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### Mount Royal University celebrates milestones in Indigenous education

Iniskim Centre toasts 10 years, while Aboriginal Education Program prepares to mark 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary



Clarence Wolfleg of the Siksika Nation welcomes attendees to the Iniskim Centre anniversary ceremony.

Ten years after opening its doors, the [Iniskim Centre](http://www.mtroyal.ca/ProgramsCourses/FacultiesSchoolsCentres/IniskimCentre/index.htm)

(<http://www.mtroyal.ca/ProgramsCourses/FacultiesSchoolsCentres/IniskimCentre/index.htm>) has transformed a cozy nook of campus into the epicentre of Indigenous education at Mount Royal University.

In celebration of the success of the Iniskim Centre over the past decade, an anniversary ceremony was held on March 21. Dozens of supporters packed the University's main corridor to hear speeches, share stories and enjoy bannock, stew and cake.

Clarence Wolfleg of the Siksika Nation, known to many in the community as [Elder Miiksika'am](https://www.mtroyal.ca/AboutMountRoyal/MediaRoom/Newsroom/honorary-degree-elder.htm),

(<https://www.mtroyal.ca/AboutMountRoyal/MediaRoom/Newsroom/honorary-degree-elder.htm>) led the opening blessing while the Turning Robe Singers of Siksika Nation performed the flag song with their distinct style of Blackfoot drumming. [Medicine Trail \(Naato'ohsokoy\) Program](http://www.mtroyal.ca/ProgramsCourses/FacultiesSchoolsCentres/IniskimCentre/MedicineTrailProgram/) (<http://www.mtroyal.ca/ProgramsCourses/FacultiesSchoolsCentres/IniskimCentre/MedicineTrailProgram/>) coordinator Dion Simon of Maskwacis recognized the many elders who made significant contributions to Indigenous education at Mount Royal over the past 10 years and beyond.

"There is only a knowing of who you are and the place where you are going and what it is that you're here to do when you have the direction and guidance of the elders," said Simon.

Kelli Rae Morning Bull of the Piikani Nation reminded the crowd that it was exactly 10 years ago that Andrew Weasel Fat of the Kainai Nation led a pipe ceremony to ask for strength and perseverance for the newly named Iniskim Centre. Following the ceremony in 2007, a 60-person procession of dignitaries — including the Chiefs for each of the Treaty 7 Nations, leaders from the Métis Nation of Alberta Region 3 and the late Alberta premier Ralph Klein — formed a grand entry.

“Guests of the grand opening were each gifted with a small package of seeds representing the new birth of the centre,” said Morning Bull, who is the student success coordinator and lead for the BMO Mentorship Program. “Today, we see the effects of planting the seeds of success for Indigenous students attending Mount Royal.

“The Iniskim Centre and centres alike are vital components to Indigenous students reaching for, pursuing and completing their educational goals. I can tell you from personal experience that without these centres and the supports offered, my own educational journey would not have been a success, and I would not be standing here today.”

Before the official opening in 2007, Mount Royal held a naming contest for the centre, in the hope students would find a name meaningful for them. Rory Loftus of the Siksika Nation submitted his entry and won the contest. Respecting protocol, the University sought and received permission to use this particular name from a group of Blackfoot elders, including Frank Weasel Head of the Kainai Nation, Weasel Fat, and Leonard Bastien of the Piikani Nation.

The word Iniskim means “Buffalo Calling Stone,” and the stone holds special meaning to the Blackfoot people. It stems from a traditional Blackfoot story about how the Iniskim stone told Weasel Woman to perform a ceremony that would call the buffalo to provide for the people.

The name represents the sense of community that can be found within the centre’s walls every day as students, faculty and staff access programs and services.



Medicine Trail (Naato'ohsokoy) Program coordinator, Dion Simon, gifts Elder Margaret Waterview at the Iniskim Centre anniversary ceremony.

Under the [Strategic Plan 2025](http://www.mtroyal.ca/AboutMountRoyal/OfficesGovernance/OfficePresident/StrategicPlan2025/index.htm), Mount Royal plans to increase Indigenous enrolment to 7 per cent of its student body from 4.7 per cent right now — all while adding thousands of full-time learners. As Indigenous representation continues to climb, so does the range of activities and supports that provide a more exceptional undergraduate educational experience for Indigenous and non-Indigenous learners alike.



“Mount Royal has been engaged in Indigenous education for many years,” said John Fischer, director of the Iniskim Centre. “With the University set to grow, the future is extremely positive.”

The Iniskim Centre’s 10-year celebration was held in tandem with the recognition another major milestone.

The Aboriginal Education Program (AEP),

(<http://www.mtroyal.ca/ProgramsCourses/FacultiesSchoolsCentres/IniskimCentre/AboriginalEducationProgram/index.htm>) which is a post-secondary preparation program for students of Indigenous ancestry, will soon turn 25 years old.

In January 1993, the Aboriginal Education “Project” – as it was known then – began offering classes to students. This project was created in response to calls for a transitional program from the urban indigenous community and organizations such as the Calgary Aboriginal Friendship Centre, the Calgary Urban Affairs Committee and, in time, the Calgary Aboriginal Education Society. The intention was to create a program for students to receive post-secondary credentials for child studies and social work

(<http://www.mtroyal.ca/ProgramsCourses/FacultiesSchoolsCentres/HealthCommunityEducation/Departments/ChildStudiesandSocialWork/index.htm>) while learning in a culturally supportive environment.

This academic year, 78 registered students make up the largest cohort in the history of the program. Participants are taking credit and non-credit courses, and most are planning to pursue higher education. About half of AEP students are applying to a credit program at Mount Royal for entry in the fall of 2017.

Tori McMillan of the Berens River First Nation in Manitoba noted in his address that the program has developed in lockstep with Mount Royal’s transition to university status in 2009.

“What hasn’t changed is the importance of transitional programs like the AEP in providing a post-secondary option for students,” said McMillan, who holds the role of AEP Administrator.

“Aboriginal youth are the fastest growing segment of Canada’s society. Many of them are recognizing that a post-secondary education is going to open doors for them and opportunities to provide for themselves, their families and their communities. This is why education is referred to as the new buffalo. Education will be the way we sustain ourselves now and into the future.”

Cory Cardinal of the Tsuut’ina Nation also spoke to the layered history of Indigenous education at Mount Royal, highlighting the opening of the Native Student Centre in Wyckham House in 1998. The centre has brought in speakers, hosted concerts and conferences, as well as round dances and powwows.

Cardinal, who serves as the Cultural and Indigenous Inclusion Programmer at the Students’ Association of Mount Royal University, believes the momentum around Indigenous education is growing and he’s looking to help rebuild the ties between students and their alma mater.

“With the community’s support, we look forward to the future of the First Nations, Metis and Inuit alumni chapter,” he said.

In his formal remarks, Provost and Vice-President, Academic Jeffrey Goldberg, PhD,

(<https://www.mtroyal.ca/AboutMountRoyal/OfficesGovernance/JeffGoldberg>) paid homage to the builders of Indigenous education at Mount Royal. And, much like the formal procession of 10 years earlier, Goldberg described the grand entry at this year’s New Student Orientation (<http://www.mtroyal.ca/AcademicSupport/ResourcesServices/NewStudentOrientation/index.htm>) as a “turning point” for the institution.

“That was incredible,” said Goldberg, of the event that saw 2,000 students, along with Indigenous drummers and dancers walk through Mount Royal’s hallways lined with hundreds of employees cheering them on.

## Bison Homecoming Celebration

Thurs. April 6 from 1:30 p.m. to 4 p.m. — Leacock Theatre

Everyone is welcome to celebrate the return of wild bison to Banff National Park. Be part of history and listen to behind-the-scenes tales detailing the reintroduction journey and the Buffalo Treaty. Enjoy an afternoon of stories with Leroy Little Bear, food and drumming.





[Reserve your free ticket. \(https://www.eventbrite.ca/e/bison-homecoming-celebration-tickets-33009632700\)](https://www.eventbrite.ca/e/bison-homecoming-celebration-tickets-33009632700)

[More information on the return of bison to Banff National Park. \(http://www.bisonbelong.ca/\)](http://www.bisonbelong.ca/)

**March 28, 2017** — Bryan Weismiller

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Mount Royal University is located in the traditional territories of the Niitsitapi (Blackfoot) and the people of the Treaty 7 region in Southern Alberta, which includes the Siksika, the Piikani, the Kainai, the Tsuut'ina, and the Iyârhe Nakoda. The City of Calgary is also home to the Métis Nation.

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