



King's honours former Board Chair, lawyer and human rights advocate Douglas Ruck, Mi'kmaw leader and educator Ann Sylliboy and retired Athletics Director Neil Hooper

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The University of King's College will acknowledge the significant accomplishments of three distinguished individuals who have made invaluable contributions to its community at the 236th Encaenia on May 28, 2026. Lawyer, adjudicator and former Chair of the university's Board of Governors Douglas Ruck, KC, BA'72, and educator, advocate and Director of Post Secondary Education for Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewy Ann Sylliboy will receive honorary degrees, both Doctorates of Civil Law (DCL). Neil Hooper, King's beloved Athletics Director for 33 years before retiring in 2024, will be named a Fellow of the College.

Douglas Ruck



Photo: Kevin Finch

Douglas Ruck, BA'72, is a distinguished lawyer, adjudicator, and community leader whose lifelong commitment to justice, equity and public service exemplifies the highest ideals of the University of King's College. Ruck has maintained a deep and enduring connection to his alma mater, graduating as the 1972 valedictorian and serving as Chair of the University's Board of Governors from 2018 to 2025. His leadership as Chair continues to strengthen the institution's culture of inclusion and academic excellence.

Ruck went on to complete his law degree at Dalhousie, launching an illustrious legal career that spans decades. He was the first full-time Chair of the Unified Nova Scotia Labour Board and has held senior positions on numerous boards and tribunals, including the Nova Scotia Labour Standards Tribunal, Civil Service Employee Relations Board, Public Sector Compensation Board and Canada Industrial Relations Board. Ruck also served as Nova Scotia's Ombudsman, where he was instrumental in creating the province's Children's Ombudsman and was a founding director of the Canadian Ombudsman Association. Throughout his career, Ruck has championed alternative dispute resolution and systemic reform, demonstrating integrity, fairness and a commitment to meaningful change.

A lifelong advocate for equity and human rights, Ruck has worked tirelessly to confront systemic anti-Black racism in institutions across Nova Scotia. In recent years, he led independent reviews for both the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Nova Scotia and the Nova Scotia Barristers' Society, producing reports with concrete, actionable recommendations that aim to transform organizational culture and advance justice.

Ruck is the son of social worker and human rights activist Senator Calvin W. Ruck, CM, who also received an honorary Doctorate of Civil Law from King's in 1999.

Beyond the law, Ruck has generously shared his expertise and leadership with a wide range of community organizations, including the Black Cultural Centre of Nova Scotia, East Preston Day Care, Rotary Club of Halifax, Duke of Edinburgh Awards, and Commissionaires Nova Scotia. He also serves as Honorary Colonel of the Princess Louise Fusiliers. Ruck continues to promote the legacy of Canada's No. 2 Construction Battalion, the country's first all-Black military unit, ensuring that the sacrifices and contributions of African Nova Scotians are remembered and honoured. In 2022, he delivered the response to the National Apology for the anti-Black racism experienced by the battalion's 600 men and for the systemic racism that denied them their dignity. Ruck accepted the apology, offered by the Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, on behalf of the descendants of the battalion.

Ruck's career reflects a rare combination of professional excellence, visionary leadership, and unwavering dedication to equity and community service. King's honours him for his accomplishments as a lawyer, adjudicator and civic leader, combined with his enduring contributions to the university.

Ann Sylliboy



Ann Sylliboy is a Mi'kmaw leader, educator and advocate whose work has made a real difference for Indigenous students and communities across Nova Scotia. Born in Unama'ki and living in Eskasoni, Sylliboy brings her lived experience and cultural knowledge to every role she takes on. She has spent more than a decade supporting Mi'kmaw learners as Post-Secondary Consultant with [Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey](#), helping students navigate university and college, including at King's, to find the support they need and succeed in spaces that haven't always been easy to enter.

Before that, Sylliboy worked as a social worker with Mi'kmaw Family and Children's Services, serving communities in some of the most challenging circumstances. She has co-chaired the Aboriginal Apprenticeship Advisory Committee, advocated for the educational interests of Mi'kmaw communities and advised institutions across the province on how to better support Indigenous students, advance Indigeneity, and implement the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission as we work towards reconciliation.

Sylliboy's connection to King's is strong and ongoing. She is a valued member of [Mawaknutma'tnej](#), King's Indigenous Circle, helping guide the university in supporting Indigenous students and initiatives, including in the creation and development of the [Mwio'mio'kuom](#), the on-campus Indigenous Student Centre. She has also consulted on King's [Mi'kmaw Journalism Initiative](#), ensuring that Mi'kmaw students in media programs receive culturally grounded mentorship and opportunities. At the announcement of the initiative in 2022, Sylliboy said, "journalism has an essential role to play in the actions that are required to help with reconciliation. Our youth have an interest in this field of study, to tell our stories, create understanding, hold truth to account and to participate fully in an industry that has typically left Indigenous peoples and issues underrepresented."

What stands out about Sylliboy is her calm, steady leadership and her unwavering dedication to students. She listens, guides and opens doors, and creates spaces where learners can succeed and communities can thrive. King's honours Sylliboy for a career spent building bridges between the Mi'kmaq Nation and post-secondary institutions. The impact of her work is felt across Nova Scotia and has been profound at King's.

Neil Hooper



A lifelong athlete who exemplifies true sportsmanship, Hooper joined King's in 1991 as Athletics Director and Men's Basketball Coach. That year culminated in the first of a sequence of championships for men's soccer, coached by Dave Douglas. Under Hooper's direction, the department continued to flourish: in the four years between 1998 and 2002, the Blue Devils won a total of seven championships between the men's and women's teams. King's later became known as one of the top varsity badminton programs nationwide—2024 marked six straight championship badminton wins combined with four gold

medals at the Canadian Collegiate Athletics Association (CCAA) nationals. In 2024, just before Hooper retired, the university celebrated its most successful season in the history of athletics at King's, with four Atlantic Collegiate Athletics Association (ACAA) championships, two CCAA gold medals and league accolades for numerous players and coaches.

Hooper was also instrumental to the creation of the [Debra Deane Little](#) and Robert Little Academic Awards, generously funded by, and named for King's Chancellor and her husband. In 2019, Hooper was recognized at the highest level of college sport in Canada, with the [CCAA Athletic Director of the Year Award](#). King's honours Hooper for his many contributions to the university, his dedication to student athletes and his involvement in athletics governance across the ACAA and CCAA.

About the University of King's College

Established in 1789, King's College is Canada's oldest chartered university and is associated with Dalhousie University. A small and extraordinarily lively academic community located in Halifax (Kjipuktuk), Nova Scotia, King's is known nationally and internationally for its highly acclaimed interdisciplinary programs in the humanities, including its renowned Foundation Year Program, its professional programs in journalism and its fine arts programs in creative writing.
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