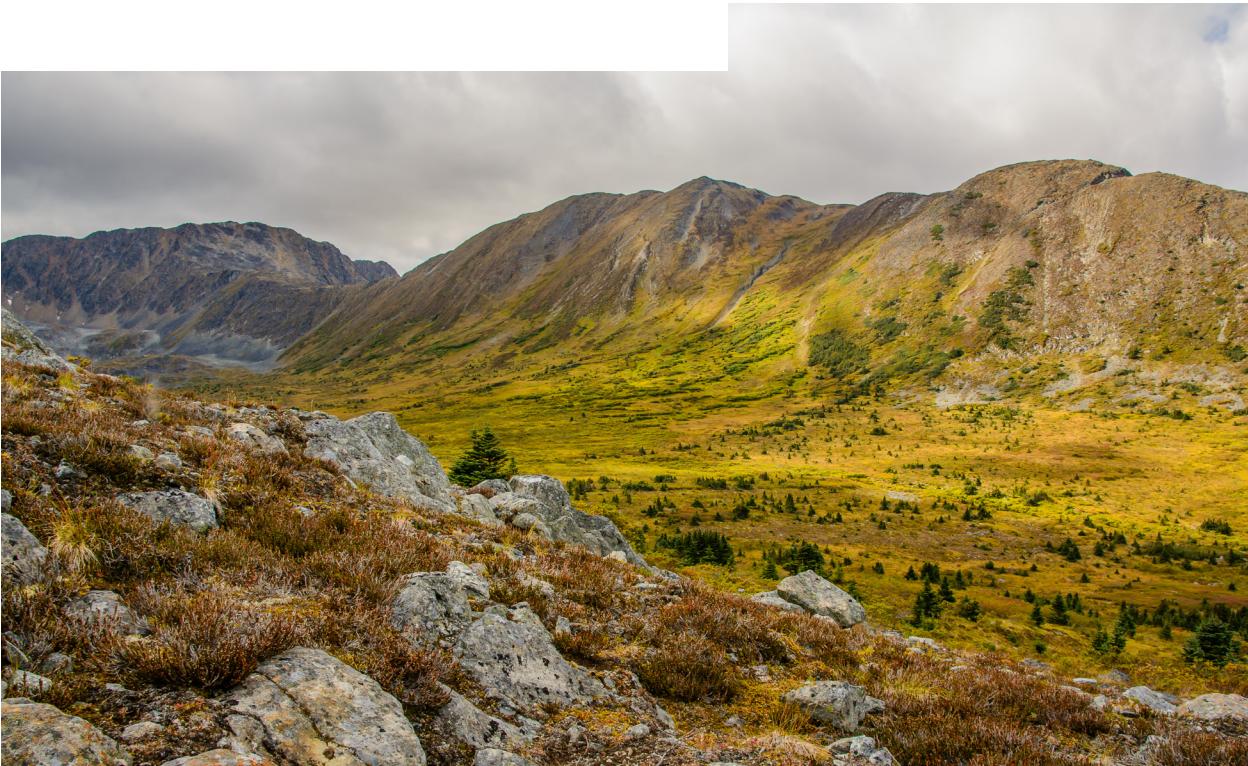


JANE GLASSCO NORTHERN FELLOWSHIP

Language, Community and Legends in Post-Secondary Education

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NORTHERN FELLOWSHIP

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The Jane Glassco Northern Fellowship is a policy and leadership development program that recognizes leadership potential among northern Canadians who want to address the emerging policy challenges facing the North. The 18-month program is built around four regional gatherings and offers skills training, mentorship and networking opportunities. Through self-directed learning, group work and the collective sharing of knowledge, Fellows will foster a deeper understanding of important contemporary northern issues, and develop the skills and confidence to better articulate and share their ideas and policy research publicly. The Fellowship is intended for northerners between 25 and 35 years of age, who want to build a strong North that benefits all northerners. Through the Fellowship, we hope to foster a bond among the Fellows that will endure throughout their professional lives and support a pan-northern network.

AUTHORS



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Luke Campbell was involved with the Yukon College Group and was integral to the formation of this paper. The group would like to thank Luke for contributing his time, ideas, and knowledge on culture and language to the group; without Luke's valuable input this paper would not have been possible.



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INTRODUCTION

Yukon College is currently in the process of becoming Yukon University. With these changes, and considering that its campuses reside on First Nation lands, the college has been considering how to respectfully include Indigenous worldviews and ways of knowing in the post-secondary education policy landscape. With 14 First Nations in the Yukon, and a college that serves numerous ethnicities from many backgrounds, there are many cultures and First Nations that must be respected, engaged and involved.

When our Jane Glassco Northern Fellowship group was tasked with working with Yukon College, we held discussions based on our experiences, knowledge and cultures. We came to the themes of “Language, Community and Legends” as a basis from which policy development and maintenance could include Indigenous people. Language, community and legends are commonalities within Indigenous cultures, not only in the Yukon but, one could argue, worldwide.

Language is at the heart of Indigenous cultures and ways of being; to understand a culture, one must have an understanding of how it is all tied to language. Community is at the centre of Indigenous cultures; we are all tied together by community, whether it be a physical community, a family community or a clan system. Legends are stories that exist throughout cultures that not only provide a source of entertainment, but have teachings of vital importance attached to them. Every legend comes with a teaching of some sort, encompassing cultural values, morals and spiritual beliefs.

With these three themes at the forefront, the Jane Glassco Northern Fellowship Yukon College Group has developed a policy recommendation paper for Yukon College. While the paper is intended for the Yukon College, the concept of “Language, Community and Legends” can be applied to policy in other institutions and organizations.

POLICY OPPORTUNITY

The Yukon College Group of the Jane Glassco Northern Fellowship was asked by Yukon College to consider the following question:

“How can Yukon College be inclusive of Indigenous people through policies, existing and new, that range the span from university governance and operations? Please provide a set of recommendations on how Yukon College could move forward in respectfully including Indigenous world views and ways of knowing in our policy landscape.”

BACKGROUND

The main campus of Yukon College is located in Whitehorse, on the Territory of the Kwanlin Dun and the Ta'an Kwach'an First Nations. Yukon College also has community campuses throughout the Yukon.

At a national level, colleges and universities have a long colonial history. Early education initiatives throughout Canada were established with the intent to “civilize” Indigenous peoples: to force Indigenous peoples to accept western ways of being and knowing. The first colleges in Canada were established in the 1700s in Nova Scotia and were created by “colonial legislatures.”¹ Systems of governance in universities across Canada have had various forms of governing bodies. Often called committees or councils and usually modeled after commissions in the United Kingdom, they are designed to provide “strategic advice on policy issues, and [to protect] the institutions from direct government intervention.”² Over time, students and faculty demanded a greater role in the governance of university structures through senates and boards.

Yukon College was founded in 1963, as a Whitehorse-based vocational and training centre aimed at teaching skills for employment. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Yukoners wishing to pursue academic post-secondary studies continued to pursue education outside the territory. In 1977, the Yukon Teacher Education Program was launched: a two-year

university-level program in collaboration with the University of British Columbia. Following a 1979 Yukon Government-commissioned study, it was suggested that a Whitehorse-based post-secondary and continuing education institution be established.³

By 1982, the Teacher Education Program had morphed into studies in liberal arts. In 1983, the then Minister of Education, Bea Firth, announced that the vocational institute and the UBC-linked courses were to merge into Yukon College. It existed entirely under the auspices of the Yukon Department of Education. Under the New Democratic Party government of 1986, led by Tony Penikett, the role of the College’s community campuses expanded. Governance of the College was moved out of government hands, and into those of a Board that was to consist of at least 30% First Nations people and an additional 30% rural community members; power was to be held by the predominantly Indigenous rural communities. The Yukon College Act now specifies that there be 12 members, including three community campus representatives, a staff representative, a student representative and three First Nations representatives.^{4 5} Since the President of the College is a non-voting member, rural and First Nations members still hold the balance of voting power.⁶ The Board of Directors oversees the College’s mission and strategic plan.

1 Glen A. Jones, “Introduction to Higher Education in Canada,” *Higher Education Across Nations*, 1 (2014): 3, accessed Aug. 2, 2019, https://scholar.googleusercontent.com/scholar?q=cache:YQzKrFAnDcJ:scholar.google.com/&hl=en&as_sdt=0,5.

2 Jones, 8.

3 Aron Senkpiel, “Post-Secondary Education in the Yukon : the Last Thirty Years,” *The Northern Review*, 13 (Fall 2007): 6–19. <https://thenorthernreview.ca/index.php/nr/article/view/136/81>

4 Government of the Yukon, Yukon College Act, RSY 2002, c.234. Accessed December 4, 2019, http://www.govyk.ca/legislation/legislation/page_y.html; or at http://www.education.govyk.ca/pdf/policies/yukon_college_act.pdf.

5 Yukon College, “BOG-17 Board Member Selection Process, Board of Governors.” Accessed August 31, 2019. <https://www.yukoncollege.yk.ca/sites/default/files/inline-files/BOG-17 Board Member Selection Process.pdf>.

6 Senkpiel.

Policy development and changes at the college are done through the Senior Executive Committee (SEC). The Senior Executive Committee is composed of the vice-president, president, deans, directors, and the registrar of the college. In August 2019, there were 16 members of SEC. Like many other post-secondary education institutions in Canada, the college has a formal process for policy development, which includes the requirement that all policy recommendations be submitted for review and approval to the SEC. Policies created adhere to relevant “federal and territorial legislation, agreements, policy(s) and other documents.”⁷ The policy development policy specifically encourages relying on pre-existing policies from other institutions. The order of consultation is also made explicit: student union, employees’ union, occupational health and safety, academic council, and other boards or subcommittees. SEC members are expected to lead consultations with their staff. If there is an expectation that First Nations be consulted, this is not made explicit. Neither is any potential role of the President’s Advisory Council on First Nations Initiatives (PACFNI) specified, though presumably the President would have the option of seeking their advice before signing the policy. The policyholder is then responsible for the administration of the policy.⁸

Yukon College includes the First Nations Initiatives Department (FNI), which is an arm of the President’s office. The department has the aim of “integrating an understanding

and awareness of the culture, traditions, and history of Yukon First Nations.” The department also coordinates the President’s Advisory Council on First Nations Initiatives. PACFNI has representatives from each Yukon First Nation. The council assists Yukon College with the goal of increasing the effectiveness of the College’s programs and services. Its mission is to “provide strategic direction to the Yukon College, specifically the Board of Governors’ and the senior management team.” It aims to encourage and support First Nation involvement within the institution, including enhancing the role of First Nations in the college and by developing First Nation Partnerships.⁹ The committee provides recommendations to Yukon College on the College’s overall direction, internal reviews, principles important to First Nations, programming, increasing First Nation involvement, achieving higher success for students, and curriculum development.¹⁰

Not only does Yukon College have PACFNI as a model to engage and include First Nations, the college has worked towards engagement with First Nations though the 2008 report *Sunrise: a Report to Yukon College on the Training Needs and Dynamics of Yukon First Nations*, led by the First Nations Initiative division and PACFNI. The report was generated from the information gathered at a summit on post-secondary education that hosted numerous Yukon First Nations. The report includes information from intensive community consultations with First Nations on training needs.

7 Yukon College, “PO-01, Policy Development and Format, President’s Office,” last modified February 2014, https://www.yukoncollege.yk.ca/sites/default/files/inline-files/PO-01_Policy_Development_and_Format_-_Approved_February_2014_-_signed.pdf, 6.

8 Yukon College, “PO-01 Policy Development and Format, President’s Office.”

9 Yukon College, “First Nations Initiatives.” Accessed September 2, 2019, <https://www.yukoncollege.yk.ca/first-nations-initiatives>.

10 Yukon College, “President’s Advisory Committee on First Nation Initiatives, Mission and Mandate.” Accessed September 2, 2019, https://www.yukoncollege.yk.ca/sites/default/files/inline-files/PACFNI_Mission_and_Mandate.pdf.

According to the report, the creation of PACFNI has allowed the college and First Nations to “walk two trails” that will form “one future.” PACFNI identified areas of priority and focus for the college: Leadership and Governance, Health and Wellness, and Heritage and Culture. Through the process of community visits, PACFNI members assisted in inviting each of their respective communities to meetings centred around education and training needs. “They met with 9 communities, 11 First Nations, and received one written response.”¹¹

Through this process, many education and training-related issues and opportunities were identified, and 17 recommendations in response to the issues, opportunities and needs were made. Two of the recommendations urged Yukon College to communicate with Yukon First Nations more effectively, to enhance the exchange with YFN, and coordinate with them and the community campuses. Sunrise also encouraged an increase in First Nation staff, and building additional institutional policies to expand the relationship with YFN.¹²

¹¹ Yukon College, Sunrise: A Report to Yukon College on the Training Needs and Dynamics of Yukon First Nations, last modified February 2008, accessed September 2, 2019, https://www.yukoncollege.yk.ca/sites/default/files/inline-files/Sunrise_%28Complete_with_covers%29_February_2008.pdf, 13.

¹² Yukon College.

POLICY OPTIONS

The JGNF Yukon College Group identified three policy options in response to this policy opportunity:

1. Root Yukon College policy in Language, Community and Legends.

2. Continue with the College's current plans for Indigenizing or decolonizing policy as the college evolves into a university.

3. Become a university without disrupting colonial ways of being and doing.

POLICY ANALYSIS

1. ROOT YUKON COLLEGE POLICY IN LANGUAGE, COMMUNITY AND LEGENDS

This policy option requires making three changes that focus on Yukon First Nations Language, a strong culture of community, and having policy focused around legends. This option is presented in a holistic way. Each of the policy changes we present cannot occur without the others; all intertwine, relate, and must all be worked upon. These changes are outlined in detail below:

Have Indigenous language at the forefront of any changes to and within the College, by having the Yukon College fund free, year-long Indigenous language learning for staff, board members and community members.

If the College wants its policies to include Indigenous ways of knowing, those who work within the organization need to have a basis for understanding Yukon First Nation ways of being. This would provide an opportunity for staff to have a fundamental understanding of the worldview of First Nations people. Language is a method of transfer: a way to transport worldview to the core of the work of Yukon College policy creators. Language can connect people; it creates a bond and an understanding of how a people function and their patterns of thought. In addition, language classes would provide local First Nations people with access to language learning. With this knowledge, policy writers could act as translators or channels of the information gained through thorough consultation.

Yukon College needs to truly include Yukon First Nations in creating new policy and in amending existing policy.

The moment of transition to a university is an opportunity to start at the beginning and to take time on a process that could deeply uproot the college's current practices. This process would be grounded in the overarching belief that no member of the Yukon College community be left behind. This central value is that communities must help one another and requires that Yukon First Nations be consulted about how they want to be involved in policy development.

Yukon College needs to start from the beginning and do comprehensive consultations with communities. Throughout this process, it is of utmost importance for those carrying out the work to make consultations comfortable and meaningful for community participants: Where does it make sense to meet? Could it be on the land? What local protocol should govern the meeting? It is deeply important to listen and to remember that each First Nation has its own set of values and ways of being. Each community campus will reflect this uniqueness. This is similar to the engagement that informed the report Sunrise.

To be truly inclusive of Indigenous people, the college must respect Indigenous ways of being, beginning with the creation of policy through working with community. In the college's instance, its community would be staff, students, various board members and First Nations.

PACFNI and the FNI could undertake a similar engagement and consultation process to that taken when creating the Sunrise document.

Yukon College needs to ask the communities what stories and legends they would use to aid in informing policy. If First Nations are in agreement, then legends could inform policy creation and amendments, as well as College administration.

PACFNI and FNI need to engage with First Nation communities further, to inquire about the usage of legends to assist in the creation and maintenance of policy.

Legends are what would tie the recommendations of language and community together. Legends are universal to Indigenous groups all over the world. Legends are told in Indigenous languages and are often what teaches a community its guiding principles and values.

Yukon First Nation people have survived within this great land for time immemorial. They have thrived on this earth by sharing their language and culture orally. As the people progress and flourish, one thing will remain the same: their stories.

Only if First Nations are freely willing to share legends to inform policies should this approach be pursued. If they are not in agreement, Yukon College should pursue other options. To impose an idea on pre-existing nations would be re-colonizing.

Several times throughout our group's process, it has seemed that Yukon College has been looking for a list of Indigenous principles to guide policymakers. Ideally, these would be principles common to all 14 Yukon First Nations. This is reminiscent of efforts in Nunavut to integrate *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit* (IQ), Inuit worldview, into imported southern governance structures often staffed by non-Inuit visiting for a few years from the south.¹³ In short, our fellow fellows have said that IQ as a checklist in the hands of non-Inuit is insufficient on its own.

The legends they have passed on through their people have intrinsic and important lessons, and contain guiding principles and values. Incorporating legends into policy will make policy more engaging, relatable and inclusive.

¹³ Francis Lévesque "Revisiting Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit: Inuit knowledge, culture, language, and values in Nunavut institutions since 1999," *Études Inuit Studies*, 38, Issue1–2 (2014): 115–136. Accessed December 4, 2019, <https://www.erudit.org/en/journals/etudinit/2014-v38-n1-2-etudinit01719/1028856ar/>

2. CONTINUE WITH THE COLLEGE'S CURRENT PLANS FOR INDIGENIZING OR DECOLONIZING POLICY AS THE COLLEGE EVOLVES INTO A UNIVERSITY.

Yukon College, as we understand it, is already committed to move away from colonial ways by working to Indigenize in five key areas: programming, services, space, policy, and governance. The FNI unit at the Yukon College has been working on Indigenizing policy; the college could continue down this route.

However, keeping in mind that at the core, post-secondary education institutes are western and non-Indigenous, to truly work with all Yukon First Nations, is it enough to "Indigenize" an institute's policy? Is that doable?

The Jane Glassco Northern Fellowship Yukon College Group grappled with this concept, and come from the belief that it is not enough to create band-aid solutions and throw Indigenous things onto policy and then call it "Indigenous." In order to truly Indigenize a western and non-Indigenous institute, the core assumptions need to be revisited. Therefore this option is not recommended. We recommend revisiting language, community and culture, which are core components of Indigenous cultures, and making those also the core of the institution.

3. BECOME A UNIVERSITY WITHOUT DISRUPTING COLONIAL WAYS OF BEING AND DOING.

Yukon College could continue adhering to its current policy on policy development, whereby all policy is reviewed by the Senior Executive Committee. This current policy specifies that anyone can be involved in the policy process, which indicates inclusiveness. However, there is no explicit requirement to involve First Nations as stakeholders. Given the college's communicated commitment to Indigenizing, this is not what they plan to pursue as an institution.

The college is actively attempting to be more inclusive of Indigenous peoples. Historically, western education institutions in Canada did not always have an Indigenous-friendly atmosphere nor policies. As previously mentioned, one original intent of education institutions was to westernize Indigenous people. If colonial ways of being and doing continue to be followed, then the college needs to review and update its existing direction to Indigenize and be more inclusive of Indigenous people, because it will never fit. Therefore, if Yukon College truly wants to be more inclusive, it should not continue down this path.

OPTION 1

Root Yukon College Policy in Language, Community and Legends

Yukon College can be inclusive of Indigenous people through policies, existing and new, that range from university governance and operations through Language, Community, and Legends. However, this process will take time. Because of the history of academic institutions and their origins in western perspectives, any attempts to Indigenize policy and academic institutions will take a considerable amount of time, work and devotion.

Indigenous cultures are visual and oral. Storytelling often involves descriptive words, and cultures are very much tied to land and the environment, including the animals and beings on it. To keep true to these principles, images have been chosen to represent the policy recommendations.

We strongly urge the Yukon College to take further steps by working with Yukon First Nations groups, the college community and PACFNI in creating an artistic rendering that would fit the Yukon College community's vision on making these recommendations come alive through imagery. Not only would this create more of a community through working together to create imagery that is applicable to the college, as non-Yukon College community members, the Yukon College Group believe that imposing an image on the community does not fit with the idea of decolonization. As mentioned, to truly Indigenize policy and the College's way of being, all steps to policy creation and maintenance must be carefully thought out, and each step must be respectful of Indigenous cultures.



LANGUAGE

Provide free Language Classes in immersive settings to staff, students, and affiliated board members to increase people's understanding of Indigenous worldview.

The image of the river was chosen to represent language, as it is ever changing, you cannot live without water, and nothing can be sustained without it. Without language, there are key cultural components of Yukon First Nations missing.



COMMUNITY

The college needs to include all cultures when looking to create policy and can do so by engaging Yukon First Nation communities and the college community in a meaningful way to pose the question on how the Yukon College could include Indigenous peoples in policy development.

The image of a wolf and raven/crow was chosen to represent community because together those beings create a community. While they may not always follow the same path, the beings must learn to live together in harmony and balance.



LEGENDS

Legends are traditional governing mechanisms in many Indigenous cultures. Yukon College could consult with Indigenous groups in the Yukon to look at having Legends inform the governance of the College. PACFNI and FNI could lead initial engagement and consultation.

The image of the ground was chosen to represent legends. Legends keep us all grounded and together. Legends are the foundation for many First Nation cultures and their use was how many traditionally governed themselves.



Govern the university by language, community and legends.

As a constant reminder and as a guiding system for the policy process we recommend that the Yukon College utilize the imagery and recommendations concurrently, not separately.

Language, Community and Legends in Post-Secondary Education

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