

Indigenous Education Council Meeting Minutes
Thames Campus - Chatham
Nov 10, 2025 - 10:00am

Attendance:

- Art Barron, Co-Chair
- Tina Jacobs, Indigenous Learning Advisor
- Muriel Sampson, Indigenous Counsellor
- Donna Grayer –Manitoba Red River Metis
- Carrie Ann Peters – Caldwell First Nation Culture and Language Coordinator
- Fawne Lomascolo – WECDSB Indigenous Student Success Coach
- Candida Sinopole - Post Secondary Counsellor, Aamjiwnaang First Nation
- Shelley Duben – Education Program Manager, Walpole Island First Nation
- Jeffery Blackbird - Employment Support Worker/Life Coach, Walpole Island First Nation
- Lacey Smith - Anishinabek Educational Institute Campus Manager
- Sonja Popovski - St. Clair College Research & Innovation Business Development Manager
- Karamjeet Dhillon - St. Clair College Research & Innovation Director
- Lindita Prendi – St. Clair College Centre for Academic Excellence Executive Director

Regrets:

- Jody Noah, Co-Chair Delaware First Nation
- Debbie Dolson, Chippewas of the Thames First Nation
- Raffaele Nicoletti, St. Clair College Senior V.P., International Relations and Student Services
- Cortnee Goure, SCCDSB Indigenous Education Consultant

1.0 Welcome and Introductions

- Art Barron did the Land Acknowledgement
- Round table introductions welcoming new members Shelley Duben, Candida Sinopole, and Lacey Smith

2.0 IEC Minutes – Dated March 26, 2025

- Motioned by Karamjeet Dhillon, seconded by Carrie Ann Peters – approved.

3.0 Business Arising from Minutes

- Discussion about need for an Indigenous recruitment brochure so IEC members can help promote the College in their communities.

4.0 Reports

- **4.1 Indigenous Counsellor Report** – Accepted
Muriel Sampson reported multiple community events and educational activities from summer through fall 2025, including participation in Orange Shirt Day, Sisters in Spirit vigil, and career awareness fairs, reinforcing cultural connection and outreach
- **4.2 Indigenous Learning Advisor Report** – Accepted
Tina Jacobs reported that we saw record engagement with services and community events, reflecting growing student presence and involvement. **Student Usage Center attendance surged to 900 visits in fall 2025 compared to 571 in spring 2024**, with snacks and water supplies nearly

depleted every other day, indicating increased daily Indigenous student foot traffic. Student social events continue to foster community, such as the recent Indigenous student social with 7 attendees, focusing on informal bonding rather than outings. Craft activities like dream catcher making and loom weaving are being expanded via kits to allow for creative engagement despite busy schedules.

5.0 College Updates

• 5.1 President's Report Highlights:

- COP annual retreat highlighting the challenges and opportunities in the College system.
- Support Staff work stoppage.
- S'Aints Sleighing Hunger Concert.
- Sale of Skilled Trades Regional Training Centre.

• 5.2 Research Update (K Dhillon)

- The college is exploring a partnership with Paul and Jan Smith to use their 80+ acre homestead near Courtright for Indigenous student programming and land-based learning
- Although Paul and Jan have no Indigenous roots, they seek to support Indigenous education and community growth by offering land access for healing, teaching, and student activities.
- The property includes forested areas and cabins, presenting opportunities for experiential learning and cultural connection despite location challenges (30–45 minutes from campuses).
- Discussions include community input, particularly from Muriel as a local First Nation knowledge Advisor, ensuring respect for territorial rights and future collaboration with First Nations such as Walpole Island and Aamjiwnaang.
- Research and Innovation leadership, including Karamjeet Dhillon and Sonja Popovski, are actively pursuing Indigenous-focused grants and community engagement initiatives, aiming to strengthen connections and funding pipelines.
- Efforts include roundtables on Indigenous funding, partnerships with local First Nations, and proposals for Indigenous gardens and documentary projects.

• 5.3 Enrollment Trends and Indigenous Recruitment Focus

Enrollment fell sharply overall but domestic student and Indigenous enrollment trends show targeted areas for growth and retention.

- **Fall 2025 enrollment stood at 9,377 students, a 38% year-over-year drop, with domestic enrollment rising to 81% of total despite a significant international decline**
- International enrollment dropped largely due to study permit approval rates falling to **16%**, with only **10% of 3,479 applicants** receiving visas, deeply impacting revenue and campus demographics.
- Chatham campus maintained over 1,100 students with minor declines linked to program shifts.
- **Indigenous student enrollment totaled 375 for fall 2025, comprising 3.4% of total enrollment representing a 28% increase from fall 2024**, prompting renewed focus on Indigenous recruitment.
- Art flagged Indigenous recruitment as a key growth area domestically to offset international declines.
- Tina's detailed analysis showed increased diversity across First Nations, underscoring potential for targeted recruitment strategies tailored to these communities.

- **5.4 Financial Update**

The college faces a major financial deficit shaped by enrollment trends, with Indigenous services maintaining a focused but modest budget.

- **As of August 31, 2025, the college reported a net deficit of \$6.8 million, a swing of nearly \$12.5 million from the prior year surplus, driven mainly by international student revenue losses.**
- Overall revenue dropped by **\$52 million (41%)**, while operating grants increased slightly due to international clawbacks.
- Expenses decreased by nearly **\$40 million (30%)**, mostly from workforce reductions, leave incentives, and part-time staff cuts aligned with enrollment drops.
- Non-salary spending was cut by **\$33 million (45%)**, reflecting wide cost-saving efforts.
- **The Indigenous services budget totals approximately \$283,000 annually, primarily allocated to salaries (\$200,000+), community events, elder services, nutrition, and student outings.**
- The Indigenous Student Success Fund grant provides about \$236,000, with the center supplementing to support expanded programming and events such as the powwow (\$15,000 commitment).
- Elders' engagement remains challenging but is financially supported; outreach for elders willing to participate is encouraged.

6.1 Indigenous Student Success Workplan

The college continues to integrate Indigenous knowledge into curriculum and host culturally significant events to support student success and community engagement.

- **The Indigenous Student Success Fund work plan outlines efforts in outreach, recruitment, academic support, cultural programming, and partnerships, with a three-year plan ending March 31, 2026.**
- Services include learner advising, peer tutoring (hiring about 100 tutors per semester, prioritizing Indigenous students), academic counseling, and referrals to college-wide supports like accessibility services.
- The plan emphasizes access to elders, traditional medicines, and cultural teachings, with an open call for elders to join and support students.
- Curriculum support includes collaboration with faculty to embed Indigenous ways of knowing and pedagogical techniques tailored to Indigenous learners.
- **Blanket exercises and cultural trainings continue to be delivered to various student cohorts and staff, supporting reconciliation education and awareness.**
- Faculty and staff professional development sessions have included these exercises with student participation, fostering deeper understanding and engagement with Indigenous histories and perspectives.

6.2 Annual Alumni and Student Pow Wow

- Powwow is scheduled for May 2, 2026, at the University of Windsor's Toldo Lancer Centre, co-hosted with the University of Windsor.
- The powwow traditionally includes a Friday student day with bused-in school groups and a Saturday open community celebration.
- Partnerships extend to local Indigenous associations, school boards, and community organizations, providing broad cultural education and connection.
- Planning meetings invite participation from school boards and community partners to strengthen outreach and attendance.



7.0 2025-2026 Meeting Schedule:

- January 19, 2026 - Virtual
- March 9, 2026 - Caldwell FN - Point Pelee Mess Hall.
- May 11- at Chatham campus unless there's another Regional IEC Retreat. We will follow up with Lambton and Fanshawe.

11:21am Adjournment