

Re-envisioning the First Nations Curriculum Concentration

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This project took place on the unceded, traditional and ancestral territories of the $x^w m \theta k^w \acute{y} \acute{e} m$ (Musqueam) Nation. School of Information students, staff and faculty continue to benefit from the guidance and teachings from members of this community. Funding for this project was generously provided by UBC's Advancing Educational Renewal Grant (2020-21).



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“Tending the Garden”

FNCC & Reciprocity: Advancing Education Renewal Report

The School of Information's First Nations Curriculum Concentration (FNCC) centers Indigenous knowledge, perspectives, and aspirations related to information-related practices, priorities and concerns. Since its inception in 1998, graduate students have had the opportunity to enrich their Master of Archival Studies (MAS) or Master of Library and Information Studies (MLIS) degree through participating in the FNCC.

In the first thirteen years (1998-2011) a total of **10** students (two Indigenous) fulfilled the requirements of the FNCC. A review of the FNCC in 2011, informed by FNCC alumni, Indigenous information professionals, and individuals involved in nation-wide and UBC-specific Indigenous initiatives, led to restructuring the requirements of the FNCC and enabling Dual students to participate in the concentration (MAS/MLIS). Over the next ten years (2012-2022), the number of FNCC graduates increased **ten-fold**, averaging more than ten graduates per year.

Advancing Education Renewal Grant (2021-2022)

With more students participating in the FNCC each year, there is corresponding growth in the number of requests for relevant courses, project opportunities, volunteer project supervisors with requisite degrees and experience, and one-on-one mentorship from the FNCC Coordinator. Given the exponential growth and increased demands on the concentration, along with the School of Information's commitment to UBC's Indigenous Strategic Plan, it is time to re-imagine the vision and structure of the FNCC.

In 2021, the School of Information received a grant from UBC's Advancing Education Renewal fund to launch a year-long review of the concentration. Entitled *FNCC & Reciprocity* (short name *Reciprocity*), the project was grounded by interviews and sharing circles with current FNCC students, FNCC alumni, and UBC-Vancouver faculty and staff who regularly work with FNCC students. In addition to these formal data collection activities, the team conducted reviews of relevant scholarship and held information sharing discussions with experienced supervisors of FNCC experiential-learning projects and School of Information staff.

Data collection activities:

- 22 current FNCC alumni and students participated in 5 sharing circles during the 2021-22 academic year (2-alumni, 2-current students, 1-Indigenous FNCC students & alumni)
- 14 UBC faculty members who regularly support FNCC students participated in interviews

Grounding activities:

- Scholarly review of Indigenous information-research and -reciprocity research
- 4 FNCC-focused conversations with different members of iSchool administration (administrative team, iSchool Educational Services Coordinator, MLIS program renewal coordinator)
- 2 discussions with members of Musqueam Archives & Research Department, with project leads sharing information about the project and listening to reflections generated through the sharing

Initial Findings

The engagements above brought forward appreciation for the FNCC, along with observations regarding ongoing challenges and future opportunities. Reflections on experiences with the FNCC during formal interviews and sharing circles often referenced specific unmet expectations, whether from current students, FNCC alumni, project supervisors (often FNCC alumni) or instructors. Collectively, contributions highlight the need to *tend* to the FNCC, meaning to focus on improving learners' and experiential learning supervisors' experiences with the concentration. Additionally, there was fulsome support for significant expansion—and added depth—to engagement with Indigenous concerns related to information topics throughout the School of Information. Of the dozens of specific suggestions and recommendations, no one advocated for continued growth of the FNCC in terms of student enrollment. Instead, participants called for enhancing the experience of, and relationships between, FNCC students and partner organizations and Indigenous communities.

Tending the Garden

Inspired by the array of recommendations received from participants, we offer three over-arching aspirations to guide future actions of the School of Information:

1. *Deepen **learning opportunities and clarify responsibilities** for those participating in the FNCC;*
2. *Prioritize **ongoing relationships** between the FNCC and Indigenous communities and Indigenous-led organizations;*
3. *Expand and enhance Indigenous content, approaches, and initiatives throughout the school (**across all programs**).*

Below we expand on the three themes. Each informs specific recommendations detailed in the two accompanying documents: *FNCC Strategic Plan 2022-2027* and *Walking the Talk: Indigenous Action Requests 2022*.

1. *Deepen learning opportunities and clarify responsibilities for those participating in the FNCC.*

The FNCC aspires to prepare graduates to work respectfully with Indigenous communities and Indigenous-led organizations, guided by the concepts of reciprocity and respect. However, current processes for joining the FNCC, fulfilling FNCC requirements, and applying for graduation with “First Nations Curriculum Concentration” on a student’s transcript, do not provide sufficient structure or evidence to ensure this aspiration is met. Steps need to be taken to ensure FNCC students have opportunities to go beyond reading and talking about notions such as cultural humility. They need opportunities to explore how their own professional practice can enact reciprocity and respect. [see: *FNCC Strategic Plan 2022-2027*]

2. *Develop and sustain relationships between the FNCC and Indigenous communities and Indigenous-led organizations.*

A valued component of students’ FNCC experience is engaging in an experiential learning project with and for Indigenous communities and organizations. However, the generous individuals who have served as project supervisors for these projects shared examples of logistical challenges and the types of labor required to set up a one-time, 120-hour bespoke project for a FNCC student. Too often these projects dissolve in a familiar cycle framed as, “*start up and collapse*”. Approaching the development of these projects as *long-term* partnerships would enable the intentional design of *ongoing, longer-term* projects. This approach would position a series of students to contribute to the same project over-time (i.e., passing

the baton from one to the next). Students would be expected to share their learning with each other, another component of reducing the labor for FNCC partners and ensuring these relationships are reciprocal. [see: *FNCC Strategic Plan 2022-2027*]

3. *Expand and enhance Indigenous content, approaches, and initiatives throughout the school (across all programs).*

Demands for the iSchool to prioritize hiring full-time Indigenous faculty and staff and requests for more Indigenous content across all courses (i.e., not limited to a module or a single course guest), align with *long-standing* FNCC ambitions. The project team was not surprised to hear these suggestions repeated throughout the sharing circles and interviews. However, the FNCC is not the *container for all things Indigenous* at the school. Initiating and enacting the range of changes recommended by current students, alumni, staff and faculty is beyond the “soft power” of the concentration. The FNCC coordinator position, currently held by an adjunct faculty member, has neither the administrative power nor resources to enact the school-level changes requested. As UBC’s Indigenous Strategic Plan makes clear, it is the responsibility of the entire School of Information to do this work, including the school’s leadership team, administrative team, curriculum committee, hiring committees, and all full-time faculty and staff. [see: *Indigenous Action Requests 2022*]

Conclusion

During the twenty-five years the FNCC has existed, the larger context across the nation-state of Canada has shifted dramatically through the sustained leadership, determination, and actions of Indigenous peoples. Since 1998, a dramatic and necessary shift has occurred in the ways Canadian society, writ large, engages with Indigenous peoples, knowledges and communities. This continues to be a space of growth within post-secondary institutions, and their academic and professional programs. Information school graduate students are also navigating, and sometimes leading this shift. Learners and instructors are aware that the FNCC has been in service to the shortfalls of previous and current iSchool curriculum.

They ask for a higher bar to be set.

Acknowledgements

After a period of remarkable growth, the *Reciprocity* project provided time to share, reflect, and plan for the future of the FNCC. We are grateful for the decision by UBC Advancing Education Renewal fund adjudicators and the School of Information to support this project.

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FNCC Strategic Plan 2022-2027 (DRAFT) Recommendations for “Tending the Garden”

The School of Information's First Nations Curriculum Concentration (FNCC) centers Indigenous knowledge, perspectives, and aspirations related to *information-related* practices, initiatives, priorities and concerns. Given the exponential growth and increased demands on the FNCC—along with improvements in Canadian society’s education related to Indigenous peoples’ histories, cultures, and ways of knowing—it is time to re-imagine the structure of the FNCC. The activities recommended below were offered by FNCC students and alumni, UBC faculty, and other information professionals who engaged with the FNCC over the past twenty-five years. These actions are grounded by three interconnected aspirations:

1. *Deepen learning opportunities* FNCC students
2. *Clarify responsibilities* for those participating in the FNCC
3. *Prioritize ongoing relationships* between the FNCC and Indigenous communities and Indigenous-led organizations

Short Term Actions (2-3 years)

- **Change name:** Update concentration title to “*First Nations and Indigenous Concentration*” (FNIC), a Calendar 1 change (i.e., must go through UBC Senate). The more inclusive title makes explicit that Inuit and Métis students, as well as Indigenous students from other areas of the world, are welcome. It also signals the special commitment the concentration has to Musqueam Indian Band, whose territory we occupy. The proposed name change also keeps pace with similar modifications across UBC units over the past decade.
- **Ensure concentration aligns with updated Musqueam | UBC Agreements**
- **Strengthen relationships with Musqueam Host Nation**
 - Continue conversations with Musqueam on the question, “(w)hat does it mean to be doing our work in a good way on your territory?”
 - Develop and support ongoing experiential learning opportunities that align with Musqueam identified priorities (e.g., Musqueam Resource Curation Project)
 - Work towards regular FNCC teas (i.e., informal conversations) with staff from Musqueam Archives & Research Department (e.g., 1 per term)
- **Change and strengthen FNCC requirements (through iSchool Curriculum Committee)**
 - Remove requirement for 12 “FNCC credits”
 - Replace the above with requirements for the following courses:
 - LIBR 564/ARST 585

- Minimum of 6-credits of *explicitly* Indigenous-grounded courses (from their graduate program's offerings or as an external course)
 - Adjust FNCC graduation form to align with changes above
- **Develop formal FNCC application and graduation processes**
 - *Create application process, a timeline for applications and acceptance notification, adjudication criteria and an adjudication committee:* Develop concentration application process that includes a minimum of 3 committee members, adjudication criteria, and a process for acknowledging and honoring the committee's contributions.
 - *Statement of Intent:* As part of their application process, future students will develop a statement of intent (e.g., 1 page), specifying their goals in participating in the FNCC. This might include information such as courses they intend to take, their commitment to attend FNCC teas and other FNCC professional development opportunities, and their reflections on their responsibilities as a student participating in the FNCC (i.e., who benefits from their participation?).
 - *Community presentation:* As part of their experiential learning requirement within the concentration, students will be invited to share their learning journey with the FNCC Guiding Network.
 - *Apply to graduate:* At the end of their program, students will continue to fill out the FNCC's graduation submission form, a document that prompts students to reflect on their learning and how their program of study aligned with their initial statement of intent.
- **Establish sustained support (administrative processes) for the concentration**
 - Budget for yearly GAA position (help with scheduling, planning, and hosting teas and student communication)
 - Update job description and the title of the coordinator position to better align with the strategic work required of the role
 - Welcome concentration lead as ad hoc member of iSchool's Leadership team
 - Ensure concentration lead is regularly and consistently compensated for their work (i.e., not a volunteer position)
- **Communications support:** Design and distribute refreshed and accurate recruitment material (paper and digital)

Long Term (3-5 years)

- **Develop sustained relationships with First Nations, Metis & Inuit communities and organizations, specifically supporting their information priorities through students' experiential learning projects**
 - Work towards longer-term experiential learning projects that can be handed off to future students in support of different types of learning activities (e.g., professional experience, directed study, research collaboration, capstone project)
 - Explore possibilities for community-based research and educational projects with a range of faculty and students
- **Commission Indigenous artist to create concentration logo:** Once name change for concentration has passed through Senate, commission an Indigenous artist to create a logo.
- **Expand LIBR 564:** The course, *Information Practice and Protocol in Support of Indigenous Initiatives*, should be expanded into at least two courses—one as foundational and one as more advanced, applying and deepening ideas from introductory course into more complex information spaces (e.g., data sovereignty, repatriation, reparations)
- **Develop option for FNCC capstone project:** grounded in Indigenous ethics and multi-modal knowledge sharing practices
- **Create alumni- and project supervisor-based Guiding Network**

Guiding Network members would be invited from the pool of individuals who have direct experience with the FNCC (alumni or experienced project supervisor) and are willing to respond to questions from concentration lead and iSchool Leadership Team, and potentially attend one meeting per year to guide ongoing decision-making regarding the FNCC

Cautions

Those with a vested interest in the FNCC (iSchool leadership, learners, and instructors) need to be wary of performative political positioning and ground their work in genuine interest in supporting Indigenous initiatives, including considering the following questions:

- How will the labor above be scoped and resourced appropriately?
- What might an accountability structure for the FNCC look like? For reference please see the *Indigenous Strategic Plan: Sample Performance Measurement Framework*: https://iap-2021.sites.olt.ubc.ca/files/2021/09/ISP_PMF.pdf

Conclusion

As participants in the FNCC & Reciprocity project made clear, it is time to tend to the FNCC and ensure it grounds, supports, and inspires new information professionals who are committed to working, in a good way, with and for Indigenous peoples.

“Walking the Talk”: Requested Actions in Support of Indigenous Peoples School of Information

This document builds on research findings shared as part the *FNCC & Reciprocity* project (2022) and referenced within the *Tending the Garden* project report. The following bullets highlight key areas of action and responsibility that are best situated, resourced, and led by iSchool Leadership, faculty and staff. Phrases in quotations are drawn directly from conversations with students, faculty and staff during the *Reciprocity* project.

- **Culture and Climate**
 - Create a school environment where Indigenous students, staff and faculty know they will be treated well by people of all backgrounds
- **Recruiting, Retaining, and Promoting Indigenous Peoples**
 - “Prioritize hiring full-time Indigenous faculty and staff”
 - Remove barriers for Indigenous peoples to participate in iSchool graduate programs so that they are able to participate in the school, feel supported, and “*want to complete their program*”. This includes developing:
 - Flexible entry requirements
 - Options for distance-learning so Indigenous students can remain in their communities
 - Continuing education certificates
- **Curriculum and Professional Development**
 - Increase Indigenous-grounded courses, approaches, and content throughout iSchool curriculum (“*like LIBR 564*”)
 - Reconsider traditional university frameworks (e.g., measures of success, expertise)
 - Integrate cultural humility training for instructors and staff
- **Roles and Responsibilities “Walking the Talk”**
 - Distribute labor amongst iSchool faculty regarding Indigenous topics in courses
 - Ensure Indigenous content is a priority during curricula review (“*We need reminding still*”)
 - Support all instructors in increasing their knowledge and experience engaging with Indigenous content.
 - Inspire those in the information professions to “*Care more and do better*”.
- **Accountability Plan**
 - Develop a performance measurement framework for the school’s ISP work and incorporate it into existing reporting processes at all levels (Indigenous Strategic Plan: Sample Performance Measurement Framework: https://iap-2021.sites.olt.ubc.ca/files/2021/09/ISP_PMF.pdf)
 - Place these recommendations in a publicly accessible space