



# Supporting Indigenous Inclusion at Canada's Polytechnics





Image provided by Humber College



# Acknowledgements



*As a national association, Polytechnics Canada acknowledges that our offices are located on the unceded and unsundered territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe Nation and that our members are located on the traditional territories of numerous Indigenous nations.*

*Polytechnics Canada would like to extend our sincere appreciation and gratitude to the faculty and staff who support Indigenous learners and contribute to the healing and reconciliation journey in Canada. We would also like to thank the Indigenous leaders and allies that made this publication possible by sharing their insights, best practices and stories from polytechnic campuses across the country. We recognize there is much to learn on the path to reconciliation and Canadian post-secondary institutions have a responsibility to expand access and foster greater achievement for First Nations, Métis and Inuit learners to succeed in the workforce.*

**Algonquin College** is located on the unceded and unsundered territory of the Algonquin people. Traditionally known as "Anishinabe," Algonquin people are the original inhabitants of the wide swath of territory along the Ottawa River.

**The British Columbia Institute of Technology** acknowledges that their campuses are located on the unceded traditional territories of the Coast Salish Nations of Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), səliwətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh), and xwməθkwəyəm (Musqueam).

**Conestoga College** acknowledges they are located on the traditional territory of the Anishnawbe, Haudenosaunee and Attawandaran peoples.

**Fanshawe College** acknowledges that they are located on the unceded territory of the Anishnaabe, Haudenosaunee and Lenape peoples of Southwestern Ontario.

**George Brown College** acknowledges that they are located on the traditional territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation and other Indigenous peoples who have lived on this land.

**Humber College** is located within the traditional and treaty lands of the Mississaugas of the Credit. Known as Adoobiigok, the "Place of the Alders" in Michi Saagiig language, the region is uniquely situated along Humber River Watershed, an integral connection for Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee and Wendat peoples between the Ontario Lakeshore and the Lake Simcoe/Georgian Bay regions. Now home to people of numerous nations, Adoobiigok continues to provide a vital source of interconnection for all.

**Kwantlen Polytechnic University** acknowledges that they are located on the unceded and ancestral lands of the Kwantlen, Musqueam, Katzie, Semiahmoo, Tsawwassen, Qayqayt and Kwikwetlem peoples.

**The Northern Alberta Institute of Technology** acknowledges that their campuses lie on traditional Treaty 6 territory, an important trading centre for the Métis Nation.

**Red River College** campuses are located on original lands of Anishinaabeg, Cree, Oji-Cree, Dakota, and Dene peoples, and on the homeland of the Métis Nation.

**Saskatchewan Polytechnic** acknowledges that their campuses are located on traditional Treaty 4 and Treaty 6 territories and the homelands of the Métis people. Saskatchewan Polytechnic respectfully recognizes the Indigenous peoples of these lands as part of their commitment to good relations and a reconciled future.

**Seneca College** acknowledges that the land on which its buildings rest and spaces where students, faculty, support staff and the public gather, is the traditional territory of the Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nation and the signatories of the Williams Treaties.

**Sheridan College** acknowledges that the land on which they gather has been and still is the traditional territory of several Indigenous nations, including the Anishinaabe, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, the Wendat, the Métis, and the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. Since time immemorial, numerous Indigenous nations and Indigenous peoples have lived and passed through this territory. Sheridan recognizes this territory is covered by the Dish with One Spoon treaty and the Two Row Wampum treaty, which emphasizes the importance of joint stewardship, peace, and respectful relationships.

**The Southern Alberta Institute of Technology** acknowledges it is situated on the traditional territories of the Blackfoot Confederacy which today encompasses the Indigenous people of the Treaty 7 region: the Siksika, Piikani, Kainai, the Tsuut'ina, the Stony Nakoda and the Northwest Metis Homeland. SAIT also acknowledges all the people who make their homes in the Treaty 7 region of Southern Alberta.





Image provided by Seneca College – Roberto Vazquez Photography



**The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action provide a roadmap to reconciliation and the revitalization of relationships between Canada, Canadians, and Indigenous Peoples and communities. Within the Calls to Action, education is a prominent theme.**

Polytechnics recognize their role in the healing journey between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. While acknowledging they have much to learn on the path to reconciliation, these institutions have made an ongoing commitment to addressing the history and legacy of colonialism in education. This is a long-term commitment.

Knowing there is much more to accomplish, polytechnics have taken the first steps to prioritize how Indigenous learners see themselves, their history, culture and language in their educational experiences. To achieve this, polytechnic institutions have attempted to reflect on and embed the diverse knowledge and culture of Indigenous Peoples in:

- Institutional frameworks & plans
- Campus spaces & symbols
- Pathways to post-secondary education
- Cultural supports on campus
- Partnerships with Indigenous communities
- Teaching & learning programs

Canada's future prosperity relies on a strong and inclusive society, one that addresses past inequities and builds toward a future where Indigenous learners have every opportunity to thrive and succeed. To foster an inclusive environment and ultimately a more inclusive workforce, polytechnics work in partnership with local and regional Indigenous communities to mitigate barriers to education and promote a culture of identity and belonging. Polytechnic institutions recognize their role in creating the foundation of strong and vibrant communities, creating inclusive spaces that lift voices in educational settings. In the following pages, we identify a few of the ways they are ensuring that reconciliation is a living, breathing part of polytechnic campuses.



# Embedding Commitments into Institutional Frameworks



Launched in May 2019, the [Indigenous Vision: A Framework for Action and Accountability](#) reaffirms the British Columbia Institute of Technology's 25-year commitment to the enrolment and success of Indigenous learners. Close to 500 stakeholders were consulted in the process to develop the framework, which aligns with [BCIT's Strategic Plan](#). The Indigenous Vision and associated Implementation Plan focus on three areas, positioning BCIT as a first-choice post-secondary institution with well-developed pathways to support Indigenous learners as they transition to and from BCIT.

## *Actions include:*

- People-focused inclusion actions to build awareness and understanding around truth, reconciliation, Indigenization and the legacy of colonization
- Accountability actions that create an environment that reflects and supports learners with programs, policies and services
- Relationship actions to foster a culture in which respect and collaboration underpin authentic and sustainable partnerships, representing progress toward a future that includes the place and space of Indigenous people



Image provided by Saskatchewan Polytechnic





The Indigenous student experience is at the heart of Saskatchewan Polytechnic's strategy and commitment to the renewal of relationships — miyo wahkohtowin — with Indigenous communities. The [Indigenous Success Strategy](#) focuses on the institution's efforts to implement the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action by integrating Indigenous ways of being, knowing, teaching and learning in all aspects of the institution.

*The strategy focuses on:*

- Nebah ho?á (Denesuline) **Welcome**: Ensure Indigenous students attending Saskatchewan Polytechnic are well prepared for post-secondary life and are set up for success
- Ki-kinomawo (Nakawe) **Inspire**: Help Indigenous students thrive at Saskatchewan Polytechnic
- Wiyokihiya (Dakota) **Empower**: Celebrate Indigenous student success and prepare Indigenous graduates for successful careers
- Avik wiiyawow (Michif) **Belong**: Create inclusive, respectful and welcoming campuses, where Indigenous students have a sense of belonging



Indigenous students make up 19 per cent of Saskatchewan Polytechnic's student population. Seats in all programs are reserved for Indigenous students and a Summer Transition Program is available to prepare students for success.

Saskatchewan Polytechnic's Strategic Plan 2020-2025, [Leading the Rise](#), is also based on the Cree phrase miyo wahkohtowin. At Saskatchewan Polytechnic, we honour this principle in every interaction, institutional practice, procedure, policy and service we provide to learners, faculty, staff, alumni and our communities. The institution works to create an inclusive, collaborative and respectful environment in which everyone can grow, thrive and lift each other up.





# Indigenous Spaces & Symbols on Campus

## Seneca POLYTECHNIC

Reconciliation is a journey, not a destination – a process of trial and error that was followed in Seneca's approach to designing the Centre for Innovation, Technology and Entrepreneurship (CITE). [First Peoples@Seneca](#) worked alongside design firm Perkins and Will to lead community consultations with students, alumni, employees, elders and the Indigenous Education Council to ensure Indigenous communities were accurately reflected in the [building's artwork and design](#).

CITE integrates Indigenous thinking within an academic setting to showcase how Indigenous knowledge can guide post-secondary education, creating a setting where Indigenous students view themselves as contemporary Indigenous leaders. The building's opening came shortly after Seneca unveiled Odeyto, an on-campus Indigenous centre. On the outside, Odeyto's canoe-like structure and roof mimics the position of the sun on June 21, the annual National Indigenous Peoples Day for Canadians. On the inside, 28 ribs form the side of the flipped canoe, mimicking the full lunar cycle and a woman's moon time, honouring the power and presence of Indigenous women.

Image provided by Seneca College



Designed by Ryan Gorrie and David Thomas in collaboration with Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Holders, and displayed as part of UNCEDED: Voices of the Land (2018) and Nuit Blanche: The Space Between Us (2020), Humber College's [Indigenous Cultural Markers](#) honour the unique and enduring relationship that exists between Indigenous peoples and traditional territories. They amplify Indigenous voices, histories and experiences, working collaboratively to situate the College in the context of the long and ongoing history of Indigenous peoples in what is now called the Greater Toronto Area. Taken together, they act as a touchstone that elicits appreciation and gratitude even as they build bridges between diverse cultures, landscapes and peoples.



Image provided by Humber College



# Sheridan

The Centre for Indigenous Learning and Support provides an inclusive, safe space for Indigenous students looking for academic and personal supports in an environment that recognizes the importance of distinct Indigenous cultures. Grounded in the teachings of acceptance, inclusion, compassion, good-mindedness and the seventh-generation principle, Indigenous students and families have space to embrace their cultural identity within Sheridan.

The Centre also helps new and prospective students transition into post-secondary education by organizing orientation sessions, connecting students with mentors, assisting students with applications and offering hands-on workshops for Indigenous youth. More broadly, the Centre supports faculty, staff and students as others seek to learn about Indigenous cultures in Canada.



Image provided by **Sheridan College**



# Developing Indigenous Student Pathways



As a way to lower barriers for Indigenous learners in rural and remote parts of Manitoba, RRC Polytech is providing specialized training in the skilled trades with [mobile training labs](#). Training labs support the delivery of five-month trades programs, allowing for flexible access to otherwise hard-to-reach communities. Learners can remain in their home communities and maintain connections with their employer throughout training, ensuring that family and community supports continue to be available. Meanwhile, mobile training labs are incredibly responsive to local industry demands for an inclusive, well-trained workforce.



[Pathways to Indigenous Empowerment](#) is a 1-year certificate program designed collaboratively with Indigenous communities to prepare and familiarize students with post-secondary educational expectations. The program provides First Nations, Métis and Inuit students with foundational academic and personal development opportunities, beginning with an intensive one-week orientation. The program incorporates Indigenous values and ways of teaching and learning, along with individualized curriculum delivery and weekly coaching sessions that result in a program unique to each student's learning objectives. The courses are heavily focused in communications, mathematics, environmental stewardship and personal/career development, which includes three transferable credits for further post-secondary study.





The Prospective Aboriginal Youth Program builds awareness among Indigenous youth about the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology and its programs and supports, including the Nisôhkamâtôtân Centre. The Nisôhkamâtôtân Centre is a community gathering space for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students to network, study and share their post-secondary learning experiences. The program encourages Indigenous youth to participate in activities, campus tours and information sessions to learn about career and post-secondary opportunities in a safe environment. Guest speakers include NAIT's Aboriginal Student Ambassadors, who share their first-hand perspectives and stories, ensuring youth can visualize success within NAIT's academic and skilled trades programs.



Image provided by NAIT



# Indigenous Culture on Campus



Reconciliation is not possible without the reflection of Indigenous leadership within post-secondary education. Pauline Shirt is one of the many leaders on the [Indigenous Education and Services team](#), serving as a Knowledge and Wisdom Keeper offering counselling services for students. Her approach is based on teachings, traditional medicines, ceremonies and language from the Medicine Wheel. She leads several workshops to increase awareness of Indigenous culture among students and staff at George Brown.

The Indigenous Education and Services team, which includes subject matter experts, provides students with culturally embedded skills and tools to achieve academic, career and life success. In addition to counselling services, the team offers cultural workshops and teachings, assistance with applying for bursaries, scholarships and awards, resource materials, access to employment opportunities and hosts several cultural events.



Every year, Conestoga College's [Indigenous Services](#) (Be-Dah-Bin Gamik) brings the public together through the marriage of Indigenous celebration and ceremony: singing, dancing, drumming, traditional food, artisans and sacred fire. The annual pow wow gathers more than 500 Conestoga students that self-identify as Indigenous to connect with the community and practice traditions and teachings. For Indigenous students growing up in urban settings with limited opportunities to relate to their own culture, the pow wow provides a space to connect with elders and engage in cultural activities through traditional means.

In 2020, [the celebration welcomed more than 2,000 guests](#) and celebrated a milestone as Conestoga's Be-Dah-Bin Gamik, a Place of New Beginning, heads into its 12<sup>th</sup> year with plans to expand services and establish relationships with other institutions.



Acknowledging the unique needs of each Indigenous student at RRC Polytech, the School of Indigenous Education Student Support Centre is able to strategically direct students to the supports that best suit their needs by prioritizing services by the type of request and urgency. This process ensures that Indigenous students are given the right care, in the right place, at the right time.

*Services and supports draw from:*

- Two elders on campus
- Two trauma counsellors who work with students dealing with intergenerational trauma
- Cultural center coordinator to help elders with cultural and land-based training when in-person learning safely resumes



Every November during Indigenous Education Month, Humber brings together a diverse array of educators, practitioners, scholars, students and members of Indigenous communities. The Indigenous Knowledge Gathering provides a safe space for participants to connect, think about, and actively engage in meaningful conversations about the role and inherent responsibilities of post-secondary education. Centred in an exciting program of keynote presentations, networking opportunities, interactive workshops, and breakout discussion sessions, IKG contributes to the scope of human understanding, offering values, philosophies, conceptual frameworks, and important perspectives on how to move forward in sustainable ways.



Image provided by Humber College



# Community Partnerships



To address priorities within the [Chippewas of the Thames First Nation](#), Fanshawe College developed a partnership to offer its Personal Support Worker program on-reserve. This collaboration meets the immediate needs of Fanshawe's Indigenous partners, but also provides an opportunity to offer services and supports that stand to help Indigenous learners transition into post-secondary education. The program is designed to address community job shortages and provide quality training close to home in a supportive learning environment tailored for the people of the Chippewa of the Thames First Nation.



The Southern Alberta Institute of Technology provides [group training programs](#) to serve the learning priorities of Indigenous communities in a safe, supportive and engaging learning environment. Over more than two decades, SAIT has consulted with Indigenous communities to understand their training requirements and design long-term strategies to address them. SAIT works collaboratively to determine learning outcomes and objectives, incorporate community-specific culture and traditions into program design and delivery, and recruit instructors, subject matter experts and support staff with experience building positive relationships with Indigenous peoples. Many of SAIT's training programs provide hands-on learning that is applied to community activities, such as construction-, business- and technology-focused training programs.

Image provided by Humber College

In the past couple of years, KPU has greatly expanded the scope and depth of its involvement with local and regional Indigenous communities. A community-based education and training partnership with members of Musqueam, Squamish, Tsleil-Waututh and Kwikwetlem First Nations prepares Indigenous learners in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia with skills and trades training at KPU. The program provides hands-on education to those who are seeking a career change in the construction industry. This unique partnership enables an inclusive generation of tradespeople and highlights KPU's commitment to developing unique programming that meets the needs of industry and Indigenous communities.



Image provided by KPU



# Indigenous Approaches to Teaching & Learning



**Seneca**  
POLYTECHNIC

Skoden—a common Indigenous saying—is the central concept behind a Teaching and Learning course for faculty and staff at Seneca College. The course is led collaboratively by Indigenous and non-Indigenous faculty, helping others consider how they can decolonize and indigenize their courses with the support of Seneca's Indigenous community. Faculty learn about Indigenous knowledge, Canadian colonization and the Indigenous resurgence, while having the opportunity to develop curriculum ideas and receive feedback and assistance as they incorporate Indigenous content.



Recognizing the need for culturally relevant training, Saskatchewan Polytechnic launched two Indigenous courses to build leadership capacity and break down barriers using materials and methods aligned with Indigenous values. The two programs are intended to expand community and industry knowledge and understanding of Indigenous peoples' worldviews, history and leadership styles. Indigenous leaders have been involved in the design, content curation and delivery of both courses.

Indigenous Studies is a fully online self-paced course, providing students with an introduction to the Indigenous cultural groups in Saskatchewan. Colonization to Resilience is an introductory, online leadership course that is part of a larger strategy for Indigenous-focused training, providing participants with a national perspective of leadership styles in Indigenous communities.



Image provided by BCIT

The British Columbia Institute of Technology offers a variety of resources to increase awareness, understanding and reciprocity among Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples:

- [Indigenous 101](#) is a workshop led by Kory Wilson, BCIT Executive Director of Indigenous Initiatives and Partnerships, that provides knowledge on terminology, Canadian colonialism, the Indian Act, contemporary reality and the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action
- [Indigenous Awareness Modules](#) are open-source and accessible to anyone interested in learning more about Indigenous people, their history and their relationship with Canada. The modules complement and expand on the Indigenous 101 workshops and focus on Indigenous peoples, colonization and decolonization



Image provided by Saskatchewan Polytechnic



# Conclusion



**Polytechnics are helping transform the post-secondary experience for Indigenous learners to ensure students have the supports to meet their cultural, emotional and financial needs.**

For the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action to be fulfilled in post-secondary settings, Indigenous students need equitable access and increased funding to succeed in their academic studies. As polytechnics continue their path to truth and reconciliation, they are supporting the healing journey by setting a framework for action and accountability, supporting Indigenous student pathways and redefining post-secondary experiences for Indigenous students.

Inclusive growth is best achieved when people from all economic sectors, regions and backgrounds can fully participate and benefit from a healthy, innovative economy. Polytechnics recognize a sustainable workforce needs to ensure equitable access to educational outcomes and economic opportunities that work for all Canadians, including Indigenous Peoples.

As pillars of applied education, polytechnics are redefining what it means to meet the needs of Indigenous communities by providing on-demand and on-location Indigenous-led solutions. By tailoring programs and connecting skills training and education to community priorities, polytechnics acknowledge the diverse forms of knowledge, expertise and ways of learning and working that are integral to Indigenous student success.

While this publication highlights only a handful of examples from our membership, polytechnics are continuing to innovate how they offer support to Indigenous students to help them succeed in the classroom, work placements, their communities and beyond.

# About Us

Polytechnics Canada is the voice of leading, research-intensive, publicly supported polytechnics, colleges and institutes of technology. Our mission is policy advocacy for federal action on innovation and skills.

Polytechnics Canada members play a critical role in enhancing Canada's productivity and innovation. Through their facilities and networks, our members provide meaningful solutions to industry problems and accelerate knowledge transfer. Graduates are job-ready and armed with the skills employers need across sectors.

Close ties to industry make the polytechnic talent pipeline dynamic and responsive to the challenges of developing the future workforce. Polytechnics work with industry to build programs and design curricula, to conduct applied research that helps firms scale and get products to market.

They offer students work-integrated learning opportunities and position graduates for careers. Beyond the traditional student, polytechnics embrace those at mid-career who find themselves displaced from the labour market or simply need short-term retooling to refine and modernize their skillsets.

At Polytechnics Canada, we are proud promoters of the polytechnic education model—applied, hands-on and technical; industry-focused and industry-driven.

Learn more at [polytechnicscanada.ca](https://polytechnicscanada.ca).

## Our Members

**ALGONQUIN**  
COLLEGE

**BCIT**<sup>TM</sup>  
BRITISH COLUMBIA  
INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

**C** CONESTOGA  
Connect Life and Learning

**FANSHAWE**

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**SASKATCHEWAN**  
POLYTECHNIC

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