



FIRST  
PEOPLES'  
HOUSE



UNIVERSITY  
OF ALBERTA

REIMAGINING  
**First Peoples' House**

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# Leaving a legacy of sâkihitowin.

I want to begin by acknowledging all of my relations whose footsteps have marked this territory for centuries, including: Cree, Saulteaux, Blackfoot, Métis and Nakota Sioux. To my nêhiyawak Ancestors, kinanâskomitin to all of you for caring for this land for centuries, which is now where Amiskwaciwâskahikan / ᐱᐢᑦᐱᐢᑦᐱᐢᑦᐱᐢᑦᐱᐢᑦ and the University of Alberta reside – a place where we all can learn, laugh, play and grow together in harmony.

Our Ancestors left us so much – a legacy of deep roots, culture, traditional ways of being and knowing, tribal languages, âcimowina, ekwa âtayôhkewina and sacred ceremonies. They left us with so much love that you can see it and feel it everywhere. sâkihitowin is the legacy I want to leave behind.

I want to know that each First Nation, Métis and Inuit student is proud that they chose the U of A, because of its core values and the way they felt grounded in integrity, fairness and respect during their time here – but, more importantly, that each student knows they are safe, not only through words but in practice. I hope that they bear witness to Truth and Reconciliation on this campus.

This transition into a larger space is a very meaningful action in reconciling historical traumas of our past. It's integral to the overall FNMI student journey at the U of A. My hope is that FNMI students are able to honour a holistic way of being by staying true to who they are and continue meskanaw, while on their academic journey.

My ongoing hope is that FNMI students are celebrated because of the melody of diversity that they bring to the U of A. I want FNMI students to know that their rich cultural traditions, histories, and, at times, the beautiful unrefined pieces of themselves, will continue to enrich and beautify the U of A community – just by being here.

I know that this legacy of love is what we all aspire to leave behind – one that, when you, your friends, family or grandchildren walk this campus, they see your love sprinkled in the corners and corridors of campus. The love left behind is for the next seven generations to feel far after we have left okâwîmâw askiy.

Together, we call on the collective to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with sâkihitowin alongside First Peoples' House in creating a new home for First Nations, Métis and Inuit learners at the University of Alberta.

**SHANA DION**  
*Assistant Dean, First Nations, Métis and Inuit Students*  
Office of the Dean of Students  
University of Alberta

# tawâw

When students enter First Peoples' House, they are greeted with the nehiyaw word tawâw, which means "welcome, there is room for you." It is a deep and intentional way to welcome one another and to know that you belong.

First Peoples' House is much more than a student service centre for First Nations, Métis and Inuit students at the University of Alberta. For more than 30 years, it has been the heart of the FNMI student community on campus, connecting with thousands of learners over many generations on their journeys of university life.

First Peoples' House provides students with holistic support. Its programming and resources aim to understand and honour FNMI learners' academic journeys by fostering better cultural, mental, emotional, physical and financial wellness. Whatever an FNMI student seeks – an intuitive learning space, nourishment on any given day, a space to connect with friends or kihtehayahk, or a printer with ink – it is a safe place that provides them with what they need, as they are, so they can achieve academic and personal growth.

First Peoples' House has always had the expertise to create transformational change in the lives of FNMI students, but without adequate resources or space, it has never had the chance to gather and serve the whole FNMI student body.

At present, First Peoples' House can only fit 50 people into its space – and the U of A has more than 1,800 FNMI students.

Renovating First Peoples' House will empower its staff to do unprecedented heart-work in a way that has not yet been possible due to physical restraints. With your support, First Peoples' House can grow alongside its community and invite them in, saying tawâw – and truly have space for FNMI students to belong and thrive.



- **There are more than 1,800 FNMI students at the U of A.**
- **First Peoples' House has a 98 per cent student satisfaction rate.**
- **1 in 5 students say access to First Peoples' House was essential to their ability to graduate.**

**FNMI students are the fastest growing demographic at the U of A.**

## Glossary

**âcimowina:** Stories

**ekwa and âtayôhkewina:** Sacred stories

**FNMI:** First Nations, Métis and Inuit

**TKK:** Traditional Knowledge Keepers

**kihtehayahk:** Elders

**kise yôtin:** Calm wind

**meskanaw:** To walk in truth

**nehiyaw:** Cree

**nimihitotân:** Let's dance

**okâwîmâw askiy:** Mother Earth

**sâkihitowin:** Love

**tawâw:** Welcome, there is room for you



## Create a home away from home.

The University of Alberta has a renovation plan to transform the former H.T. Coumts Library on North Campus into a new home for First Peoples' House.

This project will significantly increase the size of First Peoples' House – but more importantly, it will increase the capacity of its holistic student supports through expanded programming, staffing and resources.

It will physically and visually reside in the centre of North Campus, representing an important shift in the institutional and cultural landscapes at the U of A and beyond. Sustainability, responsible resource use and longevity for future generations will be top priorities to align with First Peoples' ways of respecting *okâwimâw askiy* and "living lightly on the land."

The renovated First Peoples' House will ensure that any FNMI student that seeks support at the U of A will find exactly what they need to succeed and belong – in a space made just for them.

This includes dedicated spaces for cultural wellness like gathering spaces, creative spaces, an interactive multimedia lab, Elder spaces, a community kitchen and a movement and dance studio; emotional wellness spaces for trauma-informed care, meditation and advising; and academic support spaces for tutoring, mentorship, studying and advising, including classrooms and office space for the Transition Year Program.

“

**When FNMI learners enter the renovated First Peoples' House, they will engage their five senses. They will be called in by traditional songs and the smell of traditional medicines. They will be brought together with cultural foods, wrapped in nature and the four sacred elements, and know that this is where they belong.”**

**– SHANA DION, Assistant Dean, First Nations, Métis and Inuit Students**





Grant Bruno

## A space to be together.

“When I began my undergrad, I was a very shy, introverted person. I had a hard time reaching out to people, and I wasn’t able to connect well because of my own insecurities and lack of confidence.

But I remember going to the orientation at First Peoples’ House in my first year — it was the first time that I was able to see people just like me, from communities just like mine, who had families and problems like my own, all gathered in a space together.

It allowed me to be myself — and it was crucial to my success in the long term.

When it comes to meeting other Indigenous people, we often ask each other who our family is, if we have connections to it, and then build relationships from there. So, that’s what I’ve done over the years. I show up at First Peoples’ House, introduce myself, start making small talk and that community within the university supports me. It supports me relationally and socially, and it supports me physically, emotionally and spiritually, too. My worldview as a Cree person addresses all facets of health, and that’s what First Peoples’ House does. It’s done that for me for 10 years now.

Some students might show up for the food because they don’t have enough to eat at home, and that food is going to get them through the week. Others show up to use the printer. Some show up to smudge or talk to the Elders. It’s what I appreciate most about First Peoples’ House: it’s practical. You can just show up, and it’s there for what you need.”

**GRANT BRUNO**, PhD Medical Sciences Candidate

## A place of ceremony.

### Kihtehayahk

Kihtehayahk and Traditional Knowledge Keepers at First Peoples’ House guide programming with a cultural foundation and teachings that support staff in strategic planning and provide stability for FNMI students to reconnect and continue connecting with who they are and where they come from. Larger common spaces in a variety of sizes, and dedicated Elder office spaces, will allow more FNMI students to connect with kihtehayahk and Traditional Knowledge Keepers in impactful ways.

### Ceremony

Defining a specific room or space as a place of ceremony is a western, colonial concept. First Peoples’ House is and will be, in its entirety, a place of ceremony. First Peoples’ House will continue to uphold and honour traditional ways of being and knowing through practising ceremonies and honouring the teachings of its ancestors. Ceremony is what keeps FNMI spirits grounded on okâwîmâw askiy, and the renovated First Peoples’ House will ground FNMI students at the U of A in every corner and corridor of its space.

“

**My favourite resource at First Peoples’ House is our Elders. They are my direct connection to knowledge and the backbone of our teachings. They are our knowledge holders. They let me ask questions, and it’s always a safe space.”**

**— KENTON CARDINAL,**  
*Transition Year Program grad and political science student*



Kenton Cardinal with Elders Elsey Gauthier and Francis Whiskeyjack.



Danni Okemaw

### Movement, Meditation and Dance

Movement can be foundational to the journeys of culture, self and identity. Traditional dance, drumming and meditation can foster mindfulness, kinship and reciprocity. Whether a student wants to learn something new or practise something old, a new and open safe space will be dedicated to movement in its many powerful forms.

“I faced many obstacles during my time as an undergraduate student, but I found role models and support at First Peoples’ House. I watched them cater to the students and the community, and it made me want to do the same with my passion and love for dance. I don’t think that there would be nimihitotân without First Peoples’ House – the ideas and plans were made there, and the passion for it was a direct reflection of the staff’s commitment, love and care for us.”

– DANNI OKEMAW, BA(NativeStu) grad and co-founder of nimihitotân

### Community Kitchen

First Peoples are a communal people, and eating together reflects a core cultural practice. A new community kitchen will facilitate traditional cooking classes. It will be the perfect place to host First Peoples’ House’s iconic monthly feasts – and most importantly, connections and relationships.

### Creative space

Engaging in creative cultural traditions like beading, painting and other cultural programs are important parts of developing students’ identities and connecting them with their past, present and future. A new creative space will allow students to interact with and learn from guest artisans, Elders and each other.



Jade Tootoosis, '10 BA(NativeStu) and First Peoples’ House Alumna

# A place for community.

## Trauma-Informed Care

FNMI students are often experiencing, unpacking and learning about intergenerational traumas during their time in university. They carry a weight and face barriers that many other students do not. The renovated First Peoples' House will have the proper layout and space to prioritize mental and emotional support. As soon as a student enters, kise yôtin will be present to help facilitate wellness and belonging. kise yôtin is there to talk, bring them to a safe space, and connect them with the specific resources they need.

"First Peoples' House privately invited me to an okâwîmâwi-kîsikanisik (mom's day) gathering when I was struggling with postpartum. The gathering was intended to give back by making sure we felt recognized, appreciated and supported. For the first time in a while, I felt that I was a person again. I wasn't just a mother. I wasn't just a student. I was myself, and it was refreshing for me. I really needed that. The people I've connected with at First Peoples' House see me for who I am, and they have become family to me."

— MONIQUE CARDINAL MAKOKIS-LEE,  
education student



Monique Cardinal Makokis-Lee

# A place for learning.

## Transition Year Program

Some FNMI students may not be prepared to enter a U of A faculty through the regular admissions route. The Transition Year Program is not an upgrading program, but a full-time U of A program in Open Studies that is thoughtfully and holistically developed to prepare FNMI students for admission into most of the U of A's faculties. In the renovated space, the whole second floor will be dedicated to Transition Year Program classrooms and resources, allowing up to 60 students per year to be accommodated, together, in a good way.

## Resiliency Connections

University life encompasses lots of dynamic and rigorous learning. That's why First Peoples' House offers access to academic supports such as diverse tutoring and an FNMI graduate writing program that supports FNMI undergraduates, as well as partnerships with numerous academic supports across campus. It is important for FNMI learners to remain connected with vital resources that support their success on their academic journey. The renovated First Peoples' House will have ample dedicated study, workshop and classroom spaces to support students' academic success and connect them to the resources they need, in a space made just for them.

## Family of Support

The renovated First Peoples' House will be able to support the growth of the FNMI family of support at the U of A. FNMI learners are the fastest growing student demographic at the U of A, and in turn, the renovated First Peoples' House will provide adequate space for staff, students and programming, with room to grow alongside its community. Staff are the interconnection for FNMI students in areas like scholarships, bursaries, dedicated housing, emotional support, guidance and diverse tutoring supports, all guided by cultural teachings of kinship, kindness, respect, humility and sâkhitowin.

“

My dream is to be a nurse. But, as a high school student looking ahead at extremely competitive acceptance rates and the move from a rural to urban setting, I didn't know if I could do it. The Transition Year Program and First Peoples' House opened the door for me. First Peoples' House kept me grounded and walked with me through that transition, and the Transition Year Program prepared me for my university experience.”

— KHAILEN PRUDEN,  
TYP grad and  
nursing student



Khailen Pruden

## A place for growing.

“Until you understand, truly, why you struggle with your own identity, you can’t move forward. University did that for me. I came to understand history. I came to understand why my own mother and Kokum struggled. It opened that all up for me, and completely reset my identity as an Indigenous woman. Having a place where we could find a belonging was crucial to our success. It literally impacted the course and quality of our lives.”

— **GERALYN DOROTHY WRIGHT**, TYP and BA(NativeStu) grad, and CEO of Cree-Ation Community Care Society

“

**When I studied in Native Studies, it was such an emotional experience. Professors and teachers are talking about your life. They’re talking about things that your grandparents and parents went through. I’m the first generation of females in my family line that didn’t go to residential school. So, the first time that I sat in on a lecture about residential schools, there was so much grief, so much anger, so much of every emotion. I couldn’t have done it without First Peoples’ House.”**

— **KRISTAN BERGERON**, TYP and psychology grad, and Manager of Cree-Ation Community Care Society

“First Peoples’ House is reconciliation. It’s where we go with our grief. It’s where we go with our success. There’s nowhere else on campus like it. My kokum, mother and aunties all found their community of support here, and now it’s my turn. Like them, I am embraced and supported here; I am comfortable and at ease with my identity; and I feel most like myself. When everyone gathers, it makes me feel like there is a space just for me at the U of A. It’s been that way through the generations.”

— **J AHLITA BERGERON**, TYP grad and current psychology student



Geralyn Dorothy Wright, Jahlita Bergeron, and Kristan Bergeron

### Intergenerational Impacts

Students that are connected to and engaged in First Peoples’ House are connected to the resources, knowledge and community they need to experience powerful and transformational growth that transcends the university experience and has lasting generational impacts. The renovated First Peoples’ House will have the space and resources for all FNMI students at the U of A to experience this growth.

## It begins with a building ... but there’s so much more.

The University of Alberta and First Peoples’ House are seeking philanthropic support to advance this project.

It is appropriate that support for this renovation extends beyond First Peoples’ House’s community to the broader U of A and public communities as a collective response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada’s Calls to Action, the United Nations’ Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the U of A’s Braiding Past, Present and Future: University of Alberta Indigenous Strategic Plan.

We all share the responsibility to work towards reconciliation, dismantle systemic barriers and celebrate the diversity, strength, complexity, resilience and beauty of First Peoples and their cultures, languages and knowledge systems.

Finishing renovations is the first step towards making this a reality.

The U of A has allotted \$18 million towards the First Peoples’ House renovation.

### Philanthropic support of \$6 million is needed to make the reimagined First Peoples’ House a reality.

Once the renovations are complete, additional and ongoing funding will be needed to ensure First Peoples House’s life-changing and vital programming will meet the needs of the U of A’s growing and evolving FNMI student body.

Together, we can create a home away from home for all First Nations, Métis and Inuit learners at the U of A today and for generations to come.







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For more information about supporting First Peoples' House:

[www.uabgive.ca/FPH](http://www.uabgive.ca/FPH)

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*This case was developed with the support and guidance of Shana Dion, Assistant Dean; First Nations, Métis and Inuit students; and members of the First Peoples' House community.*