Nora Sanders is currently the General Secretary of the United Church of Canada and formerly served as Deputy Minister of Justice of Nunavut. She graduated from Western with a degree in History in 1977.

When I started at Western, I had no intention of majoring in History, but the first year course was so good that I went in that direction and never regretted it. “History” can mean so many things, from ancient times to the generation just ahead of us. It’s all important, but I found myself most interested in stories from the history of Canada, especially in the 20th century. As it turned out, those studies gave me all kinds of background information…. and background understandings…. that have served me well through my career in legal practice, government, and now leadership in the United Church of Canada, (Canada’s home grown church formed by Act of Parliament in 1925).

I remember particularly a seminar with Dr. Peter Neary, where he encouraged each of us to go deeper into the history of our own part of Canada. I think that was part of what made history come alive for me. Starting by finding out how much I didn’t know about the place most familiar to me gave me an understanding of how events of the past remain part of the world we know today. This was helpful to me as I moved to parts of Canada that were new to me, and I think it helped me realize that there is always more to the story than what first meets the eye.

If I could change one thing about my studies at Western, it would be to add something that would have given me insights into the history of First Nations, Inuit, and Metis in our country. When I was at Western, I didn’t go seeking that information, at least in part because I had no idea how much I didn’t know. It wasn’t until I moved to Yellowknife almost a decade after graduating from Western, that I began to realize how little I knew about the history and therefore the current lives of the original peoples of Canada. Of course, it wouldn’t be possible to learn it all in university courses. I have spent most of my adult life learning through my work, communities, and friendships, and still have a long way to go. Times were different in the 1970’s but I hope that history students at Western today are all getting introduced to this important area of our history before they graduate.