SPRING 2020

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Indigenous Academic & Community Engagement

# NEWSLETTER

## MESSAGE FROM IACE

As a university, we value our relationships with Indigenous communities and organizations, and I wanted to reach out to you directly during the challenging and unsettling times we are all facing. The support, connection and strength of relationships is vital at any time, and even more so as we all look for ways to respond and cope with the impacts of COVID-19. I would like to share with you the actions we are taking as well as offer our support to you and your communities and organizations.

At UVic, we have placed the health and well-being of our students, faculty, staff, and the community at the heart of our response. Everyone on campus has made extraordinary efforts to ensure students can complete their term and continue to have access to essential services and support. Classes for both the current and summer semester have transitioned to online learning and other modes of instruction, and work continues remotely. Our response will evolve as we work with other institutions, public health officials and our provincial and federal governments to support our communities and do our part to slow the rate of COVID-19 transmission.

We recognize that the university engages with students, communities and organizations in a number of ways, and we hope that the need to reduce our work off campus with the shift to physical distancing is not causing you undue hardship.

The health of Elders and community members is at the top of our minds, and across the university work continues in a number of ways even if we are not able to visit you at this time, including preparing for the next Aboriginal Service Plan and connecting with the members of Elders' Voices.

The team in the Office of Indigenous Academic and Community Engagement remains committed to supporting our students and maintaining strong relationships with Indigenous communities at this difficult time. We would be happy to hear from you about how we can engage with you at a distance and support the work of your communities and organizations. We can be reached at iaceservices@uvic.ca.

*Qwul'sih'yah'maht Dr. Robina Thomas*
*Executive Director, IACE*

## Land Blessing Held for UVic Residence Project

Elder Dr. Skip Dick at the student residence land blessing.

On January 22, Elders Dr. Skip Dick from the Songhees Nation and May Sam from the Tsartlip Nation, offered a territorial welcome and a land blessing respectively, at the site of UVic's future 600-room student residence building and dining hall.

A number of faculty, staff, students and community members, who have been involved in planning Indigenous components of the new buildings, were acknowledged at the ceremony.

The land where the residence building and dining hall will be built was once covered by camas fields and vast stands of Garry oaks. Less than a kilometre east stood Sungayka, the principal village of the Lekwungen peoples.

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# Smudging Expands on UVic Campus

UVic's new Smudging Guidelines, which were announced earlier this year, are aligned with both the Truth and Reconciliation's Calls to Action and the university's Indigenous Plan. The Guidelines provide students, faculty and staff with an assurance that the campus is a safe place to take part in Indigenous ceremonies and practices.

The Guidelines, developed collaboratively by a team of Indigenous staff, faculty and graduate students, along with non-Indigenous staff at UVic, strive to create a warm, welcoming and respectful environment and a sense of place for all Indigenous people on campus. They also demonstrate that the UVic community values diversity and is inclusive of Indigenous ways of knowing and being.

Outdoor smudging can take place anywhere on campus, except near doors, open windows and building intake units. Indoor smudging can take place in buildings where adequate ventilation is available. A list of buildings and more smudging information is at www.uvic.ca/services/indigenous/students/smudging.

## *Congratulations 2019 / 2020 Indigenous graduates!*

# NSU Turns 50

In 1969, several UVic students came together to form an organization to represent the interests of the growing Indigenous community on campus.

The Native Student Union (NSU) was formed, and 50 years later it's still going strong.

Today, NSU membership is open to all Indignous students enrolled in UVic programs.

The organization is run by a council of seven elected students who serve the membership by advocating for Indigenous student rights and equality, overseeing programs and hosting events.

The NSU council meets weekly and members can attend meetings and vote on motions. Each spring, the directors are elected at the annual general meeting.

The NSU has two offices on campus - the main office in the basement of the Student Union Building (room B023) and a satellite office in the First Peoples House.

This year, the NSU supported several actions and programs including Indigenous Youth for Wet'suwet'en and Two Spirit Hangouts.

You can reach Peter Underwood (W̱SÁNEĆ), NSU's office coordinator, at contact@uvicnsu.ca. Their website is at uvicnsu.ca/home.

# Uvic SafetyApp

UVic recently launched an app that integrates with the university's safety and security systems. Developed by Campus Security, this free app provides students, faculty and staff with added safety while on the University of Victoria campus.

The SafetyApp is UVic's official communications app and will send you important safety alerts and provide instant access to campus safety resources. You can download it from Google Play or the Apple Store.

By honouring our ancestors, Elders, families, children and youth, we work together, bring in our good feelings and prepare for the work ahead to advance Indigenous education and cultural resurgence.
IACE Vision Statement

# Two Indigenous Writers Talking

What happens when two acclaimed Indigenous writers get together to talk about writing, storytelling and moose hunting? First year writing students in the Faculty of Fine Arts who attended the meet-the-author event in March, learned that words can be a source of medicine for both writer and reader.

The event was organized by UVic Associate Professor Greg Scofield (Métis). He interviewed Richard Van Camp (Dogrib Tlicho), acclaimed UVic alumnus and author of 24 books, who was on campus to receive a Distinguished Alumni Award. The two authors have been crossing paths for more than 20 years at book events and authors' festivals. Richard and Greg engaged in a lively and insightful conversation that had the audience enthralled.

Richard's post-secondary education began in 1991 at the En'owkin International School of Writing. He transferred to UVic's Creative Writing Program in his third year, where he earned his BFA in Writing. He also holds a Master's Degree in Creative Writing from UBC. Richard has taught creative writing at Emily Carr University, UBC and the University of Alberta.

UVic Associate Professor and author Greg Scofield and UVic alumni and author Richard Van Camp.

"Through writing, you can make things right. You can resurrect the dead. You can use your writing for revenge," he told the writing students.

"Writing from a place of curiosity and pain is how you connect with your reader," Richard said. "The most powerful words that guide a writer are 'what if'."

"As readers we're looking for truth. We're living in a time of epic loneliness. People are hungry for stories."

He also believes that Indigenous writers can't write alone. They need mentors, Elders, knowledge keepers and other writers.

He urged students to have the time of their lives while studying at UVic and to write the things they want to write about.

Richard offered three pieces of advice to emerging writers: the story is boss; your stories will take as long they need to take; and earn every word.

# Nurse Drop-in Program at First Peoples House

Every Tuesday morning, Stephanie Benedik packs her bag full of medical supplies and walks across campus from the Petersen Health Clinic behind the Student Union Building, to Room 128 at the First Peoples House. For three hours, Stephanie, a registered nurse who received her Bachelor of Science in Nursing at UVic, meets with and advises Indigenous students who have concerns or questions about their health.

Registered Nurse Stephanie Benedik at the First Peoples House.

Launched in April 2019, the Nurse Drop-in Program has proven to be a convenient, culturally-safe place for Indigenous students on campus. Stephanie worked for five years as a primary care nurse with the T'Sou-ke and Songhees First Nations. She's been employed at UVic for two years at the Petersen Health Clinic, a primary care centre on campus with physicians, nurses and other practitioners providing health care exclusively to UVic students.

During her drop-in office hours, students can access blood pressure tests, temperature readings, simple lab work, immunizations, STI screenings and birth control information. For more complex health concerns, Stephanie can help coordinate an appointment at UVic's health clinic. Stephanie and her colleagues from the on-campus clinic also take part in student fairs and orientation week, and offer regular harm reduction programs like naloxone training sessions.

Stephanie has had an interest in a health care career since she was a student at Claremont High School. In her teens, she volunteered at the Saanich Hospital maternity ward, and later at the Gorge Road Hospital working with long-term rehab patients. After receiving her nursing degree at Camosun and UVic, she started working with Indigenous communities.

"Nursing and health care is a great field to get into," she said. "Indigenous nurses, doctors and support staff are in high demand in urban and remote communities in BC."

She has seen first-hand how the history of Indian hospitals and residential schools has led to a lack of trust by many Indigenous people for hospitals and health care workers.

History has shown that people sometimes avoid seeking health care when they need it, because of an unpleasant experience they had in the past at a hospital or from health care workers. Putting off treatment, however, can lead to more serious health problems down the road. Visiting Stephanie during nurse drop-in hours at the FPH is one step towards effective health management.

(The Nurse Drop-in Program is currently closed until further notice.)

## NEW STUDENT WELLNESS CENTRE

UVic's Counseling, Health and Multi-faith Services are coming together this year to create the Student Wellness Centre (SWC). The new centre will provide UVic students with physical, emotional and spiritual care. The current Counseling and Health services facilities will be moving into the newly renovated space (formerly the Technology Enterprise Facility) at 2300 McKenzie, across from CARSA. Multi-faith will remain in its current location, with programming integrated with the Health and Wellness Building.

## Land Blessing (con't from page one)

In 1850, the Lekwungen, W̱SÁNEĆ and other First Nations on Southern Vancouver Island, were relegated to small parcels of 'reserve land'. It didn't take long for Sungayka to be renamed Cadboro Bay by newcomers, who established new businesses, marinas and housing.

In 1959, Victoria College's University Development Board purchased the Gordon Head Army Camp and adjacent federal land, and 141 acres of land from the Hudson Bay Company.

Keatton Tiernan (Cree/Metis), 4th year Kinesiology student, spoke at the Land Blessing for the new student residence.

A half a century later, on a gray and rainy January morning, Dr. Skip Dick welcomed a small gathering of students, faculty, staff and building contractors to the traditional territory of the Lekwungen people.

Standing on the very place where his ancestors once lived, hunted and harvested camas for thousands of years, Dr. Dick radiated the deep pride of someone welcoming guests into their beautiful home.

Elder May Sam shared how pleased she was to see so many students, staff and faculty at the Land Blessing. She expressed her hope that all students would feel safe, welcome and at home at the future student residence building.

Joel Lynn, MC for the event and Executive Director of Student Services, aknolwedged several community members, including Kathy and Doug LaFortune, who were involved in planning cultural uses for the trees that will be impacted by the construction.

Keatton Tiernan, a student at UVic, shared his perspective as an Indigenous student who arrived at UVic four years ago, not sure if he would find the campus a welcoming and safe environment.

"At five years old I was told by my educators that someone of my 'kind' could never make it to university and now I am 21 and speaking at an event that is set up to honour Indigenous peoples, at a university that I attend as a student," Keatton said. "In terms of truth and reconciliation, we as a society have a long way to go still, but it's important for us to stop and recognize the strides that have been made by Indigenous peoples."

"The land blessing event to me," Keatton continued, "is a signal to the other hurt and struggling Indigenous youth out there, that there are people in powerful positions looking out for you, which isn't something five year old Keatton necessarily could say."

Victor Underwood, Tsawout Nation

## ELDERS' VOICES

### Victor Underwood

The sweet smell of sage flows through the First Peoples House every Tuesday during the school year.

Tuesday is the day that Victor Underwood, one of the founding members of IACE's Elders' Voices Program, smudges the First Peoples House. While smudging isn't considered part of Coast Salish cultures, he carries out this Indigenous tradition as a reminder that the House is a sanctuary for Indigenous students who come from every part of Canada to study at UVic.

Victor, who prefers to call himself an 'Old One', had a long and successful career as an accountant, first as the band manager at Tsawout First Nation and later as a financial advisor at the South Island Tribal Council. After he retired, he started a new career as an Elder-in-Residence at Camosun College and later at UVic. He considers his community work to be "restoring our cultures."

Victor attended St. Mary's Residential School in Kamloops, where he excelled in sports, especially soccer. His high school soccer team easily beat the provincial champions in an exhibition game, but they weren't allowed to compete in the BC school league. After high school, Victor played fastball in Chilliwack. His team won the national championship and played top teams in Canada and the USA, an achievement that he is very proud of.

As the father of four children and grandfather of 18, Victor knows firsthand how vital it is to support young people on their educational journey. His favourite part of working at the FPH is sharing his traditional ways. He enjoys watching graduation ceremonies and seeing how proud the families are to see their students succeed. His message to students is to "practice your cultural ways, no matter what they are and how much you know about them."

We acknowledge with respect the Lekwungen peoples on whose traditional territory the University of Victoria stands, and the Songhees, Esquimalt and W̱SÁNEĆ peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

First Peoples House Ceremonial Hall doors "Thunderbird and Salmon" carved by Rick Harry Xwa Lack Tun (Coast Salish)

University of Victoria | Indigenous Academic & Community Engagement

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