



COURTESY OF CBU

# We Are Reconciling

Mi'kmaq-designed and delivered course from Cape Breton U attracts thousands around the world.

“Knowledge provides people and students a freedom – the freedom of choice to decide for themselves what our future could look like.”

– Stephen Augustine

**L**AST YEAR, the Knowledge Keepers of Mi'kma'ki and Cape Breton University worked together to offer a course about Indigenous Mi'kmaq history, culture and knowledge – designed and delivered by the Knowledge Keepers themselves. And they made the course free and open to anyone with an Internet connection.

Ashlee Cunsolo, then Canada Research Chair and associate professor in the departments of nursing and Indigenous studies, and Stephen Augustine, Dean of Unama'ki College and Aboriginal Learning at CBU, proposed the idea in November 2015, created a course syllabus in December and launched it in January 2016.

Augustine and Cunsolo had hoped

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*Stephen Augustine lectures in the CBU classroom, while Bell Aliant broadcasts the course to be live online and permanently available to the public. See [ajlinks.ca/CBUmooc](http://ajlinks.ca/CBUmooc).*

## *A Lesson in Grammar*

*Mi'kmaw = one person*

*Mi'kmaq = group of the people*

*Mi'kma'ki = the land of the Mi'kmaq*

for 200 participants, but the response they received was breathtaking. Twenty-six students completed the course for credit, 5,326 people signed up to participate without receiving credit, 250 paid and wrote coursework to receive a certificate, and thousands upon thousands tuned into watch the weekly classes and participate online from across Canada and 26 other countries. Bell Aliant, the local Internet service provider, reported a peak of 15,000 visitors to the site while the live-stream class aired.

“I mean, we were just flooded,” says Cunsolo. “After the first class, I had so many incoming emails that my inbox shut down. We had server problems, likely because there was just so much traffic coming in.”

Cunsolo and Augustine believe the course was so successful because of the sense of community that developed, timing with the release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's report earlier in 2015, and because the content and delivery-style of the course was unprecedented. Augustine reflects that Indigenous and non-Indigenous students alike communicated how grateful they were for the content, and that nothing like it had ever been available in their educational experience.

“It is all of our responsibility to reach out and learn,” says Cunsolo. The key to our country's reconciliation will be knowledge. More learning opportunities like this course provided by CBU are needed to provide it.

Reconciliation, says Cunsolo, “has to be done together. It's not an Indigenous journey, it's not a non-Indigenous journey, it's everyone together.” **AJ**

Leah Gerber is the associate editor of **AJ**.