Executive Summary

A new Master’s degree in Indigenous Communities Counselling Psychology (ICCP) has been approved for the Faculty of Education at the University of Victoria. Developed in collaboration with Indigenous scholars, helpers, and educators and designed for adult learners who are working in Indigenous communities, this unique MA degree develops knowledge and skills related to the worldviews, values, and needs of these communities, while also meeting nationally established Canadian standards for professional counsellor training.

The purpose of the “Walking in Two Worlds” project is to provide relevant training and specific support to graduate students in the new ICCP program in order to help them bridge the two worlds of Indigenous helping and western counselling. From the evaluation of our previous pilot Aboriginal Communities Counselling program (2008-2011), students, instructors, and practicum field supervisors noted the challenges of bringing these two perspectives together – both for students learning to be counsellors and for their Indigenous clients who are often struggling with the competing demands of these two worlds. Specific and different strategies and resources are necessary so that these developing counselling professionals can achieve a successful integration of these worldviews.

Background

Estimates of mental health and addictions service needs for Indigenous populations across Canada are 2 to 6 times the levels for non-Indigenous populations (Statistics Canada, 2006). There is, however, a dire shortage of professionally trained counsellors with the understanding, skills, and knowledge to work successfully and effectively with Aboriginal individuals and families (Stewart, 2008). To address this need, a pilot version of the existing UVic Counselling Psychology program, informally called the “Aboriginal Communities Counselling program (ACC) was delivered from 2008-11. The pilot followed the existing (western) program courses, but included curriculum and delivery methods consistent with Indigenous values and principles identified by a Community Advisory Committee. All 19 students in the pilot cohort have
graduated and are working as counsellors in British Columbia and other settings in Canada. A key factor in the ACCP pilot success was a program of Aboriginal “Mentorship” activities funded by The Counselling Foundation of Canada. This initiative included traditional ceremonies, Elder involvement, Aboriginal speakers, cultural programming, and practicum support.

Experiences from the pilot ACCP have been used to develop new courses and curriculum for a unique new MA degree program in Indigenous Communities Counselling Psychology (ICCP). This new degree replaces the ACCP pilot version.

Although the ACCP program was deemed very successful by students and faculty, an important training gap was identified: the need for specific guiding support to help the students bridge the two worlds of Indigenous helping and western counselling. Students, instructors, and supervisors noted the challenges of bringing these two perspectives together – both for the students learning to be counsellors and for their Indigenous clients who are often struggling with the competing demands of the two worlds. Thus, at the end of the pilot, it was evident that specific and different strategies and resources are necessary for successful “walking in two worlds”. This project addresses this identified need.

In addition, more support to learn the specialized integrated academic writing and other communication formats necessary for this unique blended program was another need identified by pilot cohort students and instructors. Because many of the ICCP students are entering this graduate program from non-psychology academic backgrounds, they need additional training and coaching to learn how to integrate traditional Indigenous understanding and knowledge with the American Psychological Association graduate level writing required for course assignments and credentialing. To date, we have not been able to locate any resources that address how to learn this particular and very specialized type of blended scholarship.

**Goals & Objectives**

The “Walking in Two Worlds” (WITW) project encompasses the following intentions:

1) **Develop curriculum** for ICCP students to understand and enact their role of integrating traditional Indigenous ways of learning and healing with recognized western counselling practice required for counsellor certification (“walking in two worlds”).

2) **Implement training** activities and **develop resources** to be integrated into all 10 courses and practica from January 2014-August 2016:

   • New WITW curriculum, a student training manual, and a field supervisor manual will address the challenges of “walking in two worlds” or “hybrid” programs (Eduardo Duran, 2006). Posted to ICCP website.
• A WITW Coordinator (possibly a pilot program graduate) will help develop and implement WITW activities and monitor ICCP website.

• WITW Elders. Four Elders who are experienced in both worlds will share their stories and assist students to integrate traditional teachings with western counselling methods.

• ACCP pilot Graduate Mentors. Six Mentors will meet monthly with students in groups and individually. They will use case studies and resources to help counsellors-in-training and their clients understand and successfully navigate walking in two worlds.

• APA Writing tutors (6 ACCP counselling graduates) will assist with academic writing skills, APA publication requirements, and traditional/western counselling integration.

3) WITW Project evaluation. All WITW curricula, resources, and activities will be formally evaluated at program mid-point (Year 2) and at program end in Year 3.

4) Dissemination and Community Sharing. On a regular basis throughout the ICCP Program and at program completion.

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