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PUBlic Professor Series to examine biases of web creators and strategies to advance cultural renewal

The web is an integral part of our digital lives and like all media, how websites are designed and developed reflects cultural values. This influences what we see and what we don't see, what we can do there and what we can't.

On Thursday, Jan. 25, 7 p.m. at the Sandman Signature Lodge, Melissa Shouting (BHSc '19) and Christine Clark (BFA – New Media '10, MFA '14) will explore how the web is being reshaped in Indigenous worldviews for cultural revitalization, renewal and relationship building in their PUBlic Professor Series talk — Weaving World Views: The Web as a space for cultural vitality.

Shouting and Clark have been working together the last five years exploring the intersection of technology and cultural renewal.

"All online spaces reflect the culture from which they are created. Values are embedded in content presentation and what options are available to us," says Clark, an associate professor of Web Design and Development in the Department of New Media. "We might think that some social platforms like Facebook or Instagram are culturally agnostic because whoever uses the platform can choose what they post. But in fact, there are myriad little design decisions that these companies have made that encourage patterns of use. We end up becoming complacent with fitting ourselves into Instagram size boxes."

Shouting, a registered member of the Kainai (Blood) Nation who holds a faculty position in the Faculty of Health Sciences, says their talk connects web design with health outcomes for Indigenous communities.

"Given how our digital identities are interwoven with our sense of self, it is important to establish a nurturing environment online and offline," she says. "It begs the question, what do online spaces feel like when they are designed from different cultural perspectives? What can they feel like when they are designed to reflect Blackfoot cultural values?"

Clark's research and creative practice are rooted in design collaborations that promote decolonization and environmental sustainability at local levels. She and Shouting, with many others, are currently working on the Mootookakio'ssin [MOO-DOO-KAK-IO-SIN] research project, an international collaboration exploring how to provide access to Blackfoot items held in museums in Europe using digital technologies, like photogrammetry, RTI and web-based interfaces.

"In our talk we'll look at examples of how web technologies reflect the biases of those that make them, and ways that Indigenous people are reshaping the web in their own worldview."

This is the fourth of the six-part PUBlic Professor Series of talks. Initiated in 2014, the monthly lecture series is designed to spark thought-provoking discussions and bring a diverse group of experts and researchers from the ULethbridge campus right into the community.

Check out the PUBlic Professor Series web page for the 2023/24 talk schedule, to register for priority seating or to join the series mailing list. View this advance video that discusses the upcoming presentation.

-- 30 --

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Our University's Blackfoot name is Iniskim, meaning Sacred Buffalo Stone. The University is located in traditional Blackfoot Confederacy territory. We honour the Blackfoot people and their traditional ways of knowing in caring for this land, as well as all Indigenous Peoples who have helped shape and continue to strengthen our University community.