Persistence pays off

Major grant helps preserve First Nations languages

B.C. is the hub of First Nations language diversity in Canada," says Marianne Ignace, director of SFU’s First Nations Language Centre (FNLC). Of Canada’s 60 First Nations languages, 30 are found only in B.C. and are among the most complex intellectual structures on Earth. The 60 languages comprise eight separate language “families” in which the languages are descended from common ancestor languages. Of those eight language families, six are in B.C., with some as distinctive from each other as Japanese is from English. "But First Nations languages in B.C. and Yukon Territory are in a critical state of decline," says Ignace, a professor of linguistics and First Nations Studies. She has made it her life’s work to collaborate with West Coast First Nations to find ways of preserving and teaching their languages. It’s a daunting task. For many of the languages there are only a few speakers still living. But a major new initiative led by Ignace and funded with a $2.5-million project grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) presents fresh hope for the region’s Indigenous languages and the heritages they help preserve. The seven-year project is a partnership between the FNLC and 22 First Nations community groups in B.C. and Yukon dedicated to maintaining and revitalizing Indigenous dialects. The project has four goals:

1. To continue documenting the languages. Community teams will work with academics to record stories as told by the elders and to gather information on local place names, as well as ecological and biological information.

2. To preserve linguistic integrity by determining the languages’ grammatical and phonological forms, and developing feasible ways of assessing proficiency and fluency.

3. To collaborate with the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Centre for Hellenic Studies at SFU to build cool apps for second-language learners that will help them tackle grammar.

4. To work with SFU Library Services to develop and maintain long-term safe storage and retrieval systems for language data that respects the communities’ ownership of that information.

The project will involve 10 faculty members from SFU’s departments of Linguistics, First Nations Studies, and Psychology, and from the Intellectual Property Issues in Cultural Heritage (IPiCH) Project.

This project exemplifies SFU’s community-engaged strategic vision," says SFU VP Research Mario Pinto. "It emphasizes building close community connections, and fostering interdisciplinary research and knowledge mobilization while acknowledging and respecting Aboriginal peoples and cultures.

"And by training Aboriginal graduate students and engaging Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal researchers from multidisciplinary fields within First Nations communities, it also advances the objectives of SFU’s Aboriginal Strategic Plan."
New meeting spaces for Aboriginal students

With the growth of Aboriginal enrolment at SFU, the Indigenous Student Centre (ISC) is planning a move this spring from the Maggie Benston Centre into more spacious accommodations on the lower west floor of the Academic Quadrangle (AQ).

The 1600-square-foot space will include an Elders’ room, offices for the ISC and First Nations Student Association (FNSA), and study and meeting space. The Elders’ room will accommodate smudging, a traditional practice among some prairie and eastern First Nations that uses smoke from sage or sweet grass for spirit-cleansing.

ISC director Jenna LaFrance says, “Our new centre will welcome not only First Nations, Métis and Inuit students, but all SFU students, staff and faculty interested in meeting Indigenous students and community members to learn more about our diverse and dynamic peoples’ histories and stories.”

EDUCATION PLANS NEW INDIGENOUS SPACE

Ron Johnston, director of the Office of Indigenous Education in the Faculty of Education, recently helped secure a $100,000 donation from Local 170 of the United Association of Plumbers and Pipefitters.

The faculty will use the funds to develop a much-needed Indigenous gathering space in the education building on the Burnaby campus. “We need a location where Aboriginal students can be supported and where community members can visit,” says Johnston, who notes that the faculty has one of the largest concentrations of Aboriginal graduate students in the university.

He envisions an Aboriginal “home away from home” hub, with offices as well as meeting, social and study space. It would include an outdoor area where students and the broader community could congregate for ceremonial practices such as smudging, or to enjoy a garden filled with traditional plants and herbs.

OAP SITE GETS NEW LOOK

The information is the same, but it’s easier to find now that the OAP website has been updated using the newest SFU template. You’ll find everything you need to know about OAP activities and projects at sfu.ca/aboriginalpeoples. At sfu.ca/aboriginalgrad you’ll quickly find information about on-campus support, indigenous research projects, funding programs and upcoming workshops and events.

SFU has been pulling out all the stops to improve its Aboriginal student recruitment and retention. As a result, last fall saw one of the university’s largest Aboriginal student enrolments, with more than 118 new students. In all, there are approximately 628 Aboriginal students studying at SFU, of which approximately 15 per cent are graduate students, a break-even point that is similar to the rest of the student body.

“This is a group of students that may have struggled to get here, and once they are admitted to SFU we have a vested interest in seeing them succeed,” says Nancy Johnston, executive director of SFU Student Affairs.

“We have been trying to seriously support Indigenous student retention through the Indigenous Student Centre and programs such as the Peer Counsels, Indigenous tutoring and the Elders program,” says Johnston.

“Additionally, we’re exploring whether we might bring a healer to campus to offer traditional healing practices.”

The department has also added a second Aboriginal recruiter.

“Just the commitment to understanding Aboriginal students’ needs goes deeper still. “In order to make SFU a welcoming place for Indigenous students, people at SFU need to understand Aboriginal history, and most of us weren’t afforded that through our schooling,” says Johnston. That’s why all Student Services staff are encouraged to undertake an eight-week online self-training program in Indigenous cultural competency.

While SFU has always attracted Aboriginal students transferring from college, Johnston says the secondary school pathway is catching up. As well, SFU’s Aboriginal Bridge program, which prepares Aboriginal high school graduates and mature students for post-secondary education, provides a steady flow of students.

“All of these pathways,” says Johnston, “have been enhanced by the new Aboriginal admissions policy that ensures capable individuals get the chance to study at SFU.”

SFU marks Truth and Reconciliation Week

During SFU’s Truth and Reconciliation activities last September, criminology professor Brenda Morrison and her father Neil Morrison tried carving Isadore Charters’ Residential School Healing Pole. Photo: Fiona Burrows

Aboriginal enrolment jumps
Graduate Aboriginal Scholarships attract keen scholars

Each year, SFU selects two Aboriginal graduate students to receive Graduate Aboriginal Entrance Scholarships worth up to $54,000 each over three years. The award criteria stipulates that candidates must have Aboriginal ancestry, a minimum grade-point average of 3.5 (out of a possible 4.0), and have demonstrated outstanding achievement, with particular emphasis on intellectual ability, originality and ability in research. The successful applicants for the 2013 scholarships were graduate students Kyle Bobiwash and Nicole Muir, whose research aims to help others.

HELPING BLUEBERRY FARMERS INCREASE YIELD

Kyle Bobiwash, of the Mississauga First Nation, is using his three-year, $54,000 SFU Graduate Aboriginal Entrance scholarship to further his PhD research into enhancing blueberry pollination. “All of my research is for the farmers,” says Bobiwash. “I want to inject a bit of cool science and make a difference—to make farming more profitable and ecologically sustainable.”

Bobiwash has been interested in science since his early childhood when he scoured swamps and creeks near his home to collect aquatic animals and plants. During his undergraduate degree, he conducted the first analysis of the diverse public health-delivery models among First Nations in Canada. He then went on to analyze the delivery and outcomes of the Aboriginal Diabetes Initiative across Canada, to support the program’s renewal. He eventually combined his love of the outdoors with science at the Cool Climate Oenology and Viticulture Institute in Southern Ontario. There he blended agriculture, chemistry, entomology and ecology while working alongside winemakers and grape farmers from around the globe. Bobiwash discovered an interest in blueberry pollination during work for his master’s degree at McGill University. He was exploring how to manage multiple blueberry pollinator species, such as honeybees, bumble bees and leafcutter bees in the fields to increase yield. He chose SFU for his PhD because bee expert Elizabeth Elle, professor of biological sciences, also has an interest in transferring knowledge to the public. Together, they’re working with local farmers to determine how enhancing farm habitat and agricultural management techniques can improve blueberry pollination.

“Pollinators are declining globally, so designing farm systems that encourage pollinator diversity and provide multiple year-round resources for bees is important,” says Bobiwash. “Since B.C.’s blueberry crop is the second largest by region in the world, his research has the potential to help B.C.’s farming community and economy.”

“Incorporating natural habitat, such as wildflowers and flowering shrubs within and around fields, will be key for agriculture going forward,” says Bobiwash. “It allows us to maintain farm biodiversity and the interactions between species, such as pollination and pest-predator control, that are beneficial to farmers.”

Master’s student Nicole Muir is investigating and addressing gaps in clinical care for Aboriginal children in the foster-care system. She worries that mainstream assessment tools may not be capturing healthy Aboriginal parenting practices.

HELPING ABORIGINAL CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE

Nicole Muir, a member of the Métis Nation of Saskatchewan, earned bachelor degrees in both arts and education years ago, but then found she didn’t want to work in a classroom. Instead, she spent more than 15 years as a resource worker, youth worker and traditional counselor with Aboriginal communities across Canada.

“A few years ago, I worked as a family home visitor at an Aboriginal child protection agency,” says Muir. “I helped support Aboriginal families to keep their children at home. That’s when I realized that I wanted to work specifically with Aboriginal children who were in foster care.”

She quit her job and returned to York University to study psychology. For her honours thesis, she interviewed two elders and a grandmother about traditional Aboriginal child-rearing practices.

At SFU, Muir is using her $30,000 two-year graduate entrance scholarship to investigate and address gaps in clinical care for Aboriginal children in the foster-care system. “It’s a goal that addresses a dire need,” she says. “With the support and guidance of the Aboriginal community I’m really interested in doing pragmatic research that focuses on strengths,” says Muir, “because much of the research that has been done in the past with Aboriginal communities has been deficit-based.”

First Nations filmmaker wins kudos

First Nations filmmaker Kelvin Redvers, an SFU alumnus, picked up his second Webster Award last fall, for Best Feature—Television. The Webster awards recognize the best in B.C. journalism each year. Redvers, the producer of CTV-BC’s First Story, an Aboriginal current affairs program, won the award for a Home for Edgar. The feature examines homelessness versus social housing from a cost/benefit perspective. Redvers joined CTV as a producer just three months after graduating from SFU in June 2010 with a Bachelor of Fine Arts. He has since produced 12 episodes for First Story over three seasons. In 2011, his feature Black Blood—Tainted Land, Dying Caribou, about unknown oil spills in northeastern British Columbia, won the Webster Award for Science, Technology, Environment and Health. His shows have also won three RTDNA awards from the Association of Electronic Journalists. The awards honour the best in Canadian radio and TV journalism. In addition to his work for CTV, Redvers is working on an independent short film, Rattlesnake, which he funded through Indiegogo, an online crowdfunding site.

His previous short, The Dancing Cop—a musical about native people and police officers—premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival last year. He is currently working on his first feature film. “My ultimate goal,” says Redvers, “is to become an established feature filmmaker, working in the mainstream film industry.”

SFU alumnus Kelvin Redvers, right, accepts his 2013 Webster’s award.
New EMBA supports new economic reality

The new Executive MBA in Aboriginal Business and Leadership from SFU’s Beedie School of Business is attracting significant interest—and not just among First Nations communities. The 33-month program’s first cohort of 27 students began their studies in fall 2012 and by April last year, BC Business Magazine was touting the program as one of B.C.’s 10 most significant innovations.

The EMBA draws attention to Aboriginal business and offers a credited program for established Aboriginal leaders, entrepreneurs and others working with Aboriginal communities. “This program responds to a change in B.C.’s business environment,” says program director Mark Selman. “First Nations have access to resources they’ve never had in the past. They have money to invest and opportunities; businesses are realizing that in terms of managing their risks, they need to work with First Nations.”

Students explore contemporary business issues and knowledge while recognizing that traditional Aboriginal protocols and ways of understanding the world are growing and changing as new generations assume responsibility for moving forward.

The program includes the core concepts and knowledge found in most MBA programs, but recognizes other forms of knowledge and ways of knowing are important. In July, the Industry Council on Aboriginal Business awarded Selman its Aboriginal Business Champion award for his leadership and best practices in Aboriginal engagement and business relationship development.

The EMBA students, who all have diverse professional backgrounds and management experience, have become ambassadors for improving the school’s engagement with First Nations communities.

“As a result, we’re being invited to develop programs and research with a variety of First Nations communities,” says Ulrike Radermacher, associate director of graduate programs for the Beedie School of Business. The First Nations community of Bella Bella, for example, requested assistance in preparing for its 2014 commemorative travel canoe voyage, while Kanaka Bar First Nation requested help with a comprehensive management plan for a run-of-the-river project.

The EMBA program has also attracted international interest. One of the world’s foremost authorities on First Nations economic development, professor Stephen Cornell, co-director of the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development, joined the program last fall to teach a short course on strategic factors in Aboriginal business and governance.

“We’re also developing a partnership with the only other Aboriginal MBA program we know of—at the University of Waikato, Tauri College in New Zealand,” says Radermacher. They plan to co-develop case studies in Aboriginal business, organize student exchanges, and perhaps teach courses together.

IPinCH—helping Indigenous partners drive research

When the Stó:lo Nation in B.C.’s Lower Mainland received repatriated ancestral remains from the UBC Lab of Archaeology, the event sparked a quest to discover how the Stó:lo could work with scientists to aid the repatriation. Since then, the Stó:lo have been working with IPinCH—the Intellectual Property Issues in Cultural Heritage (IPinCH) project. They’re helping to develop research protocols for scientists working with the nation’s ancestral human remains.

IPinCH, a global project led by SFU archaeologist George Nicholas, collaborates with Indigenous communities to protect their cultural heritage and intellectual property.

Last fall, IPinCH won a $50,000 Partnership Award from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). The award recognizes the project for its unprecedented use of a methodology that lets Indigenous community partners, such as the Stó:lo, drive the research.

“IPinCH has been able to demonstrate that making Indigenous communities full and equal partners in the research process enhances, not restricts or limits, the kind of research that can be done,” says Nicholas.

When the Stó:lo project is complete, it will have produced a set of policies and recommendations for researchers interested in working with archaeological remains from the traditional Stó:lo territory.

“The researchers will be entering into a partnership that defines how the research may proceed, how the data may be used, how the Stó:lo would benefit and what, if any, limitations would be placed on the publication of data,” says Nicholas.

He sees it as a model that other Indigenous communities can draw on to guide how scientists conduct research with human remains, and to ensure that local community values are respected.

Since IPinCH’s inception five years ago, 52 scholars and 26 partnering universities and organizations have been involved in 15 global community-based initiatives, case studies and special projects related to intellectual property concerns about cultural heritage.
Bill Reid Centre showcases First Nations history

Interested to know how First Nations carvers would have carved a double-finned killer whale in Masset in 1880? Or what a traditional Coast Salish long house may have looked like? You can find out by checking the Bill Reid Centre’s growing database of digitized photographs, drawings and other works that document the history of Northwest Coast art, culture and society. The images are held in the SFU Library: at.sfu.ca/bfLCB

An SFU research centre affiliated with the Department of First Nations, the Bill Reid Centre is in the midst of digitizing and cataloguing an enormous photo collection amassed by centre director and archaeologist/museologist George MacDonald. He has collected and photographed thousands of images of Northwest Coast art and culture in the field, and in museums and archives around the world.

The centre is also digitizing thousands of photos shot by New York photographer Adelaide de Menil, who in the 1960s documented villages and monuments on the Northwest Coast before the forest reclaimed them. As well, there are photos taken by the first Europeans to bring a camera into the villages.

“The centre’s uniqueness lies not only in its attempt to be comprehensive, but also in its efforts to engage First Nations communities and add a native voice to images that were predominantly taken by Europeans and Americans in times of cultural trauma,” says Bryan Myles, who manages the centre. Last fall the centre completed a two-year project with the Songhees Nation to support the cultural component of its new Wellness Centre in Esquimalt. The centre conducted research and collected historical images of the Songhees people and their culture. “We found about 500 images, from views of Victoria’s inner harbour and their village there in the mid-1800s, to tools and cultural artifacts,” says Myles.

The collection is available in a virtual museum on the Songhees Community portal: http://at.sfu.ca/min4a.

The centre has an agreement with ‘Ksan Historical Village in Hazelton, B.C. to digitize images taken between 1972 and 1975 when the Gitxsan people were revitalizing their art and culture. The images represent a range of traditional activities and performances. The centre has also been working with communities, the Bill Reid Centre’s project with the Songhees: An Aboriginal woman and her children are selling bottled milk and other liquids on the Old Songhees Reserve in downtown Victoria, just prior to the Songhees’ relocation to Esquimalt. Photo circa 1911. Photo credit: B.C. Archive Aaa-00954

A photo from the Bill Reid Centre’s project with the Songhees: An Aboriginal woman and her children are selling bottled milk and other liquids on the Old Songhees Reserve in downtown Victoria, just prior to the Songhees’ relocation to Esquimalt. Photo circa 1911. Photo credit: B.C. Archive Aaa-00954

Governor General honours SFU First Nations student

Cherry Smiley is working passionately to end violence against Aboriginal women and girls, and eliminate prostitution.

As a proud Makama’panuus (Thompson) and Dine’ (Navajo) woman, she doesn’t boast about her accomplishments. But she is coming to terms with the accolades she is receiving after winning the Governor General’s Award in Commemoration of the Person’s Case. She is one of two youth recipients. The awards celebrate the five women whose work led to the historic legal decision to have the word “person” declared to include both women and men. The award recognizes individuals who have shown similar courage and determination to significantly advance equality for women and girls in Canada.

A graduate student in SFU’s School for the Contemporary Arts, Smiley hopes the award will serve as a platform to further her cause. She is a frequent speaker at home and abroad on issues of violence against Aboriginal women and girls, prostitution and equality for women and girls.

The centre has an agreement with ‘Ksan Historical Village in Hazelton, B.C. to digitize images taken between 1972 and 1975 when the Gitxsan people were revitalizing their art and culture.

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She has volunteered with the Vancouver Rape Relief and Women’s shelter and with the Aboriginal Women’s Action Network. She also co-facilitated the Sisterwork program at the Urban Native Youth Association, which engages young Aboriginal women and girls in discussing violence, creating art and giving presentations to local communities.

In 2012 she co-founded Indigenous Women Against the Sex Industry, a volunteer group working to educate the public about prostitution as an expression of colonialism and male violence. The group is also advocating for progressive social policies that will abolish prostitution.

Smiley, 30, didn’t start university until she was in her early ‘20s, earning a BA in sociology and anthropology. “At the end of that I was introduced to feminist theory and gained a vocabulary to explain the circumstances of my life as an Aboriginal woman, and the issues that have happened to me and my family,” she says.

She also began to realize the power that art can have in creating social change. She enrolled in Emily Carr University, where she studied photography and video. At SFU, she is pursuing a Master of Fine Arts with the intention of continuing on to a PhD and a career as a fine arts professor.

Cherry Smiley protested at the Supreme Court of Ottawa last summer during the Bedford case, which argued that Canada’s prostitution laws are unconstitutional.
**Feature**

**Reaching out to Aboriginal youth**

SFU instructors and students are engaged in a variety of community activities that are making a difference to Aboriginal children and youth.

**A TASTE OF SUMMER CAMP AT SFU**

Last summer, in partnership with the Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre (VAFC), SFU introduced its first summer camp for Aboriginal youth. Each day for one week the VAFC sent kids aged six to 12 years to SFU to experience the university and the variety of camps available.

“We wanted to give the kids a taste of our summer camps and what it's like to be at the university,” says Annette Yung, an SFU student who has worked for SFU Summer Camps for the past seven years.

She organized a variety of activities, from mini-university classes in science and media communication, to sports games, computer classes, swimming and a mountain madness hike where they learned to build outdoor shelters. “They loved it,” says Yung, who is already planning activities for this year’s Aboriginal summer camp.

**SFU VOLUNTEERS HELP PEERS AT THE NATIVE EDUCATION COLLEGE**

Two days a week, SFU volunteers visit the Native Education College (NEC) in Vancouver to tutor college students in math or to help adult-education students who are working toward a Grade 12 diploma.

The volunteer tutoring program, now in its fourth year, is an outreach program of the SFU Department of Mathematics and is organized through SFU’s IRMACS Centre and the NEC.

The four tutors include SFU senior mathematics lecturer Randall Pyke and three students from the departments of mathematics and physics.

The program is also open to students from the local Aboriginal community. “I’ve had some inquiries from parents wanting to send their youth here for tutoring, as well as from some students in the ACCESS pre-trades program and the First Nations Employment Society,” says Lillian Prince, NEC’s program coordinator, Aboriginal Basic Education.

“Students tell us this volunteer program helped them through their courses,” she says. “I think it’s great—it really encourages students to stick with their math courses.”

**MATHEMATICS THROUGH ABORIGINAL STORYTELLING**

Just two per cent of B.C.’s Aboriginal student population completes Principles of Mathematics 12, a compulsory entrance prerequisite for many post-secondary programs in B.C. In an effort to change that statistic, SFU’s IRMACS Centre developed and operates the Match Catcher outreach project to help Aboriginal students improve their success in school mathematics programs.

The project incorporates elements of Aboriginal storytelling, traditions and culture into mathematics lessons, and promotes earlier teaching of basic skills and problem-solving.

Since establishing the project in 2011, SFU senior math instructor Veselin Jungic has created five animated videos that introduce math concepts in an Aboriginal context to young students.

Small Number and the Salmon Harvest is the latest video in the animated series about Small Number, a young Aboriginal boy whose adventures help students understand math is all around them—in shapes, patterns, measurements and abstract thinking.

Veselin and First Nations student volunteers from SFU have traveled throughout B.C. over the past two years to share their excitement for math with more than 2000 students in 50 schools. In 2014, Jungic is booked into June to visit schools every week in towns such as Saanich, Kamloops, Port Alberni, Fort Langley and Squamish.

“There is so much demand for this,” says Jungic. “We’re not teaching mathematics but the community seems to need someone to say a few words about mathematics and scholarship in general, so that’s what we do.”

He has also organized publication of three bilingual booklets about Small Number in a combination of English plus Blackfoot, Squamish and the latest, Nisga’a, published last November. Another book, in Sliammon, is underway. Math Catcher sponsors include SFU’s IRMACS Centre, the Faculty of Science, the Office for Aboriginal Peoples, and the Department of Mathematics, as well UBC’s Department of Mathematics and The Pacific Institute for Mathematical Sciences.

**MATH AND SCIENCE WORKSHOP A HIT**

For the past three years, Math Catcher has hosted a daylong fall workshop at the Burnaby campus to introduce Aboriginal high school students to hands-on science and math.

The goal is to encourage these youth to consider a post-secondary education in Science, Technology, Engineering or Mathematics (STEM courses). Last October, the popular event attracted 60 students and their teachers. They toured the campus and attended presentations featuring mathematicians and word puzzles in Cree, modular origami, 3D printing and actuarial mathematics.

“We try to introduce mathematics in a cultural context,” says organizer Jungic. “We have specially designed materials that demonstrate mathematical concepts using Aboriginal languages and elements of Aboriginal traditions and cultures.” The five presenters included the first Aboriginal Canadian to earn a PhD in mathematics—Edward Doustiffe from the First Nations University of Canada.

Sponsors of the free workshop included the IRMACS Centre at SFU, the SFU Office for Aboriginal Peoples, the SFU Department of Mathematics and the Pacific Institute for the Mathematical Sciences (PIMS).

MathCatcher.irmacs.sfu.ca
Science with a sense of place

Along B.C.’s beautiful Central Coast, foamy chocolate-brown streams spill out into the ocean. The phenomenon is characteristic of this coast, and scientists and local First Nations residents are trying to determine how these streams flowing out of the area’s bog forests influence local marine life.

Their work is done through the SFU-based Hakai Network for Coastal People, Ecosystems and Management, in collaboration with the Tula Foundation’s Hakai Institute. Together, they’re developing environmental research programs that are strongly rooted in the area’s distinct marine, terrestrial and cultural environments.

“We’re really focused on the notion of place-based science,” says network director Ken Lertzman, an SFU professor of resource and environmental management. “We’re very interested in questions that have broad foundations but that grow out of this particular place.”

The Hakai’s first research program is one example. Lertzman says scientists suspect brown stream water may play an important role in marine nearshore productivity and diversity. “These ecosystems are important in a social and cultural context, and in terms of the response to climate change,” he says.

Another project, on kelp-forest ecosystem dynamics, has important implications for First Nations access to resources. The Heiltsuk are very interested because the kelp forest influences a wide range of resources that are important to them—from fish living in the kelp forest, to sea otters and shellfish.

There is also a cultural landscapes program, a collaboration between SFU archaeologist Dana Lepofsky, University of Victoria ethnobotanist Nancy Turner, and the Heiltsuk people. They are conducting both archaeological and ethno biological research to determine how First Nations people historically managed the local natural resources to increase productivity and, at the same time, protect them.

“In the last year we’ve really consolidated our relationships with our First Nations partners, and expanded the groups we’re working with beyond our original partners,” says Lertzman. “I think increasingly they feel like they have a place here on campus and know they are welcome here when they’re in town.”

Fostering Indigenous community-based research

Archaeology professor Elder Yellowhorn is about to embark on a new research project—a video documentary examining the Pilkanı people’s cognitive geography, or mental mapping.

Mental mapping, says Yellowhorn, “is how people formalize their landscape, especially when they don’t have a written language. For example, place names typically have a story associated with them. By retelling the story, it formalizes the people’s geographic knowledge of their homeland.”

The Pilkanı Nation lies east of the Rocky Mountains on the plains of northern Montana and southern Alberta, and is part of the Blackfoot Confederacy. Yellowhorn’s project is typical of the kinds of Indigenous community-based research that SFU’s Indigenous Research Institute (IRI) encourages.

Initiated in 2012 and led by Yellowhorn, the IRI has about 56 members, mostly SFU faculty and graduate students who are conducting research pertinent to the Indigenous community.

The IRI facilitates introductions between researchers and community partners, fosters networking, and encourages researchers to give back to the communities in which they are working. The IRI also encourages collaboration among international Indigenous researchers, and acts as a forum for sharing research results.

Last fall, the IRI invited Moriori scholar Maui Solomon and New Zealand archaeologist Susan Thorpe to SFU to give a public lecture on their efforts to record, study and protect Moriori cultural heritage. The IRI is also responding to public interest in Indigenous issues. Last year, for example, the IRI hosted a teach-in that responded to public interest in the ‘Idle No More’ movement.

Yellowhorn and William Lindsay, director of SFU’s Office for Aboriginal Peoples (OAP), led a discussion and presentation addressing many of the concerns illustrated in the media.

“The response from the university community was overwhelming,” says Yellowhorn, who chairs the Department of First Nations Studies. The IRI also co-sponsored last year’s Residential School Education Week at SFU in cooperation with the OAP and the Department of First Nations Studies. The events included a forum on residential schools, and presentations from Marie Wilson, commissioner of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and John Milloy, of Trent University, author of A National Crime: Residential Schools in Canada.

SFU alumni Ian Giesbrecht, now a science staffer with the Hakai Beach Institute, collects data from water flowing out of the bog forests. The data are used in the Bog Forest Program, which is monitoring the Kwakshua Channel watersheds.

Elders’ Program grows

Aboriginal student Michelle Quock is a frequent visitor at the Burnaby campus’ Indigenous Student Centre, where she stops by to speak with elders and share a meal.

The Elders’ Program, now in its third year, has grown from two elders to five. They take turns visiting the Burnaby campus two days a week, and also visit the Surrey campus where a number of Aboriginal students are enrolled in the Aboriginal University Prep Program.

Elder Theresa, a traditional Kwa’ikult storyteller, joined the Elders’ Program two years ago.

She travels from Chilliwack to the Burnaby campus to meet with between four and eight students during her visits. “The majority come because they’re missing their families,” she says, adding that some are struggling with their Aboriginal identity while others may be dealing with more difficult problems, such as family violence. “I check on their safety and tell them about resources.”

Non-Aboriginal students who are doing First Nations research often visit her to learn about everything from potlatches to protocols to land claims issues.

Kahane R. Ronick, from the Office for Aboriginal Peoples (OAP), oversees the program. She finds that students go out of their way to visit the elders, and like asking for advice and listening to their stories. Quock, who is interested in studying traditional medicine, finds the elders are an invaluable source of information on the topic.

“They also help you keep things in perspective and not get so overwhelmed with school,” she says. “They tell us to take care of ourselves, which is important.”

Elder Theresa, who spent 30 years working in post-secondary institutions as an Aboriginal access coordinator, is impressed with how the OAP runs the Elders’ Program. She receives a parking pass and reminder e-mails about her scheduled visits, and there is always food available for elders and students. “We go out of our way to ensure the elders are comfortable, fed and happy,” says Ronick.

“We treat them with respect.”

“I love what I do here,” says Elder Theresa. “I think that SFU listens to our students and to me.”
Mentorship project inspires Aboriginal students

Reanne Percival was among 54 students to participate in SFU’s first Aboriginal Health Mentorship Project. She is now studying for a degree in health sciences.

BY AMY ROBERTSON

Aboriginal students preparing to pursue careers in health sciences discovered new inspiration and encouragement from SFU’s first Aboriginal Health Mentorship Project. The students, all members of the Aboriginal Pre-Health Program, spent six months paired with Aboriginal health professionals as they developed health-related research projects. They presented these projects at a public forum last March. “The project helped these students explore some of the challenges of combining culturally traditional practices with mainstream healthcare approaches,” says program coordinator Shanthi Besso.

“Creating these structured mentorships, we have increased cultural guidance and encouragement and given students access to practical health-career information and networks,” says program coordinator Shanthi Besso.

The Aboriginal Health Mentorship project was funded by Health Canada’s Aboriginal Health and Human Resources Development Canada, and the David and Cecilia Ting Endowment. The SFU Community Education Program would like to find further funding to offer the project again.

Chief Joseph to receive Blaney Award

Chief Robert Joseph, Hereditary Chief of the Gwa’waa’mukw First Nation, Reconciliation Canada Ambassador, Special Advisor to Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and a survivor of the residential school system, has received the SFU Centre for Dialogue’s Jack P Blaney Award for Dialogue. Last September, Chief Joseph helped inspire a rising national movement to revitalize the relationships between Aboriginal peoples and all Canadians with the Walk for Reconciliation, an event that attracted a crowd of 70,000 to march in downtown Vancouver.

Internationally, Chief Joseph has spoken at peace conferences and participated in delegations to the United Nations, Vatican City, Israel and Gaza, South Korea, Mongolia and other international sites. The Jack P Blaney Award for Dialogue is presented to an individual who exemplifies, internationally, the spirit and programs of SFU’s Centre for Dialogue. Recipients of the award will have demonstrated excellence and accomplishments in using dialogue to further the understanding of complex issues of public importance.

Chief Robert Joseph

Between January and March 2014, the Centre for Dialogue and Chief Joseph will host a series of community events that highlight and build upon concepts of reconciliation. The events include a full-day dialogue on Reconciling Injustices in a Pluralistic Canada, an SFU Reconciliation Workshop, Reconciliation Through Poetry, and Youth Voices on Reconciliation.

Full list of events visit: sfu.ca/dialogue.

Chief Joseph

Winds of Change is one of several new Indigenous journals added to the SFU library.

LIBRARY’S INDIGENOUS INITIATIVES

Indigenous Initiatives Librarian Jenna Walsh has been working with Aboriginal communities and SFU students, staff and faculty to determine how best to enhance and develop the library’s services for Aboriginal students. A new library fund for First Nations studies and initiatives, for example, is making it possible to acquire three new Indigenous journals:

© Journal of the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association
© Winds of Change, from the American Indian and Science Engineering Society
© Justice as Healing, from the Native Law Centre of Canada

Walsh is also working with SAGE (Supporting Aboriginal Graduate Enhancement), an interdisciplinary and cross-institutional peer-mentoring program that supports Aboriginal graduate students to successfully complete their degree.

“Aboriginal graduate students are far more engaged in Indigenous research and methodologies, and issues of Indigenous intellectual property and supporting Indigenous knowledge systems,” says Walsh. “With this in mind, she is developing more Indigenous library research and knowledge workshops as well as more culturally relevant library support for distance education courses.

In the lead-up to Truth and Reconciliation Week last September, Walsh prepared a classroom resource guide featuring library materials relevant to discussions on the residential school legacy. The guide includes videos, audio-visual materials, and selected print and electronic resources. “We have a very strong collection and I think some people may not have been aware of that,” she says.

The library is assembling a growing collection of live-streamed videos with Aboriginal content. The SFU Library will also be assisting the First Nations Language Centre as it begins to map research results from its $2.5-million Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council grant to revitalize B.C.’s First Nations languages. “The library will be developing indeed digital collections of the project’s research, including audio and video recordings,” says Walsh. “It will be holding workshops with each community to develop the collections in a culturally relevant way and observe cultural protocols of access or non-access.

The collection will include oral stories and sound files of conversations. Walsh is also working with the Indigenous Student Centre to build on the existing Indigenous academic content in Summit, SFU’s institutional research repository.

“Would be nice to have a place where we can showcase Indigenous academia—the achievements of our faculty and graduate students, and special projects by undergraduates as well.”

OFFICE FOR ABORIGINAL PEOPLES

sfu.ca/aboriginalpeoples

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