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## **New Indigenous Journalism and Communication Arts degree is a North American first**

Treaty 4 Territory – Today, First Nations University of Canada (FNUUniv) is launching the first 4-year Indigenous journalism and communication degree in North America.

A four-year Bachelor of Arts in Indigenous Journalism and Communication Arts blends multimedia training with the study of Indigenous issues and languages.

“The degree is unique and long overdue,” said Dr. Jacqueline Ottmann, FNUUniv president. “We need Indigenous voices and perspectives to tell our stories accurately and respectfully.”

Ottmann also announced extra funding to support the program, including \$121,000 annually for five years from the Mastercard Foundation, \$100,000 annually from the Inspirit Foundation over three years, and an anticipated \$10,000 in internship support during the program’s inaugural year from J-Schools Canada/Écoles-J Canada and the Google News Initiative.

Opportunities for the graduates of INCA programs are many and varied, according to Shannon Avison, associate professor of Indigenous Communication Arts (INCA). “The demand for Indigenous journalists and communication professionals has never been greater,” she said. “We get calls every day from organizations seeking interns and graduates.”

A market study conducted by INCA found 80 per cent of media managers plan to increase Indigenous-focused hiring in the next five years. “Having a degree will equip students with the academic credentials and the core competencies needed for these careers,” said Avison.

FNUUniv student Brittany Poitras has been taking INCA courses as electives in her Indigenous Studies degree. “Students will really flourish being able to take their whole degree through First Nations University. It’s such a supportive learning environment grounded in Indigenous values,” she said.

Hannah Scott, a third-year Faculty of Arts student at the University of Regina, said she’s happy to finally be able to declare Indigenous Journalism and Communication Arts as her degree major, after taking several INCA classes over the past two years.

“All students can benefit from Indigenous-focused learning,” she said. “Reconciliation is a team effort. At INCA, everyone is really kind and excited to work with one another no matter their background.”

INCA has offered a 2-year diploma program for almost 40 years, and recently added a one-year certificate focused on community radio and community relations.

The time is right to expand our offerings with a full four-year Bachelor of Arts, said Avison. “The Truth and Reconciliation Commission calls on us to ensure that Indigenous and non-Indigenous journalists have a strong foundation in Indigenous issues in Canada. First Nations University is the right post-secondary institution to do that,” she said.

A launch event will be broadcast live on CFNU The Stream at [www.cfnuradio.ca](http://www.cfnuradio.ca) starting at 10 a.m. Saskatchewan time this morning. Registration is now open and information about the degree is posted at [www.incaonline.ca](http://www.incaonline.ca)

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**File photos:** [https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/17Bl\\_tJ6vV71eyPL2JOLcQaHES5qtl1C1?usp=drive\\_link](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/17Bl_tJ6vV71eyPL2JOLcQaHES5qtl1C1?usp=drive_link)

## BACKGROUND

### What students will learn

The degree comes with a full suite of course offerings, covering topics such as respectful and ethical journalism and communications, multimedia storytelling, colonial and anti-colonial frames, managing media businesses, investigative collaborations, community radio, and a requirement of two Indigenous language courses. As well, students will complete an advanced internship focusing on an in-depth project and an advanced summer institute.

### Our story

Indigenous Communications Arts was founded at First Nations University in 1982, initially as a certificate that was later upgraded into a two-year diploma. A certificate option returned in 2021 with the creation of a one-year certificate focused on community-based media. Over the past 40 years, INCA alumni have taken journalism degrees elsewhere and gone on to fulfilling careers. Alumni include Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative journalist Connie Walker; CTV Assignment Editor Nelson Bird; CBC North Senior Managing Director Mervin Brass; SaskCulture Outreach Specialist Shelly Fayant; Leader-Post journalist and Eagle Feather News Managing Editor Kerry Benjoe; City of Regina Cultural Diversity and Indigenous Relations Advisor Brad Bellegarde, and many more top-level professionals in journalism and communications, including two INCA faculty members, Shannon Avison and Dr. Merelda Fiddler-Potter.

When it was established, INCA relied on instructors and facilities at the University of Regina. Today, INCA has dedicated classrooms, a newsroom, and production studios, including a streaming radio service, CFNU The Stream. The INCA program has become a go-to program for community organizations that want to support student learning and portfolio development, at the same time as they produce media projects economically. INCA faculty have coordinated opportunities for students to do hands-on experiential learning, working on publications for events, podcast series and documentaries for bands, tribal councils, provincial and national organizations. As well, INCA students have conducted award-winning collaborative investigations into community concerns such as poor water quality and the imposition of colonial policies. INCA is also the home of *pikiskwēwin*, an online multimedia platform that supports storytelling in Indigenous languages.

Expanding INCA to a four-year Bachelor of Arts program has been a dream since it was established. It will answer the Truth and Reconciliation (TRC) Calls to Action: “We call upon Canadian journalism programs and media schools to require education for all students on the history of Aboriginal peoples, including the history and legacy of residential schools, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Treaties and Aboriginal rights, Indigenous law, and Aboriginal-Crown relations.” Our INCA students have lived this history and understand the context of stories they are assigned in mainstream newsrooms. Some of our students are non-Indigenous and new Canadians, who leave the program much better prepared to cover Indigenous stories.

### INCA program options

**NEW: A four-year Bachelor of Arts in Indigenous Journalism and Communication Arts**, for students seeking the base qualification for a career in journalism and communications. The degree program, which begins in September 2024, offers a full degree credential within an Indigenous-led learning environment, with a focus on understanding Indigenous issues and languages in addition to advanced media skills.

**NEW: A two-year Bachelor of Indigenous Journalism and Communication Arts** provides an accelerated path to our degree program for students who already have a B.A.

**A two-year diploma program** that prepares students for entry-level work in the communications industry, including Aboriginal and mainstream media (print, broadcast, and web), and public relations. The two-year diploma is a 72-credit-hour program (24 classes). Beyond journalism classes, the INCA program requires courses in Indian history and politics, oral traditions, community-based research, business management, traditional and contemporary communication systems, strategic communication planning, languages and art.

**A one-year 30-credit-hour certificate**, primarily designed for students who wish to learn remotely and apply their new media skills in their home communities across Canada. Students engage in a full range of multimedia storytelling in theory and practice. Community-based internships are supported and students come together for a six-week intensive in-person

learning experience in the summer. Through internships and career mentoring, they graduate with career prospects in digital media creation, journalism, social media management, design, among other communications-focused fields.

Every second summer, we offer the **INCA Summer Institute in Journalism** (INCA 200). INCA 200 is a 3-week crash-course immersion in all things journalism. All students and interested members of the public are welcome to apply.

### **Quotes from letters of support for the new degree**

“Canada’s history has been distorted by incomplete information, misinformation and mistrust. By shaping the next generation of journalism and communications professionals, FNUUniv is creating the conditions for strong, accountable organizations and improved public engagement, understanding and decisions.”

- *Alastair MacFadden, Assistant Deputy Minister, Prairies Economic Development Canada, Sask. Region*

“APTN has not yet laid anyone off. We grew when others shrunk. All because of the demand for trusted Indigenous news sources in Canada. And the mainstream is still making space to retain their Indigenous journalists. There’s no going back now...As an employer, post-secondary education is a must. But with just a diploma, they are far outnumbered by higher qualified candidates...But if we can start with higher qualified Indigenous candidates, we would have more Indigenous Peoples hired, earning the experience and attaining higher decision-making rolls, not just in APTN but in other national newsrooms.”

- *Cheryl McKenzie, Executive Director of News and Current Affairs, APTN*

“Graduates with an Indigenous journalism and communications degree would be so significant and appreciated.”

- *Deborah A. Charles, Chief Executive Officer, MBC Radio*

“We recognize the need for more Indigenous communicators in the public realm...We wholeheartedly support the First Nations University of Canada and the expansion of this program, as they guide future leaders to greatness and help bring a genuine understanding of traditional knowledge to public service.”

- *Mayor Sandra Masters, City of Regina*

“In addition to addressing the need for more Indigenous expertise and perspective journalism and communication, there is also a need for education opportunities for non-Indigenous students to immerse themselves in a program like this so they can better understand the role and approach of the public sector in communicating with Indigenous communities.”

- *Dan Florizone, Executive-in-Residence, Johnson-Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy*

“An accredited journalism degree program would provide students with a more advantageous position than having just a diploma. The specialized and advanced skills training offered at a journalism degree program means students will be better prepared to immediately work in a newsroom... There is growing demand for Indigenous voices and perspectives in the media. A program that graduates students who are grounded in Indigenous values, languages and culture would be a welcome addition to any newsroom.”

- *Mervin Brass, Senior Managing Director, CBC North*