

# Community Based Research in Indigenous Studies

Indigenous Studies course 4023F

Geography and Environment course 3001F

**Field work dates: May 2nd to 7th, 2022**

## Co-Instructors

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## 1. Course Description

This semi-remote field course immerses students in Indigenous peoples' perspectives on reciprocity, restoration, invasive species remediation, land stewardship, and connections to and responsibilities to land and water. Instruction will primarily be by elders and other community leaders based at Bkejwanong Territory (Walpole Island First Nation) who will communicate with the class daily by satellite internet from and to field sites. Community-based research embodies Indigenous concepts of reciprocity. This means that students will not be the sole beneficiaries of knowledge gained in the course. In this reconfigured version of the field course, activities will take place on the campus of the UWO which is situated on a part of Turtle Island for which Great Lakes peoples have been in a relationship of responsibility for millennia. Students will come to know and respect the campus area in this context, providing an indirect benefit to the longstanding stewardship responsibilities of the Bkejwanong community. Students will use their personal and collective gifts and talents to assist in activities such as habitat observation, mapping, and related research in the process of growing and/ or re-introducing native and endangered plants and trees.

## 2. Learning Objectives

This course is designed to introduce students to the historic and contemporary realities experienced by Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. The approach, grounded in community-based methods, offers students a unique experience in the social, environmental, and political contexts that have shaped the lands, waters, and habitats of the region.

In this course, students will be exposed to complex social and environmental histories and situations, all with the broad goals of enhancing their overall understanding of:

- the colonial outcomes of land use and policy-making
- decolonization in a campus context
- historical and contemporary interactions between people and diverse ecologies
- the ways in which Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples can work together toward common objectives

## 3. Course Fee

The fee for this course will be ~\$100\* payable to the undergraduate coordinator. The fees go toward remote connectivity hardware, field transport, and, if possible, an end-of-course feast (!). Unused funds will be returned to students. In the past, Social Science students have been eligible for reimbursement from the university. Please make your deposit by contacting Anna Ivanisevic in the Dept. of Geography and Environment main office ([aivanise@uwo.ca](mailto:aivanise@uwo.ca))

\*subject to increase or decrease depending on final enrolment number.

## 4. Background

Bkejwanong Territory, which in English means “Where the Waters Divide,” is home to the Anishinaabeg of Walpole Island First Nation. Their current community is situated on six islands in the St. Clair River Delta, the largest freshwater delta in North America. The traditional homeland territory of Bkejwanong extends beyond the islands to Lake Huron, the Detroit River, Lake Erie, Michigan and Southern Ontario.

Despite centuries of colonization, the Anishinaabeg still consider the traditional territory their home, and as such they have inherent rights when it comes to the development of land and waters both on the delta, often referred to as the “Reserve” and in their traditional territory. Over the past two centuries, these rights have often been ignored, or worse, attempts have been made to remove these rights by the Canadian government, non-Indigenous industries and settler society.

During this time the pre-settlement land cover of the UWO campus has been reduced to small groves of selected Carolinian trees, and isolated copses, maintained as part of the Sherwood Fox arboretum, interspersed are small patches of prairie and an Indigenous teaching garden. Along the waters of the Deshkan Zibi (“Antler River”), renamed Thames River in 1793, are stretches of mixed Indigenous and invasive riparian plants and trees. East campus includes the junction of the Deshkan Zibi with the Medway Creek tributary which drains a remarkably biodiverse area of rare plants and fresh water mussels within the City of London. First Nations dwellings along the Medway Creek date back 1000’s of years. While much of Walpole Island remains biologically diverse, it too faces pressures from development and degradation. Nevertheless, it stands out as

a biodiversity giant among the intensely farmed Carolinian zone and is home to one of the largest contiguous tracts of forests in southwestern Ontario, globally imperilled oak savannah and tallgrass prairie remnants, one of the largest wetlands in the Great Lakes basin, and rich coastal waterways. These habitats support more than 70 species at risk.

Successive generations of agricultural, industrial, and town planning have not included Indigenous presence and land-use planning and practices, while often disregarding and degrading bioregional ecosystems. As a result, one of the current challenges facing both the Indigenous and surrounding non-Indigenous communities is to maintain and restore the remnant and marginal Carolinian forest, oak savannah, tallgrass prairie, riparian, and aquatic ecosystems. Such restoration efforts and care of existing remnant habitats are understood to be key to Indigenous cultural survival. While there are no easy solutions to the environmental challenges, in the area occupied by the UWO education about decolonizing the planning process in line with Indigenous-centered approaches is an important goal in this course.

## **5. Cultural awareness**

Students are expected to have a basic understanding and respect of Anishinaabeg culture and the Carolinian ecozone as well as shared approaches of other First Nations in southern Ontario. Peoples of the Haudenosaunee and EELÜNAAPÉEWI LAHKÉEWIT (Delaware) cultures are also close to London, mostly downriver from the UWO campus. Appropriate ethical and cultural respect will be expected of all students throughout the duration of the course. Students are not expected to be cultural experts, and relevant cultural understandings will be shared with the students as part of the learning process. Specifically, the concept of reciprocity as it relates to the 'host' Anishinaabeg community at Bkejwanong will be used as a pedagogical tool before, during, and after our community-guided experience.

## **6. Preparation**

Students will have a mandatory orientation and logistical meeting prior to the trip (likely in early March). For the field work in May, students are expected to bring the following items:

- a smart phone or tablet capable of wireless reception (details TBD) and photography (a few units will be made available for signout as necessary)
- Personal medication, notification of potential health related issues, allergies, sensitivities, and emergency contact information / health card.
- Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) such as face masks, hand sanitizer, etc.
- Hat, water bottle, work gloves, hiking shoes, rain gear, rubber boots, safety glasses, sunscreen,
- Clipboard, Notepad, waterproof paper, and pens or pencils, camera.

## 7. Course Assessment

### **Pre-trip assignment** 20 %

#### *Assignment on Braiding Sweetgrass:*

Students will submit four, written reflections on their reading of the course textbook “Braiding Sweetgrass” as follows:

Reflection 1 on the chapters in the sections “Planting Sweetgrass” and “Tending Sweetgrass”

Reflection 2 on the chapters in the section “Picking Sweetgrass”

Reflection 3 on the chapters in the section “Braiding Sweetgrass”

Reflection 4 on the chapters in the section “Burning Sweetgrass”

All Reflections documents are to be in your OWL dropbox before the first day of field work in May.

Each reflection should be one to two pages in length. It is recommended that you do one per month between now and May. It is an amazing book! If you’ve already read it, it’s worth going back. It is also very rich so try not to rush it.

### **Personal Reflections** 25%

At the end of each field day students will write about the day’s activities and record, on loose-leaf paper or a journal, their thoughts, questions, and insights into what they’ve learned. Students may also be asked by the instructors to consider a short, question relating to course material and daily encounters.

### **Individual Project** 40%

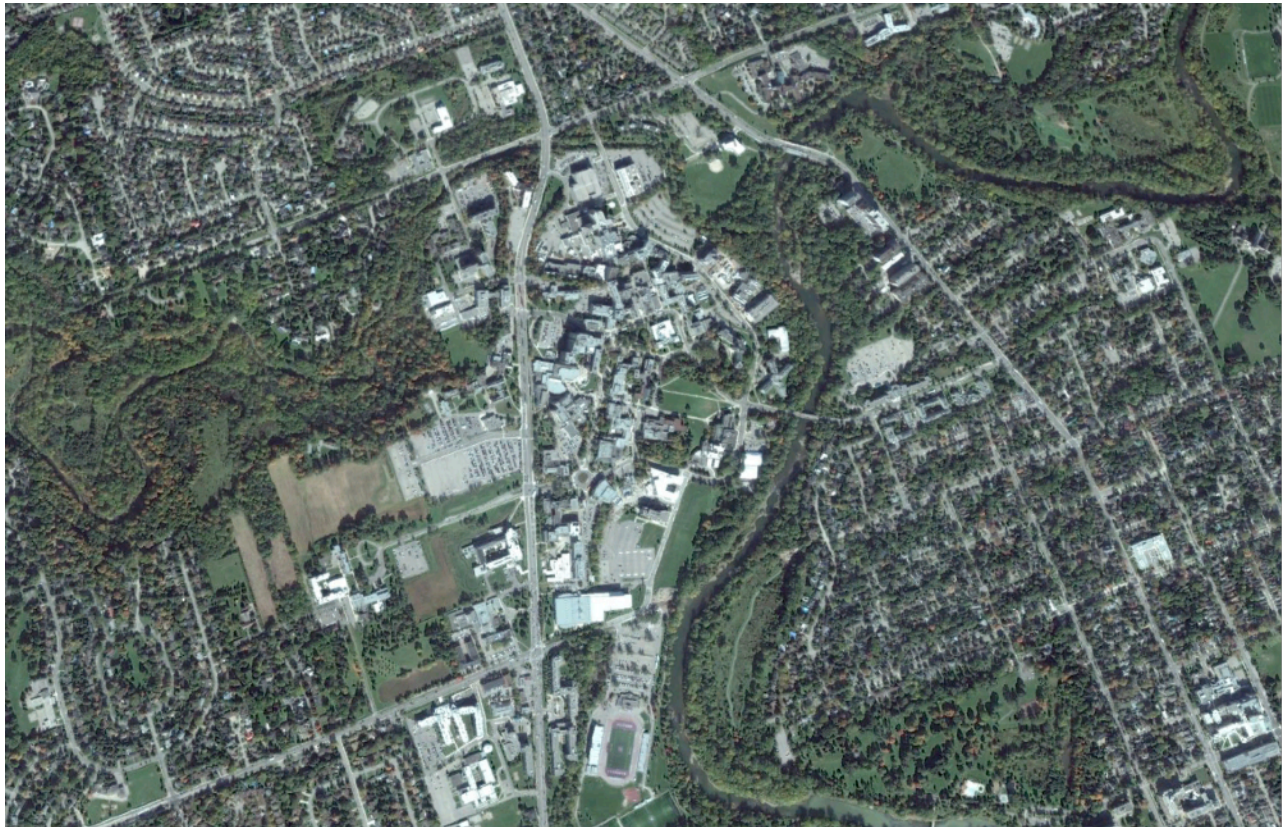
During the week students will identify a project that is realizable by the middle of May, with most field work completed during the first week of May. This project will be developed in consultation with the instructors. The project must fall within the scope of the course philosophy and community needs identified by members of the Walpole Island Heritage Centre, and focus on some aspect of restoration or cultural protocol, with an ethic of reciprocity. If the project is a paper, the topic and focus of the paper will be determined in conversation with the instructors. Project examples: Adventive species removal from campus site, vegetation and soil observations, species identification and mapping, pollinator and tree planting, care and weeding, water monitoring, educational treaty resources and documentation.

### **Photographic Portfolio** 5%

For this assignment you will prepare a digital folder or powerpoint-type file with up to ten (10) images taken by you on the trip. Images can be of nature, culture, people, adventure, geography, etc. and are to be delivered in full resolution to the instructors, by Friday, May 20th, 2022 (two weeks after field work). The up-to-10 pictures per person will be shown to the whole group at a post-fieldwork gathering. You must accompany your collection with a text file (in softcopy PDF format) that contains a brief Title and Caption for each picture or you can embed this in the powerpoint/keynote file.

### **Participation** 10%

## 8. Activities and Locations



This is a semi-remote field course guided by elders and knowledge holders at Walpole Island First Nation/ Bkejwanong Territory.

The activities will include a day visit\* to Nin.Da.Waab.Jig/ Walpole Island Heritage Centre, Walpole Island First Nation, with the remainder all on the UWO campus , centered on an outdoor location with secure wifi signal and access to a sheltered space in case of inclement weather. Students should expect to be out of doors for the full day and ready to start first thing in the morning.

\*Subject of pandemic conditions and community policy on visitor access

### Course Text

Robin Wall Kimmerer. *Braiding Sweetgrass*. Milkweed Press, 2013. (available free/ online at UWO libraries):

<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/west/detail.action?pq-origsite=primo&docID=1212658>

**SECTION ON CULTURAL RESPECT , BASIC RULES, COVID PROTOCOLS, CODES OF CONDUCT, ETC. [TO BE UPDATED later in WINTER TERM]**