

University of  
Lethbridge



## **Blackfoot and First Nations Metis and Inuit Protocol Handbook**

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This handbook is meant to share information and serve as a guideline for university faculty and staff who are hosting university events that incorporate recognition of Blackfoot and First Nations Metis and Inuit (FNMI) cultures and/or hosting Blackfoot and other FNMI peoples at the University of Lethbridge.

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this document is to provide a guideline for University of Lethbridge faculty, staff, students, board, and senate members when incorporating Blackfoot and other First Nations Metis and Inuit (FNMI) cultures into activities or ceremonies on campus. These guidelines will continue to evolve as we progress as a community.

In the Blackfoot culture, traditional teachings express that education should be perceived as a gift. Giving and receiving are viewed as equally important and create an environment where sharing is of utmost importance. Given that the university rests on traditional Blackfoot territory, it is important to recognize elements of the Blackfoot culture in appropriate ways across campus. This pays respect to our mutual identities and the knowledge that we are sharing our land and our ways with each other. In the words of Andy Black Water, Blackfoot Elder, “sharing brings honor and we will all move forward together”.

The university is within the geographic location of a Blackfoot legend about a “medicine rock”. Based on Blackfoot legend, the Blackfoot gave the university the Blackfoot name “Nato’ohkotok” (Medicine Rock) to indicate the wisdom, knowledge, solidarity, and connection to the land and people of Blackfoot territory. This is a great honor for the University of Lethbridge, and so in the spirit of sharing, we are committed to recognizing the Blackfoot and other FNMI peoples who are such an integral part of our community.

The legend of the Medicine Rock is located in Appendix A.

## **II. TERMS**

There are many terms associated with First Nations Metis and Inuit (FNMI) peoples such as indigenous, aboriginal, indian, inuit, and of course the various names associated with the diverse cultures, languages, and peoples across the province and the nation. It is important to note this diversity and our commitment to inclusion. At the University of Lethbridge, wherever possible, we will refer to our local community first and include other FNMI peoples by saying “Blackfoot and other First Nations Metis and Inuit” people or cultures. This respect to the local community and the traditional territory of the local people is in keeping with First Nations protocol across the nation and around the world.

## **III. CONVOCATION AND CEREMONIAL EVENTS**

Convocation is the most important ceremony on the University of Lethbridge campus that includes Blackfoot and other FNMI elements within the ceremony. There are several other events across campus where it is appropriate to recognize Blackfoot and other FNMI cultures and this will also be outlined.

### **1. First Nations Metis and Inuit (FNMI) Elements of Convocation**

There are three main elements to recognize Blackfoot and FNMI culture during Convocation ceremonies.

- a) The University of Lethbridge Honor Song  
The Fall Convocation ceremony opens with the University of Lethbridge Honor Song. Further information on the Honor Song is located in Appendix B.

The Honor Song may also be sung for the Graduands. Usually this will occur prior to handing out the eagle feather. If the University of Lethbridge Honor Song has been sung at the beginning of the convocation, this additional song will not be necessary.

b) Report to Convocation

The President & Vice-Chancellor recognizes First Nations peoples by stating that the “University of Lethbridge is located on traditional Blackfoot territory”. He/she may include a welcome in the Blackfoot language as follows:

Oki, ni kso koo wa wa (O-kee.... Niksoo koo wa waaa):  
Welcome to our relatives and friends

And/or, an address to the students:  
Oki, no ko saak (O-kee... no ko saaaaak): Welcome our children

c) Presentation of the Eagle Feather

Certain programs may include the presentation of an Eagle Feather to First Nations Metis or Inuit students during the relevant portion of the ceremony. Further information on the Eagle Feather is located in Appendix C.

2. Honorary Degree

If an honorary degree is being awarded to a person of First Nations Metis or Inuit background, the honor song should be performed. If it is performed at the beginning of the ceremony, this first performance is sufficient to honor the recipient.

It may be that the person being honored is an Elder or a Blackfoot Elder. In this case, it is appropriate if Special Assistant to the President or Interim Director (FNMI Centre) reads the citation during the ceremony.

It is appropriate to invite elders or members of the Kanai Chieftainship (Appendix D) to the ceremony. These people can be identified in consultation with the Special Assistant to the President. It is appropriate to include these people within the platform party. It is important to note that it may be difficult for Elders to join the procession so they can wait at the entrance to the gymnasium.

It is not unusual for a Blackfoot Elder to draw many members of the community when he/she is being honored. It is also custom for people in the audience to dance or call-out in honor of that person during the ceremony.

3. Other Ceremonial Events

It is appropriate to include recognition of Blackfoot culture at other ceremonial events on campus. This includes (but is not limited to):

- Special events surrounding convocation (luncheons, alumni functions etc.)

- The opening of new facilities or buildings
- Events that are specific to FNMI related priorities

Appropriate recognition includes a statement that the university is located on traditional Blackfoot territory by the senior officer who is bringing remarks. Also, depending on the event, it may be appropriate to invite the Special Assistant to the President or an Elder from the community to give a blessing.

#### IV. ELDERS

##### 1. Overview

Elders are a very important part of Blackfoot and other FNMI cultures. An Elder is very respected and often consulted on various issues within the community. Each Elder has their own special knowledge and often must consult other Elders on issues outside of their specialty to provide a consultation to anyone who asks.

To summon an Elder, it is customary to visit them in person or send a relative or friend. They are usually met with a symbolic gift that indicates the seriousness of the meeting or question at hand. The gift is in anticipation of the exchange that will occur as the Elder will share knowledge or perform a special task. It is important to give the Elder a lot of notice. This is because they often need time to consult others regarding the request.

There is a difference between “inviting” an Elder to an event and “summoning” an Elder to provide a consultation or perform a certain task. Several Elders may be invited to an event with the knowledge that one has been “summoned” to perform according to their special knowledge. When an Elder is “summoned”, it is important to arrange for an honorarium and this is discussed in the next section. Further information on the protocol for summoning elders is in Appendix E.

At the University of Lethbridge, Elders may be summoned through the various departments who have already established relationships. Or, certain individuals may be consulted or provide liaison such as the Special Assistant to the President, the Interim Director of the FNMI Centre, the Chair of Native American Studies or the Native Student Advisor.

Elders may be summoned for the following tasks/consultations:

- Student support and consultation
- Consultation with Faculty regarding research or an invitation to a lecture or classroom setting
- Talking circles or other FNMI related events
- Attendance at a special event and request to give a blessing or opening prayer\*

\* Please note that there are members of the campus community who also qualify to give a blessing at a special event or perform various tasks. The Special Assistant to

the President and/or the Interim Director of the FNMI Centre can also perform this task and may know of others within the campus community that will assist. When this occurs, a small gift of appreciation will suffice as opposed to an honorarium. It is important to note that anyone who is requested to perform a blessing will look at the gathering to determine if they are actually the eldest or the most appropriate person to address the gathering. If they determine that someone else is more fitting, they may decide to pass this duty to that person. It is uncomfortable for them to perform a task when someone more fitting is in their presence.

4. Honorariums

Elders who are “summoned” to provide special knowledge are given an honorarium for their requested task or consultation. Honorariums consist of a lump sum for the consultation and another sum for their travel expense. Honorariums are requested through Financial Services and this must be done at least one week prior to the Elder coming to campus. Refer to Appendix E and F for detailed University of Lethbridge procedure for arranging for an honorarium.

5. Attendance at Events

It is important to note that Elders may not be comfortable in the presence of alcohol. If there will be alcohol served at an event, it is important that this is communicated so that the Elder can decide whether to attend or request special arrangements so that they feel comfortable.

It may be customary for some Elders to be served their meal. If there is a buffet meal and there are Elders present, someone should speak to the Elders to determine if they require assistance with their meals. Elders will feel obligated to eat everything that is on their plate so asking them how much food they would like is a thoughtful gesture.

## **V. GIFTS – GIVING AND RECEIVING**

A gift is symbolic and indicates there is a respect in the sharing or exchange that is to take place or that has taken place. Harmony and balance is important in Blackfoot culture and the exchange of a gift for what you are about to receive assists to restore this balance. Traditional Blackfoot gifts include sweetgrass, tobacco, and blankets. If there is a short meeting or task that does not include an honorarium, it is appropriate to give a small gift to a Blackfoot or other FNMI person. Sweetgrass and tobacco (any kind) is a small token of appreciation that is appropriate in many situations. These gifts are used for ceremonial purposes.

## APPENDICES

### A. **MEDICINE ROCK – NATO’OHKOTOK**

Medicine Rock (Nato’ohkotok) is the Blackfoot name given to the University of Lethbridge by Blackfoot Elder, Bruce Wolf Child, at the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary or “Founders Day Celebration” on January 17, 2002.

The story of MEDICINE ROCK:

In days gone by, a group of Blackfoot people were travelling across the river and saw a red rock. A young boy was watching the rock when he saw it turn into an old man. The boy told the others what he had seen and they told him to run over and look. But when the boy reached the rock, he saw that that it was just a rock.

That night the rock came to the boy in a dream and told him, “The rock you saw is me. I am the rock”. Years later, the people from the tribe told others about the rock. Everyone came looking for it, but it was nowhere to be found. The rock had disappeared.

Now we know where the rock has gone. It has moved across the river. The rock is here-it is the University of Lethbridge. Anyone who comes to study here can wise and solid as a rock. That is why The University of Lethbridge has been named, “MEDICINE ROCK”.

### B. **UNIVERSITY OF LETHBRIDGE HONOR SONG**

Blackfoot traditional music is an art of voice. Blackfoot music artists create songs. Some songs come into existence through dreams. For the Blackfoot, there are different types and styles of songs for different purposes and occasions. There are songs that belong to clans, societies, and individuals. There are songs that go with different ceremonies. There are songs that go with names. In the traditions of the Blackfoot, it is a great honor and a great gift to have a song go with a name. In honor of its name, MEDICINE ROCK (NATO’OHKOTOK), Leroy Little Bear, gifted an honor song to the University of Lethbridge to accompany its Blackfoot name.

### C. **EAGLE FEATHER**

Students who have graduated have accomplished self-sufficiency through education. The awarding of an eagle feather is a Blackfoot symbol of achievement in acquiring further knowledge to advance self into the next phase of life. The eagle is known for its majestic qualities of flight and soaring high and also being able to see far and wide with its keen eyesight. (Andy Black Water, Blackfoot Elder)

#### **D. KAINAI CHIEFTAINSHIP**

The Kainai Chieftainship organization was officially formed in 1951 to honor those from mainstream society who have contributed to the betterment of the Kainai people of the Blood Tribe in Southern Alberta, Canada. “To be recommended as an honorary chieftain, a person had to demonstrate “past and present interest, sympathy and assistance towards progressive endeavour to the Indian’s welfare in general” or alternatively for “his recognized standing in the realms of Science, Art, Church, State, Business, and acknowledged integrity of character. “ The official motto of this organization was Mokokit ki Aekakimat which means “Be wise and persevere”

Kainai Chieftainship (Tribal Honors, A History of the Kainai Chieftainship, Hugh A. Dempsey, 1997).

#### **E. PROTOCOL FOR SUMMONING BLACKFOOT ELDERS**

Protocol for Summoning Kaahsinnooniks<sup>1</sup> (Blackfoot Elders) to University of Lethbridge

Roy M. Weasel Fat, Interim Director, FNMI Gathering Place

Awaaskataks<sup>2</sup> (Blackfoot Elders) may be summoned to the University of Lethbridge campus using one of the following procedures: (1) instructors who know someone in the Blackfoot community may make their own arrangements to involve Kaahsinnooniks (Elders) in teaching;<sup>3</sup> (2) someone within the various faculties/schools may provide assistance in finding the appropriate Kaahsinnooniks (Elder); or (3) the Interim Director of the new FNMI Gathering Place may be contacted and asked to summon Awaakataks (Blackfoot Elders) for a class, student support or university event.

To insure that appropriate Awaskataks (Elder/s) are brought in to teach traditional knowledge, mentor and support students, or to open special events within the university campus, it is important to understand what constitutes Kaasinnooniks (Elder/s) in Blackfoot communities. The following definition crafted by the Red Crow Community College Kaahsinnooniks (Elders) Advisory Council<sup>4</sup> states:

Kaahsinnooniks (Blackfoot Elder/s) is one who have been a member of the Blackfoot societies (Horns or Buffalo Women’s group) and who is recognized by the community to have and possess Blackfoot traditional/spiritual knowledge. A Blackfoot Elder is bestowed certain rights and privileges to conduct ceremonies for the Blackfoot community. Kaahsinnooni (Elder) status is earned when community members begin to approach certain individual for their expertise in traditional Blackfoot knowledge areas<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Kaasinnooniks, a Blackfoot term defines a Blackfoot cultural resource person (Elder)

<sup>2</sup> Awaaskataks, a Blackfoot term (verb) meaning the act of summoning a Blackfoot cultural resource person (Elder)

<sup>3</sup> Cathy Campbell, Faculty of Education. Instructor Qualifications and Traditional Teaching. Questions for Consideration. University of Lethbridge Response Document

<sup>4</sup>Red Crow Community College Advisory Council: Pete Standing Alone, Andy Black Water, Frank Weasel Head, Bruce Wolf Child, Sophie Tailfeathers, Evelyn Striped Wolf

<sup>5</sup> Report to the President First Nations Metis Inuit (FNMI) Centre. pg. 19 – 20.

#### Honoraria and Gifting:

In the Blackfoot community whenever Kaahsinnooniks (Elders) are summoned, an honorarium is provided to honour the presence of the summoned Kaahsinnooni (Elder) and to recognize the blessing, face painting, and wisdom / knowledge he/she is gifting / offering to whomever is calling on him/her. It is also customary to offer a symbolic gesture of appreciation e.g. a braid of sweet grass, tobacco, or a blanket for the gifts offered by Kaahsinnooniks (Elders). When Kaahsinnooniks (Elders) are summoned to the University by a professor as guest speakers or lecturers the same procedure applies. Kaahsinnooniks who are summoned as guest speakers or lectures should be provided an honorarium to cover their time away from community, preparation for the topic to be addressed, and travel expenses for commuting to the University of Lethbridge if they reside outside the area. Class members should also offer a small symbolic gift such as sweet grass or tobacco.

Start-up funding to support Kaahsinnooni involvement in the University Community has been donated to the university and is administered by the Interim Director of the FNMI Gathering Place. This funding may be utilized for summoning Kaahsinnooni should a requesting faculty or department not have available funds to provide an honorarium. Since the funding donated is limited, however, it is hoped that in the future faculties and departments will try to establish in their operating budgets some designated funding for Kaahsinnooni program involvement.

The following procedure is suggested.

1. Requests for honoraria (not available through the faculty or department) should be addressed directly to the Interim Director FNMI Gathering Place.
2. If faculties or departments require assistance in accessing an appropriate Kaahsinnooni to address a particular topic, the Interim Director will summon Kaahsinnooni with recognized expertise in a specific knowledge area
3. Lead time is approximately one-month notice to allow time for processing the honorarium, and to allow Kaahsinnooni time for preparation.
4. Honorarium is \$ 300.00 plus \$ 75.00 travel. This covers time for participation in the requested event (opening ceremony, classroom presentations, spiritual ceremony, student support / mentoring)<sup>6</sup>

The foregoing procedure is intended as a guide to facilitate summoning Kaahsinnooni to University of Lethbridge campus. It is hoped that it will be viewed as a living document that continues to evolve and develop as time goes on and the needs of the University of Lethbridge in FNMI areas are appropriately addressed.

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<sup>6</sup> Red Crow Community College Kaahsinnooni (Elder) rates established 2010

Instruction and Research:

Currently, Kaahsinnooniks have given their consent to video record their oral presentations for instructional use only. Kaahsinnooniks will consider other uses for their video recorded presentations in the future.

**F. PROCEDURE – HONORARIUMS**

The standard honorarium for an Elder who is summoned is \$300 plus \$75 travel re-imbusement. Some Elders may accept a cheque but others may require a cash honorarium. This should be discussed with the person who is inviting the Elder to campus.

To request an honorarium from Financial Services, a miscellaneous cheque requisition form is used. The Elder's name, address, and Treaty Number are required. It takes 2 weeks to process an honorarium and cheques are issued on Thursdays. Therefore, an honorarium should be requested as far in advance as possible. Indicate on the requisition form that the cheque will be "picked up" or to send it in the internal mail. Otherwise, a cheque may be automatically mailed to the address indicated.

If an Elder is receiving cash, the employee may arrange this as a personal advance through Financial Services. It is important to create a receipt that they can sign at the time the cash is received. This will then be used as proof that the cash was distributed and as part of the online expense claim to reconcile the advance.