

AC133 Protection and Respectful Use of Indigenous Knowledge, Cultural Expressions, and Wisdom

AC133	Academic	Academic Calendar
Handbooks	Degree Students, Faculty	
Programs	Degree	
	Effective Date	2026
	Reviewed	
	Accountability	Leadership Team
Documents/Forms		

1. Purpose

Western Community College (WCC) affirms its responsibility to engage respectfully and ethically with Indigenous Peoples and to protect Indigenous Knowledge, Cultural Expressions, and Wisdom.

This policy establishes a framework for the respectful use, stewardship, and protection of Indigenous Knowledge across teaching, research, curriculum development, community engagement, and institutional operations. It recognizes that Indigenous Knowledge is governed by Indigenous legal, cultural, and ethical systems and is not appropriately managed solely through Western intellectual property frameworks. The policy embraces the principles outlined in UNDRIP (United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples), DRIPA (Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act) and TRC (Truth and Reconciliation Commission) Calls to Action.

2. Guiding Principles

This policy is grounded in the following principles:

- **Respect** for Indigenous Peoples as the rightful holders and stewards of their knowledge systems.
- **Collective ownership** of Indigenous Knowledge, recognizing that it is held by Nations and communities rather than individuals.

- **Reciprocity and relationship-building** in all engagements involving Indigenous Knowledge.
- **Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC)** as a mandatory condition for use.
- **Indigenous data sovereignty**, including respect for OCAP® principles (Ownership, Control, Access, Possession) and Nation-specific governance frameworks.
- **Cultural safety, humility, and accountability** in academic and administrative practices.
- **Alignment** with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), particularly Article 31, Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (DRIPA) and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Calls to Action.

3. Scope

This policy applies to:

- All WCC employees, faculty, administrators, contractors, researchers, and students.
- All institutional activities involving Indigenous Knowledge, including but not limited to:
 - Teaching and curriculum development
 - Research and scholarship
 - Program design and evaluation
 - Marketing, communications, and branding
 - Events, public lectures, and publications
 - Library services, archives, and institutional repositories
 - Digital learning platforms and records management
 - Partnerships with Indigenous communities and organizations

4. Definitions

Indigenous Knowledge:

Holistic knowledge systems developed and sustained by Indigenous Peoples, including teachings, practices, languages, ceremonies, cultural expressions, oral histories, land-based knowledge, and spiritual understandings, utilizing story work framework to build indigenous ways of knowledge.

Indigenous Cultural Expressions:

Tangible and intangible expressions of Indigenous culture, including stories, songs, designs, symbols, art, and performances.

Indigenous Intellectual Property:

Collective and individual rights held by Indigenous Peoples over their knowledge, cultural expressions, and innovations, as defined by Indigenous legal and cultural systems.

Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC):

A process through which Indigenous communities voluntarily provide free, prior, and informed consent for the use, sharing, or application of their knowledge, cultural expressions, or perspectives. This process is based on full, accurate, and transparent information, mutual understanding, respect for Indigenous self-determination, and is conducted without coercion, pressure, or undue influence, in alignment with the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (DRIPA) and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

5. Policy Statements

5.1 Collective Ownership and Authority

Indigenous Knowledge and Cultural Expressions are held collectively by Indigenous Nations and communities. Authority over how knowledge is shared, taught, recorded, or reproduced rests with the appropriate Indigenous knowledge holders and governing bodies. Western legal concepts of individual intellectual property do not fully apply.

5.2 Consent and Community Determination

No Indigenous Knowledge may be collected, recorded, taught, reproduced, published, archived, or otherwise disseminated without documented Free, Prior, and Informed Consent from the appropriate Indigenous authority or community-designated representatives.

5.3 Respectful and Contextual Use

Indigenous Knowledge must not be:

- Taken out of cultural, spiritual, or historical context
- Altered or adapted without permission
- Used in ways that are misleading, stereotypical, or harmful

- Commercialized without explicit community agreement

5.4 Protection of Sacred and Restricted Knowledge

Sacred, ceremonial, or restricted knowledge must not be documented, stored, or shared unless specifically authorized by the relevant Indigenous authority and in accordance with cultural protocols.

6. Indigenous Data and Knowledge Governance

WCC recognizes Indigenous data sovereignty and commits to:

- Respecting **OCAP® principles** and Nation-specific governance frameworks. ([The First Nations Principles of OCAP® - The First Nations Information Governance Centre](#))
- Ensuring Indigenous communities retain authority over:
 - How their knowledge is collected
 - How it is stored and accessed
 - How it is interpreted and shared
 - How long it is retained and how it is disposed of
- Supporting community review and approval of materials prior to public dissemination.
- This will be done through the committee of knowledge keepers, who will be a part of the Office of Indigenous Engagement.

7. Responsibilities

7.1 Western Community College

WCC will:

- Establish and maintain protocols for engagement with Indigenous communities.
- Provide education and training for employees and students on respectful use of Indigenous Knowledge.
- Ensure institutional policies, procedures, and agreements align with this policy.

- Support Indigenous leadership and participation in decision-making related to knowledge governance.

7.2 Faculty and Staff

Faculty and staff must:

- Seek appropriate consent before using Indigenous Knowledge in any context.
- Consult with the Office of Indigenous Engagement (or designated lead) before initiating projects involving Indigenous Knowledge.
- Accurately acknowledge Indigenous sources and knowledge holders.
- Ensure students are aware of and comply with this policy.

7.3 Students

Students must:

- Use Indigenous Knowledge ethically in coursework, research, and projects.
- Follow instructor guidance and institutional protocols for consent and attribution.
- Respect confidentiality, cultural protocols, and restrictions on use.

8. Research and Scholarly Activity

All research involving Indigenous Knowledge must:

- Comply with this policy and applicable WCC Research Ethics Committee requirements.
- Follow community-specific research protocols and agreements, including story work.
- Include clear provisions regarding:
 - Ownership and control of data
 - Rights to review, approve, and withdraw materials
 - Conditions for publication and dissemination
 - Long-term stewardship and archiving arrangements

9. Curriculum and Teaching

- Indigenous Knowledge incorporated into curricula should be developed in collaboration with Indigenous partners wherever possible.
- Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and community experts must be engaged respectfully and compensated fairly.
- Teaching materials must reflect cultural accuracy, integrity, and community guidance.

10. Libraries, Archives, and Knowledge Storage

Indigenous Knowledge held in WCC libraries, archives, or digital repositories will:

- Be managed using culturally appropriate classification and access protocols.
- Reflect community guidance regarding cataloguing, metadata, and discoverability.
- Include access controls for sensitive or restricted materials.
- Follow Indigenous community direction regarding retention, repatriation, or destruction of materials.
- From time to time these will be utilized back by the indigenous communities and/or researchers.