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CONNECTIONS IN PRACTICE

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from multiple perspectives within and beyond the academy.

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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION TO ISSUE 23 | CONNECTIONS IN PRACTICE

By Phyllis Mauch Messenger

On April 12, 2023, the TRUTH Project, in partnership with the Minnesota Indian Affairs Council and the 11 federally recognized Tribes in Minnesota, published their final report titled “Oshkigin Noojimo’iwe, Naḡi Waḡ Peḡ tu Uḡ Ihduwa’s’ake He Oyate Kiḡ Zaniwiḡaḡ ye Kte.” TRUTH—Towards Recognition and University-Tribal Healing—is a collaboration among the 11 recognized Tribal Governments of Minnesota, the Minnesota Indian Affairs Council (MIAC),

and a core research team of three University of Minnesota graduate students and alumni with faculty support. TRUTH uses place-based, Tribally led research designed to tell the story of Tribal-University relations from an Indigenous perspective. This vitally important report has reverberated around the world. We encourage our readers to learn more about it [here](#), as well as in a review of the “[Place and Relations Capstone: Indigenizing Education](#)” article in this issue.



Roxanne Biidabinokwe Gould is preparing some smoked fish at the water and ground breaking ceremony conducted by the Indigenous Women’s Water Sisterhood and the City of Duluth. The ceremony was held for an outdoor classroom on the Waabizheshikana Trail on the St. Louis River. Image courtesy of University of Minnesota Duluth.

When *Open Rivers* launched in fall 2015, we made a promise to try to include at least one Indigenous voice in each issue. Since then, many issues have featured multiple Indigenous voices, including many involved with the TRUTH Report. Now, with Issue 23, “Connections in Practice,” a majority of the authors—faculty, staff, and students—are enrolled members or descendants of Tribes and Nations from throughout North America. They represent a growing cohort of university faculty and other professionals who work in two worlds, creating networks, honoring their traditional ways of knowing and being, while also nudging their non-Indigenous colleagues to expand their own worldviews.

In Issue 23, we intentionally focus on relationships and intersections among communities, environments, and places in teaching and learning at the University of Minnesota. We have called upon the scholars and community members who have taken the lead in the Mellon-funded Environmental Stewardship, Place, and Community Initiative. This initiative, called “MESPAC” for short, began in 2019 on the three UMN campuses that have American Indian studies programs. As Jennifer Gunn reports in the feature article about MESPAC, “Connecting Environment, Place, and Community,” a group of faculty began with the question, “What might the impact be if a major research university were to center Indigenous methodologies and approaches in humanities scholarship?” The answer is revealed in the articles in this issue.

The Gunn et al. feature highlights activities on each campus. At the UMN Duluth campus, on the shores of Lake Superior, Roxanne Biidabinokwe Gould, Wendy Todd, and their colleagues focused on water protection through creation of the Indigenous Women’s Water Sisterhood. At UMN Morris, which sits on the site of a former Indigenous Residential School, Becca Gercken and Kevin Whalen led a Decolonizing and Indigenizing Cohort to focus on Indigenous epistemologies and lifeways as they worked on curriculum development, community activism,

and institutional change. At UMN Twin Cities, various initiatives were carried out by faculty leads Christine Baeumler, Čhantémaza, and Vicente M. Diaz, along with many colleagues. In a reparative justice project, Diaz led faculty and students in a three-year focus on building kinship with the Dakota non-profit organization, Makoce Ikikcupi. Baeumler and international colleagues found many ways to decolonize place-based arts research. Further elucidation of these and other initiatives is found in a review column, “Place and Relations Capstone: Indigenizing Education,” by Susannah Smith and Carmen Petit.

Other articles in this issue discuss Indigenous ways of knowing. In “The Science in Indigenous Water Stories, Indigenous Women’s Connection to Water,” authors Todd, Northbird, and Towne present educational activities related to Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) and their tribal communities’ relationship to water. In “The College Union: Where Tradition Meets Decolonization on Campus,” Simón Franco discusses how the UMN Morris campus union creates welcoming spaces for all using Indigenous practices. The Teaching & Practice column, “Teaching Indigenous Epistemologies at the University of Minnesota,” highlights a sample of courses across the University of Minnesota that integrate Indigenous ways of knowing. In a republication of Eve Tuck’s article from *The Conversation*, she discusses the enduring effects of harmful research with Indigenous communities and the potential of Collaborative Indigenous Research.

Several articles in this issue feature the perspectives of student authors. In the feature “Learning Together: The Humanities Futures Labs,” five graduate students discuss their experiences in designing and teaching Labs for undergraduates that foreground Indigenous ways of knowing. Doctoral student Florencia Pech-Cárdenas uses an event featuring Robin Wall Kimmerer and Diane Wilson as a starting point to reflect on her own life as a Yucatecan Maya woman in “Indigenous Wisdom: Re-story-ation to Resist,”

Resurge, and Inspire.” In “Data Science in Indian Country,” undergraduates Maudesty Merino and Nick Salgado-Stanley describe a summer working with researchers from UMN Duluth in collaboration with the Fond du Lac Band of Minnesota Chippewa on a project studying the effects of sulfur on Manoomin/Psinj/Wild Rice.

In his foreword to our republication of “Where We Stand: The University of Minnesota and Dakhóta Lands,” Čhantémaza states, “the main thing that we continue to focus on is the need for accountability and reparative action for land theft. Land acknowledgments are even more commonplace than they were in 2020,

but they are still often nothing more than nice words.” In the six or so years since the Institute for Advanced Study and other UMN programs have been offering land acknowledgments, we have striven to do more than offer nice words. We believe that the programs and initiatives discussed in this issue are a testament to those efforts. We will continue to support and be allies to our Indigenous colleagues, who are leading the way in foregrounding Indigenous ways of knowing and practices of environmental stewardship and justice within the humanities and other fields of knowing, as we also move toward institutional change.

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About the Author

Phyllis Mauch Messenger is an archaeologist and anthropologist who has published numerous books and articles on archaeology and heritage. Prior to serving as an editor for *Open Rivers*, she ran the lab for an archaeology project in Honduras, organized teacher workshops and summer archaeology camps in Minnesota, and led college students on a service-learning experience in the Andes Mountains of Peru. Now she is looking forward to being in a canoe on Minnesota lakes and rivers with her young grandchildren.

THE SCIENCE IN INDIGENOUS WATER STORIES, INDIGENOUS WOMEN'S CONNECTION TO WATER

By Wendy F. K'ah Skáahluwáa Todd, Arianna V. Northbird, and Chessaly E. Towne

Editor's note: This feature article has been peer reviewed.



Mural of TEK featuring three Haida matriarchs of the land, air, and water. The mural is the work of Amanda Phingbodhipakkiya (findingsproject.com). Image courtesy of Wendy F. Todd.

Water is life. It is a familiar phrase, frequently spoken today. Even so, little thought goes into what this simple phrase means. We exist in water throughout our lives, dependent on it from conception, surrounded in water in our mother's womb, until our last water vapor breath. Water is so common, we are so accustomed to our submergence in it that we fail to notice how vital it is and fail to recognize our dependence on it, taking for granted the water vapor-laden environment we exist in every moment of every day. Taking our fragile dependence on water into consideration, one would think we would have policies and practices to protect water and respect the beinghood of water that humans feel entitled to. However, mainstream society considers water to be a commodity, disregarded and taken for granted; the importance of water does not afford it protections to maintain healthy environments or to ensure healthy food and water resources. Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) is a combination of qualitative, quantitative, and spiritual knowledge that uses the same rigor as western science and represents knowledge of place,

history, and spiritual/cultural philosophies about terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems (Smythe et al. 2020). TEK is a collection of historical knowledge of place, providing in-depth knowledge about the intricate ecological relationships between the environment and all things through a spectrum of beliefs, values, and perceptions, developed using local natural phenomena (Smythe and Peele 2021; Smythe et al. 2020)

We will consider the relationship three Indigenous women have with water and the cultural responsibility they bear as caretakers of water. We will examine the historical connections and worldviews each author (Todd and Towne as Alaska Native Haida, and Northbird as Fond du Lac Ojibwe) and their tribal community have with this sacred being. Here we discuss the importance of water to the Haida and Ojibwe peoples, demonstrate the importance of cross-cultural knowledge sharing, and present three educational activities to preserve and pass on TEK to the next generation.

Historical Cultural Connections to Water

Alaska Native Haida Connection to Water

The Haida have a complex connection and spiritual relationship with water, and it is cared for with great respect. The Haida people are matriarchal and matrilineal inheriting everything from our mothers and there is a belief that we are tied to our mothers, land, and waters by an invisible thread like an umbilical cord keeping us connected to our environment (Bell 2016). It is the women who are the language learners, clan leaders, and protectors of the environment, land, water, and air. Their reverence for water is reflected in the Haida name of the Alaska Native

Haida community of Hydaburg, Alaska, which is Higdáa Gándlaay, meaning town on freshwater, mouth of river. The Hydaburg River is located in the center of the community flowing southwest into Sukkwan Narrows on the west coast side of Prince of Wales Island (Fig. 1). The Haida language has specific words to differentiate fresh- and seawater rather than using the term "water," thus inference and context give meaning to what is being referred to. Freshwater sources such as rivers, streams, lakes, and ponds are referred to as gándla and saltwater is called *tang*, both of



Figure 1. Hydaburg River flows southwest into Sukkwan Narrows on the west coast of Prince of Wales Island. Image courtesy of Wendy F. Todd.

which are important to the sustainability of the Haida and other coastal Native peoples. These waters are important, and preference is given to waters collected from rainfall, natural springs, and wells, all of which are abundant in Southeast Alaska. In the Haida culture, water is associated with luck, and it is believed that consuming too much water could wash away one's luck (Bell 2016). Consideration of the idea of luck leads to the realization that luck is not merely an abstract idea, rather it is a directive for one to pay attention to how one's body feels and to take care of it in a better way. This belief of the negative effects of overconsumption is tied to the dilution

of electrolytes in the body and the masking of other symptoms of illness (Adrogué and Madias 2000). Luck is inferred to mean one's health, encouraging one to stay hydrated and cleansed, but not to the point of detracting from underlying health issues (Bell 2016).

The ocean is a vital resource for cultural and traditional harvesting of first foods, which have sustained the Haida for generations (Fig. 2). As "water people" the Haida believe in the medicinal powers of the ocean—that the ocean is a magnificent being who deserves great respect and that saltwater, salt air, and all creatures of the sea



Figure 2. The ocean waters of Sukkwan Narrows on the west side of Prince of Wales Island. Image courtesy of Wendy F. Todd.



Figure 3a. Traditional Haida foods from the ocean: sea greens (sea asparagus) (Figure 3a), spotted shrimp (Figure 3b), and seal oil (Figure 3c). Image courtesy of Wendy F. Todd.



Figure 3b. Traditional Haida foods from the ocean: sea greens (sea asparagus) (Figure 3a), spotted shrimp (Figure 3b), and seal oil (Figure 3c). Image courtesy of Wendy F. Todd.

contribute to our wellbeing and to what makes one Haida. There are numerous rituals and ceremonies that connect the Haida to the ocean, providing strength and purifying of spirit and mind by submerging into the ocean to cleanse, body, mind, and spirit, and to pray (Bell 2016). Ocean cleansing is a powerful way of connecting with water and the Haida culture, reminding us we were born from water and remain immersed in its many forms throughout our lives. This practice provides infinite health benefits from the vitamin-rich sea waters, and builds physical

strength and endurance, all of which result in increased immunity, mental clarity, wellness, and emotional healing (McIsaac 2020).

A wide variety of traditional foods are harvested, such as various fish species, shellfish, seabirds and eggs, sea greens, sea cucumber, seaweed, and crab species, and make up the bulk of the Haida diet (Fig. 3). As a seafaring culture, the Haida honor the power of the ocean and use it as a bountiful resource that provides life with each tide.



Figure 3c. Traditional Haida foods from the ocean: sea greens (sea asparagus) (Figure 3a), spotted shrimp (Figure 3b), and seal oil (Figure 3c). Image courtesy of Wendy F. Todd.



Figure 4. Perch Lake “Aatewemegokokaaning,” Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Reservation with wild rice growing out of the water. Image courtesy of Arianna Northbird.

Ojibwe Connection to Water

To the Ojibwe, water (nibi) is a sacred spirit, considered to be a living and moving being. Water is life and carries stories and connection; it is the center of all things and is a part of traditional Ojibwe creation stories where Turtle Island was created from a large flooding event that purified Mother Earth. The Anishinaabe, or the “original people,” carry many teachings about how to live with purpose and in harmony alongside all living and nonliving beings. Stories were told in the wintertime through the experiences of Waynaboozhoo, a spiritual being who had all the power in life to do and be anything he wanted. He was all-powerful. Even so, he carried the responsibility to guide and care for humankind, teaching lessons about respecting nature and not to use it to attain selfish desires. He taught us how to be

teachable and to care for one another in a good way, honoring the reciprocal relationship that exists between all things. Many of his experiences intersected with teachings from animals both on land and in water. The Anishinaabe carry their strengths in their animal clan systems, which is the establishment of their leadership, each harboring unique gifts given by Gitchi Manitou (The Creator).

Since the beginning of time, the Ojibwe, originally from the East Coast of Turtle Island, followed lakes, rivers, and streams that guided their survival. There was a prophecy given to the Ojibwe people which spoke of other people (Europeans) coming to create disruption to all cultures, affecting their foundations of knowledge



*Figure 5. Ojibwe woman dancing on the shore of Lake Superior.
Image courtesy of Krista Gardner.*

and ways of life. This prophecy started the migration of Ojibwe people westward to find the “*sacred food that grows on water*” (Fig. 4). Over many generations of traveling, the Ojibwe had seven major migration stops along what is known today as the Great Lakes. Wild rice (manoomin) was the food that brought Ojibwe people to Gichigamiing, which means “*the great water*.” Gichi Gumee (Lake Superior) is where the final stop of the migration occurred at Madeline Island (Mooningwaanikaaning). This place is a reminder to Ojibwe people of the last spiritual stop before spreading across the vast northern region of Gichi Gumi. Among other tribal nations, the Ojibwe have always been fluid in movement as they continue on the story of cross-cultural interactions and sharing of valuable resources. Core teachings of caring for Mother Earth are the sharing of knowledge and maintaining connections across the landscape.

Water (nibi) will always be relevant to Ojibwe people, reflecting their origin and adaptation to harvest cycles, which is the epitome of who they

are. Ojibwe ancestors carried oral knowledge systems that continue to sustain future generations of relationships to the land and water through prayer, ceremony, and song. Relationships are respected and honored to restore balance in the natural way of life. Passing on the resources given by Creator is known as “*gaa-miininangwaa ganawenjigen*,” which refers to the Ojibwe creation stories and gifts that must be taken care of. Currently, tribal leadership and community activism play an important role in protecting water quality and to reclaim spaces. Water is considered a gift, and it is the responsibility of the people to understand the reciprocal relationship with water that will ensure a future for not only the Anishinaabe, but for all. Mino Bimaadiziwin means “*to live a good life*,” and that is returning to the teachings from the ancestors and knowing what they stood for (Fig. 5). Understanding the relationship to creation defines the roles in which the Ojibwe must take care of the land, water, animals, and people.

Methodologies to Indigenous Women in Water Science

While cultural connection to water and formation of traditional knowledge may be different between our two cultures, there are some key cornerstone concepts that each culture has in common: (1) water is a sacred being that must be cared for and respected, (2) it is our cultural responsibility to be the caretakers of water, and in return, (3) water is the caretaker of us with our

very lives depending on her. We present three examples of water science activities carried out in both Haida and Ojibwe communities by Native women from these communities, to demonstrate how to use TEK and Western science to teach science lessons and highlight the transferability of TEK from two very different tribal communities through cross-cultural knowledge exchange.

Activity 1: Translating A Haida Story

The story of Raven stealing freshwater from Eagle was recorded in the winter and spring of 1900 by John R. Swanton, an American anthropologist and linguist, when he visited the Haida villages of Masset on the northern coast of Haida Gwaii and three villages in Southeast Alaska (Swanton

1908). The orthography recorded is no longer current nor actively taught. The first step in reclaiming the knowledge in this water story was done by collaborating with a Haida linguist and language learners to transcribe the story into the current Northern Haida orthography. This

activity presented language learners an opportunity to learn a new orthography, thereby granting access to a plethora of recorded stories and ancient knowledge that could be translated and given to the community in an act of reciprocity. Recording of this story was done according to

cultural protocols and practices considering the ethical use of intellectual property of the Haida people. Mr. Swanton sought and was granted permission by the nation to record these stories and acted with reciprocity by returning these recorded stories to the tribal nation.

Raven Steals Fresh Water from Eagle in Haida

Gám awáahl tlag keenggaa'aangaan. 'Wáadluu gin ts'úujuutl'aangaan. Síigaay sgún uu ijáan. 'Wáagyaan ahljii unggw 'l k'áwaayaanii. "k'wi-yáa'iihladaa" hin 'l súudaayaanii. 'Wáagyaan 'l k'wiyáa'eelaan. 'Wáagyaan kwáaneelaan. 'Wáagyaan gud gaad 'l tlaadánii. 'Wáagyaan gud xánhlaa-aa 'l xasdlaagaayaan. Áasgaay k'wiyáay uu 'l gáwdaayaan, 'wáagyaan in-gúusdgaay t'áa uu kwáandaayaan. Áasgaay k'wiyáay 'l gáwdaayaan ahl uu gwáayaay i xajúugang. Áa uu tlagáay 'l gíihliidaayaan.

'Wáagyaan, háwsan sda 'l káaydaan. Gúud náas-an káatl'aangaan. 'Wáagyaan gúudaay gándl da'áayaan. 'Wáagyaan 'wáa kunáasd gám gán t' k'iiy'anggaangaan. 'Wáagyaan gándlaay 'láangaa xutl'ayáay-d 'l gudánggaangaan. 'Wáagyaan gúudaay 'l áa-g áangaa kuyáadgaangaan. Jiingaa

'láangaa xutl'ayáay-d 'l gudáangaan. 'Wáagyaan 'l áa-sd-san 'l káaydaan, gándlaay 'l áa 'l xutl' xaayd gíigaanaay-sd aa.

Áajii ghandlaay 'l k'udidsii dluu, Jihlkáad 'l k'udasdl tláagaangaan. 'Láa 'l k'udusdláas dluu, gáawaan kwaayáang jíing'anggandaan k'yáalaan. Ahljii-ahl 'l gudangáay st'igáanii. 'Wáagyaan háw-san 'wáa t'alg 'l áa 'l k'udusdláayaan. 'Wáadluu, kwah hlgisdatl'aagáan. Ahljíigaay-san k'yáalaan. 'Wáadluu háw-san 'wáa t'alg gáagwaay 'l k'udusdláayaan. 'L k'udusdláasii káahliyaan gut-g 'l áa 'l gi k'usgadáan. 'Wáagyaan 'l áa 'l tla skáyswaaneelaan. 'Wáagyaan tláan 'l kwah k'yáalaan. Gut-g 'l áa 'l gi k'usgadáan ahl uu, gándl 'wáadluwaan gám k'ílgang'anggang, sáang 'wáadluwaan kwaayáangsii k'yaanan aa.

Raven Steals Fresh Water from Eagle in English

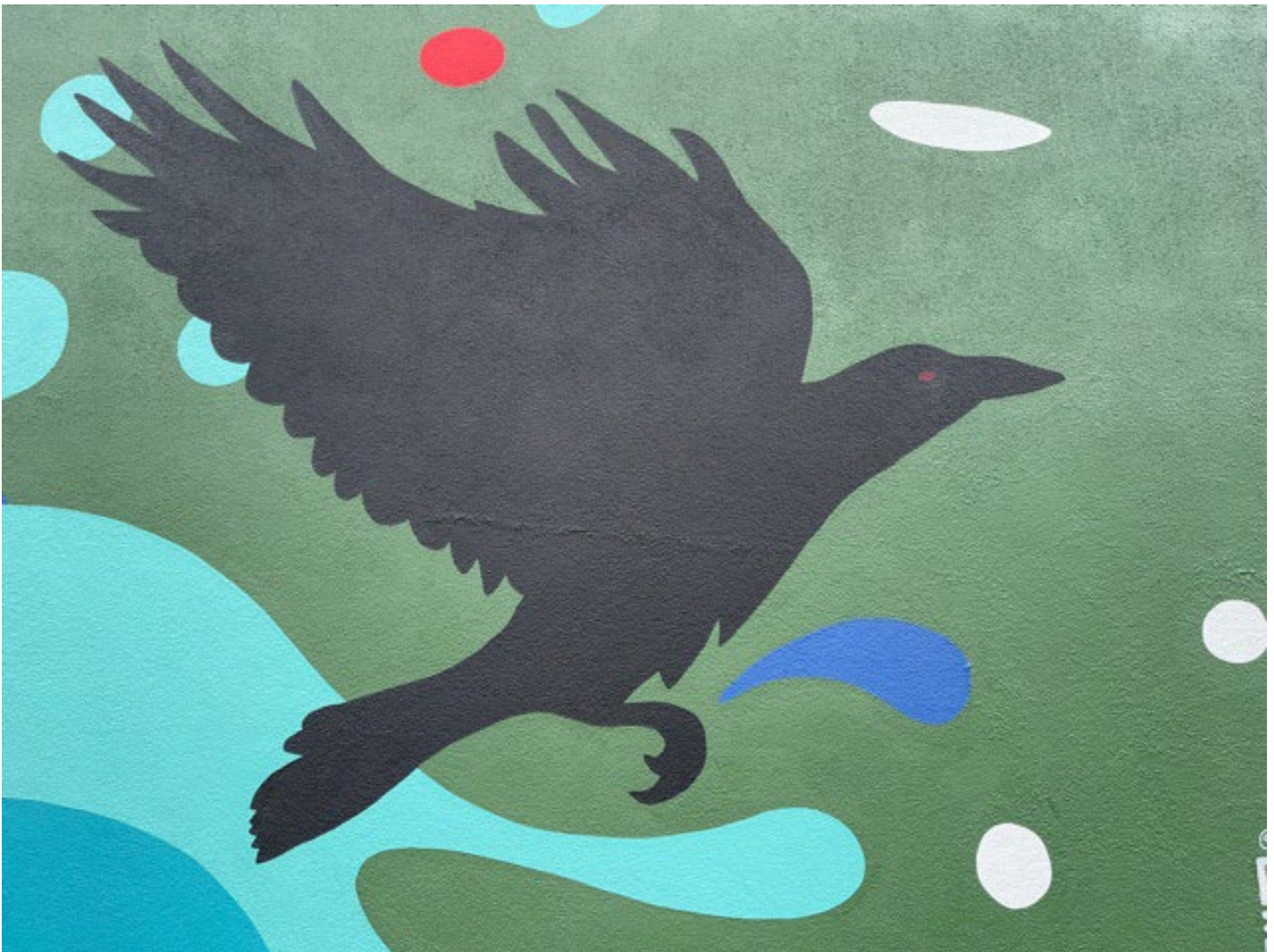
Not long ago, no land was to be seen. There was a little thing on the ocean, all water was from the sea, and Raven sat upon it. Raven said, "*Become dust*," and everything became Earth. He divided Earth and put it into the ocean on each side of him. The piece of Earth he was on was small and the rest of the Earth was large. Raven was off again, when he went to where Eagle lived and saw that Eagle owned freshwater. Raven had no water, he only had seawater, he wanted to drink the water of Eagle. However, Eagle did not want to give his freshwater to Raven. For a long time, Raven wanted the water to drink, but Eagle refused. So, Raven went to the owner of freshwater,

Eagle, and drank the water in secret and went off with the stolen water. After Raven had taken the water, he carried it in his bill and he let a drop fall, first to make the Chilkat River. When Raven spit it out, all of the water soon flowed away. The ground became dry. His mind was sick on account of this. Then he spit out more. That, too, flowed down and dried up. At that time, he let still more drop. As soon as he had let it drop, he bent it together and made a circle out of it. Then it stopped running off. Because he bent it together, all streams keep on running, although they run every day.

Cultural Interpretation of the Water Story

For the Haida and many other Native cultures from the Pacific Northwest, Raven is a central figure in many stories and lessons, described as a trickster, hero, creator, and knowledge bearer, and is thought to reflect one's own self (Fig. 6). He is the most powerful and mythical creature that spiritually and physically wanders both in the tangible and spirit world and can shape-shift

to both living and nonliving objects. He symbolizes the unknown and shows us how to see the world in a different way, through a different lens. This story explains where fresh water came from, how sneaky and smart Raven is, an understanding of the chemical differences between water resources, and how vast the world is.



*Figure 6. Raven dropping water creating rivers and stream.
Image courtesy of Amanda Phingbodhipakkiya (findingsproject.com).*

Activity 2: Deconstructing A Traditional Haida Story

Deconstructing traditional stories is a method used to discern hidden meaning in the story and should only be done with the informed consent of the tribal nation, elders, cultural practitioners, and/or the knowledge bearer sharing TEK. Here we discuss the development of culturally relevant water science curriculum using TEK guided by the authors' tribal partners. It is of utmost importance to not only have permissions to use TEK, but also to develop a meaningful long-term relationship with tribal partners in order to understand how and why knowledge was developed, why it was deemed important enough to preserve in a story, and to understand the worldview of the community in which the knowledge came from for correct meaning making to correctly

interpret knowledge through the lens of the tribe. For example, the rhetorical style of the Haida is to relay knowledge in a facetious way by saying the opposite of what is meant. There is no way to know or understand this, unless one has a deep understanding of Haida culture, and takes care not to apply one's own worldview filtered through a Western lens of knowing or religion. This emphasizes the importance of developing long-term relationships with tribal communities. Let us consider the traditional Haida story about Raven stealing water and then deconstructing it into its constituent parts to reinterpret it into Western science lessons. Keep in mind deconstruction is done only with permission and guidance from the tribal partners.

Deconstructing the Water Story for Curriculum Development

Deconstructing this story to create Western science curriculum requires close and thoughtful examination of the words chosen to tell the story, and knowledge of the Haida culture in order to infer appropriate meaning making in the context relevant to the Haida worldview. There are

concepts of Western science disciplines expressed in this one story, from social behavior to an expression of knowledge revealing a complex understanding of the world and of natural phenomena. We will provide examples of geology, geography, and environmental science.

Geology and Geography

This story begins discussing the formation of land, descriptions of the size of land masses, and an understanding of landforms and natural features. This story was created in a small tribal community on the island of Haida Gwaii, which is part of an archipelago off the northern Pacific coast of Canada. The knowledge of land size was likely gathered by those who traveled the region in traditional dugout cedar canoes. The Haida were known for their seamanship and for their ability to travel great distances around the

Pacific Ocean, which allowed them to develop and acquire knowledge of the vastness of the ocean. This knowledge is referred to in the beginning of the story when it states that "*Raven could only see the ocean.*" From the perspective of someone who had never left Haida Gwaii it would seem that only the ocean existed. It is likely that those who traveled the ocean returned to Haida Gwaii and shared stories of other land masses, noting location, distance, and the varying sizes of these land masses. This knowledge is described in

the story through the discussion of “*He divided Earth,*” demonstrating an understanding of distinct land masses not part of Haida Gwaii. Reference to the size of land masses: “*The piece*

he was on was small and the rest of the Earth was large,” refer to the island of Haida Gwaii in relation to the large land mass of the North American continent to the east.

The Water Cycle

The water cycle describes the continuous movement of water from one reservoir to another through the physical processes of evaporation, condensation, and precipitation. The description

acknowledges the transfer of heat to or from an environment. The flow of liquid water and ice shapes our planet by providing nutrients released through the chemical and physical weathering of

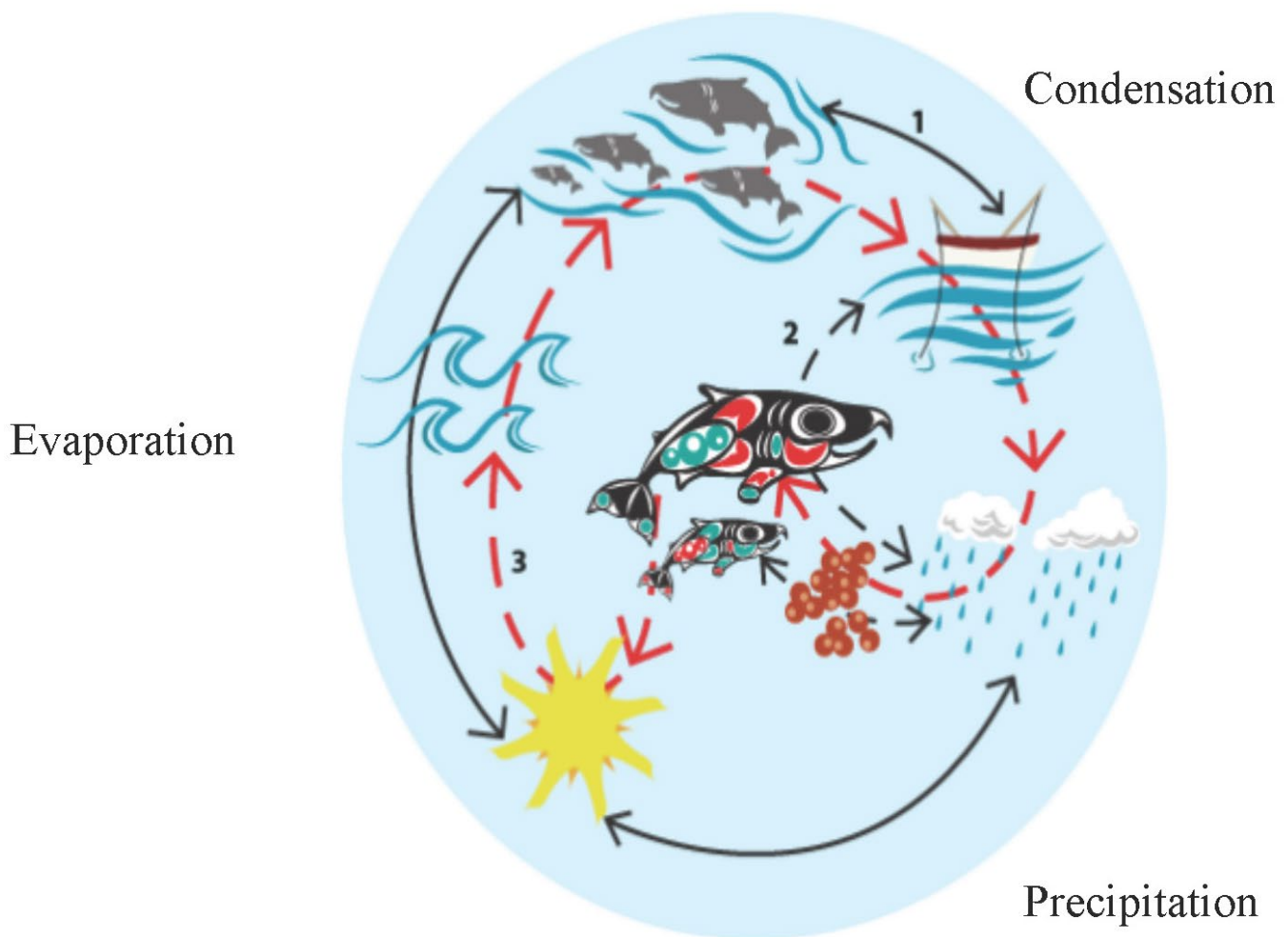


Figure 7. A re-imaged water cycle representing both TEK and Western knowledge systems. The model depicts the transfer of energy and heat around the planet through the processes of evaporation, condensation, and precipitation, as well as local natural phenomena. The image depicts the impacts of the water cycle on rivers, oceans, and animals; here it shows impacts on the salmon life cycle and importance of water and climate impacts on salmon.

Image courtesy of Wendy F. Todd; illustrated by Lauren F. R. Smythe.

rocks and minerals, thereby mobilizing nutrient pools into aquatic ecosystems, by carving out large swaths of the landscape, and by impacting global climate patterns.

In this story, Raven steals fresh water, demonstrating an understanding of the water cycle by the Haida people long before Western science credited its “discovery” to Bernard Palissy in 1546. The act of ignoring TEK emphasizes the widespread blatant disregard and erasure of TEK developed by cultural practitioners in favor of knowledge generated by Western science.

Raven steals water and “*spits it out on the land*” and “*the water soon flowed away*” describes precipitation and the flowing of rivers. The story

describes rivers becoming dry during cycles of drought and how Raven’s mind was sick because of this. This part of the story is a reference to regional climate impacts at a time when precipitation was low, hence rivers were low. The sickness signifies stress communities experience from decreased food security in periods of drought. The story ends with Raven “*bending water into a circle*” so that it always flows, demonstrating an understanding and awareness of the water cycle (Table 1, Fig. 7).

Re-imagining how science is taught, acknowledging the importance of using various knowledge systems—TEK and Western—benefits students, teachers, and scientific innovation by developing and improving critical thinking skills.

Traditional Story	Deconstructed Interpretation	Discipline
<p><i>“He (Raven) divided Earth.”</i></p> <p><i>“The piece he was on was small and the rest of the Earth was large.”</i></p> <p><i>“There was a little thing on the ocean. All water was from sea, and Raven sat upon it.”</i></p>	Referring to an understanding that there are distinct land masses and islands.	<p>Geology: science of the Earth’s physical structure, substance, history, and processes acting on it.</p> <p>Geography: study of physical features of Earth, its atmosphere and human activity as it affects and is affected.</p>
<i>“Raven was off again; he went to where Eagle lived and saw... freshwater. Raven had no water, he only had seawater, he wanted to drink the water of Eagle.”</i>	Exhibiting an understanding the different sizes of land masses. Haida Gwaii is a small island and the landmass to the east is the North American Continent.	Earth science: study of Earth’s structure, properties, processes, and four and a half billion years of biotic evolution
<i>“When Raven spit it out, all of the water soon flowed away. The ground became dry.”</i>	Understanding of the difference between fresh- and saltwater, emphasizing that only freshwater is suitable for consumption.	<p>Limnology: study of biological, chemical, and physical features of lakes and bodies of freshwater.</p> <p>Oceanography: study of oceans.</p>
<p><i>“When Raven spit it out, all of the water soon flowed away. The ground became dry.”</i></p> <p><i>“Spits it out on the land” and “the water soon flowed away.”</i></p>	<p>Understanding of the difference between fresh- and saltwater, emphasizing that only freshwater is suitable for consumption.</p> <p>Describing precipitation and the flowing of rivers, followed by a description of rivers becoming dry during cycles of drought.</p>	Hydrology: science concerned with the properties of Earth’s water, especially its movement in relation to land.
<i>“His mind was sick on account of this.”</i>	The statement <i>“his mind was sick”</i> reflects stress that communities experience during times of decreased food and water security due to drought impacts on fishery resources.	Psychology: study of mind and behavior.
<i>“As soon as he had let it drop, he bent it together and made a circle out of it. Then it stopped running off. Because he bent it together, all streams keep on running, although they run every day.”</i>	The story ends with Raven bending the water into a circle so that it always flows, one can argue that this refers to the understanding and awareness of the water cycle.	Environmental science: interdisciplinary academic field that integrates physics, biology, and geography to the study of the environment and the solution of environmental problems.

Table 1. Examination and deconstructed interpretation of the Haida water story.

Activity 3: Ojibwe curriculum

The lakes and rivers will always be a valuable resource to Ojibwe people who traditionally harvests foods and medicines connected to the lakes and rivers and use phases of the moon to correspond with cycles and harvest events. Seasonal harvest events include ricing, hunting, gathering, and fishing. Aasema (tobacco) is offered with a prayer to remind one to be mindful and thankful for the sacred gift of water. The relationship with water is understood to be reciprocal and there is TEK and wisdom that comes with understanding nature's balance. When the connection is disrupted from events like climate change, there is a ripple effect to the local ecosystem that disrupts TEK, harvest cycles, and tribal identity (GLIFWC 2023). To ensure that TEK and

cultural connection to water is preserved and passed on a collaboration with the Indigenous Women's Water Sisterhood (IWWS), a group of Indigenous and non-indigenous women who came together to share cross-cultural knowledge systems and connection to water, created water curriculum for fifth-grade students. The curriculum is called "Nibi Gizaagi'igoo Water We Love You" and was written to honor of local Water Walkers, women who walk along rivers that need healing, saying prayers in support of Nibi and all who depend on waterways (IWWS 2022, Fig. 8). Nibi Gizaagi'igoo shares a water walker's personal experiences walking along St. Louis River, which is the second biggest tributary on Turtle Island.

Universal Indigenous Connection to Water

Indigenous peoples around the globe continue to maintain a complex, physical, and spiritual connection to water, with water possessing beinghood and having rights of being a healthy entity. This importance is reflected in TEK, passed through the generations in oral traditions in creation stories. The lessons taught through water stories hold true even today, thousands of years after they were first spoken, as our human

dependence on water has not changed. What has changed is how economics has grossly corrupted our perception and the narrative of water as a vital life force to a commodity not afforded to all. Today, Indigenous women, responding to their cultural responsibility, have taken the lead by bringing awareness of water's importance, our dependence on water, and on the beinghood water should be afforded.

Discussion

Traditional stories reveal knowledge gathered over thousands of years through exploration, inquiry, and observation of natural phenomena by Indigenous peoples. Knowledge that holds true today is transmitted through space and time through art, stories, and songs. Even so, academia and mainstream society consider such repositories of knowledge as nothing more than myths or legends that hold no value, resulting in their dismissal by the scientific community. TEK

is often described with a deficit narrative outside tribal communities due to the nature of data collection and dissemination and by the credentials of those collecting and analyzing the data. This deficit narrative allows for the dismissal of TEK by western researchers, who conscientiously and intentionally extract knowledge from traditional stories and take credit for "new" discoveries claiming TEK as their own new knowledge, without acknowledging the original knowledge

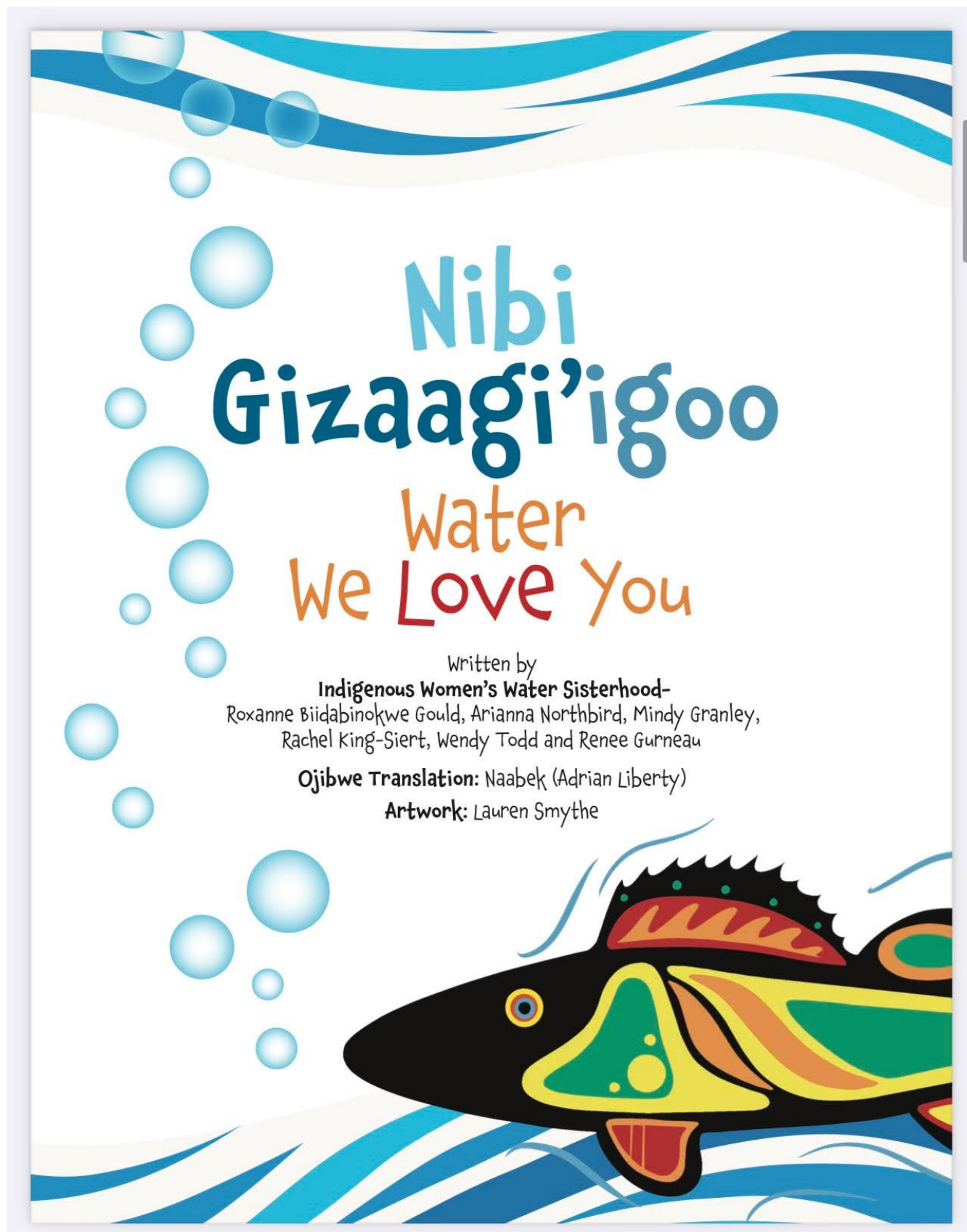


Figure 8. Cover of fifth-grade curriculum “Nibi Gizaagi’igoo Water We Love You.” Image courtesy of the Indigenous Women’s Water Sisterhood.

bearer. If science is going to be truly innovative seeking to acquire, develop, and disseminate new discoveries, technologies, and innovations, it must begin to acknowledge that there is more than one valid knowledge system (Smythe and Peele 2021). Even so, the academic landscape is slowly changing, with a steady increase of Native environmental scientists, who assert their TEK systems and histories into their research practices. Acknowledgment of the deficit language describing TEK and a conscious effort to change to asset language has thrust TEK into a new light. This changing scientific landscape continues to empower a new generation of Native scholars, as well as beginning to heal historical wounds associated with education due to the history of boarding school. For the first time, we are seeing acknowledgment of the validity of TEK and public displays of TEK in a positive way. In September 2021, mural artist Amanda Phingbodhipakkiya (findingsproject.com) completed a mural of Haida TEK in Seattle, Washington (Fig. 9). The

installation is called “Everything is connected to everything else,” after the Haida phrase “Áajii ‘wáadluuwan uu gúd ahl kiiwaagang,” meaning “Everything is connected or related,” reflecting the connectedness and reciprocity in all things.

Referring back to the story of Raven stealing water from Eagle and considering the concepts it relays, the description of Raven bending water quickly brings one to the realization that Native cultures understood that water moves among reservoirs, as well as the important role water plays in the lives of living beings. The transmission of knowledge through stories provides both knowledge and historical context so that the consumer of the knowledge can use their own life experiences to understand concepts provided.

While the story presented here was from the Haida Nation, there are elements that are reflective of the Ojibwe worldview; we see the relationship to, and connection to water, not unlike



Figure 9. Mural of TEK featuring three Haida matriarchs of the land, air, and water. The mural is the work of Amanda Phingbodhipakkiya (findingsproject.com).
Image courtesy of Wendy F. Todd.

Ojibwe water stories. Interestingly, the TEK in these stories was developed in vastly different environments, from the Haida on the Northern Pacific Ocean and the Ojibwe on the freshwater of Lake Superior. Both tribal communities share

similar stories to describe natural phenomena of water movement, composition, and importance to human life demonstrating the transferability of worldviews and science concepts in cross-cultural collaborations.

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FEATURE

CONNECTING ENVIRONMENT, PLACE, AND COMMUNITY

By Jennifer Gunn, Roxanne Biidabinokwe Gould, Becca Gercken,
Christine Baeumler, and Vicente M. Diaz

“Connections in Practice” is an appropriate theme for this issue of *Open Rivers* highlighting the four years’ work, since 2019, of the Humanities-led Environmental Stewardship, Place, and Community Initiative. This University of Minnesota initiative is funded, in part, by

a \$1.1M grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation (IAS 2019). Professor Jennifer Gunn, then Director of the Institute for Advanced Study (IAS), has led the grant project throughout, with assistance from IAS staff, including Managing Director Susannah Smith and Project Manager



*Approaching sundown at the Sax-Zim Bog in northern Minnesota, USA.
Image courtesy of Christine Baeumler.*

and *Open Rivers* Editor Laurie Moberg. Faculty leaders from the three participating University of Minnesota (UMN) campuses are named below, in sections focusing on each campus's initiative.

The goals of the Mellon Environmental Stewardship, Place, and Community Initiative (MESPAC) all have been about connection: connecting Indigenous ways of knowing and practices of environmental stewardship with the humanities; connecting the humanities with pressing environmental justice concerns; connecting three University of Minnesota (UMN) campuses with each other and with Indigenous communities; connecting activism and experiential practice with pedagogy; and connecting

all of these to decolonization and institutional transformation of the university.

Four years ago, a group of UMN faculty started with a question: "What might the impact be if a major research university were to center Indigenous methodologies and approaches in humanities scholarship?" Could we enlarge upon traditional Euro-American humanities scholarship and pedagogy by integrating Indigenous epistemologies and including diverse knowledge bases? We conceived this as a collaborative effort linking the three University of Minnesota campuses that have American Indian/Native American and Indigenous Studies departments—Morris, Duluth, and the Twin Cities—with



The Indigenous Women's Water Sisterhood conducted a water and ground breaking ceremony for an outdoor classroom on the Waabizheshikana (Western Waterfront) Trail on the St. Louis River. Image courtesy of University of Minnesota Duluth.

regional Indigenous communities already dealing with climate change and environmental injustices who could shape our concerns and priorities and share guidance and knowledge. We saw the inclusion of diverse ways of knowing and

research practices informed by the epistemologies and lifeways of Indigenous peoples as critical to advancing research and planting seeds of real institutional transformation. It was also vital for Native and other underrepresented students to



This map illustrates some of the significant Minnesota locations where work occurred as a part of the MESPAC grant.

see their knowledge bases and worldviews reflected in their classrooms and in the curriculum.

As the grant proposal came together in 2019, we focused on the idea of creating a core group—a cohort composed of faculty, staff, graduate students, and community members—across the state of Minnesota that would provide the broad imagination for this project, to be translated and implemented through the leadership of Native faculty and allies on the University of Minnesota’s Morris, Duluth, and Twin Cities campuses. The cohort would be established initially from existing relationships faculty and staff had with community partners engaged in environmental and Indigenous sovereignty issues, concerns,

and activism. We understood that relationship building takes time and trust; to foster this, we envisioned an in-person summer institute for the cohort to come together to meet each other, to hear from Native scholars and community members, to read and discuss together, and to make plans for practical collaboration over the coming years.

And then came COVID-19. A project that was designed to bring people together across campuses and communities around the state and to build relationships in person was forced to shift to Zoom and more locally focused collaborations. Building trust among an expanded network remained a goal, but it took a backseat to relying on



An earthlodge under construction at the Zani Otunwe site. Image courtesy of Waziyatawin.

existing relationships to keep moving. Additional responsibilities, family caregiving, and fatigue imposed by the pandemic and rapidly evolving changes stretched all the participants very thin. We learned that our design for creating equity among participants didn't address the issues involved in adding new work without providing new time to accomplish it. Still, having to rethink our activities also had some benefits: among others, Zoom reading groups and programming could reach more geographically dispersed community members than in-person activities, and, in reconfiguring, we were able to create more significant forms of professional development and leadership roles for graduate students—our emerging humanities leaders. The narratives from the leaders on the Morris, Duluth, and Twin Cities campuses that follow this overview provide more detail about how each campus pursued their distinctive goals within the initiative.

At our first full meeting of the cohort, we debated language: environmental stewardship versus environmental (in)justice, and what words implied about where responsibility lies for caring for all our relatives. Environmental relations and concern about climate change undergirded almost all our projects in some form: the formation and work of the Indigenous Women's Water Sisterhood around the St. Louis River watershed in Duluth; work by students to help establish traditional Dakota permaculture at the Makoce Ikikcupi reparative justice site; environmental storytelling and food sovereignty in three Humanities Futures Lab courses; exploring water and navigation traditions, ecological knowledge, and foodways in experiential learning; and representations of these and other initiatives in issues of *Open Rivers*.

Place—ties to the land and the natural world—grounded much of this work. For some projects, it was obvious, like the land recovery/restoration of Makoce Ikikcupi; the water work in Duluth and along the Mississippi; the exploration of

bogs; and the international collaboration among graduate students and faculty to develop models for ethical, decolonized arts and place-based research. Some more closely connected Indigeneity to our own academic places, such as recognizing that an important aspect of decolonizing the Morris campus is acknowledging and processing the historical trauma of Morris as a former boarding school. Another significant effort has been establishing a Great Lakes Summer Institute for Global Indigenities to expand regional networks for community engagement among both Native American and Indigenous Studies scholars and Indigenous communities.

While the pandemic posed obstacles to building community and trust through in-person interactions, virtual activities offered wider opportunities for engagement in some cases. An early online workshop on activism in pedagogy with professors Nick Estes (citizen of the Lower Brule Sioux Tribe, Oceti Sakowin Oyate) and Jaskiran Dhillon, the co-authors of *Standing with Standing Rock* (2019), was attended by faculty, students, and community members even beyond the state and established itself as one guide for Indigenizing the curriculum. In collaboration with other campus units such as the Institute on the Environment, we held a series of virtual book groups involving community members from across the state doing collective reading and attending author sessions with Martin Case on *The Relentless Business of Treaties* (2018); Christopher J. Pexa on *Translated Nation: Rewriting the Dakota Oyate* (2019); and Diane Wilson on *The Seed Keeper* (2021). Attendees experienced respectful listening, learning directly from Dakota elders invited by Chris Pexa to his author session. Morris's successful decolonization discussion process was shared through the Twin Cities' Office for Public Engagement's monthly Decolonization and Community-Engaged Scholarship roundtable, which reaches a broad community and campus audience. The collaborative "Thinking Spatially: Indigenous Mapping"

symposium was livestreamed to the North American Cartographic Information Society's annual conference, as well as to campus partners and the public.

At its core, our goals for the MESPAC initiative were to advance institutional transformation through collaborative efforts and—to cite the original grant proposal—“to remake the humanities and prepare a new generation of humanities scholars to engage environmental issues by integrating diverse ways of knowing and the participation of the people impacted by these issues” (IAS 2019). Decolonization of the academy, that is, critiquing and changing the legacies of colonialism in the content and structures of higher education and incorporating previously excluded voices and knowledge, is not abstract; it must be embedded in our daily practices, as the Morris listening sessions and roundtables demonstrated.

At the culminating Place and Relations Capstone, one of the panelists reminded us that we live on Indigenous land and it is incumbent on us all to learn about Indigenous ways of knowing to decolonize our minds. Inclusion is not token acknowledgment—it means having non-native people understand the significance of Indigenous worldviews and learn how to work with Indigenous people and communities. On the same panel, Gavin Zempel, a Morris undergraduate, noted that “the Humanities Futures classes take other topics [not just Native studies] and indigenize it, so it's great to learn it that way....Indigenizing different topics.”

In the following segments, faculty leaders from the three campuses discuss highlights of their MESPAC work, including some of the material benefits of their particular projects.

UMN Duluth—Water Is Life

Faculty leaders: Roxanne Biidabinokwe Gould, Associate Professor, Department of Education and Ruth A. Meyers Center for Indigenous Education; and Wendy F. Todd, Assistant Professor, Departments of American Indian Studies and Earth and Environmental Sciences.

A major focus of UMN Duluth's effort in the MESPAC initiative was development of the Indigenous Women's Water Sisterhood (IWWS), bringing into conversation Indigenous women from around the world who care and speak for water and ceremony. The project grew out of research by Associate Professor Roxanne Biidabinokwe Gould (Grand Traverse Band Odawa/Ojibwe), focusing on Indigenous women, their traditions and work to protect their water. Working with Professor Gould on IWWS are UMD faculty Wendy F. Todd (Haida) and Rachael King-Siert, now Red Lake Nation College Minneapolis Site Coordinator (Red Lake Ojibwe Dine); Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Water Resource Technician Arianna Northbird (Fond du Lac Band of Ojibwe); City of Duluth Sustainability Officer Mindy Granley; and

Red Lake Ojibwe Elder and former Tribal College President Renee Gurneau (Red Lake Band of Chippewa Indians).

The IWWS initiative recognizes that the world is out of balance, and that water—the lifeblood of Mother Earth—is in trouble. Only one percent of the world's water is potable, yet it has to supply eight billion people and all beings that rely on fresh water to live. An ongoing vision of IWWS is to engage youth, since it will be their world. Indigenous prophecies always look ahead seven generations; the work we do now will impact seven generations into the future—not only for Indigenous people, but for all. IWWS has created a curriculum for children, written both in Ojibwe, “Nibi Gizaagi'igoo,” and in English, “Water We Love You.” The beautifully illustrated story is

about a “nibi walk,” led by Sharon Day (Bois Forte Band of Ojibwe), along St. Louis River to Lake Superior, asking for healing of the river. In 2022, IWWS co-sponsored a “Nibi Gizaagi’igoo” Earth Day with Fond du Lac Community College, facilitated by Arianna Northbird. The event, repeated in 2023, focuses on highlighting student environmental research and connecting those students with scholars working in the field. In addition, IWWS worked with the City of Duluth on a water and groundbreaking ceremony on April 18, 2023 for an outdoor classroom on the Waabizheshikana (Western Waterfront) Trail on St. Louis River. As Professor Gould describes it, “This is letting Earth and water know we wish to collaborate with them going forward. We want to be in positive relation with them and all the

beings that live in that place....People can use this space to learn about, pray for, and protect the water. Hopefully wherever they travel or reside, they will take this awareness to work, educate, and defend their own watersheds.” The City will erect Ojibwe signage, designed in cooperation with IWWS.

COVID-19 had an impact on the work at UMD. We were hoping to do more face-to-face work initially, but we changed course. We started with ceremony to center us, worked on planning with the City of Duluth, and developed the children’s book. We worked on the website, which will carry us forward from the MESPAC grant to keep people posted on future work. Some of the Sisterhood have moved on. They were there for



In April 2023, IWWS worked with the City of Duluth on a water and groundbreaking ceremony for an outdoor classroom on the Waabizheshikana Trail on the St. Louis River. Image courtesy of University of Minnesota Duluth.

the founding, and now we will bring others in to help do the work. Professor Gould described the concept of “ogimakwe, the person foremost for the job, not seen as a permanent leader. Not seeing it that way, we hope someone else will step up. I’m not concerned about the work continuing. In terms of COVID, it helped us to center our thinking about the health of the earth and water, [and what happens when] we don’t pay attention to instructions given to us to live in good relationship all of creation.”

The grant enabled the establishment of IWWS; we created cohorts with small resources that allowed us to do the work. The grant provided resources and a team with various gifts to support the work. Beyond the life of the grant, the IWWS will continue to work with Indigenous women all over the world, and anybody who is doing water protection work, whether they are scientists, artists, activists, educators, or others. We want everybody to feel they have a part in this work; we all need this for our survival.



*Roxanne Biidabinokwe Gould, Arianna Northbird, Sharon Day, and Mindy Granley on the day of the water and groundbreaking ceremony.
Image courtesy of University of Minnesota Duluth.*

Indigenous women are important to the leadership of this work, but we need everyone, the whole spectrum of gender that is representative of the life of the planet. Traditionally, everyone had an important place in our communities.

Regarding reach and impact, the outreach focuses on the Great Lakes, in the Odawa community in Michigan, and throughout Minnesota, with both Anishinaabe and Dakota communities. With publication of the children's book and curriculum, we believe it will be far reaching. Gould has just published an article in an education studies journal on COVID and White Supremacy. Her

forthcoming book, *Rematriating Her Lifeblood, Decolonizing Our Waters to Restore the Balance*, will include this research, Indigenous women's stories, and interviews.

Our focus at UMN Duluth has been on Indigenous work and rematriating water governance. When we're allowed to care for the natural world, we do a pretty good job. Six percent of people in the world are Indigenous; we hold twenty percent of the land and eighty percent of biodiversity of the planet. It would be advantageous, not only for us, but for the world, to support us.

UMN Morris—A Decolonizing and Indigenizing Cohort: One Model to Work for Change

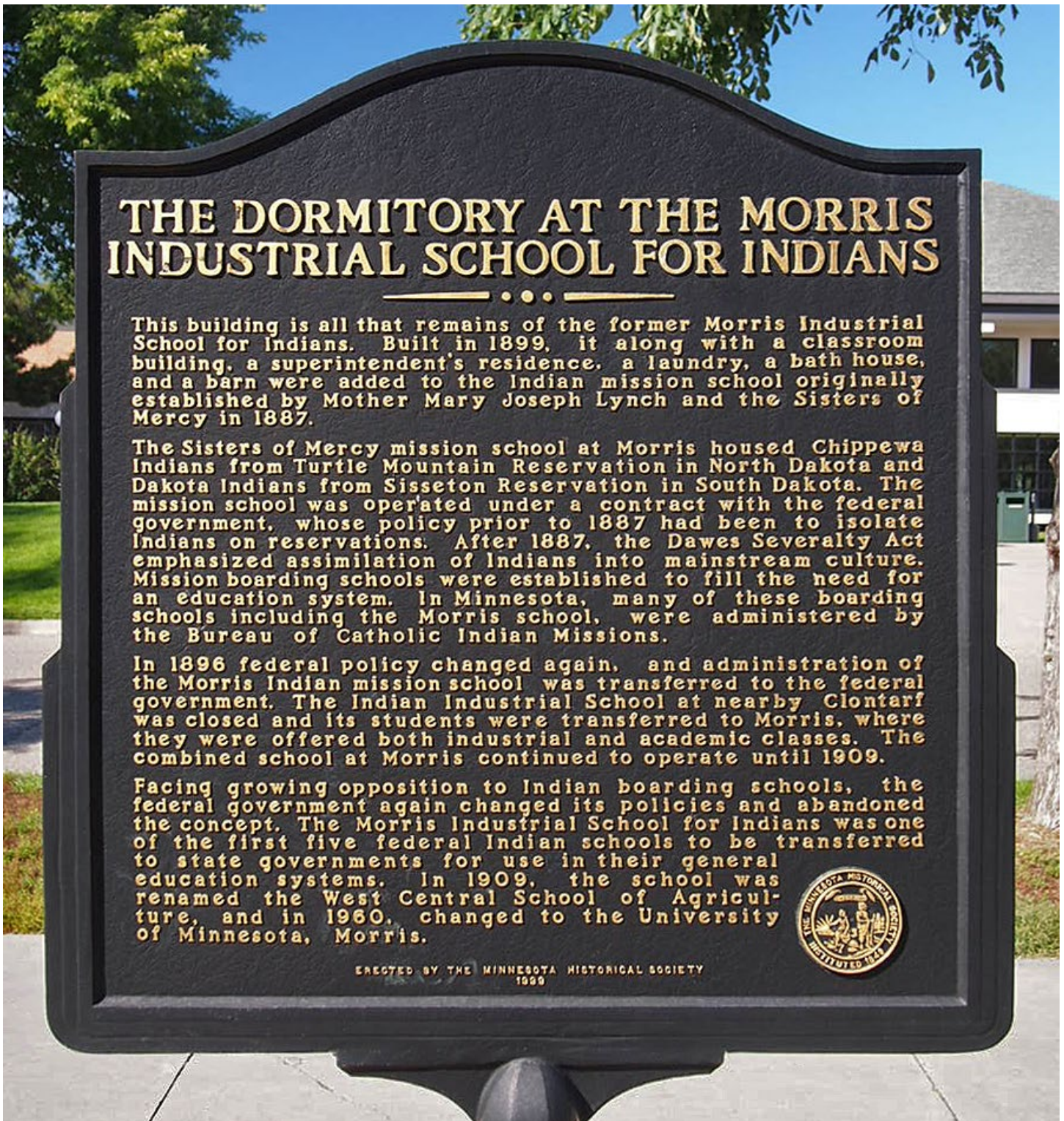
Faculty Leaders: Becca Gercken, Associate Professor of English and Native American and Indigenous Studies; and Kevin Whalen, Associate Professor of History and Native American and Indigenous Studies.

The humanities-led MESPAC Initiative created rich opportunities for institutional change at UMN Morris. The initiative had three main trajectories: curriculum development (integrating Indigenous ways of knowing into environmental education with an emphasis on humanities education and experiential work), community-engaged activism to center Indigenous epistemologies and challenges, and institutional change. As the Morris team was deciding on its central project, it was clear, given the history of the Morris campus and its current demographics, that institutional change was the most pressing—and asked for—need.

For readers unfamiliar with the University of Minnesota Morris, our campus is on the site of

a former Indigenous Residential School. Open from 1887-1909, it was first run by the Sisters of Mercy and then by the federal government. Because of this history, we have a tuition waiver for indigenous people from the United States and Canada, and currently 32 percent of our student population is indigenous. Most are Anishinaabe and Dakota, but we regularly have students from more than 50 nations. We offer a Native American and Indigenous Studies major and minor and are a Native American Serving Non-Tribal Institution.

With the goal of creating a more equitable, inclusive, and culturally competent campus community, the Morris MESPAC team—which also included Clement Loo, Assistant Professor



This plaque is in front of the building that was the dormitory building at the Morris Indigenous Residential School. Image via Gobonobo, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons.

of Environmental Studies and the Student Success Coordinator for Equity, Diversity, and Intercultural Programs; Simón Franco, Assistant Director of Student Activities, Conferences and Events; Adam Coon, Associate Professor of Spanish and Latin American Studies; and Erin Kiyukanpi, recent Morris graduate—offered a yearlong, six-part series devoted to decolonizing and Indigenizing curricular, co-curricular, and extracurricular work. Through a series of listening sessions and roundtables, the cohort leads provided resources and support for faculty and staff interested in expanding their knowledge of indigenous epistemologies and lifeways in

order to create change on campus. By centering Indigenous epistemologies and other ways of knowing, we worked to transform how our campus community thinks about relationships with the planet and each other.

A central point of the MESPAC initiative is that content alone does not create change; methods must change as well and thus our cohort approach reflected indigenous values. Workshops 1 and 4 were listening sessions, with the remaining sessions designed to address the cohort's interests, concerns, and challenges as determined by the listening sessions.



Dormitory at the former Indigenous Residential School in Morris, Minnesota on the University of Minnesota campus, the last remaining building from that era.

Image via Gobonobo, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons.

Morris MESPAC Workshops

1. Introduction and Listening Session
2. Indigenous Theory Reading Discussion
3. Decolonizing Your Classroom and Office
4. Reflection: Takeaways and Resources
5. Building Capacity Reading Discussion
6. Moving Forward and Setting Benchmarks

While it is tempting to share the details of each session, we have instead chosen to highlight those that our cohort described as most transformative. In Session 1, we asked participants to identify areas in which they needed more information and support, and the overwhelming response was readings that would inform a conversation about Indigenous methodologies and ways of knowing and how those methods and ways of knowing could help us reimagine our work as a campus community. Based on the cohort's input, we chose excerpts from Shawn Wilson's *Research is Ceremony* (2008) and Aileen Moreton-Robinson's essay "Relationality: A Key Presupposition of an Indigenous Social Research Paradigm" (2017) for Session 2. Both of these readings focus on the role of relationality in Indigenous research. We talked about applying this idea in the classroom and more broadly in terms of our co-curricular and extra-curricular work; we also talked about emphasizing the responsibilities we have to members of our community, with community imagined in broad terms from classroom to campus to beyond campus. Our core question for this workshop was "how might we approach our work differently if we think of our students, colleagues, and community partners as relatives?"

Our third session, *Decolonizing your Classroom and Office*, built on our previous conversation about relationality and developing a sense of personal responsibility and accountability in

our work to consider how we might transform our spaces and approaches. In this session we began by tackling academic practices that, while grounded in an effort to diversify the academy, often fall short of their goals and in fact may inhibit institutional change.

For example, we are not actually diversifying the university or its population—student, faculty, or staff—if we require codeswitching. We are merely changing demographics. True change can only occur if the institution adapts rather than demanding that historically underrepresented people assimilate. The same is true with our curricula. It is not enough to change content. We also have to change how we approach content.

In this session we also grappled with language that sounds inclusive but may have the effect of exclusion. For example, language such as "I don't see color" or "in my classroom (or lab or office) everyone is equal"—risks erasing the real lived differences of people of color and other historically marginalized persons. They do not stop being Indigenous—or African American or queer or non-binary—because they are in your space.

We talked about how cultural differences could impact how faculty and staff respond to students and how students engage with faculty and staff. As part of the official excused absence policy for family illness or bereavement, our students are asked to provide evidence of the illness or loss. However, in many Native cultures it is problematic and even dangerous to speak about illness and/or death. Thus it can be complicated for students to share reasons for their absences or why they are behind in class. We worked with cohort members to draft syllabus and office protocol language that would signal to students an awareness of these cultural boundaries.

The cohort discussed strategies to create a culturally informed sense of inclusion for Indigenous

students on our campus. One easy way to make change is to work in a circle if possible; have students engage with each other face to face. We also talked about bringing food to share or having food in your office. Food is a sign of welcome and community. We encouraged cohort members to have snacks and water available for visitors and to feed their class or staff to help build community if they had the means to do so.

The inaugural University of Minnesota Morris cohort included 25 members from each of our divisions; 11 of our departments; and at least 6 of our offices, including Admissions, Financial Aid, Residential Life, and Career Services. We have had a positive response from the cohort and, at their request, have continued on-going pop-up sessions and plans for additional workshops. Rachel Johnson, Associate Professor of Biology and Math and Science Division Chair, characterized her cohort experience as follows:

Participating in the decolonizing and Indigenizing series was a transformative experience for me. I learned about how the methodology that I'm using in my teaching can have a huge impact on my students and their learning experience in my classroom. I've restructured how I teach Molecular Biology to incorporate a lot more flexibility and transparency into the class. I also have students make connections between what we're learning in class and issues that impact current events or their day-to-day lives.

If you find yourself interested in creating institutional change, consider the following questions that we asked of our cohort in the early stages of our work together:

- How often do your historically underrepresented students see people that look like them in the front of their classroom? In campus offices?
- How much of their histories, their stories, their lifeways, are reflected in the core curriculum?
- When and where do they see their expressive cultures and their values in the campus's physical places?
- When they hear "we" and "our" statements, how likely are they to feel included? How likely is it that they share the culture and experience being referenced?

These questions, while specific to the Morris campus and its population, could easily be adapted to anything from a K-12 learning environment to a corporate office.

Because of the history and location of the University of Minnesota Morris, it made sense for us to focus on Indigenous epistemologies and lifeways, but we believe this model could be useful to any campus, workplace, or community in terms of fostering a conversation about decolonization. It can also be easily adapted to reflect the demographics of your institution, place of work, or neighborhood. What sort of conversations might be needed to help all community members feel as if they belong on your campus? In your classroom? In your office? In your place of business? We hope that this model from the Morris MESPAC leadership team might help others with that work.

UMN Twin Cities

Faculty leaders: Christine Baeumler, Professor and Chair, Department of Art; Čhaŋtémaza Neil McKay, Senior Teaching Specialist, Department of American Indian Studies; and Vicente M. Diaz, Professor and Chair, Department of American Indian Studies.

Over the course of MESPAC, the Twin Cities campus team carried out a number of initiatives and projects in collaboration with other campus and community organizations. For example, faculty lead Čhaŋtémaza (Neil McKay) and Monica Siems McKay, Assistant Director of the Center for Community-Engaged Learning, led discussions on land acknowledgments and reparations for the University's Office for Public Engagement,

ultimately resulting in the December, 2020 *Open Rivers* article "Where We Stand: The University of Minnesota and Dakhóta Treaty Lands." This article is one of the most viewed articles in the journal, so we have reprinted it in this issue[1].

The accounts below address initiatives related to courses and some research and extracurricular projects carried out as part of MESPAC.

Reparative Justice Project

In one initiative, led by Professor Vicente M. Diaz, faculty and students spent three years building kinship with the Dakota non-profit organization, Makoce Ikikcupi. Cohort member Waziyatawin, Dakota scholar and activist, is the executive director of the reparative justice project that combines land-back, food sovereignty, and restoring traditional Dakota ways. Makoce Ikikcupi centers activities in Zani Otunwe, a 21-acre village of traditional residential lodges, permaculture gardens, and ceremonial sites. Before the pandemic, and definitely thwarted during the height of COVID, Diaz and UMN cohort and community leaders, including

Čhaŋtémaza, and HolyElk Lafferty, James Rock, and Roxanne Gould (members of the Makoce Ikikcupi Governing Council), led undergraduate and graduate students, Twin Cities community members, and UMN faculty participants to establish good relations with, and at, Zani Otunwe. We provided hands-on labor and assistance in land clearing, planting, and weeding, and generally assisted in any work that needed to be done. Students also used their artistic talents and organizing skills by assisting in web design and other media and lobbying needs, producing zines, and other forms of experiential learning.

Graduate Leadership Fellows

Under Diaz' supervision, MESPAC funds were reprogrammed to create a team of graduate student leaders to assist in the Minnesota hosting of the 2023 Summer Institute for Global Indigeneities (SIGI), to be held June 10–15, 2023 on the UMN Twin Cities campus, and to help vision, propose, and begin to fundraise for the creation of a permanent Native Great Lakes–themed institute to include Big Ten and other regional institutions in

summer 2024. The Minnesota SIGI was modeled after the annual SIGI held at the University of Washington Seattle, which is an intensive week-long graduate student professional and intellectual institute that brings together Ph.D. students and faculty from universities that offer comparative Native studies. They hold workshops and engaged activities on the intellectual and institutional challenges of Global Indigenous



Many hands make light work at Zani Otunwe. Governing council member Roxanne Biidabinokwe Gould is shown here stripping bark from the many logs used in earthlodge building. Image courtesy of Waziyatawin.

studies, providing epistemological and professional strategies for successfully completing and disseminating research projects not always legible to conventional academic disciplines. Hosting SIGI 2023 will introduce the model to

the University of Minnesota and Big Ten faculty, and Indigenous community partners, allowing us to customize and host a Native Great Lakes/ Mississippi River regional version in 2024, and in the future.

Decolonizing Place-based Arts Research

In spring 2021, Professor Christine Baeumler collaborated with IAS fellow, Professor Mary Modeen (Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art & Design [DJCAD], University of Dundee, Dundee, Scotland), on an international symposium, *Decolonising Place-based Arts Research*, with five Ph.D. students from DJCAD, and four University of Minnesota students (two

doctoral students from the Departments of Forest Resources and Theatre Arts and Dance, and two MFA students from the Department of Art). In this three-day interdisciplinary symposium, held on Zoom, they asked questions about the rights and responsibilities of researchers and discussed student projects. Two guest speakers also participated: Professor Tania Ka'ai (Auckland



"Decolonising Place-Based Arts Research," 2021, Ed. Mary Modeen.

University of Technology) and Dr. Alexandra M. Peck (MESPAC's Visiting Scholar of Critical Indigenous Studies). Dr. Peck was also a guest speaker in the 2021 Visiting Artist and Critics program in the Department of Art, UMN Twin Cities.

An outcome of the symposium was a collaborative book, *Decolonising Place-based Arts Research*, edited by Mary Modeen (2021), with essays by the symposium participants

and two additional German artists. Baeumler contributed the essay, "Reflecting on Backyard Phenology: A Participatory Art and Citizen Science Collaboration." The book was published in December, 2021, by DJCAD (University of Dundee), in association with the Institute for Advanced Study (University of Minnesota) and Te Ipukarea Research Institute (Auckland University of Technology), with additional distribution by Huia Press (Auckland, NZ).

Book Groups and Author Engagement (2020, 2021)

The conversations among the MESPAC faculty cohort on the UMN Twin Cities campus, along with those at UMN Duluth and UMN Morris, were important opportunities for faculty to share their knowledge, challenges, and ongoing projects. With the intent to create broader discussions within the university community and with the general public, Baeumler initiated two book groups through MESPAC. The first book group focused on *The Relentless Business of Treaties: How Indigenous Land Became U.S. Property*, by Martin Case (2018). The opening event, an IAS Thursdays program on February 20, 2020, featured presentations by Case, Čhantémaza (American Indian Studies; MESPAC faculty co-lead, UMN Twin Cities), and Becca Gercken

(Native American and Indigenous Studies and English; MESPAC faculty co-lead, UMN Morris). In addition, Martin Case created five short videos, based on his book chapters, which can be used by classes and groups reading the book.[2]

The second book group focused on Diane Wilson's novel, *The Seed Keeper* (2021). During an IAS Thursdays event held on April 8, 2021, Wilson gave a reading, and Baeumler interviewed her about the book (IAS Thursdays 2021). The online audience was able to discuss the book and ask the author questions at a second Zoom event. Diane Wilson won the 2022 Minnesota Book Award in Fiction for *The Seed Keeper*.

Bog Enthusiasts Symposium

Professor Mary Modeen traveled to Minnesota and spent three weeks in residence during February, 2022, at the IAS as a fellow. While in residence, she traveled with Christine Baeumler to the Sax-Zim Bog, north of Duluth, and met with Professor Brenda Child (UMN Twin Cities Departments of American Studies and American Indian Studies) and artist Jonathan Thunder, to tour the bog in winter, February 4–6. Modeen and Baeumler also met with Dakota author and cohort member Diane Wilson and visited the tamarack bog behind Wilson's house on February

12. As a MESPAC project, Wilson is mapping the bog ecosystem and considering ways to protect the bog and wetland near her home from agricultural runoff. Barr Engineering ecologist, Fred Rozumalski, met with the group at the site to discuss the water quality issues.

On February 10, Modeen and Baeumler hosted a Bog Enthusiast gathering at the IAS for 20 people, which included an interdisciplinary group of artists, activists, undergraduate and graduate students, and faculty who are passionate about



*Mary Modeen takes a picture at the Sax-Zim Bog on a chilly day in February, 2023.
Image courtesy of Christine Baeumler.*

bog ecosystems. Modeen gave a presentation about issues that impact bogs in Scotland and the UK. Afterwards, participants shared their own concerns about threats to bogs and wetlands in

Minnesota. This meeting was intended to build an interdisciplinary coalition of people who want to continue to meet and advocate for bog and wetland ecosystems.

Conclusion

Shortly before this issue of *Open Rivers* went to press, the hybrid “Place and Relations Capstone: Indigenizing Education” brought together faculty leaders and student and community participants to share outcomes of the grant’s work and consider future work to address ongoing issues around university relations with Native communities. The overlapping Humanities Futures Workshop brought Indigenous and other underrepresented undergraduates into conversation with the Capstone presenters, as well as meeting with graduate student mentors and faculty to explore what graduate education in the humanities could offer them. The symposium panels and workshop conversations reflected the learnings and understandings developed during the MESPAC initiative.

Here are some of the lessons we are taking away from the last four years’ work and carrying forward in our individual and collective academic work.

- Experiential learning must be embedded in our pedagogy. This includes giving students opportunities to work with communities, to see the skills they can develop and contribute, to learn from elders as at Makoce Ikikcupi or in the curricula created by the Indigenous Water Women’s Sisterhood in Duluth and the Humanities Futures Labs.
- Practices and processes that reflect Indigenous and other values are as important as the content. The undergraduate Humanities Futures Labs, graduate student mentoring in the Humanities Futures Workshop, and placing graduate

students in leadership roles to design and co-teach the Labs and develop the regional Great Lakes SIGI transformed practices of inclusion and acknowledgment of diverse expertise in a way that went far beyond the initial goals of developing new curricula. Participants practiced collaborative humanities—changes in the working methods of the humanities from solo research production and reliance on texts to collaborative community engagement and relationality, recognition of all our relatives.

- We learned much about how to work for institutional transformation from our own process: the need for time to listen, read, reflect, and not only to build, but to sustain, relationships. We came to understand the ways in which institutional administrative systems and policies can be inhospitable and obstacles to respectful relationships with community partners. This was unintended learning, but no less critical for undertaking the culture change necessary for institutions to foster equity and justice within their own walls and society at large.

As we tackle the challenges of sustaining this work, some of our aspirations have shifted or become more focused. *The TRUTH Report, Oshkigin Noojimo’iwe, Naḡi Wan̄ Petu Un̄ Ihduwas’ake He Oyate Kin̄ Zaniwičaye Kte*, which focuses on the persistent, systemic mistreatment of Indigenous peoples by the University of Minnesota, was published the same week as the Capstone Symposium (2023).

Another project financially supported by the Mellon Foundation through the Minnesota Transform Just Futures grant, the TRUTH Report demands a reckoning that will inform our future work as well. From our own projects, we have new visions for what the work of the humanities looks like in communities and in addressing critical social issues; the TRUTH Report is a humanistic work of rigorous, collective historical research and a foundation for new knowledge and research models. These projects necessitate new methods and inclusive content in the classroom, in research, and in graduate education and professional development. Institutional transformation requires cultural change to decolonize

the curriculum, institutional structures, and campus spaces. It also involves finding ways of sharing university resources with communities as genuine partners in pedagogy and research, and sharing across campuses to enhance depth and offerings for students. Pragmatically, the latter would include increased, integrative support for Native American and Indigenous Studies across all the UMN system campuses and expanding the Humanities Futures Lab model and the place-based research and community-engaged experiential learning. Above all, sustainability means continuing to build and nurture the connections, respectful relationships, and collaborative practices that reflect our commitments.

About The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation

The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation is the nation's largest supporter of the arts and humanities. Since 1969, the Foundation has been guided by its core belief that the humanities and arts are essential to human understanding. The Foundation believes that the arts and humanities are where we express our complex humanity, and that everyone deserves the beauty, transcendence, and freedom that can be found there. Through our grants, we seek to build just communities enriched by meaning and empowered by critical thinking, where ideas and imagination can thrive. Learn more at mellon.org.

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Footnotes

[1] "Where We Stand: The University of Minnesota and Dakhóta Treaty Lands" is the second most visited article in *Open Rivers* since it was originally published in fall 2020.

[2] *The Relentless Business of Treaties: How Indigenous Land Became U.S. Property* by Martin Case (Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2018) explores the economic and political motivations of those who, on behalf of the United States, negotiated and signed treaties with Indigenous nations. In this series of five [videos](#), the author introduces each section of the book and offers topics for reading group discussions. Find a wide range of reading group resources from the Institute for Advanced Study and Institute on the Environment at the University of Minnesota at <https://ias.umn.edu/reading-group>.

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About the Authors

Jennifer Gunn is a former director of the University of Minnesota Institute for Advanced Study and a faculty member in the Program in the History of Medicine in the Medical School. Of settler descent, raised in the Southern United States, her research is on the history of rural health and medicine in the Upper Midwest in the early to mid-twentieth century, examining the influence of different economic geographies on the organization of and access to health care.

Dr. Roxanne Biidabinokwe Gould is Kitchwikwendong Anishinaabe from the Grand Traverse Band of Michigan. She is an associate professor of Education in the Department of Education-Ruth A. Meyers Center for Indigenous Education. Roxanne's work has extended throughout the Indigenous world with a focus on critical Indigenous education, land and water pedagogy and restorative justice. As a founder of the Bdote Learning Center, Roxanne developed the model for the place-based Dakota and Ojibwe language immersion school. She presently serves on the governing council of Makočé Ikikčupí, a Dakota land recovery project, as elder emeritus for Dream of Wild Health, a Native gardening project; on the Indigenous Roundtable for the Science Museum of Minnesota and the Indigenous Women's Water Sisterhood. In her personal life she is a mother and grandmother with life long relationships through marriage and deep friendships with the Dakota community. As an Indigenous person living on Dakota homeland she is committed to reparative justice for Dakota peoples and homelands as she would want from anyone living in her Anishinaabe homeland of Kitchwikwendog.

Becca Gercken is an associate professor in English and a founding faculty member of the Native American and Indigenous Studies program at the University of Minnesota Morris, where she has also served as Chief Diversity Officer and Senior Advisor to the Chancellor for Diversity and Inclusion. Gercken's research frequently focuses on representations of Indigenous people and Indigenous expressive cultures. Her most recent project is a monograph about historical and contemporary ledger narratives. Gercken received the Horace T. Morse Award for Outstanding Contributions to Undergraduate Education in 2017.

Christine Baeumler is a professor and chair in the Department of Art, a socially engaged/environmental artist, and a co-leader on the Twin Cities MESPAC faculty team. During the grant period, she focused on engagement around issues of environmental stewardship, with an emphasis on place-based arts practices, shared readings, and convenings with graduate students, faculty, staff, artists, and scientists.

Vicente M. Diaz is Pohnpeian and Filipino from Guam. An interdisciplinary scholar, Diaz founded and heads the Native Canoe Program in the Department of American Indian Studies, University of Minnesota Twin Cities campus. The program uses Indigenous watercraft for community-engaged teaching and research on Indigenous water traditions. Diaz's research is on comparative Indigenous cultural and political resurgence in Oceania and the Native Great Lakes and Upper Mississippi River region, particularly through the lens of Trans-Indigenous theory and practice, which foregrounds Indigenous histories and technologies of travel and mobility and pan-Indigenous solidarity

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

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.

***[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

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

certainly 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 millennia.

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 transmuting 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 Uñ Ihduwas'ake He Oyate Kiñ 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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About the Authors

Racquel Banaszak (Bad River and Bois Forte Ojibwe) is a visual artist and public historian. Her work often focuses on Indigenous histories, law and policies, and representation. She is currently pursuing her Master of Heritage Studies and Public History at the University of Minnesota. She earned her graduate certificate in Native American Studies from Montana State University (2018) and a Bachelor of Science degree from the Minneapolis College of Art and Design (2012). She also studied Indigenous Visual Culture at the Ontario College of Art & Design University in Toronto, Canada.

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 Othúnwe (“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.

Tyler C. Seidel is Hunkpapa Lakota (Standing Rock) and a first-generation student with a Bachelor of Science degree in biology, specializing in conservation and biodiversity. He is currently in the ecology, evolution and behavior Ph.D. program at the University of Minnesota Twin Cities where his dissertation research is focused on how aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems are connected through food webs in urban environments. His work has been supported by the National Science Foundation, has urged him to learn from the Institute for Advanced Studies, and has inspired him to build meaningful connections with local and international community advocates.

FEATURE

PLACE AND RELATIONS CAPSTONE: INDIGENIZING EDUCATION

By Susannah L. Smith and Carmen Petit

How can we decolonize the university? For the past four years, Indigenous community members and faculty, staff, and students from the University of Minnesota’s Duluth, Morris, and Twin Cities campuses have developed projects aimed at doing exactly this as part of the Environmental Stewardship, Place, and Community Initiative, funded by a grant from the Mellon Foundation. On Friday, April 14, 2023, participants in these initiatives gathered at the University’s Institute for Advanced Study to share their ideas and experiences in the capstone symposium “Place and Relations: Indigenizing Education.” The capstone encompassed topics of higher education, Indigenous sovereignty

and traditional knowledges, and the role of space, place, and land. The speakers touched on the integral intersections in these subjects, as well as their points of divergence and disconnect. Arriving on the heels of the TRUTH Project’s publication (*Towards Recognition and University-Tribal Healing*)—a report which revealed the University of Minnesota’s complicity and facilitation of colonial dispossession and violence—the capstone provided necessary space for Indigenous leaders and thinkers to strategize and share knowledge and methods, and for non-Indigenous community members, listeners, and allies to contend with their potential roles in this contemporary stage of colonialism.



*The landscape adjacent to a water blessing by the Indigenous Women's Water Sisterhood.
Image courtesy of the University of Minnesota Duluth.*

Beginning with Water

The symposium began with a Water Ceremony led by Ojibwe Elder Sharon Day. She set a tone of generosity—and obligation—when she shared that, as a member of the Marten clan, she was taught that her duty is to the care of the family, the clan, the band, the tribe, and eventually all humanity. When we pray, she explained, we pray for everything: the water, the earth, the plants, and everyone. With gifts of water and tobacco, she led a song of love, thanks, and respect for water.



The symposium took place in the Best Buy Theater in Northrop at the University of Minnesota Twin Cities campus. Image courtesy of Nina O'Leary.

TONGVALAND as an Exercise of Colonial Unknowing

Mishuana Goeman, an enrolled member of the Tonawanda band of Seneca, and Chair and Professor of Indigenous Studies, University at Buffalo, gave the keynote address, “Caring for Landscapes of Justice in Perilous Settler Environments.” She presented the work of Native American artists that pushes against colonial geographic erasure in the Los Angeles area, demonstrating the tensions between settler and Indigenous aesthetics. Goeman acknowledges that Indigenous people today are both (in the words of Linda Hogan) “the result of the love of thousands,” and the result of genocide. Rather than let the violence of settler colonialism define who American Indians are, she prefers to write about the life-giving force of Indigenous artists.

Goeman’s talk focused first on the TONGVALAND project, a public-art installation of the work of Tongva artists on seven prominent billboards in the Los Angeles metro area August-September 2021. The Gabrielino-Tongva are the people native to the Los Angeles Basin who were dispossessed by Spanish settlers, Mexican authorities, and the U.S. government in turn. She characterized the TONGVALAND installation as an effort to counter a settler commercial map of Los Angeles, in which land is seen as a resource or something to extract from. The TONGVALAND project is an exercise of colonial unknowing and Indigenous embodied knowing on the settler landscape, reflecting a refusal of settler ordinances and geographies.

The pieces are a display of what Goeman calls “Rematriation,” an Indigenous practice to bring healing: “Our ancestors lived in community with nature; we have a responsibility to restore this.” Cara Romero’s works “Mercedes at Kuruvungna,” “Miztla at Puvungna,” and “Weshoyot” depict Indigenous women plunging into sacred water or holding traditional objects, demonstrating their relationship to the land. Displaying large images of these women in specific locations is an important way to cope with the exploitation of and violence enacted on Indian women’s bodies and the land on which the work was displayed. Other works, such as River Garza’s “What the City Gave Us,” demonstrate how turning land into property and a commodity allowed its desecration. This piece is a collage of images of conventional depictions of Indians, the polluting oil wells that brought settlers, an early mission building, and maps combined with graffiti statements such as “If the land isn’t healthy, we are not healthy.” This piece, Goeman asserts, shows Indigenous presence and refusal of erasure. Goerman also discussed a public art installation by Tongva artist Mercedes Dorame. “Pulling the Sun Back – Xa’aa Peshii Nehiino” creates Indigenous belonging in a public park. This installation demonstrates three elements in Tongva space: home, healing space, and ceremonial space. Goerman sees it as offering a reflection on space and communities of care. Dorame’s work allows us to begin to imagine new landscapes, grounded in Indigenous epistemologies.

The First Panel: Beginning With Indigenous-led Community Projects

The remainder of the symposium comprised three panel presentations. In the first, “Relating with Place: Indigenous-led Community Projects,” three Indigenous women—Maggie Lorenz (enrolled Turtle Mountain Ojibwe and descended

Spirit Lake Dakota), Waziyatawin (Wahpetunwan Dakota), and Roxanne Biidabinokwe Gould (Odawa and Ojibwe, Grand Traverse and Little Traverse bands of Michigan)—discussed projects that reclaim Native spaces and ways of working.

Wakan Tipi Awanyankapi

Wakan Tipi Awanyankapi is a Native-led, environmental conservation nonprofit operating in the East Side of St. Paul, Minnesota. Executive Director Maggie Lorenz described the development of this organization from its start in 1997 by a group of non-native, majority white, middle-to-upper class neighbors dedicated to bringing Lower Phalen Creek, which had long been diverted and buried in storm sewers, back to the surface. This work included restoring and cleaning up the land through which the creek would run to the Mississippi, which included heavily polluted land that had been serving for years as an unofficial dump site. The focus of the organization shifted when the site underwent a review required by the National Historic Preservation Act. They discovered that the land included Wakan Tipi cave, a significant Dakota sacred site. What had begun as a relatively straightforward effort to restore a stream, clean up polluted land, and create neighborhood amenities like a dog park and soccer field now became a project of cultural reclamation. At this point, Lorenz noted, the organization had no ties to the Native community, and its members realized that Native input was necessary. As she describes it, their thought process developed from “we should do something special here for Dakota people” to “we should do something special here with Dakota people,” then finally to, “we should turn this project over to Dakota leadership and support that leadership.” Over time, the organization changed its name

from Lower Phalen Creek Project to Wakan Tipi Awanyankapi and its board is now on the cusp of becoming majority Native. Lorenz, who started working with the organization in 2019, said that she had never before experienced this kind of transformation, and she sees similar processes taking place in other organizations.



Wakan Tipi Awanyankapi is a Native-led environmental conservation nonprofit. Founded in 1997 by community activists, the project area stretches from Lake Phalen to the Mississippi River and throughout the East Side River District.

Makoce Ikikcupi

According to Executive Director Waziyatawin, Makoce Ikikcupi is engaged in the project of land recovery and Dakota repatriation. Following the Dakota War of 1862, the Dakota people were dispossessed and exiled from their homelands in Minnesota. The purpose of Makoce Ikikcupi is to buy back small parcels of land and establish communities that practice traditional Dakota ways of being. They use sustainable and regenerative practices to restore the land and honor their ancestors. The organization made its first land purchase in 2019 of 28 acres in Granite Falls, Minnesota, and began building its first village, Zani Otunwe, or Village of Wellbeing. Living in an earth lodge, with the community gathering to sing, drum, process medicinal plants, and practice crafts is, in Waziyatawin's words, a simple and beautiful way to live. In summer



Zani Otunwe is also known as the Village of Wellbeing.



*Waziyatawin shared this intimate view of an earthlodge she and her husband lived in at Enemy Swim on the Lake Traverse Reservation in South Dakota.
Image courtesy of Waziyatawin.*

2022, her granddaughter gave birth in the earth lodge, attended by her mother, a traditional midwife, and surrounded by Dakota people and ancestors. She reckons this child to be the first Dakota baby born in an earth lodge in 300 years. “This is what reclaiming is: reconnecting with our ancestors. We don’t know what outcome of this work will be, but the intention is profound.” As

part of the Environmental Stewardship, Place, and Community initiative, Professor Vicente Diaz brought his University of Minnesota students to Zani Otunwe to see place-based Indigenous education in action and learn what it is like for an Indigenous population to try to reclaim, recover, and reconnect with the land, offering them a transformative experience.

Indigenous Women’s Water Sisterhood

Roxanne Biidabinokwe Gould, Associate Professor in the Department of Education and Ruth A. Meyers Center for Indigenous Education at the University of Minnesota Duluth, spoke about the establishment of the Indigenous Women’s Water Sisterhood as part of the Environmental Stewardship, Place, and Community initiative. The Sisterhood is a response to the world’s water crisis by Indigenous women, who have always had the responsibility of caring for water. Indigenous peoples lost their relationship to the water of their homelands as land was ceded to settlers. Gould stated that practices of human supremacy, Christianity, and heteropatriarchy reduced water to “it”—yet water is not “it,” but “who.” “As Indigenous people, we are part of Mother Earth. Tributaries flow like the blood in our veins. There is a sacred relationship that binds us.” With this in mind, a small group of Indigenous women founded the Indigenous Women’s Water Sisterhood to decolonize their water, using traditional and spiritual knowledge to protect the Lake Superior watershed. Their work has included creating children’s curriculum in both English and Anishinaabe and collaborating with the city of Duluth to create an outdoor teaching and ceremony space. Gould finished with the call to action by first water walker Josephine Mandamin: “So what will you do for the water?”



Indigenous Women’s Water Sisterhood uses collective Traditional and Spiritual Knowledge to raise awareness about and to take actions to improve and protect the sacred Lake Superior watershed.

Reemphasizing the Power of Indigenous Leadership

The projects discussed in this panel demonstrate the power and agency of Native people who are asserting their intrinsic relationship to place and referencing their own traditions and practices in important efforts to restore balance and health to the environment we all share. Their collective expertise illuminated the capacity and need for non-Indigenous, and particularly white, solidarity for leveraging the redistribution of financial

resources, land, and institutional authority to Indigenous peoples. Congruently, they reemphasized the power of Indigenous leadership as it pertains to the protection and stewardship of the lands, waters, and other-than-human kin. Their work has cultivated spaces of Indigenous cultural and political authority and reinvigorated sovereign Indigenous relations and reciprocal care with the land.

The Second Panel: The Humanities Futures Labs

The second panel of the day offered further practical examples, this time in development of humanities curriculum. “Indigenous Pedagogy in Higher Education: The Humanities Futures Labs” featured undergraduate students, faculty, and graduate instructors who have been participating in three one-credit virtual Humanities Labs offered in spring 2023 to students at the University of Minnesota’s Duluth, Morris, and Twin Cities campuses. Humanities Labs, as Professor Becca

Gercken explained, are a new phenomenon and there is little information on how to create and run them. The team of faculty and graduate fellows that designed the three Humanities Futures Labs aimed for the labs to be interdisciplinary, to model and use Indigenous methods, and to drive institutional transformation. They intended not to imitate the sciences, but to ask questions and demonstrate the practical application of the humanities to students.

Examining the Challenges and Benefits of Interdisciplinary Work

The team started work far in advance with a two-week intensive summer workshop in 2022 at which they reviewed models and methods of the (few) existing Humanities Labs that they were able to find. They considered how their methods might differ from science models, weighed the strengths and weaknesses of using a lab format, and examined the challenges and benefits of interdisciplinary work. They examined how lessons are taught and knowledge collectively built in Indigenous communities, using that model for their pedagogical approach. The topics for each lab were developed by the two graduate fellows and one faculty member who would teach that lab, drawn from their own interests and

knowledge, approaching the material with an Indigenous lens using Indigenous research methods. Tyler Seidel, a PhD candidate in Ecology, Evolution, and Behavior, has a long-standing interest in incorporating traditional Indigenous knowledge into science; both are a form of story-telling. The lab he co-taught, “Unearthing Earth Stories,” analyzed Indigenous stories using Text Data Mining to investigate how personal identity and relationships inform Indigenous understandings about the earth and climate. Professor Clement Loo said that his group was interested in running a lab on mining sovereignty, but as they all knew much more about food sovereignty, they developed the lab “Food

and Relationality” instead. Racquel Banaszak, a Master’s candidate in Heritage Studies and Public History, said that her interest in gardening and

another fellow’s background in plants led to the lab “Seeds, Cycles, and Stories.”

Applying Indigenous Knowledge to Traditional Scientific or Western Ways of Thought

The undergraduates particularly appreciated the practical application of Indigenous methods of work. Gavin Zempel, who has a double major in Psychology and Native American & Indigenous Studies, spoke of this as “Indigenizing” topics beyond what he learns in his Indigenous Studies classes. Neo Bhavsar, double majoring in Indigenous Studies and Public Policy, thought

the best part of the lab was applying Indigenous knowledge to traditional scientific or Western ways of thought, to the benefit of the material. Mia Sam, majoring in Native American & Indigenous Studies, appreciated the sense of inclusivity that permeated all aspects of the labs through the perspective of Indigenous ways of knowing.



The Humanities Futures Labs panel. From left to right, Tyler Seidel, Racquel Banaszak, Mia Sam, Gavin Zempel, Neo Bhavsar, Professor Becca Gercken, and Isabel Huot-Link. Professor Clement Loo attended the panel remotely. Image courtesy of Nina O’Leary.

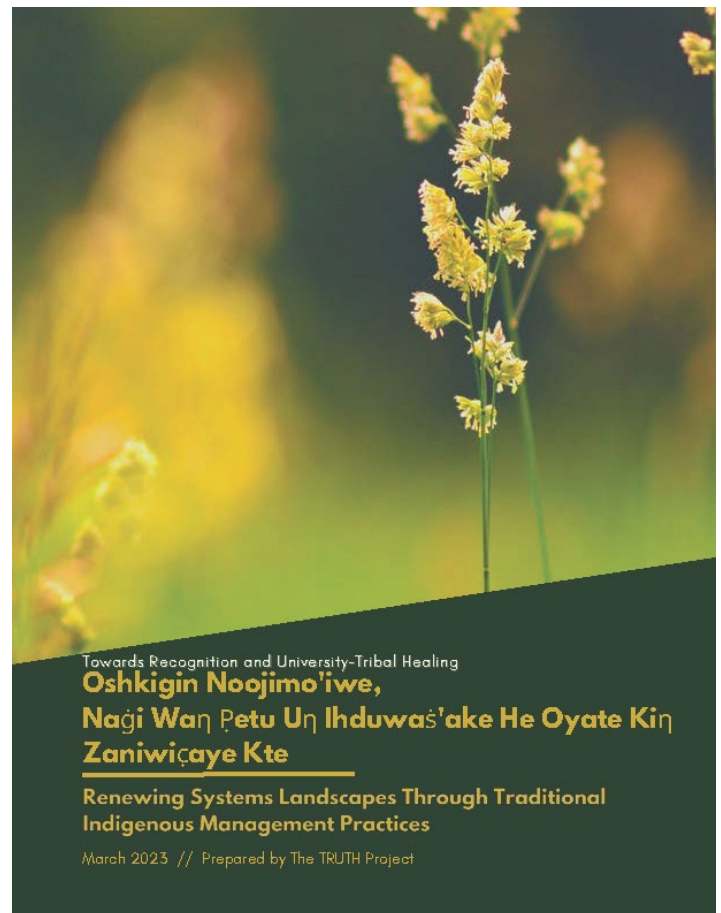
One Credit Is Just Not Enough

What advice or ideas from the labs did the participants have for future work? Both instructors and students thought that a one-credit lab was insufficient; a full-credit course would give space for more material and Indigenous research methods. They also advocated incorporating Indigenous knowledge systems in all subjects and increasing recognition of Indigenous ways in academia. Gercken and Loo both discussed the difficulty of engaging alternate methods of pedagogy and research. The academy is fundamentally hierarchical, productivity oriented, and exclusionary. Pushing against these conventions by engaging

in authentic conversations and relationships brings to light deeply rooted, otherwise hidden barriers. By making these barriers visible, we can figure out how to make those structures better to engage in knowledge generation from a variety of perspectives—which is a profoundly humanistic endeavor. This panel demonstrated that Indigenousizing the curriculum is not only possible, it is appreciated by students and instructors alike. Furthermore, because there are so few models, creating a Humanities Lab is a great opportunity for experimentation.

The Third Panel: TRUTH, Reparations, and Transformation

The final panel of the day, “University Reparations and Transformation: Embarking on a Tremendous Journey,” focused on work to make universities accountable for how they have benefitted from Land Grant/Land Grab funding and for their complicity in exploitation of Indigenous resources, knowledge, and people. Jaime Arsenault (White Earth Ojibwe), Tribal Historic Preservation Officer, Repatriation Representative, and Archives Manager for the White Earth Band of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe, outlined her reconciliation work with the College of St. Benedict and St. John’s University, once the site of an Indian boarding school. This work involves difficult conversations and requires commitment on all sides to build right relationship. Repatriation work is hard at first, but she thinks that everyone who is involved goes through a transformation: “we are smiling more when we get to the end.” Engaging students in this process teaches them how to do ethical work with and guided by community. They learn to



*Front page of The TRUTH Report,
Oshkigin Noojimo'iwe, Nāgi Waŋ Țetu Uŋ
Ihduwaś'ake He Oyate Kiŋ
Zaniwiçaye Kte.*

take risks and not shy away from having difficult conversations. She is hopeful that this process will be repeated as we work with what the TRUTH Report has revealed.

Elizabeth Rule, enrolled member of the Chickasaw Nation and Assistant Professor of Critical Race, Gender, and Culture Studies at American University, discussed her work with Landback Universities, which takes its inspiration from the Land-Grab Universities investigation published by *High Country News* in 2020. Landback Universities is a collaboration of

Indigenous people exploring the central question of transferring land back to the tribes and peoples from whom it was expropriated. They are convening a group of students, higher education administrators, faculty, staff, and members of communities representing Tribal nations to work together to share best practices and strategies for thinking about land return. Including people who are at all ranks and stages, from inside and outside of academia, is crucial to break down the silos that characterize higher education.

Relocation and Land Dispossession Are Directly Linked to Adverse Outcomes

An Garagiola, descendent of the Bois Forte Band of Chippewa, University Project Coordinator of the TRUTH Project, and Project Manager in the University of Minnesota's Office of Native American Affairs, discussed the TRUTH Project's work and the recent release of the TRUTH Report. This collaboration between the University's Office of Native Affairs and the Minnesota Indian Affairs Council (MIAC) was spurred by a series of resolutions in 2020 by MIAC calling for actions that the University could take to be in better relationship with Minnesota's eleven recognized tribes. Garagiola described piecing together the story of how the University played a role in the relocation of Native peoples, especially her own community of Bois Forte Chippewa. She discovered from University Extension Office records that 36 families from Bois Forte were relocated at the same time as her grandmother; she concluded that her family was part of this relocation. Relocation and land dispossession are directly linked to adverse outcomes for those who were relocated; Garagiola's subsequent family history reflected this. She and other Tribal researchers were able to map

out Native land that the University acquired and trace profits that the University made from the sale of lands and from exploitation of Indigenous resources and knowledge. This constitutes two kinds of violence: externalized violence against Indigenous land and resources, and internalized violence in the devaluation of Indigenous epistemologies and profit from Indigenous knowledge while declaring that knowledge not good enough to use. The Morrill Act called for perpetual holding of the funds derived from sale of the lands, creating the Permanent University Fund (PUF). TRUTH researchers discovered that the University used the PUF to make municipal bonds that were means to support settlement of non-Native peoples and continue to be a source of income for the University. The TRUTH researchers call for Permanent Reparations, breaking up the PUF and sending a steady stream of revenue to be overseen by Tribal representatives and invested in Tribal priorities. Garagiola also spoke about how difficult the process of discovery was for the TRUTH researchers, who were learning about these traumas for the first time.



*Jaime Arsenault and An Garagiola talking with Vicente Diaz.
Image courtesy of Nina O'Leary.*

Indigenous Futures

The three presenters reconfigured deafening losses into potentialities for Indigenous resurgence with the land, both within and beyond the confines of academia. Central to their discussion was the impetus to convene and orient these findings, movements, and intellectual groundings towards Indigenous futures. Arsenault suggested envisioning what we want the world, the land, the

water, the communities around us to look like in seven generations, and then working backward to make it happen. To do real reparative work, Rule suggests coming together with solidarity and allyship as people tied to these institutions, in a way that supersedes and supplants that institutional structure and is mutually reinforcing.

All About Relations

This symposium was exhilarating and thought provoking. One might initially wonder what a discussion of Indigenous-led place-based restoration projects or an installation of public art by Native artists has to do with Indigenizing education, the theme of the symposium. These presentations were all about relations—to one another, to place and the natural world, and to those who have come before us. Education does not occur in a vacuum, but in relationship and community. We cannot Indigenize education without an Indigenous understanding of how to be in relationship and community with one another. This requires a cultural change in the academy, as Clement Loo made clear in his discussion of Humanities Futures Labs. Virtually all of the presenters were Indigenous, and all of the initiatives and work they described—whether on or off campus—are currently led by Indigenous people. This is work that everyone can and should engage in, but if we are serious about Indigenizing the curriculum, we must do this by listening and following Indigenous examples.

As many presenters attested, this work is hard, but well worth the effort. Native people are learning their own history, reestablishing practices,

restoring their relationship to earth and water, and taking control of spaces, places, and narratives. At the same time, settlers are also learning this history; coming to accept, honor, and respect Indigenous ways of knowing and doing; and relinquishing control—preferably by restoring land back. Both Maggie Lorenz and Jaime Arsenault described similar trajectories in the process of developing relationships and coming to a place of true respect and cooperation. An Garagiola made clear that the process of uncovering and learning is extremely difficult for Native peoples; we should be mindful of that trauma. However, it seemed that all presenters looked to the future, refusing to let a history of violence and genocide define them and looking rather, as Mishuana Goeman said, to the life-giving work of their communities.

These speakers and sessions culminated in resounding power, reaffirming the knowledge, persistence, and authority of Indigenous peoples, communities, and leaders. Simultaneously, the symposium shed necessary light on the ongoing need for reparations and repatriation from these institutions steeped in ongoing, violent colonialism in order for collective survival to unfold,

guided by these knowledges and movements. As Vicente Diaz (Filipino-Pohnpeian from Guam and American Indian Studies Department Chair, University of Minnesota Twin Cities) articulated:

like water, Indigenous knowledges have been incarcerated, damaged, polluted, contained, and dammed. It is due time for them to flourish.

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About the Authors

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Carmen Petit is an undergraduate student at the University of Minnesota in the Department of American Indian Studies. From Washington state, she came to Minnesota in 2019 where she lives with her dog, Buffy, and cat, Stevie. She currently works with Birchbark Books and the Bockley Gallery.

FEATURE

WHERE WE STAND: THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA AND DAKHÓTA TREATY LANDS

By Čhantémaza (Neil McKay) and Monica Siems McKay

Reflecting on the three years since writing “Where We Stand,” the main thing that we continue to focus on is the need for accountability and reparative action for land theft. Land acknowledgements are even more commonplace than they were in 2020, but they are still often nothing more than nice words, rarely, if

ever, accompanied by substantive action. The Dakhóta and other Indigenous people want to know what you are willing to give up when you acknowledge you are on someone else’s land. When you give that land acknowledgement, what are you acknowledging exactly? Do you have even the basic knowledge of how the people



Northern Minnesota. Image courtesy of Lee Vue..

you name were dispossessed of their land? Do you know the treaties that were used to provide legal justification for that dispossession? The fact that this article continues to be downloaded so frequently, and that we are still frequently asked to present this information to a wide variety of audiences both within and outside of the University of Minnesota, tells us that this knowledge is still far from as common as it should be. In the past three years, the University of Minnesota has taken some important steps toward reparative justice, including the repatriation of the Weisman Art Museum's Mimbres collection and the implementation of the Native American Promise Tuition Program. Ultimately, however, we have become more and more convinced that to right the wrong of land theft, land must be returned. This is a simple

and straightforward proposition, but significant psychological and legalistic barriers in both individuals and institutions continue to make this goal difficult to achieve at a large scale, though land return is becoming increasingly common. We are encouraged by this progress and plan to continue pushing the University of Minnesota to give land back to the Dakhóta and Ojibwe people. As the Australian band Midnight Oil said in their 1987 song "Beds Are Burning":

*The time has come
A fact's a fact
It belongs to them
Let's give it back.*

—Čhaŋtémaza and Monica Siems McKay

Makhóche kin de Dakhóta Makhóche hécha ye/do.[1]

This land is Dakhóta land.

We begin with a land acknowledgement—an increasingly frequent practice, especially in higher education settings and academic conferences. Land acknowledgements call much-needed attention to the Indigenous history of the places on which we stand. Despite the centuries-long and ongoing erasure of Indigenous peoples from American history textbooks and classrooms, and the chronic consignment of Indigenous peoples to the past in mainstream American consciousness, it remains a fact that every inch of what is now the United States is land to which one or more Indigenous nations has a deep and abiding connection, and of which, at some point,

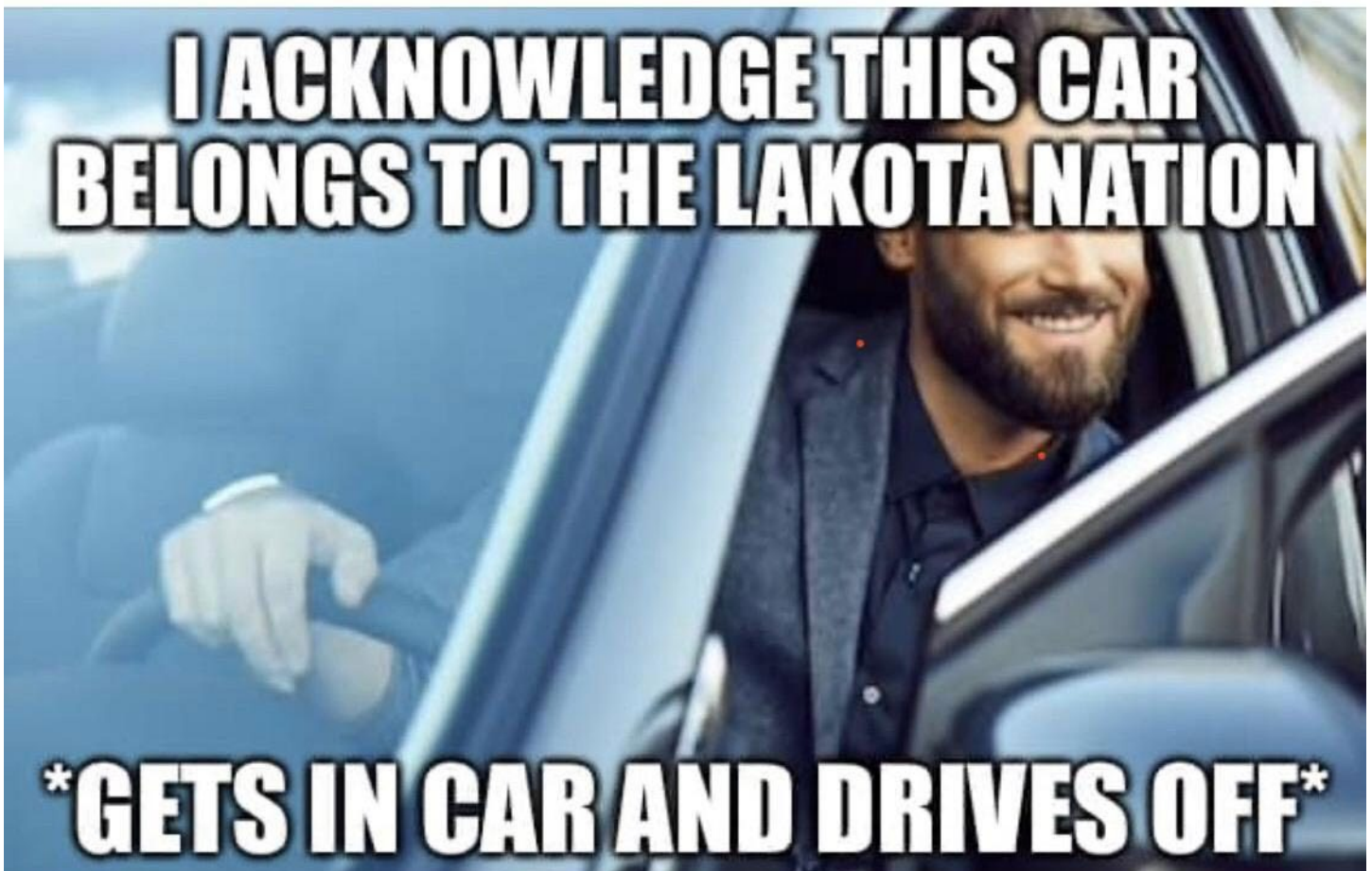
the U.S. government at least tacitly acknowledged Indigenous ownership.

To correct the erasure and to honor those Indigenous nations, land acknowledgements typically identify whose "homeland" the speaker and listeners are situated in. At the University of Minnesota Twin Cities, many land acknowledgements state that our campus sits on Dakhóta homeland. This is certainly true; in fact, the Dakhóta are the only people who are truly indigenous to this place, as their history begins with their emergence from the earth near the confluence of the Mississippi and Minnesota Rivers. But it is also a problematic statement, since it can easily be interpreted as meaning that Dakhóta people *used to* live here and that they

have primarily a spiritual, as opposed to physical and legal, connection to this place. Indeed, the authors of a March 2020 *High Country News* [article](#) described many land acknowledgements in higher education settings as “formal statements that recognize the Indigenous people who *formerly possessed* the lands those colleges now stand on” (emphasis added).^[2] When formulated

in this way, land acknowledgements can be seen as a gesture of both good will and respect, but in fact they become little more than virtue signaling or checking a box for diversity and inclusion. Recognizing and verbally honoring Indigenous peoples in no way obligates us and our institutions to look critically at how possession of our campus lands shifted to non-Indigenous hands.

Woke settler colonialism: land acknowledgments



In recent years, many memes about the emptiness of land acknowledgements have circulated online, bringing a welcome note of humor while still sending a powerful message about continuing injustice.

Worse yet, land acknowledgements can actually do harm to Indigenous people, who are frequently asked by schools, churches, colleges, universities, professional associations, and others to give such acknowledgements. For an Indigenous person to get up and say, “This is Dakhóta land,” when there is no reciprocity from the institution can be insulting. To Indigenous people, this could come

off as, “Hey you, Indian! Could you tell everyone that they’re on the land of your people, but we still get to keep everything here and will continue to benefit from what is not rightly ours? Thanks!” To actually contribute to restorative justice for Indigenous peoples, land acknowledgements need to address the legal status of the land in question, which entails knowing the treaty



It is important to remember that Indigenous territories do not match settler colonial boundaries. While the Dakhóta treaties involved land cessions in what is now Minnesota, this map shows how far the Ochéthi Šakówinj (the Seven Council Fires of the Dakhóta/Lakhóta/Nakhóta nation, historically referred to as the “Great Sioux Nation”) ranged in their travels and settlements. The core area of what can be considered “Dakhóta homeland” would include all of Minnesota, parts of Wisconsin, Iowa, and Nebraska, all of North and South Dakota, part of Montana, and southern Canada above those states.. Map courtesy of usdakotawar.org CC BY-NC-SA after “Aboriginal Map of North America denoting the Boundaries and Locations of various Indian Tribes”. The House of Commons. Britain: 1857.

history. In mainstream American consciousness—shaped by dominant historical narratives and K-12 education—treaties provide a veneer of legitimacy for the dispossession of Indigenous peoples. Treaties are generally viewed as documenting real estate transactions whereby Indigenous peoples “sold” their lands to the United States government in exchange for money and other considerations. While not a perfect description of a treaty, this suggests a useful analogy. Suppose we made a purchase agreement with you for your home, agreeing to pay a specific price for it, but then we moved into your home and never paid you for it. Would we have any legal right to live in your house? What would you call what we had done? And if we willed the house to our children and they to theirs, even though our grandchildren weren’t the ones who stole the house, would they have a right to live there?

Thus, when we say the University of Minnesota’s Twin Cities campus illegally occupies Dakhóta land or sits on land stolen from the Dakhóta people, we’re not being dramatic or hyperbolic. And since the U.S. government failed to uphold its obligations under every one of the 375 or so treaties it made with Indigenous nations across the continent that were then ratified and proclaimed—in other words, every treaty is a broken treaty—most land acknowledgements should lead to the same conclusion.

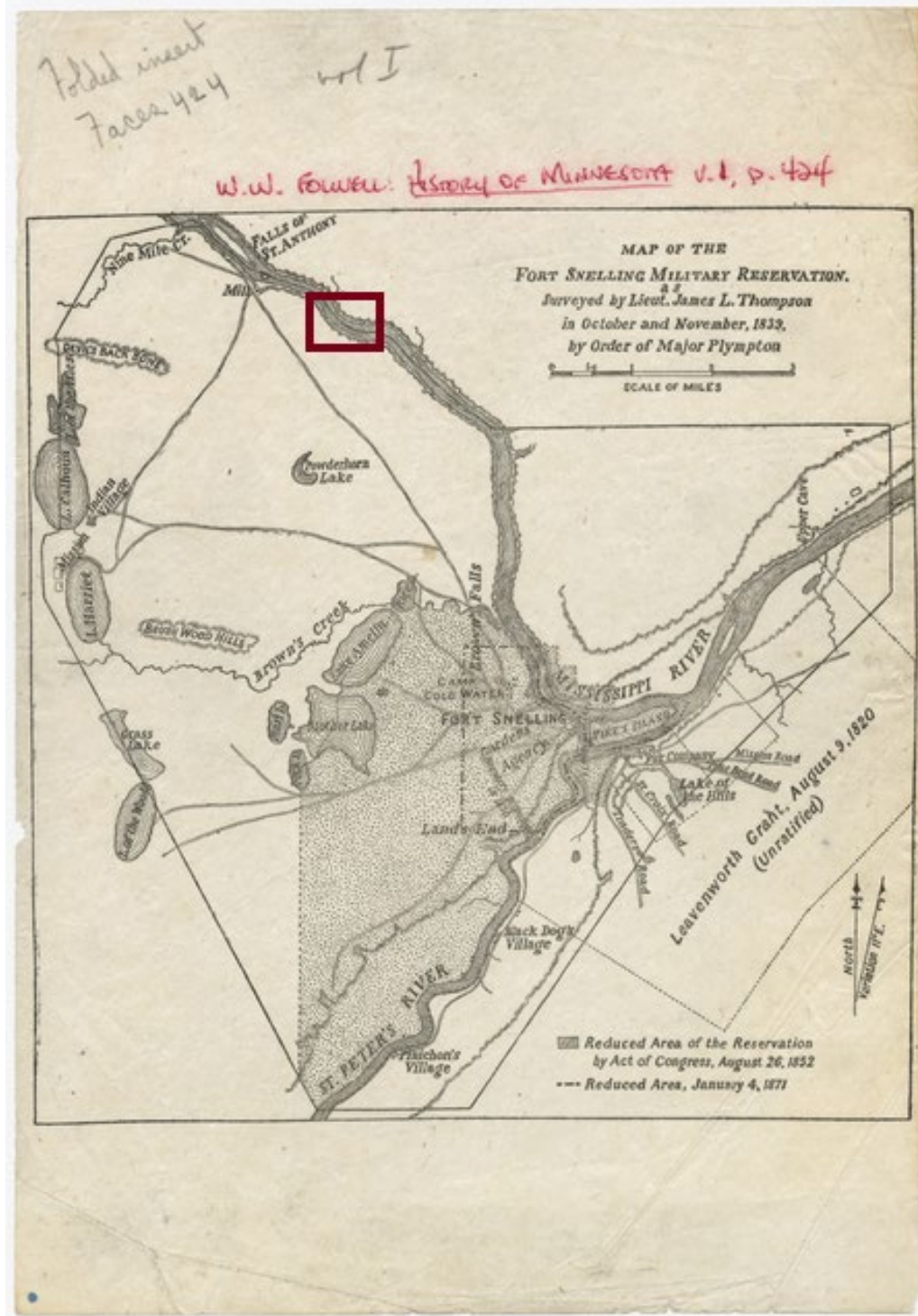
To further clarify the terms of this discussion, it’s important to note that we are asserting that in its dealings with Indigenous peoples, the U.S. government failed to follow its own domestic laws and the international law frameworks it subscribes to. Some historical narratives acknowledge that massive injustices resulted from treaties, but suggest that Indigenous peoples were easily taken advantage of because they didn’t share the European-American concept of land ownership. This is both absolutely true and absolutely irrelevant to this discussion (and it plays into a romanticized stereotype of Indigenous peoples as simple or unsophisticated, as children

of nature, etc.). Through treaty-making, the United States brought its legal system to bear on Indigenous peoples, and then broke its own laws. They set the rules of the game, then cheated.

Other popular conceptions—or misconceptions—about Indian treaties include that they are just “old pieces of paper” by which we don’t need to consider ourselves bound today, and/or that they were simply formalities or niceties provided to Indigenous peoples to benefit them as they naturally, inevitably lost their land bases as the U.S. lived out its Manifest Destiny. But if a treaty is just an old piece of paper, the same could be said of the United States Constitution—which, as it happens, assigns a much higher status to treaties. Treaty scholars often mention the “supremacy clause,” Clause 2 of Article VI of the Constitution, which states, “This Constitution, and the Laws of the United States which shall be made in Pursuance thereof; *and all Treaties made, or which shall be made, under the authority of the United States, shall be the supreme Law of the land*; and the Judges in every State shall be bound thereby, any Thing in the Constitution or Laws of any State to the Contrary notwithstanding” (emphasis added). Legally, then, treaties are absolutely on a par with the Constitution.[3]

See an interactive map of Indian Land Cessions (Treaties) in Minnesota.

Treaties are also, by definition, agreements between sovereign nations. By making treaties with Indigenous nations, the U.S. government was approaching Indigenous peoples on a nation-to-nation basis. By virtue of living independently on the North American continent for millennia before the arrival of Europeans, Indigenous nations have inherent sovereignty; importantly, in treaty-making the U.S. government merely recognized that sovereignty, rather than somehow granting sovereignty to other nations. Likewise, the U.S. government can’t do and hasn’t done anything to take away Indigenous sovereignty, despite the best efforts of



It is uncertain whether a map of the land ceded in the 1805 treaty exists. This map of the “Fort Snelling Military Reservation” was made in 1839. The treaty defined the ceded lands as “from below the confluence of the Mississippi and St. Peters, up the Mississippi, to include the falls of St. Anthony, extending nine miles on each side of the river.” St. Anthony Falls is shown at the top of this map of the military reservation. The East and West Bank campuses of the University of Minnesota Twin Cities sit on either side of the Mississippi (indicated in maroon) just south of the falls and thus lie within the 1805 treaty lands. After map of the Fort Snelling Military Reservation as surveyed by Lieutenant James L. Thompson in 1839.

early Supreme Court Chief Justice John Marshall. In a notorious series of decisions now known as the Marshall Trilogy issued between 1823 and 1832, the Court attempted to define Indigenous sovereignty out of existence by inventing out of whole cloth the concept of “domestic dependent nations.” Massive confusion and inconsistency in the U.S. government’s view of Indigenous sovereignty ensued and continues until the present, as illustrated by the fact that despite the Marshall Trilogy, the government continued to make treaties with Indigenous nations until 1874, when it arbitrarily discontinued the practice.

In the 1970s, one of the major demands put forward by the American Indian Movement (AIM) was for the U.S. government to resume treaty-making—to come back to the negotiating table with Indigenous nations on the basis of mutual sovereignty. In this way AIM can be seen as a sovereign rights, rather than a civil rights, organization. While civil rights movements aim for full participation in civil society and enjoyment of the rights guaranteed to all U.S. citizens, the Indigenous struggle for sovereign rights asserts, in effect, the right of Indigenous nations to stand apart and self-govern; it pushes the U.S. government to honor its existing treaty obligations or, if it is unable or unwilling to do so, to renegotiate those agreements.

Land Grant or Land Grab?

To apply all of the foregoing to the institution by which we are both employed, we state that the University of Minnesota’s Twin Cities campus was built on and stands on land that is both Dakhóta homeland and (legally, rightfully) Dakhóta land that the institution illegally occupies. This is true both physically, with regard to the land on which this three-part campus sits, and philosophically, as at least some of the lands the federal government granted to the territory and then the state of Minnesota to endow a public

During his presidency, George W. Bush perfectly illustrated the confusion about Indigenous sovereignty that has pervaded federal Indian policy since the early 1800s. See video [here](#).

One final important concept to note for this discussion is that of usufructuary rights. In many treaties between the U.S. government and Indigenous nations, the Indigenous nation would cede land but retain the right to utilize the ceded lands in a variety of ways, most often for hunting, fishing, and gathering foods. During the 1990s, Ojibwe tribes in Minnesota and Wisconsin asserted their treaty-defined usufructuary rights by fishing for walleye at times and in ways that violated the two states’ regulations, as enforced by their respective Departments of Natural Resources. When cited for violations, Ojibwe anglers mounted legal challenges based on the treaties, and the Supreme Court ultimately affirmed those rights. White anglers and other citizens expressed outrage that the Ojibwe were being “given special rights,” but the Supreme Court decisions confirmed the Indigenous claim that through the treaties, they had simply retained rights they had always had in and on their own lands.[4] One might have hoped that these landmark cases would have permanently put to rest the “old pieces of paper” argument, but the temptation to ignore treaties whose provisions inconvenience the U.S. government and its Euro-American citizenry remains strong.

university, were included in treaties the United States government made with the Dakhóta Oyáte (nation) in 1805, 1837, and 1851.

The aforementioned March 2020 High Country News article created a major splash in the world of higher education as soon as it was published under the title “Land-grab universities” with the subtitle, “Expropriated Indigenous land is the foundation of the land-grant university system.” The article presents highlights of an extensive

research project *High Country News* staff conducted over two years, tracing the processes through which the U.S. government acquired the lands it in turn granted to state governments to endow public universities. The bulk of federal land grants to state universities took place under the Morrill Act, signed by President Abraham Lincoln in 1862. The lands so granted were in the “public domain,” which sounds benign, but masks the fact that this simply means they had been expropriated from Indigenous nations but not opened up to private White settlement.[5] As longtime employees of Minnesota’s land-grant university, prior to beginning this exploration of treaty history we both subscribed to the common misconception that the federal government provided the state with land on which to (physically) build a higher education institution. In fact, the purpose of the Morrill Act and other federal land grants was to provide “seed money” for these institutions—to furnish states with endowments for their universities in the form of assets of land.

The University of Minnesota takes significant pride in predating Minnesota’s statehood. The “University of the Territory of Minnesota” was established in 1851, supported by a grant of two townships (46,080 acres of land) for its “use and support.” A grant of an additional two townships came in 1857; Minnesota became a state in 1858; and then the Morrill Act brought a windfall of 120,000 acres. The fledgling territorial university almost closed within a few years of opening; having accrued massive debts, it was only saved by the sale of much of the granted lands. The university’s first building, Old Main, was built on a parcel of land on a bluff above the Mississippi River on its East Bank near St. Anthony Falls, a parcel gifted to the institution by a founding Regent of the University. In 1854, the sale of some of the original land grants allowed the university to purchase 27 acres surrounding this parcel, forming the nucleus of the original campus, now known as the East Bank campus of the University of Minnesota Twin Cities.[6]

This university would clearly not exist today had the federal government not provided these lands to the territorial and state governments. But the story of those grants doesn’t end in the 1860s. As *High Country News* discovered, “at least 12 states are still in possession of unsold Morrill acres as well as associated mineral rights, which continue to produce revenue for their designated institutions,” and Minnesota is one of them, with the State still holding 25,840 acres of Morrill Act lands and an additional 22,028 acres of mineral rights in its “permanent university fund.” The Department of Natural Resources manages these lands, which generate revenue in a variety of ways, particularly through timber and mining leases, and transfers that income to the university.[7] These realities place our vaunted land-grant university system squarely within the U.S. government’s colonial enterprise, more benignly known as westward expansion. As David Chang, University of Minnesota Professor of History and Chair of American Indian Studies, noted in his opening remarks for a 2018 campus symposium on Reparations, Repatriation, and Redress, the transfer of federal lands to states as endowments to support the establishment and operation of universities was “public land policy for white settlement, capitalist transformation, and the development of the state.” By endowing institutions whose primary purposes were to provide low-cost instruction in agriculture and other practical arts, the federal government furthered the establishment of an American society based on individually owned homesteads. As *High Country News* noted, the government accomplished this using “dubiously acquired Indigenous land.” To state the matter more plainly, much of the land the federal government doled out to states was, quite literally, stolen from Indigenous peoples. This raises the question of what institutions like our own are obligated to do to rectify the fact that they received stolen property and are built “not just on, but with” Indigenous land.

Dakhóta Treaties

As noted above, the three major treaties between the U.S. government and the Dakhóta Oyáte that included land cessions were signed in 1805, 1837, and 1851. These three treaties exhibit a wide range of tactics the U.S. government frequently employed while negotiating, enacting, and following through on Indian treaties; these are tactics which render the treaties and, with them, the U.S. government's claims to the ceded lands, invalid. [8]

In 1805, explorer Zebulon Pike, who now has a mountain in Colorado named after him, came up the Mississippi River looking for sites for U.S. military forts. With the help of interpreters, he negotiated a treaty ultimately signed by the leaders of two Dakhóta villages. This very short document states that “the Sioux Nation” granted the U.S. government “full sovereignty and power” over an area including nine miles on either side of the Mississippi River from below the confluence of the Mississippi and Minnesota Rivers to St. Anthony Falls. In exchange for this land, “the United States shall, prior to taking possession thereof, pay to the Sioux”—and here Pike left a blank, so as signed, the treaty did not specify a price. Under the treaty's third article, the Dakhóta retained usufructuary rights to the ceded lands.

Despite being so slim, the 1805 treaty took a convoluted journey through the ratification process. First it simply languished; President Thomas Jefferson finally submitted it to the Senate in 1808. Before ratifying it, the Senate needed to determine the payment amount, and although Pike had noted in his journal that the 100,000 acres the government was receiving through the treaty was “equal to \$200,000,” the Senate filled in the blank in Article 2 with “two thousand dollars, or... the value thereof in such goods and merchandise as they shall choose.”[9] Even this meager payment, one percent of the land's appraised

value, was not even attempted until 1819, when “a quantity of goods worth two thousand dollars” was sent up the Mississippi to settle the treaty obligation. Along the way, some of the goods were diverted to settle a claim by members of the Sac and Fox nations for the murder of one of their own by a White man the previous year, but the U.S. government still considered the treaty paid in full when the remaining goods reached Fort Snelling for disbursement to the Dakhóta. The Dakhóta, unsurprisingly, disagreed, and the next time the government came to negotiate a land cession treaty, they didn't hesitate to raise the issue of nonpayment for the last one.

Two other issues with the validity of the 1805 treaty encompass both ends of a spectrum from legalistic technicalities to fundamental intent. With regard to the former, after the Senate ratified the treaty, President Jefferson appears not to have formally proclaimed it, a necessary final step for it to take effect. As to the latter, the ambiguity of the language of “granting” land to the government for military posts opens up a possible interpretation that this agreement was never intended to constitute a land sale by the Dakhóta. Lawrence Taliaferro, the Indian Agent at Fort Snelling for nearly twenty years, subscribed to this view, noting in his journal that he viewed the “convention with Pike” as “nothing more than a perpetual lease” of land that was still “taken and deemed to be the Indian country.”[10]

In theory, subsequent land cession treaties could have clarified the status of the land included in the 1805 agreement. For instance, in 1837 Bdewákhax̄thunwax̄ Dakhóta leaders gave up any claim to land east of the Mississippi River in exchange for \$1,000,000, but with payments structured in highly convoluted ways, including \$15,500 per year to be paid in the form of goods and provisions selected by the government and \$8,250 per year to be spent on

“medicines, agricultural implements, and stock, and for the support of a physician, farmers, and blacksmiths,” which allowed the government to pay the salaries of White missionaries and other so-called agents of civilization. Another \$15,000 per year would come in the form of cash interest payments of 5 percent on \$300,000 that the government would invest in state stocks for this purpose, but the treaty cryptically specified “a portion of said interest, not exceeding one third, to be applied in such manner as the President may direct.” One historian has noted that “all involved parties” agreed that this clause meant “the government was required to spend \$5,000 per year for the benefit of the Mdewakanton people.” The Dakhóta leaders who negotiated and signed the treaty consistently maintained that

government representatives had assured them they would receive these funds directly, but the government later claimed they had informed the Dakhóta that the president intended to use these funds for the education of Dakhóta children. In fact, the government gave some of this money to White missionaries to support their schools, but ultimately most of these funds were simply never distributed.^[11]

Again, when the U.S. government next attempted to negotiate a land cession treaty in 1851, the Dakhóta balked and raised the issue of why they hadn’t received what was promised to them in 1837. Thaóyateduta (His Red Nation, better known in English as Little Crow, who would go on to lead Dakhóta soldiers in the 1862



Artist Francis Millet’s depiction of the signing of the Treaty of Traverse des Sioux in 1851 gives an air of nobility to what were, in fact, shady dealings by the United States government. The painting still hangs in the Minnesota State Capitol.

U.S.–Dakhóta War) told the government’s treaty negotiators that the Dakhóta “would talk of nothing else” until the question of these education funds was resolved.

Through the 1851 treaties of Mendota and Traverse des Sioux (two treaties with the same terms, negotiated separately with different Dakhóta bands), the Dakhóta ceded their claims to all remaining lands in Minnesota. There are myriad problems with these treaties, starting with the additional coercion tactics government officials employed during the negotiations. Frustrated by Dakhóta leaders’ recalcitrance, Commissioner of Indian Affairs Luke Lea told them, “Suppose your Great Father wanted your lands and did not want a treaty for your good, he could come with 100,000 men and drive you off to the Rocky Mountains.”[12]

To this duress the negotiators added outright fraud with an infamous document known as the “traders’ paper.”[13] As had become customary in Indian treaties, government officials planned to divert funds from the amount they agreed to pay for the land to settle Dakhóta hunters’ debts to fur traders. As increasing White settlement in the Territory of Minnesota reduced the availability of game, Dakhóta hunters found it increasingly difficult to procure enough furs to pay for goods the traders had advanced to them on credit. In treaty negotiations, however, White traders could simply state the total amount they were owed; they were not required to provide any documentation to support their claims. A list of traders and the amounts owed to them was drawn up, and during the signing of the Treaty of Traverse des Sioux, Dakhóta leaders were led through a process of signing two copies of the treaty and this additional document, which they and others present believed to be a third copy of the treaty. Even a White missionary who assisted in translating the terms of the treaty during the negotiations and attended the signing ceremony was unaware of the content of the third document, through

which a huge portion of the payment for the land cession was siphoned off to White traders with no accountability. Ramsey was later investigated by Congress for fraud, but his fellow Republicans ultimately dropped the matter with no charges or sanctions.[14]

Jameson Sweet, who is Dakhóta, received his Ph.D. from the University of Minnesota, and is now Assistant Professor of American Studies at Rutgers University, has reflected, “You can point to every treaty where there’s some kind of fraud, where there’s some kind of coercion going on, or they’re taking advantage of some extreme poverty or something like that so they can purchase the land at rock bottom prices. That kind of coercion and fraud was present in every treaty.”[15] Interestingly, though, it’s not only modern scholars who acknowledge these issues; contemporary critical voices can easily be found as well. For example, when asked to review the 1805 treaty in 1856, the U.S. Senate’s Military Affairs Committee ultimately concluded:

“It does appear that General Pike made an arrangement in 1805 with two Sioux Indians for the purchase of the lands of that tribe, including the Faribault island, but there is no evidence that this agreement, to which there is not even a witness, and in which no consideration was named, was ever considered binding upon the Indians, or that they ever yielded up the possession of their lands under it... [I]t was never promulgated, nor can it be now found upon the statute books, like any other treaty—if indeed a treaty it may be called—nor were its stipulations ever complied with on the part of the United States.”[16]

The *St. Peter Tribune*, the local newspaper of a Minnesota River Valley town, editorialized in 1861 that “It is little else than a farce to call our agreements with the Indians treaties.... They have no power to enforce them, no minister or consul to present their views or defend their

rights.”[17] By this time conditions among the Dakhóta, who were now confined to a small reservation along the Minnesota River, were becoming dire; the government’s failure to make treaty payments would culminate in starvation in the summer of 1862, and with no other recourse to compel the government to fulfill its obligations, some Dakhótas saw going to war as the only option available to them.

Canadian scholar Sam Grey once posed the question, “How do you steal a continent?”, and answered with what at first sounds like a quip, but reflects the treaty-making process accurately: “You redefine stealing.”[18] When examined, these “supreme laws of the land” quickly take on the appearance of a thin veneer of legitimacy over wholesale land theft. It’s also clear that White settlers understood this reality at some level. Historian Roy Meyer noted that as soon as the 1851 treaties were signed—prior, that is, to their ratification by the Senate and official enactment—White settlers began “pouring onto the

ceded lands... crossing the Mississippi ‘in troops,’ making claims, and building shanties on lands which they as yet had no legal right to intrude upon.”[19] These settlers could rest assured that the government would complete any needed legal maneuvers to allow them to stay.

The legality, or lack thereof, of the Dakhóta treaties took a final turn in the aftermath of the 1862 Dakhóta–U.S. War, when Congress passed an act abrogating all treaties with the Dakhóta. International law allows for unilateral abrogation by any party to a treaty, but such a withdrawal should result in a return to the status quo ante. [20] The U.S. government’s abrogating the Dakhóta treaties but maintaining its claim to all the lands included in those treaties represents perhaps the ultimate legalistic sleight of hand. This brings us back to our earlier analogy of a real estate transaction in which the buyer decides after the closing to stop making the mortgage payments but still occupies and claims to own the house.

Rent Is Due

So now we have come back to the pressing question of what we do with this information. Knowing the truth of how our institution fits into the history of the dispossession of Dakhóta people and how we have benefitted and continue to benefit from the theft of Dakhóta lands should obligate us to take reparative action (we categorically reject “but that happened a long time ago and we aren’t the ones that did it” as a moral excuse).

At the 18th Annual A.I.S.A. (American Indian Studies Association) conference, held in Albuquerque in 2017, the common theme permeating presentations and discussions was focused on what the colonial educational institutions (colleges and universities) are doing to acknowledge, honor, and give back to the Indigenous peoples whose lands they occupy, legally or illegally. Some of the simplest (in concept, if not

in implementation) steps institutions can take include making sure Indigenous people don’t have to pay for their programs and services. Within the University of Minnesota system, which encompasses five campuses across the state, one campus currently has a tuition waiver in place for Native students. The University of Minnesota Morris is built on land formerly occupied by an Indian boarding school where the focus was to eradicate native culture and language. The last managers of the boarding school were a group of nuns who, when they decided to get out of the education business and gift the school’s buildings and grounds to the federal government, attached a stipulation that as long as the property was used as any sort of school, no Native pupil should be charged to attend. When the federal government gave the property to the state for the establishment of another public university campus, this stipulation went along with it. As

currently operationalized, this policy provides for any student who is an enrolled member, or the child or grandchild of an enrolled member, of a federally recognized tribe to receive a full waiver for the cost of tuition. As a result, Native students comprise over 20 percent of U of M Morris's student body, a situation virtually unheard of in a public university.

Here on the Twin Cities campus, the Bell Museum of Natural History, the state's official natural history museum operated in partnership with the University of Minnesota, recently implemented free admissions for Native people. Significantly, the Bell Museum's Board of Directors chose not to require tribal enrollment or ID to claim free admission, thus sidestepping the thorny issues of federal recognition and blood quantum criteria. The Museum has also made it clear that this policy is not an act of charity toward Indigenous people; rather, it is an acknowledgement that the museum occupies Dakhóta land, so Dakhóta and other Indigenous people should not have to pay a fee to tour the facility. An official land acknowledgement, including a recognition that Dakhóta people are the original natural scientists of this land, was literally built into the museum, and four dioramas within the main exhibit halls include commentary on Minnesota habitats, environments, and seasons in Dakhóta and Ojibwe, thus helping to document and preserve these endangered languages. The Museum's Board has expressed a commitment to continually identifying more steps they can take

to honor both Indigenous worldviews and epistemologies and Indigenous people themselves.

As another example, *High Country News* notes that "South Dakota State University has recently redirected income from its remaining Morrill [Act] acres into programming and support for Native students hoping to attend SDSU."^[21] But all these initiatives evade the question of our institutional obligations to Indigenous people who have no interest in participating in any of our programs as students or visitors. We must stretch our conceptions of what is possible to start to consider the question from this angle, but we're not without examples here either. In New Zealand, the government has returned a significant amount of land to the Waikato Maori tribe, the most fundamental and obvious way to right the wrong of illegally seizing the land in the first place. In this case, "land return" means the government recognizes the Waikato tribe as the rightful owners of the land, which includes the city of Hamilton. It doesn't, however, mean that all non-Maori people have been driven from the land, and all their homes and businesses destroyed or taken over. Instead, the Waikato tribe collects rent from non-Maori businesses and institutions, including the University of Waikato.^[22] A model like this affirms Indigenous sovereignty by directly providing resources to the tribe to do with as they please, rather than allowing the university to decide what it wants to do "for" Indigenous people. Ultimately, we feel strongly that this is where this conversation needs to go.

Hináǎ ded unyákuŋpi ye/do.

We are still here.

Despite the best efforts of the Minnesota state government to ethnically cleanse us/them from Minnesota after the 1862 war, Dakhóta people have always been, and are still, here, still at home, and unfortunately sometimes homeless, within our/their homelands. We/they know our/their history, and have not forgotten the treaties. This is another reason it is critically important for institutions like the University of Minnesota not

to unilaterally decide what amends might look like and what it is willing to (con)cede—to give up—in the pursuit of justice, but rather to approach Dakhóta communities as sovereign entities, including the four federally recognized tribal nations within the present borders of Minnesota, as well as the diaspora of communities in North and South Dakota, Nebraska, Montana, and Canada that represent the Dakhóta exile.

Mní kiŋ wakháŋ ye/do. Mní kiŋ phežúta ye/do.

Water is sacred. Water is medicine.

The East Bank and West Bank portions of the University of Minnesota Twin Cities campus straddle the Mississippi River and lie within the boundaries of a national park, the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area. The university sits on and utilizes this river and other waters that, from a Dakhóta perspective, are also sovereign entities, as are the land itself and the many plant and animal nations that live on the land and in the waters. In this perspective, another major shortcoming of most land acknowledgements is that they don't actually acknowledge the land in this way.

The Dakhóta connection to the land and all that live and exist here is important. The Dakhóta people and other Indigenous peoples have seen for thousands of years that we must be aware that we co-exist with other life. Human beings are not the most important life on earth; in fact, we can't survive without help from our relatives, but they

can manage quite well without us. The Dakhóta philosophy of Mitákuye Owás'ŋ, "all my relations," or "I am related to all that is," reflects this understanding by acknowledging that all things from water, plants, and animals to the stars are part of our fellow creation and we must maintain a respectful relationship with all of these things we are connected to. This brings us back to the observation that traditionally, the Dakhóta and other Indigenous peoples did not construe their relationship to land in terms of ownership, but rather of belonging and stewardship. Again, we mention this not to romanticize Indigenous people, but rather to suggest that if we can peel back the layers of legal sleight-of-hand through which, as Martin Case puts it, Indigenous land was transformed into U.S. property;^[23] if we can return treaty lands to their rightful owners; then we open up the possibility of paying the lands and waters themselves, as well as the lands' original inhabitants, the respect they are due.

Footnotes

[1] There are many different ways of writing the Dakhóta language, which did not have a written form until the arrival of European-American missionaries in the nineteenth century. Throughout this article we use one of a handful of writing systems that consistently represent the language phonetically, to make it easier for learners to pronounce words correctly.

[2] Robert Lee and Tristan Ahtone, “Land-grab universities: Expropriated Indigenous land is the foundation of the land-grant university system,” *High Country News* vol. 52, no. 4 (March 30, 2020). Accessed online at <https://www.hcn.org/issues/52.4/indigenous-affairs-education-land-grab-universities>.

[3] Martin Case, *The Relentless Business of Treaties: How Indigenous Land Became U.S. Property* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2018), 4–6.

[4] The Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission (GLIFWC), established as result of the Ojibwe treaty rights court cases, provides excellent educational materials on treaty rights, including “A Guide to Understanding Ojibwe Treaty Rights,” <http://www.glifwc.org/publications/pdf/2018TreatyRights.pdf>.

[5] Lee and Ahtone, “Land-grab universities.”

[6] C.W. Hall, *The University of Minnesota: An Historical Sketch* (Minneapolis, 1896), 12.

(Resource available in the University of Minnesota Libraries’ Digital Conservancy at <https://conservancy.umn.edu/handle/11299/59620>.)

[7] “Minnesota’s Permanent University Land and Fund,” Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Division of Lands and Minerals report, 2017. https://files.dnr.state.mn.us/lands_minerals/permanent_university_handout_fy17.pdf.

[8] The information in this section was compiled from three major sources: Gwen Westerman and Bruce White, *Mni Sota Makoce: The Land of the Dakota* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2012); Roy W. Meyer, *History of the Santee Sioux: United States Indian Policy on Trial*, rev. ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993); and the *Why Treaties Matter* virtual exhibit developed by the Minnesota Humanities Center in partnership with the Minnesota Indian Affairs Council and the Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian, <http://treatiesmatter.org>.

[9] Westerman and White, *Mni Sota Makoce*, 141.

[10] Westerman and White, *Mni Sota Makoce*, 147.

[11] Linda M. Clemmons, “‘We Will Talk of Nothing Else’: Dakota Interpretations of the Treaty of 1837,” *Great Plains Quarterly* vol. 25 (Summer 2005), 173–85 (see especially pp. 180–1).

[12] William G. LeDuc, *Minnesota Year Book for 1852* (St. Paul: W.G. LeDuc, 1852), 79–82; cited in Meyer, *History of the Santee Sioux*, 83. Meyer explains that the *Minnesota Year Book* contained “a reprint of a day-by-day account of the treaty negotiations, published in the *Minnesota Pioneer* from July 3 through August 14, 1851.”

[13] The traders’ paper slipped in with the Treaty of Traverse des Sioux is widely seen as one of the most egregious instances of fraud in U.S.-Indigenous treaty-making. See Westerman and White, *Mni Sota Makoce*, 180–81 and 190–92.

[14] Ramsey’s investigation and acquittal by the United States Congress are mentioned briefly by Roy Meyer, *History of the Santee Sioux*, 87 and Westerman and White, *Mni Sota Makoce*, 192. Meyer notes that William Watts Folwell’s *History of Minnesota*, vol. I, pp. 462–470, provides a more detailed account of the investigation.

[15] Quoted in Lee and Ahtone, “Land-grab universities.”

[16] The report can be found in the University of Oklahoma College of Law Digital Commons at <https://digitalcommons.law.ou.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2272&context=indianserialset>. The quotation is taken from the *Why Treaties Matter* virtual exhibit, <http://treatiesmatter.org/treaties/land/1805-dakota>.

[17] Quoted in *Little Crow and the Dakota War* (2017 film), which cites the April 3, 1861 *St. Peter Tribune*.

[18] Sam Grey, “The Past as Present: Settler Colonialism and Justice after Indigenous Genocide,” East Side Freedom Library *What’s in A Name?* Speakers Series (St. Paul, MN: March 31, 2016).

[19] Meyer, *History of the Santee Sioux*, 84.

[20] Howard J. Vogel, “Rethinking the Abrogation of the Dakota Treaties and the Authority for the Removal of the Dakota People from their Homeland,” *William Mitchell Law Review* vol. 39, no. 2 (2013), 538–581.

[21] Lee and Ahtone, “Land-grab universities.”

[22] We first learned about the University of Waikato paying rent to the Waikato-Tainui Māori tribe in a conversation with Dr. Sophie Nock, Senior Lecturer in Te Pua Wānanga ki te Ao (Faculty of Māori and Indigenous Studies), during the 2020 Native American and Indigenous Studies Association (NAISA) conference, which was held on that campus. Information on the return of land to the iwi (tribe) can be found at <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/page/waikato-tainui-sign-deed-settlement-crown>. This site includes a link to the Deed of Settlement, which lays out the terms of the university’s lease.

[23] Martin Case, *The Relentless Business of Treaties: How Indigenous Land Became U.S. Property* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2018).

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GEOGRAPHIES

THE COLLEGE UNION: WHERE TRADITION MEETS DECOLONIZATION ON CAMPUS

By Simón Franco

Higher education has undergone many changes since the first colleges in the old world came to be. Institutions of higher learning respond to societal pressures and needs, which means that education is ever evolving and dependent on the social context in which institutions find themselves. However, there is no denying that the first institutions of higher learning were not welcoming places for people not of the elite classes. These institutions were, and are, places

where the education of future leaders has been the premier goal (Cohen and Kisker 2010). To achieve this goal, institutions of higher learning have employed a mixture of curricular, extra-curricular, and co-curricular tools.

Providing a forum for students to apply the theoretical learning acquired in the classroom became a necessity as institutions of higher education adapted to the societal changes of the eighteenth



On November 29, 2016, fast food workers around the USA went on strike for a \$15/hour wage. About 300 protesters gathered at Coffman Memorial Union and called on the Minneapolis City Council and the University of Minnesota to pass a \$15/hour minimum wage for all Minneapolis workers. Image courtesy of Fibonacci Blue via Flickr. (CC BY 2.0)

century. The first student society formed at Oxford in 1812. Its founder, Augustus Hare, underscored the value of debate as the only path to the truth and indeed considered debate the only value of education (Butts 1971). Of course, the truth that Hare sought was dependent on the context of his time. In America, the newly formed colleges found that their students also wanted to apply their recently acquired knowledge outside the classroom. As a result, students at these institutions “formed literary clubs, debating societies, and other groups” (Cohen and Kisker 2010, 75). Much has changed since Hare’s days and the first clubs and societies of the early and mid-nineteenth century, but the spirit of these extra-curricular activities remains alive. College unions are the heirs of these traditions. The role of the college union is currently understood as “advance[ing] a sense of community, unifying the institution by embracing the diversity of students, faculty, staff, alumni, and guests... bolster[ing] the educational mission of the institution and the development of students as lifelong learners by delivering an array of cultural, educational,

social, and recreational programs, services, and facilities.”^[1] Through a student-centered approach and encouragement of self-direction and self-realization, college unions lend themselves to fulfilling the educational imperative of creating the leaders of tomorrow.

The role of the college union, as expressed by the Association of College Unions International, signifies that the work of decolonizing the academy naturally belongs in its spaces and programs. By fostering the spirit of innovation, social justice, and belonging, the college union is the place on campus where different ideas and ways of knowing all coexist and are instilled in the leaders of tomorrow. The Mellon Environmental Stewardship, Place, and Community (MESPACE) Initiative created the opportunity for institutional change at the University of Minnesota Morris. Once one has an understanding of the history of college unions and their role in student leadership, it becomes clear that any decolonizing work that happens on a college campus needs to include the union.

History of College Unions

The Oxford Union

The precursor to the Oxford Union, the Attic Society, was formed at Oxford in 1812. This society sought to provide students with a forum to freely discuss and debate ideas (Butts 1971). As expressed by Butts, the Attic Society was formed with the belief that “[t]he contest of mind against mind is the greatest benefit Universities can confer” (1). This notion was prevalent in the early and mid-nineteenth century during which the goals of higher education were, to a large extent, focused on the socialization of the youth and were not academic—as we understand it today—in nature (Cohen and Kisker 2010).

The Oxford Union Society was officially founded in the spring of 1823. The main purpose of this union continued to be to foster an environment in which debate among students was encouraged and praised. In his seminal book *The Role of the College Union*, Porter Butts states that the Oxford Union retained a tradition of exclusiveness from the Attic Society. It remained a place for the elite at this prestigious institution to debate “the love of books. There were claims of philosophy. History might enter in.... Politics allured, not theoretically, but as a likely occupation for one’s whole existence” (Butts 1971, 2). Thus

the privileged few who were admitted to the Oxford Union had a place to hone the skills and knowledge needed to enter the Statesman's profession. Butts points out that of the eight students who were presidents of the Oxford Union in 1823, seven were on their way to the "house of Commons or the House of Lords" (3).

The preparation of future leaders was very much ingrained in the spirit of the Oxford Union since its inception. Although not the first of its kind, the Oxford Union is celebrated as a trendsetter for leadership organizations and for being the longest continually running college union still in existence.

College Unions in America

Imitation fosters standardization. The first colleges and universities in the United States were modeled on European educational institutions. Everything regarding the collegiate experience in the early days of institutions of higher learning in America was a direct transplant from the colleges of the old world (Cohen and Kisker 2010). So,

too, were the college unions, with Harvard being the first college in America to adopt the college union in 1880. Butts (1951) and others (Butts et al. 2012; Bloland 1961; Rullman and Harrington 2014) state that the college union at Harvard was started by students to fulfill the role the Oxford Union had played for the students of Oxford



Harvard Union is now known as the Barker Center. Built in 1900 and designed by McKim, Mead & White, this building is now listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

University. “[A] large and comprehensive club” where ideas of the time could be expressed and dissected, a “house for meeting each other, for meeting your teachers... and for meeting the older graduates” was envisioned at Harvard in 1901 with the dedication of the new student union building on that campus (Butts 1971).

The University of Pennsylvania soon followed suit; in 1896 the university dedicated Houston Hall as a center where “all students from the various departments” could have a place “where all may meet on common ground” (Butts 1971, 11). At the University of Pennsylvania, the first vestiges of student government were made evident through the combination of the student union (Houston Hall) and a student common forum where the different clubs, groups, and organizations came together to discuss the challenges of the era (Butts 1951).

At the dawn of the twentieth century, other institutions in America began to adopt the college union idea. In his inaugural address as president of the University of Wisconsin, Charles Van Hise stated that “[i]f Wisconsin is to do for the sons of the state what Oxford and Cambridge are doing for the sons of England, not only in producing scholars but in making men, it must once more have commons and union” (cited in Butts 1971, 11). Van Hise’s notion underscores the progress schools were making in providing a place for the development of the whole student in and out of the classroom. At Princeton, University President Woodrow Wilson remarked in a 1909 address that

The chief and characteristic mistake which the teachers and governors of our colleges have made in these latter days has been that they have devoted themselves and their



Shevlin Hall at the University of Minnesota. Image courtesy of Ben Franske.

plans too exclusively to the business, the very common-place business, of instruction, and have not enough regarded the life of the mind. The mind does not live by instruction. The real intellectual life of a body of undergraduates, if there be any, manifests itself, not in the classroom, but in the way they do and talk of and set before themselves as their favorite objects between classes and lectures (cited in Butts 1971, 11).

President Wilson's address was inspirational to many other institutions of higher learning. As Rullman and Harrington (2014) point out, Wilson's ideas of the true purpose of education profoundly influenced the role that college unions would come to play in twentieth and twenty-first century America.

By the 1920s, colleges and universities in the United States had grown tremendously. This growth was primarily because more students had access to higher education, particularly women, who were entering institutions of higher learning in greater and greater numbers (Cohen and Kisker 2010). This change in demographics was apparent at the University of Minnesota, with female students organizing and claiming space for themselves in Shevlin Hall, while male students did the same in Nicholson Hall. The changing demographics of universities meant that the understanding of what community meant on college campuses was changing and the college union became a place where men and women could interact in productive co-curricular and extra-curricular activities. Social activities, artistic performances, and intramural and competitive sports began to contribute to the formation of a new collegiate identity (Cohen and Kisker 2010; Butts 1971). These changes were evidenced at the University of Minnesota, which began construction of its union in 1939.

The Great Depression and the Second World War (WWII) marked the next two decades of American society. As institutions of higher education were affected by these events, so too were

the college unions. From the Depression, ideas of professionalizing the administrative staff working at the unions and increasing the oversight of student activities were developed (Butts 1951). From WWII emerged the notion of providing more recreational activities when large groups of young people were gathered together away from home (Butts 1971). The college unions heeded this call, providing more spaces for recreational activities and the arts. With the Red Scare looming over post-WWII American society, debates about the governance and direction of college unions became the norm in the 1950s.

The governance structure of college unions became unclear in the mid-1950s, with students distrusting the paid personnel—the union administrators who had become the norm in the previous decades—and with the faculty and staff of colleges and universities underestimating the capabilities of the student leaders. Out of this mistrust came the governing body we see today on many campuses, a committee-like structure which is independent of the union but still is part of campus governance (Butts 1971; Butts et al. 2012; Bloland 1961). The role of the college union director was also solidified at this time. As stated by Butts (1971), the director of a college union provides continuity, sets goals and standards, provides leadership, advocates for the student union to faculty and administrators, and selects and trains the professional staff of the union.

The next decade was marked by the societal changes taking place in America. Interestingly, it was neither the Civil Rights Movement nor the Counter Culture that threatened the life of college unions. It was the word “union” and its association with the labor movement that created a tense atmosphere on college campuses (Butts et al. 2012). The word “union” came to signify labor unions, complete with bargaining units for contract negotiations. The college unions had to argue for their existence, redefining their place on campus as more than “social centers.” College unions had to change this perception and stress the union's role as a place for cultural, civic, and

leadership development (Butts 1971; Lane and Perozzi 2014).

The societal changes of the 1950s and 1960s continued to be felt at the college unions at the dawn of the 1970s. The college union became a place for activism. Sit-ins, overnight stays, and other demonstrations became commonplace on many campuses' unions around the country. For example, in 1970, 132 students were arrested at Michigan State University after refusing to vacate the union building (Butts et al. 2012). In 1971, 17 students were arrested for occupying administrative offices at the union of the University of Nevada at Reno. These students were requesting a space within the union building for the Black Student Union (Butts et al. 2012). The University

of Minnesota system saw its own protests, including the 1969 Morrill Hall occupation by University of Minnesota African American students demanding new programs and the 1970 University of Minnesota Morris student walkout to protest the war in Vietnam.

The 1980s and 1990s saw the commodification of education. With the treatment of education in the 1980s as a business, college unions were perceived as auxiliary to the institutions of which they were a part (Butts et al. 2012). An auxiliary is any self-sustaining campus service (i.e., residential life, dining services) that does not receive funding from tuition or state allocation (D. Israel-Swenson, personal communication, 2016). This business model perception of college



A photo of the Morrill Hall takeover at the University of Minnesota Twin Cities in 1969, which resulted in the creation of the Department of African American and African Studies. Photo courtesy of the University of Minnesota Archives.

unions as not directly connected to the institutional mission of colleges and universities meant that the educational mission of the union was lost. However, efforts by professionals in the field intensified and the college unions realigned their mission to enhance educational opportunities for students (Butts et al. 2012).

It was in this era that a union was founded at the University of Minnesota Morris. Although there already existed a vibrant tradition of engagement through Student Activities, a dedicated union, called the Student Center at Morris, was not built until 1992. This building was in the best tradition of college unions around the country, included meeting spaces, recreational lounges, and an incorporation of the existing Edson Auditorium

as a performance venue. Decisions in the Student Center planning process reveal that there was an effort to recognize if not decolonize the University of Minnesota Morris' complex history as the site of an Indian Residential School. A dining space was named the Turtle Mountain Cafeteria in honor of the reservation from which many residential school students came, while the largest public meeting space was named Oyate, a Dakota word meaning people or nation, to acknowledge its location in traditional Dakota homelands (B. Gercken, personal communication, 2023). In other ways, however, Morris's union was in-line with nationwide movements towards the commodification of education because it had to charge students fees to fund the Student Center's construction.



*The Student Center at the University of Minnesota Morris.
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The turn of the twenty-first century brought with it greater emphasis on learning outcomes and student academic achievement, but also shrinking budgets (Butts et al. 2012). The increase in prominence of online education meant that student unions were collecting fewer fees from on-campus students. This drop in revenue became more pronounced during the financial collapse of 2008, when parents and students demanded a lower-cost higher education and saw services provided by college unions as superfluous and unnecessary (Butts et al. 2012). Once again, the professionals in the field found themselves justifying their existence (Crone and Tammes 2014). Social movements like the MeToo movement and Black Lives Matter found a home in the college union. With growing student social awareness, college campuses saw massive investment in program and services to help survivors of sexual violence and police brutality. The second decade of the twenty-first century has been marked by the upheaval created in higher education by the COVID-19 pandemic. College union professionals were once again at the forefront of maintaining the culture of student engagement even at a distance.

Experiences at the University of Minnesota Morris followed these national trends. Student Activities has better aligned their programs and services to student learning outcomes, helping the campus community understand how what we do matters as part of a well-rounded collegiate experience. Student Activities assessment data shows a strong correlation between student engagement and retention at Morris, as it does nationwide. This correlation was at the core of changes we made during the Covid pandemic to continue to provide student engagement and support and remind our students that they belong. We created the #MorrisMission engagement series in the spring of 2020 to help our students feel connected as they finished their school year from home. These programs, which fostered weekly opportunities for student participation, were awarded the Association of College Unions

International Shirley Bird Perry Staff-Driven Program of the Year in 2021.

We now better understand the elitist beginnings of the college union and also their ability to reflect and create transformation in a campus community. Through the thoughtful deployment of programs, services, and interventions, college unions are spaces where students, faculty, and guests all come together to create community. Creating spaces in the union goes beyond the theoretical or metaphysical. Union professionals curate physical spaces where barriers are removed, different levels of ability are recognized, and where people from different cultures can all come together. Dining facilities respond to the cultural imperative from many traditions of sharing a meal together. Gathering spaces with furniture configured as a circle facilitate conversation and foster egalitarianism. Performance venues celebrate diverse cultures. Such changes are evidence at Morris of an on-going commitment to diversity, a commitment that needs to continue, but also needs to advance the efforts to decolonize the work of Student Activities and Engagement. The MESPAC grant created the opportunity for me to extend my decolonizing work beyond the union.

What I brought to the MESPAC leadership team was my student affairs professional knowledge of how physical spaces, student development, and community-building all interact and respond to societal changes. In one of our MESPAC cohort meetings, I led a conversation about how physical space impacts students' engagement and feeling of belonging. As a result of this session, our financial aid office completely revamped their physical space, including rearranging desks and seating to create a more welcoming environment, and incorporating Indigenous art as part of their décor. Many faculty reported similar changes to their office spaces and spoke of creating an environment that removes barriers and a sense of hierarchy in communication. They used the knowledge I shared to decolonize their space.

College Unions and Leadership

A core part of my work at Morris has been to move the institution's leadership development programs away from a Eurocentric approach to leadership development and to recognize other ways of knowing. I created and implemented MLEAD, the Morris Leadership Education and Development Program, a co-curricular leadership certification program with the express purpose of decolonizing student leadership on our campus, moving away from Eurocentric, individualistic notions of leadership to more communal and group-focused leadership models. In a 1966 bulletin of the College Union Association, Butts asks the question "who will educate the leaders?" (Butts 1971, 127). He suggests that college unions should play a large part, citing the social and community-building aspects of college unions. He also argues that unions create "good, actively participating citizens" and "leaders of our common life together" (128). It was with these comments in mind that I shared the "Introduction to Leadership Theory" and "Multicultural Leadership" units of the MLEAD program with the Morris MESPAC cohort. The first unit engages with definitions of leadership that go beyond a leader-centric approach while the second utilizes a leadership model developed using traditions from African, African-American, Hispanic, and Indigenous traditions. By sharing these models with our cohort, I hoped to help them understand that one person in a leadership role can create significant change.

Throughout our MESPAC cohort work, I emphasized that leadership needs a special focus in any decolonizing efforts. While there has been consistent movement to more diverse and inclusive strategies in college unions and leadership programs, too often leadership is only recognized or understood if it follows Euro-American models. While we now understand that this tendency goes back to the origins of college unions, we also know that we cannot decolonize if we are

still adhering to the aspirations and methods of Regency-era English aristocrats.

From its inception, the mission of the college union has always been directly related to the holistic development of students. Student Development theory provides a useful framework to contextualize the college union mission. The Campus Ecology model in particular provides greater insight into the role of college unions in student development and student leadership development. Campus ecology is defined by Evans and colleagues as "the study of the relationship between the student and the campus environment" and as "the transactional relationship between students and their environments" (2010, 168). As this definition makes clear, college unions have a profound impact on molding the lives of students and creating the leaders of tomorrow because they are important campus agents in terms of providing programs and services. College unions provide a setting in which each aspect of campus ecology comes into play. These aspects are "Behavior-setting theory, Subculture approach, Personality type, Need X Press = Culture, Social ecological approach, and Transactional approach" (168–72). What makes the college union crucial to student development and, more specifically, to student leadership development is that it provides a place to exercise student leadership through student organizations, program coordination, and employment opportunities.

It is evident at Morris that our students have an impact on the student center environment and the ecology reflects our earlier discussions of physical space and its role in student life. For example, our students have petitioned to have a mural that honors the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa in the Student Center and students are also working to update a display case that chronicles our campus history from a decolonized and indigenized viewpoint. We also have a completely

student-led radio station and the distribution of student activities fees is determined by a majority student-led committee. Through the work of the Morris MESPAC cohort, support staff and faculty are better prepared to assist students in this work.

As discussed earlier, college unions since their inception have changed to meet social needs. Our understanding of leadership has also changed as social needs have changed. While a century ago notions of leadership were focused on the qualities and skills of a leader, today leadership theories focus on the transactional relationship “whereby an individual influences a group...to achieve a common goal” (Northouse 2016, 6).

Conclusion

Even though much has changed since the eighteenth century, the college union remains the center of community, society, and leadership building in our institutions of higher learning. Today, college unions remain a forum for free expression, civic engagement, student governance, and overall leadership development. While one does not need to know the lengthy history of college unions to be successful nor do they need to be aware of how well Campus Ecology development theory maps onto the mission of college unions, having this information can help practitioners better develop programs and services that acknowledge the transformational nature of the college years. Such programs will help students transition to new stages of development and create future leaders. Moreover,

Because college unions provide the forum where this process between leaders and followers takes place, college unions should be understood as the heart of student leadership development today. Using these definitions, it is clear that today’s college union is not that far removed from the first debate societies of Oxford and Cambridge. Debate societies were a place for future leaders to exercise their leadership skills and attributes. What today’s student leaders are trying to accomplish is very different from what the aristocratic students Oxford and Cambridge were trying to accomplish, but how they accomplish it has remained the same: through the forum of the college union.

having this knowledge helps faculty and staff reframe how they understand the college union as a place where decolonizing is already happening and needs to continue happening. Through the MESPAC initiative, I was not only able to elevate current decolonizing efforts at the University of Minnesota Morris, but also to ensure that our college union remains the vanguard of decolonizing efforts. Although the college union has come a long way from its beginnings and has often led the way in campus efforts to diversify—including at the University of Minnesota Morris—the work of diversifying and decolonizing has not ended. We have to resist the allure of the “we’ve always done it this way” paradigm. And, above all, we must remember that community building also requires fun.

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Footnotes

[1] "The Role of the College Union Statement," The Role of the College Union, Advancing Campus Community, <https://www.acui.org/rolestatement>.

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IN REVIEW

INDIGENOUS WISDOM: RE-STORY-ATION TO RESIST, RESURGE, AND INSPIRE

By Florencia Pech-Cárdenas

I was fortunate to attend an in-person conversation between two Indigenous scholar-authors, Diane Wilson and Robin Wall Kimmerer, at the University of Minnesota's Northrop Auditorium on May 17th, 2022 (Kimmerer and Wilson 2022). In this column, I share part of my reflections and stories as an Indigenous scientist inspired by Robin and Diane's conversation, specifically Robin's emphasis on the importance

of healing our relationships with the land and nonhuman relatives, and the need for "Re-story-ation" of the land. As I understand it, re-story-ation means to return our stories to the land and to remember how to hear the stories the land tells. I respond to the call for re-story-ation by reflecting on my relationships with land where I reside currently, and where I am building connections and relationships to my ancestral lands. As



*Robin Wall Kimmerer and Diane Wilson in conversation.
Photo: Rebecca Slater, by Rebecca Studios.*

Indigenous peoples, most of our stories have been fractured and interrupted by colonial and neo-colonial processes, so re-story-ation is a way to resist, resurge, and inspire others. Our stories are our lived experiences and the knowledge that has been passed to us (consciously or unconsciously) by our ancestors, the land, and nonhuman relatives. Re-story-ation is a gift to restore our souls, our stories, and our lives.

Robin Wall Kimmerer is an Indigenous botanist and a distinguished Teaching Professor at the State University of New York, where she writes and teaches about what she has learned from plants. Robin uses both Western and Indigenous lenses—and languages—to interpret and express what she experiences, day to day, related to plants, life, and more. Bringing together Indigenous knowledge and Western science is

not an easy task given that these two types of knowledge systems sometimes have opposing or conflicting characteristics. Nevertheless, Kimmerer does this in a way that most audiences can understand and appreciate. As a teaching assistant for a class where Robin's book, *Braiding Sweetgrass* (2013), was a requested reading, I cannot express how happy students were that the instructor included this book as part of the teaching material for the class. The learning they gained was beyond purely academic or scientific knowledge. In the book, Robin tells us about the teaching of plants in her personal and professional life from scientific and Indigenous perspectives. Two of my favorite chapters in this book are "Skywoman Falling," and "The Three Sisters." I love these two chapters because I can draw connections with my own life experiences and cultural background.



Diane Wilson and Robin Wall Kimmerer. Photo: Rebecca Slater, by Rebecca Studios.

Relationships with the land

I am Maya Yucateca from the Yucatan Peninsula in Mexico. I came to the University of Minnesota to study for a Ph.D. in 2016 and, at times, I have felt lost. On first impression, tropical Yucatan and temperate Minnesota do not have much in common. Or that is what I thought in my first years in Minnesota, which also were my first in life as a mother in a different country, surrounded by different languages and cultures. However, little by little, I have found some commonality and connections between Minnesota and Yucatan.

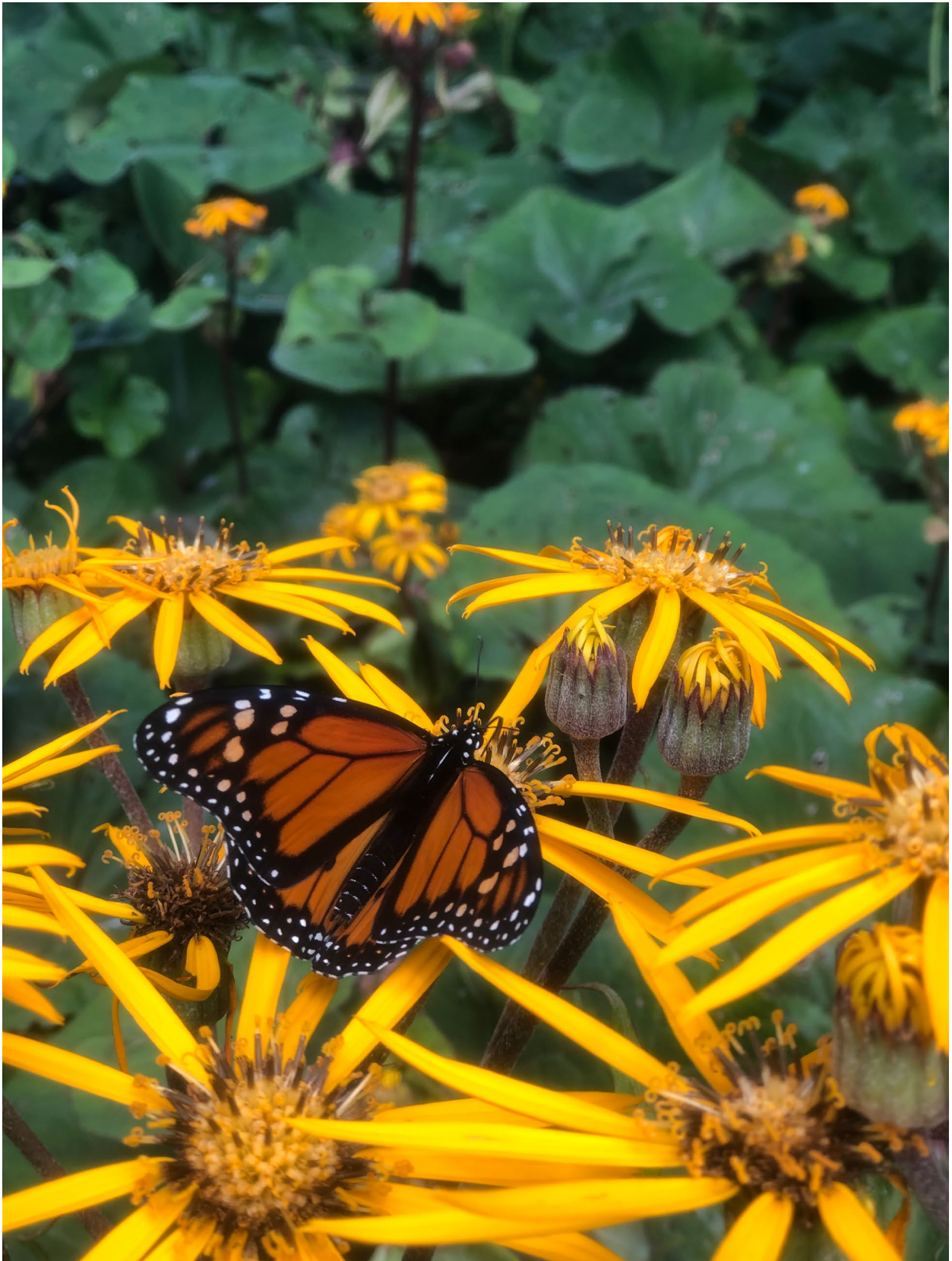
First of all, Minnesota and Yucatan are both Indigenous lands. While Minnesota is the ancestral and current homelands of Dakota and Anishinaabe people, Yucatan is the ancestral and current land of thousands of Maya people. Transnational Indigenous scholar Jessica Hernandez (2022), in her recent book, *Fresh Banana Leaves: Healing Indigenous Landscapes through Indigenous Science*, talks about being welcome and unwelcome guests as Indigenous peoples in other Indigenous lands. Jessica talks about how as displaced Indigenous peoples we must not just acknowledge the land we are in, instead we also need to build respectful and reciprocal relationships with the local Indigenous communities and with the land. Although this can be challenging sometimes, we must do as much as possible from our side to fulfill these responsibilities, so we do not behave as unwelcome guests in other Indigenous peoples' homelands. Jessica received this teaching from her grandmother, and it is something that we hear in our communities and homes. When we go to other people's homes, whether family, friends, or relatives, we do not behave as we want or without consideration.

Rather, we behave with respect and try to build honest and responsible relationships.

Second, by paying attention to the teachings of nonhuman relatives around me, I have also found that Yucatan and Minnesota have nonhuman relatives in common. For instance, I was surprised to see northern cardinals on the Twin Cities campus of the University of Minnesota, because in Yucatan you only can see cardinals if you live in rural areas or in the forests, while here you see cardinals all over the place. Each time I see a cardinal I think of Yucatan, and I feel connected to home. Seeing cardinals on cold winter mornings while walking through the St. Paul campus, with their red plumage bright against the white snow, brings some tropical sunshine to my heart and makes me realize that, although I am far, I still have connections through my nonhuman relatives to my tropical Maya homelands.

Monarchs are another way I feel connected to my homelands. Monarchs are important for ecological, cultural, and social reasons in Mexico. I was so delighted to see how people in Minnesota also care so much about these little friends. Each time I see them, I will remember my time in Minnesota studying for my Ph.D. and how these amazing insects help me feel connected to my home country. However, monarch butterflies are now an endangered species.

I write about these beings because, just as Robin talks about connections and relationships to the earth and all living beings, or nonhuman relatives, we need to listen to them so we can restore our souls, our stories, and our lives.



Monarch butterflies, now an endangered species, are important for ecological, cultural, and social reasons in Mexico and are also celebrated in Minnesota.

Image courtesy of Florencia Pech-Cárdenas.

Deconstructing our colonized minds

To learn we need to unlearn, to construct we must deconstruct, and to connect we need to disconnect. This happened to me. I needed to deconstruct all the non-Indigenous beliefs I had in my head so I could learn to see and appreciate the gifts my parents and ancestors gave me. For instance, they helped me see land as a healer and teacher and not from an extractive Western perspective. That work also allowed me to recognize the gifts that nature gives me here in Minnesota and in Yucatan. I am here because of my parents and grandparents' traumas and sacrifices, so I try

to understand and appreciate the decisions they made, thinking of us, the future generations.

During the pandemic, I turned to my mother and father's example of taking care of plants. I filled my tiny apartment with indoor plants everywhere. Every summer, my husband, son, and I complete an application to receive a garden plot for the summer in our student-housing co-op. Last summer was not the exception and we were so fortunate that we got one. Planting squash, corn, and beans in my garden also helped



*Chaya, also known as Cnidoscolus chayamansa, is commonly referred to as Maya spinach.
Image courtesy of Florencia Pech-Cárdenas.*



Corn, beans, and squash are staple crops for Maya people, and can be a fond remembrance of home. Image courtesy of Florencia Pech-Cárdenas.

me to go through tough moments in my life. They also helped me to reconnect with my culture and home country. I became more conscious of cooking foods we eat at home such as beans with squash and *epazote*, *sikil p'aak*, and other Yucatecan dishes my mother is passing on to me. I call my mom each time I have cravings for Yucatecan food, and lately I have begun to share these dishes with people I care about. To pass the gifts my mom gives me by sharing her knowledge, I need to share my dishes with others as well. My family and I continue to learn about the land, plants, animals, and more each gardening season.

Some of my relatives have been displaced from our homelands. I went to visit my grandma and aunts in California in the summer of 2021, and I was so impressed that they even had plants that are very important to us in Yucatan, such as *chaya*. Chaya is the common name of this plant, also known as *Cnidoscolus chayamansa* by botanists. Recently, some people have started to refer to chaya as the Maya spinach, given the plant's high concentrations of iron and other nutrients. However, for a long time this plant was stigmatized and considered a poor person's food. I remember people referring to *chaya* this way during my childhood when my mom cooked it with ground pumpkin seeds and sour orange juice, with corn tortillas as a side.

Jessica Hernandez (2022) asserts in her book that we, as Indigenous people, bring our Indigeneity with us, compelling us to build new connections with the places we live beyond our homelands. That Indigeneity comes in the form of plants, clothes, knowledge, stories, food, kinship, ancestry, language, last names, and more. I could not pass up the opportunity to bring a cutting of a *chaya* plant back to Minnesota with me. Of course, my *chaya* plant is mostly indoors in Minnesota. So far, it is doing well and I have put it outside so the summer sun and heat can help my plant survive its next winter indoors.

As Kimmerer (2013) emphasizes in her chapter "Skywoman Falling" in *Braiding*

Sweetgrass, motherhood was and still is a very important process and respected role in Indigenous societies. However, we learned in a colonized culture that motherhood does not have the same esteem. I saw motherhood as a very bad thing when I was a child. I am the second of seven children, and the first female, so I grew up being the mother of my siblings. I love my family, and I am grateful I had many siblings because I have so many experiences to talk about. I saw motherhood as something oppressive and that, in becoming a mother, your life ends. Colonization brought a lot of traumas to my family, which have been passed down through intergenerational trauma. Nevertheless, my family's history and experiences have also created opportunities for us, the new generations, to be able to navigate two worlds. This does not make it less traumatic and painful, and I do not have the intention of romanticizing this process.

Indigenous people have found several strategies to adapt, to resist, and to find ways to heal. Healing is an important part of a transformation and change. Without healing, all of the traumatic experiences haven't been metabolized to build strength and resilience, but are instead internalized, leading to harmful behaviors. I have seen this in my own family.

My four grandparents spoke Maya and my dad also learned to speak Maya because he was raised by his grandmother. My paternal grandmother migrated in the 1970s and left six children in the pueblo of Temax. My mother did not learn Maya because her parents used it as a language for adults. This time was one of *mestización*, an attempt to assimilate Indigenous people into Mexican society. My grandparents had to migrate to the city in search of better opportunities. I am not sure what "better opportunities" means, though, because we had an overwhelming number of struggles in the city as well. In the pueblo, there was no work or employment and the *milpa* (kool/Maya agricultural system) did not provide enough to sustain the economic needs of the family under the new economic system



*Robin Wall Kimmerer reading a passage from 'Braiding Sweetgrass' with Diane Wilson.
Photo: Rebecca Slater, by Rebecca Studios.*

of development and modernization. The *kool*, milpa's name in Maya, is an agricultural system that consists of the management of the forest landscape to ensure forest regeneration, biodiversity, and food production. Kool's main crops are several varieties of corn, squash, and beans, and more than a dozen of other edible and medicinal plants. This system has been in the peninsula for over three millennia and it is a vital component of the Maya self-subsistence autonomy (Wammack-Weber and Duarte Duarte 2012).

Both of my *abuelos*, or grandfathers, were *campesinos* (*kolnáalo'ob*/Maya farmers), so they did not gain income or money. Instead, they

produced food, managed the forest landscapes, kept bees, and carried ancestral knowledge of the physical and metaphysical environments.

Unfortunately, most of my *tíos* (uncles) and *tías* (aunts) moved out from the community and they could not apply all of this knowledge in the city. Like my parents, most of them left the town, and migrated to the city. My dad was sent to formal education. His parents did not want him to be a *campesino* because that was seen, wrongly, as something with no future. Instead, they felt he needed to become a *profesionista* (a person who earns a bachelor's degree in the formal education system).

Re-story-ation: from listening to gifting our stories

Robin Wall Kimmerer's conversation with author Diane Wilson was full of meaning, wisdom, and reflection, but the subject that most touched me was the call for "Re-story-ation." Sharing our stories, as Indigenous peoples, has been a very important way to keep our cultures alive.

After hearing Robin and Diane's conversation, I found myself reflecting on how storytelling is an important part of Indigenous cultures and a way to create, pass, and transform knowledge production. When we share a story, we share our experiences, our beliefs, our dreams, our spirituality, our fears, and our views about the world. Sharing stories also helps us build relationships among human and nonhuman relatives. Stories are for learning, cautioning, loving, and also inspiring. Jessica Hernandez opens her book with these words: "For our Indigenous pueblos, by our Indigenous pueblos. May we continue to write and tell our stories, instead of our stories being written and told for us." As Jessica states in her book, many of Indigenous peoples' stories have been written and told by others, using non-Indigenous frameworks to interpret Indigenous people's knowledge.

Nevertheless, it is not just about Indigenous people telling, writing, and sharing their own stories, it is also about non-Indigenous peoples listening carefully and working to understand the holistic meaning of those stories. Taking care of those words will allow us to truly understand and collaborate with each other. Indigenous peoples have been telling and recording stories for centuries, but they have not been listened to with care, or considered important enough to understand the full meaning of this knowledge. It seems as if the world is finally starting to open their ears to listen.

When I was child, I remember my dad used to tell us stories about his experiences with the spirits of the nonhuman world, such as the forest, animals, and more. I did not understand fully at my young age, but now when I recall those stories, I find meaning and learning. My mom did the same, telling us stories about her life growing up; there she was teaching us family history, life experiences, and traditional knowledge about food, plants, and animals. Today, as a mother, I share these stories with my son, and try to teach these stories and my own new stories as my parents and grandparents did. Motherhood is a gift, and



The Maya tropical rainforest is well cared for. Image courtesy of Florencia Pech-Cárdenas.

I have the responsibility to give gifts back to my son. I am giving him the stories I received from my parents.

Gifts were another huge part of the conversation between Robin and Diane. Unfortunately, in western culture, gifts have become material, either to show how much material wealth you have or given as a compromise, rather than an act of gratitude. Indigenous gifts, on the other hand, are not materialistic, and don't have to be tangible. In Indigenous cultures, actions, sentiments, behaviors and even thoughts are considered gifts. When I moved to Minnesota, I was not aware of all the gifts and stories I was receiving from my nonhuman ancestors and relatives. Emotionally

and spiritually, I was in a hard place. I was, and still am, undergoing a transformation. However, by paying attention to this place—the beautiful color of cardinals, the flying monarchs, the bees, the blooming flowers—I was given the gift of remembering my ancestral land in the Yucatan Peninsula. They were welcome gifts from the Dakota lands that I had not realized. Now it is my turn to give my stories to my son, to my family, and to you all. Sometimes we receive gifts that we must pass along to others, rather than keep them to ourselves.

I remember my mom was always giving to our neighbors, friends, and family. Even when we did not have that much, she always tried to give and



A small planting of corn. Image courtesy of Florencia Pech-Cárdenas.

share with others. I asked her once when I was a youth, why she has to do that, and she told me because we must. I did not understand at that time, but now her words have meaning. I plant my garden and I take care of the land, then the land gives me gifts, and it is my responsibility to share those gifts with my neighbors, family, and friends. Gifting is an act of gratitude and reminds us that we are in a relationship with other beings, human and nonhuman.

This last season, I planted corn. My plants grew very well in the first month, but in the second month they were eaten by rabbits. I was so disappointed, but then I remembered a story that a Maya colleague from Guatemala was sharing in a virtual talk about Indigenous agriculture. In her talk, she mentioned that her grandfather always

planted in his milpa three seeds of corn: one for the land, one for the bird, and one for the *tuza* (a small rodent that eats seeds, roots, and young plants), because we have to take care of our non-human relatives as well. If the land wants to give us corn in return, then it is a gift, but if the land wants to give gifts to the bird and the *tuza*, then we are reminded that it is not up to us to seek out gifts. We are not engaged in a superior-inferior hierarchy with our world, but we are invited into a holistic understanding of the land and all nonhuman relatives and spirits. As I reflected on my experience, I saw that “my” corn was a gift from the land to the rabbit. The land reminds us who we are and, to learn from the land, we must listen, respect, and share our stories.

Note from the Editor

In 2020 and 2022 Open Rivers published reviews of Robin Wall Kimmerer’s *Braiding Sweetgrass* and Diane Wilson’s *The Seed Keeper*.

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About the Author

Florencia Pech-Cárdenas is a Maya Yucateca from the Yucatan Peninsula of Mexico; she is currently a Ph.D. candidate in the Natural Resources Science and Management program at the University of Minnesota. She has a master's degree in Biological Sciences-Natural Resources track from the Scientific Research Center of Yucatan, where she learned in depth about Western science. Her research interests range from ethnobiology to Indigenous forestry with a current focus on Maya communities' management of the forest (as a holistic living relative). Florencia is an interdisciplinary scholar who aims to bring Indigenous perspectives into the forestry field. Florencia is also a mother, a sister, a daughter, and a wife. She is currently reclaiming her Indigenous language and enjoys learning it and reconnecting to her ancestral roots.

PERSPECTIVES

DATA SCIENCE IN INDIAN COUNTRY

By Maudesty Merino and Nick Salgado-Stanley

At the end of July 2022, some 150 individuals from across the country gathered at the University of Minnesota Twin Cities for “Data Science in Indian Country,” the Fifth Geoscience Alliance Conference since 2010. Founded by Dr. Nievita Bueno Watts of California State Polytechnic University, Humboldt (Cal Poly Humboldt), Prof. Anthony Berthelote of Salish Kootenai College, and Dr. Diana Dalbotten of the University of Minnesota’s St. Anthony Falls Laboratory, the Geoscience Alliance (GA) is a coalition of students, educators and staff, Indigenous community members, and others committed to broadening the participation of Native Americans, Alaska Natives, and people of Native Hawai’ian ancestry in the geosciences.

“We envision a future in which Native Americans are no longer underrepresented in the geosciences,” write the GA founders. “We look to a day where Native scientists take a leadership role in helping to steer our country toward a more sustainable and environmentally ethical relationship with the Earth.”

During the Fifth Geoscience Alliance Conference, participants discussed a number of key questions regarding data collection and analysis. They asked:

- *What safeguards are in place to protect and steward culturally sensitive data and knowledge?*



Wild rice growing in northern Minnesota. Image via Superior National Forest, (CC BY 2.0), via Wikimedia Commons.

- *What role does Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) play in study design and data interpretation?*
- *How might environmental or cultural resources be imperiled by sharing data with non-Native entities?*

Two students engaged in these discussions were Maudesty Merino and Nick Salgado-Stanley of Cal Poly Humboldt. Both Maudesty and Nick brought their experiences in the St. Anthony Falls Laboratory's Research Experience for Undergraduates on Sustainable Land and Water

Resources (REU SLAWR) to the conference. Working with researchers from the University of Minnesota Duluth and in collaboration with the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, Maudesty and Nick contributed to a multi-year study on the effect of sulfur on Manoomin (Ojibwe) / Psin (Dakota) / Wild Rice.

In the following essays, Maudesty and Nick share their insights about their experiences.

—Clare Boerigter, St. Anthony Falls Lab Communications Manager

Researching in a Place away from Home

Maudesty Merino

Just before the summer of 2021, I was accepted into the Doris Duke Conservation Scholars Program, a two-year immersion program for scholars entering the field of conservation. The first summer was in preparation for an internship, helping us establish our skill sets and perspective in conservation science. Based on our experience of the first summer, our mentors helped us find an internship for the following summer. This led me to the Sustainable Land and Water Resources REU program in the summer of 2022, based at the University of Minnesota with the Kawe Gidaa-naanagadawendamin Manoomin “First we must consider the wild rice” Collaborative.

This is where I was introduced to new perspectives and opportunities to learn firsthand about Indigenist-led Research. Such research is based on the principles and philosophies of Indigenous peoples and is conducted by Indigenous people within their own communities (Boyd 2014). I felt out of place even as an Indigenist scientist, simply because I was conducting Indigenous research in a place away from home. I have gained many skills throughout my lifetime, learning from elders, teachers/professors, workshops, wellness

circles, conferences, and internships. There are differences in our Indigenous knowledge systems, as no place is ever the same. This has allowed my perception and approaches to collaborative ecological research to grow.

I began this project thinking about how I was going to see or learn something new and different. However, I recognize that I had not only learned the same lesson as many more before me who had also been guided to Psin/Manoomin, but a large part of this reciprocal relationship was to give back. “Plants answer questions by the way they live, by their responses to change; you just need to learn how to ask” (Kimmerer 2018, 158). I did not know how best to do that at first, and it took me the whole summer to recognize what had always been there. It felt only right that I continue to share my story and be that guide for future Indigenist leaders within all fields, reminding them of what it means to learn the language of the plants.

Indigenous perspectives are necessary voices when discussing potential change or measurement within a landscape, as are all stakeholders along with continuous inclusion throughout the

implementation process. During my second summer internship, I attended a Tribal Adaptation Menu Workshop on the lands of the Fond Du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa. There we focused on the Indigenous-led research and conservation of Psin/Manoomin, as well as their process of conducting research, including the seven Ojibwe values: Nibwaakkaawin (wisdom), Zaagi'idiwin (love), Minaadendamowin (respect), Zoongide'ewin (bravery), Gwayakwaadiziwin (honesty), Dabaadedendiziwin (humility), and Debwewin (truth). These new perspectives helped me change some aspects of my perception while also strengthening others, showing me an additional pathway to understanding and recognizing how the land has changed over time.

There are many protectors of Psin/Manoomin; their survivance today is all thanks to the Dakota and Ojibwe families picking up the bulk of these responsibilities. Although commonly known as Ojibwe peoples, they actually refer to themselves as Anishinaabe and their language as Ojibwe. The great migration prophecy of the Anishinaabe tells of their journey to the land where the “food grows on the water,” leading to a new equilibrium of stewardship for Psin (wild rice) by the Dakota and Manoomin (wild rice) by the Anishinaabe (Great Lakes Wild Rice Initiative, 2020). The spiritual, emotional, physical, and mental wellness of the Indigenous peoples are strongly connected with Manoomin or Psin; they even named the August moon as their Ricing Moon, the Manoominike-giizis (Ojibwe.net). The Anishinaabe and Dakota story of healing begins with Manoomin/Psin, just as Manoomin/Psin's story of survivance is carried on through their stories; it is a story of reciprocity and resilience.

Healing the land also heals the people by instilling altruistic values and deepening our roots with the land as stewards. The Dakotas' story of survivance has much to do with their core values and their return to Psin, the knowledge having been passed down to help guide them: Wóokiya (generosity and helping), Wóksape (wisdom),

Wówaunšidaŋ (caring and compassion), Wóohoda (respect), Wówahbadaŋ (humility), Wócekiya (prayer), and Wówicaka (honesty and truth) ([Our Seven Dakota Values – Native American Heritage Month](#)). These altruistic values instilled within the Dakota and Anishinaabe have raised them to be protectors or activists on Psin/Manoomins' behalf. As an Indigenist researcher, I feel it is important to consider not only the people, but also the beings or species themselves, as they hold stakes in the land. Psin/Manoomin is respected as an animate being by the Dakota and Anishinaabe, having formed a reciprocal relationship that would ensure each others' survival (David et al. 2019).

Gelinas wrote, “When we work in relationship with stakeholders, we can achieve things that no one of us could accomplish on our own” (2016, 157). This highlights those parts of our experiences that may be hidden from others, while also encouraging “the satisfaction and comfort of being part of and contributing to a community of people.” These concepts can lead to new beginnings or changes within our society, helping us to diversify the various communities of research. There will always be multiple pathways to knowledge and change, helping to ignite our survivance, perpetuate acts of reconciliation, and brighten the light of revitalization, while also fighting for repatriation. Positive ecological collaboration is a process of unity and understanding of each other and using our differences as strengths and inspiration for new and inclusive solutions. One example of a positive ecological collaboration is the Kawe Gidaa-naanagadawendaamin Manoomin or “first we must consider the wild rice” Collaborative. The Collaborative has partnered traditional ricers and scientists, all who have been protecting Psin/Manoomin long before, laying out the groundwork for future researchers like myself. Psin/Manoomin (wild rice) has its own protocol under the Kawe Gida-naanagadawendaamin Manoomin collaborative, inspiration drawn from all of the Indigenous communities. One of

the protocols' guiding principles is the level of respect and understanding one must have for Psin/Manoomin as it builds cultural competency (UMN Manoomin project protocol).

We as Indigenous peoples have struggled to align with the scientific ecological methodologies, though it does not change that “generations of data collection and validation through time builds up to well-tested theories” (Kimmerer 2018, 159) of traditional ecological knowledge. Indigenous perspectives tend to lean more on the side of relational interactions of living beings originally from Turtle Island, rather than seeing nonhuman others as objects to be controlled. This is one of the primary differences in practicing Scientific Ecological Knowledge (SEK) or Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK). SEK has some similarities with TEK, including their observational and subjective qualities that imply a process of curiosity and inquiry (Stokes 2022). This bridging of social capital through the sharing of knowledge systems can bring great strength and diversity to the modernized scientific community. Social capital has two aspects that help us socially bond with people who are like us and bridge the gap with those different from us (Gelinas 2016, 157). The information that is shared within the Indigenous communities is spatially specific, having “developed in a multiplicity of cultures that have passed down a knowledge of place through thousands of years of experience to subsequent generations” (Tribal Adaptation Menu Team 2019, 8). Indigenous perspectives are extremely important to incorporate when looking into potential research sites, as “many of the ecological crises humanity is facing are due to the pervasiveness of the western perspective in decision-making around the globe”(9). The knowledge changes everywhere you go; these knowledge systems tend to lean on the side of plurality or multiple ways of knowing (Stokes 2022).

The Anishinaabeg are a symbol of cultural survival and perspective; they have often called

“for observation, deliberation, recognition, and adaptation,” not western perspectives of “exploration, domination, exploitation, and extraction” (Tribal Adaptation Menu Team 2019, 9). This can bring a very different perspective to conducting research, as we recognize what happens when we no longer value their wisdom and suddenly “our teachers and relatives quickly become ‘resources’ stripped of their true identities and sold on the open market to the highest bidder” (10). Indigenous peoples strive to come together in a good way, so when researching, we must be sure to use “the approach of respect and reciprocity” helping to open doors “to local perspectives and stories in ways that discussion questions, which tend to be direct and focused, will not” (11). I personally resonate with the teachings from my Auntie and what it means to dance for the people, to share our good medicine by allowing ourselves to keep a good mindset and do things in a good way. I have worked to incorporate these values into my mental model and allow it to positively change my mindset, especially when conducting research.

Psin/Manoomin is a relative to the Anishinaabeg as many other “plants, animals, and other manidoog (spirits) are our relatives and original teachers” (Tribal Adaptation Menu Team 2019, 10). I wanted to ensure that I acknowledged and reciprocated the respect that was necessary in order to gain a slight understanding of the importance Psin/Manoomin holds for the people. This includes specific parameters placed around communities caring for Psin/Manoomin, respecting their vulnerable stages such as floating leaf stage and choosing to not disturb our relatives. The floating leaf stage is the most sensitive stage of Psin/Manoomin's life cycle, their abundant survivance is variably dependent on “weather, water and/or nutrient levels, and presence of pests” (GLIFWC 2018, 29). It leads to a different way of understanding and finding solutions for ecological restoration that also takes into consideration the environment as a whole and how all things interconnect. This includes understanding

and respecting the wisdom being shared, and recognizing the different forms of survivance—or presence—worldview.

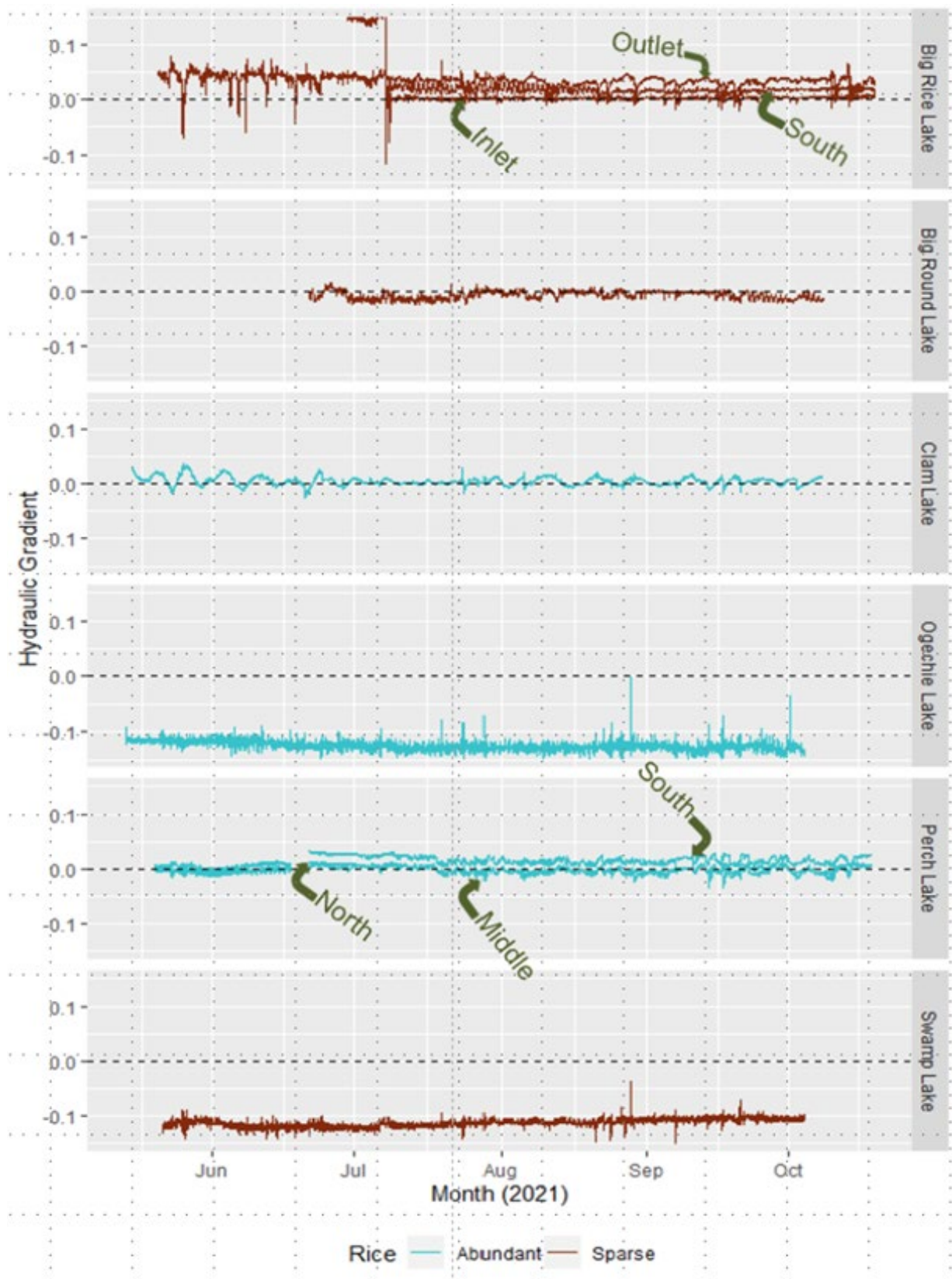
Survivance, Reconciliation, Revitalization, and Rematriation are all important aspects that should always be considered when Mother Earth is involved. When we begin to revitalize our way of life and share our knowledge with the communities, both young and old will slowly begin to feel the good medicine that's been looking over them always. Continuing through the motions of reconciliation for our individual mental well-being, we are best understood together, our good medicine is stronger together. This mindset of greed and need brings pain and suffering upon us. Though once we are “assembled by those who have a covenant of reciprocity and respect, the bricks of science build a hospital, a school, a water purification plant, a wildlife refuge, and organic farm, and generate knowledge on behalf of our more-than-human-relatives” (Kimmerer 2013, 56). Survivance is a part of all of us; survivance is the battle scars and intergenerational trauma that have been passed down from our ancestors.

The survivance of Psin or Manoomin is highly interconnected with the Indigenous peoples and the revitalization and reconciliation of both their life history strategies. This journey through ecological colonization has led the people directly into the decolonization of those very same practices. Decolonization has many forms as it is a, “process of disruption, resistance, disentanglement, renewal, and creation out of the ashes of colonialism” (Strutt 2021, 21). There are multiple changes throughout Psin/Manoomin's life cycle, including germination, submergent, floating leaf, emergent, flower, and the seedling. Psin/Manoomins' survivance is interconnected with conditions created by the wetlands and Indigenous peoples (David et al. 2019). In order to revitalize their way of life, they cherished Psin/Manoomin practices and passed them down through the generations. Once people began to change their minds about reconciliation, they began to reciprocate a more positive relationship.

The rights of Psin/Manoomin are directly connected to their health, meaning a key factor in strengthening their survivance tactics for Psin/Manoomin involves the understanding of how they are interrelated.

As part of my 2022 SLAWR internship, I analyzed data from 2021 of the groundwater and surface water fluctuations according to research sites with Psin/Manoomin abundance and sparsity. The hydraulic gradient graphs I created are comparable to the graphs in the Kawe Gida-naanagadawendamin Manoomin Collaborative's “Site Comparison Report for 2018–2020.” Our tribal partners have provided the research locations and have chosen where to place their stream gauges and piezometers, according to Psin/Manoomin abundance and sparsity. The tribal partners include: 1864 Treaty Authority (4 sites), Fond Du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa (2 sites), Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission (1 site) Lac Du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewa (3 sites), Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe (2 sites), and St. Croix Chippewa Indians of Wisconsin (2 sites). The hydraulic gradient looks at the differences of the hydraulic head or water levels along the same path of water flow, where the differences in points are being accounted for. Psin/Manoomin has a beautiful sense of understanding with groundwater and surface water; they have evolved to benefit from the varying fluctuations of water levels (David et al. 2019).

The graph above was created from the 2021 dataset. While it did not reveal any major changes or correlations, there are still patterns to be recognized. Upwelling means that water levels are rising, while downwelling means they are going down. This can be important for many different reasons, including the influx and assimilation of nutrients during reoccurring flood events, as “emergent macrophytes acquire the nutrients required for growth directly from wetland sediments and incorporate them into living biomass” (Arneson 2020, 6). The nutrients being absorbed by the plants may be deteriorating the plants'



Hydraulic gradient on Minnesota and Wisconsin lakes. Data gathered by the Kawa Gidaa-nanaagadawendamin Manoomin Collaborative and analyzed by the author and her mentor Gigi Voss. Image courtesy of the author.

ability to flourish. “The sensitivity of individual waterbodies to sulfate pollution effects on wild rice toxicity can thus be predicted from the analysis of the carbon and iron concentrations in the solid of a wetland” (Pollman et al. 2017). Both Ogechie and Swamp Lakes have downwelling hydraulic gradients, meaning the water levels have gone down. However, Ogechie is a known ricing site of abundance with a lot of Psin/Manoomin to compare with other known sparse sites. The pattern of one abundant site and one sparse site having the same characterization of upwelling or downwelling continues the known method of Psin/Manoomin needing a variance of shifting water levels (Great Lakes Wild Rice Initiative 2020). The stream gauge measures the flow of surface water while piezometers focus on the ground water levels. Each site also carries two types of pressure transducers. The Solinst barologger records the air pressure in fifteen minute increments; it is placed above the water and inside the pvc pipe. The Solinst levelogger also records every fifteen minutes, though it is placed underwater and measures temperature and pressure. Understanding the movement of water is helpful in many situations; for this situation it is allowing us to compare the gradients with Psin/Manoomin abundance and sparsity. Big Round Lake and Perch Lake have multiple stream gauges and piezometers, showing the spatially specific shift of upwelling and downwelling. This helps increase our spatial understanding of these specific areas and how the land’s geography may be shifting the dispersion of water.

Many different factors continue to nurture and care for Psin/Manoomin, though as dams begin to fail they also negatively affect the necessary parameters for Psin/Manoomin; the fluctuating water levels help keep the Ginoozhegoons (pickerelweed) from invading (Great Lakes Wild Rice Initiative 2020). Truth be told, the temporal scale is off for this short three-year analysis and we would need more time to truly determine what is working and not working. However, tribal entities have been more successful in

supporting Psin/Manoomin and understanding what they need to flourish. Flooding helps uproot perennials and invasive plants, but flooding at the wrong time of year may be affecting the sensitive floating leaf stage of Psin/Manoomin. Each area of Manoomin is different and therefore requires more spatially specific data and information (David et al. 2019). Every tribal partner is different in their implementation of research methods; more often than not different solutions are necessary for different problems. Especially as there are many different factors that influence Psin/Manoomin, learning their language begins with understanding their lifeway preference (Kimmerer 2018, 158) like greater water clarity, with a higher submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) cover, and a sandy substrate for sediment composition (Arneson 2020). A longer temporal scale of research may help clarify the actual pattern upheld by Psin/Manoomin.

Why is this research different? How have these Indigenous perspectives improved and expanded the process of conducting research? The beginning of this research involved the building of a relationship with this living being, staying consistent with all the stakeholders and learning the plants’ language (Kimmerer 2018). The tribal stakeholders are able to help with almost every aspect of the project, so they should be included throughout the process. This includes access to more lands, historically sacred places for ecological survivance and adaptability of Psin/Manoomin. It includes providing researchers with the opportunity to change the approach and push for creative thinking, “the ways we enact relational accountability” (Wilson and Hughes 2019, 7). It includes learning and incorporating Indigenist-led research philosophies when researching on their land, which means that researchers “include a relational and emergent understanding of reality and Knowledge, and requires a particular way of behaving in the world” (7). These ideas are woven throughout the collaboratives’ research protocol, pushing them to find new methods for conducting research, such

as respectfully staying out of the waters during the sensitive floating leaf stage. The voices that were previously pushed to the side have finally been given the support necessary to make change and have a voice in water quality standards, reporting, and policy intervention. Species have been evolving to attract pollinators for ages now, so why is a human following Psin/Manoomin any different? Are we not all controlled, if not mesmerized, by the very beings or “resources” that sustain us, helping us in all aspects of our lifeways—physically, spiritually, mentally, and emotionally.

I came into this internship thinking I would learn a lot about the process for collaborating positively. I have gained more questions than answers—more dreams than results. However, the one thing I’ve noticed in common between the Indigenous communities and these different spatially specific species is that by creating this connection with the land, it becomes sacred to the community. Understanding and researching for Indigenous communities means recognizing that “Indigenist knowledge is not made up of discrete or arbitrary relationships but rather represents a system of relationships that encompasses worldviews and cultures that arise from their place” (Wilson and Hughes 2019). These complex systems of knowledge and interconnecting relationships, within both the natural world and modern society, have become highly intricate with different perspectives weaving themselves into a metaphorical basket. Through this journey of weaving a basket, I am also writing, dreaming,

and praying to the creator and my ancestors above me for guidance and protection. It becomes more than just the physical dependency of each other, but rather the understanding and willingness to commit. The increase in traditional teachings is meant to help us all recognize who we are and how we’ve come to be, to have gratitude for our adaptability in times of crisis. The connections that are built within these Indigenous communities are dynamic and meant to push the limitations of our colonized mindsets instilled within us from a young age.

There were many different organizations that guided and supported me throughout my journey of becoming a Indigenist Researcher, including but not limited to: The Round House Council, The Maidu Summit Consortium, The Susanville Indian Rancheria, The Fifth Direction Program, The Doris Duke Conservation Scholars Program, The Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority participation, The Indian Natural Resources Science and Engineering Program, The Indian Tribal Education and Personnel Program and Club, The American Indian Science and Engineering Program, The Sustainable Land and Water Resources Internship, Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission, The University of Minnesota, and the Kawe Gida-naanagadawendaamin Manoomin Collaborative. All of these programs have brought me to a good place, with encouraging leaders who have guided me along my lifeway to “the place where the food grows on the water.”

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Data Science Across Borders

Nick Salgado-Stanley

As an undergraduate pursuing degrees in wildlife conservation and economics at Cal Poly Humboldt, I was drawn to professionals who understood the importance of data and its applications to the natural world. In particular, I was excited to be part of a community of scholars who were committed to preserving Indigenous sovereignty through academic research and collaboration.

Entering a space of Indigenous knowledge and respect as a non-native student was a new experience for me. Initially, I was hesitant to speak up and questioned my place in an environment rich in cultures unlike my own. However, positive affirmations from mentors, peers, and strangers alike allowed me to see that having multiple backgrounds in one space is imperative to create inclusive solutions to a diverse world.



Fond du Lac Water Resources Director Nancy Schuldt (left) and REU researcher Amber Simon (right) take water samples at Big Lake for E. Coli and other water-borne diseases. Image courtesy of Nick Salgado-Stanley.

At the gathering, provoking ideas were questioned, and cultural questions were answered. Most importantly, though, mental walls were broken down; through roundtable discussions that allowed people of different backgrounds to shed light on controversial issues, people grew comfortable enough to discuss the misconceptions and stereotypes that typically surround Native American affairs.

Specifically, we had discussions in intimate groups where everyone was encouraged to share experiences and thoughts. Educating many different generations on how to respectfully treat their elders, people of different ethnicities, and even how to pronounce different nations across the continent all help to eradicate ignorance from STEM spheres.

One perspective I considered throughout the Fifth Geoscience Alliance Conference was how Chicano individuals' concerns are reflected in academia regarding data sovereignty. Speaking from experience as a Latino in STEM, I believe that data sovereignty is very important to many Chicano issues, and is especially relevant for those in the San Joaquin Valley in California. Here, many Chicano farm workers suffer from human rights violations.

The San Joaquin Valley supplies a quarter of the United States' food, yet its workers have long been viewed as second-class citizens. United Farm Workers, a labor union recently backed by California Senator Alex Padilla, is advocating for the equal treatment of farm workers, regardless of citizenship status or national origin. A large part of the fight is in accessing figures to estimate exactly how many farm workers in the state are protected under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals Act, or DACA, and immigration legislation passed by Congress and signed into law by President Biden (White House 2023).

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, only 12 percent of reported farm workers across California are Hispanic (USDA n.d.); however,

organizations like United Farm Workers believe the figure to be far higher because of the number of unreported immigrants who come to the States seeking work and legal protection (Harvey 2017). The data on workers who have sought asylum or attempted to obtain visas is kept private by the Department of Homeland Security in many states, including California. Individuals not counted by the U.S. Census are unable to collect social security, local tax refunds, and other benefits, which historically have been solely for U.S. citizens.

Similarly, data sharing has long been controversial for Native nations in both the United States and Canada. When data on natural resources and people is collected by state or federal agencies and not shared with tribes, cooperation is nearly impossible. One example is the contention surrounding the Line 3 pipeline being developed through the reservation of the Fond Du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa outside of Duluth, Minnesota. In the last decade, after years of secrecy, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and Fond Du Lac officials finally began consulting in order to protect native species and cultural resources and respect the 1854 Treaty that ensures the Band's rights to fish, hunt, and live according to traditional standards (Minnesota Humanities Center n.d.). Small steps are being taken toward a respectful relationship between Indigenous tribes and the U.S. government as progressive leaders take power and follow through on promises related to land back movements and Native sovereignty (Fonseca 2022).

One common theme between the Chicano farm workers of California and the Fond Du Lac Band members of Minnesota is a disconnect between the people and those in power. There are certain incentives for the latter to keep their cards close. Less documentation of immigrants entering the West means less government spending on social security benefits and an ever-increasing population of fearful workers who are historically overworked and underpaid. In the Midwest,

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the Bureau of Indian Affairs offices and officials receive some of the smallest portions of government spending (USCCR 2003).

Yet, when the rights of every person residing in this country, regardless of nationality, are respected, momentous achievements follow. The Fond Du Lac Band recently opened Mashkiki Waakaa'igan Pharmacy, the first fully funded tribal pharmacy in downtown Minneapolis (Huggins and Mueller 2022). In California, the

United Farm Workers union has recently completed a 28-day march across the Golden State to demand equal treatment of undocumented workers by California legislators. Despite the many struggles that remain across the country, strength persists among the impoverished. Likewise, the Fifth Geoscience Alliance Conference created a sense of solidarity among all present. Unity existed in rooms full of diverse participants at the University of Minnesota for a very important gathering.



From left to right: Parker Arntsen-Beaudin, Nick Salgado-Stanley, Cheyenne Koran, Maudesty Merino, joining a special dinner on renewable energy at the Fifth Geoscience Alliance Conference in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Image courtesy of Nick Salgado-Stanley.

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About the Authors

Maudesty Merino is a Mountain Maidu from Kotasi ni Sumbilim area, and is enrolled with the Susanville Indian Rancheria. Currently, she is attending the California State Polytechnic University, Humboldt, studying for her B.S. in Environmental Science and Management concentrating in planning and policy, and a Native American Studies minor in Indigenous Peoples Natural Resources Use and Environment.

Nick Salgado-Stanley is a third-year undergraduate student pursuing degrees in wildlife conservation and economics at California State Polytechnic University, Humboldt. He plans to use both natural and social sciences to devise plans to address the many issues encompassed by intersectional environmentalism. To begin this journey, he has been graced with the opportunity to be a part of the Research Experience for Undergraduates on Sustainable Land and Water Resources (REU-SLAWR) where he independently conducted research on how industrial mining impacted Minnesota's native resources, specifically wild rice (manoomin).

PRIMARY SOURCES

COLLABORATIVE INDIGENOUS RESEARCH

By Eve Tuck

Collaborative Indigenous Research is a way to repair the legacy of harmful research practices

A recent disclosure from Harvard's Peabody Museum has brought attention, yet again, to the need to rethink the relationships between universities and Indigenous communities.

Recently, the Peabody Museum announced that it has been holding locks of hair collected throughout the 1930s from more than 700 Indigenous children forced into residential boarding schools in the U.S.



*University research has a legacy of doing harm to Indigenous communities. However, a new collaborative project is showing how research can be done in a better and inclusive way.
(Shutterstock)*

The museum has apologized, vowing to return the hair clippings to Indigenous communities. In their written statement, they acknowledge that the clippings were taken at a time in which it was common practice in anthropology to use hair samples to “justify racial hierarchies and categories.”

If you grew up outside of Indigenous communities, Black communities, poor communities, and/or disabled communities, you might be surprised to learn that many have had negative experiences with university-based researchers. Nearly 25 years ago, renowned Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith observed that research is “probably one of the dirtiest words in the Indigenous world’s vocabulary.”

Some of the studies that have done Indigenous communities the most harm were used to justify genocide and land dispossession. These weren’t research as we would understand it today — they were white supremacist propaganda. But they are still the legacy of many contemporary fields of science and social science.

Some of these studies amounted to forms of torture deployed on Indigenous people, alongside Black people, people in concentration camps, disabled people and poor people under the auspices of science. These are the sorts of studies that necessitated the introduction of institutional ethics review boards in universities and communities.



Indigenous Peoples have always been researchers. Many Indigenous worldviews, knowledge systems and values are based in inquiry, curiosity and sharing the results of inquiry through storytelling. (Shutterstock)

Legacy of harmful research

Some studies have been coercive, not allowing Indigenous communities the ability to refuse or withdraw. Others have been conducted under duress. Some are deceptive. These are studies that say they are about one thing, but are really about something else.

Many other studies are extractive. Researchers pop up for a time, take what they need and leave. Far more are harmful because they over-promise (they can't possibly generate the change that

Indigenous communities desire). Or they are simply time-wasters: they learn something that the community already knew, but no one seemed to listen to them about.

Because of this history and contemporary situation, many people who grow up in Indigenous families are critical of researchers who don't appreciate the real stakes, or real benefits, of research for Indigenous communities.

Learning from Indigenous ways of knowing

Since time immemorial, Indigenous communities have engaged in research activities, even when these approaches to research have been dismissed as unsystematic or not objective. Indigenous Peoples have always been researchers. Indeed, so many Indigenous worldviews, knowledge systems and values are based in inquiry, curiosity and sharing the results of inquiry through storytelling.

In addition to these ways of knowing, for more than two decades another approach to research with Indigenous communities has been practiced by researchers working inside and outside of the university. This approach, what I and others have come to call Collaborative Indigenous Research, is a deliberate challenge to the harmful ways university-based researchers have engaged with Indigenous communities.

This approach is rooted in the belief that Indigenous communities have long pasts, and even longer futures. It begins with the premise that Indigenous people have expertise about their everyday lives and the institutions and policies that affect them. This expertise reveals how institutions and policies impede their hopes and dreams. Collaborative Indigenous Research examines how Indigenous communities can bring about change to policy, practice, and relationships to lands, waters and one another.

This is research that honours Indigenous knowledges, not as something from the past, but as something that is enlivened through our collaboration. This is research that focuses on supporting the agency and self-determination of Indigenous communities, often in collaboration with Black communities and communities that have also experienced colonial violence.

Collaborative Indigenous research

One of the barriers that has kept people from learning how to do Collaborative Indigenous Research is the lack of support for Indigenous scholars who might otherwise be able to mentor newcomers to the field. This is a practice that,

like so many other Indigenous ways of knowing, is best learned by doing, and from someone who is invested in the learner's future. However, the same harmful aspects of university-based research that make Indigenous people suspicious of

some research are also at work when Indigenous students stay away from careers in universities.

The Collaborative Indigenous Research (CIR) Digital Garden is one way of removing that barrier, by creating a space for learning, sharing and connecting across the internet in order to grow inspiration and expertise.

As an Indigenous scholar, I am often asked how research with Indigenous Peoples can be done in a more ethical way. This project — which took five years to build — is an answer. The CIR Digital Garden is a new online platform where users

can search, read and post brief profiles of their studies.

Each profile includes key information about a study, including location, communities, research questions and methods. Profiles use categories and tags to make it easier to search and browse the site — think Pokémon cards, but for Indigenous research.

Unlike other research databases, the profiles also include the theories of change — how the collaborators think we can bring about social change — and what constitutes evidence in each



Eve Tuck and Tkaronto CIRCLE Lab youth researchers and collaborators hold a hand-made banner that reads: 'History erased but never displaced. WE ARE HERE.' (Eve Tuck), Author provided.

study. The CIR Digital Garden isn't behind a paywall or written only for an academic audience. The goal is to show how collaborative Indigenous research is already a thriving practice, with important place-based specificities represented in the various profiles.

To give new users a taste of what the capabilities of the garden are, we have already pre-loaded nearly 200 studies, so that you can search and read the types of profiles we hope will someday fill the garden. We hope that these initial 200 will be just a fraction of all of those that university and community-based researchers will add. We have an editorial team in place to review and

support contributors in creating their study profiles.

We hope that this garden finds those who have a strong desire to do research differently. We hope this garden can be a gathering place for those who know this work is important, and might thrive with the support that isn't often available in universities. We hope that we can nurture growth away from the harmful legacies of research done to Indigenous communities.

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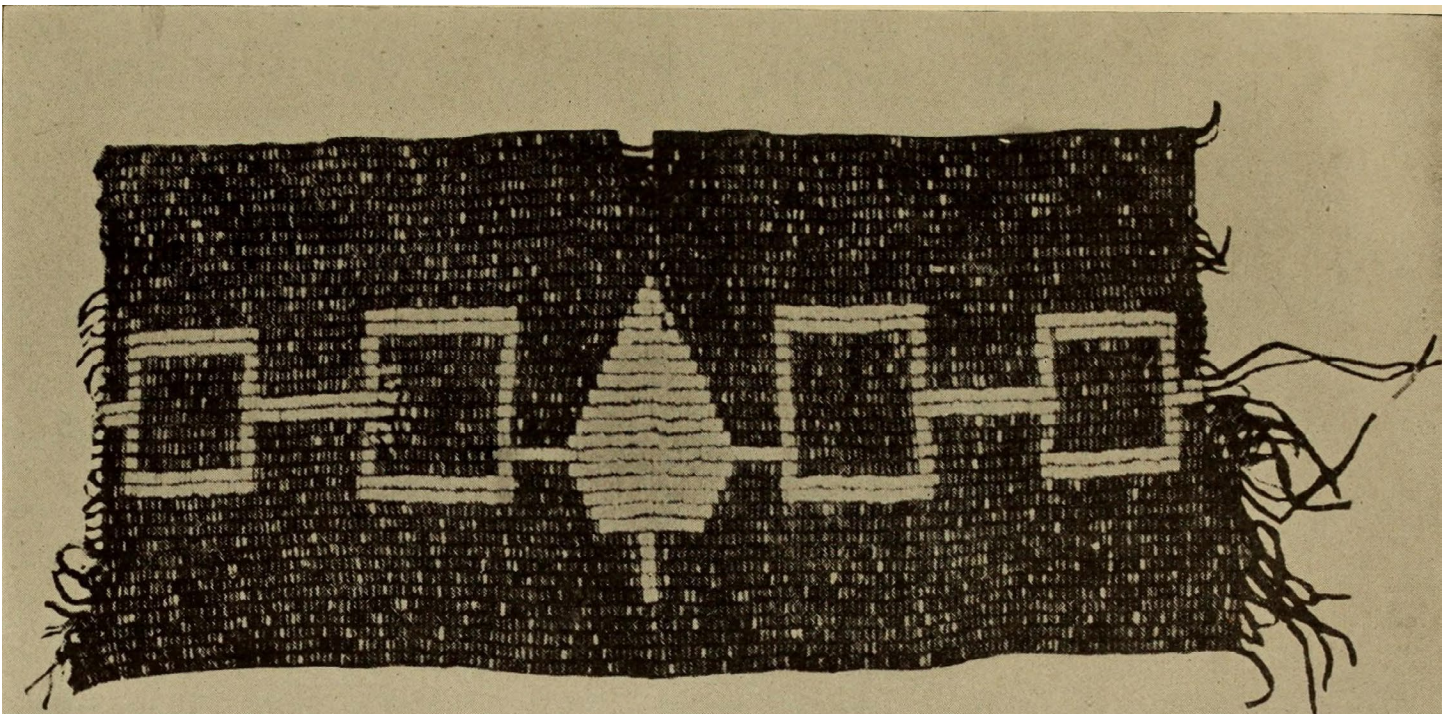
TEACHING AND PRACTICE

TEACHING INDIGENOUS EPISTEMOLOGIES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

By Vicente M. Diaz, Michael Dockry, Elizabeth Sumida Huaman,
Thomas Reynolds, and Rebecca Webster

It has been argued that the twin ongoing and overarching crises facing students in higher education today are the urgencies of calls for justice and the threats from a changing climate. Indeed, these are inextricably intertwined. Students will face them no matter what their profession, or however they find themselves living as a citizen in the world. As Vicente Diaz reminds us so eloquently in his contribution to this collection, “the epistemological system on which our present political, economic, and cultural existences are based is unsustainable. We

need radically different ways of defining what it means to be human, of understanding human-ness in relations of kinship and reciprocity, and of understanding and respecting the living world around us.” The other participants in this collection echo Diaz’ call, from a broad range of collegiate, departmental, and professional perspectives. The range and depth of the work represented here reminds us all that Indigenous ways of knowing are essential to our future, and must become part of the experience of all of our students.



The Hiawatha Wampum Belt, depicting the five original nations of the Haudenosaunee and their interconnections.

As part of this issue of Open Rivers, we are sharing work that demonstrates the ways that the University of Minnesota and community partners are engaging Indigenous epistemologies in education, research, and community engagement. While the issue stems from the work of the Environmental Stewardship, Place,

and Community Initiative, we are eager to share a collection of work that demonstrates ways that others—both on and off campus—are expanding these conversations and doing work that exceeds this single project.

—Open Rivers editors

Vicente M. Diaz, Professor of American Indian Studies

What course(s) do you teach that integrate Indigenous ways of knowing? What is the course about?

AMIN 1001 Intro to American Indian Studies:

This is a survey course that introduces the student to the field of American Indian Studies through readings, films, and other source materials from multiple disciplines and from movements for political and cultural resurgence in Indian Country and the Pacific region. In a nutshell, it presents and counters the history of settler colonial law and society with ongoing histories of American Indian and Pacific Indigeneity. The course discusses aboriginal belonging to place in North America and Oceania, as Indigenous claims and conditions of aboriginal belonging are articulated through vernacular language and practices, and as they are further expressed through relations of kinship and relations of reciprocity between Indigenous people with land/water/sky scapes as well as with other-than-human personages.

AMIN 3312 Indigenous Environmentalism:

This is an upper level course that explores Indigenous perspectives on the environment through what's referred to as Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge. The course, aka "the canoe course" uses Indigenous watercraft from North America and Oceania, as well as traditional ecological knowledge about water, as well as the relations of kinship and reciprocity among water, land, sky, and personhood (human and other-than-human) to examine alternative ways to define what it means to be human and alternative ways of understanding "nature." Key in this course is the concept of Indigenous Relationalities or the fundamental relations of kinship and reciprocity that are taught to exist among humans and other-than-humans, and between them and land/water/and sky-scapes as personages.

Both courses address our department's Student Learning Outcomes that include Learning Indigenous Knowledge systems and learning how to be a Good Relative or the embodiment of practicing Indigenous Relationalities of kinship and reciprocity with the world around us.

Why do you teach this course? What do you hope students are getting from the course?

AMIN 1001 is a gateway course that fulfills General Education requirements as well as the requirements for the three bachelors degree programs in our department (American Indian Studies, Dakota, and Ojibwe). AMIN 3312 is an upper level topic. I teach these courses because they address our department's Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs), which I love, and want the students to take away from these and all of our classes.

The SLOs are:

Sovereignty

- Understand how sovereignty is a spiritual, moral, and dynamic cultural force that empowers Indigenous individuals and their nations to act socially and politically as self-determining agents in the world.

Diversity of Native and Indigenous Knowledge

- Engage the diversity of philosophies and cultures of Native people in North America and/or of Indigenous people across the world.

- Understand AIS as an interdisciplinary field of knowledge that affirms, reflects on, and synthesizes ways of knowing that exist among Native and Indigenous peoples.

Resurgence and Revitalization

- Recognize the continuity and revitalization of Native/Indigenous thought, language, and political and social identities over time and into the present.
- Identify how Indigenous values and ethics inform the types of justice Native and Indigenous peoples seek for their communities.

Being a Good Relative

- Acquire skills to help them think about both Native/Indigenous nations and society at large.
- Accept responsibility to communicate what they have learned verbally, in writing, and/or through other forms of media.

From your position as a teacher and scholar, what kinds of institutional change do you hope to see moving forward based on the kinds of teaching you are doing now?

I refuse to compartmentalize my teaching and research and service, opting instead for engaged learning/teaching and research with Indigenous communities. The institutional changes that I hope to see are cultural shifts in the University's relationships with American Indian and Indigenous people whereby the University of Minnesota (UMN) community—administrators, faculty, staff, and students—make a greater commitment to centering Indigeneity in all aspects of knowledge production. This means two things. First, the UMN community will recognize and

understand that the institution and its knowledge practices are fundamentally predicated on the dispossession of Indigenous people of their lands and the subordination of Indigenous relationalities, referred to above, beneath Judeo-Christian and Enlightenment-based epistemologies and cultures that underscore and continue to inform knowledge production. Second, the University will work aggressively to replace such values with Indigenous relationalities and knowledge systems. This is important because the epistemological system on which our present political,

economic, and cultural existences are based is unsustainable. We need radically different ways of defining what it means to be human, of

understanding human-ness in relations of kinship and reciprocity, and of understanding and respecting the living world around us.

Michael Dockry, Assistant Professor of Forest Resources

What course(s) do you teach that integrate Indigenous ways of knowing? What is the course about?

Environmental Sciences, Policy, and Management

ESPM 3014/5014 Tribal and Indigenous Natural Resource Management:

This course is designed to develop and refine the student's understanding of tribal and Indigenous natural resource management, tribal and Indigenous perspectives, and responsibilities natural resource managers have for tribal and Indigenous communities. For part of the class, I use the [SDI Indigenous model](#).

Forest and Natural Resource Management

FNRM 5140 Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Western Natural Resource Management:

This graduate course is designed to refine the student's understanding of traditional ecological knowledge, Indigenous knowledge, and the relationship to western natural resource sciences and ecology. Students read and discuss foundational and current literature on the topic. The course has a focus on Indigenous scholarship. Students lead class discussions and prepare an individual research project (typically a research paper) related to the class topic and/or their thesis. Students also discuss and practice how to be good relatives.

Why do you teach this course? What do you hope students are getting from the course(s)?

I want to give students an understanding of tribal perspectives on the environment, forestry, and knowledge.

From your position as a teacher and scholar, what kinds of institutional change do you hope to see moving forward based on the kinds of teaching you are doing now?

I want all natural resource professionals to know how to work ethically with tribes, understand their legal, moral and ethical responsibilities for working with tribes, and how to be a good relative.

Elizabeth Sumida Huaman, Associate Professor in Organizational Leadership, Policy and Development

What course(s) do you teach that integrate Indigenous ways of knowing? What is the course about?

As an Indigenous/minoritized scholar, I aim to include Indigenous literature and scholarship, community member self-representation and speakers, and other Indigenous content throughout all of my courses. However, I have designed and taught two new courses at the UMN that incorporate Indigenous epistemologies.

Organizational Leadership, Policy and Development

OLPD 5122 Indigenous education:

This course examines the relationship between local cultures, knowledges, and education. Linked with the field of comparative and international education, this course pays particular attention to local Indigenous educational experiences and in the global context. These experiences are examined using chronological (factors of time), thematic (topical yet interconnected ideas), and critical approaches (issues requiring urgent attention), including analysis of historical trajectories of Indigenous education, the expansion of mass schooling, education and language ideologies and policies, and notions of resistance, agency, and innovation in educational design that address pressing concerns today. This course assumes Indigenous education as *part of an array* of anti-, post-, and decolonial strategies for Indigenous self-determination, and thus takes a holistic and connective approach towards understanding educational design, practice, and impacts as part of Indigenous knowledge systems. The course also assumes multiple definitions of education proposed by Indigenous and other critical scholars,

highlighting education as a) formal schooling historically designed by non-Indigenous groups, b) ancestral education/Indigenous socialization, and c) Indigenous sovereign pedagogies. The course seeks to expand our understanding of the vital links between these different educational practices, in and out-of-school and across diverse places, from U.S. American Indian and Alaska Native communities to agrarian Indigenous communities in the highland Andes to the Pacific Islands and beyond.

Organizational Leadership, Policy and Development

OLPD 5080 Qualitative Research Design:

Applied Indigenous methods:

Over the past several decades, Indigenous research methodologies have emerged as critical research worldviews that navigate, reinvent, and reimagine approaches to knowledge production through research. As research paradigms, Indigenous methodologies offer worldviews for research design rooted in Indigenous knowledge systems and self-determination concerned with efforts towards decolonization, healing, transformation, and mobilization. Using this qualitative research design course, one of our aims is to understand the tensions and choices that characterize the multiple negotiations that researchers and communities enter that transform research today. As such, this course reviews qualitative methodologies and methods while building on the work of Indigenous research methodologists who offer theoretical research frames (including

vital questions and challenges) and local examples of Indigenous research methodologies in practice.

The course is anchored by three processes:

1. We explore fundamental principles of Indigenous self-determination and their direct impact on Indigenous research design, including Indigenous knowledge systems, Indigenous holistic ecological planning, and theories of decoloniality;
2. We examine local examples of decolonizing methodologies with focus on epistemological contributions from Indigenous scholars from geographically, culturally, and linguistically diverse regions of the world, and we address their calls to examine power and ethics, including representation, participation, and accountability;
3. We relate Indigenous methodologies to research practices and methods, and specifically, aspects of qualitative research design—research questions, methodological selection, data triangulation, data analysis, and dissemination.

Indigenous research methodologies are highly contextual and participatory. While the course offers examples of practical application of Indigenous research methodologies through the development of research designs and methods by Indigenous researchers, there are no singular solutions or outcomes proposed by Indigenous methodologies. However, there are underlying political dimensions, ethical questions,

investigative processes, and approaches to dilemmas that can provide common ground for discussion across communities and disciplines. Thus, our work in this course is to build fellowship as co-researchers engaging questions and strategies together regarding the following—How do researchers and the communities we care about define and practice knowledge exploration and production and for what purposes? What is the significance of co-designing research agendas? What do terms like “participation,” “transparency,” and “collaboration” mean? How can we develop principles of research ethics and codes of researcher conduct? What is required to develop responsible research agendas in the Anthropocene?

Additionally, under the Interdisciplinary Center for the Study of Global Change (ICGC), I was invited to teach “Ways of Knowing in Development Studies and Social Change,” which I re-designed to focus entirely on Indigenous epistemologies (learning through and with attention to mind, body, and spirit) and project-based learning. Also through ICGC, I offered a seminar titled, “Comparative Indigenous Research and Learning: Methodologies, Social Movements, and Interconnections.” I am also the primary author/course designer for a new field-based series of courses in the College of Education and Human Development focusing on “Comparative Indigenous education research and design,” which will be launched in the next academic year (2023–24). It will include field-based courses with partner community sites in New Mexico, Peru, Japan, Canada, and Alaska.

Why do you teach this course? What do you hope students are getting from the course?

I teach courses that center Indigenous knowledges, knowledge systems, educational development, and land/environment because I understand and have experienced directly erasure and dehumanization of Indigenous peoples from an

individual and collective community standpoint. The firm and unwavering presence of Indigenous knowledges within Westernized institutional/university systems is a critical political and epistemic project for Indigenous scholars and our allies.

That Indigenous theories and pedagogical practices have something to offer is not an assertion that I beg students or colleagues to understand, but rather position as among the most obvious

humanizing possibilities for student learning and social change, especially in a time of accelerated global shift.

From your position as a teacher and scholar, what kinds of institutional change do you hope to see moving forward based on the kinds of teaching you are doing now?

1. Solidarities among multiple knowledge streams based on generous epistemological and pedagogical exchange openly discussed and supported by many kinds of educators at the University of Minnesota;
 2. Strong, critical, and authentic partnerships with Indigenous nations that do not talk down, romanticize, tokenize, or burden Indigenous community members;
 3. Explicit institutional soul-searching regarding the commodification of knowledges, including Indigenous knowledges and appropriation of Indigenous materials, lands, and stories.
- I want for students to love themselves and to love their work, and to know how to do rigorous work that is of service to the people and places they hold dear.

Thomas Reynolds, Associate Professor in Writing Studies

What course(s) do you teach that integrate Indigenous ways of knowing? What is the course about?

Writing Studies 3315 Writing on Land and Environment: Although originally designed to be a course about environmental policy writing, I have changed the course so that it considers underlying understandings about land that are fostered through the stories we tell. I am interested in the ways that writing has shaped and is shaped by our relationships to land. This course is about how different writers have conceived such relationships through the genre of “Nature Writing,” a loosely organized set of texts that crosses disciplinary boundaries. I hope that students get a sense for how we write and talk about land, and

how language used by settler colonists has often furthered an instrumental understanding of land as always available for use of various sorts. A counter-narrative also runs through the course in which Indigenous notions of reciprocity, kinship with the land and its non-human beings, and a first principle of respect and gratitude in relation to land play a central part. We read and write about Robin Wall Kimmerer’s *Braiding Sweetgrass* and other Indigenous texts and authors to get different perspectives and gain knowledge of the diversity of views among these authors.

Why do you teach this course? What do you hope students are getting from the course?

This course is part of the Writing Studies elective curriculum, and it enrolls students from across the University. I work with students to help

surface ideas about land that have become submerged and normalized in Euro-American culture. I hope that by making explicit these

ideas and others based in Indigenous belief and knowledge that students will bring a rich set of understandings to their work in their majors and to fields and civic conversations beyond college.

Students begin, and in some cases continue, this work through class discussions, their writing in the course, and a collaborative video project.

From your position as a teacher and scholar, what kinds of institutional change do you hope to see moving forward based on the kinds of teaching you are doing now?

I hope that the University community continues to learn about and acknowledge its own involvement in furthering ideas and acquiring land while failing to acknowledge and value Indigenous

life and well-being. I support moves such as the recent efforts to return the Cloquet Forestry Center land to the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa.



The Mississippi River, in flood, as seen from the University of Minnesota Twin Cities campus, just downstream from the classroom. Image courtesy of Thomas Reynolds.

Rebecca Webster, Assistant Professor in American Indian Studies

What course(s) do you teach that integrate Indigenous ways of knowing? What is the course about?

American Indian Studies / Tribal Administrative Governance / Master of Tribal Administrative Governance

AMIN/TAG 3810 and MTAG 5210

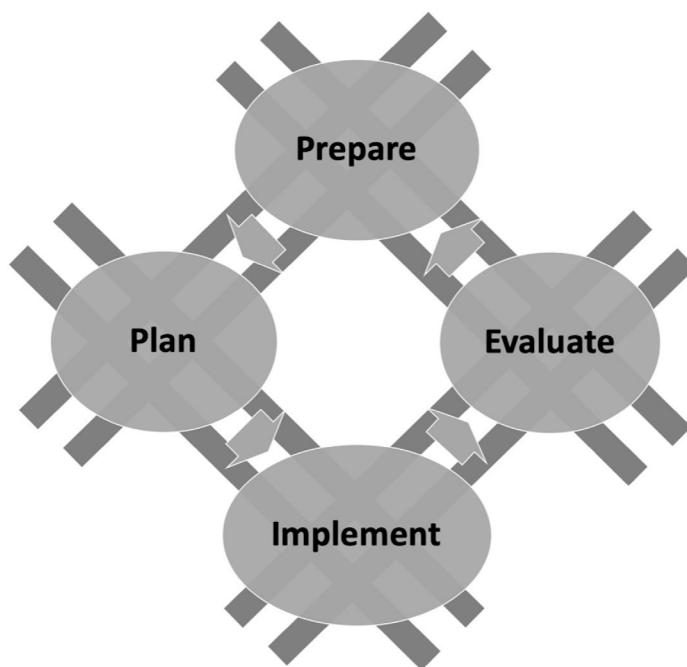
Strategic Management:

This graduate and undergraduate course looks at getting the tribal community on the same page to move forward in the direction the community wants to head in. We use historical examples of how communities achieved this including the Haudenosaunee Great Law of Peace.

American Indian Studies / Tribal Administrative Governance / Master of Tribal Administrative Governance

AMIN 3830 and MTAG 5220 Tribal Operations:

This graduate and undergraduate course looks at how tribal governments function to respond to needs of tribal citizens and deliver governmental services. We look at cultural matching, finding ways to incorporate traditional governing concepts into modern structures.



A common Haudenosaunee silver brooch, generally referred to as a council square or council fire, inspired our illustration of the cycle of strategic planning (see figure 2). Historically, this brooch represented a meeting. The outside logs represent the chiefs and clan mothers, and the inside logs represent the firekeepers. The clan mothers and the chiefs received input from the community before making decisions. As we will see, input from the community is key in successful strategic planning. Image courtesy of Rebecca Webster.

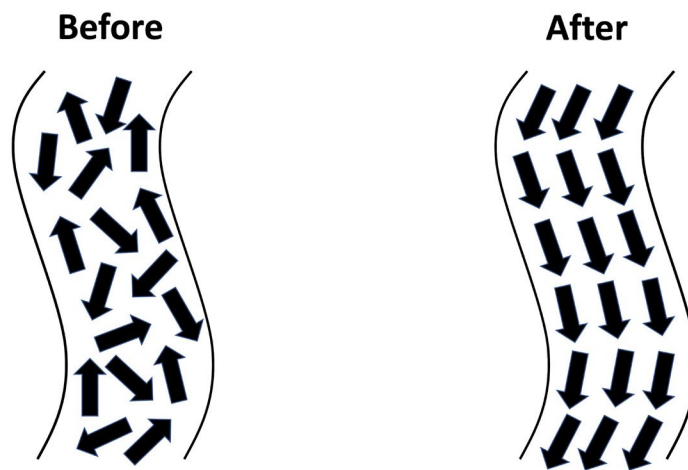
AMIN/TAG 4250 Tribal diplomacy:

In this undergraduate course, students consider historic and contemporary government-to-government relationships from a tribal perspective.

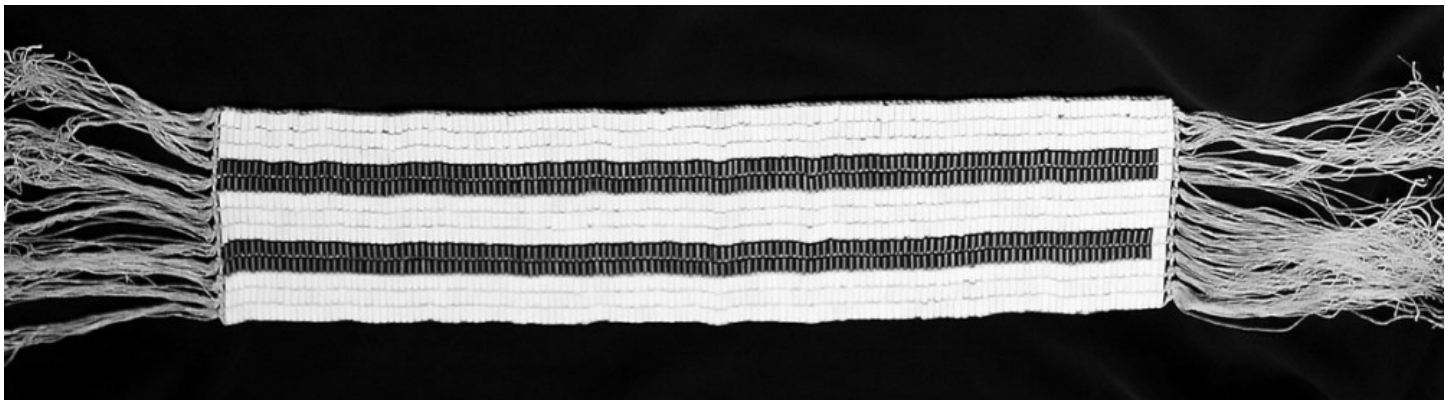
Why do you teach this course? What do you hope students are getting from the course(s)?

I hope students are able to rethink how they approach tribal governance. Tribes are not like state or local governments. They are also not like standard businesses. Tribes have rich cultures

and history that predate all of these conversations. Sometimes we need to look back in order to find ways to move forward.



Before strategic planning, everyone is off doing their own thing, and everyone is headed in the direction they think they should be headed in. Strategic planning is a way to get input from a lot of people and build consensus about what direction the entire community should be heading in. After strategic planning, everyone is going in the same general direction down the river together. Image courtesy of Rebecca Webster.



The Two Row Wampum is one of the oldest treaty relationships between the Onkwehonweh original people of Turtle Island North America and European immigrants. The treaty was made in 1613.

From your position as a teacher and scholar, what kinds of institutional change do you hope to see moving forward based on the kinds of teaching you are doing now?

Mostly, I hope to see the recognition that education and history are not “one-size-fits-all” concepts. Not only do we all have different ways of learning, we have different ways of knowing that are equally valid in the classroom and in our careers. Indigenous students often use a different lens when they approach these topics. Also, Indigenous students are often taught to

see through a lens that conforms to mainstream society that doesn’t acknowledge their unique perspective as an Indigenous person. With respect to non-Indigenous students, I think it is valuable to expose them to these alternative ways of viewing the world so they can head into their careers with a more open mind and an ability to view situations from more than one perspective.

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