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 2017, the IRI co-hosted a successful lecture series on Aboriginal issues. Mr. William Lindsay introduced and hosted the first lecture in the series. Bryan Myles, PhD candidate in FCAT, presented his lecture entitled “Encountering Early Photography of Northwest Coast First Nations” on March 7. In it he explored the common themes of mechanical representations and the ethnographic gaze when the camera left the studio. Images captured in photographs that once incited criticism are now regarded as artifacts of controversy and a hologram for online representations.

Dr. Eldon Yellowhorn introduced and hosted Katherine Nichols, PhD candidate in First Nations Studies by special arrangement, on March 14. Her presentation ”An Investigation at the Brandon Indian Residential School” reported on a community-based participatory action research project examining the cemeteries associated with this school. Issues such as surveying the grounds to identify unmarked graves using near surface remote sensing techniques, reclaiming the names and identities of the children buried there, and developing strategies with the first nation to best commemorate its legacy.

Professor Marianne Ignace, from the departments of Linguistics and First Nations Studies, presented her lecture ”Reclaiming Story, Sense of Place and Deep History with the Help of Digital Media” on March 21. Her lecture emphasized the potential and overarching influence of digital media on the languages of Indigenous people. As the lead investigator of a SSHRC funded project on revitalizing languages, she related ongoing work with indigenous leaders and community activists across the province to push back against the loss of ancient speech.

The last lecture on March 28 was entitled ”Indigenous Community Enterprises in the Andes: Challenges and Opportunities” by Dr. Gretchen Ferguson. She discussed her work with several indigenous communities in Peru and Bolivia to draw
attention to their struggles, which Aboriginal people in Canada would find familiar. Whether the enterprise is cultural ecotourism or boutique berry wines, people in the Andes are looking for ways to interact with the global community but on their own terms. They too wish to engage with modern economies to improve their quality of life without sacrificing their cultures and languages.

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 SFU Harbour Centre. The 15th Annual Indigenous Graduate Student Symposium was two-day event, March 10/11, which 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 and the core members continue to be involved. Currently Dr. Vicki Kelly, Dr. Mary Ellen Kelm, Dr. annie ross and make up 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 a 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. However, Mr. William Lindsay has announced that he is stepping down as Director of the Office for Aboriginal Peoples to concentrate on completing his PhD. Moreover, Dr. Eldon
Yellowhorn has been Chair of First Nations Studies since 2012, and Director of the IRI since 2014, and will be taking Administration Leave soon. Therefore, the subject of passing on the directorship and recruiting new faculty to the steering committee will be a priority.

Other

Membership in the Indigenous Research Institute, which currently sits at 64 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’ this has proven difficult, especially when they lose their access to SFU email network.

The IRI is attracting attention from other academic institutions in Canada and the U.S. that wish to start their own versions. Dr. Yellowhorn received an invitation from Lakehead University in Thunder Bay, ON, to address their symposium on March 8 about the approaches and benefits of such an Indigenous Research Institute. On May 31, Mr. William Lindsay and Dr. Yellowhorn played host to Dr. Douglas Medin from Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois. His queries were on how their university could establish a community-focused Indigenous Research Institute on their campus.

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