

Indigenous Studies Program

IS 4023: A field course in Land Healing and Responsibility

BRIEF COURSE OUTLINE

Fall 2025

Date:00/00/0000

Instructor and course information:

Instructor: Desmond Moser and Clint Jacobs

Method of delivery: in person

Credit value: 0.5

Antirequisites: ES3023, GE4023

Prerequisites: None.

First Class; Friday Sept 12th

Field work dates: Every Friday AM Sept 12th, 19th, 26th, Oct 3rd, 10th, 17th, 24th, 2025

Field trip date: MANDATORY Bkejwanong day trip; On Sunday Oct 26th*, there is a **mandatory field trip** to the Nin.Da.Waab.Jig Heritage Centre, WIFN

Classroom: Fridays Nov 14th to Dec 5th, 10:30AM to 12, Wampum Learning Lodge

Co-Instructors

Clint Jacobs, email: clintjacobs01@gmail.com. Des Moser, email: desmond.moser@uwo.ca
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Teaching Assistant:TBD

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 community leaders and elders based at Bkejwanong Territory (Walpole Island First Nation). 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:

- 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. 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 Ziiibi (“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 Ziiibi 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.

4. 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 LAHKÉEWIIT (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.

5. Course Assessment

Participation in field work and final field trip 20%

Showing up to field work and class trips on time and ready to learn throughout the sessions.

Reading Assignments on Braiding Sweetgrass 15%

Students will **submit to their OWL Dropbox** four, written reflections on their reading of the course textbook "Braiding Sweetgrass" available as a downloadable ebook at UWO library.

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

Each reflection should be one to two pages in length. If you've already read the book, it's worth going back. It is also very rich so try not to rush it. We have divided the book in to four groups of sections;

Reflection 1 on the sections "Planting Sweetgrass" and "Tending Sweetgrass" DUE Sept 26

Reflection 2 on the chapters in the section "Picking Sweetgrass"; DUE OCT 10

Reflection 3 on the chapters in the section "Braiding Sweetgrass" DUE Oct 24

Reflection 4 on the chapters in the section "Burning Sweetgrass" DUE NOV 14

Journal Reflections based on Field sessions 20%

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 be asked by the instructors to consider a short, question relating to course material and daily encounters. Upload your reflections/responses to OWL by midnight Wednesday that follows the field session.

Individual Project 40%

By Friday, Oct 17th, students will identify a project that is realizable by the end of term. 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 **pdf file** with 5 images taken during course activities plus caption and text description. Images can be of nature, culture, people, adventure, geography, etc. DUE in your OWL Dropbox, put your name in the filename, by Friday, NOV 14th, 2024. The submission will be shared with the class at an end of term gathering.

8. Location, Timing, and Nature of Course Activities

SEPT 19 to OCT 24 FIELD WORK

We will meet for weekly Friday morning field sessions at 8:30am in the parking lot of the Ivey Spencer Leadership Centre starting Friday Sept 12th.

Here is the google map link for our meeting place every Friday at 8:30: It is the lower parking lot behind the Ivey Spencer Leadership Centre on Windermere Rd.:

<https://maps.app.goo.gl/kkWonGLE2Ev6DjCX6>

Please note that Braiding Sweetgrass author, Dr. Robin Wall-Kimmerer, will be visiting our field site Friday morning, Oct 18th...it is reading week and attendance optional but it will be very special!

SATURDAY NOV2nd MANDATORY FIELD TRIP to BKEJWANONG ; same meeting place and time, On SUNDAY OCT 26th, we will travel by rental vans/cars to the Nin.Da.Waab.Jig Heritage Centre, WIFN for a day of teachings and habitat visits.

NOV 14 to FRI DEC 5th WAMPUM LEARNING LODGE CLASSROOM WORK: FRIDAYS 10:30AM-NOON

For the last month of term we'll be meeting to complete individual projects and have a potluck meal at the Wampum Learning Lodge from 10:30AM to NOON every Friday starting Nov 14th.

Preparation

- Field Clothes; work or hiking boots, comfortable pants for yard work that can be tucked into socks (tick prevention), long sleeve shirt, hat, rain gear, water bottle, lunch, sunscreen
- a smart phone for GPS work and photography (a few devices can be made available for signout as necessary)
- Any personal medication, notification of potential health related issues, allergies, sensitivities, and emergency contact information / health card.
- Clipboard, notebook for field observations/ reflections, pens, pencils
- Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) you wish to use such as face masks, hand sanitizer, etc.

Course Text

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

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

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