

**Elders-in-Residence at Vancouver Island University:
Transformational Learning**

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**Dr. Melody Martin
Dr. Laurie Meijer Drees**

**First Nations Studies Department
Vancouver Island University**

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Abstract

Postsecondary educational institutions across Canada are increasingly committed to addressing the historical disadvantage of aboriginal learners within their programs. Overall, involvement of Elders is perceived as a positive strategy for improving aboriginal student success. Vancouver Island University in British Columbia has, since 1994, pioneered the employment of aboriginal Elders-in-Residence. The findings of this study, based on the question “**What is the value and impact of the role of Elders-in-Residence at Vancouver Island University?**” emphasize the positive contribution Elders from local First Nations communities make to daily life on campus, whether in the classroom or at large. Although the study does reveal that concerns exist about the respect and support for, and the nature of, the role of the Elders as teachers, all respondents nonetheless believed in the value of the positions. The study concludes with four important recommendations for improving, clarifying and acknowledging the important contribution Elders bring to postsecondary education.

Preamble

It is recognized in post-secondary educational institutions in Canada today that aboriginal education is a priority. Universities and colleges across the country are developing new strategies and initiatives to address the need to attract, retain and graduate more aboriginal students than in the past. Concomitantly, there has been identified a need to engage non-aboriginal learners in educational programming that supports and enhances aboriginal education. To this end, a broad range of new policies and programs have emerged, attempting to benefit every learner's journey.

Historically and still today, many aboriginal education initiatives are motivated by a perception that aboriginal learners operate from a deficit position. Such initiatives suggest that aboriginal learners are less educated, unprepared, less able, and hampered by their socio-economic and cultural position in Canadian society. Current alternative perspectives that de-emphasize the deficits of aboriginal learners seem to be, up to this point in time, receiving little or no attention.

Yet two approaches in particular to aboriginal education focus on strengths of aboriginal learners and their communities. First, in 2009, the Canadian Council of Learning, seeking to offer "a new narrative that supersedes the familiar storyline that concentrates on learning deficits and academic shortcomings," published a ground-breaking report on the state of aboriginal learning in Canada. It suggested,

Current measurement approaches typically focus on the discrepancies in educational attainment between aboriginal and non-aboriginal youth (in particular, high-school completion rates) and often overlook the many aspects of learning that are integral to an aboriginal perspective on learning. As a result, conventional measurement approaches rarely reflect the specific

needs and aspirations of aboriginal people. (http://www.ccl-cca.ca/pdfs/StateAboriginalLearning/SAL-ExecSum_EN.pdf)

Instead of adapting the current models for measuring learning, CCL developed a new framework for measuring aboriginal learning based on *aboriginal* conceptions, definitions and domains of knowledge and learning, entitled “Holistic Lifelong Learning Models”. Of note, these models emphasize “the central role that Elders play in the promotion of lifelong learning for aboriginal people” http://www.ccl-cca.ca/pdfs/StateAboriginalLearning/SAL-ExecSum_EN.pdf).

Second and similarly, the Alaska Native Knowledge Network (ANKN) has worked since the 1990s to develop and codify aboriginal standards and domains for knowledge and learning for the public education system in that state. Like the CCL, ANKN acknowledges the central role of aboriginal Elders in successful learning models for aboriginal people. As shared in a discussion on the value of experiential learning, the ANKN reaffirms, “Elders... are an important part of Native life throughout Alaska. One of the strategies that is proving most successful in connecting the school curriculum to students lives in culturally and educationally meaningful ways is through the involvement of Native Elders as teachers...” (<http://www.ankn.uaf.edu/NPE/Elders.html>). Both organizations and their findings emphasize the value of land, community, family and spirituality as critical domains or sources of knowledge and teaching.

Supported by the ongoing, Elder-related work and recommendations of these two associations, the findings of *this* research project assume new and pressing significance. Elders are important to all levels of learning, and based on this research, have a new and valuable position in post-secondary education. In fact, the presence of Elders has the potential to significantly transform the learning framework of aboriginal education in the academy.

Moreover, such change has the potential to benefit *all* learners, students and faculty alike.

Introduction

Since the late 1960s Canadian postsecondary institutions have responded in various ways to increasing pressure from aboriginal communities to enhance the quality and presence of aboriginal education. Programs and initiatives stemming from these responses included the formation of Native Studies departments, Native teacher training programs, Aboriginal Child and Youth Care programs, and enhancements of mainstream professional training in law and healthcare. Concomitantly, aboriginal communities across Canada launched their own postsecondary educational initiatives, driven by the political momentum of the ideas contained within the renowned policy paper *Indian Control of Indian Education* (National Indian Brotherhood, 1972). Scholarship in education began to increase exponentially to address the perceived deficits that aboriginal students demonstrated due to inappropriate educational opportunities and expectations (see for example, Barman, Hebert & McCaskill, 1987; Kirkness, 1992; Battiste, 1995; Kirkness, 1999; Wilson & Wilson, 2002). This literature continually outlined the historical and structural racism within the public education system, and the shortcomings of educational offerings within that system for First Nations students. A primary focus of this literature is on the lack of understanding and commitment within the system, and the associated lack of success of aboriginal students at all levels.

More recently, studies have shifted somewhat to focus more on the need for culturally appropriate education, thereby contributing to learner success (Levin, 2009). Such research includes theoretical discussion about facilitating the use of traditional knowledge, indigenous knowledge, and indigenous languages. Others continue to suggest that decolonizing education is fundamentally the only acceptable approach to remedying the educationally impoverished situation that indigenous peoples face (see for

example, Battiste, Bell & Findlay, 2002). In this literature, the notions of decolonization range from regaining jurisdictional control over education (National Indian Brotherhood, 1972; Stonechild, 2006), reclaiming control over cultural knowledge (Wilson & Wilson, 2004), to indigenizing faculty (Alfred, 2004, p. 95). This theoretical debate continues (see, for example, Kuokannen, 2007; Mihesuah & Wilson, 2004), yet few scholars to date provide much clear, practical, programmatic application of or curricular direction for these ideas.

In an attempt to apply, from a locally-grounded perspective, the sentiments expressed in this aforementioned literature, Vancouver Island University (VIU) launched its First Nations Studies Program in 1992. A critical part of this initiative was to include local Elders in the curriculum and the classroom as a daily and foundational part of the program. Through intensive discussion, conjoint planning and formal partnership, Native bands from the central Vancouver Island region negotiated with university administrators to create a community-based, First Nations Bachelor of Arts curriculum. Today this program continues to have as a key feature a requirement for local Elders who continue to provide leadership for the curriculum and classroom activities. In the fall of 1994, the First Nations Studies Program debuted with an intake of 75 students, the great majority (90%) being of aboriginal descent. The first-year class featured a team comprised of four academic instructors, three of whom were faculty and one Elder-in-Residence. Today, the program consists of five academic instructors and two Elders-in-residence.

Obviously, the program has undergone many changes in terms of course offerings, team structure and curriculum since its launch. One thing has remained constant: the ongoing and active presence of the Elders-in-Residence. Indeed, the role of Elders has begun to expand beyond the boundaries of the First Nations Studies Program. VIU's Office of Aboriginal Education currently hosts three additional Elders-in-residence on its main

campus to offer support to students in all faculties. These Elders are not regular members of a particular class or program. Given all Elders' significant contribution to programs and campus life in general, it became apparent in 2010 that it would be worthwhile to evaluate the Elders' role across the institution.

First, because of the Elders' contribution to the learning environment at VIU, it became important to use an evaluation process to foreground and document more precisely the role of Elders on campus. In this way, it would become apparent if and how the role had evolved since its inception, and thus serve as a form of public acknowledgement to First Nations and university communities of that evolution. Second, there were increasing demands on the Elders to extend their influence to virtually all areas of campus life, which begged questions of what the success of their role was based in. If it could be demonstrated why all areas of the university were interested in availing themselves of Elders, their emergent role could be better described and understood. Third, in 2007 the British Columbia provincial government offered special, one-time funding in support of Aboriginal educational initiatives at a number of postsecondary institutions, including VIU. At VIU, based on the popularity of the existing Elders-in-Residence, some of these funds were used to enhance the complement of Elders-in-Residence in order to serve a broader academic audience. Including the new Elders in the evaluation process would serve to provide additional data and context for a thorough understanding and evaluation of the role and impact of Elders-in-Residence more generally. Fourth and lastly, data and insights gained from an evaluation of the Elders-in-Residence's role and impact would serve to contribute and guide aboriginal education at VIU, where aboriginal education is a stated priority in the institution's overall academic plan.

As a result of the abovementioned historical development and current institutional practices and goals regarding roles of Elders in aboriginal education, a formal evaluation, supported by VIU's Scholarly Research Fund

and the Aboriginal Service Plan, was launched in the fall of 2010. The central question pursued through written surveys and select interview was **“What is the value and impact of the role of Elders-in-Residence at Vancouver Island University?”** Findings from that evaluation featured here clearly show students express a deep appreciation for the Elders, both in their academic and personal lives. Data indicates that the presence of Elders has a transformative effect on student life. In a more constrained way, administration, faculty and staff express clear support for the role of Elders and call on the university to maintain their presence and to further develop their roles.

Methodology

The goal of this research was to assess the impact, academically and personally, of Elders in-residence on students, faculty and staff at VIU, in order to document and generate scholarly insights into the role of Elders in-residence in postsecondary institutions. Data related to this research was derived from the following:

1. written surveys completed by both students, faculty and staff at VIU,
2. face-to-face interviews with individual students, faculty and staff at VIU,
3. information gathered from other Canadian postsecondary institutions hosting Elders, through phone interviews, email and institutional websites.

I. Written Survey Methodology

I. a) Student surveys. The body of the student questionnaire (see Appendix A) was based on a Likert-style survey, consisting of 9 positive statements about the impact of Elders-in-Residence on student life. Respondents were asked to choose among five responses to each statement, ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree,” or “not applicable.” The statements were formulated based on an overview of educational literature, which provided a generally agreed-upon identification of the roles (e.g. teacher, carrier of cultural knowledge, model of cultural protocols and values) and characteristics (e.g. respectful, caring, generous, spiritual) of First Nations Elders. A final statement in the questionnaire asked the student to identify generally the number of interactions that she or he had with Elders-in-Residence. Space was provided at the end of the questionnaire for written comments.

Questionnaires were distributed at three sites on VIU's Nanaimo campus: First Nations Studies classes, classrooms in other departments where Elders-in-Residence were featured guest speakers, and VIU's Aboriginal student centre, The Gathering Place. Participation was voluntary and responses were anonymous.

I. b) Faculty and staff surveys. The faculty and staff questionnaire (see Appendix C) was divided into three parts. Part One asked for general information regarding the faculty member's position at VIU and the number of interactions he or she had had with Elders-in-Residence. Parts Two and Three were based on a Likert-style survey. Part Two consisted of 5 positive statements about the faculty member's professional and/or personal interactions with Elders-in-Residence, and providing a choice among five responses to each statement, ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree," and with a "not applicable" option. The statements addressed areas such as professional development, understanding of local First Nations communities, and increased knowledge in the faculty member's discipline. Part Three consisted of 5 positive statements about the faculty member's perception of the Elders' impact on students in her or his class. For the purpose of comparison, the statements were very similar to some of the statements in the student survey, and addressed areas such as interest, trust, comfort, questioning and respect. Space was provided at the end of the questionnaire for any further comments the respondent wished to make.

The questionnaires were distributed on both the Nanaimo and Cowichan Campuses of VIU, to individual faculty working outside the First Nations Studies Department¹ but with an established history of interaction

¹ First Nations Studies faculty did not participate in the surveys or the interviews, because of potential conflict of interest due to the regularized appointment of Elders-in-residence to that program. Other programs in Nanaimo employ Elders without regularized appointments.

5. The Elder(s) were able to stimulate interest among the students in the classroom.

Strongly agree **Neutral** **Strongly disagree**

1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	N/A
42 (76%)	6 (11%)	1 (2%)	1 (2%)	0	5 (9%)

6. The Elders at VIU widened my perspective of other worldviews.

Strongly agree **Neutral** **Strongly disagree**

1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	N/A
34 (62%)	10 (18%)	7 (13%)	1 (2%)	0	3 (5%)

7. Cultural knowledge shared by the Elder(s) in relation to spirituality contributed positively to the classroom.

Strongly agree **Neutral** **Strongly disagree**

1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	N/A
48 (87%)	2 (4%)	1 (2%)	1 (2%)	0	3 (5%)

Additional student comments. Forty-two of the fifty-five respondents (76%) provided additional comments on the survey form (see Appendix B). All were positive in varying degrees, with the majority being quite positive. There were no negative comments.

In the grouping “Statements about the presence of and need for Elders on campus,” 37 respondents provided a wide variety of words and phrases describing specific elements of their interactions with Elders:

cherished, spiritual support, emotional support, the highlight of the programs, grounding, valuable resource, wisdom, facilitate awareness and understanding, invaluable for the learning process, balance, good sense of humour, instilling respect, grounding spiritually, guidance, comfort, essential part of passing on traditional knowledge, awesome, one of the best educational experiences, an important part of the university, positive, healthy learning environment, “beingness,” puts a face to the historical context of our selected readings, a treasure to the institution.

In the grouping “Statements about Elders meeting personal needs in time of stress,” 5 respondents noted specific and personal help they had received from Elders during a period of stress, such as dropping out of school, mental health issues, homesickness, and spiritual need.

In the grouping “Statements about the overall benefit of Elders on campus,” 2 respondents wrote generally about their realization that Elders could have helped them with challenges in their past, and would benefit others who need guidance.

II.b) Faculty and Staff Survey Findings: A total of **eleven faculty and staff** completed written surveys. Responses were collated according the number of responses to the Likert categories related to 1) each of the 5

statements about the respondents' interaction with Elders, and 2) each of the 5 statements about the respondents' opinions regarding student interaction with Elders. As well, percentages of responses within each category were calculated to the nearest whole number for the purpose of comparison. Additional written comments from respondents were copied verbatim and left unedited. Comments were loosely grouped under the following three categories: "The positive role of Elders in the classroom," "The experiences of respondents who have infrequent or outside-of-the-classroom interactions with Elders," "The need for Elders to play a larger role in governance, decolonization and indigenization of the university" (see Appendix D).

Demographic Information

Respondent's position at VIU?

Six respondents indicated that they were teaching faculty. They taught in a variety of disciplines and areas: Accounting, sport health and physical education, liberal studies, English, carpentry, education, and management. Two respondents indicated that they were non-instructional faculty. One of those respondents indicated that his or her position was that of Program Manager. Three respondents indicated that they were faculty, but did not specify any discipline, area, or department; nor did they indicate whether they were instructional or non-instructional faculty.

Number of times an Elder-in-Residence has visited respondent's classroom within the last 2 years?

0 times 1-2 times 3-5 times 6+ times

5 (46%)	2 (18%)	1 (9%)	3 (27%)
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Strongly Agree

Neutral

Strongly Disagree

1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	N/A
5 (46%)	2 (18%)	2 (18%)	0	0	2 (18%)

Additional faculty and staff comments. All eleven respondents offered additional comments on the survey form (see Appendix D). All were generally positive. There were no negative comments.

In the grouping “The positive role of Elders in the classroom,” two respondents provided comments. One spoke about the positive impact the love and caring, calm, respect and storytelling that an Elder brought to the class. The other respondent spoke of the beneficial impact that Elders have on students, and of the benefits to the country if Elders were integrated into courses.

In the grouping “Experiences of respondents with infrequent or outside-of-the-classroom interactions with Elders,” six respondents offered comments. One respondent explained that he/she had not recently had an Elder in class but had previously hosted an Elder on three occasions. Another respondent explained that some of her/his responses on the survey were based more on personal or collegial interactions with Elders rather than classroom experiences. A third respondent indicated that he/she had previously worked in a bi-cultural team including Elders. This respondent indicated a positive experience, finding it essential to have an Elder in the classroom in a course addressing Aboriginal cultures.

In the grouping “The need for Elders to play a larger role in governance, decolonization and indigenization of the university,” five respondents commented. One comment addressed a perceived need to

decolonize the campus and the curriculum, and indicated that “indigenizing things” was not the same as decolonizing. Another respondent believed that there is “deep and widespread support amongst faculty and staff” for decolonizing the university, and that Elders would play a key role. One respondent spoke of the need to get Elders involved at the governance level of the institution. Another spoke of the need to have Elders in a number of programs across the institution, and that their positions should be funded out of respect for the Elders’ expertise. One respondent expressed a need to deepen students’ understanding of how indigenous knowledge is represented and organized in the academy.

III. Written Survey Analysis

III. a) Student Survey Analysis: Student responses to all nine statements about their experiences with Elders were in general very positive, ranging between sixty-two and ninety-four percent in the category of “strongly agree.” Seventy-five percent of respondents have substantial interaction with VIU Elders each semester: forty-two percent on a daily basis and thirty-three percent between three and five interactions a semester. Given the strong, positive responses to the survey statements, it seems clear that those interactions were of significant value. Of note is statement 9, which is summative in nature: “Indigenous Elder participation in the learning process at Vancouver Island University should be continued.” Ninety-four percent of the responses were in the “strongly agree” and four percent were in the “agree” categories. Even though a quarter of the 55 respondents have three or less opportunities to interact with Elders during a semester, only one respondent disagreed about continuing Elder participation at VIU. Those who had less contact seem to have found it positive enough to desire continued contact.

Statements 2, 5, 7 and 8 involve perceptions of Elders as facilitators or role models of respect, trust, spirituality, support, and interest. These statements received slightly higher percentages of strong agreement compared to statements 1, 3, 4, and 6, which involve more specific ideas about relevancy to course topics, ability to clear up confusion about cultural teachings, the use of clear examples or illustrations to clarify a topic, and the widening of perspectives on other cultures. This difference might suggest that although an Elder's presence supported or encouraged certain desirable values, the exact link to course content and outcomes was not always clear to students.

III. b) Faculty and Staff Survey Analysis

Analysis of Part One. Responses to statements 1 and 2 about classroom experiences or teaching methods correspond generally to the faculty and staff profile regarding the number of visits by Elders in their classroom. Forty-six percent of respondents have never had an Elder in the classroom, so the large number of "N/A" and "Neutral" responses to statement 1 and 2 is not surprising and provides a positive context for the percentages of "strongly agree"(27% and 36%) and "agree"(36% and 9%) responses. Within this context, the percentages indicate the Elder brought appropriate and relevant knowledge to the instructor.

Interestingly, statements 3 and 4 address how Elders may have increased the respondent's knowledge of the local community, or contributed to the respondent's personal and/or professional development. There are notable percentages of "strongly agree"(73% and 46%) and "agree"(9% and 36%), and no "N/A" responses to these statements. This trend seems to indicate that all respondents have indeed had positive experiences with Elders, but not necessarily within a classroom context.

Statement 5, regarding the respondent's future intentions about having Elders in the classroom, shows that eighty-two percent intend to seek

an Elder's involvement. While there are two "N/A" responses, there are no negative responses.

Analysis of Part Two. Responses in Part Two of the faculty and staff survey were favourable overall, with between 64% and 74% of combined responses in the "strongly agree" and "agree" categories. There were no negative responses to any of the statements. Statements 1, 2 and 4, addressing an Elder's ability to facilitate and encourage an environment of trust, respect, comfort, interest and support, received the highest combined percentages of positive responses (73%, 74% and 73%). Statements 2 and 5 addressed more specific activities such as clearing up cultural misunderstandings and encouraging students to ask questions, and received somewhat lower percentages of the combined positive responses (64% and 64%).

Problematically, 46% of respondents noted at the beginning of the survey that *they* had no contact with Elders in their classroom within the last 2 years; yet, the percentages of responses about *student* experiences of Elders in the classroom seem to indicate otherwise. This anomaly might indicate that students involved with Elders in the classroom have communicated their experiences to the respondents, or that faculty respondents have perhaps observed student responses to Elders in situations outside the classroom, such as at feasts and other public gatherings on campus or in First Nations communities. In the "Additional comments" section of the survey, one respondent did indicate answers to this part of the survey were based on interactions witnessed outside of classroom activities.

IV. Interview Methodology

IV. a) Student Interviews: During the distribution of the written survey, students in contact with Elders at VIU were offered the opportunity

to be interviewed individually. Those volunteering to be interviewed were placed on a contact list, contacted in person, by email or by phone, and interviewed at a later time. Interviews were conducted on a “first come, first served” basis, and on a student’s availability at interview times. Five student interviews took place on the Nanaimo Campus. The interviews were conducted, and digitally recorded, by graduate and undergraduate research assistants. Interviewees were assured anonymity in their responses.

The interview consisted of four semi-structured questions (see Appendix E) as well as an opportunity for open-ended comment, at the discretion of the interviewee. The questions focused on the value and importance of Indigenous Elder participation in the learning process at Vancouver Island University.

All student interviews were reviewed in detail, and summative notes on the answers to the four semi-structured questions were taken, along with pertinent quotes. Where there were additional comments, summative notes and quotes were taken on thoughts, ideas or issues that went beyond the four initial questions, and that were still relevant to the topic of the study.

IV. b) Faculty and Staff Interviews: Individual faculty were approached and recruited for interview based on the presence of a regularly featured Elder in their program area (e.g. Child and Youth Care, Aquaculture), or on demonstrated frequent and direct involvement with Elders-in-residence, as part of their professional role (e.g. Librarian, staff in First Nations Student Services). Participation was voluntary and anonymous. Fifteen faculty and staff were interviewed.

The interview consisted of 4 semi-structured questions (see Appendix F) similar to those asked of student interviewees, with questions focusing on the value and importance of Indigenous Elder participation in the learning process at Vancouver Island University. There was also an opportunity for open-ended comment, if the respondent wished. Interviews took place on

the Nanaimo and Cowichan Campuses, and were conducted and digitally recorded by graduate and undergraduate research assistants.

All faculty interviews were reviewed in detail, and summative notes on the answers to the 4 semi-structured questions were taken, along with pertinent quotes. Where there were additional comments, summative notes and quotes were taken on thoughts, ideas or issues that went beyond the 4 initial questions, and that were still relevant to the topic of the study.

V. Interview Findings

V. a) Student Interview Findings

1. What have been the impacts of indigenous Elder participation on your education at Vancouver Island University?

Students indicated that the presence of Elders in the classroom was new to them. One respondent found “it was refreshing to see the elders in the classroom, particularly in discussions, giving their personal insights through life experiences.” Three students spoke about how the Elders’ presence changed them. One respondent stated, “I never really had much contact with Elders in my own communities...It [their presence] triggered something in me about my culture...valuable beliefs and cultural aspects of being First Nations and wanting to instill that in my children.” Another respondent spoke about how the Elders’ presence made him “think so much about life, guidance and patience. When I first came to university, I didn’t have a lot of patience and Aunty Ellen [retired Elder-in-Residence] testified to that and she helped to get me through.” One student stated that the Elders’ participation in the classroom “connects you to land...to this...where they’re from. We can visualize it, even if you’re not Native.” The same student also spoke about the impact on her of learning protocol, and of

hearing song and prayers to start the day; these things remind her “how to be,” and make her “aware and respectful of time and place.”

2. a) What are the benefits of having indigenous Elders participate in the educational process?

“It really made me aware of the importance of listening, learning the skills of listening, and value of their stories, their experiences, their wisdom,” spoke one respondent. Another student spoke of the importance of Elders’ stories as complementing written histories: “...telling the First Nations traditions in relation to the topics brought up in class. I hear that continuously...and of hearing the pre-stories of history and of how things used to be. There is history before history that isn’t written that you need to hear, and the stories that connect time and place.”

Two respondents spoke of the Elders’ presence as important to aspects of institutional leadership and the inclusion of and respect for indigenous knowledge in the educational process. “Traditionally in First Nations cultures, the Elders had a leading role in decision-making amongst the community because of their wisdom.” Another student reiterated, “Indigenous knowledge is so important and it’s something that society is just starting to grasp onto and realize it is important knowledge.”

b) What are the challenges of having indigenous Elders participate in the educational process?

One respondent was concerned about the institution’s ability to understand that “without the Elders being there to give their insights into how they want the [First Nations Studies] courses run, we lose that integral piece of a full spectrum of aboriginality.” Another student stated that although society is beginning to realize the importance of indigenous knowledge, “we’re not quite there yet.”

3. Do you think that the relationship between indigenous Elders and Vancouver Island University can be improved? If so, how can the relationship be improved and why is it important?

Student responses to the need for improvement in the relationship between indigenous Elders and VIU addressed mainly issues of understanding the respect that Elders should be accorded in the classroom and in the wider university. One respondent stated that VIU could do more to make people aware of and “recognize that the Elders are the carriers of the knowledge that is time-tested, sacred knowledge that has been handed down through the generations.” Another student also talked of the need for “understanding. Because I have a lot of Caucasian friends and they’re always interested to hear how much fun we’re having. I think they aren’t aware of the Elders-in-Residence to begin with.” Two respondents spoke of an issue involving parking permits for Elders. “I can think of one Elder that comes here and he was kinda upset, and he said, ‘They took my parking pass away.’ It is simple things like that that you don’t do to our Elders. Why would they do that?” A second respondent stated, “I feel very strongly that when I see my Elder on campus, in the heat of the summer, looking for a parking space because his parking pass has been taken away for his off-season period...but he is coming up here to check in with people...he should not have to be looking for parking.”

Suggestions for improving relationships ranged from ideas of daily/weekly routines to more elaborate activities that show respect for and honour the presence of Elders at the university. One student stated, “You know from your teachings to be respectful of the Elders and go visit the Elders and go listen to stories from them, or just go visit them to see what they have to say and to see how they are doing.” In relation to the parking issue, one student responded, “Our Elders deserve the Gold Card on campus.” Two students gave specific suggestions for raising awareness of the presence of Elders on campus, and honouring and showing respect. One suggested “a welcoming meal at the start of the year so everyone is aware that they are here, why they are here, and acknowledge them, because that is

what we are continuously doing.” Another student suggested sending a delegation of Elders from VIU to and Elders conference.

4. Do you have any additional feedback regarding this research topic that you would like to share that has not been covered in the survey and interview questions?

The various answers to this question were integrated into the answers provided in the first three questions above.

V. b) Faculty and staff interview findings

Faculty and staff interviewees tended to respond to questions in a two-fold manner by relating the question both to the Elders’ impact on students and to the Elders’ impact on faculty.

1. From your experience, what are the impacts of indigenous Elder participation in education on the students and faculty members at Vancouver Island University?

All interviewees stated positive impacts on students. For example, they suggested Elders at VIU

- provide a particular and important kind of guidance for students,
- inspire students with cultural teachings and stories,
- bring a spiritual presence to campus,
- offer counsel to students experiencing life challenges,
- foreground a holistic approach to interacting with students,
- maintain an emotional balance in the classroom,
- pass on beneficial traditional teachings to students,
- promote “groundedness” for students,
- teach active listening through the stories,
- encourage students to value the wisdom that Elders can bring,
- model respect for culture,
- reassure First Nations students,
- play a critical role in student retention,

- help build a bridge between VIU and First Nations students who may have had previous bad associations with educational institutions,
- bring meaningful teachings that are good for all students

The majority of respondents indicated many of the same aforementioned positive impacts on faculty. There were also a number of positive impacts that related more directly to faculty, both personally and in general. For example, Elder participation

- “has changed the way we do things overall... There are protocols that are in place and our administration continually acknowledges the territory that we are in,”
- “has changed me in all aspects of myself as a human being,”
- “adds an extra dimension of knowledge and wisdom that many of the instructors don’t have,”
- “provides local knowledge and ways of doing things,”
- “encourages everyone to pause...for a moment,”
- “defuses situations,”
- has helped our faculty take “the first tangible step in building culture,”
- helps faculty “teach with respect to the [First Nations] culture.”

Of note are a number of statements made by interviewees that indicate either a lack of clarity concerning the role and impact of Elders vis-a-vis faculty and staff, or a perception of conflicting pedagogies that leave faculty and staff wondering how they are supposed to act or react to the perceived conflict. One respondent indicated that the presence of Elders “opens up questions about pedagogy and what education is.” Another respondent, although believing that Elders on campus are “a good thing,” stated, “They are not a resource for me. They’re more a resource for the First Nations Studies Department.” One faculty member spoke about the challenge of

giving up “that space and time [to Elders], not always being totally certain what the relevance of what they’re saying is, because they’re bringing a very different perspective sometimes... In a traditional academic setting, the professor is used to being centre of attention, leader of the classroom. So you are giving up that leadership.” Another respondent spoke as well about a perception that faculty have become separated from influences such as Elders who usually work outside the university setting: “You see, when we work up here, all of us, we become... like the mushroom effect and we are all kind of sheltered from the real world... All of us up here need to step away from the campus and find out what the real world is like.” Finally, some worried about how to integrate indigenous knowledge into their curriculum, asking, “How do I plan on incorporating? Do I find it important? ...What is the appropriate way to incorporate that? What are the guidelines?”

2. What are the benefits and challenges of having indigenous Elders participate in the educational process?

Virtually all interviewees indicated that they had already outlined in Question 1 their thoughts on the benefits of Elder participation in the educational process; therefore, the findings for Question 1 incorporate all responses addressing the positive impacts of Elder participation.

Faculty expressed a fair range of thoughts about the challenges of Elder participation in the educational process. Responses attest again to a perception that the role of Elders is unclear, creating unanswered questions, confusion and inappropriate treatment on several levels. For example, there was a general concern about the institution’s ability, within a bureaucratic structure, to choose and provide appropriate working conditions for Elders. Several respondents spoke about the lack of knowledgeable faculty and staff who could educate others on protocols for working with Elders at the university: “The challenges are in understanding the right way, the appropriate way to approach an Elder, to ask them for help and recognizing that it needs to go beyond just tokenism.” One respondent remarked, “The

institution did not know enough about protocol and being respectful to Elders...There was conflict when there didn't need to be conflict." One person worried, "How do you interview for an Elder? How do you post that job in a respectful way?" Another respondent stated, "The challenges are having the correct Elders...By that, I mean Elders that understand the educational process as well as the transformation that students are going through."

Other respondents felt that it was disrespectful to classify and pay Elders at the level of technician, rather than as faculty. One person stated, "In the current situation they [the Elders] are kinda regarded a little bit as ad hoc: additional personnel, not crucial. They are not professors so they are paid at a lower rate, and the length of the contracts does not match the times when they need to be here; and so you see a lot of volunteer work [by the Elders]." Another instructor involved in a course where the special funding for the Elder expired, talked about the class' difficulty adjusting to the Elder's absence. In a related statement, one respondent asked, "How do we support them [Elders] better? How do we provide them with better working conditions? With more time? And perhaps not feel like they have to be everything to everyone." Another respondent perceived that there remains a general "I-know-we-should-do-this, but-I'm-not-certain-what-the-value-of-it-is" attitude throughout the institution regarding the participation of Elders. One person remarked, "I think the institution on the whole doesn't understand the role and value of Elders."

Faculty and staff talked as well about some of the bureaucratic challenges of inviting and hosting Elders in their classroom. One respondent perceived that "there is an idea out there that they [Elders] are just for native students." Another announced, "I just read on the website that the Office of Aboriginal Education also has Elders, and I don't know what their role is in the institution...I didn't even know they were there." Some faculty felt they did not have enough knowledge of protocols to feel comfortable hosting an

Elder. One person stated a lack of “understanding the protocol and how it [the classroom visit] can all transpire. It would be nice to really understand all those.” Another observed, “I can see how it could be a challenge, the process of setting up visits...like who to go to.” One respondent was concerned about the ability or desire of faculty to follow up on a visit by an Elder: “To me, one of the big challenges is legitimizing this [visit by an Elder] beyond just that visit. I want it to become even more legitimate... legitimized in our school curriculum [and] Ministry of Education.”

There were also concerns among faculty about the how the restricted timing of classroom interactions may challenge Elders: “The challenges of the Elders might be to probably not have enough time to deal with the issues the students bring forward to them.” Another respondent remarked about timely versus timed issues in the classroom: “We are working within a system that is not timely, and because of the value and respect that Elders deserve, they take precedence over other things. And that is not always understood when one goes to one’s next appointment here.” One respondent perceived that Elders might have difficulty “engaging in the classroom if they are not familiar with the content, especially when dealing with science and technology.”

3. Do you think that the relationship between indigenous elders and Vancouver Island University can be improved? If so, how can the relationship be improved and why is it important?

All responses to this question indicated that the current relationship between indigenous Elders and Vancouver Island University could be improved. The central idea in the responses is mainly one of increased opportunities and institutional support for faculty and staff to develop relationships with Elders in order to improve curricula, enhance student experiences, and forge stronger ties to First Nations communities. Ideas included: increasing the number of Elders on campus, inviting Elders to faculty forums and meetings, organizing for Elders to have formal input on

curriculum, and maintaining good communication about who the Elders are and what their roles are.

4. Do you have any additional feedback regarding this research topic that you would like to share that has not been covered in the survey and interview questions?

The various answers to this question were integrated into the answers provided in the first three questions (above).

VI. Interview Analyses:

VI. a) Student Interview Analysis: It is important to remember that all the students interviewed had had contact with Elders at VIU; thus, they spoke primarily from direct experience. Those experiences were decidedly positive. The students perceive Elders' roles as equally valuable to personal, spiritual, communal, and academic aspects of their lives. In the view of students, Elders model and teach attributes such as patience and respect, skills such as listening and exercising protocols, and academic content through their sharing of histories and cultural traditions.

Among the student interview respondents there is particular concern over a general lack of understanding on campus of the role of Elders, and of the respect that should be accorded them. The issue involving the removal of an Elder's parking permit was a particularly sore point in terms of a demonstration of what, in the students' opinion, would be a basic protocol for dealing with Elders. The students seem aware that the appropriate inclusion of Elders and indigenous knowledge at VIU--and in society in general—is a work in progress, and that “we're not quite there yet.”

VI. b) Faculty and Staff Interview Analysis: Faculty and staff interviewed demonstrate a range of openness, enthusiasm and support regarding the participation of Elders in the educational process at VIU. The

positive impact of Elders on the interviewees runs the gamut from the deeply personal and spiritual to the more professional, involving curriculum and pedagogy. Faculty and staff appear confident that they have in common with Elders a concern for the well-being and education of students. Yet, the increasing presence of Elders on campus appears to further impact faculty and staff in a way that they find challenging to articulate, but that can perhaps be expressed as variations of disjuncture, discomfort, confusion, curiosity and frustration.

For some faculty especially, standard perceptions of their disciplinary and pedagogical responsibilities seem to weigh significantly in the face of their experience or impression of Elders' teachings and ways of teaching. Faculty, in some cases, seem to feel that they are put in a position of brokering some kind of academic compromise when they do not have all the information needed to do so. Verbs such as "respect," "honour" and "value" appear frequently in the interview transcripts in positive relation to Elders, but many of the interviewees express a need for more knowledge of protocols and much more interaction with Elders in order to be able to articulate and ground their understanding in appropriate action.

Although not directly stated, interviewees' negative remarks about Elders' job classification and pay, and the general instability of funding for their positions create at least an impression of institutional lack of serious commitment to creating an appropriate place for Elders, and thus to supporting faculty and staff in their endeavors to adapt. This underlying impression could also contribute to some faculty and staff's frustration and confusion.

Conclusions

Postsecondary educational institutions across Canada are increasingly committed to addressing the historical disadvantage of aboriginal learners within their programs. Many varying strategies have been employed in efforts to increase the recruitment, retention and graduation of aboriginal learners, including the development of culturally-responsive student services, increasing the cultural relevancy of curricula across disciplines and even facilitating the presence of aboriginal Elders in classrooms and in the institution at large. For example, many Elders are employed as community liaison workers, while fewer are involved in administrative roles in leadership positions (see Appendix H for a listing of institutions surveyed and findings). Overall, involvement of Elders is perceived as a positive strategy for improving aboriginal student success.

Despite the historical and current volume of research literature focusing on the deficit position of aboriginal learners at the postsecondary level, the *role* of Elders in improving the development of aboriginal education is still not well understood. Scholars such as Battiste et al (2002) recognize that successful inclusion of aboriginal perspectives has still not been attained because change at the postsecondary level has not been “accompanied by a comparable change in the presumptions and content of university curricula and disciplinary knowledge” (p. 87). In fact, her research suggests “Programmatic initiatives have remained at the level of improving access and retention through *add-on* [emphasis added] program innovations” (p. 87). Thus, the inclusion and role of Elders at the postsecondary level as teachers needs to be viewed something more than an appendage to existing classroom structures and curricula.

The Canadian Council of Learning (CCL) and the Alaska Native Knowledge Network (ANKN) have demonstrated that holistic approaches to

aboriginal education, acknowledging and using knowledge domains heretofore relatively new to academic life - including Elders – are key to eliciting positive results for all students, including aboriginal learners. The findings of this study reaffirm and expand on the views and policy and program suggestions of the CCL and ANKN.

This study reveals a variety of important insights on the role of Elders-in-Residence at Vancouver Island University (VIU). The results of the study clearly demonstrate that students, faculty and staff alike see Elder presence at the university as a positive development and opportunity. Overall, students at VIU have the strongest positive response to their experience with Elders-in-Residence. First, student interaction with Elders is a new and exciting development for many - both aboriginal and non-aboriginal alike. Second, Elders serve as significant models of respect, trust, spirituality and support in both students' academic and personal lives. Paradoxically, students do not dichotomize their academic and personal interactions with Elders. Without using the term “holistic”, students allude strongly to the all-encompassing impact on their lives of the Elders-in-Residence. Third, students seem to have opportunity to interact with Elders outside of their classrooms, which they view as a benefit. Students enjoy the benefit of intergenerational contact on campus. Finally, in this study students voiced concerns about the lack of institutional respect for those Elders-in-Residence they hold dear. Interestingly, this concern for the well-being of their senior mentors suggests the teachings of respect and sharing they receive from the Elders have brought students to consider the larger context of Elder presence in a postsecondary setting.

Faculty and staff are also quite positive about the role and presence of Elders-in-Residence at VIU. Overall, faculty and staff reflect a positive attitude towards the Elders, although it is obvious they have fewer opportunities to interact formally and informally with the Elders-in-Residence. Faculty and staff use terms similar to the students in this study to

describe the respect, comfort, trust and interest that Elders engender. Faculty and staff are clear that the Elders can indeed bring appropriate and relevant knowledge to campus. Yet, many reflect on their lack of cultural experience and institutional information that might facilitate increased and relevant contact with the Elders. For some, contact with Elders actually creates a feeling of disjuncture as faculty struggle with their role as teachers *vis a vis* the role of Elders as teachers of another kind. Some faculty suggest feelings of conflict around leadership in the classroom when Elders are present there as teachers. Unlike the students in this study, faculty occasionally dichotomize their own role of academic leadership and their wish to accommodate the leadership of Elders. Despite these uneasy feelings, faculty and staff express confidence in their collective contribution to, and concern for, the well-being of students. Like students, faculty and staff also express concern over the lack of institutional support for the Elders-in-Residence in a professional context.

The findings of this study, based on the question “**What is the value and impact of the role of Elders-in-Residence at Vancouver Island University?**” emphasize the positive contribution Elders from local First Nations communities make to daily life on campus, whether in the classroom or at large. Although the study does reveal that concerns exist about the respect and support for, and the nature of, the role of the Elders as teachers, all respondents nonetheless believed in the value of the positions.

Recommendations

The results of this study speak to several recommendations that VIU might consider in their continuing efforts to support and enhance the role of the Elders-in-Residence.

1. **More time with the Elders would be beneficial for everyone.**

Elders are welcomed and appreciated in the classrooms and as visitors to the many areas of VIU's campuses. Creating and facilitating culturally appropriate and adequate opportunities for all on campus to interact meaningfully with Elders on campus should be treated as a priority. This will no doubt require additional Elders, since those who already work on campus also carry substantive community responsibilities as well. Part of what gives Elders-in-Residence their "credentials" is their ongoing and active presence in the life of their home communities.

2. **Improved protocols and policies for the "care" of Elders would enhance their work.** With increasing demand on Elders' time and attention at VIU, it will be important for the institution to work *with* Elders to plan carefully how many Elders are required and how to apportion their time. In addition, it will be critical that the institution create an appropriate "care" system to address Elders' specific needs as senior citizens *and* as highly valued and deeply respected members of their aboriginal communities. Such policies and protocols should address issues such as: parking, distribution of work hours, number of hours present on campus, number of hours accorded to representation of VIU off-campus, the nature of their supervision, and questions around honoraria.

3. **It is important to confirm at all levels that the Elders are present for the benefit of all.** Misunderstandings and concerns exist on the

part of students, and particularly faculty and staff, around “who can and should have access to Elders.” As a result, it will be important for VIU to publically and pro-actively develop mechanisms supporting the *ongoing* clarification for all stakeholders (including the Elders themselves) of their various roles. This includes *ongoing* discussions around “best practices,” rather than codifying and defining the roles of Elders narrowly. As the Canadian Council of Learning points out, the teachings of the Elders are for everyone. How best to make such knowledge available broadly in a manner that is not prescriptive, nor targeting a minority audience only, is a challenge VIU has an opportunity to address.

4. **Faculty and staff want to learn more about Elders.** Prescriptive guidelines and definitive codes for the roles of Elders are counterproductive to offering as many people as possible access to this invaluable resource. It is recommended that VIU eschew workshops, seminars or conferences as a means of facilitating understanding around the role of Elders. Instead, VIU would be better served by creating experiential professional development opportunities for faculty and staff through direct contact with Elders. It will be important that Elders participate in the planning of appropriate types of increased contact opportunities. Research shows that *unmediated* contact with Elders has the greatest positive outcome for the building of meaningful professional and academic relationships.

APPENDIX A

Research Project:

“Transformational Learning: Elders-in-Residence at VIU”

VIU Student Survey Form

In this collaborative endeavour of VIU professors, students, and graduates, we are assessing the impact of the role of “Elders in-residence” on students and faculty at VIU. Faculty and students have the opportunity to participate in this project through a short survey, and faculty and students may also volunteer to participate in a brief interview following the completion of the survey.

As a participant in this project you are volunteering to participate in a short written survey. The survey will be your opportunity to share the impact of the role of “Elders in-residence” on you professionally, and / or personally.

There are no known harms associated with your participation in this research project. The central anticipated benefit of this research will be to generate scholarly insights into the role of Elders in-residence in post-secondary education.

All records of participation will be kept strictly confidential. Only members of this research team will have access to the data. Data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the supervisor’s office. Data will be destroyed at the end of the project. Results from this study will be reported in a written research report for VIU, an oral presentation for Elders in-residence, and published scholarly articles. However, one of the expected outcomes for this research is that it will be published. Your anonymity is ensured. Any information that may later identify you will be removed.

Participation is completely voluntary. It may be discontinued at any time for any reason without explanation and without penalty. You may choose not to answer any question that might make you feel uncomfortable.

If you have any concerns about your treatment as a research participant in this study, please contact the VIU Research Ethics Officer, by telephone at 250-753-3245 (ext, 2665) or by email at reb@viu.ca.

I have read the above form, understand the information read, and understand that I can ask questions or withdraw at any time.

By submitting this survey, I consent to participate in this research study.

This survey should take approximately 10 minutes of your time.

Section 1

The general purpose of the survey is to gather information regarding the value of indigenous elder participation in the learning process at Vancouver Island University: e.g. participation in classroom lectures, discussions, field trips, and your personal interactions with the elders on campus.

Please read the statements below and put a check after the number that best indicates your opinion; or if the statement does not apply to your experience, check the “non-applicable” (N/A) box.

1. In my class, Elder(s) provided teachings relevant to the subject area.

Strongly agree		Neutral		Strongly Disagree	
1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	N/A

2. The Elder(s) at VIU facilitated an atmosphere of respect and trust in the classroom.

Strongly agree		Neutral		Strongly Disagree	
1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	N/A

3. The Elder(s) at VIU were able to clear up any points of confusion or misunderstanding around cultural teachings.

Strongly agree		Neutral		Strongly Disagree	
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1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	N/A
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4. The Elder(s) used examples or illustrations to clarify the topic being addressed.

Strongly agree Neutral Strongly disagree

1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	N/A
----	----	----	----	----	-----

5. The Elder(s) were able to stimulate interest among the students in the classroom.

Strongly agree Neutral Strongly disagree

1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	N/A
----	----	----	----	----	-----

6. The Elders at VIU widened my perspective of other worldviews.

Strongly agree Neutral Strongly disagree

1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	N/A
----	----	----	----	----	-----

7. Cultural knowledge shared by the Elder(s) in relation to spirituality contributed positively to the classroom.

Strongly agree Neutral Strongly disagree

1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	N/A
----	----	----	----	----	-----

8. Elders at VIU provide role modeling and support to students

Strongly agree

Neutral

Strongly disagree

1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	N/A
----	----	----	----	----	-----

9. Indigenous Elder participation in the learning process at Vancouver Island University should be continued.

Strongly agree

Neutral

Strongly disagree

1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	N/A
----	----	----	----	----	-----

10. During a semester, how often do you interact with the indigenous Elder at VIU.

1-3 times	3-5 times	Daily	N/A
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Section 2 – General Comments

Use the space provided to offer any further feedback or advice regarding the value of indigenous Elders at VIU.

APPENDIX B

Research Project:

“Transformational Learning: Elders-in-Residence at VIU”

Written Survey Comments: Students

Statements about the presence of and need for Elders on campus

I would like to acknowledge the living knowledge through our Elders in residence. What is shared is what needs to be heard. It is never the same. How do you evaluate live, living knowledge?

I deeply appreciate the connection I made with Uncle Ray this year. I truly believe his presence makes the learning experience richer and more valuable. I am so grateful for the opportunity to learn from him.

Culturally, having Elders around – even seeing them reminds me I am part of a culture and it must be remembered and cherished.

I found that the presence of an Elder in the classroom contributed a great deal to the atmosphere in regards to respect among students.

I personally am grateful that we have Elders on campus. It is nice to know that if I ever need to talk to an Elder, there is one here at school. Elders have and share a lot of their knowledge and wisdom.

The Elders provide invaluable spiritual and emotional support for students, First Nations or otherwise.

Not only do the Elders offer teachings regarding what we learn in the classroom, but they also offer emotional support for the students outside the classrooms. They are the highlight of the programs.

I find that their presence in the classroom is grounding. Their wisdom speaks volumes associated with topics in class. I feel that every classroom should have Elders involved in student learning. They are a valuable resource.

Having Elders within the classroom and on campus validates the value of self and gives myself the courage to continue at this learning facility.

Relevant cultural teaching aspects that help to facilitate awareness and understanding of self and environment.

Elders are essential!

Elders are one of the strongest aspects to the First Nations program.

I believe that the Elders teaching are invaluable for the learning process of First Nations studies.

Having been in a First Nations program that utilized Elders differently than at VIU, the comparison shows me just how valuable Elders really are to the learning done in this program. The evidence is endless as to why Elders are important.

Very important to have Elders involved and I think all schools, elementary and so on should have Elders integrated into programs.

This is my first FNAT class at VIU so I left questions blank. I think we are privileged to have Elders in the class and they definitely increase First Nations learning. It is a great opportunity for non-Indigenous people to experience Indigenous culture.

Maintain respect and confidentiality. Easily approachable. Uplifting and spiritual.

Elders provide an invaluable connection to First Nations culture and teachings. A strong support for students and staff.

The value of Indigenous Elders at VIU is very important to any student that attends VIU. To have traditions and values is very beneficial for any students.

Offer value.

First Nations Elders are very important in bringing balance and a good sense of humour.

Due to commuting, I have not had the opportunity to sit one-on-one with an Elder in residence, however, I do find their presence in class as most beneficial to students and faculty, instilling respect with the content of FNAT study – grounding spiritually is key to success.

Elders and Vancouver Island University enable students with guidance and comfort when entering a new setting.

Indigenous elders are very important to students as their cultural teachings make the learning experience and first Nations studies enjoyable, better, ... I love the prayers and singing in the morning it simply makes my day! The support they provide on one-on-one visits is wonderful as well.

The First Nations program is largely centered around cultural exploration and that is not an experience you can get from books alone; it is paramount that elders are involved.

The elders at Vancouver Island University provide invaluable education to their students and are an essential part of passing on traditional knowledge.

Elders in the classroom are awesome.

Having an elder be present in our classroom has been one of the best educational experiences I have ever had.

I interact with an elder at least once a week. The elders bring a comfortable feeling to the class because they remind me so much of my great grandparents.

I think they play an important part of the university.

I can really feel the difference in the energy of the classroom when an elder is not present especially when it's not a first Nations studies class.

I think the advice and participation of First Nations Elders is essential in many of the programs offered at Vancouver Island University.

Indigenous knowledge is very important for a positive, healthy learning environment and the elders on campus provide that to me as a student at Vancouver Island University.

The Elders demonstrated respect, balance and beingness through words as well as actions. My personal development was greatly enhanced with the knowledge shared.

The Elders of Vancouver Island University are integral to the First Nations studies program. They are a treasure to the institution.

Elders in residence at Vancouver Island University has changed and transformed myself and having their presence puts a face to the historical context of our selected readings. I once took zero First Nations studies classes and an elder came to a non-First Nations studies class and made me

realize the importance to honor the day with a prayer and song. They all provide grounding and support.

I am not of First Nations, but cannot explain how much of a positive impact the role of Elders has made on me.

Statements about Elders meeting personal needs in times of stress

Without our Elders I would have dropped out long ago. I am always super excited to come to class in the morning knowing I will hear a song or a prayer or both. I value my Elders so much and feel like they fill such an important role in my academic life as well as my personal life.

It would be nice if there was Elders I can talk with because of my own mind problems. I need help real bad.

I found out that I was able to talk with Elders about various problems that I had and they were very supportive. It made my day to see one of them.

The elders are extremely helpful, courteous, and positive role models on campus. They have helped me through many stressful times and in times of spiritual need.

I am not located near my grandparents and elders seem to fill in gaps of missing elder interactions and teachings.

Statements about the overall benefit of Elders on campus

While I believe that having an Elder present does not change the outcome for me, I do see the benefits of having Elders present for those who need the guidance that they may provide.

I took the Pro Baking program and was not aware of Elders on campus. Guidance with family life would have been beneficial.

APPENDIX C

Research Project:

“Transformational Learning: Elders-in-Residence at VIU”

Faculty Survey Form

In this collaborative endeavour of VIU professors, students, and graduates, we are assessing the impact of the role of “Elders in-residence” on students and faculty at VIU. Faculty and students have the opportunity to participate in this project through a short survey, and faculty and students may also volunteer to participate in a brief interview following the completion of the survey.

As a participant in this project you are volunteering to participate in a short written survey. The survey will be your opportunity to share the impact of the role of “Elders in-residence” on you professionally, and / or personally.

There are no known harms associated with your participation in this research project. The central anticipated benefit of this research is to generate scholarly insights into the role of Elders in-residence in post-secondary education.

All records of participation will be kept strictly confidential. Only members of this research team will have access to the data. Data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the supervisor’s office. Data will be destroyed at the end of the project. Results from this study will be reported in a written research report for VIU, an oral presentation for Elders in-residence, and published scholarly articles. However, one of the expected outcomes for this research is that it will be published. Your anonymity is ensured. Any information that may later identify you will be removed.

Participation is completely voluntary. It may be discontinued at any time for any reason without explanation and without penalty. You may choose not to answer any question that might make you feel uncomfortable.

If you have any concerns about your treatment as a research participant in this study, please contact the VIU Research Ethics Officer, by telephone at 250-753-3245 (ext, 2665) or by email at reb@viu.ca.

I have read the above form, understand the information read, and understand that I can ask questions or withdraw at any time.

**By submitting this survey, I consent to participate in this research study.
This survey should take approximately 10 minutes of your time.**

Part 1- Demographic Information

What is your position at VIU? (Please include discipline/department/area or other pertinent information.)

Below, please circle the answer that reflects approximately how many times an Elder-in-Residence has visited your classroom within the last 2 years?

1-2

3-5

6+

Part 2 – Your Interaction with Elders-in-Residence

Please read the (5) statements below and circle the number that best coincides with your opinion. If the statement does not apply to your experience, circle “non-applicable” (N/A).

1. An Elder-in-Residence provided knowledge which augmented my instruction.

Strongly Agree
Disagree

Neutral

Strongly

(1)

(2)

(3)

(4)

(5)

(N/A)

2. The Elder-in-Residence who visited my class/area addressed topics relevant to the curriculum.

Strongly Agree
Disagree

Neutral

Strongly

(1)

(2)

(3)

(4)

(5)

(N/A)

(1) (2) (3) (4) (5)
(N/A)

2. The Elder-in-Residence facilitated a comfortable and supportive atmosphere.

Strongly Agree Neutral Strongly
Disagree

(1) (2) (3) (4) (5)
(N/A)

3. The Elder-in-Residence was able to clear up points of confusion or misunderstanding around cultural teachings.

Strongly Agree Neutral Strongly
Disagree

(1) (2) (3) (4) (5)
(N/A)

4. The Elder-in-Residence facilitated an atmosphere of respect and trust in the classroom.

Strongly Agree Neutral Strongly
Disagree

(1) (2) (3) (4) (5)
(N/A)

5. The Elder-in-Residence encouraged students to ask questions.

Strongly Agree Neutral Strongly
Disagree

(1) (2) (3) (4) (5)
(N/A)

Part 4 – Comments

APPENDIX D

Research Project:

“Transformational Learning: Elders-in-Residence at VIU”

Additional Survey Comments: Faculty

The positive role of Elders in the classroom

The greatest value that I observed in inviting an elder-in-residence in our classrooms is the focus placed on love and caring that is essential in teaching and learning. Establishing an immediate sense of calm and groundedness was--has been--also very powerful. In the midst of a demanding program, creating and reaffirming the need to listen patiently and calmly with respect and openness to words spoke from an elder is an important component. Storytelling as a form of knowledge and communication was also highlighted.

It would be a travesty to not have elders in the classes geared primarily to First Nations Arts Transfer students. It would be a great thing for our country as elders were included in any courses focusing on First Nations Arts Transfer topics. Let me rephrase that: it is a travesty that they are not integral to those courses.

Experiences of respondents with infrequent or outside-of-the-classroom interactions with Elders

I haven't had any elder in class for a couple of years now; last time I taught the class I had younger speakers on First Nations spirituality. Aunty Ellen spoke in my class on three earlier occasions.

My answers in part two are based on personal--collegial interactions with elders. My answers in part three are based not on classroom activities but other interactions I have witnessed with students.

My experience was in the context that no longer exists--a bicultural team teaching Arts One First Nations. I indicated not applicable for questions five, part two, because I no longer teach courses in which having an elder in my classroom is feasible. If I were to teach again in the course addressing aboriginal culture, the presence and participation of an elder would be

essential. I thank elders Ellen White, Ray Peter, and Louise Underwood for teaching me to listen, to learn from stories.

In the past we have asked elders to open our classes with an opening prayer, and none have ever participated in the class after the prayer.

The need for Elders to play a larger role in governance, decolonization and indigenization of the university

The institution should actively work towards decolonizing the campus and the curriculum. I don't think that's the same as indigenizing things?

If elders were involved at the governance level of the institution that might be a move away from lip-service. (Would elders see themselves at the governance level? What would it take to get them invited to that level?).

There is, I believe, deep and widespread support amongst faculty and staff, for a sincere move towards decolonization. I can think of five-six people in my building alone who truly, deeply, understand some of the issues. Elders play a key role in their having "got it."

I wonder if there's a way of working with an elder to deepen students understandings of how indigenous knowledge is represented and organized in the scholarly literature. Right now it's pretty much a great divide in terms of language used in library land, and the reality of words that scholars use, and the words used by ordinary First Nations Arts Transfer citizens.

Elders should, I think, be based-funded in a number of different programs around campus, and in courses focused on First Nations topics, but not just in the First Nations program. Hiring elders as sessionals does not ensure that they are treated with full respect by this institution (sessionals of whatever stripe don't get well treated). Bottom line. They are essential for the institution! They can support, educate and create a dynamic difference in the education of all students!

APPENDIX E

Research Project:

“Transformational Learning: Elders-in-Residence at VIU”

VIU Student Interview Questions

Interview questions:

1. What have been the impacts of indigenous Elder participation on your education at Vancouver Island University?
2. What are the benefits of having indigenous Elders participate in the educational process? The challenges?
3. Do you think that the relationship between indigenous elders and Vancouver Island University can be improved? If so, how can the relationship be improved and why is it important?
4. Do you have any additional feedback regarding this research topic that you would like to share that has not been covered in the survey and interview questions?

APPENDIX F

Research Project:

“Transformational Learning: Elders-in-Residence at VIU”

VIU Faculty Interview Questions

Interview questions:

1. From your experience, what are the impacts of indigenous Elder participation in education on the students and faculty members at Vancouver Island University?
2. What are the benefits and challenges of having indigenous Elders participate in the educational process?
3. Do you think that the relationship between indigenous elders and Vancouver Island University can be improved? If so, how can the relationship be improved and why is it important?
4. Do you have any additional feedback regarding this research topic that you would like to share that has not been covered in the survey and interview questions?

APPENDIX G

Research Project:

“Transformational Learning: Elders-in-Residence at VIU”

Other Canadian Postsecondary Institutions Surveyed

Names and Provinces of Other Postsecondary Institutions Surveyed		
Capilano University, BC	University of British Columbia, BC	St. Thomas University, NE
Chemainus Native College, BC	Acadia University, NS	University of Manitoba, MB
Nicola Valley Institute of Technology, BC	Cape Breton University, NS	University of Winnipeg, MB
North Island College, BC	Dalhousie University, NS	First Nations University of Canada, SK
Simon Fraser University, BC	St. Francis Xavier, NS	University of Saskatchewan, SK
Thompson Rivers University, BC	Mi'kmaq/Maliseet Institute (Univ. of New Brunswick), NB	Memorial University of Newfoundland, NF

Information on other institutions

In order to frame this research project within the context of First Nations Elders’ presence and participation in post-secondary programs across Canada, a survey of 18 other institutions was conducted. A questionnaire consisting of six structured questions (see Appendix H) was used to gather information on post-secondary institutions involving First Nations Elders in some capacity in their programs. Questions sought specific

information on 1) whether the institution worked with Elders, 2) the role of Elders in the institution, 3) the institutional designation or title for Elders, and 4) the placement of Elders within the physical space of the institution. Responses were collected using the various institutional websites and emailing or telephoning representative employees.

Findings. The four general categories listed above were used to collate responses for the purpose of establishing patterns of institutional involvement of First Nations Elders, and for comparing them to Elder involvement at VIU.

Institutions that work with Elders. Fourteen of the eighteen respondents indicated that their institution has an existing working relationship with Indigenous Elders. The responses did not necessarily imply that the institution employs Elders, however. For instance, one institution stated that it has members of an advisory council who are in contact with Elders. Another institution responded vaguely that it has relationships with Elders from numerous nations to reflect the diversity of the students attending the institution.

Four of the institutions surveyed do not have an existing working relationship with Indigenous Elders. It is of note, however, that employees from two of these institutions indicated that they have personal relationships with Elders. Another institution responded that although its Aboriginal Student Advisor is the contact for Aboriginal communities and Elders, that position is currently vacant.

Roles of Indigenous Elders in the institution. The roles of Elders in other post-secondary institutions are diverse. Elders' work tends to reach beyond duties specifically listed in their job description. The range of Elders' roles and responsibilities includes: teaching in classrooms; providing cultural guidance and support services for students, staff, and faculty; liaising with communities; sitting on committees and advisory councils.

Seven of the institutions surveyed have Elders working in the classroom. Some are designated for a particular program such as Nursing, Indigenous languages, and Bridging programs. Two institutions have faculty members with regular teaching positions who are considered Elders. One institution noted that while Elders are regularly involved in classroom programming, they are not a formal part of the curriculum.

At seven institutions, Elders were involved in roles as community liaisons. Community liaison includes activities such as: liaising with public schools, involvement with the Department of Education, committee membership, youth camps, and volunteer activities.

At three institutions Elders are involved in administrative roles, which include the following activities: participation in advisory councils and developing new programs and services for students.

Student services and support is a key role for Elders. This role involves activities such as: providing counseling, support and encouragement to students, both as a group and privately. At twelve of the institutions surveyed, Elders are in roles of student service and support; they provide services to staff and faculty as well at five of those institutions. However, Elder support for students and faculty tends to be program specific.

Elder roles involve providing opening prayers and ceremonies for classes and events at seven of the institutions surveyed. They deliver guest lectures and presentations for classes at eight of the institutions.

At four of the institutions, Elders are involved in the role of providing cultural guidance. The methods of delivery vary. Some provide guidance for cultural workshops that take place on campus. Some are involved in providing instructors with language and cultural knowledge, and educating institutional departments about the protocols for working with Elders. Some

are involved in cultural ceremonies held within the community and made accessible to students.

Institutional designation or title for Elders. There are varying employee designations for Elders at post-secondary institutions across Canada. Not all Elders at these institutions had professional titles designating them as Elders. At one institution, Elders are designated as members of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE). At four institutions, Elders are designated faculty members. At four institutions, Elders are not actually employees; instead, they receive honoraria in compensation for guest speaking in classes or attending institutional activities. Four institutions have special employee designations for Elders, such as “Elder” or “Elder-in-Residence.

Placement of Elders within the physical space of the institution. Elders are housed within student services for Indigenous students at five of the institutions surveyed. At three institutions Elders are located in the area of faculty offices. Elders at three institutions have a separate office space. Two respondents explained that Elders have no office space at the institution; instead, when Elders are invited to classes, they sit in the classroom with the students. A unique response from one institution indicated that it mattered little where Elders were housed in the institution; they had built the house (institution) by their work in developing, directing and teaching the Indigenous Studies program.

APPENDIX H

Research Project:

“Transformational Learning: Elders-in-Residence at VIU”

Survey questions for other postsecondary institutions

Name of Contact, Institution and Program:

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1. Does (*name of program or institution*) have an existing relationship with Indigenous Elders?

2. If so, what is the role of Elders within the program and institution? (i.e. Classroom, student services, academic programs)

3. How does the institution classify Elders' position titles? (i.e. Faculty members or technicians)

4. Are the Elders employed year round or are they employed for certain months of the school year?

5. Are the Elders available to all students?

6. Where are the Elders located within the institution? (i.e. Part of student services, separate office space, or with faculty).

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