



**UNIVERSITY
OF ALBERTA**

Affirming and Acknowledging Indigenous Ceremonial Practices at the University of Alberta

The University of Alberta, its buildings, labs and research stations are primarily located on the territory of the Nêhiyaw (Cree), Niitsitapi (Blackfoot), Métis, Nakoda (Stoney), Dene, Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) and Anishinaabe (Ojibway/Saulteaux), lands that are now known as part of Treaties 6, 7 and 8 and homeland of the Métis. The University of Alberta respects the sovereignty, lands, histories, languages, knowledge systems and cultures of all Indigenous Peoples.

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Grounding

In alignment with institutional strategic plans, University of Alberta campuses support the rights of First Nations, Métis and Inuit individuals and groups to engage in cultural and spiritual practices on campus and on the land.

[Braiding Past, Present and Future: University of Alberta Indigenous Strategic Plan](#)

- “4.2 Develop the necessary policies to support the use of university infrastructure for internal and external Indigenous community-building and gathering purposes and ceremony” (p. 53)
- “5.1 Revise and create new university policies to support and celebrate Indigenous inclusion, respectfully facilitate connections between the university and Indigenous communities, and bridge university/legal practices with Indigenous-centred protocols and Indigenous identity” (p. 53)

[Shape: A Strategic Plan of Impact](#)

- “We incorporate Indigenous identities, languages, cultures and worldviews across the university. This includes working to dismantle systemic barriers and celebrating the diversity, strength, complexity, resilience and beauty of Indigenous Peoples, cultures, languages and knowledge systems. *Braiding Past, Present and Future: University of Alberta Indigenous Strategic Plan* is a crucial foundation for our next decade.” (p.16)

[A Culture of Care: University of Alberta’s Safety Action Plan](#)

- “Cultural safety means an environment where employees can be their authentic selves. Employees should feel safe no matter how they identify as a human. University employees (and students) are diverse in their identities, including, but not limited to: gender, faith, mobility, linguistically and culturally. No employee should have to mask their authentic selves. Every employee should feel accepted and respected for who they are, in all of their complex identities and for the gifts that they uniquely contribute to the workplace.” (p. 4)

In 2016, Canada adopted the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) which affirms Indigenous rights to “...manifest, practise, develop and teach their spiritual and religious traditions, customs and ceremonies.” By acknowledging and supporting these ceremonies, the University of Alberta recognizes these rights as incontrovertible, addressing historical injustices which banned or suppressed these practices.

This document affirms that ceremony can be conducted without disruption or interference **anywhere on campus, including, but not limited to, outdoor spaces, classrooms, lecture halls, gathering spaces, and residences.**

These guidelines were developed in collaboration and consultation with the Office of the Vice-Provost, Indigenous Programming and Research, the Assistant Dean, First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Students, representatives from Facilities and Operations, Environment and Support Services and Employee Labour Relations, Human Resources, Health, Safety + Environment (HRHSE), the Indigenous Advisory Council, the SU, ISU, GSA, IGSA, and several other Indigenous staff and faculty members at the University of Alberta.

Indigenous Ceremonial Practices

'Indigenous ceremonial practices' encompass the diverse cultural and spiritual traditions practiced by Indigenous Peoples. It is vital to recognize the distinct rights of Indigenous Peoples within Canada. Indigenous ceremonies are rooted in deep spiritual, cultural, and historical traditions that vary across nations and tribes. Generally, the right to lead a ceremony is bestowed on individuals who have been trained and recognized by their community as having the knowledge, experience, and spiritual connection to do so.

Indigenous ceremonial practices include but are not limited to: lighting of sacred medicines (often referred to as [smudging](#)), lighting the Qulliq, pipe ceremonies, ceremonial fire, and performing ceremonial songs with rattles and/or drums. These may involve lighting or burning one or more sacred medicines from Mother Earth, such as sage, tobacco, cedar, sweetgrass or pualunnguat (resembling fur mittens). Different plants are used for wicking of the Qulliq, of which, Arctic cotton is one.

Safety

As with any practice that involves fire and smoke, it is essential to ensure safety and dispose of materials properly. Those who practice these varied ceremonial practices also recognize the need for suitable vessels during burning and the correct handling of ashes and matches produced from ceremonial fire.

Should Indigenous students, staff, or faculty have concerns regarding the practicalities of a specific location, they are welcome to consult with the [Facilities Services Partners](#).

This gesture is not about seeking permission but rather collaborating to ensure peace of mind. Engaging in open dialogue with F&O fosters understanding, ensures that everyone involved is aware and respectful, and can assist in promoting a supportive environment for the Indigenous community. The F&O team can provide guidance on risk mitigation, offer suggestions on suitable spaces, and answer any logistical concerns.

Signage

Signage is required. Posting a notice on the door can lessen the likelihood of interruption and establish a foundation of mutual respect and understanding with those around you. Building and fostering relationships is at the core of these considerations:

- **Preventing Disruptions:** A posted notice provides a clear indication to the broader community that a significant event is underway and reduces the likelihood of unintentional obtrusions.
- **Raising Awareness:** A posted notice also offers an explanation to those who may be confused by unfamiliar smells, sights, or sounds. This proactive communication helps to foster understanding, particularly within a diverse campus community where familiarity with Indigenous ceremonial practices may vary.
- **Addressing Health Concerns:** Some individuals have sensitivities to smoke. Particularly when conducting a ceremony in a shared space or near neighbours, making them aware of a ceremony provides an opportunity to make alternate arrangements in consideration of their health.
- Download signage templates in [English](#) and [French](#).

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Do I need to request permission before engaging in Indigenous ceremonial practices?
2. Is signage required for Indigenous ceremonial practices?
3. Am I required to participate in Indigenous ceremonial practices if I am invited?
4. Are non-Indigenous people allowed to partake in Indigenous ceremonial practices?
5. Does lighting sacred medicines pose a fire risk?
6. Will the smoke from the lighting of sacred medicines set off the alarms?
7. A ceremony has been scheduled or is occurring in/near my work area. I have health concerns regarding the smoke/scent - how do I address these concerns?
8. Are there University of Alberta spaces that are frequently used for Indigenous ceremonial practices?
9. Are there University of Alberta spaces that cannot accommodate Indigenous ceremonial practices?
10. What are the practices for conducting Indigenous ceremonial practices in University of Alberta Conference spaces?
11. What are the practices for conducting Indigenous ceremonial practices at the University of Alberta Hospital?

Question 1: Do I need to request permission before engaging in Indigenous ceremonial practices?

Indigenous students, staff, and faculty do not need to request permission before engaging in Indigenous ceremonial practices. However, should Indigenous students, staff, or faculty have questions regarding the practicalities of a specific location, they are welcome to consult with the [Facilities and Operations](#) (F&O) team. Engaging in open dialogue with F&O fosters understanding, ensures that everyone involved is aware and respectful and can assist in promoting a supportive environment. The F&O team can provide guidance on risk mitigation, offer suggestions on suitable spaces, and answer any logistical concerns.

Indigenous Ways of Being include a deep respect for others. For example, if you are a student in an in-person class or in a final examination, you would speak with the instructor and your classmates as to whether lighting sacred medicines in these situations is comfortable for the community as a whole.

Question 2: Is signage required for Indigenous ceremonial practices?

Yes. A notice outside the room and informing the broader community may prevent disruptions from people who are unfamiliar with these practices and the associated scents, light smoke. Download signage templates in [English](#) and [French](#).

Question 3: Am I required to participate in Indigenous ceremonial practices if I am invited?

Ceremonial activities are voluntary and any person should not feel forced to participate. You may opt to stay in the room or choose to leave the room respectfully.

Question 4: Are non-Indigenous people allowed to partake in Indigenous ceremonial practices?

Yes, non-Indigenous individuals can participate in Indigenous ceremonial practices, but there are key considerations to keep in mind. Participation should always be rooted in genuine relationships, often coming from a direct invitation by Indigenous community members or leaders. It's important for guests to understand the ceremony's significance and approach it with respect and humility.

Indigenous traditions can vary widely among different nations and tribes. Not all Indigenous people will share the same teachings or ceremonial practices, which is why it's essential **everyone** seeks guidance and asks questions when in doubt. This ensures they understand the specific customs and protocols of the ceremony they attend.

Question 5: Does lighting sacred medicines pose a fire risk?

Whenever people engage in lighting sacred medicines, we ask that they be mindful of fire safety—for instance, placing medicines in an appropriate container, monitoring the container while the medicines are burning, and safely disposing of ashes outdoors. Please consult with the Facilities and Operations [Emergency Management Team](#) (F&O) team on fire safety.

Question 6: Will the smoke from the lighting of sacred medicines set off the alarms?

Although the lighting of sacred medicines (smudging/lighting of medicine/Qulliq) involves fire, the Facilities and Operations team has determined that it does not pose a fire hazard and will not set off the alarms.

Question 7: A ceremony has been scheduled or is occurring in/near my work area. I have health concerns regarding the smoke/scent - how do I address these concerns?

Members of the U of A community are encouraged to work with the community to address concerns prior to any ceremony. However, there may be instances where a ceremony has been scheduled or is in progress and individuals didn't know or weren't aware, and may be concerned for personal reasons (allergies, respiratory vulnerabilities or sensitivities). In these instances, the individuals who have documented concerns should speak to their supervisor and alternate work arrangements should be made for the employee to remove themselves from the area until the ceremony is complete. For those who have not yet shared these concerns, the following [policy](#) may be used. In the event of conflicts between Indigenous ceremony guidelines and safety policies, community members should work together to determine how to proceed in a way that adheres to both requirements.

Question 8: Are there University of Alberta spaces that are frequently used for Indigenous ceremonial practices?

Indigenous ceremonial practices may take place anywhere at the University of Alberta, including, but not limited to, outdoor spaces, classrooms, lecture halls, gathering spaces, and residences. Some spaces must be booked ahead of time, and there may be a charge for booking space. Where applicable, booking contacts and room numbers for frequently used spaces are in [Appendix A](#).

Question 9: Are there University of Alberta spaces that cannot accommodate Indigenous ceremonial practices?

Specific units (such as labs, clinics, Archives) may have documented hazard assessments or safety or other policies that prohibit any combustion or smoke in specific spaces. Indigenous students, staff, and faculty members may consult the F&O Emergency Management Team by reaching out to emergencymanagement@ualberta.ca.

Question 10: What are the practices for conducting Indigenous ceremonial practices in University of Alberta Conference spaces?

First Nations, Métis, and Inuit guests and community members on campus are welcome to conduct ceremonies while using the University of Alberta conference facilities. If your group intends to hold a ceremony, inform the [Conference Services team](#) when you are booking your event, and they will ensure you are provided with the necessary assistance.

Question 11: What are the practices for conducting Indigenous ceremonial practices at the University of Alberta Hospital?

Although the hospital is affiliated with the University of Alberta, its operations are overseen by Alberta Health Services. For additional information, please refer to the Alberta Health Services | Patient Access to Indigenous Spiritual Ceremonies [webpage](#).

Appendix A: Frequently Used Spaces

Although Indigenous ceremonial practices may occur anywhere on campus, certain rooms are frequently used for ceremonies to provide and improve accessibility for faculty, students or staff. Some spaces must be booked ahead of time, and there may be a charge for booking space. Booking Contacts are provided below, where applicable. The Indigenous Ceremonial Practices filter on the [Campus Maps digital tool](#) can be used to locate these frequently used spaces.

North Campus

Building	Room	Booking Contact
Athabasca Hall	AT 227	Centrally Scheduled Space
Agriculture, Life and Environmental Sciences (ALES)	Atrium	questions.ales@ualberta.ca 780-492-0102
Central Academic Building (CAB)	CAB 365	Centrally Scheduled Space
Edmonton Clinic Health Academy (ECHA)	2-150, 2-420, 2-430, 2-490	Centrally Scheduled Space
Edmonton Clinic Health Academy (ECHA)	Sperber Health Library - Indigenous Learning Space	UAlberta Library - Booking Request
Education North	Kiva Room (2-103)	Centrally Scheduled Space

Education North	4-110, 5-109, 7-111, 7-131, 2-111	Laura Boisvert (laura.boisvert@ualberta.ca) 780-492-0847
Education South	107, 113, 128,129	Centrally Scheduled Space
Education South	122, 533A, 733A, 749, 751, 1030	Laura Boisvert (laura.boisvert@ualberta.ca) 780-492-0847
HUB Mall	Multi-faith Prayer & Meditation Space (172 HUB Mall)	Interfaith Chaplains' Association
Humanities Centre	2-34	Centrally Scheduled Space
Humanities Centre	3-95, 4-29, 4-59	vpnam2@ualberta.ca 780-492-9232
Humanities Centre	4-65	arts.indigenous@ualberta.ca 780-492-6457
Law Centre	LC105	rmbook@ualberta.ca
Lister Conference Centre	Alberta/Aurora/Bison/Evergreen/ Glacier/Maple Leaf/Prairie Rooms; Lister Dining Centre	conference.services@ualberta.ca 780-492-6057
Medical Science Building	2-02	mm29@ualberta.ca 780-492-0199
Pembina Hall	2-06, 2-30	nativest@ualberta.ca 780-492-0519
Peter Lougheed Hall	City Room, Dining Hall	conference.services@ualberta.ca 780-492-6057
Students Union Building (SUB)	First Peoples' House (2-400)	No booking required.
Students Union Building (SUB)	Interfaith Center	Interfaith Chaplains' Association
University Hall	Council Chambers (2-100)	Centrally Scheduled Space
Van Vliet Centre	Main Gym	Campus & Community Recreation
Van Vliet Centre	East Gym 1-220	Campus & Community Recreation

Enterprise Square

Building	Room	Booking Contact
Enterprise Square	2-157 (School of Business)	Sarah Cristello (scristel@ualberta.ca) 780-492-5832
Enterprise Square	2-620i (Indigenous Gathering Space)	ENT - Indigenous Gathering Space (calendar for availability)

Augustana (Camrose)

Building	Room	Booking Contact
Classroom Building	C014, C101, C103	Internal Booking System
Faith and Life Centre	Faith and Life Multi-Faith Prayer Room	No booking required.
Faith and Life Centre (Outside)	mîkiwahp (tipi)	augustana.iss@ualberta.ca
Forum	wahkohtowin Lodge (L1-040), wahkohtowin Lodge Classroom (L1-055)	augustana.iss@ualberta.ca
Forum	Community Space (L1-030)	No booking required
Forum	Elder's Room (L1-050)	augustana.iss@ualberta.ca

Campus Saint-Jean

Building	Room	Booking Contact
Grand Salon, Pavillon Lacerte	1-07	CSJ Room bookings
Salle 3-04	3-04	CSJ Room bookings
Pavillon McMahon	1-44C	CSJ Room bookings

Residences

Building	Room	Booking Contact
Lister Center	Alberta/Aurora/Bison/Evergreen/Glacier /Maple/Prairie/Wild Rose Rooms; Lister Dining Centre; David Tuckey Gymnasium	Conference Services conference.services@ualberta.ca 780-492-6057" with "Lister Front Desk"
HUB	The Vault	HUB Community Association 780-439-8410
East Campus Village	E- Campus Commons; Nîpisiy House Multi-purpose room, I-House meeting room	Book through the Residence Coordinator of the building you are currently living in.