Research

The Indigenous Research Institute was created to encourage synergy in research about Indigenous peoples across disciplinary boundaries and to facilitate community-based projects with Indigenous partners. Although the IRI does not have an autonomous research program at the present time, our faculty affiliates share the results of their studies through forums and lectures. The institute promotes collaborative research projects and supports its members for internal and external funding.

Teaching

Through February and April 2015, the IRI co-hosted, with the Office for Aboriginal Peoples and the Vancity Office of Community Engagement, the second annual lecture series on Aboriginal issues. Dr. Eldon Yellowhorn (FNST at SFU) introduced the speakers in this series.

On February 3rd Elisa Vandenborn, a PhD candidate, shared her insights about her research on child welfare policies in Canada and Scandinavia in her lecture, “The problem of the Individualistic Self in the Overrepresentation of Aboriginal Children in the Child Protection System in British Columbia.” The Department of First Nations Studies, with a grant from the Dean of Arts and Social Sciences, invited the distinguished Navajo weaver, Marilou Schulz, to visit the Burnaby campus and conduct weaving workshops. On February 17th she co-presented, with Dr. annie ross, “Land, Land, Forever, For All to Exist: Environmental-Spiritual Impacts of Mining on Indigenous Lands.” On March 3rd Dr. Anke Kessler disclosed the data she collected from her study of Indian reserves in “Privatization of Reserve Land: Can we expect a de Soto effect from the First Nations Private Property Ownership Act.” Dr. Rob McMahon followed on March 17th with his presentation “First Nations Innovation and Decolonization using ICT.” In order to demonstrate the efficacy of communication technology he was joined, via video-conference,
by two researchers in Moncton, N.B., and one person from the Listuguj Mi'gmaq First Nation in Québec. The last event in our speaker series on April 14th brought two linguistic researchers from Kamloops, Drs. Marianne and Ron Ignace, who related their efforts in working with the language spoken by the Secwepemc people. In their illustrated lecture, “Yiri7 re Stsq’ey’s-kucw: Secwepemc Oral History and Indigenous Laws,” they discussed accounts of legal principles embedded in their traditional narratives about social responsibility.

We fulfill our stated goal of facilitating communications between Indigenous communities and the University by hosting events that construct the nexus where various groups find common purpose. The IRI co-sponsored, in partnership with the UBC Faculty of Education and others, the 13th Annual Indigenous Graduate Student Symposium at SFU Harbour Centre on March 7th. This one-day gathering focused on the theme of “Hands Back, Hands Forward: Indigenizing the Academy Through Relationships” and brought graduate students from universities across the province to this forum to compare their research. The keynote speaker was Dr. David Newhouse, Chair of Indigenous Studies at Trent University, who was joined by Dr. Ethel Gardener, Elder in Residence at SFU, and Dr. Amy Parent of UBC.

Community

The Indigenous Research Institute was launched on June 21, 2012, to coincide with National Aboriginal Day. Our charter membership list includes fifty-four people, comprised of faculty and graduate students, representing varied disciplines from across the University. The IRI is intended to facilitate networking among this group of researchers, and those who have joined since. Included in the terms of reference is the 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 – now called The University Communications Office - has added several of the IRI Steering Committee members, and regular members, to its SFU Directory of Experts. The Communications Office 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. This was noted by media outlets that sought our comments on current affairs affecting Aboriginal people, such as the release of the summary report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Continuing

As stated in the terms of reference a steering committee, consisting of Dr. Eldon Yellowhorn (Director), Dr. Tom Perry (Associate Director), Dr. Vicki Kelly, Dr. Mary Ellen Kelm, Dr. annie ross and Mr. William Lindsay, was created to govern 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 e-mail list was created so that they can share news or form on-line discussion groups.

**Other**

Introducing the IRI to the university community and beyond entails finding the right media to convey an image of our purpose. We often receive invitations to attend events, such as academic conferences or the university’s Open Houses, and to participate in public events. Previously we have commissioned a logo, illustrate to affix to our communications, but we also needed a way to make an impact. Visualizing our terms of reference to inform the public persuaded us to create an IRI banner that makes an appealing statement of our Institute.

The IRI logo by acclaimed First Nations artist, Juanita Ens, is seen at the top of this memo letterhead. The image portrays a salmon egg to convey a message of new beginning and growth. An protuberant eye expresses learning through research and discovering new knowledge.