

INDIGENOUS STUDIES 2412F
GEOGRAPHY AND ENVIRONMENT 2412F

Indigenous Health and Healthcare Environments Fall 2026

Instructor: Dr. Vanessa Ambtman-Smith, Assistant Professor

Department of Geography & Environment and Assistant Professor, Indigenous Studies
Program

Class Schedule: see page 3

Office Hours: Tuesdays 12pm -1:00pm via zoom or by appointment

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Land Acknowledgment

I take this opportunity to welcome students to the traditional lands of the Anishinaabek (Ah-nish-in-a-bek), Haudenosaunee (Ho-den-no-show-nee), Lūnaapéewak (Len-ahpay-wuk) and Attawandaron (Add-a-won-da-run) peoples, on lands connected with the London Township and Sombra Treaties of 1796 and the Dish with One Spoon Covenant Wampum. This land continues to be home to diverse Indigenous peoples (e.g., First Nations, Métis and Inuit) whom we recognize as contemporary stewards of the land and vital contributors of our society.

Course Description

The health of Indigenous people - individuals, families, populations, and communities, are deeply affected by colonization and other distal, Indigenous determinants of health, including structural ones that have become embedded within places and spaces of health, such as hospitals. This course provides historic and conceptual foundations for understanding contemporary Indigenous health through the lens of colonial disruption and dispossession, situating contexts of health and healthcare environments as important places of reconciliation.

NEW FOR 2026: This course deepens its focus on environmental dispossession and repossession as central concepts for understanding Indigenous health. New units examine the climate crisis and wildfires (including a case study of Maui and the Lāhainā fires), the health implications of pipelines and resource extraction in BC and Alberta, and the Indigenous determinants of health, drawing on *Because This Land Is Who We Are* (Richmond, Coombes & Louis, 2024) and *Theory of Water* (Simpson, 2025).

In this course, you will have the opportunity to develop an understanding of spatial practice and policy through exploring concepts from multiple perspectives on Indigenous health -- from professional/clinical perspectives to people/patients, and inclusive of traditional knowledge keepers/Elders. The focus will be on spatially examining spaces of Indigenous health practice and policy grounded in decolonizing, critical theory. Themes and concepts in Indigenous health geography are examined as they relate to creating equitable spaces, practice and policy. This course enhances learners' awareness about critical thinking skills through course readings and discussions related to case studies in various learning activities, as well as through personal reflection.

Prerequisites: None

Antirequisites: None

Credit Value: 0.5

Required Text

Greenwood, M., Leeuw, D. S., Stout, R., Larstone, R., & Sutherland, J. (2023). *Introduction to determinants of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples' Health in Canada*. Canadian Scholars. Cost for text: \$139.99 (Amzon.ca) or \$89.99 (print) or \$79.99 (digital ebook) via: [Introduction to Determinants of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples' Health in Canada - Canadian Scholars](#)

Additional required readings will be available through the Course Readings tool on OWL Brightspace, in an open access (free) PDF version.

Richmond, C., Coombes, B., & Louis, R.P. (2024). *Because This Land Is Who We Are: Indigenous Practices of Environmental Repossession*. Bloomsbury Academic. Open access (free), DOI: 10.5040/9781350247703.

Simpson, L.B. (2025). *Theory of Water: Nishnaabe Maps to the Times Ahead*. Knopf Canada. Selected excerpts will be posted on OWL.

Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of this course, students will:

- Critically appraise Indigenous health practices and research
 - Compare and contrast processes of colonization and reconciliation in healthcare
 - Recognize and respect core concepts and approaches to cultural safety and equity in healthcare environments
 - Advocate for equitable healthcare for Indigenous peoples
 - Assess Indigenous health related research that is used to inform policy and healthcare practices
 - **NEW:** Explain processes of environmental dispossession and repossession and their relationships to Indigenous health and wellbeing
 - **NEW:** Critically analyze how climate change, wildfires and resource extraction shape the Indigenous determinants of health, and identify Indigenous-led responses
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Course Schedule: Fall 2026, 2412: Indigenous Health and Healthcare Environments

Date	Week	Topic & Themes	Key Assignments
Sept 9	Week 1	Introduction to the Course and Creating Community <i>Required readings:</i> Syllabus	None
Sept 16	Week 2	Land as a Determinant of Health and Traditional Medicine <i>Required readings:</i> Introduction, Greenwood et al. (pp. xvii-xxiv); Lines, L.A. et al. (2019) Connection to the Land; Richmond, Coombes & Louis (2024) Introduction, Because This Land Is Who We Are (open access, OWL)	1st Discussion Activity (5%) due Sept 17
Sept 23	Week 3	The Indian Hospital <i>Required readings:</i> Boyer & Leggett Ch. 4; Allan & Smylie Ch. 5; Video: "How Canadian Institutions are failing Indigenous people" https://youtu.be/g-59me5wWAo?si=9feo9OULMZNs_oK9	Final Project Proposal due Sept 25 (5%)
Sept 30	—	NO CLASS: National Day for Truth and Reconciliation (non-instructional day). Students are encouraged to attend the Sunrise Ceremony and campus events.	None
Oct 7	Week 4	Indigenous Wholistic Health and the Indigenous Determinants of Health <i>Required readings:</i> Smith & Waters Ch. 10; Ahenakew (2011) Birth of Windigo; Kotierk, A., Ch. 11: Inuktitut as a Public Health Issue, in Greenwood et al.	2nd Discussion Activity (5%) due Oct 8
Oct 14	Reading Week	NO CLASS: Fall Reading Week (Oct 10-18)	None
Oct 21	Week 5	Environmental Dispossession and Repossession: Reclaiming Land, Reclaiming Health <i>Required readings:</i> Big-Canoe & Richmond (2014); Richmond, Coombes & Louis (2024) Ch. 2: The Practices and Praxis of Indigenous Environmental Repossession, and Ch. 5: Gathering for Wellness in Biigtigong Nishnaabeg; Ambtman-Smith & Richmond (2020)	3rd Discussion Activity (5%) due Oct 22
Oct 28	Week 6	Student Oral Presentations: 3-Minute Lightning Talks (Group A) Contemporary Indigenous Health/Healing Places	Oral Presentations: Group A (15%)
Nov 4	Week 7	Student Oral Presentations: 3-Minute Lightning Talks (Group B, TA-led).	Oral Presentations: Group B (15%)
Nov 11	Week 8	Storytelling, Allyship and Cultural Safety (Guest Lecture: Dr. Rick Fehr) <i>Required readings:</i> McCallum & Perry Ch. 3: Brian Sinclair; Ishiyama (2014) A.R.T. Program Introduction; Browne et al. (2022) Anti-Indigenous racism. Includes an allyship segment and exercise; a tailored Story-telling Assignment option is available for Indigenous students (details on OWL).	Story-telling Assignment (20%) due Nov 13
Nov 18	Week 9	Wildfires, Climate Crisis and Indigenous Health <i>Required readings:</i> McGee (2020) Evacuating First Nations during wildfires in Canada; Montesanti et al. (2021) Exploring	4th Discussion Activity (5%) due Nov 19

		Indigenous ways of coping after a wildfire disaster in Northern Alberta	
Nov 25	Week 10	Indigenous Traditional Healing Space - LHSC Victoria Hospital Site Visit <i>Location:</i> E1-204, Victoria Hospital, LHSC <i>Required readings:</i> Cidro et al. Ch. 19	None
Dec 2	Week 11	Pipelines, Extraction and the Indigenous Determinants of Health (BC/Alberta) <i>Required readings:</i> Spice (2018) Fighting Invasive Infrastructures: Indigenous Relations Against Pipelines; Women's Earth Alliance & Native Youth Sexual Health Network (2016) Violence on the Land, Violence on Our Bodies (excerpts)	5th Discussion Activity (5%) due Dec 3
Dec 9	Week 12	Water is Life: Theory of Water, Healthcare Transformations and Indigenous Futures <i>Required readings:</i> Johnson et al. Ch. 20; Allen et al. (2020) Indigenous-led partnerships; Simpson, L.B. (2025) Theory of Water (excerpts, OWL) <i>Delivery:</i> online/asynchronous (final class).	Final Project due Dec 11 (40%)

Method of Evaluation

Assessment	Description	Weight	Due Date
<i>In-class Discussion Activities & Reflections</i>	5 activities throughout term (weeks 2, 4, 5, 9, 11), completed in class and submitted via OWL as short exit tickets; graded complete/incomplete. Drop lowest score.	20% (4 of 5 counted)	End of day Thursdays
<i>Final Project Proposal</i>	Written (max 300 words) or video format proposal; graded on completion (checklist)	5%	End of Week 3
<i>Oral Presentation</i>	3-minute lightning talk on a contemporary Indigenous health/healing place (Group A: Oct 28; Group B: Nov 25, TA-led). Includes structured peer assessment of three classmates (3 of the 15 marks)	15%	Weeks 6 and 7
<i>Story-telling Assignment</i>	700–800-word story on course-relevant topic with basic research (multiple format options)	20%	End of Week 8
<i>Final Project</i>	Choice between a meaning-making assignment (individual or in pairs, with each partner submitting a brief individual reflection) or a traditional 2500-word individual essay with minimum 5 scholarly sources; all formats include a 1-page written or 5-minute audio reflection	40%	End of Week 12

Total: 100%

Enhanced LHSC Site Visit (Week 10 – Nov 25, TBC)

Location: Indigenous Traditional Healing Space, Victoria Hospital (E1-204)

Address: 800 Commissioners Rd E., London, ON

Focus: Integration of traditional healing practices within Western healthcare institutions, and examination of how technology supports or challenges culturally safe care.

Key Policies

Attendance and Participation

This course is designated as in-person. Regular attendance is essential for community building and meaningful dialogue. Zoom accommodation available only for illness/extreme weather. By design, some content is delivered online/asynchronously, with recorded material and a structured activity posted on OWL: the Maui case study (week of Nov 25, while Group B lightning talks run in class with the TA) and the Dec 9 final class.

Assignment objectives and rubrics will be posted on OWL, as well as discussed in class. Should you have a concern regarding the grade you received for an assignment, you must wait 24 hours from the receipt of the grade (on OWL) to contact the instructor. In doing so, please make an appointment and prepare in writing, with evidence, why you feel your grade is inappropriate. Please be aware that in requesting a grade reassessment, your grade could go up/down/or stay the same. Note that calculations errors (which do occur!) should be brought to my attention immediately. Methods for dealing with missed work and course content are at the discretion of the instructor(s). Students should be aware that some learning outcomes cannot be easily made up and may need to be completed in a subsequent year. Your instructor will provide you with further information as to how this applies within this course.

Supporting Documentation Required: Final Project only

Built-in Flexibility: Discussion activities include drop-lowest provision; oral presentations may be pre-recorded if needed.

Cultural Safety

All discussions will be conducted with respect for Indigenous knowledge systems and lived experiences. Students are expected to engage with cultural humility and openness to learning.

Technology Use

Laptops permitted for course-related activities. Social media use will result in device restrictions.

Important Dates - Fall 2026

Sept 7, 2026	Labour Day; Western closed
Sept 9, 2026	Fall/ Winter term classes begin
Sept 17, 2026	Last day to add a full course, a first-term half course, a first-term full course, or a full-year half course on campus and Distance Studies
Sept 30, 2026	National Day for Truth and Reconciliation (observed as a non-instructional day at Western)
Oct 12, 2026	Thanksgiving Holiday, Western closed
Oct 10-18, 2026	Fall Reading Week
Nov 30, 2026	Last day to withdraw from a Fall 12-week course resulting in a grade of WDN (withdrawn, without academic penalty); later withdrawals appear as F
Dec 9, 2026	Fall/ Winter Term classes end

<i>Dec 10, 2026 (see Registrar)</i>	Study Day
<i>Dec 2026 (see Registrar)</i>	Mid-year examination period

Support Resources

Contact Information

- **Email:** vambtman@uwo.ca (24-48 hour response time)
- **Office Hours:** Tuesdays 12:00-1:00 pm or by appointment

Zoom Office Hours:

<https://westernuniversity.zoom.us/j/98512349097?pwd=7C41hMaZxLaBGhwr72u8WvN3r0A6ui.1>

Additional Support:

Contingency plan for an in-person class pivoting to 100% online learning. In the event of a COVID-19 resurgence during the course that necessitates the course delivery moving away from face-to-face interaction, all remaining course content will be delivered entirely online, either synchronously (i.e., at the times indicated in the timetable) or asynchronously (e.g., posted on OWL for students to view at their convenience). The grading scheme will not change. Any remaining assessments will also be conducted online as determined by the course instructor. In the event that online learning is required, a stable v1 (2021.09.03) internet connection with working microphone and webcam will be required. As has been the case in the past, the decision to pivot to online learning will be made by Western, and not individual instructors or departments (excepting temporary online instruction in the event of instructor illness).

A Note on Plagiarism:

Students must write their assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major scholastic offence (the Scholastic Offence Policy can be viewed in the Western Academic Calendar).

Plagiarism Checking:

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (www.turnitin.com).

Policies on Examinations:

No electronic devices of any kind are allowed during tests and examinations.

Policy on Laptops and other Electronics/Phones in Class:

Laptops are permitted in class but if it is observed that students are on social networking sites such as Facebook or Twitter, they will be told to close the lid and they will not be permitted to use it for the remainder of the class. Be sure that all cell phones are turned off at the beginning of class.

Accessibility Options:

Students with disabilities work with Accessible Education (formerly SSD) which provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive testing. The accommodation policy can be found here: [Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities](#).

Please contact the course instructor if you require material in an alternate format or if you require any other arrangements to make this course more accessible to you. You may also wish to contact Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) at 519 661-2111 x 82147 for any specific question regarding an accommodation. Information regarding accommodation of exams is available on the Registrar's website:

www.registrar.uwo.ca/examinations/accommodated_exams.html

Scholastic Offences

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following web site: www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

Mental Health

Students who are in **emotional/mental distress** should refer to Mental Health @ Western (http://uwo.ca/health/mental_wellbeing/index.html) for a complete list of options how to obtain help.

Indigenous Services:

A link to Indigenous Initiatives can be found at <http://indigenous.uwo.ca> and the Indigenous Student Centre here: <http://indigenous.uwo.ca/students/about>

Writing Support Centre:

A link to the Writing Support Centre can be found at <http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/writing/>

Academic Consideration for Missed Work

University policy on academic considerations are described [here](#). This policy requires that all requests for academic considerations must be accompanied by self-attestation. Further information about academic considerations, and information about submitting this self-attestation with your academic consideration request may be found [here](#). Please note that any academic considerations granted in this course will be determined by the instructor, in consultation with the academic advisors in your Faculty of Registration, in accordance with information presented in this course outline.

When a student receives academic considerations or academic accommodations which overlap with the built-in flexibility of the assessment, the longest period of accommodation will determine the deadline. The built-in flexibility of the assessment should not be taken to extend any considerations or accommodations.

Accommodation for Religious Holidays

Students should review the policy for [Accommodation for Religious Holidays](#). Where a student will be unable to write examinations and term tests due to a conflicting religious holiday, they should inform their instructors as soon as possible but not later than two weeks prior to writing the examination/term test. In the case of conflict with a midterm test, students should inform their instructor as soon as possible but not later than one week prior to the midterm.

Special Examinations

A Special Examination is any examination other than the regular examination, and it may be offered only with the permission of the Dean of the Faculty in which the student is registered, in consultation with the instructor and Department Chair. Permission to write a Special Examination may be given on the basis of compassionate or medical grounds with appropriate supporting documents. To provide an opportunity for students to recover from the circumstances resulting in a Special Examination, the University has implemented Special Examinations dates. These dates as well as other important information about examinations and academic standing can be found [here](#).

Course Materials and Technology

All course materials will be posted to **OWL Brightspace**. Students requiring technical support can contact Western Technology Services at 519-661-3800.

Browser Requirements: Current versions of Safari, Chrome, Edge, or Firefox with JavaScript and cookies enabled.

Statement on the Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Philosophy and Approach

In IS/GEOG 2412F, we recognize that AI tools can be valuable learning supports while also acknowledging their limitations, particularly in understanding Indigenous knowledge systems, lived experiences, and culturally sensitive content. This course emphasizes critical thinking, personal reflection, and the integration of multiple ways of knowing—areas where human insight and cultural understanding remain essential.

Students will have opportunities to critically engage with these technologies while learning about their appropriate and ethical use.

Permitted Uses of AI

AI tools (such as ChatGPT, Claude, Grammarly, etc.) may be used for:

- **Research assistance and brainstorming:** Helping you explore initial ideas, identify research directions, or understand complex concepts
- **Writing support:** Grammar checking, sentence structure improvement, and clarity enhancement
- **Organization and planning:** Creating outlines, organizing thoughts, or structuring arguments
- **Learning support:** Explaining difficult concepts or serving as a study tool (similar to a tutor)
- **Critical analysis exercises:** When explicitly assigned, comparing AI-generated content with course materials to identify biases or limitations

Restricted Uses of AI

AI tools should NOT be used for:

- **Generating substantial portions of written assignments:** Your voice, analysis, and critical thinking must be authentically yours
- **Creating personal reflections:** Reflection assignments must represent your genuine thoughts and experiences
- **Storytelling assignments:** These require your authentic voice and perspective
- **Completing discussion activities:** In-class discussions rely on your preparation and genuine engagement
- **Representing Indigenous knowledge or experiences:** AI cannot authentically represent lived experiences or traditional knowledge systems

Required Disclosure and Best Practices

1. **Transparency:** If you use AI tools in preparing any assignment, include a brief note describing how you used them (e.g., "I used ChatGPT to help organize my initial outline and check grammar")
2. **Cultural Sensitivity:** Be aware that current AI systems have significant limitations in understanding Indigenous perspectives, traditional knowledge, and culturally specific contexts. Always critically evaluate AI-generated content through the lens of what we learn in class

3. **Verify Information:** AI tools can produce inaccurate information, especially about Indigenous communities and health topics. Always fact-check using credible sources and prioritize Indigenous-authored materials
4. **Apply Course Learning:** Use insights from our course discussions to critically assess any AI tools you encounter or use
5. **Maintain Academic Integrity:** You remain fully responsible for the accuracy and integrity of all submitted work

Learning Rationale

This policy recognizes that AI literacy is increasingly important while preserving the authentic learning experiences central to this course. Your personal insights, cultural understanding, and critical analysis of Indigenous health issues cannot be replicated by AI, these are the core competencies this course aims to develop.

You are also encouraged to critically evaluate these technologies, including their environmental footprint and implications for Indigenous data sovereignty (OCAP principles).

Assignment-Specific AI Guidelines

In-Class Discussion Activities & Reflections (20%)

- **Prohibited:** AI cannot be used to generate reflection content or discussion responses
- **Permitted:** Grammar checking and basic editing only after you've written your authentic response
- **Rationale:** These activities assess your personal engagement and critical thinking development

Final Project Proposal (5%)

- **Permitted:** Brainstorming initial ideas and organizing thoughts
- **Required:** All final content must be your own words and ideas
- **Disclosure:** Note any AI assistance used in idea development

Oral Presentations (15%)

- **Prohibited:** AI-generated slides, talking points, or presentation content
- **Permitted:** Technical assistance with formatting, basic research fact-checking
- **Rationale:** Presentations assess your understanding and communication skills

Storytelling Assignment (20%)

- **Strictly Prohibited:** Any AI involvement in story creation, narrative development, or creative elements
- **Permitted:** Final grammar and spell-checking only

- **Rationale:** Storytelling requires authentic voice and cultural sensitivity that AI cannot provide

Final Project - Essay Format (40%)

- **Permitted:**
 - Initial research assistance and source identification
 - Outline organization and structure planning
 - Grammar and clarity editing of completed draft
- **Prohibited:**
 - Generating thesis statements or arguments
 - Writing substantial portions of content
 - Analysis or interpretation of sources
- **Required Disclosure:** Detailed explanation of any AI assistance

Final Project - Creative Format (40%)

- **Permitted:**
 - Technical assistance with formatting or design software
 - Initial brainstorming for creative direction
 - Grammar checking of written reflection component
- **Prohibited:**
 - Creating artistic content, visual elements, or creative components
 - Generating ideas for creative expression
 - Writing the required 3-page reflection
- **Rationale:** Creative work must authentically represent your learning and perspective

This course outline is subject to change with advance notice. Students will be informed of any modifications during class and via OWL Brightspace.