



SEPTEMBER 2024

Engaging the Elders on Campus

Guidelines to learning and practicing,
together, ways of being in good relation.



We are here to help
others take their next step
in their learning journeys.

— Elder Nina Bolton



Table of Contents

Engaging the Elders on Campus

Purpose & program overview	4
Engaging with the Elders	6
Intention	9
Relational accountability	9
Respect	9
Cultural humility	9
Reciprocity	9
Preparation	10
Learning	10
Valuable Resources	11
Unlearning	12
Naming poor habits	13
Connection	14
Arranging a Request	14
Request Details	15
Note about transparency	15
Reciprocation	16

Purpose & program overview

Purpose of the guidelines


At Yukon University, it is an honour and privilege to host the Elders on Campus as part of our wider community of supports for cultural learning, teaching and advising.

This document offers key guidance on ways we invite everyone to show respect for our Elders time and energy as well as helping us to balance the many requests for their participation from across the University (and beyond).

For Yukon First Nations, Elders are held in the highest regard. In the same spirit, we have a responsibility to ensure that each request and interaction with our Elders on Campus also aligns with practices of cultural safety.

We are pleased to know just how valued our Elders on Campus are as we witness an ever-increasing number of requests for their participation in the many programs and activities at YukonU!





Hawk Wing
Hedgehog mushroom

Overview of the Elders program

The Elders Program at Yukon University is comprised of a vibrant and generous group of Elders on Campus who are supported by the Elders' Coordinator. The Elders' Coordinator is a wonderful source of cultural knowledge who is also available to support you in understanding protocols and developing respectful relationships with Elders.

Our Elders on Campus are available for the following:

- offering cultural and spiritual supports to students, staff and faculty
- co-instructing workshops and classes
- opening and/or hosting events
- participating in cultural activities
- guiding faculty, staff, and students on ways to be in good relation with land and community
- helping build connections with knowledge keepers and across the territory and many many more activities as the opportunities arise, even plucking duck!

Engaging with the Elders

Interested in extending an invitation to our Elders on Campus?

In the spirit of relationship and reciprocity, **prior to requesting the time of our Elders**, we encourage you to review and consider the following practices for engaging the Elders.

INTENTION

Showing up with a good heart

PREPARATION

Disrupting patterns of harm

CONNECTION

Ethically engaging with our Elders

RECIPROCATION

Engage in equitable practices of engagement



Elder Sarah Lennie joining
the YNTEP/BEAD programs
Fall Gathering.



Elder Nina Bolton in the *Samay Thia* Harry Allen Elders Lounge at the Whitehorse Ayamdigut Campus.

INTENTION

Showing up with a good heart

In relational work, as this is, we ask that you consider the intentions and values that are guiding your request to work with and learn from our Elders.

RESPECT

Listen to and honour the contributions of our Elders. Consider their time, energy, and relevance of the request to their interests, knowledges and experiences.

RELATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY

Take responsibility for the ways you 'show up'. Be prepared to hold space for uncomfortable truths, difficult conversations and the (potential) impact on the relationships with Indigenous Peoples that you are seeking to create.

RECIPROCITY

Understand how this request (re)centers or supports the interests, needs and values of our Elders and/or Indigenous Peoples. Ask, who benefits in this relationship?

CULTURAL HUMILITY

Understand your cultural and personal biases; practice being open and curious about renewed ways of relating to knowledges, land and community.

PREPARATION

Disrupting patterns of harm

LEARNING

It is all too easy to 'transform' our words and adopt the *'language of reconciliation'* without actually transforming (or intending to transform) what we do. The work of reconciliation at Yukon University aligns with the work and the time invested in your own personal learning and unlearning journey. To support you in your personal journey of transformation, invest time in reviewing these resources and reflecting on what you're learning about yourself.

Transforming ourselves is a prerequisite to transforming our institution.



From left to right: Elder Sarah Lennie, Darlene Scurvy, and Dr. Norma Shorty at the YNTEP/BEAD programs Fall Gathering.

VALUABLE RESOURCES

Together Today for our Children Tomorrow

- What inequities persist?
- What is contributing to these inequities within our university?

Breaking the Dawn: Re-imagining Reconciliation Through Re-education

- What am I willing to learn, lean into or lead on to advance these commitments to reconciliation?

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Final Report and 94 Calls to Action

- What is my understanding of the role I can play in advancing truth, healing and reconciliation in my personal and professional lives?

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

- What is self-determination and why does it feature so prominently in the UN Declaration?

Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls

- How am I prepared to support and advocate for the safety, healing and well-being of Indigenous womyn?

UNLEARNING: REFLECTING ON THE READINGS

Whether developing new or strengthening existing relationships, consider moving in a way that will not increase the workload on our Elders or Indigenous partners. To be in appropriate relations, **you sometimes need to surrender your own agenda and personal needs in order to be in service of an Indigenous human rights-based approach for creating and strengthening respectful and reciprocal relationships.**

Without disrupting habits and the status quo, you risk replicating patterns of harm.

Instead, we invite you to further reflect on what draws you to engage with our Elders and explore your own expectations for what you're asking of them. Do you genuinely want to deepen your understanding of Indigenous practices of being in good relation? How will the relationship(s) be stronger after this exchange? What do you intend to do with the Indigenous knowledge you / your students are learning and engaging with? How can you centre, learn from, and engage, ethically, with the cultural knowledge shared with you? Are you prepared to hold space for difficult truths that can emerge from these invitations?

If so, we raise our hands to you in gratitude for "doing the work!"



NAMING POOR HABITS THAT CAN UNDERMINE MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT

While well-intentioned, we are mindful of the following reasons to engage with our Elders that replicate, rather than interrupt, patterns of harm.

Tokenizing

Checking off the 'opening/closing prayer, land acknowledgment, or other 2 minutes of Indigenous cultural services' on your agenda.

Exploiting


Misappropriating Indigenous knowledges and relationships without spiritually or materially benefiting or crediting the source(s) of knowledges.

Virtue signaling

Demonstrating, in public spheres, that you're a credible ally and visibly including Indigenous Peoples in your agenda(s) that have not been co-designed.

Performing

Seeking redemption, forgiveness or gratitude from Indigenous Peoples.



Wild Chamomile/Pineapple Weed
Photo credit: Teresa Waugh

CONNECTION

Ethically engaging with our Elders

We welcome all staff, students and community members to contact the Elders Program to invite the Elders to events, classes and into conversations. You can request the support and participation of our Elders in your programs and activities by getting in touch with the Elders' Coordinator.

Please contact the Elders Coordinator Bobbie-Lee Melancon at least 2 weeks prior to the event that you wish to invite the Elders to. This ensures that there is enough time to balance schedules, prepare activities and supplies and travel to various locations.

Come and introduce yourself to the Elders before the event and share tea, stories and more information about the event.

ARRANGING A REQUEST

You can arrange the request and connection through the Elders' Coordinator, Bobbie-Lee Melancon:

In-person


Samay Thia Harry Allen
Elders' Lounge

By phone

867 668 8732

By email

elders@yukonu.ca
bmelancon@yukonu.ca



Caribou Lichen

REQUEST DETAILS

Please include as much information as you can

Dates and times

Is this an ongoing event? Please clarify the day or days requested. Include start and end times; also plan to schedule in enough time for our Elders to settle in.

Location/transportation/travel

For off-campus locations, please consider arranging travel and/or accommodation.

Audience (students, community members, staff, etc.)

Who will the audience be? Ask your audience/class to research topics beforehand so that they are prepared to engage with the Elders in a respectful and meaningful way.

Course or event details and topic/theme/nature of the event

NOTE ABOUT TRANSPARENCY

Understanding the ways we prioritize requests

Given the popularity and value of the Elders on Campus, we are fielding more and more requests. While we are making every effort to expand the program to meet student needs across all the campuses, we do have to prioritize requests with our Elders' well-being and ways that we are making the institution a better place for those who will come after us.

Availability

- Not only time but energy and ability to offer meaningful contributions

Relevance

- Opportunities that support students well-being and learning journeys
- Opportunities that align with our Elders' knowledges, skills and interests

RECIPROCATION

Engage in equitable practices of engagement

Please consider ways that you are prepared to support the Elders and reciprocate the sharing of knowledge. This can take many forms but might include:

Encouraging the recognition of Elders as Indigenous faculty in your classrooms

Coordinating among your colleagues to prioritize which events and activities the Elders will be asked to support (recognizing that there is an increasing number of requests for the Elders to attend)

Gifts of supplies or food to the Elders Lounge

Offering to support regularly scheduled events such as Roddy's campfire

Continue on the journey of "doing your own work" to reflect on reconciliation and looking at ways that you can support systemic change, such as getting involved in work related to the University Reconciliation Framework, *Breaking the Dawn*.

For requests to share ceremonial practices — such as song, story and prayer — spiritual gifts of reciprocity are welcomed and encouraged. These could be gifts of music, song, medicine and more.



A close-up photograph of a branch with several vibrant green, oval-shaped leaves. The leaves have a slightly textured surface and are arranged along the branch. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green, suggesting a natural outdoor setting.

Love has no edges.

— Elder Sarah Lennie





Photo credit: Teresa Waugh



Engaging the Elders on Campus

867 668 8732

elders@yukonu.ca or bmelancon@yukonu.ca

yukonu.ca/about-us/elders-on-campus