

Land Acknowledgement
OCUFA Executive and Board of Directors Meeting
May 7-8, 2020

My name is Gautam Das and I am serving on the OCUFA Executive as Member-At-Large and as the President of the Lakehead University Faculty Association. I am honoured to be giving the Land Acknowledgement today.

I would like to acknowledge the original custodians of this land and pay my respect to the elders – past, present, and future – for they hold the memories, the traditions, the culture, and the hopes of Indigenous Peoples.

I would also like to recognize that I work on and am speaking to you today from the traditional land of the Fort William First Nation – Signatory to the Robinson Superior Treaty of 1850 and in partnership with the Union of Ontario Indians, Nishnawbe Aski Nation, Grand Council Treaty 3, and the Métis Nation of Ontario.

I was born in India and came to Canada for higher education. My attraction to Canada was the Telecom Industries, like Nortel Network, and JDS Uniphase. I completed my PhD and started my career as a University Teacher at Lakehead University in Thunder Bay. The concept of achieving goals always drove me, so I never had time to see around me! When my children were born, I became part of a childcare centre, called Nanabijou Childcare Centre, located on Lakehead University campus. I served as a Vice-Chair of the Board of Directors of the centre and during my tenure, I had the pleasure of working with and meeting Indigenous members of the community whose children also attended the centre, some of whom I became great friends with. Through these friendships, I had the honour of learning about their customs and traditions, something I had not experienced prior to moving to Canada. As a

result, I became more familiar with the local cultures and began teaching my own children the history of the relationship between Indigenous Peoples and the Canadian state, a history that is full of violence and darkness but also strength and resilience. I believe it is important that our children have a good understanding of the ongoing struggles between the Canadian state and Indigenous Peoples. Having these candid conversations about contemporary relations with my children is how I see us taking the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action to heart and acting on them.

As the President of the Lakehead University Faculty Association, I was involved in developing the university's Equity Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan. Through this process, I have begun to learn about Canada's long history of depriving Indigenous communities' access to territory, land, food, health care, and their cultures. I am also learning about the strength and resilience of Indigenous communities and thank my friends for graciously sharing their culture and stories. As I continue to learn and educate myself about Indigenous communities, I also encourage my kids to learn as well. I believe education is an important aspect of recognizing and respecting Indigenous communities and an integral part of respecting the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action.