

FORUM DRUM

Fall 2024
Issue 13, Volume 2

Executive Update

By Christina J. Cook

Well, your ALF started the year off strong with a new Executive with Indigenous lawyers and law students from across the province. We have featured photos of the ALF Executive in this newsletter, but we are so pleased to be joined by:

- Former Chairs: Isabel Jackson (Vancouver), Adam Munnings (North Vancouver), Randy Robinson (Chilliwack)
- Vice Chair: Martin Buhler (Nanaimo)
- Members at Large: Charlotte Rose (Kamloops), Andrea Glenn (Victoria), Jesse Young (Kelowna), Breanne Martin (Victoria), Shawnee Monchalin (Vancouver)
- ILSA Student Representatives: Kristofer Charlebois (Vancouver), Katarina Sawchuk (Victoria) and Trevor Tailfeathers (Kamloops)



So, you see that your ALF Executive is made of dedicated volunteers from across the province.

We have a busy year planned for the ALF this year. We plan to have monthly Community Lunches via Zoom, wherein we invite Indigenous lawyers and law students to come together to connect and discuss whatever issues and topics they decide. Our first Community Lunch on September 19, 2024 was well attended with 12 people, and we had a wonderful conversation. The final Community Lunch this year will be held on November 21. In 2025, they will be held on the following dates: January 16, February 20, March 20, April 17, May 15 and June 19. Please be sure to join us!

In addition to the Community Lunches, we are planning to have multiple lunchtime webinars, including a joint ALF – Sexual and Gender Diversity Alliance Section, a Professional Legal Training Course information session and a judicial application information session.

Continued on the following page

**This is the last PDF version of the Forum Drum.
Look out for the new web version next year.**

Forum Drum Editors

Christina J. Cook, Charlotte Rose, Shawnee Monchalin

In This Issue

Executive Update

Nisga'a Lawyer Debra Febril
Called on Nisga'a Lands

A View from the BC Human
Rights Tribunal

Reflecting on Reconciliation:
Over a Decade of TRU Law
Working to Ensure
Reconciliation is Carried
Out in a Good Way

Rebuilding Community: UBC ILSA

Beading as Medicine:
A Reflection on the
Aboriginal Lawyers Forum
Lunch Beading Sessions

Call for Accomplices:
BC First Nations Justice Council
Offers New Opportunities
to Join Groundbreaking
Indigenous Justice Centres

Raising our Hands to Justice Tina
on her Appointment to the BCSC

South Island Mixer Success

Indigenous Law Students
Association at TRU –
Update 2024/2025

Meet Your 2024-25
ALF Executive

ALF Retreat: Empowering
Indigenous Voices,
Nurturing Leadership

Check Out Murray Sinclair's
New Book "Who We Are: Four
Questions for Life and a Nation"

'Incalculable loss': Murray
Sinclair remembered

**ABORIGINAL
LAWYERS FORUM**



**CANADIAN
BAR ASSOCIATION
British Columbia**

Continued from the previous page

We are hosting our annual events: the ALF Holiday Banquet on November 29, 2024 ([buy tickets](#)), Speed Mentoring with Law Students in February and the ALF Retreat in May (location to be announced at the Holiday Banquet).

In addition to the events we plan, your ALF works to ensure that CBABC includes Indigenous voices and perspectives in many of its initiatives. The ALF signed a joint statement with CBABC President Lee Nevens in September denouncing the Law Society of BC Resolution #3, which contained harmful Indian Residential School denialism. Members of the ALF Executive sit on other CBABC committees, including Access to Justice, BarTalk Editorial, Truth & Reconciliation, Policy & Advocacy and Equity, Diversity & Inclusion. Adam Munnings sits on CBABC's Board of Directors.

We have a busy year planned, but we are so grateful to provide a place for Indigenous lawyers, law students and law graduates to come together. We are stronger together and look forward to seeing you at the next ALF event!

Nisga'a Lawyer Debra Febril Called on Nisga'a Lands

By Debra Febril

On July 29, 2024, I became the first Nisga'a lawyer to be called to the BC Bar on Nisga'a lands!

It took two years of work to organize, plan and seek permissions to have the ceremony outside the traditional courthouse setting and outside a main city like Vancouver or Terrace. The main resistance I faced was that it had never been done before. Special thanks to Chaslynn Gillanders, Christina Cook, the Honourable Leonard Marchand, Justice Ardith Wal'petko We'dalx Walkem, the Nisga'a Lisims Government and Executive, Vicki George, Amber Prince and Katrina Harry for your support to make this incredibly powerful day happen.

I did not want to be called to the bar in Vancouver, where only a handful of my family and friends could attend. I wanted to be called to the bar surrounded by my community and everyone that helped me reach my goal!

I am also not the first Nisga'a lawyer, but unfortunately, I did not meet any of the lawyers from my Nation until after I graduated from law school. My journey in law was not easy. I faced some seemingly insurmountable barriers and hurdles that many of my peers did not. I think back to the toughest times and find that is when one of my "adopted" mentors would show up and share their knowledge and experiences with me. In those moments, I remember thinking: "If they can do it, so can I." So, I kept going. I can't help but feel that my journey would have been a little easier if I was connected with someone from my Nation who walked the path before me.

I wanted to celebrate my achievements "Loud and Proud" with members of my community so that they knew I was there. I wanted our youth to see that anything is possible and if I could do it, they could too! But more than that, I wanted them to see me as someone who walked that path and know in their hearts, I would be there to walk with them if they ever needed me to.

For me it was one of the most powerful things I have ever experienced. Not only was I surrounded by loved ones, members of the legal profession and my community, I also entered the room where Nisga'a laws are made as a Nation with self-determination, with the permission of WSN (Wilp Si'ayuukhl Nisga'a) and in the presence of Ganim Siwilyeenskwi! For the first time in my life, my cultural training and my legal training came together. I have always known I share a different world view. I was raised to think Nisga'a first. I have learned that I have very different lived experiences than most of my colleagues in the legal profession. July 29, 2024 was the day I proudly celebrated my differences and understood the profound words of my very first law mentor, Christina Cook: "Your differences are exactly why our profession needs you!" The bar needs to be more representative of the people we serve.



A View from the BC Human Rights Tribunal

By Amber Prince

I was appointed as a member the BC Human Rights Tribunal after working with Deborah Campbell on her human rights complaint for 3+ years. Before my Tribunal appointment, I was a staff lawyer at a non-profit. As we geared up for the hearing, Métis lawyer Myrna McCallum joined Ms. Campbell's team as co-counsel.

Deborah Campbell's courage and perseverance resulted in landmark decisions about Indigenous-specific discrimination: [*Campbell v. Vancouver Police Board*, 2019 BCHRT 12 \(Campbell No. 1\)](#) and [*Campbell v. Vancouver Police Board* \(No. 4\), 2019 BCHRT 275](#). Her case is also a part of my journey to becoming a member at the Human Rights Tribunal.

Ms. Campbell alleged anti-Indigenous discrimination in an encounter with the police. She was walking her dogs in her neighborhood when she witnessed police arrest her 19-year-old son. The way the police treated her during that encounter was the subject of her complaint. The Tribunal held a four-day hearing in September 2019 to decide whether the police discriminated against Ms. Campbell.

Ms. Campbell won her case. Tribunal member Devyn Cousineau (now Vice Chair) made a number of observations and findings about Indigenous-specific discrimination.

In *Campbell No. 1*, Member Cousineau decided that the Union of BC Indian Chiefs was an appropriate intervenor in the case. In this decision, at paragraph 18, Member Cousineau:

- Said that a contextual approach to human rights complaints is especially important in complaints involving Indigenous people
- Took notice that Indigenous people are disproportionately underrepresented in complaints brought to the Tribunal, despite a long history of colonialization that continues to prejudice Indigenous people
- Confirmed that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission called on all participants in the justice sector to provide culturally competent services. This goal is advanced when the Tribunal has the fullest possible understanding of the social context in which alleged discrimination is said to arise; and
- Decided that UBCIC could give social context evidence, to give meaning to Ms. Campbell's interaction with the police

In *Campbell No. 4*, the final decision on Ms. Campbell's complaint, Member Cousineau set out legal principles relating to Indigenous-specific discrimination:

- Deliberate, open, racist attacks exist. But more commonly, people do not express racial prejudices openly or even recognize them in themselves ... most complaints, like this one, turn on an inference: para. 102.
- The facts of this complaint – like many race-based complaints – can only be understood within their broader social context and a proper understanding of that context may support a finding of discrimination: para. 105.
- Individual acts viewed in isolation may be “ambiguous or explained away” but viewed as part of the “larger picture,” with an understanding of how racial discrimination occurs, can support a finding of discrimination: para. 105.

Applying this framework to the evidence, the Tribunal found that police have a heightened duty to respond appropriately to the needs and circumstances of Indigenous peoples: para. 124. They did not meet this duty in their interaction with Ms. Campbell.

Instead, the police stereotyped her as suspicious, a possible criminal and a threat - instead of a mother concerned about her son: paras. 126-128. Viewed through this lens, she was dragged away from witnessing her son's arrest and threatened with arrest herself: paras. 68-73, 114 and 135.



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As far as I know, this was the first time that an Indigenous woman was represented by two other Indigenous women at a BC Human Rights Tribunal hearing. Myrna McCallum and I speak about that experience on her [Trauma-Informed Lawyer Podcast](#), and on the [Indigenous Human Rights Podcast](#). This experience affirmed to me that Indigenous representation matters.

Shortly after the Tribunal issued *Campbell No. 4.*, Ardith Walpetko We'dalx Walkem, QC (now Justice Walkem) released [Expanding Our Vision Report](#). This report provides a snapshot of Indigenous Peoples' experiences with human rights issues in B.C. and makes recommendations for the Tribunal to respond to those experiences. This report was featured in the [Fall 2023 Forum Drum](#) by my colleague Shawnee Monchalin.

When the Tribunal posted member appointments in 2020, it felt like a part of my journey to apply. When I was offered an appointment in 2021, I said yes.

I joined the Tribunal at an exciting but challenging time.

On November 25, 2021, the B.C. government added Indigenous identity as a protected ground under B.C.'s *Human Rights Code*. It also amended the *Interpretation Act* confirming that B.C. laws must align with Indigenous rights, affirmed in s. 35 of the Constitution and the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* [UNDRIP].

At the same time, the Tribunal's active cases nearly tripled in the [2021-2022 fiscal year](#), leading to delays. Under the leadership of our Chair, Emily Ohler, we sought a budget increase to reflect our workload, and instituted a [backlog strategy](#). We continue to make progress on the backlog.

We also continue to make progress on implementing the *Expanding Our Vision* Report recommendations - with critical guidance from the [Expanding Our Vision Implementation Committee](#).

My involvement with human rights law looks a little different now. I no longer advocate for one party. Instead, I carry the responsibility to make just and timely human rights decisions and advance the *Expanding Our Vision* Recommendations. Because of Deborah Campbell and Myrna McCallum, I trust that I bring a unique perspective and knowledge to this work.

There is still much human rights work to be done. For example, the Tribunal has yet to fulfill all of the *Expanding Our Vision* recommendations, issue a leading case on the meaning of Indigenous identity as distinct ground under the Code or substantively consider the application of UNDRIP.

Perhaps your own experiences, work or interest will lead you to cross paths with the BC Human Rights Tribunal in some way. If you do, I am confident that you will have unique knowledge and skills to share.

Save the Date

Aboriginal Lawyers Forum Retreat 2025

May 23-25

Stay tuned as details will be announced soon!

Reflecting on Reconciliation: Over a Decade of TRU Law Working to Ensure Reconciliation is Carried Out in a Good Way

By Murray Sholty

The Faculty of Law at Thompson Rivers University has been actively working to implement the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, noting particularly those that pertain to law schools and the legal profession. TRU Law is very grateful for the hospitality of Tk'emlups te Secwepemc and the Secwepemc Nation for hosting our faculty on their traditional and unceded territory (Secwepemculecw).

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada

The TRC called for a curriculum that prepares law students for assuming leadership as lawyers in the process of reconciliation and for meeting Indigenous clients and claims with knowledge, respect and compassion. As part of our mandatory first year curriculum, we currently build awareness and knowledge of residential schools' history by taking our first-year class to the neighbouring reserve lands of Tk'emlups te Secwepemc and holding a class in the former residential school.

Beyond content in mandatory courses, TRU Law offers upper year courses dedicated to Indigenous peoples and the law.

Mandatory Course:

- Truth and Rebuilding Canadian Indigenous Relations

Electives:

- Indigenous Peoples and Canadian Law
- Comparative and International Indigenous Rights
- First Nations Governance and Economic Development
- First Nations Business and Taxation
- Kawaskimhon National Aboriginal Moot

10-year Reunion

The inaugural TRU Law class of 2014 celebrated their 10-year reunion in May, reuniting alumni, faculty and administration. The event was filled with nostalgia and excitement as attendees reconnected with old friends.

Ten years ago, the inaugural class graduated from TRU Law, which launched in the fall of 2011. It was the first law school to open in Canada in over three decades. Without upper-year students, everyone had to figure things out as they went.

Graduates at the reunion reflected on their unique position in building the law school from the ground up. The law building was not yet built when they started, and brilliant professors and aspiring lawyers from across the country took a chance on TRU Law.

The TRU Law 2014 Indigenous graduates Chrystie Stewart (Tk'emlups te Secwepemc), Miranda Seymour (Lheidli T'enneh), Debra Febril (Nisga'a) and Murray Sholty (Hagwilget) had to balance classes with social and family life, and the overall challenges of adjusting to law school. They helped play an integral role in establishing the various inaugural law student groups, including the Indigenous Law Students' Association.

Miranda Seymour said "establishing the first ILSA at TRU was not only a big responsibility, but also a huge privilege. It was an opportunity to be a part of something brand new and to build a strong foundation for future Indigenous law students and ILSA members.



Murray Sholty, a Hagwilget member, is an Assistant Teaching Professor to the Faculty of Law and the Bob Gaglardi School of Business and Economics at Thompson Rivers University.

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The TRU ILSA was created to not only provide a safe space for Indigenous law students but also to bring together Indigenous law students with non-Indigenous law students and faculty and make connections within the Kamloops community, particularly Tk'emlups te Secwepemc. Over 10 years later and I am so happy to see the TRU ILSA going strong!"

Since graduating, these TRU Law Indigenous alumni have pursued inspiring careers and lives, becoming business owners, partners, in-house legal counsel, working for a tribunal, a law professor, and more. The reunion celebrated their entire cohort's achievements and reaffirmed the strong bond among graduates.

Documentary Film: 2024 Kawaskimhon National Aboriginal Moot, TRU

TRU Law had the privilege of hosting this year's 2024 National Kawaskimhon Aboriginal Moot on March 8th and 9th.

The Kawaskimhon Moot is unique in that it is a consensus-based, non-adversarial negotiation. It combines Indigenous legal traditions with federal, provincial and international law, emphasizing concepts of dispute resolution.

The school captured the 2-day experience in a film, [*2024 Kawaskimhon National Aboriginal Moot, TRU*](#), which features Justice of the Supreme Court of Canada Michelle O'Bonsawin, Chief Justice of British Columbia Leonard S. Marchand and TRU Law Dean Daleen Millard, among many others.

Our law students are placing in top spots in Indigenous law writing competitions

Two TRU Law students placed in the top three in the Sovereignty Symposium XXXI Chief Justice John B. Doolin Writing Competition in Oklahoma City recently. The symposium invites domestic and international university students to submit research papers to be considered for the annual writing competition prize (on any legal issue concerning Indigenous law). TRU Law students Steven Parker and Rob Houle placed 2nd and 3rd, respectively.

"The Sovereignty Symposium is known for being a premier American legal conference on tribal sovereignty and governance. Notably, my submission focused on a critical legal issue impacting the Inuit. I am thankful to have been awarded second place in this year's writing competition because my success raises the Indigenous People of the Arctic and TRU's profile among American scholars," said Parker.

Houle's paper on Indians and the 49th Parallel brought him to the third-place win. "I am honoured to have been successful in my second submission to the Sovereignty Symposium. The symposium offers an important opportunity for scholars doing work on Indigenous issues to share their perspective and how the law affects Indigenous rights. To have my piece selected from several other submissions across North America reflects the quality of work that takes place at Thompson Rivers University," he said.

At the previous year's Sovereignty Symposium writing competition, TRU Law students Emma Payne, Cailey Harris and Rob Houle received the top awards.

Conclusion

TRU Law continues to focus on implementing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action, which is reflected through the good work of the inaugural Indigenous students that made up part of the TRU Law's class of 2014, TRU Law's commitment to Indigenous content in our courses and curriculum and TRU Law's ongoing efforts to support Indigenous and non-Indigenous students' success with research and writing about Indigenous legal issues.

Dean Daleen Millard said: "I firmly believe TRU Law's Indigenous initiatives with the *TRU Law Statement on the Findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, new Indigenous law course offerings, new Aboriginal and Indigenous law content embedded within existing course offerings and now amazing student performances within the area of Indigenous law at the national and international level is setting the school on a firm path towards contributing to reconciliation."

Rebuilding Community

By UBC ILSA

We would like to start by first acknowledging the Unceded territories of the Coast Salish peoples, the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skxwú7mesh (Squamish) and səliłwətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations, on which the University of British Columbia is located.

This year, UBC ILSA is setting forth on rebuilding community and bringing back a much-needed revitalization under the banner of alliance and comradery. The executive for UBC ILSA this year is a mixture of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students who have the same mindset and illustrate the foundations for what the club is striving to be going forward.

Moving forward, UBC ILSA will strive to be foundational in becoming a safe space once again for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students who wish to rebuild community. From bringing back firm events this academic year, to having joint events with other BIPOC clubs at Allard, UBC ILSA is taking the approach of being proactive.

UBC ILSA hosted the Sisters in Spirit Vigil once again on October 4, and in doing so continued the tradition of honouring the memories of missing and murdered Indigenous women. We are also moving away from the apathy that Indigenous people face in the public perception, with a retitling of Indigenous Awareness Week to Indigenous Alliance Week. This is meant to engage with students from all walks of life, and to offer a branch of friendship to those who may feel unsure of how to best get involved with Indigenous initiatives and students at Allard.

We are also excited to continue the annual ILSA fundraiser Gala, which is being organized for this academic year. The aim is to raise \$50,000 towards the Indigenous Law Students' Association Award. UBC ILSA will be reaching out to firms across the lower mainland to find a Title sponsor for the Gala this year and work hand in hand with firms that wish to contribute to this initiative as it comes to completion.

As the new executive team has started this school year, UBC ILSA has made amendments to their constitution and brought into enforcement a new zero-tolerance policy. This is the foundation for rebuilding community at Allard as everyone deserves to feel safe, respected and heard as we move forward. For all our events this year, we will be offering safe ride vouchers to ensure students and staff make it home safe. This initiative is also one that the Law Students' Society has heard of and is also bringing into effect moving forward.

UBC ILSA through this academic year is working hard to ensure that we lead on the forefront of upholding accountability, supporting progressive and forward thinking and ensuring that the community we are rebuilding is one of integrity and courage.



Indigenous Law Students' Association



*UBC ILSA Executives 2024/25:
From left to right: Samantha Olsen, Brooklyn Fowler,
Kristofer Charlebois, Jena Kieren, Samuel Spartano*

Beading as Medicine: A Reflection on the Aboriginal Lawyers Forum Lunch Beading Sessions

By Michelle Casavant

As a Métis lawyer, I have come to appreciate the cultural importance of beading. More than a form of creative expression, beading is medicine—a way to heal, to connect and to find strength. This past year, during the 2023-2024 Aboriginal Lawyers Forum lunch beading sessions, I witnessed firsthand how the act of beading brought Indigenous lawyers together, helping us create not only beautiful works of art but also a stronger, more united community.

The Aboriginal Lawyers Forum, an important arm of the Canadian Bar Association, serves as a gathering place for Indigenous legal professionals, promoting the inclusion and recognition of First Nations, Métis and Inuit lawyers. The monthly lunch beading sessions became a beloved feature of the ALF events, providing a space to network, share stories and heal through the timeless tradition of beading.

Beading as Medicine: A Cultural Anchor

Beading holds deep cultural significance for many Indigenous Nations across Turtle Island. For generations, beads have adorned clothing, regalia and items of everyday use. The designs often carry stories, teachings and expressions of identity. This traditional practice, passed down through generations, holds a sacred place in Indigenous culture—serving as a form of resilience and cultural preservation.

As Indigenous lawyers, many of us navigate complex intersections between traditional knowledge and contemporary legal systems. Often, the pressures of balancing these worlds can be overwhelming. The monthly beading sessions served as a much-needed reprieve from the fast-paced, high-stress environments in which we work. The simple act of threading a needle, focusing on intricate patterns and watching vibrant beads come together was a meditative experience—a form of healing and grounding.

In our sessions, we often talked about how beading helped us center ourselves. The repetitive motion of stitching beads into patterns quieted the mind and allowed us to focus on the present moment. For many of us, this act of creation was therapeutic, offering a sense of calm and renewal. This is why we call beading medicine—it has the power to heal not only the individual but the community.

Building Community Through Beading

What made the ALF lunch beading sessions special was not just the beading itself, but the sense of community it fostered. Lawyers, articling students and law students gathered once a month to share in this experience. Whether seasoned in the legal profession or just starting out, everyone was welcome at the beading table.

These sessions provided a unique space for Indigenous lawyers to connect in a way that felt authentic to our shared cultural values. While networking events in the legal profession are often formal and intimidating, the beading sessions felt warm and inviting. We sat side by side virtually, beading our own projects—some of us working on earrings, others creating medallions or pins—and as we beaded, we talked. Conversations flowed easily, from the challenges of practicing law as an Indigenous person, to sharing advice on legal cases, to simply catching up on life.



Call for Accomplices: BC First Nations Justice Council Offers New Opportunities to Join Groundbreaking Indigenous Justice Centres

As more Indigenous Justice Centres open across B.C., BCFNJC invites those whose hearts and minds align with ours to join us and work with First Nations leaders and communities to advance first-of-its-kind, transformative justice work.

Way! Weytk! Tansi! Biindigen! Taanishi! Miyotôtâkewin! Tunngsugit! Hay'sxw'qa si'em! Greetings in your ancestral language. As you step through the doors of one of our Indigenous Justice Centres, you will be welcomed into a space of warmth, kinship and Indigenous laws and protocols. Led by the teachings of our Elders and Ancestors, inspired by our fierce leaders of today and driven by the voices of our youth, a new direction for justice is being set by and for Indigenous people.

Through the [BC First Nations Justice Strategy](#), BCFNJC is expanding a network of Indigenous Justice Centres (IJC) across the province and calling in those seeking and craving change – accomplices who want to change the way they practice law and support, heal and care for Indigenous people in the justice system. We invite those with diverse professional and lived/living experience – including lawyers, resource support workers, administrators and legal assistants – to join our Legal and Outreach Teams and contribute to the powerful work being done to transform the justice system.

“For centuries the justice system has been used as colonial tool of oppression – it has been designed to make an Indigenous person feel lost, disoriented and cut-off from the healing connections of their Nations and communities,” stated Kirsten Barnes, IJC Clinical Director. “Our Indigenous Justice Centres represent a new way forward. Each one breathes life into the laws, protocols and traditions of our Nations and offers a new way of viewing and enacting justice – justice that is healing, restorative and rooted in kinship. We are so excited to invite you to join us in this re-envisioning of justice, in the practicing of law that relies on Indigenous protocols, customs and legal systems to put the wellbeing of Indigenous families and communities first.”

Weaving together a strong network of legal and wraparound supports, there are currently 9 physical IJCs operating across the province – in Merritt, Chilliwack, Prince George, Prince Rupert, Vancouver, Kelowna, Surrey, Nanaimo and Victoria. These IJCs house interdisciplinary Legal and Outreach teams that are actively using their collective community, cultural and professional expertise to help Indigenous clients not only navigate criminal and child protection cases, but also access a full spectrum of legal and social supports that ensure they remain connected to the foundational care and support of their communities.

“It is important to know that when you join our IJCs we are doing things differently, outside the framework of a conventional law firm. Our work is holistic, rooted in healing and restoration. With each client we serve, we know that we serve their family, their loved ones, their communities, their Nations – we are all connected and the work of our IJCs transcends a single relation or individual,” stated Kirsten Barnes, IJC Clinical Director. “Every action we take and every decision we make to support a client is grounded in and interwoven with community and the teachings, legal traditions, protocols and stories of Indigenous ancestors and kin. If this speaks to your heart, please join us.”

BCFNJC is currently in the process of opening six more IJCs in communities across B.C., for a total of 15 centres by the end of 2024. With this expansion comes exciting opportunities to join both existing and upcoming IJCs. A variety of positions are open, in different locations across B.C., including Office Administrators and Managers, Intake Liaisons, Resource and Support Workers, Legal Assistants, Staff Lawyers, Gladue Writers and more. While each team member at our IJCs may have a different title, they all hold the important role of being a helper and caretaker supporting an Indigenous person on their healing and restorative justice journey.

Contribute to empowering work that is being supported by a dynamic network of justice partners and become part of an organization setting a new direction of Indigenous justice, at both the provincial and federal levels. [View](#) the full list of positions open.



Raising our Hands to Justice Tina on her Appointment to the BCSC

By ALF Exec

The Aboriginal Lawyers Forum is pleased and proud to congratulate the Honourable Justice Tina L. Dion who has been appointed a judge of the Supreme Court of British Columbia.

Justice Dion is a member of the Kehewin Cree Nation, Alberta. She received her undergraduate degree from the University of Alberta in 1994, Bachelor of Laws from the University of British Columbia in 1997 and Doctor of Juridical Science from the University of Arizona in 2008. She was the first Canadian Law Clerk to the Navajo Nation Supreme Court, Window Rock, Arizona (1998). She was admitted to the British Columbia Bar in 1999 and to the Alberta Bar in 2014.

Justice Dion was appointed to the Provincial Court of B.C. in 2019. She regularly sat as one of two judges in First Nations Court New Westminster. Prior to her appointment to the bench, she had been in private practice in the areas of civil litigation, administrative, environmental, regulatory and Aboriginal law since 2013. She articulated and worked with criminal firm Orris Burns prior to joining Blake, Cassels & Graydon LLP where she practised civil litigation. She was in-house counsel and Director of Legal Services with the Tsawwassen First Nation Government. She served as an adjunct professor at UBC Law over a 12-year period. She regularly chaired and presented at the Continuing Legal Education Society of British Columbia conferences. She was appointed King's Counsel in 2016.

Justice Dion has been an active supporter of the ALF since its inception in 2010 as the first and still the only CBA forum of its kind in Canada. When she was still a practicing lawyer, she was the Chair of the ALF in 2016-2018. Those years were transformative as the ALF was being sought for leadership on issues related to the representation of Indigenous people in the legal profession. She was the first ALF Chair to sit on CBABC's Board. Furthermore, CBABC dedicated seats to ALF representatives on several key committees including Truth & Reconciliation, Indigenous Justice Advocacy and the Advisory Committee to the Judicial Council of BC. She co-chaired CBABC's inaugural Truth and Reconciliation Working Group, whose final report was presented and approved by CBABC in September 2018.

Justice Dion truly exemplifies the ALF's mandate to enhance the stature and influence of Indigenous people in the profession.

The ALF hosted a free celebratory reception for Justice Dion on November 5, 2024 at the Bill Reid Gallery in Vancouver. While the ALF celebrates the appointment of every Indigenous judge in B.C., the ALF hosted this reception for Justice Dion, our former ALF Chair from 2016- 2018.



Did you know?

Terry Vyse, Mohawk, became the first Indigenous woman in Canada to be appointed to the Bench when she was appointed to the Ontario Court of Justice in 1991.

South Island Mixer Success

By Christina J. Cook

On October 10, 2024, the ALF hosted a mixer for Indigenous lawyers and law students in Victoria. Twenty Indigenous lawyers and law students attended this event hosted by the ALF at the BC First Nations Justice Council Victoria Indigenous Justice Centre Office (794 Yates Street). Attendees enjoyed delicious refreshments and heartwarming conversations with other Indigenous lawyers.

A big shout out goes to the main event organizers, ALF Exec Members Breanne Martin, Andrea Glen and Katarina Sawchuk.

The connections and conversations flowed, and we were so pleased to have many senior lawyers share their experiences and advice with the junior lawyers and law students. Event organizers drafted some ice breaker cards to help people connect but reported that they did not need to use any of these ice breaker cards. Our event organizers reported that the conversations flowed and so many people commented that they were grateful for an Indigenous lawyer/law student safe space to discuss issues and topics freely.



We hope this Vancouver Island mixer is the first of many. The ALF is committed to connecting with Indigenous lawyers, law students, law graduates and judges across B.C. and we have wanted to have more events on Vancouver Island.



Thank you to everyone that came out to the event, and please keep your eye out for the next event in Victoria. In the meantime, we hope you join us at the regularly scheduled ALF Online Community Lunches! On the third Thursday of each month, the ALF hosts a Zoom lunch where Indigenous lawyers and law students meet virtually. This low-key gathering provides a safe and supportive space to discuss topics important to Indigenous colleagues. This lunch also provides an opportunity to foster greater connections within the community. [Register](#) for the next one on November 21, 2024.

Indigenous Law Students Association at TRU – Update 2024/2025

By TRU ILSA

The Indigenous Law Students Association was founded in the fall of 2011 to ensure that Indigenous perspectives would be considered and incorporated within Thompson Rivers University's Faculty of Law. ILSA is a student-led club striving to create a welcoming environment for all current and prospective students in the TRU Faculty of Law by assisting in intercultural learning and by liaising with cultural resources. ILSA engages with the TRU Faculty of Law, the greater TRU community and surrounding Indigenous organizations and communities, especially Tk'emlúps te Secwepemc. ILSA promotes diversity, equity and Indigenous perspectives by coordinating and supporting events and knowledge-keeper consultations. TRU ILSA plays an important role in advancing the understanding, application and recognition of Indigenous law within legal education. ILSA provides support for Indigenous Law students through a network of peer support that helps them navigate the challenges of law school, including study groups, mentorship programs and social and educational events and workshops that help build a community among Indigenous students. ILSA collaborates with Cplul'kwe'ten or the "Gathering Place," an Indigenous student center located on TRU campus that provides weekly mentorship and activities tailored specifically to Indigenous students on campus.



TRU Law responded to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Call to Action #28 by making it one of its strategic goals and continuing to improve intercultural knowledge, dialogue and respect. [Chrystie Stewart](#), lead partner at Stewart & Springford LLP, a law firm in Kamloops, is an alum of TRU Law, graduating in the class of 2014. She is the current mentor, support person and advocate for Indigenous law students at TRU Law. In her role, Chrystie keeps in touch with Indigenous students throughout the year and serves as the on-site coach for the Kawaskimhon Moot with help from other faculty professors. Chrystie is also a consultant for the Faculty of Law and advises the faculty on student support issues and possible curriculum changes.

ILSA advocates for the interests of Indigenous Law students within TRU and beyond and ensures that the TRU curriculum incorporates Indigenous legal perspectives through dynamic, ongoing discussions with faculty and staff. ILSA also ensures that the needs of Indigenous students are incorporated within TRU mandates and policies. Furthermore, the TRU Law Department mandate supports ILSA's mission by implementing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Call to Action #28 by teaching law students about Indigenous peoples and the intersection to Indigenous law and legal perspectives. TRU Law's response and strategic goals are in accordance with TRU's strategic priorities, which include increasing intercultural understanding through the indigenization of the university by including traditional and contemporary Aboriginal teaching, learning, knowledge, research and creative practices.

On May 9, 2017, TRU and the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc signed a partnership agreement. This agreement acknowledged, among other points, that TRU was situated on traditional Tk'emlupsul'ecw ell Stk'emlupsemc territory. TRU also developed the [Coyote Project](#), a pan-institutional initiative comprised of commitments from all nine faculties at TRU, TRU World, Open Learning and the TRU Library. The aim of this project is to accelerate indigenization at TRU. Professors at TRU Law welcome guest speakers into their classes to share their experiences with the law and access to justice. TRU offers a variety of courses that support the TRC Calls to Action including: Kawaskimhon National Aboriginal Moot, Indigenous Peoples and Canadian Law, First Nations Business and Taxation, First Nations Governance and Economic Development and Comparative and International Indigenous Rights Law. Most faculty are willing to bring an Indigenous lens to any of the other courses. For example, in the In-house and Corporate Council class, even though the focus is on corporate law, the faculty member has allowed work around In-house council learning for on-reserve work.

This fall, members of ILSA will have the opportunity to attend the annual Aboriginal Lawyers Forum Holiday Banquet in Vancouver. This prestigious event allows ILSA members to network with legal professionals, scholars and other students, strengthening the foundation for the next generation of Indigenous lawyers.

Continued on the following page

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ILSA is currently collaborating with Society of Law Students to plan this year's SLS Conference, "Criminal Justice System Reform," scheduled for February 6-7, 2025. This event will be centred around sentencing reform, rehabilitation, systemic racism and the need for changes to be made to address the overrepresentation of Indigenous people in prisons. It is our hope to incorporate culturally relevant initiatives.

TRU ILSA Executives 2024/25:

President: Trevor Tailfeathers

Treasurer: Jessanna Jones

Secretary: Cely-Rae Street

3L Representative: Vacant

2L Representative: Garfield Staats

1L Representative S.91: Vacant

1L Representative S.92: Cely-Rae Street

1L Representative S.93: Vacant

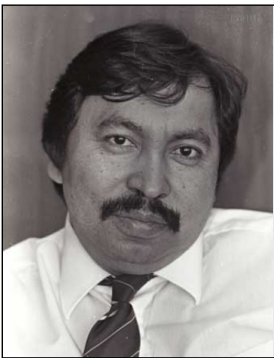
Ally Representative: Vacant

Visual Arts Representative: Jessica Murphy

Social Media Manager: Jessica Murphy



From Left to Right: ILSA President Trevor Tailfeathers, Secretary Cely-Rae Street, Treasurer Jessanna Jones, 2L Representative Garfield Staats



Did you know?

Dave Joe, citizen of Champagne and Aishihik First Nations, was the first Indigenous Lawyer Called to the Bar in Yukon in 1977. Dave attended UBC Law school and even prior to attending law school he worked in the Yukon on Aboriginal rights. He was the chief negotiator for the Council of Yukon First Nations. In 2011, Dave Joe was awarded the CBA's President's Award, and in 2008 he was awarded the Order of Canada.

Meet Your 2024-25 ALF Executive



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Gitxsan First Nation
Department of Justice Canada
Past Chair & Member at Large



Christina J. Cook
Brokenhead Ojibway Nation
BC First Nations Justice Council
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Breanne Martin
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Métis Nation of Ontario
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Jesse Young
Métis Nation
& Shawnee First Nation
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Dakelh and Sto:lo Nations
Miller Titerle Law Corporation
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Krisofer I. Charlebois
Lac La Ronge Indian Band
& Osage Nation
Allard Student Liaison



Trevor Tailfeathers
Blood Reserve
TRU Student Liaison



ALF Retreat: Empowering Indigenous Voices, Nurturing Leadership

By Charlotte Rose

In May 2024, CBABC ALF hosted its annual retreat for Indigenous legal professionals (including judges, lawyers and students) within the unceded Ancestral territory of the Lil'wat7úl and Skwxwú7mesh Nations (Whistler).

The Squamish Lil'wat Cultural Centre provided a beautiful and grounding environment for attendees. Events started with inspiring discussions about leadership followed by relationship building by fireside. The amazing cultural centre team prepared magnificent Indigenous-inspired charcuterie boards.

In acknowledging the Ancestral territory of the Lil'wat7úl (Lil'wat) and Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) Nations, attendees took the time to honour the territory by learning about *temíxw* / *tmicw* (the territory) and its people, who have shared the area since time immemorial. The Lil'wat and Squamish Nations are truly rich in culture and traditions, and attendees were grateful for the gifts of knowledge, especially the opportunity to join in dance and song led by the center's Lil'wat Cultural Ambassadors.



Connections of leadership continued with a magnificent presentation from Stsmélqen (Dr. Ronald Ignace), a member of the Secwépemc (Shuswap) Nation (Skeetchestn) and the current Indigenous languages commissioner, who spoke to the importance of language and law.



Leah George-Wilson facilitated the thought-provoking roundtable on Indigenous Cultural Competency in the Law, where attendees weighed-in on the requirement for all lawyers to take Indigenous Cultural Competency training. This roundtable discussion was followed by the awe-inspiring Madeline McCallum, who bravely shared her Indigenous lived experience and the wisdom she has learned in her journey. The teaching she shared with attendees centred around gratitude, the power of self and the responsibility of healing.

Continued on the following page

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While wrapping up a day of beauty and learning, attendees shared a delicious meal. During his amazing keynote, the kind and humble Hon. Chief Justice Leonard Marchand Jr., graciously shared his most recent career achievement as the first Indigenous Chief Justice of British Columbia.

On the final day, retreat attendees started the day with the medicine of movement led by the brilliant Randy Robinson, who guided a low impact walk through the cedars. Energized attendees took part in the final session, A 100 Questions for a Hundred Lawyers, led by both Michelle Casavant and Christina J. Cook.

Each retreat we see growth and support, and this year's was no exception. Registration was offset by the generous donations of many sponsors, including First Peoples Law, First Nations Financial Management Board, Narwal Litigation LLP, MT & Co., Mandell Pinder LLP, Boughton Law, Clark Wilson, Richard Buell Sutton LLP, Baker Newby LLP, and Buhler Law. Jimmy Pattison Group (Nester's Market), Lush, BCFNJC and others donated welcome bags.

We are grateful to the Lilwat7úl and Skwxwú7mesh Nations for having us within their beautiful lands and look forward to seeing everyone at the next retreat in May 2025. Stay tuned for the retreat's location announcement at our Holiday Banquet on Nov 29, 2024.



Check Out Murray Sinclair's New Book "Who We Are: Four Questions for Life and a Nation"

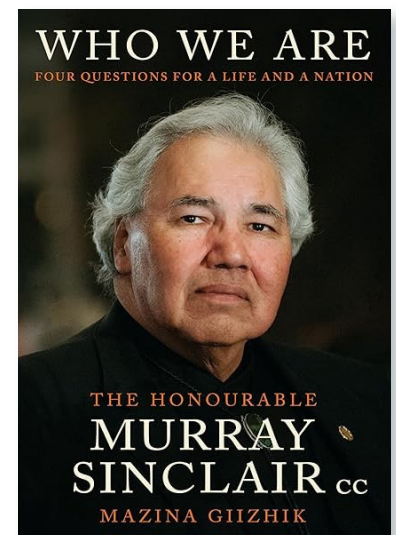
By Christina J. Cook

Murray Sinclair has worn many hats over the years, from Judge to Senator, Chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Co-Chair of the Manitoba Aboriginal Justice Inquiry, lawyer, father and grandfather. Murray Sinclair shares his life story in this book, while also sharing his reflections on some the most important Indigenous legal issues Canada is facing today.

Sinclair structures his book around the four questions: Where do I come from? Where am I going? Why am I here? Who am I? In this book, Sinclair shares his personal stories about growing up in Selkirk Manitoba, becoming a lawyer and a judge and traveling around Manitoba to conduct the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry. Within his stories, Sinclair also provides his reflections and analysis on issues of Indigenous identity, human rights, and what is "justice."

Sinclair also shares the racism and challenges he faced in his career that, as Indigenous lawyers, we can all relate to. In one anecdote, Sinclair, who was the first Indigenous person appointed to the Bench in Manitoba in 1988, recalls the racism he faced from another judge after his appointment. The other judge boldly proclaimed to Sinclair that the only reason Sinclair was appointed to the Bench was because he was "native," to which Sinclair – without skipping a beat – replied that must have meant the only reason the other judge was appointed to the Bench was because he was white! – Ha!

This is a must read book for all Canadians, but Indigenous lawyers and law students will find it particularly fascinating and relatable.



'Incalculable loss': Murray Sinclair remembered

By Kathleen Martens for APTN News

Some who knew retired judge and senator speak about his legacy.

His name is synonymous with reconciliation. But Murray Sinclair, who died Monday at 73 following a lingering illness, was also a prominent Indigenous judge, advocate and leader.

"He wanted to create change," says Sheila North, [executive director of Indigenous Engagement at the University of Winnipeg](#) and former grand chief of Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak.

"Not only with non-Indigenous people, but also with Indigenous people."

Sinclair was a member of Peguis First Nation and raised on the former St. Peter's Indian Reserve north of Winnipeg. His traditional Anishinaabe name was Mizhana Gheezhik, which means The One Who Speaks of Pictures in the Sky.

Sinclair graduated law school from the University of Manitoba and was later named Manitoba's first Indigenous judge, where he served in the provincial court.

"He talked about times when he was the only Indian person in the room," recalled North, of Bunibonee Cree Nation in Manitoba. "And, he talked about the time when he would show up as the judge and the security staff were questioning what he was doing there and why he was there."

"I think, one time, they thought he was one of the accused."

But instead of bitterness and anger, Sinclair channeled his experiences into powerful messages, whether he was steering the country through its colonial past or advising articling lawyers on racism in the justice system.

"He was a mentor," says Harold (Sonny) Cochrane, who welcomed Sinclair as a partner at his [Winnipeg-based Cochrane Sinclair law firm](#) in 2020.

"It could be as simple as me knocking on his door and having a chat with him for a half hour in his office talking about certain legal issues," says Cochrane, who grew up on Fisher River Cree Nation north of Winnipeg.

"He really encouraged anyone to essentially call him any time. I know many lawyers called him on his cellphone or he would come in for a particular meeting. (He) was very, very open."

The two first met on the golf course.

"He was very, very genuine. Very wise," added Cochrane. "He looked at things, I believe – these are my words – very equitable. Understanding there are some historical wrongs that have to be addressed but also very fair."

Cochrane feels Sinclair, a twice-married father of five, developed that outlook from his time on the bench and in the Canadian Senate.

"He was very impartial, very fair. He was not by any means an angry individual. Very balanced."

Patrick Deane, principal (president) of Queen's University in Kingston, Ont., knew Sinclair professionally from Winnipeg.

When Sinclair was unanimously nominated as the first Indigenous person to hold the position of chancellor at Queens, Deane called him on a Saturday afternoon.



Anishinaabe from Manitoba, Murray Sinclair was a judge, senator and chairman of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. He died [Nov 4, 2024] at 73. Photo: APTN News

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He was floored when Sinclair returned his call almost immediately.

Sinclair [served in the voluntary position](#) from April 2021 to June 2024, and then agreed to stay on in a consulting role.

Deane says Sinclair delivered memorable convocation speeches.

And elevated Queens' reputation and standards.

"He left us a very different institution," says Deane, particularly when it came to the controversial issue of Indigenous identity of academic staff members.

"His passing is an incalculable loss."

Sinclair was appointed to represent Manitoba in the Senate in 2016. He helped form the Independent Senators Group and sat on half a dozen senate standing committees.

"I describe him often as the type of leader who led from within," says [Sen. Kim Pate](#). "He inspired all of us to do the best we could, and to always remember the generations to come in everything we were doing."

Pate says Sinclair leaves behind an "amazing" legacy that she's sure came at a cost to his family and community.

"So thank them for that," she says, "and (let's) demonstrate our affection, our care and honour his legacy by actually continuing the work."

Personally, Pate says she was struck by Sinclair's humility.

Here was this influential force against racism and injustice who had overseen intense public inquiries into anti-Indigenous bias spreading messages of hope and joy. The recipient of numerous honorary degrees, Sinclair heard in-person the stories of roughly 5,000 residential school survivors during six years with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.

The commission's resulting 94 calls to justice showed the country how to make amends with Indigenous Peoples.

"How do you sum up a lifetime of working to ensure fairness, justice, equality (and) love for people?" Pate wondered.

North, a former journalist, says Sinclair provided counsel on everything from working in the media to calling out racism in the courts. He was co-chair of Manitoba's Aboriginal Justice Inquiry in 1988.

"He built people up," she says. "You didn't feel offended you just felt educated about a truth you needed to hear."

She remembers Sinclair phoning after she grilled a First Nations chief during a television interview.

"He said it was important to be held accountable, that leaders need to be accountable to their people."

In private, she describes Sinclair as laid back and curious, with a sense of humour.

Kind of like a favorite uncle.

"I don't think we're ready to see him go. His presence with us is going to be tremendously missed and leave a void.

"He's like no other in our community."

Sinclair has left part of himself behind in those he inspired, and his recent memoir ["Who We Are: Four Questions For a Life and a Nation"](#).

The book spans decades of Sinclair's life in a series of letters written to his granddaughter, Sara Sinclair. When he became too ill to continue, his son, Niigaan Sinclair, a university lecturer, newspaper columnist and APTN National News pundit, completed it.

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