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CONNECTIONS IN PRACTICE

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from multiple perspectives within and beyond the academy.

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FEATURE

LEARNING TOGETHER: THE HUMANITIES FUTURES LABS

By Racquel Banaszak, Caitlin Cook-Isaacson,
An Garagiola, Isabel Huot-Link, and Tyler Seidel

When we first started thinking about a Mellon Environmental Stewardship, Place, and Community Initiative (MESPAC) opportunity for undergraduates, our idea was to host a summer workshop for students interested in Humanities graduate work, with priority for historically

underrepresented students and those interested in Indigenous studies. But with the ongoing challenges of planning travel-based, in-person events during a pandemic, we changed our thinking, and members of the MESPAC team worked to bring the Humanities Futures Labs to



*Canoeing in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, Duluth, Minnesota, USA.
Photo by Lee Vue on Unsplash.*

life. In place of a workshop, we imagined small, intensive classes grounded in active, hands-on Humanities work informed by Indigenous methodologies.

Humanities Futures Labs are still very much experimental; there is not much information about them, there is significant overlap—with few helpful distinctions in the literature—with Digital Humanities work, and most of the schools running them are private or flagships. Much of the published conversation about Humanities Labs focuses on theoretical underpinnings along with descriptions of collaborators' disparate expertise. We also found lots of glossy descriptions and websites of completed Digital Humanities "lab" projects. What we did not find was a lot of "how to" information.

Thus we quickly learned that we were starting much more from scratch than we imagined, but we stuck with this model because Humanities Futures Labs meet our MESPAC goals in the following ways: first, such labs are highly interdisciplinary, which makes them a good fit for American Indian Studies. Second, the Humanities Lab model maps well with Indigenous ways of knowing and methodologies. Finally, the Humanities Lab model fosters institutional transformation, a key principle of the MESPAC initiative.

The What and Why of Humanities Futures Labs

We wanted to create a new type of Indigenous humanities work for our undergraduate students while also offering a professional development opportunity for our graduate fellows. Our work started in earnest with a two-week summer workshop for the Humanities Futures Lab Graduate Fellows (HFLGF) in 2022. These fellows are graduate students with a variety of disciplinary and personal commitments and experiences that informed our collective work to create these lab courses. They include Isabel

Huot-Link from the Master of Human Rights program; Tyler Seidel from the Department of Ecology, Evolution, and Behavior; Racquel Banaszak and Caitlin Cook-Isaacson from the Heritage Studies and Public History master's program; An Garagiola from American Studies; and Patricia Johnson-Castle from History. We began by establishing a shared foundation in Indigenous research methodologies and an awareness of and commitment to the role of relationality in our work. We discussed the little literature there is on Humanities Futures Labs and also looked at lab courses across the country—a list as short as the lit review, by the way. When looking at the existing lab courses, we advised the fellows to pay attention to models and methods rather than the content that those models and methods produced.

And then it was time to design the labs, starting with the following questions we asked the HFLGFs to consider as they planned their courses:

- *What methods of research collection and analysis do humanities labs offer that may differ from "traditional" science lab models?*
- *How do you construct a lab that is not merely a humanities topic in a science lab format? Would you draw upon scientific models, already-established humanities labs, or some other format altogether? What are the strengths and weaknesses of using a "lab" format?*
- *What are potential obstacles or learning curves that can arise when taking an interdisciplinary approach to research? (Discuss discipline-specific methodologies that can translate to other disciplines, the importance of collaborative vs. solo research, learning from other disciplines, etc.)*

- *Begin thinking about the ways in which arts/humanities/social science/science and the environment overlap or diverge. A key component of our work is showing how these disciplines are not at odds with each other, but rather, are complementary. How would you create this balance in a lab?*
- *Why are humanities labs important now? What has changed in academia that*

this type of class is especially useful and important?

As our fellows worked through these questions, three labs started to take shape; they were taught during spring semester and May term 2023. Below you will find the course descriptions and the student instructors' stories, written in response to questions posed by Open Rivers [OR] and the MESPAC leadership team.

—Becca Gercken, Associate Professor of English and Native American and Indigenous Studies

Course Descriptions

NAIS 2215 Unearthing Earth Stories: a Humanities Futures Lab

Co-Instructors: Tyler Seidel, Isabel Huot-Link, Professor Carter Meland

With coding that analyzes language patterns, the class investigates how personal identity and relationships inform Indigenous stories about the Earth. Who tells the story impacts the story that is told. Students are introduced to Text Data

Mining, or coding that analyzes language patterns. With this tool, the class investigates how personal identity and relationships inform stories about the Earth and the Climate using Indigenous ways of knowing.

NAIS 2216 Food and Relationality: a Humanities Futures Lab

Co-Instructors: An Garagiola, Patricia Johnson-Castle, Professor Clement Loo

This course considers food systems and farm policy in the context of sovereignty and autonomy of Indigenous communities. It also addresses

inclusive governance, with particular attention to the autonomy of Indigenous communities.

NAIS 2217: Seeds, Cycles and Stories: a Humanities Futures Lab

Co-Instructors: Racquel Banaszak, Caitlin Cook-Isaacson, Professor Becca Gercken

In crafting stories through mapping, audio recordings, writing, and/or visual art, students explore how to acknowledge and understand the spaces we inhabit as Indigenous places, how our

relationships with plants inform our worldviews, and how we can critically engage with the lands we live on to create healthy, nourishing spaces for future generations.

Questions and Responses

[OR] What drew you to want to participate in designing and teaching a Humanities Futures Lab course? How does this align with your personal and professional goals?

Isabel Huot-Link [IHL] This process of designing and teaching a Humanities Futures Lab was the perfect opportunity to deepen my learning about Indigenous ways of knowing and capitalize on my strengths as a teacher and humanities-oriented person. While environmental issues have always been important to me, I have often felt unable to deeply engage in issues

the sciences seemed to own. So I welcomed the chance to dive into hands-on problem solving regarding the earth and environment through humanities tools. To have the privilege of teaching a Humanities Futures Lab to undergraduates from across UMN Morris, Duluth, and Twin Cities campuses is an honor. It is also the deepest way I can imagine to learn more about



*Protestors march toward the headwaters of the Mississippi River with makeshift “black snake” resembling a section of pipeline in June 2021.
Image via Frypie, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons.*

Indigenous ways of knowing as a tool for learning through and alongside humanities and the Earth. During the Line 3 pipeline resistance movement, I answered the call for allies to defend the land and water from fossil fuel industry expansion and treaty rights violations. There I found myself invited into Indigenous space for the first time, witnessing the infinite interconnectedness of people with the water, and the critical role Indigenous leadership plays in environmental justice. Heeding the values of Indigenous ways of knowing, environmental problem-solving must expand beyond the sciences to include the broadest array of creative minds and engage solutions that can draw us away from climate disaster, moving us instead into sustainable, equitable, interdependent community relations. The Humanities Futures Lab is a small yet critical step in achieving this overarching cultural shift.

Tyler Seidel [TS] My dissertation research is focused on how land and water ecosystems interact through food webs in urban environments. In order to proceed with any research design I may have, I need to first develop and build consensus with the people living around potential research sites. Throughout this stage of the research process, I learn more about the environment and wildlife from the people living nearby. Such experiences have challenged me to consider ways to elevate the experiences, stories, and knowledge of the environment from people living nearby. By learning more about narrative and tools to describe their elements, I was drawn to participating and designing a Humanities Futures Lab so that others can find ways to engage with their voices and share their knowledge in alternative formats. Centering stories is a common theme in both scientific writing and the humanities, and my hopes are to align my personal experiences with Indigenous epistemologies and my professional experiences in ecology to better support a collective understanding of ways we communicate about our shared environment.

Racquel Banaszak [RB] As an Anishinaabe educator and artist, I am passionate about Native truth-telling. I have both worked on and studied “Indigenous Education for All” policies and initiatives, which seek to address the issues regarding the lack of representation and/or misrepresentation of Indigenous peoples, lands, and nations as well as educate all students, Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike, on Indigenous histories, knowledges, and nationhood. I recognized the Humanities Futures Lab as a unique way of utilizing these passions and experiences to work with students to critically and creatively understand our relationships to the Indigenous lands we are on.

Caitlin Cook-Isaacson [CCI] I had never heard of a Humanities Futures Lab, but I have long been interested in different models of learning and teaching. The “lab” in the title sets a tone of research questions and experimentation for the course that I think is often lacking in conventional humanities undergraduate education. I have a lot of anxiety about our global future, so I feel drawn to any work that is moving people toward new/old/liberatory/life-affirming ways of being in relationship with the planet and with each other. One of my goals is to continue to build my capacity to be comfortable with not knowing, and there are so many things that are “unknown” to me as I co-lead a lab in May 2023. Students will direct their own projects and determine their “output” at the end of the class. We will ask for feedback about how we can better structure our class time or resources to meet students’ needs, not just in a closing evaluation, but throughout. We are attempting to change the typical teacher-student power structure to be more relational, dynamic, and equitable. This is difficult, necessary, and rewarding work for me personally and professionally.

[OR] How did the two-week development process shape your understanding of what a Humanities Futures Lab is?

[IHL] When I initially heard about the Humanities Futures Labs Graduate Fellowship opportunity, I understood this model to be replacing “science” in the science lab model with “humanities,” but I quickly learned that is not quite right. The two-week development workshop expanded my perspective to include the understanding that interdisciplinary collaboration is essential to Indigenous ways of knowing, as well as the humanities lab model. Furthermore, the workshop itself, designed in the form of a humanities lab, exemplified experiential learning. Discussion posts and group conversations emphasized holistic learning; the workshop leaders saw us as whole people, not only learning how to build a Humanities Futures Lab, but also participating in our own lives along a continuum of lifelong learning. This method of learning to develop the lab informed our choices in designing our own labs through relationality, interconnectedness, and the vulnerability of storytelling.

[TS] The two-week course development process of the Humanities Futures Labs Graduate Fellowship was challenging. I enjoyed working through our theoretical understanding of Indigenous epistemologies and found many themes readily translatable to a Humanities Futures lab. Centering relationality was a useful process to help guide potential course structuring because it limited the abstractions we could make toward assessing the future. I felt that by beginning with co-developing a working space of knowledge, we are more sensitive to ways to teach relational practices. I believe relational practices are essential model behaviors and worked well in our lab environment.

[RB] I initially came to the two-week Humanities Futures Lab (HFL) development space with knowledge I acquired during my undergraduate experiences in art school working extensively on collaborative community-based projects. I

saw the HFL as an extension of these types of projects, and this process helped me understand how this is integrated within a public research institution setting.

I was drawn to the examples we were shown of how other universities practice Humanities Futures Labs, from engaging with Indigenous knowledges to integrating these into community spaces. An example I was particularly drawn to was Arizona State University’s [“Indigenizing Food Systems” course](#). Through the coursework, students engaged with historical and contemporary issues impacting Indigenous food sovereignty and how to support local Native nations.

The two-week process helped me better understand the complexities of teaching within a higher education setting. I gained valuable insight into how the University of Minnesota operates, from course planning to student recruitment to methodologies. In particular, we were instructed in the technical and ethical aspects of teaching Indigenous-based coursework.

[CCI] I really appreciated that we, as graduate students, were invited into a collaborative course design process that is very similar to what we will be asking our undergraduate students to do—explore, within the given container, what kinds of questions or themes we find the juiciest, then go deeper from there. Going through the course development process gave me insight into what it might feel like for the students we will be working with: what is an appropriate pace, what may be challenging or uncomfortable, where to build in down time or breaks, etc. Also, I think the structure of the Humanities Futures Lab model was a really good fit for our subject material: Indigenous Epistemologies in Environmental Humanities. We had the freedom to define what our “work” together (both in our cohort and with our lab students) looks like or feels like in ways

that are different from a typical academic course. We are attempting to not just learn about, but also practice, some of those ways of knowing and

ways of understanding the world that push back against colonial, Western educational models.[1]

[OR] This research and work involved imagining Indigenous research in the specific contexts of work within/by/with/for Indigenous communities. Why is this approach significant? What are the challenges?

[IHL] As a white settler co-teaching one of these labs, I believe that incorporating Indigenous ways of knowing into a course absolutely requires working alongside Indigenous co-teachers. This is a significant move because traditional

education has employed a lot of extractive and appropriational practices. The ethics and intentionalities behind the design of each of these courses, allowing collaboration between Indigenous and non-Indigenous co-teachers, with



Advocate for Indigenous food sovereignty, Chef Sean Sherman of Owamni in Minneapolis is harvesting wild ramps by the St. Croix river. Image via DThompson1313, (CC BY-SA 4.0), via Wikimedia Commons.

Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, are extremely delicate. That these classes focus on Indigenous research as specifically contextualized by Indigenous authors and Indigenous teachers is rare in academia, and also transformative. This type of intentionality changes the way students and teachers approach knowledge, emphasizing why and how we use knowledge, rather than indiscriminate extraction through the hubris of manifest destiny. Treating knowledge as a relative that should be honored and respected transforms everything about the freedom of research and knowledge that the academy is built on. This poses challenges in the layers of multicultural collaboration, and the racial/political power dynamics of a white supremacist settler colonial society will always affect relations between and among students, teachers, and community members connected to such a class. While these dynamics exist in every class, they are not always explicitly recognized.

[TS] Indigenous communities are sovereign nations. Traditional Indigenous knowledges are often critiqued in terms of alleged insufficient empirical data; however, traditional knowledges are synthesized applications of linguistic relativity. Verbal colonialism in research practices contests the ability of many Indigenous peoples to exert intellectual sovereignty, and inhibits the acceptance and integration of these ideas into broader developing fields of study. Co-developing and promoting work within/by/with/for Indigenous communities advocates for a more holistic and just Indigenous representation and mobility of sovereignty. The Humanities Futures Labs Graduate Fellowship and the courses developed by the Fellows provides us with an

[OR] What role do environment, place, and/or relationality play in the Humanities Futures Lab you designed?

[IHL] The lab “Unearthing Earth Stories” that I co-developed with Tyler Seidel, along with the guidance of Becca Gercken and Carter Meland, began with “movie pitch” visuals. At the time I

opportunity to address and engage with present and emerging imperial nostalgia that can often misrepresent and exclude Indigenous peoples through neocolonial practices.

[RB] Because the Humanities Futures Lab takes place at a public land-grant research institution, it has responsibilities and obligations to support Indigenous peoples, communities, and nations. Indigenous erasure is a consistent problem in education within academic settings. By grounding HFL courses in Indigenous research, not only are we valuing and uplifting Indigenous understandings, but we are also working to reclaim Indigenous knowledge systems.

Because of the historical and ongoing injustices impacting Indigenous communities, we must consciously be intentional with how Indigenous knowledge systems are utilized and who is telling the stories. We must strive to uplift Indigenous knowledge keepers, artists, writers, chefs, seed keepers, and more. We also need to be conscious of the responsibilities we have to Indigenous nations, lands, and more-than-human relations.

[CCI] Centuries of genocidal practices toward Indigenous communities in the name of scientific “research” have done, and continue to do, unspeakable harm. However, there are a growing number of Native scholars both within and outside of the academy who are now leading research efforts for their communities.^[2] It is crucial that research be conducted following the protocols and practices of a specific community, and Indigenous knowledge and “data” must remain the intellectual property of their communities.

was researching industrial potato agriculture on the White Earth Reservation. While documenting the dust storm effects of dry potato fields on windy June mornings, I imagined a story about

battling the Potato King: An Anishinaabe hero from White Earth Nation wields heritage purple potatoes as their secret weapon against the soil nutrient-sucking giant french fry potato rival. As Tyler's prairie madness horror story visions collided with his technical affinity for coding software, we together grew an idea of how Indigenous stories about the Earth can be understood through text data mining techniques. We tossed around discussion questions:

- How does the author affect the story being told?
- How do Indigenous and non-Indigenous authors use language differently to talk about the Earth?

- How does the language of text data mining reflect extraction and white supremacy culture?

Through these conversations, the Lab became grounded in Indigenous stories about the Earth, reflections on relationships that students have with their community and the land they live on/with, and their own identity stories. Personal identity will be crucial in grounding the Lab, beginning with asking students to consider their positionality[3] and how that informs how they will approach the class content, through an intersectional frame.[4] Students continually reflect on their relationship with the land as they read Earth stories by Indigenous authors, consider the ethics of tools such as text data *mining*, and make intentional choices about their research methods and methodologies.



Tyler Seidel and Racquel Banaszak at the Place and Relations Capstone, talking about the Humanities Futures Labs. Image courtesy of Nina O'Leary.

[TS] The Humanities Futures Lab we designed privileges narrative as a practice to relate the ways we communicate and feel about environments and places across different communities. The scientific community uses story structures of data points, statistics, and models to explain human experiences within our environments. In their own scientific methods, Indigenous peoples use stories with coded language, nuanced ceremonies, and beliefs that determine many dimensions of landscape and wildlife interactions. We will apply tools from the domain of natural language processing, through an educational lens of Indigenous epistemologies, to explore the ways we communicate and feel about the natural world.

[RB] One of the central concepts in our Humanities Futures Lab is Indigenous seed-keeping. Our coursework allows students to engage with the plant relatives and how they shape our world. Indigenous seeds have been impacted by settler colonialism—while some are no longer with us, others are asleep, and many have helped Indigenous nations continue to survive and thrive. Through a series of plant walks with Indigenous knowledge keepers, as well as journaling, students will collaboratively create a zine [a small self-published creative work] amplifying their relationships to Indigenous landscapes and our more-than-human relations.



“Sing Our Joys” by Racquel Banaszak (Bad River Band of Lake Superior Ojibwe) (8 1/2”x11”, graphite pencil, photograph, cotton thread). Image courtesy of the artist.

[CCI] It has been really wonderful to be able to work with Racquel Banaszak as we co-create our lab. Our course was designed to be hybrid—half online and half in person—on the University of Minnesota Morris campus. As students in the UMN system, we are all on Dakota and/or Ojibwe land, but the Morris campus is also a former boarding school for Indigenous youth from many Native nations. We will begin the lab by inviting each student to spend time deepening their relationship with a place, somewhere near to wherever they will be joining us from during our online class days. While we will be physically distant from one another, we will each take walks or sit outside, listening to, observing, and engaging with our environments. When we come together in Morris, we will build on similar activities as we grapple with the questions:

- How can we acknowledge and understand the spaces we inhabit as Indigenous places?
- How do our relationships with plants inform our worldviews?
- How can we critically engage with the lands we live on to create healthy, nourishing spaces for future generations?

Some of the elements that Racquel and I are bringing into our lab’s grounding are seeds, stories, food sovereignty, songs, environmental histories, maps, and art. I’m looking forward to where the lab students decide to take things from there!

[OR] This project is called the Humanities Futures Labs. How is this work informing the future(s) of environmental (and/or) humanities education?

[IHL] Though Decolonization/Indigenization in academia^[5] is a growing conversation, classes that explicitly center Indigenous ways of knowing are still relatively rare. To bring these ways of knowing into an interdisciplinary marriage between sciences and humanities in an environmental humanities lab context is new in its explicitness and builds toward Indigenous futurity. Vine Deloria Jr., in his collaborative text *Power and Place: Indian Education in America*, imagines the future of Indigenized/Decolonized education where Indigenous students increasingly develop interdisciplinary fields of study, stimulating a steady practice of self-determination. Deloria writes:

Initiating an accelerated educational system for Indians was intended to bring Indians up to the parity of middle-class non-Indians. In fact, this system has pulled Indians into the Western worldview, and some of the brighter ones are now emerging on the other side, having transversed the Western body of knowledge completely. Once this path has been established, it is almost a

certainty that the rest of the Indian community will walk right on through the Western worldview and emerge on the other side also. And it is imperative that we do so. Only in that way can we transcend the half millennium of culture shock brought about by the confrontation with Western civilization. When we leave the culture shock behind we will be masters of our own fate again and able to determine for ourselves what kind of lives we will lead.^[6]

I hope these humanities futures labs can be a contribution to that “confrontation with Western civilization” toward Indigenous self-determination. I hope also that they contribute to a discussion within humanities and environmental education that siloing disciplines is harmful and restrictive. With a more interdisciplinary, open approach, everyone gets to learn more, and we can consider more expansive, creative solutions to pressing issues affecting our communities, such as climate change.

[TS] Our course is centered on relationality with a strong foundation in positionality and intersectionality. Throughout the course, we will be working with stories about the environment that contain narrative elements unique to those who are sharing the stories. By comparing stories and learning more about the meanings attributed to words, we can privilege individual experiences in the environment. In the context of global change, individual experiences and actions in our shared environment will be increasingly important to mobilize to secure a more just and equitable environment for all.

[RB] Our HFL asks students to question, analyze, and understand their relationships to the land they are on. Students engage with the

***[OR]** How does this work contribute to institutional transformation, both in education and beyond?*

[IHL] Interdisciplinary collaboration and Indigenous ways of knowing are transformational to the academic institution. These labs are actively breaking the boundaries between disciplines such as environmental sciences and humanities, and challenging the hegemony of Western epistemology and cosmology. As more classes take on these roles, the institution is already changed.

[TS] I feel fortunate to work with other instructors from different generations. The transfer of intergenerational knowledge is an important feature of Indigenous epistemologies. In this way, we can connect generations through dynamic discussions, often including the use of various Indigenous languages. The institutional transformation our course promotes is the expression of Indigeneity in multimodal storytelling formats. We are collectively able to promote place-based learning through recollecting and critically analyzing stories.

[RB] By focusing on what it means to be in relation with Indigenous lands, this work values and uplifts Indigenous knowledge systems as the

Indigenous histories of the land and how the environment has changed. The course imagines the future of the Indigenous lands.

[CCI] We need to try out all sorts of innovative ways of learning and teaching, and I think Humanities Futures Labs are a great structure to keep playing with. The “assignment” in a Humanities Futures Lab starts off pretty nebulous, which can be uncomfortable for students who want a clear list of requirements to complete on that path to an ‘A’ grade, but it ultimately requires each individual or group to design a project in which they have some kind of investment, beyond the grade. Also, stories can be science and science can be stories.

future. We all have responsibilities to our more-than-human relations and by centering these obligations, we are reminded of the possibilities where these Indigenous lands flourish.

[CCI] If there are more of us involved in education (whether briefly or long term) with some experience practicing non-hierarchical pedagogical models, or in research that is not extractive, exploitative, or commodified, we have a better chance to create learning environments that are healthier for all people, and better-equipped to solve some of our ongoing crises.

An Garagiola responded to the questions posed by MESPAC by first positioning herself in the narrative story of her family’s migrations, then discussing her hopes for institutional transformation and the importance of a relationship-based Indigenous paradigm.

Nawapo: Bringing Provisions. Food as an Introduction to Indigenous Sovereignty, Research Ethics, and Relationality

by An Garagiola

Positionality

Boozhoo indinawemaaganidog. An indizhinikaaz. Asabookone Zaaga'igan indoonjibaa. Iminiziska indoondaadiz.

Hello, my relatives. My name is An. I am a mother, daughter, and granddaughter from the Bois Forte Band of Chippewa, Nett Lake, where my family is enrolled. I was born and raised away from our homelands—most of my connections are with the Urban Native community in the Twin Cities.

I am from people who were relocated multiple times. The Bois Forte Band has lived in northern Minnesota for centuries. Our ancestors journeyed from the East Coast up the Saint Lawrence River, around the Great Lakes, and followed rivers and lakes inland in a migration that lasted millenia.

The Indian Relocation Act of 1956 pushed Native people to leave their reservations for urban centers. The Twin Cities was one place where Native people from all over Turtle Island were relocated. This geographic extraction was another attempt at forced assimilation. These policies were created with the intention of disconnecting Tribal citizens from their cultural and land-based identities to open up more land for extraction and settlement. Relocation left many Native people in desperate need of housing and cut off from traditional kinship networks. Intergenerational knowledge of culture was nearly lost or forgotten, with youth in many families cut off from the cultural knowledge of their elders. The impacts of Indigenous land dispossession reverberates to this day, and is seen in many social outcomes,

including home ownership, income, education, and health.[7]

In 1958, the University of Minnesota Extension facilitated the relocation of Bois Forte Band Members once again.[8] Thirty-six families were removed from their homelands and sent to Minneapolis, cut off from resources, family, and kinship networks. One of the people relocated around this same time was my grandma. Relocations have deprived Indigenous families of land and culture for three generations, and have catapulted many families, like mine, into a cycle of disconnection. These are echoes of the original violence enacted by colonialism. Boarding schools attempted to steal our culture from my grandmothers. Institutions like the University of Minnesota enacted genocidal policies in an attempt to ethnically cleanse this land. But they failed. We are still here. Resisting and thriving.

I come to academia from a circuitous route. I set out on my higher education journey at a community college as a nontraditional, first-generation student parent. I am now a Ph.D. Student in American Studies by way of a Master of Public Policy degree. My experiences lie at the intersection of disability, gender, Indigeneity, and poverty. Through this positionality, I perceive problems and craft strategies at the confluence of multiple worldviews. It is my hope to teach what I've learned to others, in a Humanities Futures lab where students can practice transmuted uncomfortable truths into healing, understanding, and change.

In coordination with my co-instructors, Patricia Johnson-Castle and our advisor, Dr. Clement Loo, we have designed a lab that introduces students to Indigenous research, research ethics, and how colonialism impacts Indigenous access to socially just, culturally relevant, and

Institutional Transformation

As a researcher and project manager for TRUTH (Towards Recognition and University-Tribal Healing),^[9] I am committed to sharing the full history of this land grant/land grab institution. ^[10] Academia continues to root itself in the epistemological hierarchy of Western knowledge, especially when it comes to research practices with Indigenous communities and who then gets to access, learn, know, write about, and hold that collected knowledge. I will forever carry and share what I learned working on the TRUTH project, especially the importance of data sovereignty and good ways to work in community. We have often said throughout our time on the TRUTH project that one of our goals is to have more students graduate from the University of Minnesota with an understanding of tribal

Importance of Relationality

Our lab framework is constructed with an Indigenous paradigm.^[12] This relationship-based paradigm considers humans and more than humans equally and is steeped in the Seven Generation philosophy, an ontological orientation of relational accountability that takes into consideration the next seven generations past and future in all of our actions. It honors connections to ancestors, Aki, the earth, all who reside on her, and all who will come to reside on her. It insists upon treating research as a ceremony that celebrates the connections between us all.^[13] Rather than centering Western research practices like validity, reliability, and statistical significance,

sustainable food systems. Students will examine land use in the contexts of Indigenous sovereignty, and consider how provincial, state, and federal governments of Canada and the United States consult with Indigenous nations in land-based decisions.

relations. This is an incredible opportunity to do just that.

More recently, my role as a project manager at UMN has expanded to the University's Office of Native American Affairs. Under the leadership of Karen Diver, the University has been drafting an Indigenous Research policy that addresses and corrects the ways research methods have not always been in the best interests of the land, treaties, and Indigenous peoples. This is important, because often research is used against our communities, rather than for them.^[11] It has been an honor to be a small part of that process, and I am thrilled to teach this policy to students this semester.

students will learn to formulate their methods and methodologies around the questions:

- What are our obligations to Indigenous peoples?
- What are our obligations to future generations?
- To whom are we accountable?

Our Humanities Futures Lab gives students the opportunity to begin to conceptualize what it means to be accountable to all our relations, human and human+.

In Conclusion

The Mellon Environmental Stewardship, Place, and Community Initiative created an opportunity for transformation in the University of Minnesota system's curricula, and this transformation is perhaps nowhere better realized than in the work of the Graduate Fellows and undergraduate students of the Humanities Futures Labs. Laboratory courses are about hands-on, experiential learning, a modality not often used in the Humanities. These labs, grounded in Indigenous methodologies and pedagogies and committed to relationality as a core aspect of the work, demonstrate that a new way to learn

about and engage with environmental concerns is possible—a way that honors the history of this land and its Indigenous inhabitants. The success of these labs—and their popularity with students—prompted institutional interest in not only continuing but also expanding the presence of Humanities Futures Labs in University of Minnesota curricula. This important work, made possible by the Mellon grant, will continue with a new generation of faculty and students.

—Becca G

Footnotes

[1] Shawn Wilson, *Research Is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods* (Winnipeg: Fernwood Pub., 2008); and Aileen Moreton-Robinson, "Relationality : A Key Presupposition of an Indigenous Social Research Paradigm," in *Sources and Methods in Indigenous Studies*, eds. Chris Andersen and Jean M. O'Brien (New York: Routledge, 2017).

[2] See Eve Tuck's piece on Collaborative Indigenous Research in this issue, and the Collaborative Indigenous Research Digital Garden, <https://www.oise.utoronto.ca/collaborativeindigenousresearch/research>.

[3] How a person identifies regarding power and identity in relation to others.

[4] Intersectionality, coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, refers to the ways that multiple oppressed/privileged identities compound each other, and a person's experience cannot be defined by only one such identity (e.g. Black woman, as experiencing both anti-Black racism and misogyny).

See Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Anti-discrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," University of Chicago Legal Forum: Vol. 1989, Iss. 1, Article 8, <http://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8>.

[5] The terms decolonization and Indigenization are often paired together as they are mutually reliant concepts. Decolonization refers to distancing academia from colonial cultures of dominance by Indigenizing these spaces, through promoting and increasing Indigenous faculty, students, cultural spaces, content, approaches to education, knowledge, ways of knowing, and more.

[6] Vine Deloria, Jr. and Daniel R. Wildcat, *Power and Place: Indian Education in America* (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 2001), 133.

[7] R. Akee, “Land Titles and Dispossession: Allotment on American Indian Reservations,” *Journal of Economics, Race, and Policy* 3, no. 2 (2020): 123–43.

[8] University of Minnesota Extension Records [*Red Lake Reservation 1969*], 1858–1996 and 2003, Collection no. 935, Box 146 of 165, University Archives, Elmer L. Andersen Library, University of Minnesota, https://archives.lib.umn.edu/repositories/14/archival_objects/313443.

[9] Recently, the TRUTH project released their final report, [the TRUTH Report](#), titled *Oshkigin Nooji-mo'iwe, Nāgi Wan Petu Uŋ Ihduwas 'ake He Oyate Kiŋ Zaniwiçaye Kte* (2023).

[10] Also see An Garagiola and Audrianna Goodwin, “TRUTH Part I” and “TRUTH Part II,” *SPARK Ezine*, University of Minnesota Community of Scholars Program Writing Initiative in the Graduate School Diversity Office, 2022, online at <https://sparkezine.com/2022/07/12/truth/>.

[11] Graham Hingangaroa Smith, “Indigenous Struggle for the Transformation of Education and Schooling,” in *Transforming Institutions: Reclaiming Education and Schooling for Indigenous Peoples*, ed. G. H. Smith (North Geelong, Australia: Spinifex Press, 2003), 1–14.

[12] M. A. Hart, “Indigenous Worldviews, Knowledge, and Research: The Development of an Indigenous Research Paradigm,” *Journal of Indigenous Social Development* 1, no. 1A (2010).

[13] Wilson, *Research Is Ceremony*.

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Caitlin Cook-Isaacson is a masters student in Heritage Studies and Public History, and an editorial assistant for Open Rivers, both at the University of Minnesota. Her previous work in community organizing, education, farming, and storytelling informs her approach to doing collaborative public history, where she is drawn to environmental histories, listening circles, oral histories, archival research and mapping. She also studies ethnobotany through the University of Alaska at Fairbanks, and lives with her partner and kid in Bdeóta Othúŋwe (“Many Lakes City”), also known as Minneapolis.

An Garagiola, descendent of the Bois Forte Band of Chippewa, is a mother of three, a Ph.D. student in American Studies, and Project Manager in the Office of Native American Affairs at the University of Minnesota, where she recently graduated with a Master of Public Policy degree from the Humphrey School of Public Affairs. Her studies and work commingle at the confluence of research ethics and data sovereignty. An is part of the core research team on the Towards Recognition and University-Tribal Healing (TRUTH) Project. She was the University Coordinator and a lead researcher for TRUTH, scouring the historical archives at UMN and MNHS to uproot the full story of the founding board of regents. Through the examination of treaties, legislation, maps, archived communications, and ledgers, Garagiola's research has uncovered how the founding regents drove a pattern of wealth transfer from Indigenous Peoples to the institution, often for their own personal gain. Off campus, An is an Organizational Development Consultant, working with practitioners to rematriate Indigenous management, development, research, evaluation, and data sovereignty into internal and external partnerships.

Isabel Huot-Link is a community educator and activist interested in the political nature of education. She has lived and studied on Dakota, Anishinaabe, and Quechua lands, and conducts research on the impacts of and methods for transforming oppressive institutions including police and prison complexes, fossil fuel industry, and assimilationist education. Currently, she is pursuing a Master of Human Rights at the University of Minnesota, and serves as a Humanities Futures Labs Graduate Fellow and Graduate Research Assistant with the Mellon Environmental Stewardship, Place, and Community Initiative.

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