

November 16, 2017

University of Calgary launches transformative Indigenous Strategy

University introduces a parallel process for shared journey with the Indigenous community toward reconciliation

Calgary, AB - After nearly two years of extensive consultations with Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples on campus and in southern Alberta, the University of Calgary is proud to share *ii' taa' poh' to' p*, a strategy that will reset its relationship with the Indigenous community and ensure all aspects of campus life are informed by Indigenous perspectives.

“We are working towards authentic reconciliation, walking together with Indigenous communities on parallel paths, while creating an ethical space for authentic conversation that will enhance mutual understanding and respect,” says Dru Marshall, provost and vice-president (academic). “As a post-secondary institution, we have a responsibility to play a key role in reconciliation efforts. It is time for our entire university family to come together to renew and deepen our relationship with Indigenous communities, so that we may flourish together.”

The strategy's Blackfoot name, *ii' taa' poh' to' p*, means a 'place to rest, to re-energize during a journey' and was bestowed in ceremony by Kainai Elder, Andy Black Water from the Red Crow Community College. This gift, along with the gift of traditional cultural symbols transferred by Dr. Reg Crowshoe, were bestowed by elders in recognition of the parallel path the University of Calgary has embarked upon with Indigenous communities to develop a strategy grounded in Indigenous ways of knowing that will guide the university as it embarks on the path of reconciliation 'in a good way.'

The guiding principle of the strategy, 'in a good way,' is an Indigenous concept that demonstrates working in the context of kindness, clear purpose, integrity, moral strength and communal spirit. The strategy is framed by a conceptual model grounded in Indigenous theory of transformation and renewal, and communicated through cultural symbolism. The cultural model includes symbols reflective of Indigenous ways of knowing, doing, connecting and being, based on pictographs and petroglyphs from sacred sites located throughout southern Alberta. Drawing heavily on symbolism identified by traditional knowledge keepers, the symbols reflect the primary principles and components of the strategy. The cultural model is intended to be a visual representation of the strategy from an Indigenous perspective and is a manifestation of the parallel processes used throughout the development of the strategy.

“It was important that the University of Calgary develop its Indigenous strategy the right way. We needed to develop a safe space in order to be able to understand each other,” says Piikuni Traditional Knowledge Keeper Reg Crowshoe, a member of the university's senate. “We looked at developing a playing field so the oral system and the written system can work together in harmony.”

From the start of the process in March 2016, the task force and working group that guided the development of the strategy included members from the university community, diverse Indigenous communities, and was informed by an elder advisory council.

“Throughout the 'gathering stories' community engagement process, which took place throughout the Fall of 2016, the university purposely took the role of listener. I think this was an important stage in our journey. The participation and information gathered throughout this stage helped us gain a better understanding of ourselves as an institution, our

relationship with community, and the best path forward,” says Shawna Cunningham, director of the Indigenous Strategy. “Ideally, our path to reconciliation through transformation and renewal is an evolutionary process, and our journey has just begun.”

The large community engagement series was part of the second stage of the Journey Towards an Indigenous Strategy, and garnered over 2,200 points of contact including frontline organizations, service providers, traditional knowledge keepers, as well as Indigenous and campus community members. Community members were invited to participate in three gatherings for direct dialogue and an in-depth online survey.

ii' taa' poh' to' p will be a living document that will guide the university for generations to come and includes 27 recommendations designed to move the university forward on the journey of reconciliation.

Recommendations include removing barriers that hinder student access, participation, and success; increasing representation of Indigenous peoples throughout the fabric of the institution including students, faculty, staff, and leadership; creating appropriate space in academia to respectfully include and validate Indigenous knowledge in research, teaching, and learning; increase inter-cultural capacity across the campus by providing credit and non-credit learning opportunities on Indigenous histories, people and cultures through professional development and integrated curricula; and engage in the planning and construction of a new building dedicated to Indigenous education and ways of knowing. In addition, the recommendations call for a review of existing programs related to Indigenous peoples, communities, histories and contemporary realities to ensure that program content does not perpetuate stereotypes and is respectful and inclusive of Indigenous perspectives.

The Indigenous Strategy comes at a pivotal time for the university. With the *Eyes High* 2017-2022 vision, and the Institutional Sustainability Strategy and Campus Mental Health Strategy in place, the Indigenous Strategy adds a pathway to create and rebuild relationships with Indigenous communities.

The Indigenous Strategy was approved by the University of Calgary's Board of Governors on October 20, 2017. For more information and to read the full Indigenous Strategy visit: ucalgary.ca/indigenous-strategy.

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