Annual Report for the Indigenous Research Institute

Research

The Indigenous Research Institute was created to encourage synergy in research related to Indigenous peoples and to facilitate community-based projects with indigenous partners. Although the IRI does not have an autonomous research program at the present time, faculty affiliated with it conduct their research independently and share their results through forums and lectures. The institute promotes collaborative research projects and supports its members for internal and external funding.

Teaching

Through four Wednesdays in March 2016, the IRI co-hosted a successful lecture series on Aboriginal issues. Dr. Eldon Yellowhorn (FNST at SFU) introduced and hosted the series and presented one of the lectures. William Lindsay presented his lecture entitled “Dragons and Tricksters: An Intersection of Chinese and First Nations Culture, Philosophy, and Leadership” on March 2. In it he explored the common themes that exist in the two cultures. He also screened “Cedar and Bamboo”, which is a short documentary profiling four descendants of mixed heritage families.

"Two-Spirit and Indigenous Transgender Stories and Photos of Safety, Belonging and Wellbeing" by Cindy Holmes, Bon Fabian, Elizabeth James, Sandy Lambert and Chase Willier was the second presentation on March 9. This group effort reported on a community-based participatory action research project examining the life experience of gender non-conforming individuals living in Vancouver. Issues such as safety, wellbeing, and place dominate their lives and require that they develop novel strategies for belonging.

Professor George Nicholas, from the Department of Archaeology, presented his lecture "Pragmatism at the Intersection of Indigeneity, Cultural Property, and Intangible Heritage" on March 16. His lecture was based on the results of his years long analysis of intellectual property and the overarching influence on the heritage of Indigenous people. As the lead investigator in the IPINCH Project he worked with indigenous leaders and community activists, including those from international and local contexts.

The last lecture on March 23 was entitled "Finding Mile Zero on the Powwow Trail" by Dr. Eldon Yellowhorn. Powwows are essential celebrations that have a very loyal following in Indian Country. This cultural phenomenon is intellectual property that does not conform to the standard discourse on protecting customary knowledge.
Rather than needing protection, the powwow succeeds by sharing the whole complex among first nations. Powwows are the most successful cultural exports from the plains and are responsible for creating a recording industry dedicated to producing this genre of music.

Community

The Indigenous Research Institute was launched on June 21, 2012, to coincide with National Aboriginal Day and our membership list included 54 people representing varied disciplines from across the university. Our membership is comprised of faculty and graduate students, and is intended to facilitate networking among this group of researchers. Included in the terms of reference is goal to promote research in areas related to Indigenous peoples, and to facilitate community-based projects with Indigenous partners.

Media relations are important for reaching out to the broader community. Therefore the Public Affairs and Media Relations office has added several of the IRI Steering Committee members, and regular members, to its SFU Directory of Experts. PAMR regularly reaches out to us for comments to add to its Issues and Experts list and to prepare press releases about first nations subjects that are in the news.

As part of its mandate, the IRI engages in community-oriented programmes that advance the goal of creating space for indigenous students. This year the IRI contributed to the annual Supporting Aboriginal Graduate Enhancement (SAGE) gathering at UBC First Nations House of Learning. This two-day event, March 4/5, brought together elders and indigenous scholars to provide mentorship and inspiration to young scholars.

Continuing

As stated in the terms of reference a steering committee was created for the IRI. With the retirement of Dr. Tom Perry, Dr. Eldon Yellowhorn has assumed the role of Director. Dr. Vicki Kelly, Dr. Mary Ellen Kelm, Dr. annie ross and Mr. William Lindsay make up the rest of the steering committee, which governs the overall direction of the Institute and oversees its management. The steering committee meets regularly to plan Institute activities, such as co-hosting events that fall within our mandate. Initially the steering committee contributed to planning the terms of reference and the application process for the IRI. Since its establishment, its activities include organizing and hosting a series of lectures by SFU faculty and visiting scholars. The Office for Aboriginal Peoples’ website contains a portal to a page for the IRI. The Institute continues to accept new membership applications. Members are encouraged to network and to that end an email list was created so that they can share news or form on-line discussion groups.
Other

Membership in the Indigenous Research Institute, which currently sits at 59 members, has fluctuated since it was created. Some changes in our membership roster result from graduate students who complete their programmes. While we encourage alumni to remain as ‘friends of the IRI’ but this has proven difficult, especially when they lose their access to SFU email network.

[Image of the Indigenous Research Institute logo]

Acclaimed Haida artist Juanita Ens created the Indigenous Research Institute logo, which portrays a salmon egg to convey a message of new beginning and growth.