

Province, treaty commission develop new Grade 12 course

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LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

MANITOBA'S newest Grade 12 elective investigates the meaning of the phrase: "We Are All Treaty People."

The education department teamed up with the Treaty Relations Commission of Manitoba to co-create a social studies curriculum.

Ahead of the winter term, the duo unveiled a new 40S credit: Land and Treaties: Relationships and Responsibilities.

"I don't know anywhere else in Canada where this has happened," said Connie Wyatt Anderson, treaty education lead for the commission.

"Teachers are so darn humble — that's just the way they are, but I think Manitoba and Manitoba teachers and school communities are really acting as a template for other jurisdictions."

For the veteran history teacher, this Grade 12 course is a fitting way to send off graduates because it requires them to think critically about their place, responsibilities and perspectives in modern-day Manitoba.

The 16-page curriculum is broken up into four strands, including identity, land as a relative, relational responsibilities and inherent sovereignty, active agency.

The spirit and intent of the Numbered Treaties, signed between 1871 to 1921, and their ongoing roles are central. The course also prescribes lessons about precolonial confederacies, Métis scrip and contemporary agreements.

It covers a wide range of topics, from historical treaty-making protocols to the reclamation of Indigenous place names.

Throughout the course, students are asked to compare First Nations, Red River Métis and Inuit worldviews with colonial worldviews on the use and possession of land. They also study different ways Indigenous people have sought to defend their rights through legal and economic resistance.

Wyatt Anderson noted that this section — "inherent sovereignty, active agency" — is a stark contrast to textbooks that have long framed Indigenous people as passive actors throughout history.

One of the biggest fallacies of the Numbered Treaties is that First Nations leaders signed a document and got scammed, she said.

"We know from written and oral evidence that First Nations were astute bargainers," she added.

A soft launch of the course is underway across Manitoba. The province is preparing a formal pilot for fall to collect feedback and fine-tune the framework.

What sets this credit apart from others is just how much it is grounded in self-reflection, Wyatt Anderson said.

The opening unit asks students to draw on

their own experiences as they consider the interconnectedness between humans and the lands they inhabit. It calls on students to answer four iconic questions that were often posed by the late justice and senator Murray Sinclair.

Who am I? Where do I come from? Why am I here? Where am I going?

"It's a nice hook," Wyatt Anderson said. "You're starting with a bit of 'heart learning' before you get into 'head learning.'"

The career educator has dedicated the last decade to creating treaty education resources. Before that, she taught history and geography for 20 years at Oscar Lathlin Collegiate in Opaskwayak Cree Nation.

The commission tapped her to draft a senior-years course on treaties during the 2017-18 school year in response to a resolution in favour of bolstering training at the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs.

Teachers had to seek special permission from the province to run sections of that course — which is the foundation of the new credit — between 2018 and 2025.

Wyatt Anderson indicated there are early discussions among provincial officials about whether this course should be required for graduation.

There are currently only three mandatory credits for Grade 12 students. In order to graduate, students must complete at least one English Language Arts and mathematics course as well as phys-ed.

"We believe (this course) will play a crucial role in building a more inclusive and respectful society, grounded in mutual understanding and respect," the curriculum document's introduction states.

A provincial spokesperson echoed those comments in an emailed statement that described the collaborative project as "a significant milestone."

The Seven Oaks School Division's Adult Education Centre is one of the first sites in Winnipeg that is offering the course to students this winter.

"As we, as a community, continue our work towards truth and reconciliation, having Grade 12 students having this opportunity to get a focused course on lands and treaties and understanding their roles and responsibilities is critically important," said Tony Kreml, superintendent of the school division.

The Treaty Relations Commission of Manitoba is planning two days of training for interested teachers in June dedicated to the new course and how to deliver it.

Wyatt Anderson said her team is at the ready to help teachers navigate the contents of the new curriculum and share resources.

Approximately 250 students had taken an early iteration of the course as of June 2025, according to the commission.

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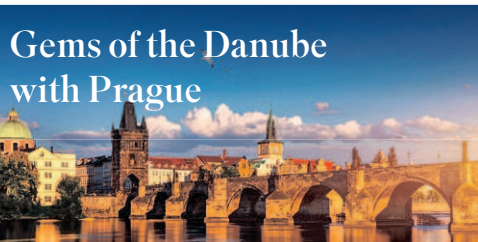
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