

māmowī āsohtētān
"Let's Cross This Together"

Building Reconciliation
INTERNAL FORUM
2018 REPORT

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Planning Committee

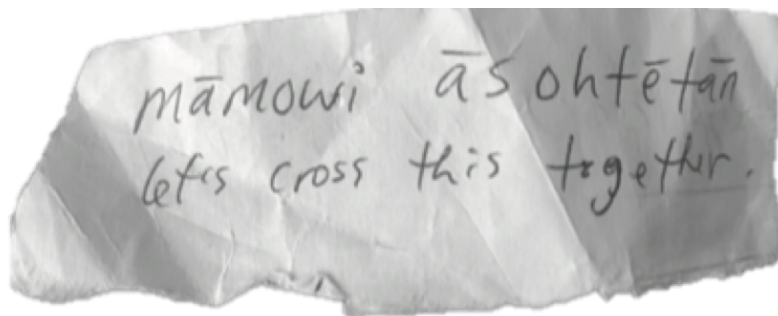
Thank you to the Planning committee who took time out of their busy schedule to help make this event a success

- Jacqueline Ottmann,
- Patti McDougall,
- Candace Wasacase-Lafferty, and
- Danette Stang,
- Meghan Sired, and
- John Shelling

Naming of this Forum

A special thanks to Randy Morin, University of Saskatchewan Faculty Member, who explained the gifting of the name māmowī āsohtētān.

As Language Keeper Morin recounted to the group, he had a moment of inspiration about a Cree phrase that encapsulated the theme and intent of the Building Reconciliation Forum and shared the concept with Jackie Ottmann and gave her a piece of paper (pictured below) with the translation on it. On the day of the forum it was revealed that moving forward the title of this event will be māmowī āsohtētān Building Reconciliation Internal Forum.



BRIEF HISTORY & CONTEXT OF THE FORUM

Following the release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Actions in June 2015, the University of Saskatchewan hosted the first Building Reconciliation National Forum held on November 18–19 at two sites: on the Saskatoon campus and at Wanuskewin Heritage Park. This event engaged in thoughtful discussions on how the USask community could move forward on the Calls to Actions and what on-going work needed to be done with universities across Canada to achieve the needed outcomes.

In 2017, University of Saskatchewan hosted an Internal Forum that asked faculty, staff, and students to reflect on the work that was happening nationally and locally and consider what was still needed to undertake Indigenization and Reconciliation on campus. A commitment came from this forum to host an Internal Forum each year. Following the success of the 2015 event, and listening to the advice of the USASK faculty in 2017, the 2nd Annual Building Internal Reconciliation Forum was hosted on Treaty 6 Territory and homeland of the Métis on the Saskatoon campus on Tuesday September 18 from 8:30-4:30pm.

This event had engagement with over 350 people registered with physical attendance around 250 people and almost 100 participants signing into the live streaming and YouTube videos in the morning and afternoon. This is a slight increase from the 2017 event that averaged around 300 people. We are excited to see that there is an increase in participation and hope to continue the trend of increasing our numbers each year.

The 2018 Internal forum was notable for its being a highly engaging, interactive, dialogue-oriented event with four focused dialogues arranged in conversation circles. After the preliminary morning greetings, prayer, and introductions the keynote speaker was introduced, Chief Tammy Cook-Searson of the Lac La Ronge Indian Band. She discussed her personal experiences as well as giving context to the importance of Residential School survivors at the forefront of all Reconciliation initiatives and the imperative for language revitalization within the university.



For the majority of the event, USask participants were assigned to attend four group sessions located in four areas on campus and were to move around the university campus in a clock-wise fashion. Each event had Thought Leaders to engage focused conversations that asked participants to openly and constructively share their thoughts on four designated topic areas, presenting the philosophies, theories, and current practices on their topic for the first part of the circle and then posing questions for smaller group talking circles.

The Thought Leaders for the Circles were as follows:

- **Conversation Circle 1:** Indigenous Student Experiences at Convocation Hall, Peter Mackinnon Building facilitated by Candace Wasacase-Lafferty and Indigenous Students Panel
- **Conversation Circle 2:** Ally Relationships: Building and Sustaining "Right Relations" at the Garry Room, Marquis Hall with Dr. Louise Million and Louise Halfe
- **Conversation Circle 3:** Indigenous Perspectives on Research at the Graduate Students Association Common with Dr. Margaret Kovach and Jaris Swidrovich
- **Conversation Circle 4:** Meeting Reconciliation Through Anti-racist, Anti-oppression Education at the Gordon Oakes Red Bear Student Centre with Dr. Verna St Denis and Marlene McKay

The Thought Leaders repeated the same presentation to four different groups throughout the event in a manner by which is used by Elders, Storytellers, and Knowledge Keepers to teach and reinforce the important theme of the day. If time allowed, the thought leaders presented a short summary of the dialogue.

Student and Residential School Survivor witnesses moved throughout the Conversation Circles listening and noting interesting points and reflections. The forum concluded with a closing ceremony that had forum witnesses Shyanna Goodwin, Marie Prosper, and Eugene Arcand briefly reflecting on the themes of the day and ended with a powwow dance presentation and participants joining hands and ending in a Round Dance led by Chris Scribe and the ITEP drummers.



INDIGENOUS APPROACHES

At the core of the 2018 Building Reconciliation Internal Forum was ensuring that Indigenous Knowledge systems and protocols were at the forefront of this event. Committee planners sought out to build a respectful, engaged, safe space for thinking together and where Indigenous protocols were put at the centre for each event. Here are some ways in which they approached the event:



DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

We ensured that each circle had a diversity of people, who came from the University community, including faculty, staff and students and identities to ensure that we are in a space that engages in ethical space¹ notions in the conversation circles.



PROTOCOLS

The local protocol of including both First Nations and Métis knowledge holders was an important first step. The protocols of tobacco gifting functioned to invite Knowledge Keeper Norm Fleury to start the day off in a good way with his prayers and thoughtful opening, and concluding with a shared Round Dance by Chris Scribe, Director of the Indian Teacher Education Program, to end the day.



IMPORTANCE OF STORYTELLING

Storytelling is central to how Indigenous people relay their knowledge. Repetition of these stories provides speakers with a proper entrance by allowing each Thought Leader to build from their prior knowledge as they engaged each of their topics in the circle. This was the basis for the conversation circles.



PHYSICAL CONNECTIONS

Having a physical connection with new knowledge or information recognizes that people need to engage their body as well as their mind. Participants were asked to walk to the next event which gave them time to connect and walk to create some physical motion to connect the head, heart and feet to the work they are doing.



GIFTING

Indigenous protocol of gifting is an important element for building and maintaining relations and for supporting learners. Each event provided materials for creating a bracelet of coloured beads and after each circle, they took their learning and beads to the next circle to receive another set of coloured beads. The intent of the beaded bracelets was they could then gift it at the end of the event which honours the belief in gifting in the Indigenous community

¹ Ethical Space was used by Wille Ermine in the article "the Ethical Space of Engagement" in Indigenous Law Journal/Volume 6/Issue 2007

Conversations Circle Review

Each Conversation Circle was approximately 45 minutes long and unlike 2015 and 2017, there were no videos to accompany the Circles as they were meant to be conversation driven and create safety to speak one's truth. There were appointed note takers at each circle who noted general topical ideas or commentaries on what was offered. This report thus relied on these notes to take some meaning and synthesize them to build this report. What follows is a thematic analysis of the raw data from the four circle conversations.

Each of the four conversations circles data synthesized by note takers that day held the following themes that transcended the entire event.

01 Participants, both non-Indigenous and Indigenous, affirmed that racism and the historical effects of colonization are still largely effecting Indigenization and Reconciliation efforts in the university and need to be acknowledged within the university's strategic plan, programming, education, and orientations.

02 The nature of safe space was discussed in all conversation circles with many participants, especially students, noting that they do not feel as safe as they would like, within their classes, whether in the areas of class time, class work, discourses, and social relations in and around the institution. Participants talked about the need for the university to build a greater awareness of safety and racism among their faculty, staff, and leadership to ensure that race, racism and racialization are understood and anti racism principles adopted. All this is needed to ensure Indigenous students safety and safety for faculty to speak about anti-racism without retribution and consequences.

03 Participants noted that the university needed to honor multiple knowledge systems at the university in all disciplines and all levels of leadership came out in all the conversation circles. The need for ceremony, Elders, Indigenous content, and Indigenous-focused research were viewed as imperative for reconciliation and Indigenization in the university.

04 Throughout the conversations circles, most participants shared their own stories of uncomfortable experiences in the university as well as their hopes and dreams for Reconciliation/Indigenization, leading to many emotions expressed. There was a strong sense of hope that change is possible at the university but it would require action oriented strategy that encompasses the TRC Calls to Action and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

CONVERSATION CIRCLE 1:

INDIGENOUS STUDENT EXPERIENCE

Thought Leaders: Candace Wasacase-Lafferty and Student Panelists

Discussion Questions:

1. What brought you here?
2. How important would it be to do a degree and stay closer to your home community? Is it important on being at the university of Saskatchewan?
3. How can Indigenous Students be encouraged to excel?
4. What do Indigenous students want to experience?
5. How do we reach students who are struggling?
6. What is Indigenization?
7. What does it feel like to be safe/unsafe in the classroom or campus?
8. What do you want the university of Saskatchewan to learn from your student experiences?
9. What is good about your experiences?
10. What is the university doing well?
11. What tools did the university give you when you go home?
12. What tools do you have that helped you at the university



EMERGING THEMES FROM THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

a) The first theme that emerged was that all Indigenous students are diverse from their geographical and cultural origins, backgrounds, and experiences. As well, the Indigenous student experience varies on campus, depending on the nature of their academic interests and program choices and college access to Indigenous programming, Indigenous faculty and Indigenous student numbers, all of which impact on their on-going student experience. Everyone is on their own journey.

b) Generally, students from specialized programs like Indian Teacher Education Program (ITEP), Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program (SUNTEP), Northern Teacher Education Program (NORTEP), Aboriginal Students Achievement Program (ASAP), responded that they had a better experience due to the academic and social recognition and enhancement of the Indigenous student relationships with culture, language, geography, knowledges, faculty, etc.

c) Students held that a university environment contributes well to students' learning. Multiple cultural identities of Indigenous People in Saskatchewan, as well as international students, opened new avenues and ways of learning from their sharing together. Learning from diverse groups strengthens their own cultural knowledge.

d) Students are hyper aware of attitudes built on negative or biased assumptions, whether among students, faculty or staff. They noted that the stereotypes and stigmas associated with colour, Indigeneity, or identities as being a barrier to their success within the university. Indigenous students are more likely to witness negativity from what is perceived as equity seats and Indigenous entrance into designated Indigenous programming. Perceived as being weaker academically, they carry these stigmas from professional colleges leading to other social or relational struggles with other students. Identity politics or the negative perception of how one identifies was noted as a barrier to fitting in and developing a sense of belonging among Indigenous students. Students who look or do not look Indigenous experience racialization differently (ex. White passing, not being Indigenous looking, acceptance in ceremonies), creating additional burdens and barriers to engaging in the Indigenous community at the U of S.

e) There was a perceptual split on whether there was enough cultural programming at the university. While many could relay praise for the Gordon Oakes Red Bear Centre, the USask Powwow, and cultural programming, many still had strong feelings of needing more culture infused into the academic learning and education systems with different approaches needed for different students.

f) One-to-One Support was also seen as crucial for students who are away from their home communities, especially for long periods or during difficult times at the university. Mentoring, advisement and counseling were viewed as essential for students away from home to feel a sense of belonging and security from feeling displaced in the university.



CONVERSATION CIRCLE 2:

ALLY RELATIONSHIPS: BUILDING & SUSTAINING RIGHT RELATIONS

Thought Leaders: Elder Louise Halfe & Dr. Louise Million

Discussion Question:

- What is it that I needed to learn in order to be able to do something, to contribute to develop Right Relations?



EMERGING THEMES FROM THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

a) Strong theme of understanding both your identity and heritage as part of first steps to ensuring “Right Relations” with others at the U of S. Identity plays an important role in relationships development, education, and understanding our roles as allies. We need to have a strong understanding of ourselves to see the diversity of others.

b) White privilege and racism were noted heavily in this conversation circle. It is noted that it is easier to stay silent, but there is a strong need noted for people who have privilege to speak up about injustices that they see. To increase the allies needed in this university, awareness and sensitivity to the history of Eurocentric privilege and the systems and discourses it produces are needed to encourage working together.

c) Intercultural awareness and anti racist education are needed to be on-going programming and learning for all levels of the university community, as there are more similarities within cultures and it is essential to have conversations from those of diverse cultural identities.

- Strong emphasis was placed on helping members from settler communities to move beyond shame and guilt and to learn about the history of colonization and their responsibility to ensure that people of color are not doing all the heavy lifting.
- Indigenous and Western ways of knowing are different yet needed to be in everything we do at the university.

d) Strong sense of hope and validation in comments about working together and collaboration at the university makes allyship stronger and possible in one’s lifetime.



CONVERSATION CIRCLE 3:

INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVES ON RESEARCH

Thought Leaders: Dr. Margaret Kovach & Jaris Swidrovich

Discussion Questions:

- What is your understanding of Indigenous research and methodology? Gaps? How is research related to reconciliation?
- Why does it matter that we think about research in education? Why does research matter?



EMERGING THEMES FROM THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- a) Honoring meaningful engagement with Indigenous communities was the biggest theme with many participants noting that relationship building and communication must be done differently, when one is Indigenous or non-Indigenous. Some difficulties were noted when increasingly faculty have to commit to university rules to conduct research within pressures of their current roles (tenure track, publications have less impact on community but needed in university) that often does not honor the relationship building in communities.
- b) Not everyone has the skill or ability to do research with Indigenous communities. There must be standards or cultural competency training to ensure that harm is not being done to the relationships and to Indigenous communities with the research.
- c) There is a need to understand power dynamics and bias that exist among researchers conducting western research. Research is not done to but with participants. We need to change how we look at research and researchers' relationships and perceived roles, as most times the community is the expert in the field not the researchers. Change is needed around Indigenous research being community driven and not researcher interest driven.
- d) Researchers need to move away from a notion of Indigenous people and cultures being a singular group and understand the complexities and diversities of Indigenous cultures across Canada. There is a lot of differences between Indigenous cultures. Pan-Indigenous approaches are problematic.
- e) There is a perceived lack of legitimacy of Indigenous knowledge and research in western methodologies. Difficulties arise when Indigenous research is seen as less than western research or expectations of research is seen in the limitations of western research.



CONVERSATION CIRCLE 4: MEETING RECONCILIATION THROUGH ANTI-RACIST, ANTI-OPPRESSION EDUCATION

Thought Leaders: Dr. Verna St. Denis & Marlene McKay

Discussion Questions:

- How informed are you about anti-racist, anti-oppression?
- What do you need to know about institutional and structured racism?
- How can the USask contribute to building an anti-racist, anti-oppressive society and institution?
- How do those in the dominant group (mainstream, settler community) know and acknowledge and come to terms with holding the power and dominance?



EMERGING THEMES FROM THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- a) While there was an affirmation that many people see the merit in anti-racist work, they were unsure about the depth and breadth of the concepts and feel like they need ongoing education on basic concepts.
- b) The awareness of power dynamics and systemic oppression within the university were evident in multiple references of white men being at the top of the hierarchy and that needed to change. White privilege is engrained within the university and many participants noted that it was a barrier identified by students, faculty, and leadership in the university.
- c) For participants there was a strong sense of the long road ahead in this work and how uncomfortable the topic of racism and anti-racism makes people feel. Many people spoke of personal situations that happen within the university that reinforces systemic oppression and privilege.
- d) Policy and practices within the university were noted as barriers to anti-racism and to reconciliation, including policies related to tenure and promotion, merit, Elder usage, strategic plan needing stronger wording, and the need for health and wellness tools for dealing with trauma of colonization.
- e) In the university context, some success was found in the increase of anti-oppressive or equity understanding in all areas of leadership, classes, and programs.
 - Strong emphasis is still needed for professional colleges to get more anti-oppressive training, such as in law, engineering, and nursing as schools that were brought up more specifically.
 - More discussion is needed with open forums at all levels to discuss this work and creation of toolkits or orientations available in the university.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Through data on conversations with participants and presenters, some takeaways for the next event appeared as follows:

Presenter Fatigue: Although the repetition of four circles was appreciated by participants as it led to smaller groups and a sense of safety in the groups by the end of the day, there was presenter fatigue with hosting the same 4 topics and questions throughout the day. Feelings of getting lost and forgetting what was mentioned as a big issue for the presenters.

Separation of Conversation Circles: Some of the participants had mobility issues and felt overwhelmed with the walk between the different conversation circles which led them to stay at the same conversation circle more than once or to leave the event early. Next years' recommendations would be to have them closer together as some presenters felt very far away from the event and disconnected.

Evaluation and Measurement: As there was evaluation survey in 2017, but no final report and no evaluation survey in 2018 but a final report that year suggests for next year's event, there should be a planned process for understanding the desired outcomes long and short term, and activities directed to ensure that activities follow the planned direction of the events. Creating a strong event logic model and evaluation tools for the day of the event will ensure that compiling data, information and recommendations for next year's event is an on-going activity and streamlined.

Keynote: Many people expressed their excitement and profound wisdom of our keynote speaker Chief Tammy Cook-Searson but noted how short she spoke and felt like it was a missed opportunity to hear more in the beginning of the event. A suggestion for next year's event would be to have a keynote speak to all in the beginning and also host a conversation circle so people could unpack the talk and engage with the speaker.

Forward Thinking: In the conversation circles, there were more reflections and thus strong emotive storying on the layers of problems, barriers, and concerns associated with a topic and very few action-oriented solutions. Next year it is recommended that discussion topics be guided to be more forward-thinking, collaborative, and action-oriented from the diverse locations of the participants.

One Day Event: Although this was seen as a successful event, many people discussed how tired and exhausted they were from the day. This content might be better spread out either between two days of making Internal Reconciliation Forum afternoon events or spread out throughout the year with each year a leading Indigenous speaker beginning the year with a public lecture and discussion.