our deeply relational ways of connecting with each other.

Systemic change requires institutional accountability, particularly around issues like identity fraud. Policies must prioritize authenticity and reconciliation, involving Elders and HR in

vetting processes to ensure honest representation and committees focused on consensus building. Institutions must embrace both top-down policy changes and traditional methods, like talking circles, to address discrepancies respectfully.

In conclusion, Elders remain our guiding force, grounding us with wisdom from decades of change and resilience. Their lived experiences offer the path forward as we navigate these challenges together.

Missy Leblanc

MA Student in Cultural Studies, Curatorial Practices, University of Winnipeg, Métis/nehiyaw/Polish and a citizen of the Métis Nation of Alberta.

I'm currently a graduate student in Cultural Studies at the University of Winnipeg, located on Treaty One Territory and the homeland of the Métis. My roots are in Edmonton, amiskwacîwâskahikan, the traditional territory of my people, where both my parents—Sixties Scoop survivors—were born and raised. My maternal grandfather was a Polish settler in Alberta, and my maternal grandmother was from Canoe Lake First Nation, though I'm still on the journey of connecting with that part of my heritage. My paternal grandparents were Métis, with deep ties to Red River, Lac Ste. Anne, and the Papaschase First Nation.

Recently, I've been deeply impacted by a case of identity fraud at the University of Winnipeg. It has affected me academically, personally, and professionally, forcing me to delay my studies. While hesitant at first, I accepted the role of Witness after consulting with friends, family and mentors, feeling that I could contribute a unique perspective and learn from others navigating similar challenges.

In reflecting on the conversations over the past two days, three key themes stood out:

Misunderstanding of Métis Identity
Many people do not fully understand Métis history or what it means to be Métis. In mixed spaces, I often find myself having to educate others, including First Nations and Inuit individuals, about Métis identity, which can be alienating and exhausting. There is a need for better education about the processes to vet Métis citizenship. There have been suggestions for a national Métis registry.

Kindness vs. Anger
The tension between kindness and anger was evident in these discussions. Those harmed by identity fraud are rightfully angry, yet there's an emphasis on approaching these conversations with kindness. I see kindness as rooted in ethics and care—different from niceness, which is about pleasing others. Accountability and constructive criticism can coexist with kindness and even anger.

Colonialism and White Supremacy
This issue is deeply tied to colonialism and white supremacy, yet many are uncomfortable discussing race in these spaces. Proximity to whiteness and its privileges must be acknowledged and does not have to diminish one's Indigeneity. Jean Teillet and Dr. Kim TallBear highlighted the complexities of political versus racial identities and how current EDI initiatives often fail to address the unique harms caused by identity fraud.

Institutions must create systemic changes that address the specific equity needs of Indigenous communities, moving beyond generalized EDI frameworks. These conversations are just the beginning, and we must continue to confront these challenges together.

Zoe Roy

Ph.D. student, Education, York University

Zoey Roy's poetic and reflective witness statement touched on profound themes of identity, colonization, resilience, and self-determination.

Roy emphasized the healing power of storytelling and art, framing them as tools for reclaiming Indigenous identities and ways of knowing. Through her reflections, she underscored the importance of cultural expression in navigating colonial systems. The inclusion of children's songs and wisdom highlights the purity and resilience of Indigenous youth, serving as a reminder of the strength found in community and the need to foster spaces where children can thrive.

Internalized Colonialism: Roy poignantly illustrated how colonial systems perpetuate cycles of harm, including internalized oppression and epistemicide (the destruction of Indigenous knowledge systems). Her critique of "toxic guilt" calls for deeper, actionable changes rather than superficial expressions of remorse. "Feeling guilty won't fix these systems. I've learned that toxic guilt just keeps people stuck, spinning in cycles of harm." "We cannot expect institutions to protect Indigenous people. As long as this is going on the way it is, I can see that the cost of Indigenization of colonial systems will be the institutionalization of Indigenous people."

Imposter Syndrome as a Colonial Tool: "That weight of internalized oppression, that sense of not being enough—it's not who we are. It's a tool used against us, designed to make us doubt ourselves and our worth. Imposter syndrome isn't natural; it's something colonial systems have planted in us." By framing imposter syndrome as a product of colonialism, she challenged the notion that feelings of inadequacy are personal failings. Instead, they reflect systemic efforts to undermine Indigenous identities and agency.

Relational Accountability: Roy underscored the centrality of kinship and relational responsibilities over institutional validations. Her reflections on grief and love resonate deeply, presenting these emotions as pathways to reconnection and healing. Acts of self-love, cultural reclamation, and refusal to conform to colonial expectations were framed as resistance. "Our children deserve better. They deserve to live in a world where their identities aren't torn apart, where joy isn't stolen from them."

"This work of reclaiming and resisting, it's not easy. But every act of self-love, every moment of refusal to conform to colonial expectations, is a step forward. I see this clearly in our classrooms and universities. These institutions weren't built for us, and they won't protect us." Roy advocated for compassion when met with cases of fraud and using Indigenous values like respect and reciprocity as guides. This approach contrasts punitive frameworks, aligning instead with community care and healing. Zoey identified the limitations of educational institutions in uplifting

and protecting Indigenous sovereignty and acknowledged their role in perpetuating colonial harm.

"When I speak to language speakers, I want you to know we hear you, and we need you. Your work is vital, and it gives us hope. And when I think of the children, they're not asking us to pave the way for them—they're demanding that we start. They're reminding us that the longest journey is the one from the head to the heart. It's time for us to take that journey, to reclaim our roots, and to reframe how we see ourselves and our place in this world. Hiy Hiy."

Pre-Conference Suggested Reading List

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The Final Report (March 2022) Indigenous Voices on Indigenous Identity

Speaker and Panel Profiles

Dr. Jacqueline Ottmann
President, First Nations University of Canada

Dr. Jacqueline Ottmann is President of the First Nations University of Canada and is Anishinaabe (Saulteaux) from Fishing Lake First Nation in Saskatchewan. Prior to her academic career, Jackie was an elementary, high school teacher and principal.

She remains an engaged scholar alongside her responsibilities as a senior academic leader. Ottmann has been recognized as an international researcher, advocate, and change-maker whose purpose is to transform practices inclusive of Indigenous leadership, methodologies, and pedagogies.

Jacqueline is driven to create schools and communities that foster a deeper sense of belonging and appreciation for Indigenous peoples – their histories, stories, ways of knowing and being. Ottmann is also the first Indigenous person to become President of the Canadian Society for the Study of Education.

Denise Baxter
Vice-Provost, Indigenous Initiatives at Lakehead University

Denise has served as Vice-Provost Indigenous Initiatives since 2017. She also teaches in both the Department of Indigenous Learning and Department of Continuing Education. She is completing her PhD in Equity and Indigenous Education at York University. As an established education leader, Denise has worked in multiple contexts including public school boards, the Ministry of Education, Lakehead University, and First Nations private schools for the past 29 years. Within each of these contexts, she has built capacity and partnerships with multiple community stakeholders. Her work with the community has involved education conferences, workshop presentations, and traditional pedagogy.

She currently serves on the following boards: YES Employment, Children's Centre Thunder Bay, the Thunder Bay Police Services Governance Committee, Keewatin Patricia DSB and a provincial EDI advisory committee. A Marten Falls First Nation member, she maintains that preserving and practicing cultural traditions and ceremony keeps her connected to the community, Indigenous cultures, traditions, and protocols. She works to establish networks, strengthen relationships with Indigenous communities and governments, and build capacity between Indigenous, public, and private partners which have supported multiple initiatives that advance educational outcomes for Indigenous students.

Michelle Cyca
Freelance Journalist & Editor

Michelle Cyca is a member of the Muskeg Lake Cree Nation in Treaty 6, and a freelance journalist and editor from Vancouver. She is a contributing editor to Maclean's, a contributing writer to The Walrus, and the editor of Indigenous-led conservation coverage for The Narwhal.

Her long-form investigation into Indigenous identity fraud, The Curious Case of Gina Adams, was published in Maclean's magazine in October 2022, and is a finalist for the 2023 Written Feature award from the Canadian Association of Journalists.

Her work can be found in The Globe & Mail, The Guardian, IndigiNews, The Tyee, Chatelaine, and many other places. Previously, she was the communications manager at Emily Carr University.

Speaker and Panel Profiles

Jean Teillet
Senior Counsel, Pape Salter Teillet LLP

Jean Teillet is Senior Counsel with Pape Salter Teillet LLP and specializes in Indigenous rights law. Jean has long been engaged in negotiations and litigation with provincial and federal governments concerning Métis and First Nation land rights, harvesting rights and self-government.

She served as counsel before all levels of court, including lead counsel for the landmark case R. v. Powley in which the Supreme Court of Canada affirmed constitutional protection of Métis harvesting rights. Jean was a founder of the Métis Nation of Ontario and the National Aboriginal Moot. She sits on the MMIWG Federal Sub-Working group.

Jean is a frequent author and lecturer on issues surrounding access to justice, Indigenous rights, identity, and history. She is also the great grandniece of Louis Riel.

Dr. Jeffrey Ansloos
Associate Professor and Canada Research Chair, University of Toronto

Dr. Jeffrey Ansloos is an Associate Professor of Indigenous Health and Social Policy, and the Canada Research Chair in Critical Studies in Indigenous Health and Social Action on Suicide at the University of Toronto. Ansloos' research currently focuses on Indigenous health justice; environmental dimensions of suicide; housing; and Indigenous peoples rights.

He is the research director of the Critical Health and Social Action Lab. He is a registered psychologist and teaches in the Department of Applied Psychology and Human Development, on topics of like grief and loss, critical community psychology, disability justice, and social and relational theories. Ansloos is an affiliate faculty of the School of Cities and the Tkaronto CIRCLE (Collaborative Indigenous Research, Communities, Land and Education) Lab at the University of Toronto, and an adjunct faculty member of the School of Child and Youth Care at the University of Victoria. Ansloos is Nêhiyaw (Cree) and English; and is a citizen of Fisher River Cree Nation (Ochekwi-Sipi; Treaty 5).

He was born and raised in the heart of Treaty 1 territory in Winnipeg. He currently resides in Tkaronto.

Dr. Kim TallBear
Professor and Canada Research Chair, University of Alberta

Kim TallBear (Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate) (she/her) is Professor and Canada Research Chair in Indigenous Peoples, Technoscience, and Society in the Faculty of Native Studies, University of Alberta. She is the author of Native American DNA: Tribal Belonging and the False Promise of Genetic Science.

In addition to studying genome science and other settler-colonial disruptions to Indigenous self-definitions, Dr. TallBear studies colonial disruptions to Indigenous sexual relations. She is a regular panelist on the weekly podcast, Media Indigena. You can follow her research group at https://indigenoussts.com

She tweets @KimTallBear. You can also follow her monthly posts on her Substack newsletter, Unsettle: Indigenous affairs, cultural politics & (de)colonization.

Speaker and Panel Profiles

Dr. Alex Wilson
Professor & Academic Director, the Aboriginal Education Research Centre, University of Saskatchewan

Dr. Alex Wilson is a member of the Opaskwayak Cree Nation and is currently a Professor with the Department of Educational Foundations, College of Education at the University of Saskatchewan.

She completed her BA (Psychology) from California State University Sacramento in 1994; EdM (Human Development and Psychology:Psycho-social and Cultural Development) from Harvard University in 1995; and EdD (Human Development and Psychology) from Harvard University in 2007.

Dr. Adam Murry
Assistant Professor, University of Calgary

Dr. Adam T. Murry (Apache), PhD, is an assistant professor at the University of Calgary where he runs the Indigenous Organizations and Communities Development Research lab. He is co-principal investigator for the Alberta Indigenous Mentorship in Health Innovation (AIM-HI) network and Network Environment for Indigenous Health Research (NEIHR) in Canada, and conducts research on Indigenous employment, mentorship, allyship, education, Indigenous studies, substance use, mental health, sustainability, and ministry.

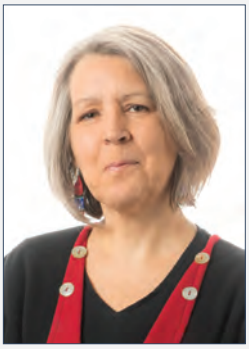
Dr. Murry has multiple peer-reviewed publications and book chapters, serves on several diversity and Indigenous-specific committees, and consults with both the non-profit and Tribal sector.

Lori Campbell
Associate Vice-President, Indigenous Engagement, University of Regina

Lori is Two-Spirit and is a member of Montreal Lake First Nation, Treaty 6 territory. She is an intergenerational survivor of the Indian Residential School system and a child from the Sixties Scoop generation. Lori has made it her career advocating for social justice and working towards a more equitable society for all. With over 15 years of progressive leadership in student services, academics, research and administration, Lori is an experienced leader in education.

Through the sharing of her lived experiences, traditional knowledge, and professional proficiencies she provides uncomfortable truths required for advancing processes of Indigenization, decolonization, and reconciliation within organizations and communities. Lori holds two undergraduate degrees (Indigenous Studies and Psychology), a master's degree in Adult Education and is a PhD candidate in Social Justice Education. She currently holds the position of Associate Vice-President, Indigenous Engagement at the University of Regina.

Speaker and Panel Profiles

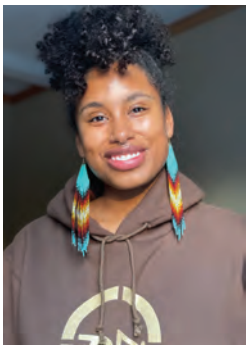


Manon Tremblay
Senior Director, Indigenous Directions, Concordia University

Manon Tremblay is a member of the Muskeg Lake Cree Nation. She is the Senior Director, Indigenous Directions at Concordia University where she oversees the implementation of the Indigenous Directions Action Plan.

Prior to her appointment at Concordia, Manon was the Director, Indigenous Research at the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada where she led the initiative to build Indigenous research capacity.

Prior to that, she was the Senior Project Leader for the Public Service Commission of Canada's Aboriginal Centre of Expertise where she worked in strategic Indigenous recruitment programs and services. Manon has spent 20 years of her career as a university student services administrator, part-time faculty and senior leader on Indigenous affairs.

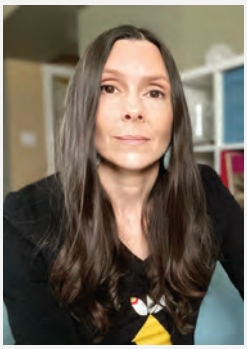


Keisha (wapahkesis)
Emerging Artist and University of Saskatchewan Graduate Student

Keisha (wapahkesis) is a 2S nīhithaw (Woods Cree) emerging artist, academic and a band member of the Lac La Ronge Indian Band in north-central Saskatchewan. They are also Afro-Caribbean (Jamaican) on their mom's side. Keisha holds a B.A. Honors in Indigenous Studies from York University and is undertaking their Master's of Educational Foundations at the University of Saskatchewan with a research focus on community-led Indigenous language revitalization.

They are a second language learner of nihithawiwin (Woodland Cree-TH dialect) and has released a Cree Kids Book that they illustrated themselves and translated with help from their Cree mentor Christine McKenzie. With mentorship from 2S filmmakers Fallon Simard and TJ Cuthand, Keisha was able to produce their first film in 2019 that screened internationally.

In the past year, Keisha was selected as part of NSI Indigidocs program and is in the post-production of their film, pî-kiwîk (Come Home) that will premiere on on APTN, documentary Channel, CBC Gem, NFB platform, nsifilms.ca and aptnlumi.ca in March of 2023. Keisha's dreams are to get into filmmaking and animation and through which, to tell stories in their Indigenous language (Cree) to inspire and encourage youth to learn Cree.



Trina Roache
Rogers Chair in Journalism, University of King's College

Trina Roache is a proud member of the Glooscap Mi'kmaw community, an award-winning video journalist and the Rogers Chair in Journalism at the University of King's College in Kjipuktuk (Halifax). Trina spent over two decades working for CBC, APTN National News, and APTN Investigates.

She's a regular guest on Media Indigena, a podcast with host Rick Harp, that focuses on Indigenous current affairs. As a journalism educator, Trina brings an L'nu perspective to her journalism courses, essential for the hard work required in reconciliation. She's currently studying for her master's in history at Dalhousie University.

Speaker and Panel Profiles

Loretta Pete Lambert
Member of the Board, First Nations University of Canada

Ms. Pete Lambert is a mother, aunt, grandmother and wife. She is from the Little Pine Cree Nation. Loretta's education includes degrees in education and a Juris Doctor in Law. She is currently a practicing lawyer and has taught elementary, secondary, and post-secondary school.

She possesses Professional Teaching Certificates from the provinces of Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia. Loretta is a proven successful education administrator. She managed and coordinated the creation of the website www.creedictionary.com, archiving the Cree Language based on two dictionaries: one from Dr. Arok Wolvengrey, First Nations University of Canada and from Dr. Earle Waugh, University of Alberta.

Loretta was an elected Board Member with the Greater Catholic School Division and an appointed Board Member of the Many Nations Cooperative Board. Her experience on these boards shows proven success in governance and leadership.

Bob Badger
Cultural Coordinator, Office of the Vice-Provost Indigenous Engagement, University of Saskkatchewan

Bob is from Kawacatoose First Nation. He was born and raised on Keeseekoose First Nation where he spent a great deal of time learning from his Great Grandparents. Bob has a Bachelor of Indigenous Fine Arts from the First Nations University of Canada and a Masters of Education, Indigenous Language Revitalization from the University of Victoria.

Bob is the Cultural Coordinator in the Office of the Vice-Provost Indigenous Engagement at the University of Saskatchewan and is responsible for walking beside Colleges, Schools and units from across the university on their Indigenization journey. His role is to build cultural capacity, provide guidance to the university community on how to work with elders and knowledge keepers in respectful and meaningful ways, assist individuals in their understanding of Indigenous cultures and teach about the diversity of Indigenous peoples.

His elders taught him to be humble and to always be respectful of different cultures. He brings this teaching with him to work every day as he helps to educate the campus community in their Indigenization processes.

Angel Oliver
Graduate Student, McGill University

Angel Oliver is Ojibway from Natokamegwanning First Nations in Ontario. Her Indigenous name is Ozawaabiiminseek which means Yellow Bird. She is currently completing a master's degree in occupational therapy at McGill University.

Elder Profiles

Dr. Maria Campbell
Elder & Indigenous Knowledge & Wellness Coordinator, First Nations University of Canada

Elder Maria Campbell is a Métis author, playwright, filmmaker, teacher, community worker, Elder, mother, grandmother, and great grandmother. Campbell was born in 1940 in northwestern Saskatchewan on a trapline and grew up in a road-allowance community. She is also a lifelong advocate and contributor to Indigenous and Canadian letters, arts, and politics. Maria is best known for her 1973 bestselling memoir Halfbreed, which was re-published in 2019.

She has published 7 other books, the most recent Keetsahnak Our Missing and Murdered Indigenous Sisters, co-edited with Kim Anderson and Christi Belcourt. She is currently finishing her 8th book. Maria was made an Officer of the Order of Canada in 2008.

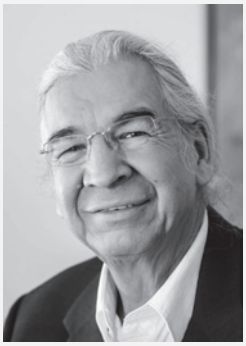
Dr. Wanosts'a7 Lorna Williams
Elder, Associate Professor Emeritus, Indigenous Education, University of Victoria

Dr. Lorna Wanosts'a7 Williams is Professor Emerita of Indigenous Education, Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Victoria and Canada Research Chair in Education and Linguistics. She has been living and breathing the Calls to Action on education and language since before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was ever imagined. She built her career on the principle that quality education for Indigenous children must be characterized by strong cultural teachings alongside a Euro-Western education. As a child, Wanosts'a7 was sent to Indian Day School and then to residential school at St. Joseph's Mission, where her Lil'wat language was lost.

Shortly after returning home from residential school, she was hospitalized for hepatitis and community elders assisted her recovery and relearning of her language. In turn, she became an English interpreter for the elders in her community. Lorna helped to develop the writing system for Lil'wat and co-authored the first curriculum and learning resources for teachers to teach the language in school. These materials continue to be used to teach today. In 1973, Wanosts'a7 was instrumental in opening Mount Currie's band-controlled school, only the second First Nations community in Canada to do so.

The school delivered an innovative curriculum including Lil'wat and Euro-Canadian knowledge, history, and values, with instruction given in both Lil'wat and English. Each course was carefully negotiated to ensure that they did not colonize Lil'wat children. At the University of Victoria, Dr. Williams initiated and led the development of Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Indigenous Language Revitalization, and a Master's in Counseling in Indigenous Communities. She also initiated, designed, and implemented a mandatory course in Indigenous Education for all teacher education students, leading to the requirement that all teacher education programs in British Columbia include an Indigenous Education course.

Elder Profiles



Elder Joseph Naytowhow
Elder, Singer, songwriter, performer

Elder Joseph Naytowhow is an award-winning Plains/Woodland nehiyaw (Cree) interdisciplinary artist from the Sturgeon Lake First Nation Band in Saskatchewan. His generosity and compassion for sharing cultural knowledge makes him a much sought after speaker, performer, facilitator, and outdoor educator for adults and children alike locally, regionally and internationally. A longtime resident of Saskatoon, he has been playing music and telling stories, both tall and short, for over 35 years.

In addition to his busy schedule of performances, he has served as a cultural advisor to various institutions such as residencies, Indian Teacher Education Program in Saskatoon, and multiple universities across turtle island. Joseph holds a Bachelor of Education degree from the Indigenous Teacher Education Program (ITEP) and can currently be found at the College of Law, U of S where he serves as Emerging Elder/Cultural Advisor. He is pleased to share his creative life experience,coyote trickster tendencies, and cultural knowledge when invited to do so.

Elder Reepa Evic-Carleton
Elder & Therapist, Inuuqatigiit Centre for Inuit Children, Youth, and Families

Reepa Evic-Carleton was born in Cumberland Sound, Nunavut, and then relocated to the community of Pangnirtung, Nunavut when she was 5 years old. In the North, her work experience included working for 10 years as a Housing Manager in Pangnirtung and one year as Community Social Worker in Child Protection. In 1989, she moved to Ontario. In Ottawa, Reepa spent 7 years working as a Family Support Worker at Tungasuvvingat Inuit, working closely with the shelter CAS Ottawa and sitting on the AIDS Committee of Ottawa. Ms.

She also worked at Pauktuutit, the national association for Inuit women, coordinating national activities around the issues of substance abuse. She then co-founded the Mamisarvik Healing Centre, the first Inuit-specific trauma and addictions treatment centre in southern Canada. At Mamisarvik, she worked as a therapist and then as the Program Coordinator. In 2017, Reepa joined the Inuuqatigiit Centre for Inuit Children, Youth, and Families, where she works as a therapist and facilitates parenting programs and healing circles for mothers.

The Late Elder Millie Anderson
Acknowledgement

The late Elder Millie Anderson, was a respected Elder and caring mother and grandmother who took great pride in helping students and staff with the Beading Circle at FNUniv's Regina Campus.

She was born in the Northwest Territories and was part of the Elders (kêhtê-ayak) Council for many years. Late Millie spoke at the inaugural National Indigenous Identity Forum on Elder's Perspectives on Kinship and Identity in March 2022 and we want to acknowledge the role she played in supporting this dialogue.

Moderator Profiles

Dr. Celeste Pedri-Spade
Associate Provost of Indigenous Initiatives, McGill University

Dr. Celeste Pedri-Spade is an Anishinaabekwe and member citizen of Nezaadiikaang (Lac des Mille Lacs First Nation) located in Treaty 3 territory. In 2022, Celeste became McGill University's first Associate Provost of Indigenous Initiatives and in this role she oversees the University's ongoing response to the 52 Calls to Action articulated by the Provost's Task Force on Indigenous Studies and Indigenous Education. She also holds a faculty position in the Department of Anthropology. Before arriving at McGill, she was the Queen's National Scholar in Indigenous Studies at Queen's University.

Celeste began her academic career at Laurentian University where she served as an associate professor and the inaugural Director of the Maamwizing Indigenous Research Institute. Her current research interests include Anishinaabe gikendaasowin, critical pedagogies and identity politics, the role of Indigenous visual/material culture in decolonial praxis, and the materiality of Anishinaabemowin. Celeste received her PhD in Visual Anthropology from the University of Victoria.

Dr. Beverly Jacobs
Senior Advisor, Indigenous Relations and Outreach, University of Windsor

Dr. Beverley Jacobs is recently appointed as Senior Advisor to the President on Indigenous Relations and Outreach at the University of Windsor and she practices law part-time at her home community of Six Nations of the Grand River Territory. Her research focuses on Indigenous Legal Orders, Indigenous Wholistic Health, Indigenous Research Methodologies, and Decolonization of Eurocentric Law. Beverley has obtained a Bachelor of Law Degree from the University of Windsor in 1994, a Master of Law Degree from the University of Saskatchewan in 2000 and a PhD from the University of Calgary in 2018. Dr. Jacobs is a former President of the Native Women's Association of Canada (elected 2004 to 2009).

Beverley is also appointed as Indigenous Human Rights Monitor with the Mohawk Institute Residential School Survivors' Secretariat which was established in 2021 to organize and support efforts to uncover, document and share the truth about what happened at the Mohawk Institute during its 136 years of operation. Beverley is also a consultant/researcher/writer/public speaker.

Her work centres around ending gendered colonial violence against Indigenous people and restoring Indigenous laws, beliefs, values, and traditions. A prolific scholar, her published work has earned her numerous awards; her research combined with her advocacy has translated into national and international recognition. Dr. Jacobs received the Laura Legge Award from the Law Society of Ontario in 2021 and she was inducted as a Member of the Order of Canada in 2018.

She received two awards from Mohawk College in 2018: Alumni of Distinction Award and Distinguished Fellow – Adjunct Professor. In her first year of teaching at the Faculty of Law, University of Windsor in 2017, she received an Office of Human Rights, Equity & Accessibility, Human Rights and Social Justice Award. In 2016, she received a Franco-German Prize for Human Rights and the Rule of Law from the Governments of France and Germany for her human rights fight for the issues relating to missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls in Canada.

In 2008, she also received a Governor General's Award in Commemoration of the Person's Case, an Esquao Award from the Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women and a Canadian Voice of Women of Peace Award from the Canadian Department of Peace Initiative and Civilian Peace Service Canada.

Moderator Profiles

Neal Kewistep (MC)
Executive-in-Residence, University of Saskatchewan

Neal Kewistep has spent most of his career fostering relationships with government, community-based organizations, Indigenous organizations and educators. In his current role, Neal is involved with the ongoing leadership training of many Chiefs, Councilors, and Senior Band Administrators of Indigenous communities.

Prior to joining the policy school, Neal was the Interim Director of Population and Public Health in the Saskatchewan Health Authority, where he was responsible for 13 departments ranging from Healthy Families, to Immunization, and to Inner-city Health Services.

Neal Kewistep holds a Master of Public Administration degree from the Johnson Shoyama Graduate School and has a Bachelor's Degree in Indigenous Studies from First Nations University of Canada. In addition to his formal education, he counts his traditional training from Elders as being relevant in teaching him the role of a servant leader.

Qwul'sih'yah'maht (Dr. Robina Thomas)
Associate vice-president Indigenous, University of Victoria

Qwul'sih'yah'maht (Dr. Robina Thomas) is a member of Lyackson First Nation and has Snuy'ney'muxw and Sto:lo ancestry through her grandparents. Robina is currently the Vice-President, Indigenous and holds a faculty position in the School of Social Work. Robina was the inaugural Director and Executive Director of the Office of Indigenous Academic and Community Engagement, and inaugural Associate Vice-President, Indigenous. Her research focuses extensively on Indigenous women, children, residential schools, storytelling, and anti-colonial/anti-racist practices as a way of life. Her Master's thesis focused on Kuper Island Residential School and her PhD. dissertation focused on Indigenous Women and Leadership — "Protecting the Sacred Cycle: Indigenous Women and Leadership."

Moderator Profiles

Dr. Christy Bressette
Vice-Provost & Associate VP, Indigenous Initiatives, Western University

Christy R. Bressette is Western's first Vice-Provost & Associate Vice-President (Indigenous Initiatives). Christy—whose Anishinabek name is Neeta-Noo-Kee Kwe (Hard-Working Woman)—joined Western on March 1, 2021, after serving as the National Coordinator for Indigenous Education with the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada since 2008. Serving with passion and commitment over the past two decades, Christy has also supported area Anishinabek, Haudenosaunee, and Lenape Nations, as well as Friendship Centres, within work to advance education outcomes for Indigenous learners in the areas of policy, curriculum, and governance.

As one of the first Indigenous women to earn a PhD in Educational Studies from Western, where she also earned her BA (Honours) in History and BEd (with distinction), Christy has strong ties to Western. In addition to teaching at the primary and secondary level in Ontario and British Columbia, she has also taught several graduate-level courses related to Indigenous culture and education in Western's Faculty of Education since 2004. In 2017/18, she co-chaired the Provost's Task Force on the Implementation of Western's Indigenous Strategic Plan (2017/18). Throughout her career, Christy has demonstrated an astute ability for bridging cultural differences between people to help ensure inclusive, equitable, and quality education opportunities for all.

Dr. Savage Bear
Director, McMaster Indigenous Research Institute, McMaster University

Dr. Savage Bear is a rabble-rouser, Nehiyaw'iskwew (Cree woman) and member of the Montreal Lake Cree Nation in northern Saskatchewan. She is the Director for the McMaster Indigenous Research Institute (MIRI) and is an Assistant Professor within the Indigenous Studies Department. Savage is also the National Director of Walls to Bridges (an education program bringing post-secondary education to incarcerated and formerly incarcerated folks).

Before coming to McMaster, Bear worked at the University of Alberta, where she was the Director of the Indigenous Women & Youth Resilience Project and the academic lead on 'Indigenous Canada,' a highly successful online course boasting over half a million learners; she was also an assistant professor of Native Studies and Women's and Gender Studies. An accomplished academic, Bear has made significant contributions to Indigenous scholarship and the national Indigenous education landscape since earning her PhD from the University of Alberta in 2016. Her current research includes social justice, prison abolition, body sovereignty, sexuality, gender and reproductive justice, contemporary Indigenous art, and Indigenous literature. When she is not marking, teaching or enjoying her new role as Kookum (grandmother) you will find her literally chasing waterfalls around Hamilton's amazing trails with her dog, Odin.

Marilyn Poitras
Lawyer, ethical space designer, public speaker

Marilyn Poitras is an ethical space designer, public speaker, and positive deviant. She attended the Native Law Centre Summer Program, obtained her LL.B. at the University of Saskatchewan, her LL.M. at Harvard Law School and learns Indigenous law from Elders and the land.

In addition to being a lawyer, she has worked as a law professor, a writer, a film producer, a negotiator, a facilitator, a public speaker, a commissioner, a consultant and a design thinker.

Michif and Irish Scottish, born and raised in Southern Saskatchewan Marilyn comes to her work in this field with passion and conviction and focuses her lens on relationship development on the Indigenous front.

Witness Profiles 2023

Zoey Roy
Ph.D. student, Education, York University

Zoey Roy is an award-winning rebel with a cause. A humorous presenter and a luminous storyteller, Zoey offers practical wisdom for living well amongst the violence of settler colonialism. A lover of words, having fun and synthesizing knowledge, Zoey is a hip hop inspired poet with an insatiable appetite for creating, learning, and growing.

Nehithaw-Dené and Michif, Zoey is a citizen of Peter Ballantyne Cree Nation in Northern Saskatchewan and is based in Ottawa, ON. She has a Bachelor of Education, a Master of Public Policy and is now pursuing a Ph.D. in Education at York University.

Natasha MacDonald ᓇᑖᓯ ᒪᒃᑖᓈᓪᓪ
Ph.D. Student, department of Education, Concordia University

Natasha MacDonald is Inuk and is currently a Ph.D. student in the department of Education at Concordia University in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. MacDonald specializes in intercultural communication in English second language (ESL) learning via social media in Inuit communities where Inuktitut is still a first language.

As English is often the lingua franca on social media, MacDonald examines the process of decolonizing ESL education from an Inuit perspective.

Rylan McCallum
MSc. Student, Faculty of Medicine, University of British Columbia

Rylan McCallum is Métis/Anishinaabe and a member of the Manitoba Métis Federation. Rylan was born and raised in rural Manitoba on Treaty One Territory and is now living on Xwməθkwəy̓əm Traditional Territory completing his Masters of Science degree in Experimental Medicine at the University of British Columbia.

His research focuses on cholesterol disorders and how they pertain to the cardiovascular health of Indigenous communities.

Missy Leblanc
MA Student in Cultural Studies, Curatorial Practices, University of Winnipeg

Missy LeBlanc (Métis/nêhiyaw/Polish, member of the Métis Nation of Alberta) is a curator, researcher, and writer based on the Prairies. In 2019, she was the winner of the Middlebrook Prize for Young Canadian Curators and a runner-up for the Canadian Art Writing Prize.

LeBlanc holds a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Alberta, double majoring in the History of Art, Design, and Visual Culture and Sociology (2015) and a Diploma in Arts & Cultural Management from MacEwan University (2017). LeBlanc is currently working towards a Master of Arts in Cultural Studies, Curatorial Practices from the University of Winnipeg on Treaty 1 Territory.

Witness Profiles 2022

dr. linda manyguns
associate vice-president, Indigenization and decolonization, mount royal university

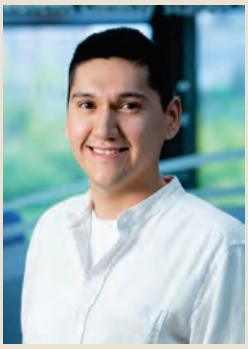
dr. linda manyguns is the associate vice-president of indigenization and decolonization at mount royal university. a Blackfoot woman, she was born on the Tsuut'ina Nation and registered at Siksika. she is an elder for the Buffalo Women's Society and part of the Beaver Bundle Society. traditional knowledge informs her respect for all life and all thoughts.

manyguns has a bachelor of arts from st. thomas university, a master's from carleton university, a law degree from university of ottawa and a doctorate from trent university. previously, she spent 11 years as a professor at the university of lethbridge in the department of Indigenous studies.

Dr. Lynn Lavallee
Professor and Strategic Lead, Indigenous Resurgence in the Faculty of Community Services, Toronto Metropolitan University

Dr. Lynn Lavallee is Anishinaabe registered with the Metis Nation of Ontario. She is the Strategic Lead, Indigenous Resurgence in the Faculty of Community Services as well as a Professor in the School of Social Work at the Toronto Metropolitan University. She previously served as the University of Manitoba's first vice provost Indigenous engagement in 2017.

Lynn completed a Bachelor of Arts in Kinesiology and Psychology, Master of Science in Community Health and Doctorate in Social Work. Her research expertise lies in the areas of Indigenous research ethics, Indigenous research methodology, and Indigenous health and well-being. Lynn achieved full professor status in 2019.



Moses Gordon
PhD student, University of Regina

Moses Gordon is from the George Gordon First Nation. He holds a Master of Public Policy, a Bachelor of Arts in History, and a Certificate in Economics from the University of Regina. Moses is currently a doctoral student with the Johnson-Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy as well as a Senior Analyst with the Indigenous Peoples' Health Research Centre (IPHRC). Before assuming these roles, he served in various leadership and professional capacities within IPHRC since initially joining the research centre in 2018.

While his foray into Indigenous health is a recent one, Moses arrived from a multidisciplinary background in research on Indigenous development, governance and nation building. Prior to working at IPHRC, Moses spent three years working in research at the First Nations University of Canada.

Dr. Dustin Louie
Associate Professor and Director of NITEP, University of British Columbia

Dr. Dustin Louie is the Director of NITEP (Indigenous Teacher Education Program) and an Associate Professor in the Department of Educational Studies at the University of British Columbia. He is a First Nations scholar from Nee Tahi Buhn and Nadleh Whut'en of the Carrier Nation of central British Columbia and is a member of the Beaver Clan. Dr. Louie has a BA in history and a PhD in Educational Leadership from the University of Calgary and an MA in Human Security and Peacebuilding from Royal Roads University.

He has worked extensively in teacher education, while also leading dozens of school districts, government agencies and social service organizations through decolonizing transformation of their philosophy, organization and practices.

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Roland Kaye, Helper
Preston Gardipye, Helper

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Neal Kewistep

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Darryl Anderson
Yellow Creek Drum Group
Carrie McNab
Tristan Durocher
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Joseph Naytowhow

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