Research

The purpose of the Indigenous Research Institute is to promote research in areas relate to Indigenous peoples and to facilitate community-based projects with indigenous partners, however it does not have an autonomous research program at the present time. Instead, faculty affiliated with the IRI carry out their research independently and use it as a forum to share their results. The institute promotes collaborative research projects and supports its members for internal and external funding.

Teaching

Elucidating the conditions of Indigenous peoples is the purpose of research and reportage. Periodically current affairs bring special attention to issues involving Indigenous peoples, which in turn captures the attention of the general public. One such opportunity arose with the ‘Idle No More’ movement. In response to the public interest expressed about it the IRI hosted a ‘teach-in’ on January 18, 2013. Dr. Eldon Yellowhorn and Mr. William Lindsay led a discussion/presentation that addressed many of the concerns that informed the narrative illustrated in the media. The response from the university community was overwhelming, which suggested a vacant niche that is underserved.

The IRI, in cooperation with the Office for Aboriginal People and the Department of First Nations Studies, co-sponsored the Residential School Education Week in mid-February. Events included presentations by Marie Wilson, Commissioner with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and Dr. John Milloy of Trent University, author of A National Crime: Residential Schools in Canada. Dr. Eldon Yellowhorn and Mr. William Lindsay led a forum, which was open to the university community, on residential schools that included a panel of survivors.

On April 30, 2013, the IRI, in cooperation with the Department of First Nations Studies and the iPinCH Project, co-hosted a Moriori scholar, Maui Solomon, and a New Zealand archaeologist, Susan Thorpe, who were visiting SFU from Rekohu, the Chatham Islands/New Zealand. Their seminar presentation reported on their efforts to record, study and protect Moriori cultural heritage, with special emphasis on the core themes of indigenous methods and ethics.
Community

The Indigenous Research Institute was launched on June 21, 2012, to coincide with National Aboriginal Day. By our inaugural meeting our membership list had grown to 54 people representing varied disciplines from across the university. Our membership reflects the university community and is open to faculty and graduate students, so creating networks among researchers whose common research agenda intersect with these goals is a priority for this institute. Among its terms of reference is 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. The press release about the creation of the IRI yielded a live, in-studio interview on The Early Edition, the CBC Vancouver morning show. Since then various members have been contacted by local and national media outlets to share their expertise and to contribute information and opinions on current affairs.

Continuing

As stated in the terms of reference a steering committee, consisting of Dr. Eldon Yellowhorn (Acting 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 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. There remains some work to be done, for example, we will continue our search for a logo that can adorn Institute letterhead.

Other

At the inaugural meeting a questionnaire was distributed to those in attendance that solicited suggestions about the meaning and purpose of the Institute. Opportunity to network was the number one response to the question, “What does an ‘Indigenous’ Research Institute mean to you?” Many respondents felt there was a knowledge pool at SFU that was not recognized because the researchers were distributed across the university and no coherent forum to share their research. The IRI can be the channel where scholars working in isolation conducting studies on similar topics can share their results and experiences. Participants felt that opening lines of communication that give voice to the community and being the nexus of community connections be
prominent motives for the Institute. Generally there was considerable support for the idea of foregrounding Indigenous research in a collaborative environment that emphasizes the interdisciplinary nature of academe.

Respondents to the question, “What can an ‘Indigenous’ Research Institute do for you regarding research?” pointed out that it could be an important interface between the university and the wider community and raise the profile of SFU among first nations. Fostering connections, collaborations and cross-fertilization, as well as opportunities for mentorship between junior and senior scholars, were cited as features of the institute that sustained effective scholarly activities.

The final question was: “What potential Institute ‘activities’ would you like to see happen?” It received many helpful suggestions, including a Speaker Series, a refereed journal series, workshops, seminars, and community gathering. The one theme that repeatedly got mention was the need to share the results of scholarly research within the university and with First Nations and the wider community.