

RESEARCH & INNOVATION
ABORIGINAL
RESEARCH



Dr. Judy Iseke | Dr. Peggy Smith



Through collaboration, and community-driven projects, Lakehead's researchers are making significant contributions on issues that touch Aboriginal People.

CREATING THE FUTURE NOW

Aboriginal Peoples of Northern Ontario carry with them a wealth of experience, tradition, and knowledge.

It is an understanding of the world that is often rooted in place, and in a deep sense of culture and heritage.

Lakehead University embraces the strengths and opportunities of its Aboriginal partners, and has built world class research initiatives around this connection. Research in this area delves into the wide variety of places and spaces that encompass Aboriginal People of Northern Ontario.

Through various academic and research activities, Lakehead University's scholars are examining issues that matter to First Nation's people of the North. These include forest management, community social services, food security, and education. Every project is undertaken cooperatively, with the goals and needs of First Nations People placed at the forefront of any action.



KEEPING the land

Since the mid-1990s members of Pikangikum First Nation have been working with the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources on resource development and conservation for their traditional lands, located north of the 50th parallel.

This relationship has resulted in a land use plan and environmental assessment and is now focused on developing a forest management plan for the Whitefeather Forest. Along the way, the Whitefeather Forest Research Co-operative has enlisted research support from Lakehead University's faculty of Forestry and the Forest Environment.

Dr. Peggy Smith, a Lakehead University researcher of Cree descent, surveyed criteria and indicators developed by other Indigenous communities across Canada to evaluate sustainable forest management. Pikangikum reviewed this research and has now formulated their own unique criteria and indicators system to evaluate strategies for sustainability in a way that is meaningful in Pikangikum culture.

This project was one part of Pikangikum's ongoing effort to translate their worldview into practical ways to manage their community's resources. Dr. Smith is now discussing with Pikangikum, research to analyze socio-economic factors relating to forest management.

In both projects, the First Nation's approach is driven by their Elders, the community's connection to the land, and their traditions of "keeping the land" (cheekahnahwaydahmungk keetahkeemeenaan).

This work is supported with grants from the Sustainable Forest Management Network.

Dr. Peggy Smith
Faculty of Forestry and the Forest Environment

ABORIGINAL RESEARCH PARTNERSHIPS BUILD ON THE TRADITION AND EXPERIENCE OF FIRST NATIONS PEOPLE — LAKEHEAD IS LEADING THE WAY

HELPING the helpers

Social workers deliver care and support for a wide variety of client situations. A key ethical principle behind any clinical involvement is the need to avoid dual relationships with their clients. Social workers are trained to stay away from having additional connections with those whom they are trying to help.

But in rural and remote areas, such as many Aboriginal communities, it can be virtually impossible to avoid dual relationships. In a village or remote community, a client is likely a neighbour, an acquaintance, or even a family member.

Dr. Keith Brownlee and his colleagues are studying how social workers in small communities manage these dual relationships, while still delivering effective therapeutic care.

Through this work, researchers at Lakehead hope to bring an increased awareness to the profession about some of the challenges and realities of providing professional social work services in very small communities. The researchers also will help improve the professional standards and practices of social workers who work with rural, remote and Aboriginal communities.



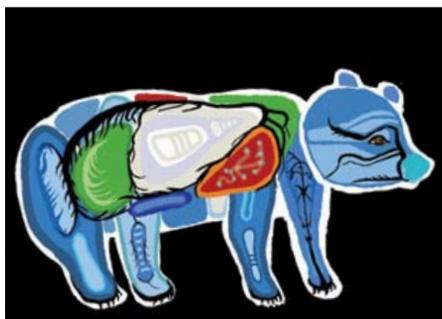
Dr. Brownlee's work is supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC).

Dr. Keith Brownlee
School of Social Work

STORIES from the past

In Indigenous cultures, Elders tell stories to help community members learn and honour their past, understand their present, and shape their future.

But in today's First Nations and Métis communities, these storytellers are aging. Their stories, and the knowledge they carry, are in danger of being lost. A team of students and researchers is recording this knowledge in various forms, including video and films.



Jayal Chung

Led by Dr. Judy Iseke, Canada Research Chair in Indigenous Education and a member of the Métis Nation of Alberta, the team starts creating a film by recording stories and conversations with Elders. Working with a team of educators and artists, Dr. Iseke then looks beneath and beyond the story's narrative, pairing story elements with music and visuals to communicate the Elder's deeper meaning.

These films are available to help strengthen connections among community members and broaden the range of information available about Indigenous cultures. An Alberta museum is developing a curriculum around one of the films.

This research has been supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC).

Dr. Judy Iseke
Faculty of Education, Canada Research Chair in Indigenous Education



TESTING for strengths

Most tests for elementary students assess learning in an academic subject. But students in grades 4 through 8 at a Thunder Bay elementary school with a 40% First Nations population have taken a special kind of test: an assessment, developed by Lakehead University researchers, that spotlights their unique personal strengths.

Teachers use this strength information to boost student engagement and address behavioural issues. Positive psychology has shown that energy for solving problems comes, not from focusing on the problem, but from developing strategies around the person's strengths.

And the approach appears to be making a real difference in the elementary school. Part way through the project, early results already show a significant decrease in bullying.

Lakehead University researchers Dr. Edward Rawana and Dr. Keith Brownlee developed their strength assessment in close consultation with First Nations Elders and parents. In addition to assessing strengths at home and school, the tool looks at other life areas, including free time and faith/culture. Designed for children aged 10 to 18, the assessment can be customized for different settings.

This research has been supported by the Ontario Education Services Corporation.

Dr. Edward Rawana
Department of Psychology
Centre of Excellence for Children & Adolescents with Special Needs

IMAGINING the future

Explorers encounter an unknown civilization. This leads to characteristic stories ranging from Pocahontas to Star Trek, where the group describing the encounter is typically the explorers. Research by Dr. Judith Leggatt, Chair of Lakehead University's English Department, is turning the tables on this mainstream approach. She investigates ways Indigenous civilizations tell this story.



Dr. Leggatt's research looks at the growing body of First Nations speculative fiction. From contemporary science fiction novels, to stories from Aboriginal oral tradition that feature alien visitors, travel through space and time, and alternate realities, Dr. Leggatt is uncovering a rich "sci-fi" practice, and is working on a book-length study of her findings.

Aboriginal writers often use science fiction themes to show a future world that includes a dynamic Native culture. This is in contrast to the mainstream portrayals that often depict Aboriginal cultures frozen in some distant moment in time. Aboriginal storytellers also use speculative fiction to examine the cultural experience of colonization and exploitation, often through a dystopian lens.

In Western traditions, science is a subset of knowledge bounded by objectivity. Aboriginal writers, in contrast, present narratives in which an Aboriginal shaman or healer, commands spiritual, natural, and physical knowledge that is an advanced part of the culture's science and technology.

Dr. Judith Leggatt
Department of English



GROWING community health

When community members care for a garden, fruits and vegetables may not be the only crops – or even the most important ones.

The Learning Garden is a program developed by researchers at Lakehead University's School of Social Work and Department of Psychology. Through it, Dr. Connie Nelson and Dr. Mirella Stroink have shown that tending a garden can improve the gardeners' understanding of health, and strengthen a community's cultural connection to food cultivation.

The program started when a former student from Ginoogaming First Nation, concerned about health problems in his community, approached Dr. Nelson and Dr. Stroink to see if Lakehead's Food Security Research Network could help.

From that seed grew the Learning Garden – a holistic, place-based research and learning program that used gardens to study attitudes, knowledge, and learning about food and culture in Aroland First Nation and Ginoogaming First Nation. By harvest time, participants had started living what they learned. For example, some people made healthier food choices, while others planted a garden for an Elder.

The success of the Ginoogaming and Aroland projects has sparked an interest from other First Nations communities in starting community gardens of their own. Drs. Nelson and Stroink are now developing a toolkit to help communities identify their own food resources and needs. The goal is to explore how a local food system that integrates both cultivated and boreal food sources can promote community resilience.

Relationships developed in the Learning Garden helped inspire another research project that examines connections among food, the environment, and perceptions of contamination in traditional foods. This work is supported by a Health Canada grant to the two First Nations communities.

The Learning Garden program was supported by a grant from the Canadian Council on Learning, with additional support from the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation.

Dr. Connie Nelson
School of Social Work

Dr. Mirella Stroink
Department of Psychology



Food Security Research Network
in and for the North

