

# Community Based Research in Indigenous Studies

Indigenous Studies course 4023F

Geography course 3001F

**Dates: Field activities May 2 to 7, 2021; Final project due June 18, 2021**

## Co-Instructors

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## 1. Course Description

This semi-remote field course immerses students in Indigenous 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 community leaders based at Bkejwanong (Walpole Island First Nation) who will communicate with the class daily by 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 revised version of the field course, activities will take place on the campus of Western University 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 be required to use their personal and collective gifts and talents to assist in activities such as habitat observation, mapping and analysis in preparation for re-introducing native 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 and indigenization in a campus context
- Indigenous approaches to land stewardship
- historical and contemporary interactions between people and diverse ecologies
- become familiar with indigenous vegetation types and their significance
- the ways in which Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples can work together toward common objectives
- geographic field approaches to mapping and analysis

### 3. Course Fees

The fee for this course is \$250 payable to the respective undergraduate coordinators in Indigenous Studies and Geography. The fees go toward remote connectivity hardware on campus, a copy of the course book (“Braiding Sweetgrass” by Robin Wall Kimmerer) and to support an end-of course feast. Students are eligible to apply for reimbursement from the university.

### 4. Background

Bkejwanong, which in English means “Where the Waters Divide,” is home to the Anishinaabe people 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 Western University 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 Ziibi (“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 Ziibi with the Medway Creek tributary which drains a remarkably biodiverse area of rare plants and freshwater 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 LAHKÉEWIIT (Delaware) cultures are also close to London, mostly downriver from the Western University 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 receive an orientation and logistical meeting prior to the field course. At this time students will be given the course text book which we will read together in four stages before May 2, 2021. Any additional readings will be posted on OWL. 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, etc.
- Clipboard, Notepad, waterproof paper, pens or pencils, and a camera (cellphone).

## 7. Assessment

### Two, pre-fieldwork assignments

25%

#### *Assignment 1 (20%):*

Students will submit four, one-page reflections following each of four zoom discussion sessions (one in each of Jan, Feb, March and April) of the course textbook "Braiding Sweetgrass".

#### *Assignment 2 (5%):*

This assignment is designed to acquaint students with the geography, culture, ecology, and history of this part of Turtle Island. At the pre-field course meeting, students will have the opportunity to choose one of three topics: route map assignment, settlement assignment, and nations assignment. This assignment is due when we meet for our first class.

- For the route map assignment, students can use google earth to plot the road, trail, and river routes between the **north end of Walpole Island (Highbanks)**, and **Western University**. Chart the distance it takes to travel to each location by canoe, foot and automobile.
- For the settlement assignment, students are asked to document the history of land occupancy and use of the UWO campus and Medway Creek areas since the last glaciation.
- The Nations assignment will require students to identify each of the Indigenous lands and nations currently within a 150km radius (i.e. distance to Walpole Island) of the Western University campus, the treaties to which they were signatory in the lower Great Lakes, at least one of the signatory Chiefs, and the extent of the traditional territory.

### Personal Reflections

25%

Each night students will reflect on the day's activities and record, on loose-leaf paper or a journal, their thoughts, questions, and insights into what they've learned. At the end of each day, students will be given a question to answer relating to course material and daily encounters.

### Individual Project

45%

During the week students will identify a project that is realizable by the end of June, 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 Heritage Centre, and must 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: vegetation and soil observation, identification and mapping, tree planting, care and weeding, water monitoring, educational treaty resources, and documentation.

### Photographic Portfolio

5%

This assignment involves preparation of a digital folder or PowerPoint-type file with up to ten (10) pictures taken by you on the field course with a digital camera. Pictures can be of nature, culture, people, adventure, geography, etc. and are to be delivered in full resolution with a brief title and caption to the OWL dropbox, by Friday May 21, 2021 (two weeks after the field work). The up-to-10 pictures per person will be shown to the whole group at a post-fieldwork gathering.

## 8. Location Information

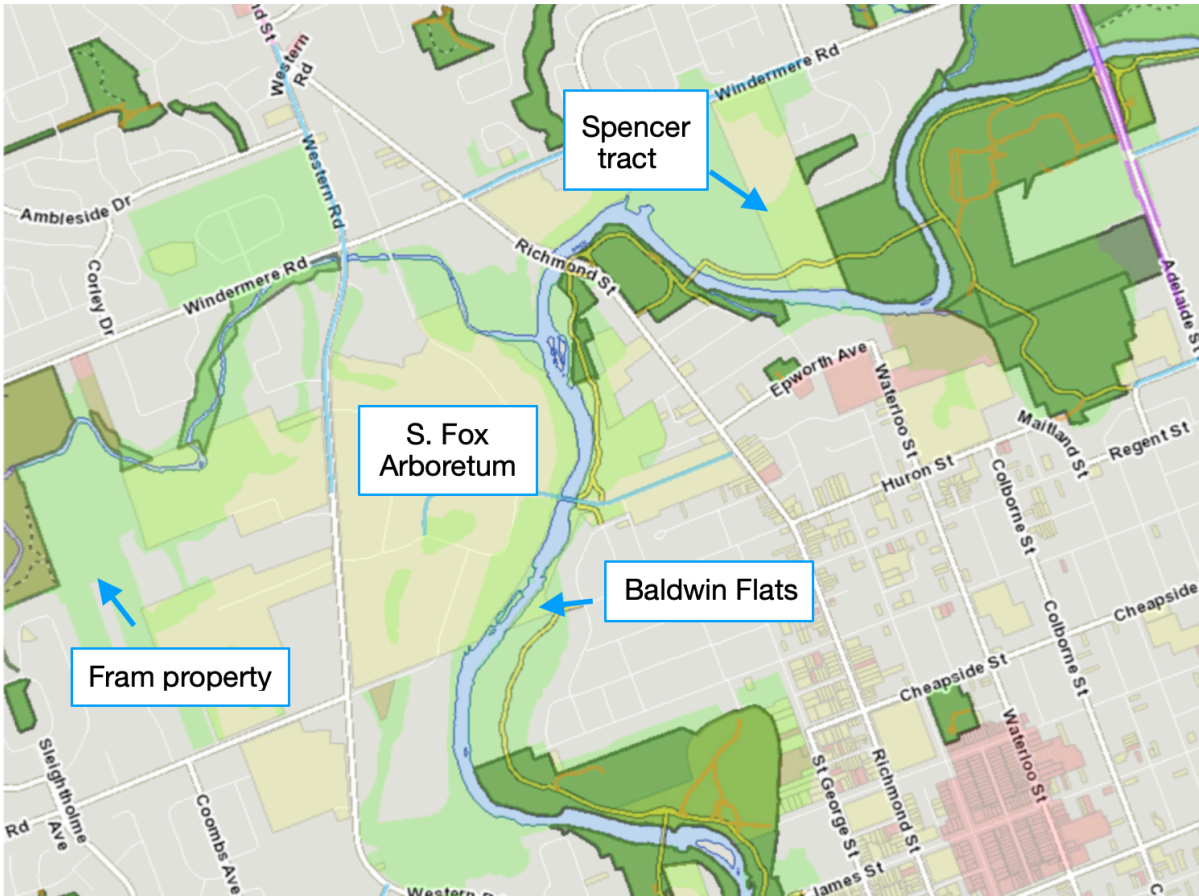


Figure 1. Modified City of London zoning map (CityMap\*) at 1:16000 indicating the location of potential teaching areas for vegetation and habitat mapping leading to indigenous vegetation restoration.

\*<https://london.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=0187f8a72f204edcbc95d595f31b5117>

This is a semi-remote field course guided by elders and knowledge holders from Walpole Island First Nation.

The activities will be on the Western University campus (See Figure 1 for potential locations), 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.

### Course Text

Robin Wall Kimmerer. *Braiding Sweetgrass*. Milkweed Press, 2013.

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