

CAGS/SSHRC PROJECT: IMAGINING FUTURE RESEARCH CHALLENGES



University of Winnipeg Focus Group Report

Addressing the question:

“How are the experiences and aspirations of Aboriginal Peoples in Canada essential to building a successful shared future?”

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List of acronyms

AANDC	Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada
CAGS	Canadian Association for Graduate Studies
CMHR	Canadian Museum for Human Rights
MDP	Master's in Development Practice
Miigwech	Thank you in Ojibway Language
REB	Research Ethics Board
RRF	Roseau River First Nation
SSHRC	Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council
TEK	Traditional Ecological Knowledge
U of M	University of Manitoba
U of W	University of Winnipeg
UWSA	University of Winnipeg Students Association

Executive Summary

Following an expression of interest submitted by its Faculty of Graduate Studies, the University of Winnipeg participated in the Canadian Association for Graduate Studies (CAGS) project: “Imagining Future Research Challenges.” CAGS has funded this project and others across Canada to help inform the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council’s (SSHRC) “Imagining Canada’s Future” initiative and profile some of the best and brightest minds in the graduate school setting.

The project at the University of Winnipeg (U of W) engaged 8 graduate students (2 males and 6 females including a female rapporteur) using the focus group approach to assess the opportunities and challenges for Aboriginal peoples in social innovation, research and building our knowledge capital for Canada’s future.

The focus group addressed the following question:

“How are the experiences and aspirations of Aboriginal Peoples in Canada essential to building a successful shared future?”

There were several local events and issues that impacted our U of W focus group. There has been significant recent national attention given to Winnipeg following the launch of the Canadian Museum of Human Rights. Less desirable national attention was afforded Winnipeg due to a Maclean’s magazine article highlighting the challenges facing the Indigenous population in our city. Finally, locally our University faculty and students have been considering a proposal by our Student Association for a mandatory indigenous course requirement.

There were many successes recorded during the discussion, while a few challenges were also identified.

Based on active facilitation, the level of participation and contributions by the participants, the thorough analysis of identified challenges, as well as the outputs of the discussion, it was evident that the objectives of the roundtable discussion were achieved to a large extent. Collectively, the talent, knowledge, skills and aspirations of the

participating graduate students at U of W helped to identify some of the emerging issues and challenges facing researchers and Canada's Aboriginal peoples.

Recommendations:

- a.) Increase the support for new researchers doing studies in Aboriginal communities in navigating the complexities of Research Ethics Boards (REB) in academic institutions.**
- b.) A proactive and collaborative approach needs to be taken within and external to Aboriginal communities to disseminate research.**
- c.) Western science could benefit by expanding its understanding of traditional knowledge systems, laying the foundation for development activities that build on, and strengthen the existing knowledge base, produced through generations of creative effort by local communities.**
- d.) The courts are the final arbiters of treaty rights, but provide a Western interpretation of right and wrong. The courts should not be the sole decision maker. Education of the Canadian public on treaty rights, is needed, as this would go a long way to help people Aboriginal peoples rights.**
- e.) Participatory forms of research and action research should be accentuated.**

Introduction

Canada's graduate students are among the next generation of leaders in academia, business and the community. Their observations and experiences are an important piece of the puzzle as our country defines what we need as individuals and as a society to thrive and move forward in the 21st century. For Canada to be successful, we need to anticipate the challenges ahead and keep our minds open to the potential futures facing us all. That is why the Canadian Association for Graduate Studies (CAGS) is undertaking this project in conjunction with the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC). SSHRC has made various proactive investments in Aboriginal research over the years, stressing an approach for and with First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples. Ideally, the knowledge from this focus group discussion will be effectively mobilized to help Canadians understand the current historical, cultural, social and economic situation in which we find ourselves, and to inform the creation of a vibrant, shared future.

The project at The University of Winnipeg (U of W) engaged 8 graduate students (2 males and 6 females including a female rapporteur) using the focus group approach to assess the opportunities and challenges for social innovation, research and building our knowledge capital for Canada's future. Each of the participants shared their biography prior to the discussion (see Appendix 2). During the introduction phase of the group, members also shared the connection that motivated them to engage in the focus group and address questions about experiences and aspirations of Aboriginal Peoples:

The facilitator's interest in the discussion was inspired by his career at the department of Criminal Justice at U of W; as well as his background in indigenous studies and his research on treaties, titles and rights in the court and how the court has dealt with these over the years.



The note taker's passion for indigenous development with a spark of doing development differently is the reason for her participation in the discussion.



My interest in the discussion stirred from my graduate studies in Winnipeg, which exposed me to various discussions on Aboriginal matters, and in my quest to know more and perhaps study how these fore-mentioned matters can be dialogued to build a lasting shared future in Canadian society.



The participant's interest in the discussion demonstrates the need for every Canadian to participate in the discourse and because she intends to work with the Aboriginal communities on issues of resource management. She hopes to learn new knowledge and broaden her experiences.



I am interested in participating in this discussion because the question being asked to the panel is something that I have addressed in some form throughout my education and applies to what I hope to achieve in the future.



My interest in the discourse can be traced to my interaction with the Aboriginal community in U of W and the entire community in Winnipeg. In addition, I want to expand my knowledge and get some ideas about Aboriginal people.



My presence here is based on the idea that I have read and been associated with a range of legal, social, political and economic theories, however I have not learned much about spiritual development or reclaiming spirituality which is fundamental for development.



I do not consider myself as an Indigenous person but a colonizer with that sense of the world. My studies in Indigenous Governance have contributed to my interest in participating here.



1.1 Project Background

When SSHRC launched the initiative, “Imagining Canada’s future”, 6 thematic questions were suggested and universities across Canada were invited to offer an expression of interest in tackling one of those questions. For us at the University of Winnipeg, it was clear that the most appropriate choice for our community was the broad thematic question of:

“How are the experiences and aspirations of Aboriginal Peoples in Canada essential to building a successful shared future?”

There were several recent events and issues arising locally and at the national level that have shaped our University level context and that underscore the importance of Aboriginal issues within the Manitoban landscape:

1.1.1 Canadian Museum for Human Rights (CMHR) in Winnipeg. The Museum (CMHR) was the dream of Winnipeg media magnate Israel Asper and it officially opened in September 2014. It is the first Canadian National Museum to be built since 1967 and it is also the first one in Canada to be built outside of the national capital region. But the creation of CMHR has not been without controversy: some academic and community based organizations have suggested that human rights violations and atrocities other than the Holocaust are being eclipsed, undervalued, or ignored by the museum. It has also been suggested that the discourse adopted by the CHR glosses over Canada’s failings with our Aboriginal peoples while accentuating its successes. In particular, senior staff of the museum officially decided not to use the word “genocide” in association with historical Canadian policies towards Indigenous peoples.

1.1.2 Welcome to Winnipeg: Where Canada's racism problem is at its worst" N. Macdonald, Jan, 2015

Maclean's magazine issued a cover story titled "Welcome to Winnipeg where Canada's racism problem is at its worst." It was an article written by Nancy Macdonald, a journalist formerly of Winnipeg that outlines a constellation of events such as the death of Indigenous youth Tina Fontaine, racist social media posts that made news, controversies during the mayoral campaign and the death of an Aboriginal man, Brian Sinclair while waiting in emergency at the Health Sciences Centre. These, and many other examples led Macdonald to conclude; "Winnipeg is arguably becoming Canada's most racist city."

1.1.3 UWSA Indigenous Requirement Proposal

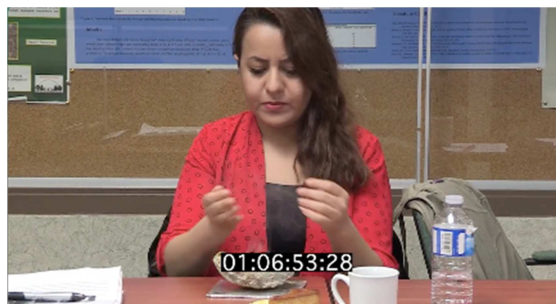
The University of Winnipeg Students Association (UWSA) and the Aboriginal Student Council collaborated on a proposal that required all undergraduate students at the U of W to take 3 credit hours from a list of approved courses that focus on indigenous content or that fosters an environment of knowledge and experience exchange between the Indigenous community and the larger University community. This proposal has not been without controversy, was debated vigorously at the University of Winnipeg's Senate and is currently being developed in consultation with various administration, faculty and student stakeholders.

Focus Group Proceedings

The facilitator started the discussion by welcoming everyone to the U of W on Treaty 1 Territory, the homeland of the Métis Nation. The discussion began with a smudge by Hector Pierre a knowledge keeper from Roseau River First Nation (RRFN) who works with the Aboriginal Student Centre at the U of W. The smudge is a cleansing ceremony and in this respect, the knowledge keeper emphasized the need to clean everything in the meeting room as a way of calling on the creator to foster the spirit of solidarity during the session. Likewise, saying miigwech (thank you) to the creator for good life and requesting the power to speak the right words during the discussion. The smudge was first offered to the east as a symbol of sacredness. Everyone participated in the smudge ceremony preceding the discussion. He offered prayers in the Ojibway language asking for thoughts and directions from the creator for the meeting, believing that everything works out as planned.



Facilitator smudging



Participant smudging

All the participants introduced themselves prior to the start of the discussion to break the ice and encourage interaction. During the introduction, each participant shared the connection that inspired them to participate in the discussion. The facilitator expressed his appreciation to all participants with their broad depth of experience

while offering a brief introduction and project background. He explained that sub-questions would be addressed in relation to the broad thematic question while tying them to the local issues identified, but they were not expected to limit their discussion to this alone. He emphasized that this exercise is about the each participant's perspectives and experiences as graduate students as researchers and as members of the community.

Sub-question 1:

“What barriers exist to increased consciousness about traditional and contemporary indigenous values, cultures, leadership, and knowledge systems?”

The first respondent mentioned that the biggest barriers include ignorance; lack of interest in others and lack of knowledge and appreciation of one another. He further stated that the compartmentalization of the Indigenous people could also be a contributing factor.

In response to this perspective, the facilitator offered connections asking: barriers for whom? The barrier could operate both ways in a mixed discussion regarding the Maclean's magazine article illustrating the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal divide. The facilitator guided the discussion toward ideas that could prevent the divide identified between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities. Also identified were the impediments within the Aboriginal community itself, particularly with Aboriginal youth and the barriers between themselves and their own traditions based on experiences they've had while growing up.

The question was also directed towards the respondent's work and research including the reclamation of spirituality, which speaks to the attempt to cross or prevent the barriers between

particular communities and their cultural traditions and values. The facilitator encouraged the participant to outline some of the work he's done on reclaiming spirituality. The participant remarked that he has found some connection with the Midewiwin¹ which emphasizes the approach that change, and the help you need to find a new life, is not to be found externally but within your culture and also within yourself. He also noted that the barrier that can be depicted within the indigenous tradition - particularly the Medewiwin - is the amalgam of spiritual ceremony where several ceremonies are borrowed from different cultures and mixed into a pan indigenous approach. The facilitator observed that we run the risk of creating something increasingly racialized with the language we use.

The facilitator asked the participants their own views on whether reclaiming spirituality could be useful in overcoming the barriers under discussion. He further queried whether reclaiming spirituality could be helpful in terms of indigenous resurgence, particularly for youth as they experience cultural alienation?

One participant believed that reclaiming spiritually could assist in a person's self-understanding, facilitating resistance to other external barriers, including alienation. However, it requires a supportive community to enable these developments. This idea can be connected to the UWSA's indigenous requirement proposal; which may be likened to English as a prerequisite undergraduate course. Another participant also supported this proposal by pinpointing the barrier in relation to the higher value placed on western knowledge versus traditional knowledge systems. In fact, the way that information is conveyed in the media and scholarship, is critiqued

¹ "The Midewiwin Society, also known as the Grand Medicine Society, are a chosen group who are responsible for the spiritual and physical health of the people. They believe that their gift of healing was given to them by the Creator, not learned. Special instructions by the elders were given to the apprentices on herbal medicines. The Mide (medicine men and women) invited candidates who showed evidence of possessing the gift of healing."

Source: <https://gct3.net/wp-content/uploads/2008/01/midewiwin.pdf>

based on its scientific or western knowledge backing. These barriers can be prevented when we as a society acknowledge that there is value beyond western knowledge and there exists alternate worldviews within our society. Another participant suggested that one of the causes of the barrier is lack of proactive dialogue. Exposure to discourse on human rights, racism, and Aboriginal issues do not begin until the post-secondary level. The participant suggests that as controversial as the Human Rights Museum is, it is imperative that students learn about these issues earlier, resulting in more human respect and interest in other communities rather than “othering” those from different groups.

Another participant disagreed with this by outlining the history of assimilation. At the time of settlement, there was an understanding between the settlers and the Indigenous Anishinabe that each would go their own way. There was no proposal to form one cohesive society, so to suggest that to instill respect and greater understanding while also attempting to incorporate traditional knowledge in Western thought, may actually be assimilationist. He is of the opinion that there is a benefit to embracing separate cultures as long as Indigenous groups stop experiencing discrimination and disenfranchisement and can attain genuine self-governance. However, to try to impose some sort of value, which is still grounded in Western thoughts, such as value in some noble course, sounds like the modern truism that describes these people as sinners and trying to make them better.

Further to this, another participant queried how to give Indigenous people a positive middle ground to know their language and culture while also transitioning into the post-secondary setting without feeling they are behind? The participant, considering the practical barrier to

leadership, indicated that there has been a lot of research done on pedagogy; emphasizing that successful learning includes the knowledge of multiple languages.

One of the participants indicated that she advocates for the idea of Aboriginal rights, and having the option to teach what they choose. However, she described some personal experiences with Aboriginal students who perform well in their schools on the Reserves, however despite their determination; most of them cannot compete with students who have learned in a colonized education system. Consequently these students drop out of university no matter how the professors tried to help them. This same participants reaffirmed that funding may be a solution to the latest issue. The participants who spoke on reclamation of identity/spirituality feel that there is a lot of benefit in reclaiming. However, it is not assimilationist unless the bureaucrats get their hands on it. Thus, it can be viewed as empowering rather than assimilationist.

The facilitator summarized items addressed throughout the discussion including issues around education and funding, self-determination as well as issues of tradition versus modernity and acknowledging that anthropologists have been speaking on this for decades. However, some participants argued that the tradition versus modernity discourse has the tendency to imprison the Aboriginals in a path of tradition and what is to be “authentically” Aboriginal as it removes the possibility of having cultural specificity such as Ojibway, Anishinabe or Cree. This recognizes the perception that Indigenous people cannot remain the people that they are while also embracing modernity.

The facilitator returned to the suggestion that research acts as a barrier between cultures and also between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals; inquiring about participants' own challenges and successes. One of the participants offered a positive example of collaborative research in the ecological field in northern Canada. She shared the experiences of a knowledge keeper in a First Nation community who learned the benefits of a partnership with Western researchers that made the recovery of extinct bears in their community possible. Similarly, another participant emphasized the importance of a positive relationship coupled with a firm understanding of Aboriginal traditions for the success of ecological and scientific research in Canada. This belief is supported by the strong relationship among scientific research, ecological research, environmental sustainability and natural resource management. Much research and development in Canada occurs on the reserves, First Nation lands, traditional territories and treaty areas which impacts how natural resources should be managed and who should be making the decisions.

One of the participants posed the question: in terms of ecological knowledge/research, does anybody pay attention to the Indigenous people locally and what might happen if you proposed a particular development project? The note taker contributed that in terms of climate change effect, Indigenous people have been invaluable with their wisdom and contributions. The traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) possessed by the Indigenous people has been passed on from generation to generation. The TEK is comparable to Western scientific research that studies the climate and environment. Scientists understand the importance of these collaborations, utilizing the TEK acquired from Indigenous people to mitigate impacts of climate change. This has been practiced particularly with the Maori people of New Zealand.

Another participant pointed out systemic negativity and prejudice as a barrier that has contributed to the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal divide. As a newcomer to Canada, she has observed that the non-Aboriginals have a negative bias toward the Aboriginals, and the Aboriginal community in response defensively creates barriers to potential relationship-building between the two groups.

Sub-question 2:

“What is needed to bridge the growing young Aboriginal population’s aspirations and potential to evolving knowledge and labour market needs?”

The facilitator recalled that funding issues were identified in the previous question, which may be an appropriate response. In fact, the way Canada funds education is different from around the world and there is something unique about the way we finance First Nations’ education on Reserves. He further asked participants if there were identified barriers that should be addressed beyond funding in relation to question number 2. One participant suggested that the Government of Canada support provincial Aboriginal school boards, providing them with funding and empowering them to examine and focus on this concern. This participant agreed that additional financial support is one solution.

Another participant pointed out that apart from funding and offering Aboriginal peoples better education, which is very important, there is a need to focus on how to keep people off welfare and maintain a quality sustainable lifestyle. This would offer young Aboriginals the opportunity to succeed and feel positive about themselves.

The facilitator invited the participants to discuss any experiences they've had or observations they've made within a university setting that might assist Aboriginal students with accessibility to higher education, helping them transition, and perhaps participate in research.

A participant related her recent experience teaching an Aboriginal student who found a laboratory course challenging. The university came to her aid by providing her with a tutor at no extra cost which assisted the student to overcome the barrier. Another participant is of the belief that the greatest assistance that can be provided to Aboriginal students, both in academics and in research accessibility, is the recognition that this population of students matter so the students themselves understand that the University community cares about their success.

Sub-question 3:

“How can we build enhanced capacity by, with and for Aboriginal communities to engage in and benefit from research?”

One of the participants from the Sciences remarked that conducting her research using a community-based research approach could be a productive response to the question. Another participant expressed his concern that too often researchers treat Indigenous communities as “object” as opposed to “subject”. Therefore in order for the Indigenous community to engage in and benefit from research, the participatory approach should be employed and these communities allowed to take ownership at any point in time. Action-based, collaborative research should also be practiced to prevent “research exhaustion” within a community that has already experienced extensive study.

The participants further discussed the stringent ethical guidelines within the university in regards to research within the Aboriginal community. They observed that one of the challenges of the Research Ethics Board (REB) is the assumption that there is only one proper way of conducting research. The participants argued that there is not simply one correct method; but it must be managed in a sensible and respectful manner. However, the participants acknowledged that the REB is very important for ensuring that academics undertake successful, safe and appropriate research in Indigenous communities.

The facilitator asked the participants as to the kind of potential they perceive going forward in research and knowledge production and the increased engagement of Aboriginal community. Do we think the Academy has done well or is there still progress to be made?

One participant suggested that much is determined by our impressions of credibility and whether we see Indigenous people as credible. Another participant proposed knowledge dissemination that ensures that the voices of the Indigenous communities are shared outside the research bubble. Another participant suggested that in academia, citation is imperative otherwise the research is not deemed reliable.

The facilitator concluded with sub-question 4:

“What are the implications of historical and modern treaties?”

According to one of the participants, the treaties are the basis of Western society’s perceptions of indigenous communities today and the understanding of these treaties as guided by the Supreme

Court. Until these treaties are enforced properly and the provisions are fully implemented, there really will be no opportunity for self-governance. Another participant proposed that the challenge with historical treaties is the mistrust it generates, creating a challenging system within which people need to work; which is counterproductive.

The facilitator asked in what ways participants felt that graduate education and research can contribute to commitments for social justice and activism. In response, a participant expressed significant learning in social justice available throughout Canada at the graduate level. Another participant noted that her own U of W graduate program was incredibly helpful in expanding the minds of herself and her classmates, generating conversations that would have otherwise not happened. She observed that Graduate Studies at U of W allowed students many opportunities to engage with a diverse group of people at different levels as well as sharing people's perspective and insights.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The focus group discussion was lively and participants were engaged, although a few were not as involved as desirable. The graduate students' collective talent, knowledge, skills and aspirations helped to facilitate dialogue and gave a unique, youthful perspective to the issues, particularly those raised by question 3. The group as a whole reflected on their experiences and focus group dialogue and came up with several recommendations that were identified as critical

a.) Increase the support for new researchers doing studies in Aboriginal communities in navigating the complexities of Research Ethics Boards (REB) in academic institutions

The importance of proper approaches to conducting research in Aboriginal communities cannot be underemphasized. The group felt that REB's could make a significant contribution in this regard by ensuring that new scholars were helped in working through issues.

b.) A proactive and collaborative approach needs to be taken within and external to Aboriginal communities to disseminate research.

Research can be important to Aboriginal communities, as well as research done within the communities. This research also needs to be disseminated and communicated to those who will benefit. This is easier said than done, and requires commitment and perseverance on the part of researchers.

c.) Western science could benefit by expanding its understanding of traditional knowledge systems, laying the foundation for development activities that build on, and strengthen the existing knowledge base, produced through generations of creative effort by local communities.

There are more and more initiatives involving Aboriginal traditional knowledge that are proving of significant benefit to researchers in areas as diverse as environmental sustainability and individual health. Traditional knowledge-generating initiatives should be a priority for funding as they would contribute greatly to a successful shared future.

d.) The courts are the final arbiters of treaty rights, but provide a Western interpretation of right and wrong. The courts should not be the sole decision maker. Education of the Canadian public on treaty rights, is needed, as this would go a long way to help people Aboriginal peoples rights.

Canadians are woefully ignorant of treaty rights and how Canadian governments do not always live up to obligations to Indigenous peoples. Efforts to educate and inform Canadians of these rights are critical.

e.) Participatory forms of research and action research should be accentuated.

Canadian researchers can best help Aboriginal communities by working closely with them in collaborative forms of research, including asking the research questions. More activist agendas are also important to promote positive directions for Indigenous communities.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Picture of Project Team



Appendix 2: Biographies

Gregory (Greg) Saar (First from the left, standing)-Participant



Mr Saar holds a B.A. in Political Science and Philosophy from the University of Alberta M.Div. and a STM from Lutheran Theological Seminary, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan; and is currently registered in the JMP, Religious Studies, at the U of M and U of W. His area of study focuses on Indigenous Spirituality.

Jeremy Leonard Patzer (Second from the left, standing) -Facilitator



Jeremy Patzer is a doctoral candidate in sociology from Carleton University and a contract instructor with the departments of Criminal Justice and Indigenous Studies at the University of Winnipeg. A Manitoban of Metis/Saulteaux and German descent, his research interests include Aboriginal law and, more broadly, the contemporary practices of justice meant to resolve outstanding issues of the colonial encounter that hold an enormous (yet sometimes unspoken) moral purchase on the legitimacy of the contemporary political landscape.

Julia Lawler (Middle from both left and right sides, standing) -Participant



Julia completed a BES at the University of Waterloo and is currently a Master's student in the Bioscience, Technology, and Public Policy Program at The University of Winnipeg. Her research interests include community-based resource management, Aboriginal forestry, and social and environmental sustainability.

Oluwabusola Olaniyan (Busola) (Second from the right, standing) –Note taker

Busola is a current student in the Masters program in Development Practice (indigenous focus). She completed her BSc at the University of Lagos Nigeria and Masters in the Environmental Management (MEM) at the same university. Her interest in development practice is geared towards deploying the hybrid business model - “Sustainability driven”; that will assist to build viable organizations (SMEs) and communities, thus addressing specific social and environmental issues.

Heba Abd El Hamid (First from the right, standing) -Participant

Heba Abd El Hamid is a current student in the joint Master’s program in Peace and Conflict Studies offered by the University of Manitoba and Winnipeg. Abd El Hamid has an Egyptian background with a strong interest in gender and politics in the Middle East.

**Alana Wilcox (First from the left, sitting) - Participant**

Alana Wilcox holds a Bachelor of Arts (Honours) degree in Religious Studies from the University of Winnipeg, where she focused on Aboriginal spirituality and culture. She continued her studies working under the supervision of Dr. Craig Willis where she investigated the effects of white-nose syndrome (WNS), a fungal disease, on the behaviour of little brown bats for her Bachelor of Science (Honours) and tested a novel method to improve survivorship from WNS for her Masters of Science. Currently, she spends her time working and volunteering with various cultural and environmental organizations and hopes to pursue a career in health sciences.

Richard Stecenko (Middle from both left and right sides, sitting) -Participant

Richard Stecenko is a self-employed computer programmer who has been attending part-time at the University of Winnipeg since 2008. He completed a BA in Rhetoric and is currently working on his thesis for a Masters of Arts in Indigenous Governance. His thesis considers means to subvert the First Nation Financial Transparency Act

Masha (First from the right, sitting) -Participant

Mahsa Hooshmandi was born in Iran and grew up in the city of Shiraz where she received her B.Sc. in Agriculture in 2007 and an M.Sc. in Entomology in 2012 (with a focus on integrated pest management and toxicological studies) from Shiraz University. In 2013 she received a scholarship from University of Winnipeg and moved to Canada to do her second M.Sc. in Entomology (this time by focusing on insect ecology and conservation biology). She received a Manitoba Graduate Scholarship in 2014 and will be starting a PhD program in the Biology Department at the University of Calgary in fall 2015 to continue her academic career.

Appendix 3 Focus Group Agenda

Imagining Canada's Future – CAGS/SSHRC Focus Group Agenda

April 16, 2015, 9:00 – 12:00 PM

Room: 4CM41 (C-Fir Boardroom)

Context: For Canada to be successful in the 21st century, we need to anticipate the challenges ahead and keep our minds open to the potential futures facing us all. This is the inspiration behind SSHRC's Imagining Canada's Future initiative. SSHRC has made various, proactive investments in Aboriginal research over the years, stressing an approach by, for and with First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples. This knowledge can be more effectively mobilized to help Canadians understand the current historical, cultural, social and economic situation in which we find ourselves, and to inform the creation of a vibrant, shared future.

Based on the recent attention given to Winnipeg following the launch of the Canadian Museum of Human Rights, the Maclean's article highlighting the challenges of the Indigenous population in our city as well as the proposal of our Student Association on a mandatory indigenous course requirement, we are aiming to address the following question:

How are the experiences and aspirations of Aboriginal Peoples in Canada essential to building a successful shared future?

9:00 AM Smudge: Performed by University of Winnipeg Elder Hector Pierre.

Introductions

Share with us some background—academic or personal—that inspired you to participate in this discussion.

Local Context

As mentioned, the following are a few recent and significant events that demonstrate the pertinence of SSHRC's question to our local context, and can help inform our discussion:

- Creation of the Canadian Museum of Human Rights, its subsequent benefits & controversies
- The January 22, 2015 Maclean's article: "Welcome to Winnipeg: Where Canada's racism problem is at its worst"
- UWSA Proposal to the University of Winnipeg Senate: Mandatory Indigenous Requirement

SSHRC Sub-Questions:

Questions that the Council has offered, in relation to the global question, are as follows:

- What are the implications of historical and modern treaties?
- What barriers exist to increased consciousness about traditional and contemporary Indigenous values, cultures, leadership, and knowledge systems?

- How can we build enhanced capacity by, with and for Aboriginal communities to engage in and benefit from research?
- What role could digital technologies and creative arts play in teaching and preserving diverse First Nations, Métis and Inuit heritage, memory and identity?
- How might the richness of endangered languages and cultures of First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples contribute to global human heritage?
- What is needed to bridge the growing young Aboriginal population's aspirations and potential to evolving knowledge and labour market needs?

Also, given your varied experiences and personal engagements, we are curious to know in what ways you feel graduate education can contribute to commitments for social justice and activism.