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Laurier Culture Camp immerses students in Aboriginal traditions

WATERLOO – Students in Wilfrid Laurier University’s Master of Social Work: Aboriginal Field of Study program are about to embark on a five-day land-based culture camp, where they will learn experientially about traditional Aboriginal worldviews. The camp, taking place from Sept. 9-14, provides a foundation for the teachings and worldviews that will occur in the classroom over the following months of the program.

Laurier’s culture camp is a full-credit course that has been offered since 2006. Students are exposed to Aboriginal values, philosophy, teachings, ceremonies, songs and dances from elders and Laurier professors. Some of the week’s many activities include building a sweat lodge, learning about traditional medicines, completing an overnight fast on the land and building a hand drum, which students will use during their education and in their wholistic healing practice as social workers.

“As the first course in the Aboriginal Field of Study program, the cultural camp lays the groundwork for students to become wholistic practitioners,” said Nick Coady, dean of the Faculty of Social Work.

Over the course of the Aboriginal Field of Study program, students are evaluated on their knowledge and their ability to “carry” and express Aboriginal worldviews and teachings in the context of their social work practice.

“This is where the academy meets traditional teachings,” said Kathy Absolon-King, interim coordinator for Aboriginal Field of Study. “Students come to our program because they want a culturally infused experience.”

Gus Hill, assistant professor of Social Work, says the culture camp is a jumping off point that helps students understand what is discussed in the classroom. “The experience grounds their learning to their whole being – as humans and as social workers,” he said.

About the Aboriginal Field of Study

Students in Laurier’s Master of Social Work: Aboriginal Field of Study program develop an understanding of an Aboriginal Wholistic Healing approach and the application of this knowledge within diverse and generalist practice contexts. This includes practices with individuals and groups, as well as in contexts where community work is undertaken and in policy and research arenas. Students learn about the interrelated and intergenerational impacts of Canadian policies with respect to Aboriginal peoples and the effects of colonization.

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