



December 2020

Two Submitted Stories for January Muse

#1 -- Our Commitment to Reconciliation

By Brian Geary

Pearson College UWC in November took another important step along the journey of reconciliation with Indigenous students, peoples and communities with the adoption of a Reconciliation Action Plan and its companion document, Indigenous Vision.

“This plan represents the first comprehensive commitment by the College to address past shortcomings,” wrote Pearson Board Chair Anne McLellan in a message to campus. “We believe this will ensure positive progress and support for Indigenous students and our relationships with Indigenous peoples and communities.”

“The plan and vision thorough and thoughtfully reflect input gathered over several months from our campus [Indigenous Vision Advisory Committee](#), Elders and Chief Russell Chipps from the Sc’ianew First Nation, Indigenous alumni, students, faculty and staff,” said Craig Davis, Head of College. “Though many voices spoke and reflected unique perspectives, they were unanimous in urging Pearson to make a strong and public commitment to reconciliation – we are committing our time, effort, expertise and resources to the actions outlined in the plan.

“It’s based on principles and understandings, including mutual respect, a focus on strengths not just deficits, developing resilience, listening more than we talk and embracing the notion of ‘two eyed seeing.’ There is a commitment throughout the plan to collapse notion of ‘us and them’ as actions themselves will hopefully build the trust necessary to restore relationships.”

Both the plan and companion Indigenous Vision document are posted to the College website (www.pearsoncollege.ca). The documents were prepared by independent consultant [Marcia Turner](#) (formerly Marcia Dawson), M.A. of Daxgedim Haanak’ Nation Building and her associates at the request of the College, and includes a comprehensive series of short and longer-term key actions under eight guiding framework themes.

Over its nearly 50-year history as a school located on the unceded territory of the Sc’ianew First Nation, Turner acknowledged the efforts of faculty, staff and Indigenous students who introduced a number of initiatives in classes and across campus to build Indigenous relationships, introduce Indigenous content and raise the visibility of the culture, history and issues of Indigenous peoples.

“These initiatives are indicative of a continuous effort by the College to build critical relationships with the local Indigenous community,” she wrote, noting the 2015 commitment by former Head Desiree McGraw to explore how the College could strengthen its relationship with Indigenous peoples, provide a

culturally responsive education system for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students and understand how the [Truth and Reconciliation Commission](#) Calls to Action could be implemented at the College.

Truth before reconciliation is a principle that calls on the College to share and understand the truth of past relationships from an Indigenous perspective and use this as a narrative to help form the way forward towards reconciliation. While it is a broad principle that applies to understanding the school's relationship with Indigenous students, Sc'ianew and Indigenous communities, the history of the First Nation upon whose territory the College campus is located provides a telling framework which encourages genuine understanding.

At the heart of the narrative is the issue of the land which was never ceded by Sc'ianew peoples whose families have ancestral ties and connection to place names, medicines and resources located on properties inextricably linked to their identities. "DND (the federal Department of National Defense) took the land and gave it to Pearson...we were not happy about that," explained Sc'ianew Chief Russell Chipps in a conversation quoted in the Reconciliation Action Plan.

Acknowledging this history helped lead to the signing of a milestone [Memorandum of Understanding](#) between the First Nation, the College and the District of Metchosin in late 2018. All three organizations are working cooperatively on land use planning that includes maintaining green zones and protected areas as well furthering the foundation for the Nation's economic development opportunities all within the British Columbia Treaty Process through the Te'mexw Treaty Association.

"Of course, the importance of institutional relationships is woven throughout Reconciliation Action Plan and Indigenous Vision but at its centre is the primacy of our relationships with and support for Pearson students and alumni who are Indigenous," said Davis. "Reinforcing the pillars of a culturally responsive and culturally safe environment is critical to the success of Indigenous students while attending Pearson and to help provide a strong foundation for Indigenous graduates.

"This is a campus-wide responsibility. It encompasses initiatives ranging from establishing culturally relevant recruitment, orientation and programming to supporting additional cultural competencies and trauma-informed practice training for adults to the simple but important act of creating campus signage in Hul'q'umi'num, the language of the Sc'ianew and a dialect of the Coast Salish people, and eventually, signage that also honours the languages of Indigenous students who have attended or are attending Pearson."

#2 -- Indigenous Special Topics Day 2020 -- A Reflection

By Arian (Year 47/2022, USA)

Led by Pearson students, Indigenous Special Topics Day on November 11 was an incredible experience. From discussions to activities and presentations, there was always something to experience and learn about.

Of the activities I attended, the "Ask Me Anything" session was extremely moving. Hearing the concerns and experiences of my peers helped me to understand that the impacts of colonization run deep. A particularly significant moment was when Graham discussed his desire to educate and speak out because his "ancestors fought too hard to give [him] a voice" for him not to use it. This reminded me that for many students at UWC, we are the dreams of our ancestors and we owe it to them to speak out about the issues our peoples face.

If there was one thing I took away from Indigenous Special Topics Day, it is this: there is so much more to learn about Indigenous history and as UWC students and people, we owe it to all marginalized peoples to educate ourselves and to understand the complex beauty of these cultures. This is the beginning of a new age at Pearson College UWC.