



NEWS RELEASE



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City collaborates with University to spread the Oki greeting

Given the chance to contribute to City of Lethbridge Reconciliation Week efforts, three University of Lethbridge new media students, working through the University's Agility Program, ran with the opportunity.

Using 3D printers, the group designed desktop gifts depicting the traditional Blackfoot greeting, Oki, as a small stand-up sign. The gifts were then presented to dignitaries coming to the city for Reconciliation Week activities, as well as the mayors who attended the Mid-Sized Cities Mayors' Caucus meeting.

"On Monday, Oki became the official greeting of the City of Lethbridge and we were looking for a way of providing a gift to some dignitaries coming to town that reflected Blackfoot culture and language," says Indigenous Relations Advisor, Perry Stein. "As 2019 is the International Year of Indigenous Languages, we're trying to celebrate that theme as part of Reconciliation Week and also trying to find those opportunities to make the conversation live beyond this week or even this year."

Stein looked to the U of L's Department of New Media, who in turn contacted the Agility Program. He met with new media assistant professor Christine Clark's students (Jared Gyorffy, Connor Kingston and Sara Séfel) on a Friday afternoon and gave them the background they'd need for the project. By Monday morning, the designs were finalized and the pieces were being printed. By Thursday last week, the mayors were receiving their gifts.

"Perry came and talked to the students about the reconciliation logo, the context of the oki sign and they were able to embody their own design effects into the process," says Agility Manager Brandy Old. "It was neat to watch them listen to Perry and the city's reconciliation plan because these were three students, one from Hungary, who don't necessarily have much connection with the Blackfoot story. For them to understand the point of the project, what the reconciliation logo means and to walk through the federal government's Truth & Reconciliation Commission was inspiring."

For Stein, the project was an opportunity to use a community partner to foster relationship building.

“After city council officially adopted the Oki greeting, I think it sparked a curiosity we’d hoped it would and now people are trying to learn more and this was a unique way to keep that learning going,” he says. “Curiosity is a gateway to empathy, understanding, connection and community building. So, the more we can provide these really welcoming approachable opportunities to make connections, the better off we’ll be.”

The students, meanwhile, engaged in a practical exercise that led to a tangible result.

“From the Agility perspective, it is about connecting the student experience in the classroom and moving it beyond to actually having an impact,” says Old. “The students were able to bridge their technical skills to a meaningful project. This project is one example of how U of L students can apply their education to the real world. As advocates for reconciliation, these types of learning experiences connect our students to Indigenous perspectives and knowledge in a meaningful way.”

To view online: <http://www.uleth.ca/unews/article/new-media-students-team-city-lethbridge-oki-initiative>

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