

Indigenous-engaged Education, Reconciliation and Relationality: Rallying Together for Respectful LIS Leadership

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ABSTRACT

The 2020 Association for Library and Information Science Education's statistics reveal Indigenous peoples represent less than one-half percent of the total number of students across the reporting programs. Meanwhile at the School of Library and Information Studies at the University of Alberta in Canada, the incoming 2020 cohort of Master of Library and Information Studies reflects close to seven percent self-identified Indigenous students. There is a story to tell. With this telling, showing up, active listening, and reflection are welcomed alongside questioning and commenting as forms of engagement with the panel's insights into a Canadian case of Indigenous-engaged education. The session serves the aim of socially engaged forms of education and educational experience aimed at addressing deeply rooted structures in society that transcend the specific case. While it operates within the context of decolonization, indigenization and anti-racism in Canadian academia, this case has potential for informing broader advancements in recruitment, teaching and learning, experiential learning, community-engaged research and scholarship, academic service or citizenship, and educational approaches that decolonize curriculum and pedagogy.

The tragic 2015 findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, pushed reconciliation between Indigenous peoples (First Nations, Métis, and Inuit) and settler Canadians to occupy an important place in public conversation and has become an increasingly pressing public issue in Canada. Within that conversation, it is widely recognized that education is a central element of reconciliation. Located on Treaty 6 territory, the territory of the Papaschase, and the homeland of the Métis Nation, in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, the School is engaged in reconciliation with Indigenous communities including Indigenous students, staff and instructors.

In Canadian context, reconciliation is about creating and sustaining a mutually respectful relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, knowing the past, acknowledging harm inflicted, reparation for the causes, and active changes in behaviour.

The School's commitment to reconciliation is inherent in recognizing that Edmonton, Alberta is home to the second largest urban Indigenous population in Canada and that over half of Canada's Indigenous population live in the four western provinces (British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba). The School recognizes its mandate as the only Master of Library and Information Studies program based in the Prairie provinces, and the only one purely online in Canada (that draws students from every province and territory including from remote regions), provides the responsibility to be reflective and supportive of reconciliation efforts.

The context for reconciliation at SLIS is introduced by Toni Samek, Professor and SLIS Chair 2015-2020, who, as a guest on Treaty 6, sets the stage for fellow panelists, including select leaders with whom she engages in reverse mentorship. Toni's fellow panelists take us through a flow of topics from Indigenous student leadership, to Indigenous instructor leadership, to allied academic librarian leadership.

Librarian Lorisia MacLeod is a 2018 alumna and a proud member of the James Smith Cree Nation. During her master's, she served as vice-president and president of the Library and Information Studies Students' Association at a time when discussions around new initiatives (e.g., land acknowledgement) for the association were just beginning to gain traction. Student leadership positions are key to the development of the field given they are often formative for self-advocacy, prioritizing goals, and identifying personal vs. organizational aims. Those interested in student governance often go on to run professional associations, committees, and other bodies further impacting the field. Drawing on her own leadership adventures and navigating leadership roles with her Indigenous identity, Lorisia discusses her experience with innovations and particularly setbacks as important elements in creating resiliency in programs and people. Kaia MacLeod, also a proud member of the James Smith Cree Nation follows.

Kaia serves as the 2020 - 2021 Library and Information Studies Students' Association president, a role she stepped into the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. Kaia shares how she pays attention to both good and bad leadership practices as she seeks out models to experiment with in the development of her own unique leadership style. She speaks to her critical experiences in learning to step back and forward, as well as getting direct and directly hands-on in her leadership journey. This journey reflects how the pandemic is impacting inequities in our communities in both new and old ways. The panel then turns to pedagogical spaces.

Responding to need for action around truth and reconciliation, the School's course entitled Indigenous Library and Information Studies in a Canadian Context, first offered in fall 2018, is a leading three-credit, graduate course in Canada about Indigenous librarianship taught from an Indigenous perspective by Indigenous instructors. Indigenous academic teaching staff, and alumni, Kayla Lar-Son (Indigenous Programs and Services Librarian, UBC) and Tanya Ball

(PhD student, Faculty of Native Studies) share their experiences developing and teaching this unprecedented course. Importantly, they offer insights into Indigenous pedagogies aimed to foster more broadly the development of the global field of Indigenous library and information studies. The panel then turns to the topic of tangible support for Indigenous inclusion grounded in intercultural ethics.

Tanya, Kayla, Lorisia and Kaia came to the School with the concrete support of the University of Alberta Library's Indigenous Internship. Librarian Anne Carr-Wiggin speaks to the Internship, as well as a sister effort, the Academic Librarian Residency program. Both opportunities are designed to create a continuum for First Nations, Métis and Inuit students from the master's program to a career in the field. Anne addresses how these efforts help to bring Indigenous voices to the library and increase relationality, as well as critical lessons learned from the first individuals involved. She also apprises us of current repatriation efforts. Panelists then engage with attendees.

Facilitated by Toni, the panel listens to and engages with attendees, enhancing accountability to conditional reflections and corrections, and the story circle. Surfacing constructive critiques and/or expressed interests in collaboration will be taken to the School for exploration in the interests of acknowledging the harms and mistakes of the past, and dedicating ourselves to move forward in partnership with Indigenous communities in a spirit of reconciliation and collaboration.

ALISE RESEARCH TAXONOMY TOPICS

education for information professionals; sociocultural perspectives; specific populations; social justice; academic libraries

AUTHOR KEYWORDS

Indigenous; library and information studies; Canada; reconciliation; relationality