



NUKSKAHTOWIN • MEETING PLACE

STRATEGIC PLAN • 2020





Indigenous Acknowledgement

Athabasca University respectfully acknowledges that we are on and work on the traditional lands of the Indigenous Peoples (Inuit, First Nations, Métis) of Canada.

We honour the ancestry, heritage, and gifts of the Indigenous Peoples and give thanks to them.



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Nukskahtowin (Meeting Place)

The university is located on the traditional territory of the Cree and Métis people and has been a welcoming place for Indigenous learners for decades, this has been reflected in the partnership(s) with Indigenous colleges and communities. The new restructuring and visioning of the centre is an opportunity to determine how Indigenous community, knowledge, and methodologies could bring the two communities (Indigenous and university) together. The centre was renamed Nukskahtowin—the meeting or gathering place.

Nukskahtowin is a welcoming place (space) for all peoples regardless of race or identity. It is a centre for ideas and people to come together to work with Indigenous knowledge, research projects, and academic programming. The centre will work towards inclusion of Indigenous knowledge and methodologies.

The centre, currently, is staffed by all Indigenous people representing Métis, Cree, and Saulteaux people.

Vision Statement

Nukskahtowin is dedicated to sharing Indigenous Knowledge in a respectful, responsive, reflective, and reciprocal manner. Our vision is an environment that respects Indigenous knowledge and values. We envision Indigenous teachings throughout the university and strive towards Indigenous excellence in all aspects of university life. We are on a path to miyo-pimatisiwin (good life) in our Cree language and we strive to live in harmony and work towards a space of respect, conciliation (kwayskahsatsowin), good relations, and reciprocity.



The Model: Miyo-Pimatisiwin (The Good Life)

Nukshahtowin uses a medicine wheel with four quadrants to represent the teachings that are foundational to our Indigeneity, culture, and life. For example, four directions, four stages of life, four medicines and four seasons—all represent miyo-pimatisowin. This education model, visioned for Nukshahtowin, will be the guiding principle of our centre. Our model is rooted in the following Cree laws given to us by our teacher and colleague, the late Dr. Harold Cardinal. These laws represent the interconnectedness and the never ending cycle of knowledge and life, for our people.

- Miyo-wicehtowin (the laws concerning good relations): include those laws encircling the bonds of human relationships in ways in which they are created, nourished, reaffirmed, and recreated as a means of strengthening the unity among First Nations people and the nation itself (Cardinal & Hildebrandt, 2000,15). The teachings/ceremonies under these laws are the foundations of new relationships.
- Wahkohtowin (the laws governing all relations): rules and laws that prescribe and proscribe conduct covering a wide range of relationships. They are comprehensive in that they contain detailed codes of behavior, setting out what is prohibited, what is encouraged, and the values that are to be respected and followed in each set of relations. (Cardinal & Hildebrandt, 2000, 34)





As part of our shared vision of Indigenous inclusion at Athabasca University, a community-wide engagement took place in the early part of 2020. Nukskahtowin embarked on community meetings to each of the four physical locations to elicit feedback on how Indigenous and non-Indigenous colleagues could work together on Indigenous inclusion in our post-secondary institution.

Athabasca University has a long history of Indigenous inclusion and consideration since its inception in 1970. We wanted to build upon the experiences of those who work within the institution and have a plan that is inclusive of our varied worldviews. As part of our vision, we use an Education Bundle model to express the foundation of this new way of conciliation within our institution.

Education Bundle (Nayahcikan ¹)

Respect

- Acknowledge and develop the role of traditional knowledge in academic settings (including courses and programs) and support, protect and preserve Indigenous knowledge, education, oral histories, and storytelling.
- Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (TRC) Calls to Action and United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People—Language and Education.

¹ **Cree for bundle.** A culturally based Indigenous guide for education practitioners in post-secondary institutions that references the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous people. The Indigenous worldview has “medicine bundles” – a kit with all necessary and sacred items (both spiritual and physical), that can assist us in our life journeys. <https://www.cps.ca/uploads/imich/D41Wabano.pdf>



- Self-determination: practicing for and within Indigenous peoples and Nations.
- Acknowledging the different worldviews of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.
- Miyo-pimatisiwin: meaning “good life” and working towards that goal through working with and for Indigenous students and nations.
- Oral traditions: being respectful and mindful of community values as a foundation for courses.

Miyo-wicehtowin (Good Relations)

- Meeting the academic needs of Indigenous scholars, nations, communities, institutions, and organizations.
- Blending cultural relevance in a Canadian educational institution in such a way as to overcome many of the social barriers that discourage the full participation of Indigenous peoples in education settings; through courses, programs, and outcomes.
- Recognition of the sovereignty of Indigenous nations and peoples.
- Following the laws of wahkohtowin; the relationship between animate and inanimate; respecting the interrelationships of land, culture, language, and the environment.



- Increasing Indigenous presence and inclusion across the university through cultural teachings.
- Collaborating and engaging with Indigenous community partners.
- Draw on an established understanding and relationship building with Indigenous communities; foster and inspire an engaged community of colleagues and students.

Kwayskahsowin (Conciliation)

Kwayskahsowin means setting things right; repairing what is broken and bringing it back into harmony and balance. The word reconciliation is the restoration of friendly relations. We did not want to go back to a previous state, we wanted to create a new one where we worked on a new relationship with non-Indigenous people in the field of Education in Canada and we want to build an ethical space where we could work on goals that would benefit Indigenous and, non-Indigenous learners. Part of this work includes:

- Strengthen the research undertaken for, by, and about First Nation, Métis and Inuit students, and scholars at Athabasca University.
- Drawing and linking our educational philosophy from the teachers we know best: our Elders, leaders, and traditional knowledge holders in Indigenous communities.
- Examining and implementation of the TRC Calls to Action and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP).
- Emphasizing the importance of a land based teaching/learning model.



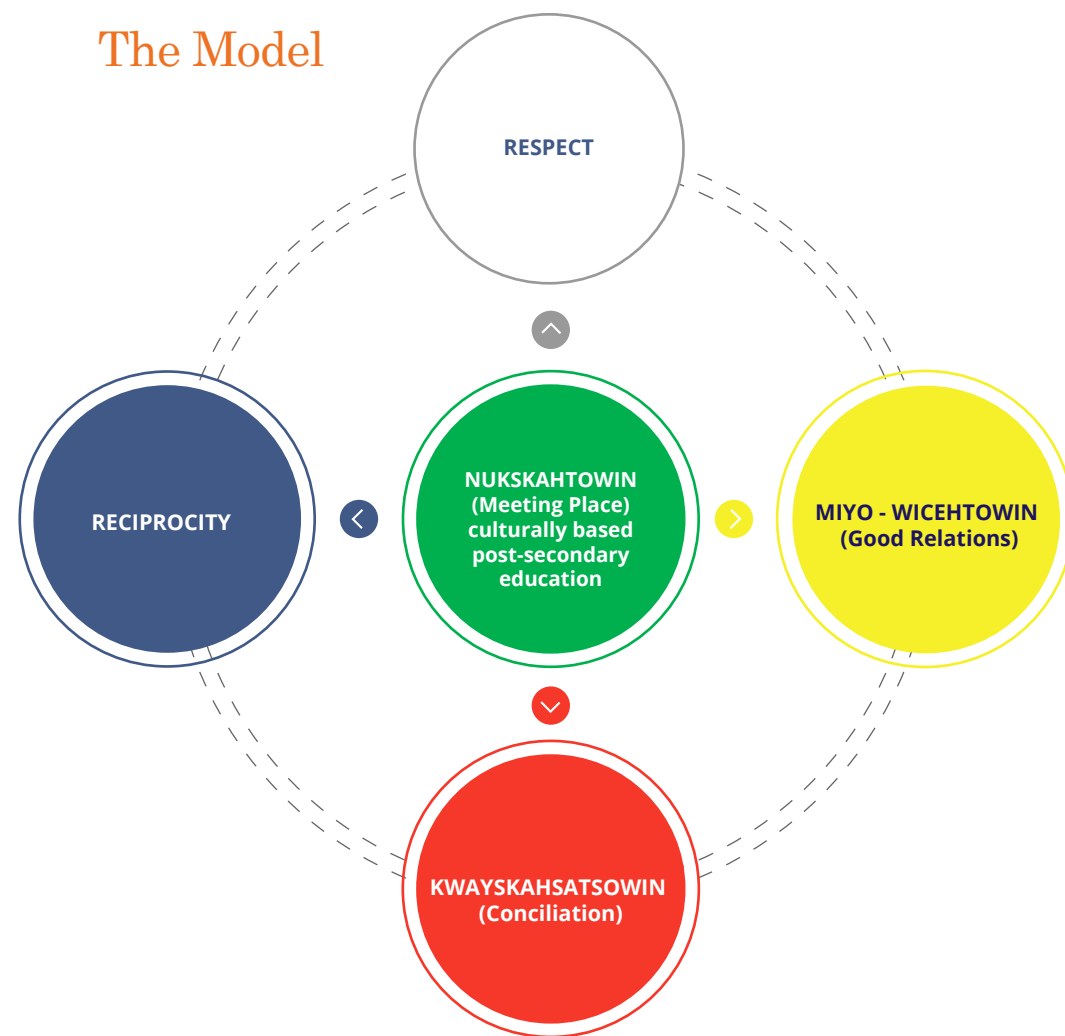
- Creating a space for Indigenous language revitalization.
- Programming options within credential programs in Indigenous languages.

Reciprocity

- Reciprocity is the equitable maintenance of harmony and balance in the exchange of knowledge, ideas, services and support between peoples, the land and all our relations, including creatures and plants. Reciprocity is a way of being and a way of living, it is the central philosophy and tenet of Indigenous peoples worldview that ensures humility, respect and honour.
- Examining Indigenous relationships in a global context and will endeavor to identify partnerships and collaborations which are mutually beneficial with Indigenous partners around the world.
- Examining new and innovative ways to educate students and will pay specific attention to areas identified as essential by Indigenous peoples (i.e. governance, culture, languages).
- Examining Indigenous and non-Indigenous worldviews as they interact and work for the betterment of Indigenous peoples.
- Advocating for land based teaching/learning, where appropriate.



The Model



Nukshahtowin Goals

Goal 1: Developing a Cultural Framework

Athabasca University is a cultural milieu of diverse experiences and worldviews. As colleagues and learners, we come together with one goal in mind, accessible education for all peoples regardless of race, place, or space. As part of our ongoing commitment to Indigenous people in the land known as Canada and in response to the Calls to Actions of the TRC and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People, we strive to move Indigenous Knowledge into the mainstream university culture as a way of building a bridge between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. In order to prepare our AU team members and learners, we will be moving forward with cultural teachings, an Indigenous Research series, and workshops regarding Indigenous Ways of Knowing and how to incorporate them into the university culture.

As part of developing a cultural framework, we will be sharing and analyzing our worldviews and we strive to come to a shared common space where ethics and values live and work towards a better university environment. This will be conducted through cultural teachings taught by Elders, knowledge holders, scholars, artists, and writers.

The resulting framework will be an integration of Indigenous knowledge into our programs and services, including research plans, courses, and programming. We will be able to respond in a culturally appropriate manner to our Indigenous partners and collaborators.



Action Plan:

1. Acknowledge and discuss the differing worldviews that contribute to the university culture, including history and influences in history. Cultural relevance within the academy and a “blending” between Indigenous culture and the mainstream academic community.
2. Conducting cultural teachings with management and a representative of each centre/faculty in a two part session. This will build a cohort of allies within the institution so that there is shared responsibility between Nukshahtowin and the university. Once the initial teachings have been completed, there will be an opportunity to discuss issues one-on-one with an Elder.
3. Facilitating monthly gatherings to share cultural teachings from Indigenous Elders/Knowledge holders in Athabasca and Edmonton.
4. Disseminate cultural information to the university faculty and staff as a whole, through online resources and further sessions with Elders.
5. Recognize Elders and Indigenous knowledge holders as Eminent Scholars that can be utilized in all disciplines and at all levels of academia.
6. Utilize technology to reach the broader academic and student audience, including an online profile of Indigenous people at the university and Indigenous leaders who have been part of the AU community.



7. The creation and inclusion of an Indigenous Research methodology course at the undergraduate and graduate levels.
8. Renew and collaborate with Indigenous communities on relationship building and academic offerings.
9. Create an Indigenous mentorship network that includes academics and senior students.
10. Increase the number of Indigenous people working at the university, at all levels.
11. Offer professional development opportunities for AU team members to learn about Indigeneity.

Goal 2: Creation of an ethical space

The creation of an ethical space to discuss Indigenous knowledge and issues will be created through the teachings facilitated from the Elders, knowledge holders, writers and artists, and relationships built with university community members. Ethical space is a common space whereby Indigenous and non-Indigenous AU community members can come together with a common understanding that we are working towards a safe space for discussion for the inclusion of Indigeneity within the academy. This space acknowledges that we come from a community of diversity with diverse worldviews but are working together to create a space for Indigenous inclusion.



Action Required:

1. Re-creation of the Neheyiwak Council: a group of Cree knowledge holders/Elders and senior management to act as an internal advisory board for initiatives to be undertaken by the university for Indigenous inclusion.
2. Creation of an Internal Allies Committee (IAC) composed of representatives of centres and faculties in the university. This board is expected to be able to implement action in their respective areas and to provide feedback on initiatives and to generate initiatives.
3. Creation of a Council of Elders to guide Indigenous ideas, issues, and interpretations for the university community.
4. Acknowledgment, acceptance and integration of differing worldviews. Recognition that there are various biases within the academy.
5. Discussions around the Calls to Action of the TRC and UNDRIP.
6. Development of plans and integrations of the goals.
7. Explain Indigenous terminology and language used in the plan.
8. Utilize technology to open spaces for dialogue within the institution.
9. Using different “voices” and Indigenous language to open dialogue regarding Indigenization ideas.



10. Creating an Indigenous Lunch and Learn series.
11. Discussion on intergenerational trauma and how that affects Indigenous people.

Goal 3: Naturalization of Indigenous Knowledge

Indigenous knowledge has always been seen as the “other” knowledge system, separate from traditional western knowledge.

An examination/review of institutional services and academic programming will be conducted to find out how we can adapt our learning systems to make room for Indigenous knowledge across the academy. The collaboration and participation of the IAC will move these recommendations to actions within their centres and faculties. This will make Indigeneity as familiar to us, as a university community, and we will be able to communicate that to our learners.

Action Required:

1. The establishment of an Indigenous knowledge committee with representatives from each faculty to participate and engage in discussion around Indigenous pedagogy, curriculum, and program development. It is expected that each faculty will have an internal committee representative who will be able to participate in Kiyokâtowak (they visit one another) with members of Nukshahtowin.
2. Indigenous learning processes to be incorporated and utilized at all levels of course development.
3. Indigenous Research methodologies to be used in course development and programming, where appropriate.



4. Inclusion of Indigenous worldviews in course and program development, where appropriate.
5. The interconnectedness of Indigenous relationships to be incorporated in course development, where appropriate.
6. Respect, interconnectedness (relationality): there is no separation from student, parent, Elders and Indigeneity—they are a bundle unto themselves and must be addressed as such. This includes past, present, and future relatives both animate and inanimate.
7. The recognition of the uniqueness of Indigenous learners and ways to incorporate that uniqueness in course materials.

Goal 4: Indigenous Research Opportunities

Upon completion of the cultural teachings and an examination of the TRC Calls to Action and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People, how to implement those into university society, discussions can take place with Indigenous partners, and allies on how to work with Indigenous communities, learners, and entities.

Action Required:

1. Create an online forum or learning series so Indigenous knowledge holders and AU colleagues can discuss Indigenous issues and share commonalities in research.
2. Inclusion of Indigenous epistemology in course development.
3. Map out what decolonization at AU looks like.
4. International Indigenous collaborations.



5. Collaboration between the Research Centre and Nukshahtowin on a research plan for Indigenous inclusion.
6. Creation of an Indigenous Research Chair will be examined and proposed to move AU forward in its quest to be the partner of Indigenous people.

The Four Year Vision:

The achievement of these goals will result in several areas of success for Athabasca University.

1. The Integrated Learning Environment (ILE): Incorporates Indigenous Ways of Knowing within the university to address the inclusion of Indigeneity within its academic and administrative parameters.
2. Human Resources: Increase in the number of Indigenous people working at the university throughout all departments.
3. Recruitment: Indigenous specific plans and ways to recruit to Indigenous people, and the introduction of an Indigenous Internship Program for students to introduce succession

planning for Indigenous people to be employed within the institution.

4. Recognition: AU is a viable option for Indigenous people who want to stay in their communities and achieve their post-secondary education.
5. Council of Indigenous Elders representing different groups – FNMI: the importance and validation of Indigenous ways of knowing in the academic environment.
6. Inclusion of Indigenous voices and language in the university.
7. Revitalization plan for Indigenous languages, using technology and community members.
8. Indigenous knowledge naturalization at all levels in the university, including other ways of completing doctoral work.





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