

GFC Aboriginal Education Committee (AEC)
Annual Report 2016-2017

Meetings

One meeting of the AEC (October 13, 2016) was held between September 2016-August 2017.

At the October 13, 2016 meeting, the Chair, Dr. Martha Many Grey Horses, informed the committee that a review process that had begun in the Fall, 2015 would continue through the coming year. The review team (comprised of Dr. Martha Many Grey Horses, Dr. Jane O'Dea, Dr. Michelle Hogue, and Ira Provost) would meet through the Fall and Spring semesters and would present a plan in the Spring, 2017 outlining proposed changes to the committee and its working groups. At the October 13, 2016 meeting, Dr. Martha Many Grey Horses also communicated her intention to suspend the activity of the AEC and its working groups until the review was completed. Dr. Martha Many Grey Horses left her position as Director of the Iikaiskini Gathering Place on November 30, 2016 and no final report of the review was provided. Dr. Martha Many Grey Horses' departure left a vacancy in the position of Director of the Iikaiskini Gathering Place from December, 2016-August, 2017. A new Director, Roy Pogorzelski, was hired to commence on August 15, 2017. From May 2016-July 2017 the position of Associate Vice-President (Students) was also vacant. Kathleen Massey began her tenure as AVP (Students) on August 1, 2017. With both the AVP (Students) and the Director, Iikaiskini Gathering Place positions vacant the ongoing work of the AEC was compromised.

In August, 2017, Dr. Mark Slomp discussed the future of the AEC with Kathleen Massey and Roy Pogorzelski, including about reconvening the committee and continuing the committee's important work. The committee will be reconvened in Fall, 2017 with Kathleen Massey as Chair. The membership will be renewed and vacancies will be filled. The AEC will be more active in 2017-18.

One of the AEC Working Groups, the Truth and Reconciliation Action Committee (TRAC), was able to maintain progress during the past year. Following the departure of Dr. Martha Many Grey Horses, Dr. Muriel Mellow, Acting Chair of NAS and TRAC member, offered to provide interim leadership of TRAC to ensure that events unfolded during the remaining part of the year. This group carried out a number of activities during the 2016-17 academic year. Overall, attendance at these events demonstrated a continued concern in the University community with matters related to the process of reconciliation. On the positive side, 1) a small budget was approved by the President's Office to support these activities and 2) activities attracted individuals who previously had not had much connection with Indigenous concerns. Broadening the circle of those who are involved in such activities can have important ripple effects in the long run. The committee formally met twice, once in September and once in early January. Initially, TRAC had discussed planning four events for 2016-17, including the items that are identified under #1, 3 and 4 below. A fourth event for the broader Lethbridge community, looking at the UN Declaration of Rights for Indigenous People, was not realized.

The following activities were either carried out under the auspices of the Truth and Reconciliation Action Committee (with estimated attendance), or supported by money from the group's budget:

1) Tobacco Offering Circle. September 21. Iikaisskini Gathering Place. A gathering was held for the University Community, at which Elder K. Chiefmoon asked for a blessing for all activities carried out by the University related to this Truth and Reconciliation in the coming year. Attendance: 30.

2) Weekly discussion group related to UBC's on-line MOOC, "Reconciliation through Education". January 24 to March 7, 2017. Native American Studies (NAS) Department, 4th floor, U Hall. In early January, it became evident, via the Women's Scholar listserv, that a larger number of people were interesting in following this on-line course. In response to this, Dr. Muriel Mellow set up a group for local participants to discuss the topics raised in the on-line offering and their implications for the U of L. This discussion group also invited input from additional resource people, including Elders Francis First Charger and Carolla Calf Robe, Dr. Leroy Little Bear, and alumni, Mike Bruised Head. There were several notable outcomes from this series of meetings, including: participants with no previous connection to the local Blackfoot community met significant community leaders; hosting the event in the NAS space meant that faculty members who had never visited that space became familiar with the department; a recommendation that an orientation on local Indigenous communities and concerns be offered for new faculty and staff was forwarded to HR, with a commitment to realize this in 2017-18. Attendance: 9-12 people per week.

3) Presentation: "Decolonizing Teaching Practice: Lesson Learned from NAS 1000." February 2, 2017. AH100.

A panel discussion presented by members of the NAS department (Dr. H. Beaulieu, Dr. L. Many Guns, and Dr. M. Hanrahan). Panelists addressed challenges that arise in teaching about Indigenous issues and concerns in large classes, such as NAS 1000, which contain a mixture of FNMI, settler, and international students. Such topics may trigger emotional pain or resistance and anger in students; faculty members presented their strategies for addressing these challenges. Attendance: 40 participants, including some from outside of the University.

4) Presentation: "Reconciliation and Research." March 22, 2017. Iikaisskini Gathering Place.

This event was organized by ORIS at the request of TRAC. A number of local researchers presented projects related to Indigenous concerns and the issues of reconciliation. This included Dr. J. Newberry, Dr. E. Spring, and K Weaver from ICYS, Dr. C. Williams from Women and Gender Studies, and Dr. C. Hodes, from Women and Gender Studies. A good discussion followed the presentations among those attending. Attendance: 50 people, including some students.

5) Discussion of the inappropriate use of racial stereotypes in graduation events linked to local high schools. May- June 2017. A presentation to local high school students to help them understand and respect cultural practices among the Blackfoot and other Indigenous groups

was planned by Dr. Linda Many Guns, and local FN leaders in conjunction with local high schools. TRAC did not plan this event but through its budget it was able to provide for appropriate acknowledgement of an Elder's participation in this presentation.

In addition to these activities, it is worth noting that other units across the University also have actively sought/are seeking to address issues of reconciliation and decolonization. A few activities which come to mind are: a presentation in early 2017 on "Two-Eyed Seeing", by Dr. Cheryl Bartlett as part of the Women's Scholar's Speakers Series; the development of a Strategic Plan by Management which includes Blackfoot concepts; plans for a new offering of the Niisitapi Teacher Education Program by the Faculty of Education in 2018; work that is underway for an Indigenization Strategy in the Faculty of Arts and Science; and Liberal Education's initiative to integrate a common book (*The Education of Augie Merasty*) on the residential school experience across a number of courses in Fall 2017. This is not meant to be an exhaustive list; rather it is only intended to be suggestive of the range of efforts that are unfolding in the University of Lethbridge community.

Looking forward, there is a need to renew and broaden the membership of TRAC to ensure its effectiveness in supporting efforts towards regarding reconciliation. The selection of Roy Pogorzelski (as the new Director of the Ikaisskini Gathering Place) and the selection of Kathleen Massey (as the new AVP Students) will undoubtedly help realize the potential of both the TRAC and the AEC.

Submitted on September 4, 2017

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