

“Tourism is a way to not only support our economy but to sustain, revitalize, and steward our lands. To move forward in truth and reconciliation and invest in our young people”. (Community member)



Enhancing Community Capacity and Evaluating Place-Based Pedagogy in Indigenous Tourism



**INDIGENOUS
LEADERSHIP
INITIATIVE**

Foreword

The genesis of the Indigenous Ecotourism Training Program (IETP) originates from the relationship between the Heiltsuk Tribal Council and Vancouver Island University, established through a protocol agreement between the two. Even though the agreement is between our respective organizations, in truth, like-minded and committed people gave effect to the successful implementation of this program. This relationship was fortified after successfully hosting the Tribal Canoe Journey to Bella Bella in 2014 for “Qatuwas: People Gathering Together”. Following that event, focus was on developing and delivering on various Qatuwas legacy projects including this ecotourism training program focused on a human legacy, well-being initiative with the objective of education, training, and capacity building within Heiltsuk and other coastal First Nation communities.

Fulfilling our stewardship responsibility, supporting human well-being amongst our communities, building and supporting the conservation economy through skills development, inspiring Indigenous youth from rural and remote communities by seeing the possibilities through visiting other communities and entrepreneurs delivering successful and prosperous enterprises was the motivation for developing and implementing this unique Indigenous tourism training delivery model. Each month, students and professors would travel to a new community where Indigenous tourism was delivered. Being in the field allowed interaction with local tourism owners, operators, and entrepreneurs who willingly shared their knowledge. Local government from the First Nation and communities were also welcomed and also shared their knowledge, thus, affirming what the students were learning and being taught in the courses. This expansive network grew throughout the delivery of each course delivered in the field. Instructors’ networks were also growing with Indigenous people and tourism operators, creating an enriching experience for all. This is an example of how First Nations communicate with one another – acknowledging one another and one’s territory and affirming who we are and where we come from. Elders or representatives from each visited community welcomed us to their territory and shared the history of the area they currently reside.

After six years of delivering this program and training to nearly one hundred First Nations young people from coastal First Nation communities, we thought it is important to review, evaluate, and determine the programs’ future direction. Through contracting out the instruction and curriculum from both Vancouver Island University and North Island College combined with travelling and meeting with local communities, Elders, other governments, leaders and entrepreneurs – including having ourselves consistently navigate, champion and hold up the students to achieve their potential – all contributed to the success of this program with the hopes it would inspire others based on a solid six-year proof of concept for this innovative tourism experiential education delivery model that helps indigenize the academy.

It has been a unique program in that it was delivered monthly in the field, and this was a challenge and a plus for participants. As for those working students, it was hard to leave their jobs for a short period and navigate the complexities of home responsibilities left behind. Yet, for other potential students, some did not fully qualify for educational sponsorship based upon the parameters. Eventually, with formative

evaluation, the delivery model evolved and the sponsorship eligibility adapted to a certificate program delivered monthly over nine months.

Students shared they liked it better than going to class for four months at a time and having to relocate for school. It was the steppingstone for many to consider post-secondary education; for once enrolled, they were a VIU/NIC student and, for many, they were the first to attend a post-secondary program. This type of programming expanded and enhanced participants' lives as we hear from them today. They continue to all share the tools they learned, applying and realizing the value of the education they received. Plus, many have asked when we are going to Delivery Level 2 of the program. In supporting the conservation economy going forward, the potential of combining the ecotourism and stewardship program would allow participants from coastal First Nations to meet employment criteria to work in the field whether in tourism or other areas.

It has been a real pleasure and gift to be a part of this collaboration and watch the program adapt and grow from 14 credits to 37.5 transferable credits, and including an internship has been invaluable. The program became richer and richer and met the needs of adapting First Nations' communities. Plus, many of the students/participants became lifelong friends.

In this time of reconciliation, we encourage First Nations to engage with educational institutions and others and build together, walk together, have those hard discussions, and reap the awards of the youth – the participants who, in the end, benefit from the leadership that said yes to collaboration. We start small and build the programs that enrich our communities and those who become a part of our lives and eventually our communities.

Frank Brown and Kathy Y. Brown

Bella Bella, June 2022

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Executive Summary

Transformation: an act, process, or instance of changing (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2022).

The term that seemed to transverse all voices and perspectives in this evaluation process was transformation — the transformation of the student, instructional team, communities of practice, administrators, and First Nations. But that transformation was not easy, not even for a minute.

As coined by Knowledge Keeper, Advisor and Cultural Coordinator Frank Brown,; “You cannot have the sweet without the sour.” This journey, from the pilot year to six years of Indigenous ecotourism program delivery, have included the sweet and the sour of building something from the ground up, something ground-breaking, new and innovative, and challenging yet rewarding, all the while building relationships, breaking boundaries through educational systems, and making a way forward for emerging Indigenous youth. The sour encompassed the unknown source of funding, timelines, the significant administrative workload, numerous voices and perspectives that needed to be heard at once, tensions between western pedagogy and Indigenous ways of knowing and learning, and the recruitment of students who were sometimes unprepared and unknowing of what was in front of them.

But clearly the sweet overpowered the sour, with transformational impacts weaved throughout the story of students, community, and people who embarked upon the journey of educational pursuits.

It was extremely rewarding after all! The personal and professional development of young Indigenous leaders was evident through confidence, employment skills and tourism industry contributors.

“So no matter what happens going forward we will gather this information, gather together and make sure it is not lost. It’s really people that make this and maintaining the goodwill and the commitment to the work and the vision of supporting First Nations capacity in education. We capture this story in gratitude for the work so that it can inform our future.” (Frank Brown)

Through the lasting friendships, cultural connections and paths of learning, the bitter taste of sour faded in comparison.

What does it take to create this type of collaborative work?

Ground truth is where we started: determining what is the information that is known to be real or true. This comprehensive evaluation process, spanning over 12 months in 2021-2022, endeavoured to uncover and expose those answers through review of past documents, reports and relevant literature, consultation with focus groups and community, asset mapping involving eight Indigenous research assistants, involvement of graduates of the program, and by completing interviews with students and First Nation members. The evaluation found that the Indigenous Ecotourism Training Program (IETP) did an exceptional job of delivering field-based, experiential ecotourism training contributing to employability in the tourism sector, and significantly influenced personal growth, self-esteem, and cultural pride.

The key findings and considerations from the evaluation are organized in three areas: First Nations, students, and community of practice (instructional team, administration, and industry). The evaluation led to six key findings from the Nations, seven from students, and four from the community of practice, followed by a combination of 23 considerations.

Summary of Findings



1. Protect and Respect: Land-Based Healing – Our Land Our Voice
2. Cultural Restoration: Cultural Pride – Nationhood
3. Regional Collaboration: Get Along to Move Along
4. Exploit and Extract: Community Caution
5. Reconciliation through Tourism: Bringing Healing
6. Responsibility: Active Participation



1. Transformation: Life Changing
2. Nationhood: Identity Development, Belonging, and Cultural Pride
3. Cohort Bond: Friendships for Life – Peer Support Network
4. Culturally Insensitive Instruction: Negative Impacts
5. Mentorship: Game Changers Frank and Kathy Brown, Cultural Coordinators
6. Place-Based Learning: Experiential Learning
7. Skills for Employment: Integrated Work Experience



1. Instructional Faculty Experience
2. Western Pedagogy and Indigenous Learning: Two-Eyed Seeing Framework – Decolonization
3. Systemic Challenges: Curriculum, Credentials, and Assessment
4. Administration: Messy Work

Summary of Considerations



1. Tourism is more than just an economic generator for our Nations; it is an opportunity to build our youth and our language and celebrate who we are.
2. Work through, in a good way, conflicting community interests, finding what is best for the Nation.
3. Tourism can be a gateway for reconciliation; it changes stereotypes, beliefs, and compassions. Intentionally build Truth and Reconciliation into the program through discussions, debates, storytelling, respecting the past, and moving forward into the future.
4. More place-based education is what will support our youth. They need to be connected to the earth to understand the rhythms of life and learning.
5. Evaluate connection of ecotourism education to the guardianship, conservation, and stewardship economy.
6. Tourism is a self determination for economic reconciliation requiring collaboration to bring regional tourism economic fairness and fully develop the Indigenous market share. Communication strategies need to be enhanced to support a collaborative attitude and approach which has the potential to improve Nation to Nation regional collaboration for tourism growth.



1. Students may require multiple efforts to be successful in educational achievements.
2. Awareness of intrapersonal barriers which include self-sabotaging attitudes towards education, such as “I cannot do this, or my family will not support me.”
3. Students who have a sense of belonging and connectedness thrive in their learning and are more engaged.
4. Intentional and iterative learning for an Indigenous learner develops deep understanding.
5. Holistic approach to learning is required for whole-person transformation through education.
6. Some students may require additional wrap-around support services, and/or counselling arising from unstable housing, emergency funding required, family responsibilities and circumstances, personal health and well being. Often, families and employers do not fully understand the ramifications of educational pursuits away from your own community.
7. Awareness that supporting students’ personal and mental wellness is significantly challenging and typically falls to the cultural coordinator. Enhance a full, team, integrated approach to student success through additional training and support in this area.
8. Continue to enhance student educational support, such as homework sessions, tutors, peer support, writing labs, etc.
9. Continue to include Elders and elected councillors as much as possible, following traditional protocols. A diverse learning environment is essential in preparing students to adapt to an evolving world and embrace those different from themselves. The program has a dynamic learning atmosphere with eight to ten instructors per program, numerous guests, business owners, invited Elders, and community members, both in and out of the classroom setting. Lecture presentations, experiential activities, field trips, hikes, public presentations and more create a vibrant culture for curiosity.



1. Indigenous education must be relevant to the learner. By both instructor and students embracing a trans-systemic synergetic approach, benefits can be experienced by all.
2. While Indigenous instructors have not been prominent in the program, they can enhance the student experience and the instructional team. Non-Indigenous faculty come with a willingness to be vulnerable and flexible in the learning environment but require culturally-sensitive training.
3. As instructional designers, educators empower students to connect deeply to learning outcomes through the experiences they create. This requires humility, a willingness to adopt and adapt and an openness to the co-teaching aspects intentionally implemented with the Cultural Coordinators.
4. Having Elders and cultural coordinators participate throughout the entire student experience is critical to reinforce protocol, land acknowledgements and Nation traditions and family connections.
5. Develop a sustainability plan inclusive of VIU administration, Recreation and Tourism department chair leadership and/or World Leisure Centre of Excellence supported with multi-year funding.
6. Curriculum review and development considering delivery, pedagogical, and curricular relevance considering current issues of Truth and Reconciliation, regenerative tourism, land conservation, and stewardship.
7. Enhance development and training for a more robust, culturally-sensitive instructional team.
8. Establish communication and coordination systems identifying roles and responsibilities between program instruction and cultural coordinators.

Acknowledgments

Throughout this report we have endeavored to tell the story through the voices of students, First Nations, communities of practice, administrators, and literature. As the people crafting this story together, we hope we have reflected and respected your voice, your perspective, and emotions. For allowing us to ask the questions, for your willingness to share your experiences and opinions, captured in vulnerability and strength, we say THANK YOU.

Heiltsuk First Nation – Bella Bella

Ahousaht First Nation – West Coast of Vancouver Island

Kwikasut'inuxw Haxwa'mis First Nation – Gilford Island (east of Port Hardy)

Namgis First Nation – Alert Bay

Homalco First Nation – Bute Inlet, Campbell River

Dzawada'enuxw First Nation – Kingcome Inlet, Broughton Archipelago

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Introduction

Research Goals

The Indigenous Ecotourism Training Program (IETP) is a partnership between the Heiltsuk Tribal Council, Vancouver Island University, and North Island College that offers a unique, innovative, community-based program that aims to improve learning outcomes for First Nations students, through hands-on training in communities that are operating Indigenous ecotourism businesses. This research project aimed to complement the capacity-building program – IETP – with a research component to benefit six First Nations located in the coastal region of BC, by informing and supporting the development of Indigenous-led tourism.

This collaborative research was divided in two streams: Stream 1: Mapping of Tourism Assets, and Stream 2: Evaluation of the Place-Based

Pedagogy Within IETP; it included partners from First Nations’ communities and students from the 2021 IETP cohort to assist with the inventory of the tourism assets in the partner communities. The inventory will support the strategies that intend to guide the development of long-term sustainable Indigenous tourism initiatives in the coastal region of BC. Additionally, an evaluation of the place-based pedagogy used in IETP was completed in each community. By capturing and evaluating the experiences of students, instructors, stakeholders, and community partners, we can better understand Indigenous ways of learning and knowing, informing education models moving forward.

Stream 1: Mapping of Tourism Assets



Goal: Enhance community capacity to engage in and benefit from Indigenous Tourism Development.

Stream 2: Evaluation of the Place-Based Pedagogy Within IETP – Telling the Story

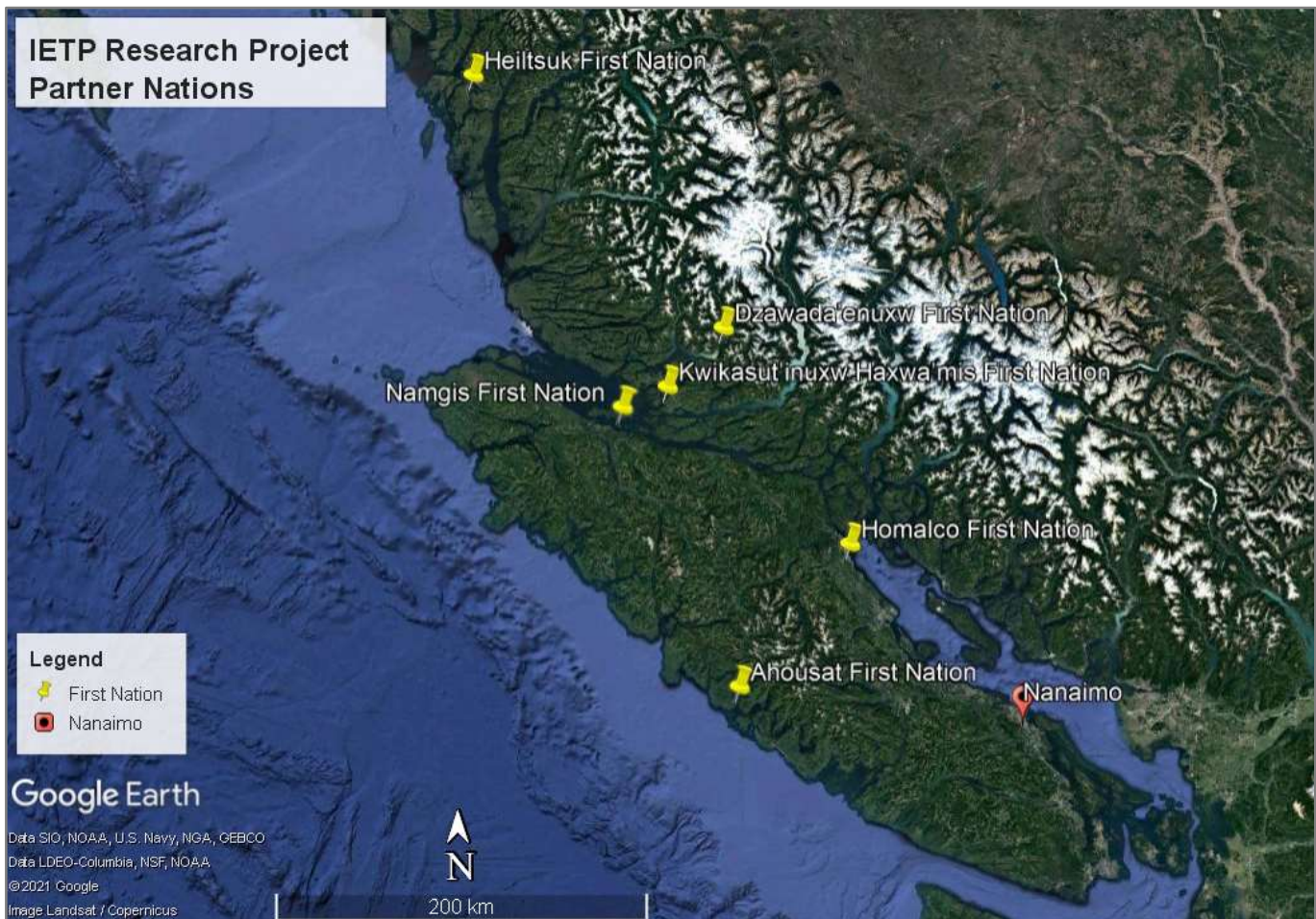


Goal: A robust evaluation of the effectiveness of place-based pedagogies within the context of an Indigenous Ecotourism Training Program.

This research project collaborated with the following First Nations:

1. Heiltsuk First Nation – Bella Bella
2. Ahousat First Nation – West Coast of Vancouver Island
3. Kwikwit'inuxw Haxwa'mis First Nation – Gilford Island (east of Port Hardy)
4. Namgis First Nation – Alert Bay
5. Homalco First Nation – Bute Inlet, Campbell River
6. Dzawada'enuxw First Nation – Kingcome Inlet, Broughton Archipelago.

The following map intends to provide a contextualization of where the Nations are centred, since their traditional territories go well beyond the specific place name.



This research aimed to evaluate the teachings and impact on local communities in a way that supports reconciliation. The work of two renowned Indigenous scholars, Verna J. Kirkness and Ray Barnhardt, stresses the important of

teaching practices that address “the Four R’s – Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity, and Responsibility”. Kirkness & Barnhardt (2001) teach us that we can begin to build our

communities with a better understanding of Indigenous Peoples when educators and schools:

- ✓ **respect** First Nations' cultural integrity;
- ✓ provide education that is **relevant** to First Nations' perspectives and experience;
- ✓ foster **reciprocal relationships**;
- ✓ demonstrate **responsibility** through participation.

Furthermore, this research incorporates learning and knowledge from the work that has been developed with the Heiltsuk First Nation for sustainable tourism development in the Great Bear Rainforest, where these partners have worked together and are continuing to build upon their partnerships. The continued relationship is evidence of the shared community at work for positive change towards sustainable Indigenous-led tourism.

It also incorporates learning from the previous five deliveries of IETP in supporting approximately 80 successful participants who represent 32 regional First Nations and

Indigenous communities, who have gained valuable skills, knowledge and understanding to engage with and further Indigenous community-led tourism initiatives.

Research Phases

This research project started in 2020 with the intent to evaluate the program after five years of successful deliveries. The program was delivered online in 2020, and the funds that were not spent on the field trips were reserved for the evaluation process. This allowed VIU to seek more funding and put together a full research proposal that aimed not only to evaluate the IETP but also to enhance capacity building in Indigenous ecotourism in the participant communities by engaging Indigenous students, Indigenous tourism operators, and communities in the process.

The phases of the research project are described below.

Phase	Period	Activities
Funding	2020	Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Training – funds from the delivery of IETP in 2020 (\$20,000)
	Jan/21	Regional Innovation Funds – VIU (\$20,000)
Project Set Up	Feb - Mar/21	Team Meetings: Expectations/goals/timeline
Project Development	Mar/21	Development of Interview Questions
	Mar/21	Ethics Application - development and submission
Project Implementation	May/21 Jan/22	Data Collection: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary • Secondary
	Sep – Oct/21	Indigenous Student Training <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completion of the Tri-Council Policy Statement Certificate: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans – TCPS 2 • Interview Training: Conducting and recording interviews, saving and sharing files • Secondary Data Collection Training
	Jan- Apr/22	Data Analysis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • thematic analysis conducted by the research team; • perception checking with team members, including cultural coordinators
Project Wrap Up	Apr- May/22	Report Writing
	Jun/22	Knowledge Mobilization

Program Background

The Roots of IETP

Vancouver Island University (VIU), as the lead post-secondary institution, along with North Island College (NIC) and Heiltsuk Tribal Council (HTC), submitted an application for the Aboriginal Community-Based Delivery Partnership Program (ACBDPP) to develop and deliver an Indigenous ecotourism training program. The application followed a previous partnership on an ACBDPP application that provided the Heiltsuk community with delivery of VIU's *Certificate in Event Management* program in Bella Bella, supporting the community's capacity in coordinating "Qatuwas 2014 – Tribal Canoe Journeys", hosted in Bella Bella in July of that year.

Vancouver Island University and Heiltsuk Tribal Council have had a protocol agreement in place since August 2011. The new project was considered an opportunity to further develop the relationship in order to meet the educational and training needs of community members.

The program was built on VIU's *Event Management Certificate* and designed to support the growing interest of First Nations' communities in developing and enhancing tourism businesses focused on ecotourism and heritage tourism.

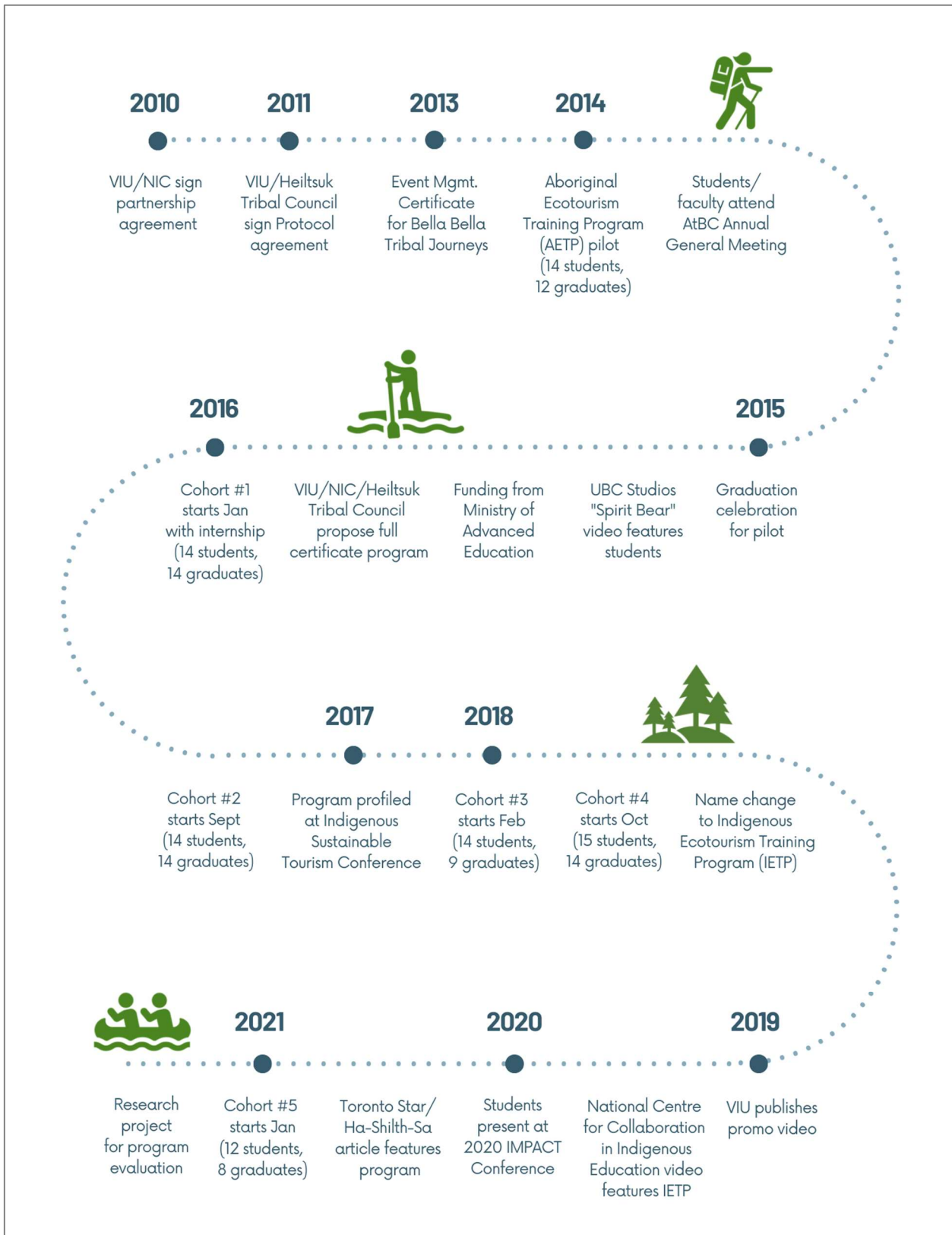
The first round of funds allowed the delivery of a pilot that offered five credit courses to a cohort of students from eight First Nations coastal communities. The program was designed to support the development of individual skills in the adventure/ecotourism industry with a focus on introducing leadership and entrepreneurial skills while achieving industry certifications, such as Wilderness First Aid and Restricted Operator Certificate – Maritime.

In 2015, the Ministry of Advanced Education announced funding for community-based programs to target marginalized First Nations youth with the funding requirement for First Nation and post-secondary partnership in support of Indigenous students. Based on the success of the pilot project, VIU, NIC and HTC teamed up again to propose the full certificate program. The success of the pilot allowed for a multi-year funding application that secured the funds for the delivery of the program for Cohorts #1 and #2 between 2016 and 2017.

It is important to highlight that tuition fees, learning resources, travel and accommodations during course delivery were covered, and additional travel supported. Also, there was a focus to target and recruit Indigenous students who may not necessarily meet post-secondary requirements and would have limited access to post-secondary education otherwise.

For a better understanding of the history of the IETP, the following section presents a timeline of the most important events and milestones of the program, from the signing of the MOU agreement between VIU president and Heiltsuk Tribal Council elected chief, later a signed sub-contract with North Island College, to the Tribal Journeys, the pilot, the following five cohorts, and up to this research project.

Indigenous Ecotourism Training Program Timeline



The Core Team

In this section, the core team of IETP was invited to share a quote regarding the program. The core team is considered those who were involved in the establishment of the program in its yearly years and include; Frank and Kathy Y. Brown, Past VIU President Ralph Nilson, Pam Botterill, Nicole Vaugeois, Sheila Cooper, Sharon Hobenshield, Dave Pinel, and Rob Ferguson.



The IETP Core Team



“Relationship was key to the success of the program and this was made possible through the combined trust in the learning process; from all the various partners (Nations, faculty, staff and students). And most definitely the Four R’s were used to ground us in all our decisions over the years. My time providing the administrative support and guidance to the IETP has been the most rewarding and at the same time the most challenging work that I’ve done at VIU. Maneuvering the multiple political infrastructures required the ability to problem-solve while maintaining internal and external relationships, to ensure the program continued to move forward.”

Pam Botterill
Manager, Indigenous Development, Vancouver Island University



“The IETP program incorporates the fundamentals of Indigenous philosophy and practice through applied land-based learning, ensuring Elder’s teachings and prioritizing community relationships. The result is Indigenous students having a sense of belonging and agency in the program, which leads to not only a successful completion of the program, but also generates pride and a responsibility to give back from the opportunity they have been provided. Reciprocity is a wonderful learning outcome to promote healing and wellness among all our relations.”

Sharon Hobenshield
Executive Director, Kwùmut Lelum Foundation



"The IETP is a beautiful example of trusted partners coming together to co-create an ever-evolving program informed by Indigenous communities' interest in advancing the stewardship of their own human, natural and cultural resources."

Sheila Cooper
Indigenous Community Engagement Coordinator,
Vancouver Island University



"Having been one of the initial evaluators for this innovative program, I was pleased to read about the continued focus on relationship building and the impact that the program is having on students and Indigenous community partners. This model is one of a kind that holds key lessons for the design and delivery of place based programs with Indigenous partners."

Nicole Vaugeois
Associate Vice-President, Scholarship, Research
and Creative Activity



"The Indigenous Ecotourism program has been a highlight in my life – challenging, humbling, and rewarding – so now an ongoing reference for all of my teaching. I appreciated the flexible teamwork between the partners for creating fluid learning

opportunities that accomplished much more than a series of courses. The students were key partners for helping to facilitate many of the rich community and cultural connections that maximized relevant outcomes. I appreciated how the cohort approach with students from multiple Nations and backgrounds, while themselves being visitors to each others' territories, helped to build a network of ambassadors. This was enriched by each cohort supporting subsequent cohorts, building a wave of positive interactions. I look forward to staying connected with as many of the graduates as possible, and continuing to work with them within the ecotourism sector and as instructors with future students."

Dave Pinel
Faculty/Coordinator, Adventure Guiding and Indigenous
Ecotourism, North Island College



"The body of work that has come to be known as the IETP has been the most worthwhile, rewarding and challenging that I have had the privilege to be involved in thus far in my professional life. I'm grateful for the teachings and the opportunities that have been shared with me along the way and committed to the work ahead. Onward!'

Rob Ferguson
Acting Associate Dean, Faculty of Management,
Vancouver Island University

Program Structure and Deliveries

“The program bridges the technical skills aspects with local knowledge and Indigenous world views in a powerful formula, providing a unique and transformative experience.” (Frank Brown)

The Indigenous Ecotourism Training Program aims to address the labour market shortage in support of communities’ economic and social initiatives. The focus of the training program is ecotourism, and the learning outcomes were strongly supported through a mix of experiences close to home, and as a tourist of sorts (educational tourism) in other First Nations’ territories and communities.



Outdoor Class in Lund - Mapping

This innovative model of delivery was designed in a way that supports Indigenous learners and aligns with best practices in ecotourism and adventure education. Learning takes place “in context” so that students can learn about concepts and then apply them in practice in a work environment. Also, students are exposed to best practices in Indigenous tourism and have

many opportunities to engage with industry leaders.

The diversity of the cohorts, with students coming from a number of First Nations, as well as the opportunity of travelling and experiencing tourism products in different locations as a core aspect of the training, truly enhances the learning experience. It also inspires and empowers them to share their Nation’s stories.

The pilot in 2014/15 offered five courses with a total of 13 credits, evolving to a 14-course program with a total of 39 credits, including the internship component. Courses were delivered in a compressed format (6-7 days per 3-credit course), at different locations selected according to specific tourism opportunities. Critical to the program was the opportunity to meet the local First Nations, follow traditional protocol and acknowledge the territories with an Elder or a representative from the local First Nation who welcomed students to their territory.

The courses were led by both North Island College (NIC) and Vancouver Island University (VIU) with equivalent credit transferability from each institution. The course descriptions by cohort are presented in the following section.

Note: If description is not presented, it means the course was the same as previous years.

The Pilot (2014-2015)

The pilot was delivered in 2014-2015 with 12 students from eight First Nations and included five courses with a total of 13 credits and an additional VHF Radio Certification.

The courses offered in the pilot year were:

TGA 100: Guiding Skills 1

Course Description: Introduction of tools for establishing and maintaining physical and psychological safety considerations for effective outdoor guiding leadership, preparing students with the practical skills specific to field training experiences and industry expectations for risk and trip management.

TGA 131: Field Specialty 1 (Canoeing)

Course Description: Development of tandem-paddling and tripping skills for flatwater and lake canoeing as per industry standards. Course provides a solid foundation for understanding and effectively managing these craft in camp and wilderness settings. Students are exposed to the rich history and modern use of canoes in Canada and traditional use of canoes within coastal BC's First Nations communities.

TOUR 207: Heritage Interpretation in Tourism

Course Description: A study of the planning and delivery of heritage interpretation messages for a variety of tourism venues such as parks, historic sites, and urban attractions.

TOUR 215: Tour Group Packaging

Course Description: An introduction to tour packaging for inbound and outbound tour groups. Emphasis is on the tour packaging process including research and design, negotiation and booking, costing and pricing of tours and development marketing techniques to sell tours.

TGA 111: Wilderness First Aid

Course Description: This course includes CPR "C" and provides comprehensive training and certification for wilderness guides operating remote from immediate emergency medical assistance.

NAU 016: Restricted Operator Certificate

Course Description: This intensive seven hour course prepares students for, and includes the examination for the Restricted Operator Certificate (Maritime) (ROC-M) as administered by the Canadian Power Squadron for Industry Canada.

Nations, and Cohort #2 had 14 students from nine First Nations.

The course offered for Cohorts #1 and #2 were:

TGA 100: Guiding Skills 1 (same as previous year)

TGA 131: Field Specialty: Paddling Skills 1

Course Description: For this program we will focus on developing paddling skills and certification across a variety of craft suited to Indigenous Tourism products.

TOUR 100: Introduction to Tourism

Course Description: An introduction to the role that leisure "plays" in contemporary society and how leisure affects the quality of life for the individual and the group.

TOUR 110: Co-operative Education Preparation

Course Description: This course will prepare students for their first Co-operative Education Work placement by examining job search strategies, resume creation, and effective interview techniques.



First Aid Training

Cohorts #1 and #2 (2016-2017)

For the first and second cohorts, the program was delivered between January 2016 and June 2017. Cohort #1 had 14 students from 11 First

TOUR 207: Heritage Interpretation in Tourism (same as previous year)

First Host

Course Description: A one-day course designed to train participants to offer exceptional service to visitors while maintaining cultural authenticity and appropriate cultural sharing.

TGA 110: Guiding Skills 2

Course Description: This course further integrates leadership techniques and considerations with environmental and navigational considerations when planning and managing outdoor adventure activities to industry standards.

TGA 111: Wilderness First Aid (same as previous year)

TOUR 159: Environmental Stewardship in Tourism

Course Description: An examination of the relationship between natural resources and the development of tourism opportunities.

TOUR 215: Tour Group Packaging (same as previous year)

TGA 132: Field Specialty: Paddling Skills 2

Course Description: For this program we will focus on developing paddling skills and certification across a variety of craft suited to Indigenous Tourism products.

NAU 016: Restricted Operator Certificate (same as previous year)

TRMT 309B: Internship

Course Description: Optional work-study opportunities for students not participating in the Co-operative Education option.



Lessons from the “Bush man”

Cohorts #3 and #4 (2018-2019)

For the third and fourth cohorts, the program was delivered between February 2018 and September 2019. Cohort #3 had 14 students from eight First Nations, and Cohort #4 had 14 students from 11 First Nations.

TOUR 100: Introduction to Tourism

TGA 100: Guiding Skills 1

TGA 110: Guiding Skills 2

TGA 111: Wilderness First Aid

TGA 131: Field Specialty: Paddling Skills 1

TGA 132: Field Specialty: Paddling Skills 2

TOUR 207: Heritage Interpretation

TOUR 159: Sustainable Tourism

TOUR 101: Introduction to Tourism Marketing

Course Description: An introduction to all aspects of tourism marketing including situation analysis, objectives, market segmentation, target marketing, budgets, marketing methods, monitoring, and evaluation. Particular emphasis is placed on understanding B.C.’s major market areas.

NAU 016: Restricted Operator Certificate

TOUR 212 Planning for Tourism and Indigenous Community Economic Development

Course Description: Drawing on both Western theory and practice and Indigenous values and traditional knowledge, this course will examine tourism as an effective tool for Indigenous community economic development (CED).

TOUR 110: Internship Planning

TRMT 309B: Internship

Course Description: Work experience through VIU Experiential Learning Department (8 weeks – Cohort #3: May to August, 2018; Cohort #4: May to August, 2019)

Cohort #5 (2020-2021)

For the fifth cohort, the program was delivered between January 2016 and June 2017. Cohort #5 had 15 students from six First Nations.

TOUR 100: Introduction to Tourism

TGA 100: Guiding Skills 1

TGA 110: Guiding Skills 2

TGA 111: Wilderness First Aid

TGA 131: Field Specialty: Paddling Skills 1

TGA 132: Field Specialty: Paddling Skills 2

TOUR 207: Heritage Interpretation

First Host

NAU 016: VHF Restricted Operator Certificate

TOUR 101: Tourism Marketing

TOUR 212: Planning for Tourism and Indigenous
Community Economic Development

TRMT 309B: Internship

TOUR 259: Sustainability in Tourism

Course Description: This course examines the relationship between sustainability and tourism in terms of behaviour and service delivery. It introduces concepts of environmental stewardship and sustainable tourism, best practices, resource and tourism asset management to maximize benefits and minimize impacts to ecosystems, communities, and visitors.

“As a lifelong learner and practitioner in the pursuit of meaningful careers and purposeful service for myself and others, I can tell you the road is never easy. It takes practice and courage to listen to the calling of the soul. Then, trusting the heart to follow the call.

And that is just what the students did (...) they engaged and committed to their individual and cohort’s success.” (Work-integrated Learning Faculty, VIU)

Students who successfully complete all the courses are awarded VIU’s *Certificate in Adventure Tourism and Recreation*. The courses also enable students to accomplish approximately 65% of North Island College’s *Adventure Guiding Certificate* if they choose to pursue that with advanced placement, or within the *NIC Tourism & Hospitality Diploma* (Adventure Guiding option).



Program Completion Ceremony (2018)

The following table presents the number of students that have participated in the IETP and the First Nations they come from. Over the years, 32 First Nations have engaged with IETP, not only in terms of representation, but providing essential support for their members to succeed in the program.

	First Nation	Pilot 2014/15	Cohort #1 2016/17	Cohort #2 2016/17	Cohort #3 2018/19	Cohort #4 2018/19	Cohort #5 2020/21	Totals
1	Ahousaht	2	2	2	2	2	4	14
2	Kitigan zibi Algonquin FN					1		1
3	Cowichan Tribes		1			1		2
4	Da'naxda'xw/Awetlala				1	1		2
5	Dzawada'enuxw						1	1
6	Dene Nation	1						1
7	Ditidaht First Nation		1					1
8	Dzawada'enuxw		1			1		2
9	Gwa'sala-Nakwaxda'xw			1				1
10	Haida Nation	2					4	6
11	Heiltsuk Nation	2	3	5	5	2		17
12	Homalco				1		2	3
13	Ka:'yu:'k'th' / Che:k'tles7et'h'					1		1
14	Kitasoo				2			2
15	Klahoose					1		1
16	Komoks		1	1				2
17	Kwakiutl Band Council		1					1
18	Kwikasut'inuxw Haxwa'mis						2	2
19	Kwakwaka'wakw	1						1
20	Kyuquot		1					1
21	Metis	1						1
22	Musgamagw Dzawada'enuxw				1			1
23	Namgis					1	2	3
24	Nuxalk	2	1	1		2		6
25	Songhees				1			1
26	Snuneymuxw		1	1				2
27	Stz'uminus			1				1
28	Tsimshian	1						1
29	Tseshah		1	1				2
30	Wei Wai Kai					1		1
31	Wei Wai Kum			1				1
32	Wet'suwet'en				1			1
	TOTAL	12	14	14	14	14	15	83

Work-Integrated Learning and Internships

Work-integrated learning is an essential aspect of the program, allowing students to put in practice the content and skills developed throughout the program and acquire work experience in the ecotourism field.

The eight-week, nine-credit internship course is delivered through VIU's Centre for Experiential Learning Department. To support entry into the tourism sector, participants worked with the work-integrated learning faculty member (with support from other course instructors and program coordinators) to identify their eight-week work internships.

The following is a list of the partner businesses for which students worked as interns (2018-2021):

- Tseshah First Nations
- Shearwater Marine Resort
- Homalco Wildlife and Cultural Tours
- U'mista Cultural Centre
- Nawalakw Healing Society
- Sasquatch Trading
- Nootka Marine Adventures
- Kwa'lilas Hotel
- Klahoose First Nation
- T'ashii Paddle
- Walters Cove Resort
- Spirit Bear Tours
- Spirit Bear Lodge
- Heiltsuk Tribal Council
- Nunumus Management
- Clayoquot Wilderness Resort
- Sea Wolf Adventures
- Moresby Explorers
- Knight Inlet Lodge
- Aboriginal Journeys
- Discovery Marine Safaris
- Farewell Harbour Lodge
- Songhees Tours
- Ocean Adventure Charter Company
- Qqs Projects Society
- Tin-Wis Resort

Methodology

The project encompassed different sets of data collection that included primary and secondary data for both research streams.

To achieve the goal of Stream 1: Mapping of Tourism Assets, the methodology included semi-structured interviews with key members from partner First Nations and Indigenous tourism operators and secondary data collection conducted by the Indigenous Research Assistants.

To achieve the goal of Stream 2: Evaluation of the Place-Based Pedagogy Within IETP, the methodology also included semi-structured interviews — this time with former IETP students, faculty, administration staff, and key members from partner First Nations. The research team also conducted focus groups with instructors and administration and conducted a thorough secondary data collection that included reports, publications, conference presentations, media releases, and other relevant information related to the program.

Stream 1: Mapping of Tourism Assets



Semi-structured interviews: Elected and Hereditary leadership (appreciative enquiry/snowball sampling); Indigenous Tourism operators

Secondary data: tourism assets in each of the partner communities

Stream 2: Evaluation of the Place-Based Pedagogy Within IETP – Telling the Story



Semi-structured interviews: former IETP students, faculty, community staff, and elders (purposeful sampling).

Focus groups: instructors

Secondary data: reports, publications, conference presentations, media releases and all available data related to the Program.

Research Findings

This section presents the research findings organized to address the research goals of Stream 1: Mapping of Tourism Assets, and Stream 2: Evaluation of the Place-Based Pedagogy Within IETP. First, the mapping of tourism assets conducted by student research assistants points out the strengths and challenges to the development of Indigenous tourism in the partner communities. These findings are then deeply explored in the “First Nations Voice” section. The following “Indigenous Student Voices” and “Community of Practice” sections then present the findings in regard to the qualitative evaluation of the IETP proposed in Stream 2.

Mapping of Tourism Assets

The purpose of this analysis was to identify community assets, strengths, and gaps in the development of tourism within the six communities of Ahousaht, Dzawada’enuxw, Heiltsuk, Homalco, Kwikwasut’inuxw-Haxwa’mis, and ’Namgis. Through inventory and tourism mapping, the communities indicated the following key aspects:

Highlights

1. **Everything is connected** - each community’s tourism operates around the community and includes natural features and cultural heritage (i.e., cultural figures, spaces, and places, etc.), as well as the idea that everything works together as “one”.
2. **Environmental Stewardship** - each community has specific land management and/or resource committees that allow them to “take ownership” to land-use. It

aligns with the highlight below of “territory reclamation or land back”.

3. **Traditional Ecological Knowledge** - this comes from community-led tourism operators and tours. Being community-led, this also comes from cultural leaders, Elders, and knowledge keepers.
4. **Cultural and Language Revitalization** - cultural and language revitalization is important to these communities in regaining self-determination that the history of oppression and colonization took away from them.
5. **Territory Reclamation or “Land Back”** – continued assertion of title and rights to lands and exercising responsibility to traditional territories (land, water and resources) is an important theme as many communities have “land code and land use” projects on the horizon. Reclaiming traditional and ancestral sites within these communities will ultimately give communities unlimited opportunity on how to use their land (i.e., tourism operations such as camping, historical sites, etc.).

Opportunities

There are ample opportunities within each community for cultural tourism and ecotourism. The following themes came from exploring Indigenous Tourism BC’s website for transparency, and corresponds to their marketing approaches:

1. Arts and Culture
2. Outdoor Adventure
3. Wildlife and Nature

4. Culinary and Wellness
5. Accommodations

Resources (e.g., committees)

There are the following common themes running through the six First Nations communities in how resources are addressed:

1. **Chief and Council** - each community has an elected chief and council that has portfolios with different priorities. A few examples of what each portfolio may prioritize are tourism, recreation, housing, economic development, and education. Note: each First Nation is diverse and therefore has diverse portfolios and/or priorities.
2. **Resource Management** - many of these communities have resource management committees, departments, or economic development corporations, etc.
3. **Stewardship Committees** - stewardship committees (i.e., land, fishing, hunting, etc.) are committed to environmental stewardship best practices.
4. **Local, Regional, and Provincial DMOs** - not every First Nation community has a local visitor centre, but each community is represented by a regional and provincial Destination Marketing Organization (DMO); for example, Ahousaht may not have a visitor centre, but they are highlighted in Tofino's and Ucluelet's local visitor centre. Each community is also highlighted by their individual regional and provincial DMO, such as Tourism Vancouver Island and Indigenous Tourism BC.

Gaps/Challenges (e.g., no committee)

Briefly, the main gaps/challenges identified are:

1. **Tourism and Marketing Committees** – business marketing and promotion through Indigenous Tourism BC required.
2. **Partnerships and Collaboration** – strengthen relationships with neighbouring communities, e.g. leaders, MOUs and local/regional/provincial DMOs.
3. **Rural and Remoteness** – can be both a challenge and an asset. Many of the communities require a boat or long drive (or both) to access. Not all of these communities are easily accessible. The only community that has “easy” access is Homalco, located on the outskirts of Campbell River, BC. Homalco has navigated their rural location by establishing an excellent ecotourism enterprise positioning their remote location as an asset.
4. **Festivals and Events** – it seems that the communities do not have many festivals or lack the accessibility/occupancy to have events/festivals, especially for people outside of their communities.

Many of the communities do not have designated committees that focus on marketing. A marketing committee would be beneficial for the communities to stay informed of events on and off-season, as well as to create and maintain partnerships and collaborations with local, regional, and provincial DMOs.

There is a need for communities to create websites that remain active throughout the year. This can include posting to their social media pages at least once a week to inform visitors.

ENHANCING COMMUNITY CAPACITY AND EVALUATING PLACE-BASED PEDAGOGY IN INDIGENOUS TOURISM

The purpose of this analysis is to identify community assets, strengths, and gaps in the development of tourism within the six (6) communities. Through inventory and tourism mapping the communities have identified the following key aspects. This study was conducted in partnership with Vancouver Island University and the Heiltsuk Tribal Council.

HIGHLIGHTS

Everything is Connected
Environmental Stewardship
Traditional Ecological Knowledge
Cultural and Language Revitalization
Territory Reclamation or "Land Back"



OPPORTUNITIES

Arts and Culture
Outdoor Adventure
Wildlife and Nature
Culinary and Wellness
Accommodations

RESOURCES

Chief and Council
Resource Management
Stewardship Committees
Local, Regional and Provincial DMOs



GAPS/CHALLENGES

Tourism and Marketing Committees
Partnerships and Collaborations
Rural and Remoteness
Festivals and Events



Protect and Respect – Cultural Restoration – Regional Collaboration – Community Concern of Extraction and Exploitation – Reconciliation through Tourism – Responsibility

The aim of the interviews within the First Nations' communities was two-fold: to ascertain community desire for tourism development and to identify perceptions on community assets, strengths, and weaknesses in the development of Indigenous tourism and place-based ecotourism education.

There was strong support within all six First Nations for tourism development and enhanced growth. Although positive and negative elements were expressed, the overall attitude and support for tourism favoured the advantages. Many benefits were reflected in elements of economic generation, entrepreneurship, and destination awareness; however, exceedingly more emphasis was placed on the benefits of non-economic generators. Indicators identified were capacity building through youth leadership, cultural and conservation protection, language revitalization and restoration, sense of Indigenous and community pride, and forward movement in Truth and Reconciliation. As one community member stated, "Creating pride, a sense of

belonging, and self worth go a lot further in a community than the economic aspects."

The gaps identified included collaboration, communication, and limited resources; and the challenges revealed concerns over conflicting community interests and the potential of extractive behaviours and impacts from visitors to the community.

The six themes that emerged from the First Nations are detailed as follows:

Protect and Respect: Our Land, Our Voice – Land-Based Healing

With the continuing growth of Indigenous tourism and interest of tourists in Indigenous culture worldwide, the need for respectful tourism product development is critical to First Nations' communities. First Nations Peoples protect and steward the biodiversity of their regions and nations so generations to come can enjoy and learn from them. The responsibility is held in high regard and each of the First Nations involved in this program expressed both concern and eagerness to get it right and do it right. There was an openness to tourism done

respectfully and a willingness to see more visitors arrive, but they want to see the right type of visitors and the right kind of tourism — tourism that is appropriate for the community. Each community will need to identify that for themselves.

“Tourism will help the community to promote cultural heritage and the natural environment by giving people the opportunity to come and learn about us from us, it allows us to control our narrative, and also it promotes learning within the community about our culture and heritage even by community members.”
(Community member)

There was also a strong desire and determination to realize a “Come Home” theme for the youth that had left their Nation and community. One community leader expressed, “Tourism is an opportunity to have them return home and feel pride in their culture, to build capacity in emerging leaders. When confidence levels come up in our youth, their skill levels go up and doors open for them. That opens door for the whole community as they become role models.”

Cultural Restoration: Cultural Pride and Indigenous Nationhood

“Cultural knowledge and awareness of our own people brings understanding, respect, and pride.”
(Community member)

Sustaining a strong cultural identity is a key component of resilient communities. An identity can be cultivated and maintained through participating in cultural events, songs, stories, and language, alongside friends and family developing a deepened connection to community and traditional lands. These types of cultural engagement have the potential to

generate protective impacts with direct influence on self-esteem, self-efficacy, and pride in self and nation (Social Health Reference Group, 2004). The strengthening of cultural identity and engagement can serve to build Indigenous nationhood, resilience, and positive coping skills in life. Identifying and engaging in Indigenous culture has been linked with enhanced self-assessed health, improved educational and employment outcomes, and greater life satisfaction. (2004).

“We need to protect our environments but do it in a way that is respectful. We have a responsibility to share our resources (stories, natural resources) and teach/educate so that people are willing to share and conserve.” (Community member)

It is no surprise that each First Nation strongly voiced their support for cultural restoration through tourism as a mechanism of change.

“Having our youth participate and learn their culture through ecotourism is positive for themselves and for the whole nation.” (Community member)



Visiting Saysutshun ‘Newcastle’ Island

“Awaken generations of people: bring the culture back stronger to the community.” (Community member)

*“It is really medicine to my heart and the community to see our youth returning and finding out who they are; this helps the whole community, the Nation, and the region together. If tourism helps us to do that then we have a responsibility to our youth.”
(Community member)*

Regional Collaboration: Get Along to Move Along

“We have to get along to move along, we have to bring everyone together” (Community member)

Collaboration is a mutually beneficial agreement or arrangement that sets out the strategies, actions, and systems of working together. Strongly indicated was the need for this collaboration, not only within communities and First Nations, but within broader regions. It appeared to be a real gap for all communities and most expressed apprehension as to how it could even be done. Additional community committees, resources, and planning were mentioned as areas to address and expand. All

SPOTLIGHT: UNIQUE COLLABORATION REQUIRED

“We have unique, niche experience in our remote areas; they take a certain kind of planning to get people in and out. It can hinder us, but I think that is why our collaboration is so very important. We all experience similar situations, and we need to be talking to one another. We need to be learning from one another and helping one another. We are all in this together.”

agreed that a collective, bigger voice is beneficial for advancing competition, sustainable practices, responsible solutions, stewardship, protection of the lands and wildlife, and economic prosperity.

“We must cultivate key relationships that are built on trust, relationships, respect, and relational integrity...it is a very slow process. This is not easy!” (Community member)

Extract and Exploit: Community Concern and Caution

The history of tourism has seen considerable exploitation of Indigenous Peoples. Land has been expropriated, economic activity suppressed by outside interests, and cultural expressions (such as arts and crafts) have been appropriated by outside groups. Appropriation refers to the act of taking something for one’s own use, typically without the owner’s permission (Westcott, 2019).

The conflict — to preserve and protect and yet hold sacred those things that have been handed down for thousands of years — created a sense of apprehension within some First Nations. The recognition of historical ways that tourism around the world has exploited Indigenous Peoples and other cultures is real and sensitive for some. It was more of a cautionary clause, but one embedded with caution and warning. Mostly, First Nations want to see tourism planned and managed well.

“Having more people in our community, especially tourist who come here specifically to do day trips, is an opportunity for our Nation to develop security policies.” (Community member)

SPOTLIGHT: Indigenous Nationhood & Cultural Pride

"Tourism will help the community to promote cultural heritage and the natural environment by giving people the opportunity to come and learn about us from us, it allows us to control our narrative, and also it promotes learning within the community about our culture and heritage even for community members and also allows people to learn about our territory."

"We have to protection of traditions. We are not willing to use sacred songs/dances and traditions as a tourism product." (Community member)

"Non-Indigenous entrepreneurs disrespecting protocols and misuse of Indigenous cultural context happens, and we just have to make sure that does not continue." (Community member)

"There will be increased environmental and cultural impacts with more people in the community, but we can learn to better manage it." (Community member)

"I feel like tourism should be more about communication and connection than appropriation." (Community member)

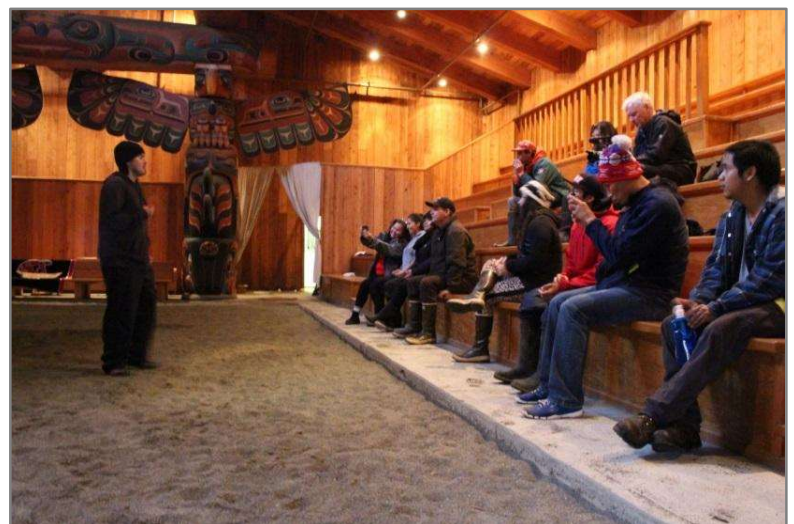
There exist some tensions in First Nations communities surrounding tourism development and conflicts in community interests. Not all enthusiastically see tourism as a growth strategy, but are willing to learn and find a way. "The

youth are being educated and finding the good way forward, so we must let them lead," stated one community leader.

Reconciliation through Tourism: Brings Healing

Tourism is a gateway for those looking to learn more about Indigenous communities, their culture, and their history, and is a way to make strides toward reconciliation (Keith Henry, president and CEO of the Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada (ITAC)). Supporting people and communities to improve quality of life, celebrate Indigenous culture, and learn new skills through tourism was a strong voice that each of the First Nations expressed throughout the interviews.

"Tourism provides opportunities for our Nation to continue dancing, singing, pot latching, and other things that keep our cultures alive. It preserves and promotes the living culture and rich heritage of Indigenous Peoples." (Community member)



Visiting Klemtu Big House

“When we share our culture, it breaks down the way people see us and what they know about the history, the label they have given us. Tourism can help us do that.” (Community member)

“Tourism can act as a way to reconciliation. There is healing through tourism and people see education can be a good thing and people want to know about our history and our ways.” (Community member)



Visiting Klemtu Big House

“There are benefits that come from cultural pride and figuring out who you are. Tourism can help to regenerate aiding in language and cultural realization, aiding in jobs and growth.” (Community member)

“Everyone is learning and gaining knowledge and experience in tourism. This is what reconciliation looks like.” (Kathy Y. Brown, Cultural Coordinator, Heiltsuk Nation)

Numerous Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action have the potential to be advanced through tourism, such as Indigenous education, language, and culture. Exposure externally enhances our language skills, storytelling, and

cultural sharing. First Nations’ cultural ambassadors also learn about themselves when they share their knowledge with guests.

SPOTLIGHT: ECOTOURISM and Conservation Economy

“For First Nations getting involved in tourism or ecotourism, that allows for that Nation to introduce their culture and why we live in this specific territory and to educate people from around the world who we are as people.

When we say that we are stewards of this territory and we've lived here for hundreds and thousands of years, they understand that because we are descended from many generations that have lived in specific territories and we have family ties that go from Alaska down to Washington State. So, at some point we all overlap, in culture or shared experiences. The more Nations that we can get involved in along the coast that will show that we have been living here in what was once pristine land and marine areas.

We're slowly losing those areas that what we once had in abundance is now reducing to the lower levels that, if we're going to continue living in our territories that we call home, then we have to do something to sustain what we have, and that's always been the goal of every First Nations: is to use what we have and to sustain it that we can live here forever and hopefully our next generations will come up.

But ecotourism is a key to introducing that to the world. That's who we are.” (Indigenous Ecotourism Entrepreneur)

Responsibility: Active Participation

To make this program work, there was a prominent level of institutional commitment; the signatories were the president of Vancouver Island University and the elected chief of the Heiltsuk Tribal Council, the chair of the Tribal Council, and the departments delivering the instruction. A protocol agreement was signed between Heiltsuk Tribal Council and VIU in 2011, setting the foundation for a long-term reciprocal relationship.

“In the spirit of reciprocity, when you give, you receive and it kind of fills your cup. The more you give, the more you receive, opposed to it being extractive. When the learning environment is safe and reciprocal for all, learning happens. When you are interested in reciprocity, you have an obligation to reciprocate.”
(Frank Brown)

Over 32 First Nations have been engaged over the duration of the program, and positive support was demonstrated through community leaders attending completion ceremonies. Several Indigenous business owners participated in every community site visited, willingly sharing their stories, experiences, and business practices.

First Nations Considerations:

- ✓ Tourism is more than just an economic generator for our First Nations; it is an opportunity to build our youth and our language and celebrate who we are.
- ✓ Work through conflicting community interests in a good way, finding what is best for the Nation.
- ✓ Tourism is a gateway for reconciliation, it changes stereotypes and beliefs. Intentionally build Truth and Reconciliation into the program through discussions, debates, storytelling, and respecting past, and moving forward into the future.
- ✓ More place-based education is what will support our youth. They need to be connected to the earth to understand the rhythms of life and learning.
- ✓ Evaluate connection of ecotourism education to the guardianship, conservation, and stewardship economy.
- ✓ Tourism is a self-determination for economic reconciliation requiring collaboration to bring regional tourism economic fairness and fully develop Indigenous market share. Communication strategies need to be enhanced to support a collaborative attitude and approach and better Nation to Nation regional collaboration for tourism growth.

Indigenous Student Voice



Transformation – Nationhood – Cohort Bonds – Culturally-Sensitive Instruction – Mentorship – Place-Based Experiential Learning – Skills for Employment

Seven themes emerged from the student perspective which reveal characteristics reflected in a holistically-focused learning environment. Students identified and commented upon deep learning attributes that encompassed both academic and personal aspects of their experience. Descriptors, such as powerful, life changing, enhanced self-confidence, motivational, lifelong friendships, pride, and support were some of the most prominent responses. Also mirrored in their reflections were challenges, barriers, difficulties, and discomforts.

Transformation: Life Changing

The IETP educational model was designed to connect with learners on both an affective level (personal and emotional) while integrating experiential knowledge. Students overall felt positively affected by the design of the learning environment. ‘Transformative’ was the number one indicator that surfaced throughout the students’ interviews and feedback. Students consistently mentioned that the opportunity of

participating in the program was life-changing, yet challenging — emotionally, physically, academically, and personally.



Canoeing on Quadra Island

“I’m so grateful that I did participate; it really changed my life. I’ve always wanted to work outdoors and was waiting for that perfect opportunity for something to present itself. It just seemed like the right fit.”

(Student)

However, for some, transformation came at a great personal cost. Barriers, such as minimal family support, self-sabotaging and limiting thoughts and attitudes, financial instability, family and work obligations, time, trauma/mental health, and past academic experience were consistent obstacles and roadblocks expressed.

"I did not believe I could do it, but then I really did learn another layer, understanding who I am and what I want. Education was always a challenge to me in the past, but I realized I can do it." (Student)

"Coming from a small rural region, I had culture shock, it was intimidating, and I did not have support. My family did not understand what I was doing." (Student)

SPOTLIGHT: Past Trauma and the Power of Play

Question: What skills, knowledge, or attitudes did you gain throughout the program?

"Yeah, like the adventure part. Being able to play, being able to be a kid again. My inner child was able to play — it's something as an Indigenous person. We've grown up with a lot of traumas in our lives in regards to the residential school. It was passed down to us. Many of us were taught to grow up really quickly and raise our siblings or take care of the house. So, for my own experience, I was allowed to go and play, and I never knew how to play. I had to grow up really quickly; I had to grow up fast. So, for me to learn how to be that child again and play and do fun activities, it was a muscle that I had to learn how to exercise really, to let loose, and go and have fun". (Student)

With an 80% student completion rate over the six years of program delivery, the ability to face, overcome, and address those challenges speaks to the RESILIENCY of everyone on this journey together — the students, instructors, cultural coordinators, and the administrators. It was a team effort and without the funding for students' educational, social, and emotional support, the challenges may have become unsurmountable for some.

Nationhood: Identity Development, Belonging, Cultural Pride

"Feeling a part of something bigger than me made me feel connected, grounded; it just made sense." (Student)

Somewhere between the lines of canoeing and learning about economic development, market promotion, first aid, and leadership, the students seemed to come to some sort of revelation that this experience — this journey of education — was not all about themselves. Interrelated relationships included fellow classmates, guest speakers, and entrepreneurs who willingly shared their knowledge and experiences in communities and First Nations. There was something bigger, something beyond their individual selves that seemed connected to a web of networks. It felt authentic yet elusive, but what was it? What was this feeling of connectedness? While the students did not use the term "nationhood", they used language to describe identity, understanding, and pride: a reinforcement of determining who they are which spread beyond their self to encompass other Indigenous people in their circle. The data suggests that there was an emerging sense of

nationhood, feeling grounded, claiming space for who they are, learning to be proud of who they are, feeling encouraged to use and practice their language and Indigenous protocols, and a reinforcement of cultural protocols, gift giving, cultural introductions, and cultural practices.

“Kathy encouraged me. She was like, “Just do it. Be proud of where you come from.” Being in the program and learning to introduce myself on my own before I go to the destinations, I started to really get connected with my language again.” (Student)

“It opened my eyes to realizing there’s so much more to the world and showed me directions that tourism

SPOTLIGHT: Inspired

Question: Would you recommend this program to others?

Yes. Absolutely, it really changed my life. I loved being outdoors on my own time, but to feel confident and to actually have that knowledge and experience behind me was so important. And my life just changed continually, and I kept growing up after I took the program. I'm not saying that that would happen for everyone, but there was even a course that we took with Dave Pinel, and it looked at understanding your own emotions and how to deal with people. And even if you didn't go into adventure tourism after the course, I feel like you would still be a little bit better than you were before you took the course. I mean, it's all about having fun. Adventure tourism is amazing. And it also is incredible that it gives the opportunity for people to feel better... and not only people, but Indigenous people to feel empowered to share their culture. And that's not something that's always been, I guess, allowed. It's just amazing that we even have this opportunity to be able to share our history and feel inspired to. (Student)

can go. And the courses and the people that did the program, it helped a lot because I wasn't that big of a public speaker and being able to, like, talk to people about the culture and just like my background of where I come from, and it just like motivated me more to be proud and speak out more.”



Canoeing in Nanaimo

“It made me realize that there was more than the learning in the classroom. There were more connections, more healing. It made us more connected to our songs and our dances and potlatch. A lot more of the traditional, cultural knowledge came out. We're able to share storytelling and I know that just being out there we're able to be ourselves, more grounded.” (Student)

“I grew up not connected to my community or having a lot of experiences that people who are connected to their community or live on reserve tend to have connection to family or get to travel to different places, or culture or just being on the land. And so, for me, it just seemed like, wow, what a good opportunity to travel firsthand too. Because when I go to places

and see it in person, it really changes, like having a connection and getting to always meet the people from that place.” (Student)

The healing properties of self-assurance and conviction through cultural pride and identity development have the potential for transferring to many other aspects of personal and community life, such as a willingness to share your experiences with others and be an inspiration to family and community members.

Cohort Bond: Friendships for Life and Peer Support Network

Good friends challenge one another to be better and enrich one’s life through shared experiences, but when students meet a stranger in this program, some become very good friend quickly. This relationship seems to go beyond friendship and merge into a bond of shared experiences. Those were the ways students described their friendships that were made while participating in the program; it was deep, rich, and vulnerable. While students felt it was organic — and it mostly was— it was also by design. Hands-on courses, such as those that



Canoe Training

developed leadership through outdoor skills and canoeing at the very beginning of the program, built competencies of shared cultural norms and social connections.

The cohort model by nature is intense and, by experiencing things together through place-based learning, team building happens quickly. The peer-to-peer activities, such as shared activities and assignments and mentoring, were experienced by students as, “activities that made me friends for life.”

“I felt connected to my peers, we shared the experiences together and it felt transformational for me, it changed me and those are my friends for life.”
(Student)

SPOTLIGHT: Support

Question: What were the strengths of the program?

I would say, I guess I'll say, again, the instructors — all the instructors that they had chosen for the program — I think were the perfect fit. And the fact that it was all Indigenous students was something that I hadn't experienced before. And I think because we had such a similar background and such a similar story that we all just got along really well from the start. And we all have very unique but similar learning styles at the same time. So, those instructors really tailored the courses to fit our needs. And were there to support us with any issues that came up or any learning struggles that we were having during the course. Yeah. So, I think that the instructors and the students were definitely the strengths of the program. And being Indigenous-based learning, it just seemed to work well. (Student)

"I think some of the most notable strengths to me in the program, throughout the entire program, was the support, the consistency of support. Then, as an individual, I felt that continuous choice to keep going because, early in the program, I felt it wasn't for me. I felt maybe I shouldn't go. There were times where I felt maybe I just bit off more than I could chew. One of those strengths that came out was in support from cohort members. They were reassuring and supportive that staying was going to be worthwhile. It ended up being something else. I was glad that I saw through."
(Student)

"The strength of the program was being so close and connected and developing that partnership, that friendship, just uniting so many different cultures. Everyone's different perspective and views really helped build the big major part of the course. I don't think you can get that in a textbook." (Student)

Culturally-Sensitive Instruction: Negative Impacts

Overall, the instructional team received positive reviews throughout the duration of the program, but one area for consideration, highlighted by both students and the instructional team themselves, was the need for further training and education for culturally-sensitive instruction.

Instruction must be sensitive to Indigenous ways of learning and understanding the history of intergenerational trauma and past negative educational experiences that are void of cultural context. It must be sensitive to the multiplicity of educational support needs. These were areas identified that lacked additional supports and impacted the learning environment for the students. While most instructors self-identified their lack of experience or preparedness and sought the required resources, others were

discouraged from returning to the classroom based on coordinator and/or student feedback.

"Not all instruction or instructors were culturally-sensitive or experienced in Indigenous ways of learning." (Student)

Lack of understanding or insensitivity led to situations in the classroom where the boundaries between instruction and the cultural coordinator's role became increasingly uncomfortable and unclear with regards to moving forward. Overall, these comments were minimal in comparison to the positive feedback for instruction.

Balancing this tension between instruction and the cultural coordinator's role required interpersonal trust involving instructors, coordinators, and students. The cultural coordinators deferred to instructors on curriculum content delivery but provided commentary or community context.

The role of the cultural coordinator functioned in two ways: asserting leadership in 'indigenizing' the academy and supporting instructors to deliver the curriculum. The cultural coordinators had a consistent presence throughout the program while instructors came and left after they delivered their course. Without the knowledge, experience, and confidence from cultural coordinators, it would have been difficult to achieve this level of program success; the coordinators added unique skill sets in education, tourism business, and program process.

SPOTLIGHT: Eldership

"I think the strengths really were Frank and Kathy for their lived experience and perspectives, because they really did provide an Eldership role for us and guidance and support all the time. And you can really tell that they're there because they want us to succeed" (Student).

It's just incredible that Frank and Kathy have such a big part... or the face of this, and the idea behind it. It's just they're such inspiring people. And I'm very grateful to have had the opportunity to be a part of the program. It was, like I said, life changing, and I can't envision a world where I didn't take it" (Student).

"Other instructors were encouraging, inclusive, welcoming staff who customized and accommodated." (Student)

Mentorship: Game Changers Frank and Kathy Y. Brown, Cultural Coordinators

Ongoing support from Cultural Coordinators Frank and Kathy Brown received significant attention. Both their presence and roles as supporters, navigators, and knowledge keepers, created an atmosphere of a safe learning environment that fostered positive experiences for the students, not only as a safe environment to learn, but also for an Indigenous person and learner in a university setting, which was predominantly a new experience for most participants. Their influence and passion for individuals to succeed was crucial to the overall outcome of student success. Numerous brothers, sisters, cousins, relatives, and friends have passed through the doors of education under the guidance and encouragement of Frank

and Kathy and that created a consistent sense of comfort and reassurance.

SPOTLIGHT: The REAL MEMORIES

"And those are the real memories that stand out for me. Aside from anything else were the places that we visited, and those memories are so clear to me. And just the way that they made me feel it was learning a lot and getting to see that reflected just in a landscape, and examples of what's possible with Ecotourism and education was really inspiring." (Student).

Each program ended with a completion ceremony instead of a graduation, as not all students were able to graduate within the parameters of the program. This continued to promote and cultivate the premise that showing up and putting in the work was an achievement as much as graduation. Being present and putting in the effort was paramount.

"I did not know what I was getting into, but I knew that if Kathy was going to be there, it would be okay." (Student)

Place-Based and Experiential Learning

Being in various communities and travelling through different First Nations was a critical design and delivery model built into the program from the onset, and students' comments reflected the highest positive reviews in this area. Students stated that it was very important for them to learn from shared Indigenous history, stories, and cultures in regions where

they would probably never be able to visit due to the cost of travelling to such remote regions.

Through territorial and culturally-specific content, Indigenous learners built foundational knowledge with deepened understanding of intergenerational knowledge transfer, the importance of language and geography of stories, land protection and rights, connection to reconciliation and much more. Finding meaning through connection to the community, the natural world, and spiritual values grounded their imagination, bodies, and minds to learn. Exposure to protocols that enabled students to share ideas with reciprocity and sensitivity to diverse cultures developed the competency of collaboration.

“The ability to travel to new communities was the highlight for me, I loved it; we met new people and places. I learned about other Nation’s stories, cultures, and it really made me feel connected to who I am.

”(Student)

“When we would go to visit the ecotourism operators that were running in that territory, we would get to talk to the Nation and learn their histories. And I think it's so important as Indigenous people to be outdoors, and to love nature. And I can't see it being any other way. Sitting in a classroom trying to learn about a place just doesn't quite make sense. The connection really isn't there, whereas some days we would be in class, but I would be sitting in a tree looking out at the ocean, listening to the waves crash, and you're talking about sustainability. It brings the emotion that should be there. That was one of the reasons why I wanted to take the adventure tourism course was because I wanted to inspire people to take care of their lands. And so, I think when you are in that place, like I said, it brings that emotion and that connection. And it's really important to be out in the field learning.”

(Student)

“Travelling to different communities really enriched my experience and motivated me, because I just don't really have the means to ever do that, to go on a boat or go to these locations or even know that they exist. So, it's just such a gift to share that with everyone going on hikes and excursions. Kathy, I think we all know, tried to remind us basically to not just sit down in our hotel if we're tired or whatever, to really just take the opportunity to go out and really get the most of the experience to go on. Just encourage us to go on the excursions and do stuff.” (Student).

However, not only was being “in the field” important; students also expressed a deep connection to the “hands-on” nature of place-based and experiential learning. It was not only about being in place, but also about using their hands to do physical or practical things rather than being in a classroom or reading from textbooks.

SPOTLIGHT: Auntie Kathy

Frank and Kathy were always there to support us and just their guidance was invaluable and just creating an environment for us to be safe. Especially Kathy would always really reiterate the importance of protocols, whether it's introducing ourselves, encouraging us to learn our language, how to interact, and gift giving, it was always a part of everything that we did. So that really instilled those values for us” (Student).

“I am the type of the person that learns hands-on anyway. My online class that I did for welding recently I think I could have done a lot better if it was all in-class, hands-on everything. Being out doing everything and then putting it in front of us saying, “Okay, this is what we're doing today,” and showing us once or

twice and then us getting it ourselves. I think that was really good. It's the best way I learned as a person.”
(Student)

“It really enhanced the learning being hands-on and seeing and doing things. I think it really changed the aspects of learning. Field learning is so different than being in the classroom and learning about things when you can actually experience it.” (Student)

“I think we learned by touch and feel and learning how things worked with our hands.” (Student)

“Learning in the field, I am the type of the person that learns hands-on anyway. My online class that I did for welding recently I think I could have done a lot better if it was all in class, hands- on everything. Being out doing everything and then putting it in front of us saying, “Okay, this is what we're doing today,” and showing us once or twice and then us getting it ourselves. I think that was really good. It's the best way I learned as a person.” (Student)

Skills for Employment

Student learning is enhanced when integrated with academic and experiential education. Upon completion of the IETP program, many students transitioned into the job market with sought-after skills and experience.

Skills, such as first aid, leadership, event planning, public speaking, understanding visitor information, professional networking, industry awareness, marketing, and risk assessment were some of the top skills students identified as critical in assisting them as they entered employment and as transferable life skills.

Whether this was within the tourism industry or otherwise, both technical and personal skills development were mentioned as important to

their holistic learning experience and career development in the program.

Students commented that learning to talk to people, whether it be in the community, with entrepreneurs, or in the classroom with fellow students and instructors was very valuable. Practicing presentation skills, gaining confidence, improving self-esteem and self-efficacy followed as descriptors.

Students also highlighted that the program inspired them for further academic learning. Many students did not believe they would have access or the opportunity to complete university courses so the increased self-esteem was a motivator to keep moving forward.

“My motivation for participating in the program was I really just needed a steppingstone into university. I wasn't too sure what I wanted to do and there was good opportunity to explore that and to have a sense of support from other students. And then also travelling to different communities and figure out what I wanted to do was helpful.” (Student)

SPOTLIGHT: LEARN TO DO BY DOING

"Yeah. I mean, for me, the technical skills were amazing to learn. Right after that program, I guess, my internship, I started tour guiding. And so, those were some hands-on skills that I learned through the course that I never probably would have tried if I hadn't taken the course. And it takes you to some crazy, amazing, beautiful places, and not only boosts your physical health, but your mental health as well as being outdoors all the time like that. And then I would say one of the ones that was another incredible thing, that we as a couple of students and I really practiced during the course, was reflecting on our day and looking at things that maybe, sometimes, if you're having a bad, like a really bad day, you might just look that as bad things that happen to you, or it might get you down, but the course really taught me to look at everything as a challenge that can be overcome. At the end of the day, we would reflect even as we got into our internships, we would... even if we weren't in the same town, some of us would chat together and talk about our day, "Okay. So, this is what happened. What can we do to grow from that experience?" Yeah, it was just really neat to still have that connection after we left. And I still reflect on that today and use those little skills that we learned from the course." (Student)

Indigenous Student Considerations

- ✓ Students may require multiple efforts to be successful in educational achievements.
- ✓ Awareness of intrapersonal barriers, which include self-sabotaging attitudes towards education, such as "I cannot do this, or my family will not support me".
- ✓ Students who have a sense of belonging and connectedness thrive in their learning and are more engaged.
- ✓ Intentional and iterative learning for an Indigenous learner develops deep understanding.
- ✓ Holistic approach to learning is required for whole person transformation through education.
- ✓ Some students may require additional wrap-around support services, and/or counselling arising from; unstable housing, emergency funding required, family responsibilities and circumstances, personal health and well being. Often families and employers do not fully understand the ramifications of educational pursuits away from your own community. In addition, the funding model dictated the target market address marginalized youth (e.g., no post-secondary education, unemployed or under-employed). This required attention to asset building for successful post-secondary education.
- ✓ Awareness that supporting students' personal and mental wellness is significantly challenging and typically falls to the cultural coordinator. Enhance a full team integrated approach to student success through additional training and support in this area.
- ✓ Continue to enhance student educational support, such as homework sessions, tutors, peer support, writing labs, etc.
- ✓ Continue to enhance the diverse learning environment with inclusion of more Elders where possible. A diverse learning environment is essential in preparing students to adapt to an evolving world and

embrace those different from themselves. The program has a dynamic learning atmosphere with eight to ten instructors per program, numerous guests, business owners, invited Elders and community

leaders, and members both in and out of the classroom setting. Lecture presentations, experiential activities, field trips, hikes, public presentations, and more create a vibrant culture for curiosity.



Exploring Tofino hands-on.

Community of Practice



Instructional Faculty Experience – Western Pedagogy and Indigenous Learning: Two-Eyed Seeing Framework – Systemic Challenges: Curriculum and Assessment

Three themes emerged from the analysis of “Community of Practice”; instructional faculty experience, perspectives on pedagogy and systemic challenges. Instructors’ perspectives are detailed as follows:

Instructional Faculty Experience

The delivery and structure of the program was designed for meaningful teaching and learning opportunities that interlace Indigenous ways of knowing with western pedagogical practices for the benefit of all students, faculty, and the collective journey towards reconciliation. An effort to produce culturally-responsive curricula with an integration of conventional disciplinary knowledge and methodologies was at best challenging and powerful simultaneously. The tensions exposed a journey of vulnerability on both sides— faculty and cultural coordinators. This approach of trans-systemic synthesis, as coined by Battiste and Henderson, (2000, 2021), is the weaving of Indigenous knowledge with western pedagogical practices. It required courage, trust, classroom innovation, and conflict resolution for both faculty and cultural coordinators throughout the entire delivery

process. Some faculty were better prepared, experienced, and willing to navigate these tensions, while others struggled to find the equilibrium that created the foundation for confidence in the curriculum delivery.

The crux of the situation was taking the most marginalized in our society and pushing them and trying to make it work while meeting academic accreditation. At times, some teaching faculty expressed they felt they needed to compromise their educational values for completion success based upon the criteria of the funding model requirements.

“In some instances, these students were the first to complete post-secondary education in their entire families. Addressing those barriers and how the funding was targeted, required innovation yet efforts to maintain academic rigor.” (Frank Brown)

Evolving out of this tension between course completion and successfully earning a credential came the recognition of the need for a strategic, individualized grading and evaluation system utilized by instructors, ensuring students could move to a completion credential rather than a graduation credential when academic challenges arose. Overall, the instructional team shared a positive teaching experience.

SPOTLIGHT: CO-CREATED LEARNING THAT TRANSFORMS

Every time people talk about this program it is that I learned as much from the students as hopefully they did from me. It was a co-creation knowledge either between the students or between the students and the instructor. When both student and instructor come to the table willing and ready to learn together, we might go down a different path we had initially anticipated, but it is still the right path. Students become empowered. It becomes transformative for both instructor and student — transformation at multiple levels.” (Instructor)

“Co-teaching experience with the cultural coordinators was exceptionally fulfilling. It was really incredible to be bouncing off someone else from a unique perspective and having the students witness to that conversation.” (Instructor)



Kayaking in Nanaimo

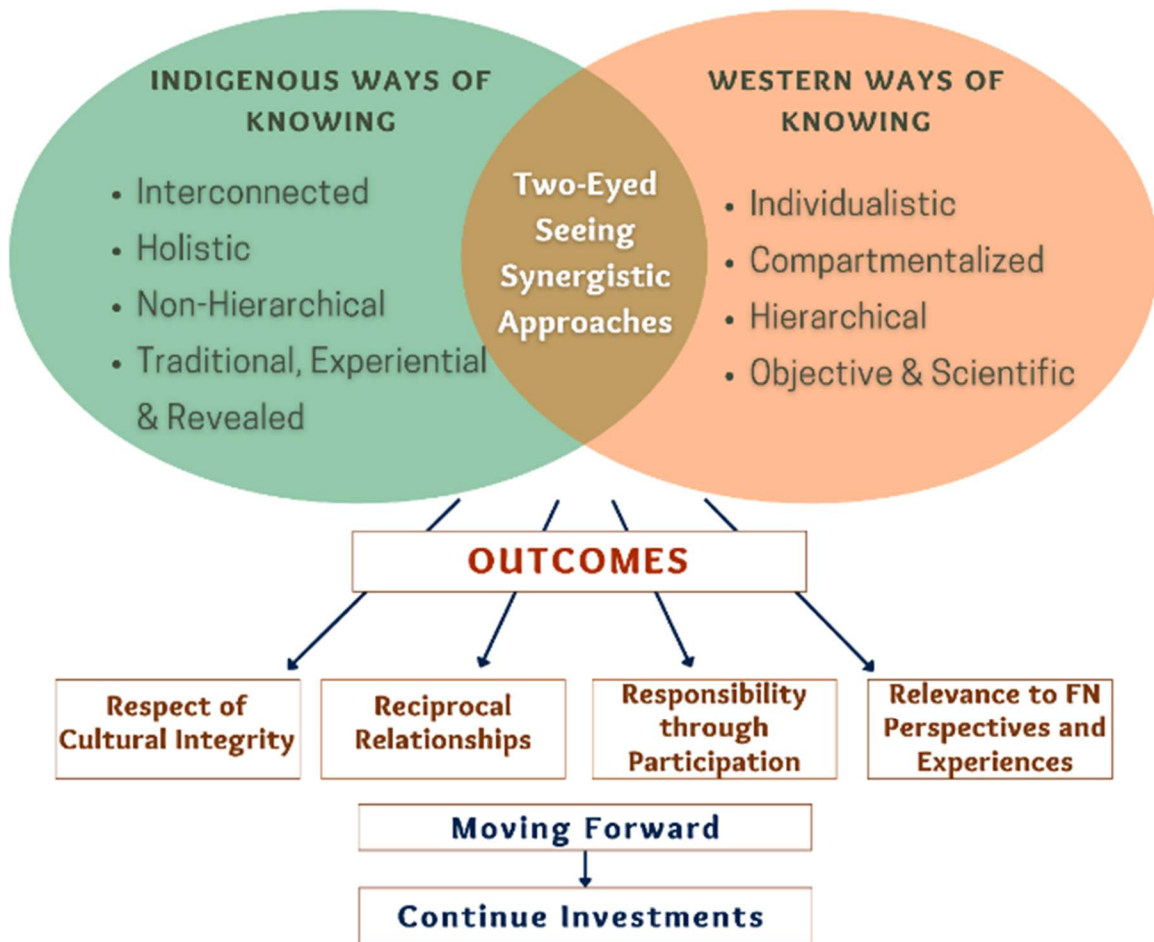
Stimulating Challenge: “The reflexivity involved for me in teaching in this program has sometimes been a little bit overwhelming. The challenges that you face can be fairly difficult, on all kinds of various levels, but certainly, when you consider the Truth and Reconciliation moments that you have and recognizing what that means and a deeply meaningful desire to engage with that process, it is very fulfilling.”

(Instructor)



Exploring Nanaimo with Rob

Western Pedagogy and Indigenous Learning: Two-Eyed Seeing Framework – Decolonization



The diagram reflects the trans-systemic synergistic approach to the ecotourism educational model that evolved throughout the program. Recognizing Elder Albert Marshall’s words, ‘two-eyed seeing’, or *Etuaptmumk*, refers to “learning to see from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing, and from the other eye with the strengths of western knowledges and ways of knowing – and learning to use both of these eyes together for the benefit of all.”

Two-eyed seeing helps us to acknowledge the idea of wholeness, a part of many Indigenous knowledge systems: looking through one eye to see things through Indigenous perspectives,

(represented as one whole eye), alongside western ways of knowing, (also represented as a whole eye) while inviting these two eyes to work together as they do in binocular vision. A weaving back and forth between knowledges that embraces a flow between the strengths of the two ways to best suit the circumstances strengthens the approach further. Ongoing co-learning with and from each perspective is an important feature of two-eyed seeing, as are collaboration and connection with culture and community (Hatcher et al., 2009).

The trans-systemic synergistic approach was messy at its worst and powerfully transformative at its best. It takes a whole student approach

and, with respect to First Nations values, leaves no one behind. Instructors with little or limited experience in teaching a full classroom of Indigenous learners had to be very fluid, organic and responsive. Humility in teaching and learning was required and leadership models of situational teaching was adopted by some instructors.

One instructor indicated that “framing questions in ways that honor the experience of students helps them to make connections to what is familiar to them, such as asking: What does this mean for you? What are some examples of bringing this to light? How does this tie together with teachings in your community from your mentors, your elders, your employers?”

When the two-eyed seeing framework was emulated, power shifted.

SPOTLIGHT: POWER ENABLERS

What made this work is that we were all champions in our respective communities, whether it was teaching, Elders, nation leaders or administrators. We could never, ever have done this if our leadership in each of those communities did not empower and enable us to do it because we had to break the rules almost every day and they knew it. They were power enablers; we had a level of autonomy.”
(Champion supporter)

“Reverse Power of dynamics: when the student finally understood that the instructor was not going to tell them about their culture and they could speak freely about their culture, there was a real reversal of power dynamics.” (Instructor)

Systemic Challenges: Curriculum, Credentials and Assessment

Students told us that their engagement in previous elementary and high school education was often riddled with alienation, racism, and culturally insensitive experiences. This systemic problem within Canada's education system is not eliminated from higher education institutions. According to Battiste (2013, p. 159), Canadian education and its associated institutions are “neither culturally neutral nor fair” and have been created out of a “patriarchal, Eurocentric society.” Thus, education systems have a self-perpetuating cycle wherein those who are seen to be mainstream are indoctrinated in accepted beliefs and ideologies associated with mainstream society, while simultaneously those accepted beliefs and ideologies act to subjugate and devalue beliefs, ideologies, and people who do not fit the prescribed mould.

Ongoing discussions amongst instructors has extended throughout the program about how we assess students for knowledge and what is the right way within the program. Assessment is problematic: Could there be a collaborative process that should be considered? There is not enough time in a five to ten day course to fully develop an Indigenous assessment within a reciprocity framework, one that honors instructors’ feedback with an opportunity for the student to redo, revise or even co-create the assignment.

“What is a reminder of the systemic issues is that all but one of the instructors were non-Indigenous, and we were also the only ones evaluating the student’s performance through assessments, thus perpetuating the colonial structure. There were ethical and relationship building experiences that were lost because of that.” (Instructor)

We are reminded that students are being prepared for a university model of education and successfully passing a course is not always the only end game in sight.

“Success does not necessarily mean completing the course for some students, it might mean just staying and having confirmation from other students. The fact that they were allowed to be a part of something, something that made them critically think makes them believe they could be a part of and contribute to community and society. That is reciprocity, a win-win for everyone, next time they might actually complete the course.” (Kathy Y. Brown)

Evaluation, which is distinct yet related to the issue of assessment, has been a topic of discussion throughout the program. *How to best evaluate competencies related to outcomes? Should it be a grade or a pass/fail approach to assessment?* Different instructors took different approaches based on the nature of their course, course content, and the instructor’s approach to assignments. While inconsistent in approach, what seemed consistent was the level of apprehension this issue created for the instructional team.

Some instructors experienced a persistent and subtle tension between relationship building and content-focused delivery. The opportunity to build relationships with students, community, and cultural coordinators competed with learning how to adapt teaching and content delivery in a culturally-responsive manner “in the moment”, with demanding schedules, limited time, clear communication, and curriculum demands, thus, creating a situation where the satisfaction and rewards of being involved in the innovation aspects of the program were interconnected with the challenges involved at

interpersonal, cultural, and institutional or systemic levels.

It was also noted that the curriculum was never actually created for this program or the Indigenous learner from the beginning. The curriculum was taken and adapted into the program, from a 13-week design to be delivered in five to 10 days.

The strength of the curriculum was that it was iteratively reviewed and formatively evaluated for pedagogical and curricular relevance by the leadership team at numerous stages; however, no formal, documented process was followed for an overall curricular review. In consideration of current issues related to Truth and Reconciliation, regenerative tourism, land stewardship, conservation economy, and indigenization, it is recommended a full review occur.

Community of Practice Considerations

- ✓ Indigenous education must be relevant to the learner. By both instructor and students embracing a trans-systemic synergetic approach, benefits can be experienced by all.
- ✓ While Indigenous instructors have not been prominent in the program, they can enhance the student experience and the instructional team. Non-Indigenous faculty come with a willingness to be vulnerable and flexible in the learning environment but require culturally-sensitive training.
- ✓ New instructional faculty need to have onboard training that brings awareness of the vulnerabilities and flexibility required in the learning environment.
- ✓ As instructional designers, educators empower students to connect deeply to

learning outcomes through the experiences they create. This requires humility, a willingness to adopt and adapt, and an openness to the co-teaching aspects intentionally implemented with the cultural coordinators.

- ✓ Having Elders participate throughout the entire student experience is critical to reinforce protocol, land acknowledgements, First Nations traditions, and family connections.
- ✓ Develop a sustainability plan inclusive of VIU administration, Recreation and Tourism department chair leadership and/or World Leisure Centre of Excellence supported with multi-year funding.
- ✓ Curriculum review and development considering delivery and pedagogical and curricular relevance that addresses current issues of Truth and Reconciliation, regenerative tourism, land conservation, and stewardship.
- ✓ Enhance development and training for a more robust, culturally-sensitive instructional team.
- ✓ Establish communication and coordination systems identifying roles and responsibilities between program instruction and cultural coordinators.

Administration: Messy Work

The administrative processes behind the delivery of the program were both time constrained and arduous. Working with multifaceted components and numerous First Nations and mobilizing students from rural communities was challenging yet rewarding. Each partner benefitted from the explicit trust of leadership to

‘make things happen in a good way’. Often this required finding creative means to navigate institutional policy and/or community dynamics. What enhanced success after the pilot year was the trust and social capital that was established amongst the partners and secondly, the availability to apply for multi-year funding. These were targeted dollars for First Nation education that Vancouver Island University and North Island College were contracted and sub-contracted to deliver through the program. Having the academy hear and support the use of cultural coordinators and deploy resources that supported students, was imperative to program success.

“This required champions within the University setting and the Nations to make it work. It was very challenging at times, but the commitment and conviction driven by a shared purpose drove the work forward. The commitment has been long standing and that made all the difference, the social capital was there to work out the problems.” (Administrator).

Tourism Industry Impacts

IETP has made many valuable contributions to the tourism industry over the years that the program has run.

A core aspect of the program has been to align with industry leaders, such as Indigenous Tourism British Columbia (ITBC) and Indigenous Tourism Canada (ITAC). In recent years, these associations underwent a name change from 'Aboriginal' to 'Indigenous' as a reflection of the desires of the communities they serve, and other societal shifts within Canada, thus, signalling the appropriate time for the VIU, NIC and HTC partnership to shift to the program nomenclature of the Indigenous Ecotourism Training Program (IETP).

Among the many success stories of IETP that have created a positive impact in the Indigenous tourism industry, we can highlight the following media coverage of the program as well as stories related to capacity building:

- ✓ Award Winning Travel Website Toque & Canoe features graduates from Pilot Project and Cohort #3:
<https://www.toqueandcanoe.com/2019/08/02/indigenoustourismbritishcolumbia-canadiantravelblog-youngleaders/>
- ✓ IETP featured on The National Centre for Collaboration in Indigenous Education on interview with Dr. Rob Ferguson:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fg57Xn8OJWE&t=215s>
- ✓ IETP Video produced by Vancouver Island University:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VYz9yLUe10&t=2s>
- ✓ Indigenous Ecotourism Program partnership with Heiltsuk Nation featured in a Global News article (2022):

<https://globalnews.ca/news/8725237/whats-behind-the-growing-interest-in-indigenous-led-tourism-in-canada/>

- ✓ Indigenous Tourism BC General Annual meeting 2014.
- ✓ Indigenous Sustainable Tourism Conference 2017: Faculty, responsible for the instruction and curriculum design of the program, shared their best practice across the academic and practitioner community. The innovative, applied place-based learning model and program were profiled to an in-person representation of 90 participants and a webinar with over 500 participants, hosting 30 different countries.
- ✓ Presentation at IMPACT – Sustainability Travel & Tourism Conference 2020, Victoria – BC. A group of students presented the program in the session, “Dose of Innovation”.
- ✓ Book chapter on Indigenous tourism authored by colleagues in the textbook, *Introduction to Tourism and Hospitality* (de la Barre, Brown, Ferguson & Pinel, 2021). The textbook is an introduction to the tourism and hospitality industry in British Columbia, and Chapter 12 discusses the evolution of Indigenous tourism in Canada, describes approaches taken to strengthen and increase the number of Indigenous tourism businesses in Canada and BC, and articulates the importance of community involvement and effective partnerships in developing Indigenous tourism.
- ✓ More than 80 students have completed the program and were accredited with a *Certificate in Adventure Tourism and Recreation* from Vancouver Island University, and credit towards North Island College’s *Adventure Guiding Certificate* and *Tourism Management Diploma*. The credit

courses are also fully transferable to both institutions and other post-secondary institutions in BC for students who choose to continue their education and credentials.

Over the years, the program has partnered with several businesses to deliver the courses and the tourism experiences. The following is a list of some of the businesses and people that engaged with the program:

- Tsa Kwa Luten Lodge - Quadra Island
- Culture Shock Interactive Gallery + Cafe - Alert Bay
- U'mista Cultural Centre - Alert Bay
- T'ashii Paddle School - Tofino
- Tin Wis Best Western Resort – Tofino
- Donnale Edgar, Assistant General Manager
- Parks Canada - Pacific Rim Unit – Tofino
- Tofino Sea Kayaking – Tofino
- Wya Point Resort - Ucluelet
- Sea Shanty Restaurant - Tofino
- House of Himwitsa (Art Gallery and Lodge) – Tofino
- Ahousaht Hereditary Chief and business owner/operator Lewis George
- Roy Henry Vickers Gallery – Tofino
- Jennifer Steven (CAO and Gallery Director)
- Clayoquot Wilderness Lodge - Tofino
- Spirit Bear Lodge – Klemtu: Manager Tim McGrady and KITASOO/XAI-XAIS guide Vern Brown
- Shearwater Resort - Denny Island
- k'awat'si Tours - Port Hardy
- Swell Tofino - Tofino
- Wya Point Surf Shop - Ucluelet
- Tofino Botanical Gardens and Ecolodge - Tofino
- Clayoquot Sound Biosphere Reserve
- Royal BC Museum - Victoria
- Songhees Wellness Centre - Victoria
- I'Hos Gallery - Courtenay
- Takaya Tours - North Vancouver
- Eagle Wing Tours - Victoria

- Bamfield Marine Sciences Centre - Bamfield
- Hakai Institute - Calvert Island and Quadra Island
- SAYSUTSHUN (Newcastle Island) - Nanaimo
- Cormorant Island Learning Centre- Cormorant Island
- Namgis Traditional Big House - Alert Bay
- Lund Hotel - Lund
- I'Hos Cultural Tours - Powell River

Guest speakers are also part of the curriculum and bring important contributions to the program, thus enhancing Indigenous tourism development. Some of the guest speakers and guides who have contributed to the program are:

- Susan McGrath (www.susanmcgrath.com)
- Tyson Touchie, President of Ucluth Development Corporation
- Scott Roberts - Aboriginal Travel Services
- Caitlin Hartnett, M.A., EdD Candidate- Campus Community Coordinator, Mount Waddington Campus
- Evelyn Voyager – NIC elder
- Chief of Fort Rupert – Leslie Dickie
- Chief of Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw – Paddy Walkus
- Davis Henderson, Tourism Coordinator - k'awat'si Tours
- Jenny Touchie - First Nations Liaison, Pacific Rim National Park Reserve, Parks Canada
- Carley Duckmanton - Indigenous Engagement Officer, Indigenous Affairs Branch Indigenous Affairs and Cultural Heritage Directorate (IACH) Parks Canada
- Laura Loucks, PhD - Research Coordinator, Clayoquot Biosphere Trust
- Tammy Dorward - Tla o quiaht First Nation and Clayoquot Biosphere Parks Canada First Nations Program Manager
- Andy Thomas, Esquimalt Hereditary and Elected Chief

- Mark & Fran-Hunt Jinnouchi - Owner/operators Evedar's Bistro
- Genevieve Hill; Sheila Sampson; Lucy Bell; and Brian Seymour – Royal BC Museum
- Clint Kuzio – Indigenous Educator, Advisor & Coordinator of Reconciliation
- Earl Newman – Hemas & HTC Councillor
- John Bolton – HTC Councillor
- Andrew Callicum - HTC Executive Director
- Bobby Martin - Shearwater services
- Krista Duncan – tour guide at Klemtu
- Doug Nealoss - Chief Councillor and Resource Stewardship Director of the Kitasoo/Xai'xais First Nation
- Kathy Sereda – PCA
- Leona Humchitt – HTC representative
- Eveyln Voyageur – NIC Elder
- Andy Everson & family - Kumugwe Dance Society
- Andy Everson - artist
- Marcia and Al Dawson - past student, Executive Director for Komox & independent consultant in Education
- Fernanda Pare – NIC Elder
- Lou-Ann Neel - Director of Education NIC - artist, entrepreneur & executive administrator for fundraising

****We thank all the businesses and people that have engaged with the program and apologize if any have been missed in this list.**



Getting ready to go surfing in Tofino

Conclusion and The Way Forward

Transformational change does not just happen! It requires a prevailing team of individuals prepared to carve new paths who are willing to remove opposition or struggles along the way. The Indigenous ecotourism program has done just that from its inception, with people behind it who are willing to disrupt boundaries, progress through barriers, and create education with significant impact. The program has been **powerful, incredibly successful, and transformative** for students, communities, First Nations, instructional team members, administrators, and coordinators alike. While challenging and demanding situations arose throughout, the stakeholders are well positioned and poised with a resilient foundation prepared to move forward.

The purpose of this evaluation is to tell the story of what made this program work, how and why it has worked, and the impacts along the way. Numerous voices spoke in “telling the story” over the last 12 months (but mainly captured over the past seven years), building upon small wins and navigating conflict to continue learning and moving forward.

A significant and notable emerging theme was that of a **future vision** with an **integrated approach to ecotourism and stewardship/conservation economy education**, along with the goal to advance the **Indigenous protected and conserved areas and guardianship** program across the country through a lens of visitor education and tourism economic development.

“The ecotourism program brought awareness of land-based healing and being stewards of the land and makes me want to fight for our territories and to be the rightful owners and understanding that we do have a say of what happened. That was a huge one for me, the guardianship and stewardship learning.”
(Student)

A final area in need of discussion is conventional research methods applied to Indigenous research. The means of gathering knowledge with and for Indigenous people falls outside many of the current research and ethical parameters within our university systems. Indigenous research methods must flow from an Indigenous paradigm and honor the way of collecting data that is appropriate to each First Nation. The significance of the researcher and the interrelationship between the method, ethics, and care conflict at times. We need to **deconstruct the research ethics approach** to bring distinction and respect to an Indigenous way. The western approach compartmentalizes knowledge and then focuses on understanding the bigger picture. Indigenous ways of knowing are captured through a holistic view. As expressed by one First Nations leader:

“Western ways of research do not necessarily fit within our Indigenous ways. We always inform the leadership, the governing bodies what we are doing and what we are a part of. We are accountable to our communities and our people. We have been researched and written about for years but the research is not always what we need to address our needs or increase capacity or economic initiatives.”
(Community member)

All considerations identified are not direct recommendations but for review and thoughtful deliberation for continued program development, modification, or revision.

The findings and considerations should be reviewed in light of current issues, such as the Truth and Reconciliation 94 Calls to Action, the

United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, stewardship and conservation economy, and the continued growth and development of Indigenous tourism on Vancouver Island, provincially, nationally, and globally.



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