



DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE **Tansi!**

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DIRECTOR, OFFICE FOR
ABORIGINAL PEOPLES

Welcome to this second annual edition of the *Simon Fraser University News* Aboriginal Peoples supplement. It's designed to give readers an overview of some of the many Aboriginal initiatives underway at SFU this year as we work with our on- and off-campus allies to implement the university's Aboriginal Strategic Plan.

First of all, we changed the names of the strategic plan and the steering committee overseeing its implementation, to make them more inclusive. The former First Nations University-Wide Strategic Plan is now called the Aboriginal Strategic Plan and the steering committee is now the Aboriginal Community Initiatives Steering Committee. These new names are more representative of all Canadian Aboriginal people, including First Nations (status and non-status), Métis and Inuit.

We are pleased to welcome SFU President Andrew Petter and Philip Steenkamp, VP External Relations, to the committee this year. They join members Jon Driver, VP Academic and Provost, and Tim Rahilly, Associate VP, Students, as well as faculty, staff and student representatives from around the university. We've also invited leaders of external Aboriginal institutions to contribute. This mixture of on- and off-campus voices will give SFU the direction it needs to succeed in its work for, and with, the Aboriginal community.

Some notable Aboriginal initiatives this year include a new Aboriginal Elders Program, a bi-weekly Coast Salish drumming and singing group, a new Indigenous Research Institute and the ongoing success of SFU's Aboriginal Undergraduate Admission Policy. There have also been numerous student-retention initiatives at both the undergraduate and graduate levels.

Other highlights include ongoing support for our Aboriginal Pre-University Bridging programs, strengthening and developing First Nations Studies—now a program major—First Nations language programming, and the signing of an international Indigenous exchange agreement with Australia's Griffith University.

In addition, we pursued numerous SAGE (Supporting Aboriginal Graduate Enhancement) projects, worked closely with the local Aboriginal community, signing several important MOU's, and increased our focus on Indigenous educational programs involving international students.

Please enjoy this second Aboriginal Peoples Supplement and discover a few of the many Aboriginal success stories that emerged at our university this year. Also check out the Office for Aboriginal Peoples website at www.sfu.ca/aboriginalpeoples for a comprehensive listing of Aboriginal services, programs and contacts at Simon Fraser University.

Aboriginal faculty opportunities

SFU's Vice-president, Academic (VPA), Jon Driver, has created two initiatives to increase opportunities for Aboriginal people to become faculty members. The first provides secure funding for highly qualified aboriginal graduate students in research-intensive programs. The second increases opportunities for Aboriginal candidates to be interviewed for faculty positions.

Starting in fall 2012, the VPA will fund one entrance scholarship for an Aboriginal masters student and one scholarship for a PhD student. Because masters scholarships run for two years and PhD scholarships run for three, when the program reaches steady state the VPA's office will be supporting two masters students and three PhD students annually, at a cost of just over \$80,000.

See *Aboriginal Faculty*, page 2.

Site sparks student success



Gary George, SFU's Indigenous student life coordinator, is one of numerous Aboriginal staff and faculty members, students and community elders who share their educational experiences in film vignettes and transcripts at FindingYourGifts.ca.

Only nine per cent of Aboriginal high school graduates are university-eligible, compared to 32 per cent of non-Aboriginal grads, according to a recent government report.

That's a troubling statistic but one a new website developed at SFU aims to help change for the better.

FindingYourGifts.ca brings together Aboriginal elders, university students and grads who share their advice and experiences in post secondary education to give prospective Aboriginal students the best possible chance for success.

The site offers practical, real-life advice on how to navigate everything from band funding to time management, while nurturing mind, body and spirit.

In one film clip, SFU Indigenous student life coordinator Gary George recalls the culture shock he felt coming to university from a small northern B.C. community. "My parents... shipped us jarred salmon, they shipped us jarred moose meat and it was such a blessing to get that in," he says. "They'd say 'Here's something from us to help you out down there'."

In another, SFU First Nations Student Association board member Angela Semple advises students considering university or college to just send in the application. "For me, that letter was just validation that I could do it. So send the letter and see where it takes you. You have nothing to lose, really."

Joyce Schneider, now a UBC PhD Student, recalls staying away from school for a week after being "crushed" by racist comments in an undergraduate class, but adds, "What got me back was remembering why I was going. It was for something bigger than myself. It was for my children...."

SFU's Community Education Program and 7th Floor Media produced **FindingYourGifts.ca** with support from the Inukshuk Fund. "This comprehensive, well researched and positive website provides timely and excellent advice and services in an easy-to-navigate format," said Aboriginal Peoples office director, William Lindsay.

"Aboriginal students will know they are not alone, that they have support, and that the tools for support exist and are within."

New Indigenous Research Institute seeks members

The Office for Aboriginal Peoples is now accepting membership applications for SFU's new Indigenous Research Institute, which is designed to bring together both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal SFU faculty and graduate students doing research in Indigenous fields.

"Our goal is to attract researchers with a common interest in Aboriginal studies to explore common themes through discussion and special events," says the institute's acting director, archaeology professor Eldon Yellowhorn.

"We're also looking for opportunities to mentor and collaborate with grad students, provide a forum for guest speakers and symposiums, and engage more closely with on and off-campus Aboriginal communities."

Although its primary focus will be on research done with Canadian Aboriginal communities—First Nations (status, non-status, treaty and non-treaty), Métis and Inuit—Yellowhorn says the institute also welcomes those working on international Indigenous research.

SFU's Senate in September approved the



Archaeology professor Eldon Yellowhorn, the SFU Indigenous Research Institute's acting director and First Nations Studies director, says the institute's goal is to attract both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal researchers in Indigenous fields.

IRI's constitution, which defines its intended scope of activities and required governance and reporting structures in accordance with the university policies regarding research centres and institutes.

The institute, which reports to the VP-Research, will be governed by a steering committee of at least six members that will determine its overall direction and oversee management of its operations.

The steering committee will examine applications and once membership has been confirmed it will schedule the institute's first meeting in 2012. To apply or obtain more information visit www.sfu.ca/aboriginalpeoples/research.html.

Bridging program opens new world



Just a few years ago, Jessica Humchitt (above) of the Heiltsuk Nation in Bella Bella on BC's central coast was doing administrative work she enjoyed at a local health clinic.

But she dreamed of going to university so she could do more—for her career, her family and her community.

Today, after completing the SFU Continuing Studies eight-month Aboriginal Pre-health Program in 2009, the 32-year-old mother of three is living that dream.

"It just fit," says Humchitt of the university bridging program, which is designed to give Aboriginal students the encouragement, support and pre-requisites they need for university along with guaranteed conditional acceptance to an SFU undergraduate program once they're finished.

Humchitt is now completing her second year of a bachelor's degree in health science at SFU, while doing a research internship she loves in a neuroscience lab (see below), and planning a career in cancer research or maternal health-care policy development.

She moved to Vancouver with her children and went through the pre-health program with 14 other Aboriginal students. They took the science courses they needed with support from an Aboriginal elder and other Aboriginal health science students and professionals.

Humchitt's professors helped her and her classmates adapt to the unfamiliar, often overwhelming world of a large public university.

The students also learned to deal with classroom debates—something they weren't used to. Their professors encouraged them to step back and not take criticism of their ideas personally, explaining that debate in university classrooms is common.

"Having an environment that's supportive and encouraging is really key," she says. "I don't think I would have ever been able to do this year if I didn't do [the pre-health] program. It's just such a different world."

Ultimately, Humchitt hopes to make a difference in her home community of Bella Bella one day. "I want to help people somehow," she says. "That was my main goal for going to school." More on SFU Aboriginal bridge programs: at.sfu.ca/GYcjhX.

MERCK CONTINUES LAB SUPPORT

Jessica Humchitt (above) was one of the first students to benefit from SFU's Training Aboriginal Youth in Biomedical Labs (TABYL) program. First sponsored last year by pharmaceutical company Merck Canada, TABYL aims to provide entry-level jobs and mentoring for Aboriginal students interested in health careers. Humchitt's internship in SFU biologist Gordon Rintoul's neuroscience lab gave her valuable experience and mentorship, and associate professor Rintoul says his research team was enriched by her passion for Aboriginal culture and commitment to her community. Based on her successes, Merck has renewed and increased its sponsorship from \$15,000 to \$25,000 to continue supporting Humchitt and expand the program. SFU biology department chair, Felix Breden, who facilitated Merck's involvement, is now creating additional Aboriginal research internship opportunities.



Aboriginal elders (l to r) Evelyn Locker (Blackfoot Nation) at the Surrey campus and Jim White (Heiltsuk Nation) and Margaret George (Tsleil-Waututh Nation) at the Burnaby campus are regularly available for group and individual sessions with students and faculty and staff members.

Elders enrich campus with cultural wisdom

First Nations elders are bringing their expertise, life experience and cultural wisdom to SFU as part of a new program launched in October by the Office for Aboriginal Peoples (OAP).

The Elders program, recommended by SFU's Aboriginal Strategic Plan, draws on the centuries-old belief in the power of elders as leaders in Aboriginal communities to help today's students, faculty and staff deal with modern life. They will also educate the university about aspects of Aboriginal life and culture.

"There was nothing officially called an elders program in traditional communities, but elders were involved in all aspects of the workings of society," says OAP director William Lindsay.

An ad hoc committee of Aboriginal employees,

a First Nations elder and a Squamish Nation member developed the qualifications, expected duties and a list of recommended candidates for the program.

The program's charter Aboriginal elders, Margaret George (Tsleil-Waututh Nation) and Jim White (Heiltsuk Nation) at the Burnaby campus, and Evelyn Locker (Blackfoot Nation) at the Surrey campus are regularly available for group and individual sessions with students, faculty members and staff.

"They'll be involved in many aspects of campus life," says Lindsay, "and their presence will benefit the community as a whole, not just people of Aboriginal descent.

The elders' duties include mentoring, cultural

support, special events support, service as an advisory group, supervision of culturally oriented courses and workshops, and lunch and one-on-one meetings with students, staff and faculty.

They will also be involved in activities such as traditional cleansing and other ceremonies, teaching Aboriginal history and culture, providing Aboriginal language support, teaching traditional games and formalizing Aboriginal protocols.

Burnaby campus elders take turns meeting with students from 11 am to 1 pm Thursdays at the Indigenous Student Centre, followed by faculty and staff meetings from 1–2 pm. Elder Locker works out of SFU Surrey's Aboriginal pre-university bridging programs office.

More: www.sfu.ca/aboriginalpeoples/elders

Small Number counts again

Members of SFU's *Math Catcher: Mathematics Through Aboriginal Storytelling* project have created their second animated film *Small Number and the Old Canoe* to increase Aboriginal students' interest in math.

Like the first episode, *Small Number Counts to 100*, the new film combines storytelling, drama and cultural references to spin suspenseful tales about Small Number, a five-year old boy who is discovering math.

The first of a six-part series, the films aim to improve the current situation in which only two per cent of BC's Aboriginal students complete Grade 12 math, compared to 25 per cent of the overall population. All of the films will ultimately be translated into numerous Aboriginal languages.

Student Dexter Anakson of the Cree Nation—Piapot First Nation Band provided English voiceover for the first episode, set on the North American plains.

SFU professor Eldon Yellowhorn of the Pikani First Nation then translated and narrated the

story in Blackfoot and Barry Cardinal of the Bigstone Cree Nation translated and narrated a Cree version.

Anakson also voiced the English version of *Small Number and the Old Canoe*, set on the BC coast, which has been translated and narrated in Squamish by T'naxwtn (Peter Jacobs) of the Squamish Nation.

A Halq'eméylem language version has also been translated by Siyamiyatelyot, Kwelaxtelot and Kwozel from the Seabird Island Nation and narrated by Siyamiyatelyot.

"To underline the universality of mathematics, the plots of our stories are not attached to a particular time and space," explains SFU mathematics instructor and *Math Catcher* coordinator, Veselin Jungic, who co-wrote and produced the videos.

"In the first story he lives in a tipi settlement somewhere in the plains; in the second he lives by a body of water. Mathematics is present throughout each story with the hope that the experience will inspire our kindergarten-aged



viewers to see math around them in their everyday lives."

The *Math Catcher* program is sponsored by a Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council PromoScience grant. Watch the videos in English: mathcatcher.irmacs.sfu.ca

Cross-hemisphere learning

SFU inked an agreement with Australia's Griffith University in September to foster regular exchanges of Indigenous students, staff, faculty and elders between the institutions and their host countries. The SFU-Griffith University Indigenous Exchange Agreement aims to strengthen ties between Aboriginal peoples and facilitate a free flow of knowledge, ideas and expertise between hemispheres.

The details have yet to be determined. But Jon Driver, SFU's vice-president, academic, says the agreement "will encourage students to become better informed about opportunities and challenges faced by Indigenous communities in another country, and will add a new dimension to the developing relationship between BC and Queensland."

The signing ceremony at SFU's Vancouver campus kicked off a 10-day tour of southern BC by 10 Aborigine post-secondary students from Queensland, Griffith University's home state.

During the informal field school, student ambassadors toured post-secondary institutions and First Nations sites, and participated in lectures and cultural events at SFU and other B.C. schools. "It is this sort of cross-cultural learning experience that we hope to promote with our new agreement," says William Lindsay, director of SFU's Office for Aboriginal Peoples.

ABORIGINAL FACULTY, CONTINUED

"I have stipulated that these awards must be made to top students entering programs that could lead to faculty positions," says Driver (right). "The degree programs must be thesis-based, so that students are developing research skills and experience that will improve their chances of being recruited for university jobs."

The Dean of Graduate Studies will administer the scholarships as part of the annual entrance scholarship competition.

The current costs associated with SFU graduate degree entrance scholarships are \$18,000 per year for PhD awards and \$15,000 annually for masters awards.

The VPA will also provide extra funding to faculties that include Aboriginal candidates in short-lists for interviews for faculty positions.

"A problem for people in under-represented groups is the difficulty they



have in bringing their credentials to the attention of employers," says Driver.

"I will encourage academic units to bring well-qualified Aboriginal candidates to interviews by covering the recruiting costs from my strategic initiatives budget."



Native Education College president Dan Guinan (left) and SFU VP-academic Jon Driver sign one of three SFU MOUs with Aboriginal community partners this year.

2011: THREE ABORIGINAL MOUS

SFU signed memoranda of understanding (MOUs) in 2011 with Vancouver's Native Education College (NEC), Métis Nation British Columbia (MSBC) and the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology (NVIT), facilitating closer collaboration with the three Aboriginal community partners. The NEC memorandum encompasses the joint delivery of higher education to Aboriginal communities, potentially including rural BC. The Métis BC agreement details collaboration on Métis culture and citizenship workshops, recruitment, research, and guest and expert exchanges. The agreement with NVIT, BC's principal public Aboriginal post-secondary institution with Vancouver and Merrit campuses, builds on existing agreements with plans for joint degree programs, pilot programs and research partnerships, expert exchanges, research opportunities and possible joint conferences. SFU's Office for Aboriginal Peoples is also pursuing agreements with several Lower Mainland first nations.

WORKSHOP TACKLES MATH, SCIENCE DEFICIT

For the second straight year, about 80 BC educators met at the Burnaby campus Nov. 8 to discuss ways to help more Aboriginal post-secondary students succeed in math and science. This year, math and science educators from Aboriginal communities also discussed why more Aboriginal students aren't completing Grade 12 math. "These annual workshops can't solve the increasing problem of Aboriginal people not getting a post-secondary education and not participating in math and science classes," says workshop co-founder and SFU math instructor, Veselin Jungic. "But we can help educators at different stages of the education process connect directly and discuss potential solutions." SFU's Office for Aboriginal Peoples co-hosted the gathering.

RECRUITMENT, RETENTION PROGRAMS FUNDED

SFU Student Services has received \$150,000 from the University Priority Fund to support Indigenous student recruitment and retention. Two-thirds of the money has been allotted for Aboriginal entrance scholarships, academic awards and financial-aid bursaries. The remaining \$50,000 is earmarked for Indigenous "student success" initiatives to enhance advising and transition support; facilitate peer mentoring; develop career resources; support students with learning difficulties; improve access to disabilities services; assist residence enrolment; and provide staff with Indigenous cultural competency training.

MAJOR IN FIRST NATIONS STUDIES

Not sure which Aboriginal courses to take? The First Nations Studies (FNST) program offers sequential, comprehensive courses rooted in traditional and contemporary Aboriginal logic, methodology, practice and theory. Current program options now include a major—new in fall 2011—as well as a minor, two joint majors in either archaeology or linguistics, a post baccalaureate diploma, and two certificates. First Nations Studies courses are also featured as requirements in the Cultural Resource Management Certificate through the Department of Archaeology. www.sfu.ca/fns.

Excavated remains return home



SFU archaeology instructor Rudy Reimer holds a replica of the handmade cedar bentwood boxes containing the Heiltsuk First Nation ancestral remains that were returned home and reburied in September in Namu, BC, near Bella Bella.

SFU faculty, staff and students joined Heiltsuk First Nation members in September for the formal return and reburial of ancient Aboriginal remains from an archaeological site at Namu, near Bella Bella in Heiltsuk traditional territory.

Retired SFU archaeologist and archaeology department founder, Roy Carlson, who led the team that excavated the remains from Namu in the 1960s and '70s with Heiltsuk First Nation approval, helped supervise the reburial.

The estimated 1,000- to 5,000-year-old human remains were used for numerous studies during their almost 34-year stay at SFU, including one comparing DNA from the bones to that of contemporary Bella Bella residents. The remains were transported to Bella Bella before being blessed and transferred to handmade cedar bentwood boxes for reburial in Namu.

Catherine D'Andrea, chair of SFU's archaeology department, says the reburial made her reflect on the value of archaeology.

"It is sometimes viewed as a hobby with limited practical value to the modern world. The scale of the effort put forth ... in making the bentwood boxes and all the other preparations, reminded me



Heiltsuk First Nation members lower the remains into their final resting place. SFU archaeology professor emeritus Roy Carlson originally excavated the remains in 1977—with permission from the Heiltsuk people—and participated in their reburial.

that even our distant past can have a profound impact on our daily lives," she says. "We may not think about it very often, but our ancient history, as well as our recent past, greatly affects how we view ourselves, how we form our identities, and it can be a source of national pride." Video: at.sfu.ca/BCQQWv.

First Aboriginal EMBA



Métis business leader Keith Henry applauds the new program, and credits SFU as a "strong supporter of Aboriginal education."

SFU's Beedie School of Business is launching Canada's first executive master of business administration (EMBA) degree in Aboriginal business and leadership, with classes for the first cohort beginning in September 2012.

The new Aboriginal EMBA will meet an increasing need for senior-level management education for Aboriginal managers and entrepreneurs, as well as individuals and organizations collaborating

with Aboriginal communities. It will provide executive-level education that reflects the growing role of Aboriginal business development.

"The executive MBA in Aboriginal business and leadership is a reflection of SFU's commitment to using its education and research resources to support Aboriginal peoples and communities," says SFU President Andrew Petter.

He adds it is particularly needed now, when Aboriginal peoples are striving to overcome longstanding challenges and exploit new opportunities.

Participants will study core management concepts and principles already included in the EMBA program but will also examine business and economic issues from the perspective of First Nations and other Aboriginal organizations.

The new program "will further support Aboriginal leaders and



Aboriginal EMBA Program director Mark Selman, has extensive experience working with First Nations communities on social and economic development.

entrepreneurs to continue their academic studies to remain competitive and build our competitive edge," says Métis business leader Keith Henry (left), president of the Industry Council for Aboriginal Business and CEO of Aboriginal Tourism BC.

"SFU has been a strong supporter of Aboriginal education and this program recognizes the changing demands of the Aboriginal business community."

The Beedie School is home to Canada's first executive MBA program, established in 1968 and has a long-standing history of creating customized programs such as the EMBA in Aboriginal business and leadership.

Mark Selman (above), Beedie School special advisor to the dean, will direct the new Aboriginal EMBA. Selman has an extensive business education background building customized business degree programs in the natural resource sector, as well as working in First Nations communities on social and economic development.

Classes will mainly take place at the Vancouver campus, although some may also be held in Aboriginal communities.

For more, visit beedie.sfu.ca/AboriginalEMBA.

Learn First Nations music

The Office for Aboriginal Peoples is sponsoring bi-weekly Coast Salish drumming and singing workshops while classes are in session, led by renowned Lil'wat composer, producer and singer, Russell Wallace (right) in an effort to bring more Aboriginal culture to the campus. The classes are open to everyone, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, whether experienced or not. Wallace's music has been part of numerous soundtracks (film, video, television) and theatre/dance productions. He's also active in intercultural collaborations and facilitating collective composition. More: at.sfu.ca/LGGgyC. YouTube: at.sfu.ca/dFYFzW.



ABORIGINAL STUDENTS BY THE NUMBERS



As of 2009–10, the latest year for which official numbers are available, a total of 556 international and domestic Aboriginal students were enrolled at SFU, including 467 undergraduates and 89 graduates. For fall 2011, 73 new self-identified Canadian Aboriginal students enrolled at SFU—51 undergraduates and 22 graduates. Fifteen of the new undergrads were admitted under SFU's Aboriginal Undergraduate Admission Policy, which allows applicants without the required grade-point average for individual faculties and schools to have their educational history, cultural knowledge, work experience and other factors considered. Only 75 per cent of SFU Aboriginal students self-identify, so the university's Institutional Research and Planning office augments self-identification data with figures received from the BC government's Student Transition Project (STP). The 2010–11 STP numbers will not be available until spring 2012.

FORTIS REP JOINS ABORIGINAL STEERING COMMITTEE

Bruce Falstead, Fortis BC's First Nations initiatives manager, has joined the SFU Aboriginal Community Initiative's steering committee, which oversees implementation of the university's Aboriginal Strategic Plan. Falstead has worked with SFU on projects including *Ahp-cii-uk* (going the right way), a program that builds long-term relationships between First Nations, corporations, government and other organizations to develop community economic and social projects at the grassroots level. Mark Selman, director of SFU's Beedie School of Business Learning Strategies Group, was recruited to facilitate the *Ahp-cii-uk* project in 2007 and enlist corporate support.

TUZ HAS THE BUZZ

Sign up at the Indigenous Student Centre's (ISC) site: students.sfu.ca/indigenous, to read their weekly electronic newsletter *Tuz* for the latest buzz on ISC programming, Indigenous scholarships, bursaries and fellowships, job opportunities, special events, announcements and more. *Tuz* (a Wit'suwit'en word meaning Talking Stick or Walking Cane) is emailed to Indigenous students, alumni, faculty, staff and friends of ISC within the SFU system.

OFFICE FOR ABORIGINAL PEOPLES

[www.sfu.ca/aboriginal peoples](http://www.sfu.ca/aboriginal%20peoples)

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FEATURE CONVOCATION

All in the family



Family members (l to r) Shana Schwentner, Marlene Erickson, Colleen Erickson and Sarah John received their MEd Arts Education degrees at SFU's fall 2011 convocation ceremony in October.

Having the support of family is important at university—and no one knows that better than four extraordinary Prince Georgia-area Aboriginal women from the same family who just completed SFU master's degrees.

Sisters Marlene and Colleen Erickson and Colleen's daughter Sarah John and step-daughter Shana Schwentner all received Master of Education (MEd) in Arts Education degrees together during SFU's fall 2011 convocation ceremony.

Marlene and Colleen are from the Nak'azdli Nation, Shana is from the Saik'uz Nation, and Sarah is associated with both communities, members of the Carrier Sekani Tribal Council.

Marlene was the first to pursue a master's degree, to learn more about her own culture and how to share it with her community's youth. The SFU MEd in Arts Education offered in Prince George in 2008 seemed a good fit, with its focus on the aesthetics of First Nations cultures.

Marlene's example inspired nieces Sarah and Shana to also apply and Colleen, a recently retired RCMP officer, joined a semester later but managed to catch up and

graduate with the rest of the class.

Their strong family ties helped, as they all live in different communities. "We had a lot of phone conversations throughout the program," says Sarah.

And they were all inspired by the legacy of Marlene and Colleen's late paternal grandmother, Mary John Sr., a renowned leader of the Carrier people who received an Order of Canada in 1997.

The SFU MEd in Arts Education at Prince George is one of many such programs the education faculty has offered throughout BC over the past 20 years in locations including Kelowna, Salt Spring Island, Kamloops, Prince Rupert and Haida Gwaii.

But associate professor Celeste Snowber, who heads the program, says this one is special: "There's a rootedness in this program because it has an aesthetics of place, especially up north, where the connection to the land is very real."

All four master's grads are now back in their communities, continuing their work as educators and role models.

SFU CAREER SERVICES

The power of stories

DAVID LINDSKOOG
CAREER ADVISOR, SFU CAREER SERVICES

Stories have an incredible power—those we tell to others, those others tell to us, those we tell to ourselves. They define us and give us shape and substance in an otherwise fluid and unpredictable world. Our careers, in particular, play a large role in the ongoing stories of our lives—a realization that has had a large effect on the way SFU Career Services works with students trying to map out their own career paths.

While change and chaos seem to permeate so many facets of life and careers, the First Nations oral tradition of transmitting knowledge still thrives, reminding us of the perpetual transformative potential that story telling holds.

At SFU Career Services, we recently adopted a narrative career-counselling method reminiscent of that oral tradition that focuses on students' stories, and how these affect—and often create—different career paths. In doing so, we are simply continuing a practice that has been in place for generations.

Career Services and the Indigenous Student Centre also co-hosted SFU's first Indigenous Peoples' Career Stories event last spring. Award-winning First Nations actor Justin Rain was one of five First Nations panelists sharing their career and life stories.

Rain shared his history of hardship, substance abuse and transformation as a message of hope for Indigenous youth: "Relationships, family, work, all these are affected when we're not venting through a positive medium. It's important that the youth around us start to hear this."

We usually think of storytelling as a means with which to inspire others, and rightly so. What we often fail to acknowledge is the inspiration we can gain from our own stories—the ones we tell ourselves, both as individuals and groups.

Rain rewrote his own story from struggling Indigenous youth to successful actor, artist, and speaker. It is in examining such narratives, and in many cases re-authoring them, that the true value of our stories is revealed. More: www.sfu.ca/career



First Nations actor Justin Rain was one of five Aboriginal panelists sharing their stories at SFU's first Indigenous Peoples' Career Stories event last spring.