



Indigenous Cultural Ceremonies Policy

Category: Human Resources;

Jurisdiction: Provost and Vice President, Academic; Vice President, Administration and Finance;

Approval Authority: Executive Team;

Established on: August 6, 2004;

Amendments: May 9, 2013; April 3, 2018; October 11, 2019; November 26, 2024; September 23, 2025

Most Recent Review: September 23, 2025

Purpose

Lakehead University (Thunder Bay and Orillia campuses) respects and supports Indigenous cultural ceremonies on campus that involve the use of the four sacred medicines (sage, cedar, tobacco and sweet grass), including (but not limited to): personal use, one-on-one counselling sessions, opening/closing prayers for events, smudging, feasts, sacred circle gatherings, sacred fires, pipe ceremonies, pow wows, drumming and singing.

The University recognizes and supports these ceremonies being conducted by Elders, students, faculty and staff in classrooms, student gathering places, offices, cultural events and meetings in various locations throughout the University.

Authority and Responsibility

This policy is in conformance with the Ontario Human Rights Commission's Policy on Preventing Discrimination Based on Creed (2015), specifically the section on Indigenous Spiritual Practices.

The Provost and Vice-President (Academic), the Vice-President (Administration and Finance), and the Vice-Provost (Indigenous Initiatives), or designates, are responsible for implementing this policy.

Policy

Lakehead University permits the on-campus use of burning any or all of the four sacred medicines in connection with Indigenous spiritual practices for personal use or at cultural and educational events, meetings and relevant classroom presentations.

Procedures

1. The four sacred medicines include tobacco, cedar, sage, and sweet grass. Other medicines associated with Indigenous ceremonies may be considered but must receive prior approval of the Vice-Provost (Indigenous Initiatives).
2. Participation in ceremonies is voluntary and no one should ever be forced to participate in a ceremony. A person who does not wish to participate may choose to stay in the room and refrain from participating in the ceremony or leave the room.
3. At least two working days prior to burning a sacred medicine, a notice shall be issued in the Communications Bulletin. Security Services and Residence Services (if applicable) shall be notified. Giving notice recognizes the importance of the burning of sacred medicines as a cultural practice and recognizes that some members of the community are sensitive and/or allergic to smoke from these medicines. These individuals are encouraged to alert their supervisors so arrangements can be made to protect vulnerable people in the vicinity of ceremonies involving burning sacred medicines. This does not preclude individual units going beyond the policy to ensure additional protection of vulnerable members.
4. Responsibility for the safe and appropriate use of the sacred medicines rests with the lead participant(s) of the event.
5. The primary designated area for the burning of sacred medicines is the Indigenous Student Services Centre (ISSC) offices and lounge, including the Elders Room (UC1007, UC1007A, UC1007B, UC1007AA, UC1007AB, UC1007AC, UC1008). People

are encouraged to use this area for ceremonies because of the presence of Elders and cultural support.

Additional designated areas for burning sacred medicines are located strategically across the campus and designed to be used when people are not able to come to the ISSC or in unforeseen urgent situations:

- Office of Indigenous Initiatives (UC2024)
- Smudge Room in Braun Building (BB2003)
- Indigenous Access Programs Lounge (BB1045)
- Bora Laskin Faculty of Law (PACI 1011, 2007, 3001, 3006, 3007, 3008)
- Orillia Campus: The Wellness Centre (OR1012), Maawnjigamig 'Where We Gather' (OR1013), The Office of Indigenous Initiatives (OR1019), Alumni Commons (OA2001).
- Bartley Residence, Thunder Bay Campus (Conference Room D)
- Nanda Gikendan Gamik
- Chancellor Paterson Library, 5th floor (LI5007)
- Kakina Nidinawe Maaganuk Teaching Lodge BL 2001 (Bora Laskin Faculty of Education)
- Indigenous Education Students Lounge BL1019
- Nijiji House

No notice is required for these areas; however, signage will be posted that explains these are designated areas for burning sacred medicines.

6. In unforeseen urgent situations (death, tragic event or others), where two working days' notice cannot be provided, and where it is impractical to use one of the above designated spaces, using alternative non-burnable forms of the sacred medicines such as oils or having the presence of medicines (without burning) is recommended.
7. Any person of the University community can request that the Office of Indigenous Initiatives provide one-on-one or group sessions to learn about the cultural practice of smudging at any time and the request will be followed up within fourteen days.

8. The Vice-Provost (Indigenous Initiatives) may designate outdoor smudging areas more than 50 metres away from any building at any time and without prior notification. The sweat lodge site in Thunder Bay and the outdoor tipi site at the Wiigwasitig Gitigaan 'Birch Tree Garden' area in Orillia is considered a designated outdoor smudging area.
9. The use of sacred medicines in our Thunder Bay and Orillia Residences should take place in the following ways with the required two-days' notice:
 - designating a room for burning sacred medicines;
 - allowing students to smudge their rooms before the general student population arrives with enough time for the smoke to clear and after the general student population departs.

Compliance: Two working days' notice will be provided to Media Relations for publication in the Communications Bulletin, Security Services and Residence Services (when applicable) mediarelations@lakeheadu.ca to inform the University community of events that will include the use of sacred medicines.

Contact and Review: Consultation with the Ogimaawin Indigenous Education Council and the Elders' Council will occur prior to approval or amendment of this policy. Questions or concerns regarding the implementation of this policy should be referred to the Provost and Vice-President (Academic), the Vice-President (Administration and Finance), and the Vice-Provost (Indigenous Initiatives).

Review Period: 5 years;

Date for Next Review: 2030-2031;

Related Policies and Procedures: Smoking on Premises Policy;

Policy Superseded by this Policy: Cultural Protocol Policy, Indigenous and Aboriginal Cultural Ceremonies Policy.

The University Secretariat manages the development of policies through an impartial, fair governance process, and in accordance with the Policy Governance Framework. Please contact the University Secretariat for additional information on University policies and procedures and/or if you require this information in another format.

Office of the University Secretariat

Hours: Monday through Friday from 8:30am to 4:30pm;

Location: University Centre, Thunder Bay Campus, Room UC2002

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