



University  
of Victoria

Graduate Studies

Notice of the Final Oral Examination  
for the Degree of Master of Arts

of

**RYAN SILAS DOUGLAS NICOLSON**

BA (University of Victoria, 2013)

**“Playing the hand you’re dealt: An analysis of Musgamakw  
Dzawada’enuxw traditional governance and its resurgence”**

Interdisciplinary Studies

Friday, January 24, 2020

2:30 pm

David Turpin Building

Room A318

Supervisory Committee:

Dr. James Tully, Department of Political Science, University of Victoria (Co-Supervisor)

Dr. John Borrows, Faculty of Law, UVic (Co-Supervisor)

External Examiner:

Dr. Christine O’Bonsawin, Department of History and Indigenous Studies, UVic

Chair of Oral Examination:

Dr. Iain Higgins, Department of English, UVic

Dr. David Capson, Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies

## Abstract

The Musgamakw Dzawada'enuxw have lived since time immemorial in what is now known as central British Columbia. This thesis identifies who the Musgamakw Dzawada'enuxw are, their form of self-government and their political organization before a "Band and Council" system was imposed by the government of Canada. This thesis also presents how literacy was appropriated by the Musgamakw Dzawada'enuxw and the broader community of the Kwakwaka'wakw in the late 19th Century through to the 20th Century to document and sustain their own form of governance and political organization.

It describes how the traditional governance was deeply engaged in processes which upheld deep connectivity between community and the land. In conclusion it argues that a return to traditional self-government would strengthen and be beneficial to current Musgamakw Dzawada'enuxw and Kwakwaka'wakw people by addressing some of the current issues faced by communities struggling to maintain their ways of life while facing pressure to assimilate to colonial structures. The thesis in a similar fashion uses the process of writing to document and record our traditional governance as a way to sustain it. As traditional oral transmission has broken down due to oppressive colonial practices it seeks to use colonial writing systems such as an academic thesis as a form of communication even though it is within the imposed system. Therefore, the thesis is written as a hybrid between a written and oral delivery of information which is intended for both an academic but more importantly, Kwakwaka'wakw audience.