

KINUK

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NEWSLETTER



Honoring Apuknajit: The Turning Toward Spring

As the days grow longer across Mi'kma'ki and the light begins to return, we enter *Apuknajit*—a season in the Mi'kmaq calendar that marks the transition from the deep stillness of winter toward the renewal of spring.

Apuknajit is often understood as the time when the snow begins to crust and carry footsteps more easily, when travel across the land becomes possible again, and when families and communities historically reconnected after the hardest winter months. It is a season of movement, preparation, and quiet change. The land is not yet in bloom, but it is awakening.

For the Mi'kmaq, the seasonal cycle reflects a close relationship with the natural world—each season guided not by fixed dates, but by observation, responsibility, and respect for the rhythms of the land and waters.

Apuknajit reminds us that renewal is gradual. It is a time to prepare for what is ahead, to strengthen relationships, and to carry forward the knowledge and resilience gathered through winter.

At Dalhousie, we recognize this season as an opportunity to reflect on our shared responsibilities: to continue learning, to build respectful relationships with Indigenous communities, and to honour the knowledge systems rooted in this territory.

As we move through Apuknajit, we invite our community—students, staff, faculty, and partners—to notice the small shifts around us, to welcome the returning light, and to walk forward together in a spirit of renewal.

Wela'lin | Thank you.



Understanding the **Mi'kmaw** Seasonal Cycle

The Mi'kmaw calendar is based on the natural rhythms of the land rather than fixed dates. Each season is identified by environmental changes, animal movements, and community practices that guided traditional ways of living, travelling, harvesting, and gathering.

Apuknajit is the late-winter season that signals transition. As the snow hardens and daylight increases, it becomes easier to move across the land. Historically, this was a time to reconnect with neighbouring communities, prepare for spring activities, and observe the subtle return of life.



Recognizing these seasons helps us understand Mi'kmaw knowledge as land-based, relational, and cyclical—reminding us that learning comes from paying attention to the world around us.





FEBRUARY 23, 2026

New ventilation system supports barrier-free smudging in Ko'jua Okuom



L - R: Michael Vandenburg, Sarah Jane Dooley, Elaine MacInnis, Rachelle MacKay, Nellie Adams, Dave Little, Andre Mereshuk, Craig Arthur.

The Ko'jua Okuom has reached a significant milestone in supporting Indigenous ceremony on campus with the installation of a dedicated ventilation system that now enables barrier-free smudging inside the space.

Located within the Downie Wenjack Legacy Space in the Killam Memorial Library on Studley Campus, the Ko'jua Okuom was created in collaboration with Indigenous colleagues to advance Indigenization, decolonization, and reconciliation at Dalhousie. The room serves as a place for reflection, gathering, and celebration, showcasing Indigenous books, artwork, and artefacts, including the Prosper Collection and a loaned selection of Mi'kmaw baskets.

"Smudging is part of a ceremony for purification while establishing a space for calmness," says John R. Sylliboy, Dal's vice provost Indigenous Relations. Smudging involves burning sacred medicines. "L'nu'k (Mi'kmaq) and Indigenous People who have long practiced this as part of their rituals are often instantly transitioned into a state of serenity when they see, feel, smell, and perform the ceremony. The fragrance of burning sweet grass or sage surfaces feelings of belonging, openness, and safety. This allows for our mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual foundations to be balanced in preparation for the space's intentional use."

From early consultations, it was clear that the ability to smudge directly within the room was essential for the community. Without a dedicated ventilation system, indoor smudges required advance coordination to adjust building systems, which limited the ability to use the space as intended. The newly installed ventilation system now enables smudging to take place safely, respectfully, and whenever required.

Jointly funded by Facilities Management and Dal Libraries, the system was installed by MCW Custom Energy Solutions Ltd., already on site completing the Killam Deep Energy Retrofit project, allowing the enhancement to be completed efficiently.



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An inaugural smudge led by Rachele McKay, Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing educational developer in the Centre for Learning & Teaching, underscored the significance of the moment and the positive impact this improvement will have on the future use of the space.

As Dal Libraries continues its work to enhance the Ko'jua Okuom, the space stands as a vital expression of the university's commitment to supporting Indigenous culture, ceremony, and community on campus.

Upcoming: Dalhousie Conference on University Teaching & Learning (DCUTL)

Opening Doors, Disciplines, and Minds: Embracing the potential of an accessible world

Wednesday, May 6 (in-person) | Thursday, May 7 (online)

Our 28th annual Dalhousie Conference on University Teaching and Learning (DCUTL) will celebrate university teaching and learning among faculty, staff, and graduate students from across Canada, and beyond. We invite our friends, colleagues and communities to share solutions, to seed ideas and to celebrate successes, contributing to a vibrant 2-day conference.

We're especially excited to be hosting **Dr. Rheanna E. Robinson** as our keynote speaker on May 6 for her talk "**Disability needs to be decolonized: How Indigenous knowledges can inform inclusive pedagogical practice**":

As principles of Indigenization, decolonization, reconciliation, and EDI continue to inform the strategic directions and priorities of universities across Canada, it is imperative the perspectives and aspirations of individuals directly affected by university policy and practice are meaningfully represented. In this talk, Dr. Rheanna Robinson will draw on her experience as an Indigenous scholar that lives with chronic illness and disability to describe how her academic research within Indigenous Disability Studies represents a compelling example of how Indigenous knowledges offer the world meaningful representations of equity and inclusion in diverse and varying ways.

Biography

Dr. Rheanna Robinson is an Associate Professor in the Department of First Nations Studies at the University of Northern British Columbia. and a Co-Lead for the Indigenous Research Stream with the Canadian Institute of Inclusion and Citizenship at the University of British Columbia.



Register and learn more about DCUTL here:

<https://dcutl2026.squarespace.com/registration>

Pjila'si — Welcome to the Indigenous Student Centre



The Indigenous Student Centre (ISC) – Studley Campus location, is a welcoming space dedicated to supporting Indigenous students throughout their journey at Dalhousie. Students are encouraged to drop in or connect with our Indigenous Student Advisors, Michele Graveline (mgraveline@dal.ca) and Dillon Hughson (dillon.hughson@dal.ca), for guidance, connection, and support.

The ISC is open Monday to Friday, with extended evening hours supported by our student staff—Julien, Noah, Ingrid, and Ella. As the number of Indigenous students, including Mi'kmaw students, continues to grow, the ISC plays an increasingly vital role on campus.



The Centre offers holistic supports such as:

- A safe and welcoming space for Indigenous students
- Help navigating university life and services
- Cultural and academic programming
- Recruitment, orientation, and transition support

Regular programming includes beading circles, Sacred Times for ceremony, Indigenous movie nights, and shared meals like our Friday Feast. Students can also enjoy snacks, pop-up brunches, and food partnerships through Second Harvest.

The ISC's community room is a flexible gathering space used for smudging, sharing circles, workshops, studying, and meetings. It is available for booking by Indigenous students and staff. Academically, the ISC offers study space, free printing, and tutoring in Math, Chemistry, and Biology in partnership with the Faculty of Science.



We also collaborate with the Bissett Student Success Centre, Writing Centre, and Accessibility Centre, hosting staff onsite to better support students.

We are honoured to share the space with **Elder in Residence Ann Labillois**, whose presence brings cultural guidance and warmth to ISC activities—from sharing circles to community gatherings.

Together, the ISC team is here to ensure Indigenous students feel supported, connected, and at home while pursuing their studies.

Michele Graveline, Advisor
Indigenous Student Centre
Dalhousie University

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Indigenous Student Enrollment 2025/26

In the 2025–2026 academic year, Dalhousie has **745** Indigenous students, including **280** Mi'kmaq students out of total 21,103 students.

Enrolment data shared here is an unofficial snapshot and may change. Official enrolment reports are released by the university annually in December and should be used as the final source of record.



Wela'lin

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