

Profiles in Leadership: Indigenizing the Academy

William G. Lindsay (Cree-Stoney), Director of Office for Aboriginal Peoples, PhD Student, Faculty of Education (SFU)

The Key Question

What has been the experience of Indigenous leaders who have strategic administrative roles in British Columbia universities and what have they encountered – personally, professionally, and institutionally - in their efforts to Indigenize these arenas?

The Issues, The Problems, The Research

In my PhD research, I explore the role of Aboriginal leaders in strategic and senior level Aboriginal-focused university offices and their role in “Indigenizing” universities in British Columbia. How such relates to current educational theory and practice and to the improvement of university systems overall are part of this study.

An expansion of this topic will be done through consideration of the following questions: How have institutions responded to issues concerning “Indigenization” and what models, current practices, and case studies exist in this regard? Regarding “Indigenization” how are differences of impact across institutions effectively gauged? How have different institutions responded to the challenge of “Indigenizing” the academy? What best practice models exist, theoretically and realistically? What is a senior Indigenous leader’s role in all of this and how can he/she make a difference? What special challenges exist and how can these be overcome?

I will provide a conceptual foundation for the dissertation by researching what is the current state of practice in universities across British Columbia regarding Aboriginal initiatives overall, including the work of senior Aboriginal leaders. Such would include an analysis, comparison, and review of pertinent offices, websites, calendars, and public documents associated with this area. The institutions to be researched in a comparative manner include Simon Fraser University, University of British Columbia-Vancouver, University of British Columbia-Okanagan, University of Victoria, University of Northern British Columbia, Thompson Rivers University, Vancouver Island University, Kwantlen Polytechnique University, University of the Fraser Valley, Capilano University, and Emily Carr University of Art & Design.

The second part of this analysis, will provide a descriptive piece involving “differences in roles” regarding the above models. Specifically, what are the “difference in roles” and perceived difference in effectiveness between universities – large and small - when it comes to consideration of Aboriginal-oriented office budgets, reporting structure, and perceived power and influence? For example, is the perceived community perception correct that the bigger universities have senior Aboriginal offices with budget power vis-à-vis the smaller universities which have more junior level, budget-starved offices,

imbedded within university sub-units like Student Services? What exactly is happening in British Columbia universities?

The “Indigenizing the University through Indigenous Leadership: A British Columbia Perspective” project will provide a leadership template for Aboriginal leaders around the province who work in the university system. It will also help non-Aboriginal people who work with and for the Aboriginal community to better understand and assist the Indigenous people they come into contact with.