



UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN

University Library

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Image from:

I-Portal
INDIGENOUS STUDIES PORTAL

Telling Our Story: Phase 4 Reporting

ohpahotân | oohpaahotaan: The Gift

Stewardship and Implementation at the University Library
August 2026



UNIVERSITY OF
SASKATCHEWAN

BE WHAT THE WORLD NEEDS

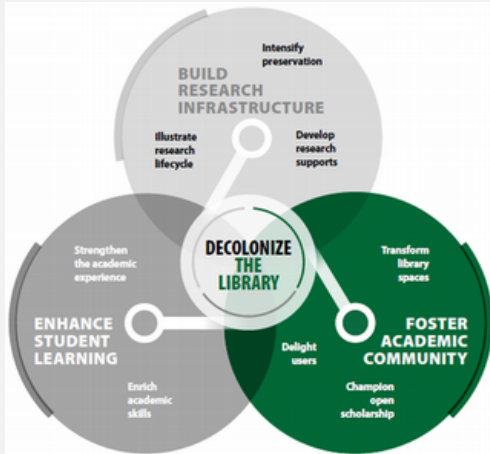
Finding Meets Found
a poem by
Lindsay "Eekwol" Knight



Adapting unfolding reworking by knowing
Cautious in one moment reckless in the next
Circular and fluid like new life in the womb
She/her is learning
She/her is moving from missing to found
Building from nothing
Off pieces lying around
But in this movement, this action
She/her comes to know
How blood has memory, history in the flow
And in this moment she/her is journeying home
In each travel, each distance
Strands collect layers
They weave stories together
No matter the teller's place

They/them track slow, aimless but still in a direction
Led by feeling that harnesses introspection
All this heritage and no way to sort it
Who's claiming who and who cares where they're going
But again, again, it's circular, fluid
Gains momentum and slows in the blink of an eye
Gives and takes laughs and cries
And as the sun sets on they/them in ceremony
Finding meets found, stars all around
It's beyond human it's visceral sound
And the strands remind as they pulsate and glow in the dimness
We're always connected, grounded placed somewhere
Our bodies are just a part of who we are
Our bodies are just a piece of who we are
Our stories are beyond our bodies
Our stories are collecting in universal futures

In 2021, during her time as the first Indigenous Storyteller in Residence, Lindsay "Eekwol" Knight wrote this poem and gifted it to the University Library.



The University Library's strategic framework is centered on our commitment to Decolonize the Library.

To work toward this goal, we must understand and dismantle the colonial perspectives underpinning library practices to make everything we do welcoming, responsive, and accessible to all. This foundational goal informs the activities and outcomes of all of the Framework's strategic commitments.

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MESSAGE FROM THE DEAN

Since the gifting of the ohpahotân | oohpaahotaan Indigenous Strategy, the University Library has understood its implementation not as a finite set of deliverables, but as an ongoing practice of stewardship. The work of the Library intersects with Indigenous students, staff, faculty, communities, and knowledges in many ways – through collections and access systems, archives, copyright and licensing practices, learning support, public services, and, critically, through daily interpersonal relationships.

This report offers an integrated picture of how the Library is stewarding ohpahotân | oohpaahotaan across the organization. It highlights our efforts toward systemic change and relationship-centred practice; long-term operational shifts; everyday acts of care, advocacy, and learning; and an honest accounting of the challenges that continue to shape this work. Rather than locating responsibility within any single unit, the report demonstrates how ohpahotân | oohpaahotaan is being enacted across the Library ecosystem.

Across the submissions included here, several shared principles consistently emerge. The Library continues to work within inherited colonial infrastructures, such as cataloguing standards, copyright law, and system platforms, while actively seeking ethical workarounds and advocating for change. Relationships are prioritized before process, particularly in archives, public services, and student support where engagement with Indigenous communities and students shapes timelines, access decisions, and service models. Care is recognized as a dimension of professional practice, including attention to emotional labour, cultural safety, and staff wellness, especially for Indigenous employees. Underpinning this work is a growing understanding of stewardship as responsibility rather than ownership, with the Library positioning itself as a temporary caretaker of Indigenous knowledges and materials.



I also wish to acknowledge that I have served as Dean of the University Library only since September 2025. The work represented in this report has been guided and carried forward through the thoughtful leadership of previous Deans and the sustained commitment of the Library's leadership team and employees. Their efforts have laid the foundations for the work described here, and for the work that continues.

As we move forward, particularly as we begin to shape a renewed strategy for the USask Library, this report stands as both reflection and responsibility. It affirms that implementing ohpahotân | oohpaahotaan is not a completed chapter, but an ongoing commitment that requires attentiveness, humility, and care. I am grateful for the work that has brought us to this point, and I remain committed to stewarding this responsibility alongside our Indigenous partners, communities, and colleagues in the years ahead.

Dr. Lori Birrell (EdD)

University Librarian and Dean
University Library
University of Saskatchewan

REFRESHING THE I-PORTAL: INDIGENOUS STUDIES PORTAL

On November 8, 2022, following nearly two years of consultation, data cleanup, and design work, the University Library launched the refreshed and re-designed I-Portal: Indigenous Studies Portal. The new I-Portal was built on a modern software platform that provides increased functionality, improved search capabilities, and a more intuitive and inclusive user experience.

The I-Portal continues to support faculty, students, researchers, and members of the broader community by providing access to a wide range of digital Indigenous studies resources. These include articles, e-books, theses, government publications, videos, oral histories, reports, and digitized archival documents and photographs.

First launched at USask in 2006 with an initial collection of approximately 6,000 records, the I-Portal has grown to include more than 71,000 records.

While the I-Portal's primary focus remains the Indigenous peoples of Canada, it also includes resources related to Indigenous peoples of the United States, Australia, Aotearoa/New Zealand, and other regions worldwide. Wherever possible, the I-Portal prioritizes links to openly accessible resources, supporting equitable access to Indigenous scholarship and knowledge.

A key aspect of the redesign was the introduction of a new turtle that serves both as the I-Portal's logo and as a navigational guide through its extensive content. The I-Portal turtle was created by Vincent Design, a Winnipeg-based company known for its leadership in Indigenous design and reflects a commitment to centring Indigenous ways of knowing within the platform's visual and functional design.

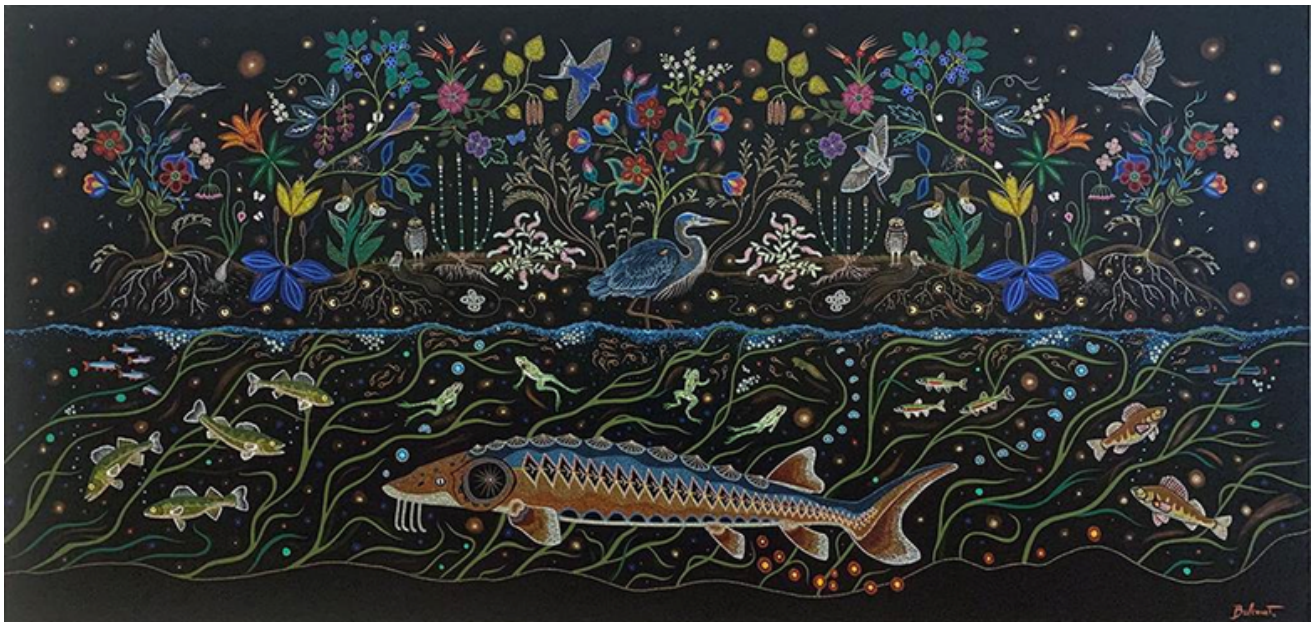


Since the relaunch, the Library has continued to invest in the growth and enhancement of the I-Portal as a living, evolving resource. In 2024, a significant new feature was introduced: the ability to filter search results by Indigenous creator. This functionality supports users in identifying and centring Indigenous voices and perspectives in their research and learning. Its development required the careful review of the I-Portal's entire corpus of over 70,000 records, with creators identified through self-declaration, contextual information, and community-informed processes. As of mid-2024, more than 1,000 Indigenous creators have been added to this growing database, with ongoing work to expand and refine these records.

This work reflects both the scale of the I-Portal and the Library's sustained commitment to improving how Indigenous knowledge is described, discovered, and valued. The development of the Indigenous creator filter was informed by collaboration with Indigenous faculty and supported by partnerships with other institutions, underscoring the relational approach that continues to guide the I-Portal's evolution.

To support users in navigating the new platform, the Library developed a series of how-to videos that introduced the I-Portal's refreshed features and functionality helping users make full use of this evolving resource.

INDIGENOUS ART IN THE LIBRARY



On November 14, 2022, artist and activist Christi Belcourt visited campus for the installation of her newest artwork, entitled *Every Dot a Prayer for the Saskatchewan Rivers* (pictured above). Commissioned by the University Library and supported by donors, the artwork was installed in the Law Library and was the subject of several events focused on exploring the intersections between environmentalism, Indigenous law, and art.

DELIVERING PROGRAMMING ACROSS CAMPUS

A key way the USask Library supports the campus community is through sustained programming for students and researchers that creates inclusive spaces for learning, dialogue, and relationship-building. This programming serves as an important modality for reaching both Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants, advancing shared understanding and supporting the goals of the *ohpahotân | oohpaahotaan* through everyday practice. In addition to standalone workshops and events, the Library prioritizes embedded programming, integrating learning opportunities directly within academic courses, research environments, and student support initiatives, to ensure that engagement is accessible, relevant, and ongoing. Together, these approaches foster community, strengthen academic success, and deepen reconciliation-focused learning across campus.

Examples of programs and initiatives delivered over the years include:

- *Love Data Week* programming focused on Indigenous data sovereignty and understanding the First Nations Principles of OCAP (Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession)
- *Coming to Know Indigenous Research in the University*, with visiting researchers from the University of British Columbia and leaders in the fields of Indigenous methodologies, education, social work, and Indigenous studies
- *Citation Justice: Information From Diverse Perspectives*, identifying and introducing systematic changes to citation practices in academia

INDIGENOUS STORYTELLER IN RESIDENCE

The [Indigenous Storyteller in Residence program](#) began in 2021 to support the University Library's goal to be an open and inclusive environment that respects and uplifts Indigenous voices and perspectives. Each year, the Indigenous Storyteller in Residence is a member of the University Library and is involved in creating and participating in opportunities to promote intercultural understanding and story-sharing between and among Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. The residency typically culminates in a presentation of a project during the university's Indigenous Achievement Week.



2021 Lindsay Knight

As the university's first Indigenous Storyteller in Residence, Lindsay fostered creative mentorship through informal "coffee talks," building supportive spaces that culminated in a public poetry and hip-hop performance, and the gifting of *Finding Meets Found*.



2022 Zoey Roy

Zoey led eight online workshops with the Saskatoon Public Library helping participants develop writing, confidence, and performance skills while supporting optional public sharing during Indigenous Achievement Week and respecting Indigenous intellectual property.



2023 Bruce Sinclair

During a twelve-week, in-person residency, Bruce built community through office hours, workshops, and talking circles, and created *Stories Forever – kakike acimowina*, a dusk to dawn livestream featuring multiple Indigenous storytellers.



2024 Tenille K. Campbell

Through *Framing Community*, Tenille used Polaroid photography and storytelling prompts to amplify voices of women and marginalized community members, encouraging connection, self reflection, and shared strength through participant-guided portraiture.



2025 Shawn Cuthand

Shawn's residency focused on drama, improv, and screenwriting culminating in a staged screenplay reading with USask students in collaboration with *Gordon Tootoosis Nikaniwin Theatre's New Voices* program.



2026 Ryan Moccasin

Ryan delivered film and comedy programming, including a masterclass, scriptwriting workshop and pitching session empowering participants to develop their creative voices and confidently share stories across screen and stage.

HARMFUL LANGUAGE AND REPARATIVE DESCRIPTION

The University Library acknowledges that some descriptions of materials in its collections contain racist, homophobic, transphobic, sexist, ableist, and other discriminatory language. These descriptions, created over many decades and across evolving professional standards, cause ongoing harm to individuals and communities who have been excluded or made vulnerable by dominant and enduring colonial structures embedded within institutions and information systems.

The Harmful Language and Reparative Description project reflects the Library's commitment to addressing this harm through thoughtful, informed, and ongoing work grounded in Indigenous methodologies, expertise in Indigenous data sovereignty, inclusive metadata practices, and archival stewardship. The work is coordinated through the Reparative Description Collaborative Circle (RDCC), the Library's central advisory body for reparative description, ensuring alignment across units and with institutional priorities for decolonization and Indigenization. This work is led by a cross-functional group of professionals, including Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff, whose knowledge, lived experience, and research focus position them to guide meaningful change in how collections are described, accessed, and understood. Their leadership ensures that reparative efforts are not only technically sound, but also ethically grounded and responsive to community needs.

The project approaches description as an inherently non-neutral practice shaped by worldview, values, education, and institutional norms. As such, reparative description requires critical reflection, care, and sustained attention rather than one-time correction. This work unfolds through interconnected phases: identifying materials containing harmful language or content; conducting careful review informed by appropriate cultural, contextual, and community knowledge, and guided where possible by respectful and reciprocal engagement; and implementing interventions such as redescription, the addition of contextual statements, or, in some cases, removal from public access. Even after these steps, descriptions remain subject to ongoing revision as language evolves and community guidance deepens.

This work has already had impact beyond the institution. The Library's approach to decolonizing and Indigenizing description practices has contributed to broader professional conversations at national and international levels helping to shape emerging standards and practices in the field.

To support transparency and user care, the Library is adding [statements and links](#) on relevant platforms where harmful language or content may be encountered. These resources acknowledge the potential for harm and offer support for those engaging with difficult materials.

The RDCC is an ongoing and evolving commitment guided by shared accountability across the Library. This work reflects not only a responsibility to preserve the historical record, but also an accountability to living communities and to future users. Grounded in the expertise of those leading the work, the project demonstrates how stewardship within the Library extends beyond collections and systems to include ethical engagement, relational accountability, and sustained responsiveness to harm embedded within inherited structures in alignment with the University's Indigenous Strategy.

SUPPORTING RECONCILIATION LEARNING

The library subscription for the *Four Seasons of Reconciliation* course has provided opportunities for foundational Reconciliation education since 2020. In collaboration with Gwenna Moss Centre for Teaching and Learning (GMCTL), a structured pathway was created for instructors to integrate the course into curriculum delivery, with facilitated discussion to deepen learning and reflection. Additionally, two graduate-level short courses were successfully piloted in partnership with GMTL.

CANADIAN HUB FOR APPLIED AND SOCIAL RESEARCH (CHASR)

CHASR at USask is a unique, university-based research support and consulting service that works with academic, government, non-profit, and community partners to support all phases of applied and social research, including data collection, processing, analysis, and reporting. Using a community-engaged approach, CHASR emphasizes collaboration, relationship-building, and aligning research with the priorities and needs of the communities it serves.

In alignment with *ohpahotân | oohpaahotaan | oohpaahotaan*, CHASR's work with Indigenous communities within and beyond Saskatchewan is grounded in economic and social empowerment, self-determination, and self-sufficiency. Over time, CHASR has developed strong relationships and bonds with these communities, many of whom have directly sought out CHASR due to its expertise and experience in community engagement, geographic information systems (GIS), and Indigenous land use planning.

Much of CHASR's recent work has been undertaken through its ongoing relationship with the National Aboriginal Lands Managers Association (NALMA), which has directly engaged CHASR to organize, clean, and standardize multiple Microsoft Excel datasets related to program activities supporting First Nations communities across Canada. This includes information on training activities, participant records, land use grants, and program deliverables. In addition, CHASR has supported and continues to support direct land use planning work and capacity building with several Saskatchewan First Nations, including Mosquito, Big River, Sweetgrass, Peter Ballantyne Cree Nation, and Muskeg Lake Cree Nation, as well as communities beyond the province.

Through this work, CHASR has faced challenges in building sufficient internal expertise and capacity to meet the exponential increase in demand for land use planning support. At the same time, this work has reinforced the importance and value of Indigenous data sovereignty. CHASR acknowledges and adheres to OCAP® principles, ensuring that all data, including Traditional Knowledge and community spatial records, remains the sole intellectual property of each community with CHASR acting only as a temporary custodian for the duration of each project.

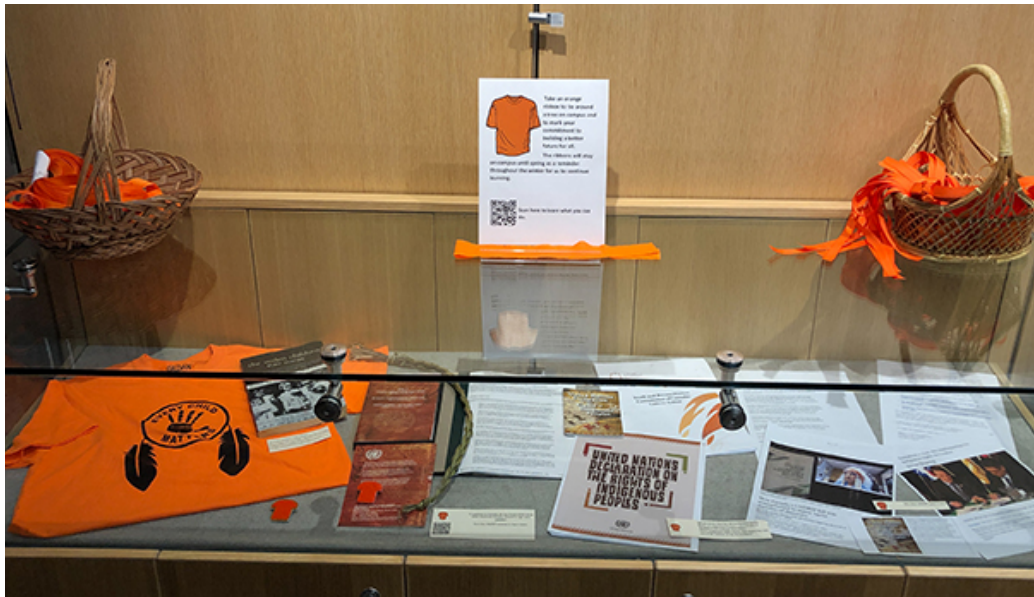
These experiences have deepened CHASR's understanding of best practices when working with community data and supporting community priorities. Many projects are focused on building internal land-use planning and GIS capacity within communities, and CHASR has contributed to this capacity building in varying ways and to different degrees.

Moving forward, CHASR will continue to provide land use planning support to its current partner communities while exploring opportunities for future partnerships. At the same time, it will work toward building greater internal capacity to enhance and strengthen the support it provides ensuring it remains a trusted and responsive partner in Indigenous-led research and planning initiatives.

INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGES AND COPYRIGHT

The University Library has created and maintains the [Indigenous Knowledges and Canadian Copyright Law webpage](#) to address the gap between Canadian copyright law and Indigenous approaches to knowledge stewardship. The page provides context, learning resources, and policy references to support more ethical research, teaching, and sharing of Indigenous cultural heritage.

The resource acknowledges that current copyright law does not adequately recognize Indigenous laws, protocols, and responsibilities, and emphasizes the importance of relationship, consent, and community guidance. Regularly reviewed and updated, the page serves as both an educational tool and a reminder of the limits of existing legal frameworks, highlighting the Library's role as steward rather than owner in this ongoing work.



Display cabinet on the ground floor of the Murray Library containing an Every Child Matters orange t-shirt, documents about the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and baskets of orange ribbons. These ribbons were taken by visitors to the exhibit and tied to poles, banisters, and other structures on campus to express a commitment to learning more about the dark legacy of residential schools.

NOT JUST ANOTHER DAY OFF

Orange Shirt Day and the Legacy of Indian Residential Schools

Not Just Another Day Off: Orange Shirt Day and the Legacy of Indian Residential Schools was a curated exhibition developed by the University Library to support learning, reflection, and action around the ongoing impacts of Indian Residential Schools. The exhibit was on display in the Murray Library from September 2021 to June 2022. Elements of the display were on both the ground and first floors of the Library drawing on materials from University Archives and Special Collections, as well as circulating collections.

The exhibition was conceived as a respectful demonstration of the work of generations of Indigenous educators, scholars, and community members. It connected the history of residential schools to the broader and continuing legacies of anti-Indigenous racism, including the Sixties Scoop; the over incarceration of Indigenous peoples; hyper-surveillance and policing; Indian control of Indian education; missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls; and enduring Indigenous resistance and resilience.

The exhibit featured archival materials from several fonds held by University Archives and Special Collections, including materials related to prominent Indigenous educators and leaders such as Cecil King and Patricia Monture Angus, alongside government records that document the administrative structures of colonial education systems. In doing so, the project foregrounded both lived experience and institutional record supporting a more layered and critical engagement with the past.

To extend the reach and impact of the physical exhibit, the Library created an [accompanying online guide](#) that remains available after the exhibit's conclusion. The guide offers books, videos, podcasts, and links to courses and events, ensuring ongoing access to learning resources and reinforcing the message that *Orange Shirt Day* is not a single moment of recognition, but part of a longer, shared responsibility.

As a feature project, *Not Just Another Day Off* reflects the Library's approach to ohpahotân | oohpaahotaan through public education, archival stewardship, and relationship-centred practice. It demonstrates how exhibition work can serve as a site of remembrance, accountability, and care, inviting the campus community to engage with difficult histories while supporting continued learning and action.

ALIGNMENT WITH OHPAHOTÂN | OOHPAAHOTAAN'S SEVEN FUNDAMENTAL COMMITMENTS

SAFETY

Creating safe spaces for Indigenous peoples to thrive

How the Library is stewarding this commitment

- Safer discovery environments
 - Ongoing removal or mitigation of racist and oppressive language in catalogue records.
 - Workarounds to reduce reliance on harmful Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) terminology by adding Indigenous-preferred and Canadian subject headings.
 - Implementation of the Saskatchewan Indigenous Subject Headings (SKISH) on new materials to reduce harm experienced during searching.
- Culturally safer archival practices
 - Restricting access to sensitive materials.
 - Rematriation of sacred and secret knowledge, including the Sacred Scrolls of the Southern Ojibway.
 - Community-led decisions about access protocols.
- Student-centred safety
 - Embedded learning and writing support in Indigenous programs (CTEP, SUNTEP, ITEP, ISAP).
 - Presence in community spaces (Gordon Oakes Red Bear Student Centre, soup and bannock).
 - Efforts to reduce feelings of isolation or deficit based support.
- Staff safety and learning
 - Broad uptake of Four Seasons of Reconciliation during work time.

Persistent challenges

- Offensive LCSH terms still display due to system rules.
- Saying “no” or restricting access can be perceived as gatekeeping to researchers unfamiliar with Indigenous protocols.
- Time and capacity limits affect the depth at which safety centred engagement can occur.

Moving forward

- Advocating for system changes (subject masking, improved indexing).
- Refining staff guidance for navigating difficult conversations with users.

WELLNESS

Supporting holistic health and wellbeing

How the Library is stewarding this commitment

- Integrating trauma-informed approaches in staff support (e.g., consideration of generational trauma when supporting Indigenous employees).
- Delivering sustained Indigenous student success programming (Writing Centre tutoring, ISAP labs, cohort-based supports, Indigenous Student Scholars Experience).
- Building community-centered learning environments through long-term engagement (Gordon Oakes Red Bear Centre presence, Soup & Bannock participation, relationship-building activities, including representation at the weekly grounding circles through the fall and winter terms).
- Providing reconciliation education and learning opportunities (Four Seasons of Reconciliation, peer mentor training, workshops).
- Supporting culturally relevant services and spaces, including storytelling programs, smudging participation, and cultural events.
- Creating safer intellectual and physical environments through removal of harmful language in catalogues and careful stewardship of sensitive materials.

Persistent challenges

- Capacity limitations to sustain individualized, high-touch programming.
- Limited Indigenous representation among staff, affecting cultural safety and mentorship capacity.
- Barriers to staff participation in cultural and wellness activities (e.g., time constraints, operational pressures).
- Difficulty ensuring consistent connections with all Indigenous student groups (e.g., SUNTEP, ITEP).

Moving forward

- Advocate for dedicated Indigenous Student Success and wellness-focused roles.
- Expand culturally grounded supports embedded within everyday services rather than optional programming.
- Improve visibility and accessibility of wellness supports (e.g., storyteller program, referral pathways).
- Continue integrating trauma-informed and culturally responsive practices into all service areas.

STEWARDSHIP

Honoring responsibilities to land, people, and knowledge

How the Library is stewarding this commitment

- Ethical custody of materials
 - Applying OCAP®, CARE, and Indigenous data sovereignty frameworks in archives.
 - Reviewing collections for repatriation potential, restriction, or redescription.
 - Stewardship agreements with communities.
- Preservation with intention
 - Improved physical preservation of Indigenous newspapers.
 - Careful stewardship of microfilm, audio recordings, and photo albums.
- Copyright stewardship
 - Public guidance on Indigenous Knowledges and Canadian Copyright Law.
 - Instruction on Indigenous intellectual property protections.
 - Engagement with Local Contexts labels.

Persistent challenges

- Canadian copyright law does not align with Indigenous concepts of ownership.
- Stewardship work significantly increases workload without equivalent resourcing.
- Communities may not have known materials existed, creating both opportunity and responsibility.

Moving forward

- Prioritizing collections for review rather than attempting breadth without depth.
- Continue to work with communities on stewardship agreements to guide the work that needs to be done in a good way.

REPRESENTATION

Ensuring Indigenous voices are present and heard

How the Library is stewarding this commitment

- Collections and description
 - Prioritized acquisition of Indigenous created resources.
 - Purchasing directly from Indigenous vendors and artists, in some cases, despite higher labour costs.
 - Enhanced treatment and preservation of Indigenous newspapers and serials.
- Indigenous knowledges in systems
 - SKISH implementation to reflect community-endorsed terminology.
 - Incorporating Canadian subject headings and non-offensive access points.
 - Local efforts to identify Indigenous authors and materials, particularly through I-Portal where systems allow.
- Learning spaces
 - Indigenous focused displays (e.g., National Indigenous History Month, National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, Indigenous Storyteller, Indigenous Achievement Week).
 - Indigenous Art in the Library.
 - Exhibitions addressing residential school histories.

Persistent challenges

- Catalogue systems do not reliably support identifying Indigenous authors.
- Indigenous languages are misrepresented by international standards (e.g., ISO codes).
- SKISH terms are not fully indexed, limiting their visibility.

Moving forward

- Exploring ways to leverage iPortal work in catalogue discovery.
- Continuing metadata cleanup projects.
- Documenting representation gaps to support system-level advocacy.

RIGHT RELATIONS

Building respectful, reciprocal relationships

How the Library is stewarding this commitment

- Community-led engagement
 - Relationship-driven archival engagements.
 - Prioritizing ethical stewardship that respects Indigenous intellectual sovereignty and ensures sensitive materials are managed in a responsible and community-led way.
 - Respecting community timelines and methods of decision making.
- Campus partnerships
 - Longstanding collaboration with Indigenous programs and centres, including the Gordon Oakes-Red Bear Student Centre and the Indigenous Law Centre.
 - Shared ownership of student success initiatives.
- Everyday relationship building
 - Staff participation in cultural events.
 - Visibility and presence in Indigenous spaces.
 - Intentional symbolic practices (orange shirt Fridays).

Persistent challenges

- Institutional timelines often conflict with Indigenous methodologies.
- Staff participation in events is constrained by scheduling and time-bank policies.
- Uneven awareness across units of existing Indigenous focused work.

Moving forward

- Clarifying internal pathways for engagement.
- Strengthening cross-unit communication.
- Recognizing relational work as legitimate labour.

CREATION

Supporting innovation rooted in Indigenous ways of knowing

How the Library is stewarding this commitment

- Advancing Indigenous knowledge systems in metadata and discovery, including SKISH implementation and ongoing reparative description work.
- Supporting Indigenous intellectual sovereignty through copyright guidance, Local Contexts engagement, and Traditional Knowledge labels.
- Developing new resources and partnerships with Indigenous vendors (e.g., Indigstree platform, direct purchasing from Indigenous creators).
- Creating collaborative structures, such as reparative description circles and partnerships with communities.
- Designing and piloting new programming models (e.g., Indigenous Student Success Pathways framework, embedded instruction in community-based programs like CTEP).
- Enabling community-informed archival practices, including stewardship agreements and co-development of archival approaches.
- Embedding Indigenous data sovereignty frameworks (OCAP, CARE) in Research Services supports and knowledge production from research.

Persistent challenges

- System constraints (e.g., catalogue systems privileging LCSH, limited SKISH indexing).
- Difficulty aligning Western institutional systems (copyright law, metadata standards) with Indigenous epistemologies.
- Lack of formalized workflows and scalable frameworks for innovative practices.
- Heavy reliance on a small number of Indigenous staff and knowledge holders.

Moving forward

- Continue building alternative knowledge frameworks (e.g., expanding SKISH, Local Contexts integration).
- Formalize and document emerging practices to support scalability.
- Strengthen partnerships with Indigenous creators, communities, and organizations as co-creators.
- Advocate for system-level changes that allow Indigenous ways of knowing to shape infrastructure (not just sit alongside it).

RENEWAL

Embracing change, growth, and transformation

How the Library is stewarding this commitment

- Undertaking reparative and decolonizing work, including rematriation of materials (Sacred Scrolls, residential school records).
- Embedding Indigenous data sovereignty frameworks (OCAP, CARE) in archival and collection practices.
- Revising descriptive practices to replace harmful language and improve representation.
- Re-envisioning archives and collections as relationship-centered rather than ownership-based.
- Developing new workflows and policies for stewardship, access restrictions, and community engagement.
- Supporting ongoing professional learning and cultural change among staff.

Persistent challenges

- Institutional systems and standards that slow or limit transformative change.
- Tension between university processes and Indigenous methodologies (e.g., timelines, consultation approaches).
- Resource and staffing constraints impacting the pace of transformation.
- Risk of overburdening Indigenous staff with leading renewal efforts.

Moving forward

- Embed renewal practices into core operations, not as project-based work.
- Expand staffing and redistribute responsibility to avoid reliance on individuals.
- Continue deepening community-led decision-making in collections and archives.
- Align institutional timelines and processes more closely with Indigenous approaches to relationship-building and consent.

RESEARCH DATA MANAGEMENT

The Library is an active partner in a coordinated, campus-wide approach to research data management (RDM) led through collaboration with the Office of the Vice-President Research, Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and other institutional units. RDM at USask will encompass the full lifecycle of research data, from collection and documentation through storage, sharing, and preservation. The Library's role is to help build capacity through services such as training, guidance, and support for data management planning. This work is inherently collaborative and continues to evolve as the institution strengthens its coordinated response to emerging national requirements and researcher needs.

Within this broader institutional initiative, the Library is also committed to embedding principles of Indigenous data sovereignty into RDM practices and services. This will include contributing to implementation efforts that centre Indigenous perspectives, supporting ethical and culturally appropriate data stewardship, and building meaningful relationships with Indigenous communities and governments in Saskatchewan. By incorporating Indigenous voices at all stages of service development – from governance and policy to training materials and workflows – the Library will help ensure that institutional RDM practices respect Indigenous data sovereignty and reflect a distinctions-based, community-engaged approach to research data stewardship.

FINAL REFLECTIONS

Past – Learning from Our Shortcomings

The work of the University Library exists within institutional histories that have not always served Indigenous peoples, knowledges, or communities with care or respect. As this report has shown, many of the systems we continue to rely on – cataloguing standards, copyright frameworks, archival practices, and access models – were built without Indigenous perspectives and, in many cases, have perpetuated harm.

As an organization, and as individuals working within it, we acknowledge that we have contributed to these harms. At times, our practices have overlooked Indigenous authority, misrepresented knowledge, or prioritized institutional processes over relationships. These are not abstract failures; they are real and ongoing impacts that require continued attention and accountability.

Recognizing these shortcomings is necessary to the work of *ohpahotân | oohpaahotaan*. It requires honesty about where we have been, humility in how we understand our roles, and a willingness to take responsibility not only for past actions, but for how we choose to move forward.

Present – Reflection, Responsibility, and Ongoing Work

The work described throughout this report reflects a Library that is actively engaged in reflection and change. Across units and roles, there is a growing shift from project-based initiatives toward sustained, relationship-centred practice grounded in care, responsibility, and respect.

This work is not without tension. It unfolds within constraints of time, capacity, and systems that do not always align with Indigenous values or ways of knowing. It also requires navigating uncertainty, making difficult decisions about access and description, and holding space for discomfort and learning.

At the same time, meaningful progress is taking place. The Library is building internal capacity, supporting staff learning, and striving to embed Indigenous perspectives into everyday practice. Efforts to amplify Indigenous voices in collections, repair harmful description, rethink stewardship responsibilities, and strengthen relationships across campus and with communities are reshaping how the Library understands its role.

This moment is one of both accountability and growth. It reflects a collective commitment to doing this work more thoughtfully, even when it is complex, imperfect, or incomplete.



Just Ahead – Expanding Relationships and Opportunities

As the Library looks to the future, this work will continue to evolve through expanded partnerships and new opportunities for collaboration. The inclusion of campus museums, galleries, and the Diefenbaker Canada Centre as new units under the leadership of the Dean of the Library creates new possibilities for integrated approaches to stewardship, exhibition, access, and public engagement.

This expanded landscape invites deeper alignment across what is often described as the GLAM sector (Galleries, Libraries, Archives, and Museums). It offers opportunities to:

- Share knowledge, practices, and expertise across units with different forms of collections and community engagement
- Develop more coordinated approaches to Indigenous stewardship, including repatriation, access protocols, and exhibition practices
- Create richer, more layered experiences for users that connect materials, stories, and spaces in meaningful ways
- Strengthen relationships with Indigenous communities through collaborative, cross-institutional work

At the same time, this growth brings new responsibilities. It requires careful attention to differing histories, practices, and relationships within each unit, as well as a shared commitment to grounding this work in Indigenous priorities, protocols, and guidance.

Future – A commitment to continuing the work

There is no point at which this work will be finished. Implementing *ohpahotân | oohpaahotaan* is not a destination, but an ongoing responsibility that must continue to evolve as relationships deepen, understanding grows, and contexts change.

The Library's commitment moving forward is to sustain and build on the work described here by:

- Continuing to invest in roles, systems, and practices that support Indigenous-led and community-informed work
- Treating mistakes as opportunities for learning and accountability, rather than as endpoints
- Advocating for systemic change while working thoughtfully within existing constraints
- Ensuring that care for communities, users, and staff remains central to all aspects of practice
- Approaching all work with humility, recognizing that there is always more to learn

The stewardship of *ohpahotân | oohpaahotaan* within the University Library is not tidy, linear, or complete, and that is itself an expression of integrity. The work described in this report reflects an ongoing shift away from performative reconciliation toward sustained, relational practice grounded in responsibility and care.

This report demonstrates that the library is not only implementing *ohpahotân | oohpaahotaan* through programs and projects, but through everyday decisions about language, access, care, and responsibility, as well as through an ongoing and persistent willingness to learn, be challenged, and adapt. As this work continues, now within an expanded community that includes libraries, archives, museums, and galleries, the commitment remains the same: to act with accountability, to build and sustain right relations, and to contribute, in meaningful and enduring ways, to the responsibilities set out in *ohpahotân | oohpaahotaan*.

AI Disclosure Statement

Microsoft Copilot was used in the development of this document in the following ways:

- to consolidate and summarize feedback from multiple divisions across the library, identifying common themes as they relate to the Indigenous Strategy's seven fundamental commitments.
- to summarize existing content and story highlights from the library's website detailing the work that has been done in alignment with the Indigenous Strategy.

These AI functions were always an addition to the team's expertise, reviewed for accuracy, and in keeping with the values of USask.

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