

Jun 27th, 11:00 AM - 11:15 AM

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Joppe, Marion; Thomas-Francois, Kimberly; and Hayhoe, Mychal-Ann, "University Best Practice and Indigenous Human Rights in Tourism" (2016). *Tourism Education Futures Initiative (TEFI) Conference*. 12.
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University Best Practice and Indigenous Human Rights in Tourism

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Universities are identified as institutions that can play a pivotal role in ensuring that indigenous human rights are recognized and adhered to, since education has been a tool for setting and promoting agendas in societies. This has been epitomized in the role played by business schools in enhancing capitalistic societies (Alvesson & Willmott, 2012). Tourism education at universities can therefore be instrumental in advancing the duty of care necessary to advance justice, fairness, recognition and empowerment of Indigenous Peoples worldwide.

The 21st Century marks a time when Indigenous Peoples are attempting to decolonize so that they can pursue their own way of life and world views (Welberg, 2008). Therefore, the two-exchanges at universities should be facilitated in a way that exposes both worldviews that Indigenous Peoples confront (Welberg, 2008). Their participation in education in the 1970's, particularly in Canada, was almost nonexistent, however, the situation has relatively improved, especially through the introduction of Aboriginal education institutions (Welberg, 2008). This introduction presents an opportunity for tertiary education institutions on a whole to promote the awareness for wellbeing of Indigenous Peoples.

Employing an exploratory qualitative research methodology specifically studying universities in Canada, this research attempted to understand the current nature of relationships between universities and Indigenous Peoples. Ultimately the objective of the research was to understand the state of affairs in order to devise strategies that will a) identify best practice for deployment by universities for engagement with Indigenous Peoples, b) recognize those universities deploying best practices, and c) assist universities that are seeking to develop their engagement practices with Indigenous Peoples.

In the context of this research the term "Aboriginal" is defined according to the Canadian constitution of 1982 and includes the three categories of native Peoples: Indians, Inuit and Métis (Kesler, 2009). The term "indigenous" however, represents a broader international context inclusive of Aboriginal Peoples, but also other groups (Kesler, 2009). This paper will therefore refer to groups of native Peoples represented in Canada as Aboriginal.

Preliminary research findings indicated that although several universities have established independent Aboriginal support services such as Aboriginal Student Resource Centers, specifically for Aboriginal students, they sparsely facilitated the sharing of knowledge and worldviews between Aboriginal and mainstream students. Thus the two-way exchanges, awareness and recognition of rights of Aboriginal Peoples remain in isolation to generations of Canadians. The exploratory nature of the research led to the realization that colleges were more progressive than universities in incorporating and integrating the essence of Aboriginal Peoples in their course curriculum, though some have been short-lived due to fiscal challenges. Tourism presents a platform for the integration and sharing

of cultural knowledge from Aboriginal Peoples, however, this was not seen as a common practice among universities.

Universities' commitment to respect and support the rights of Aboriginal Peoples varied from non-existent to high intensity. Similarly, the ways in which they acknowledged First Nations Territory varied significantly. The majority limited their recognition to an introduction of acknowledging the land at university ceremonies while at least one other focused more on empowerment of Aboriginal Peoples by seeking their representation on the university's management boards to ensure their interests are taken into consideration during the decision-making process. Their involvement in partnerships was also wide-ranging. There were a few universities that challenged the status quo and demonstrated their duty of care to Aboriginal Peoples. Only two universities had recently introduced the taking of at least one indigenous studies course as a graduation requirement starting in 2016, while one other university had a similar requirement for Bachelor of Arts students.

Research in this area is also limited; there is an imperative for researchers to assist universities in finding the pathway that will advance the well-being of Aboriginal Peoples. It is also critical that universities seek to have Aboriginal groups define themselves, their ways of thinking and their lived experiences in order that targeted interventions may be deemed a success (Logan, 2008).

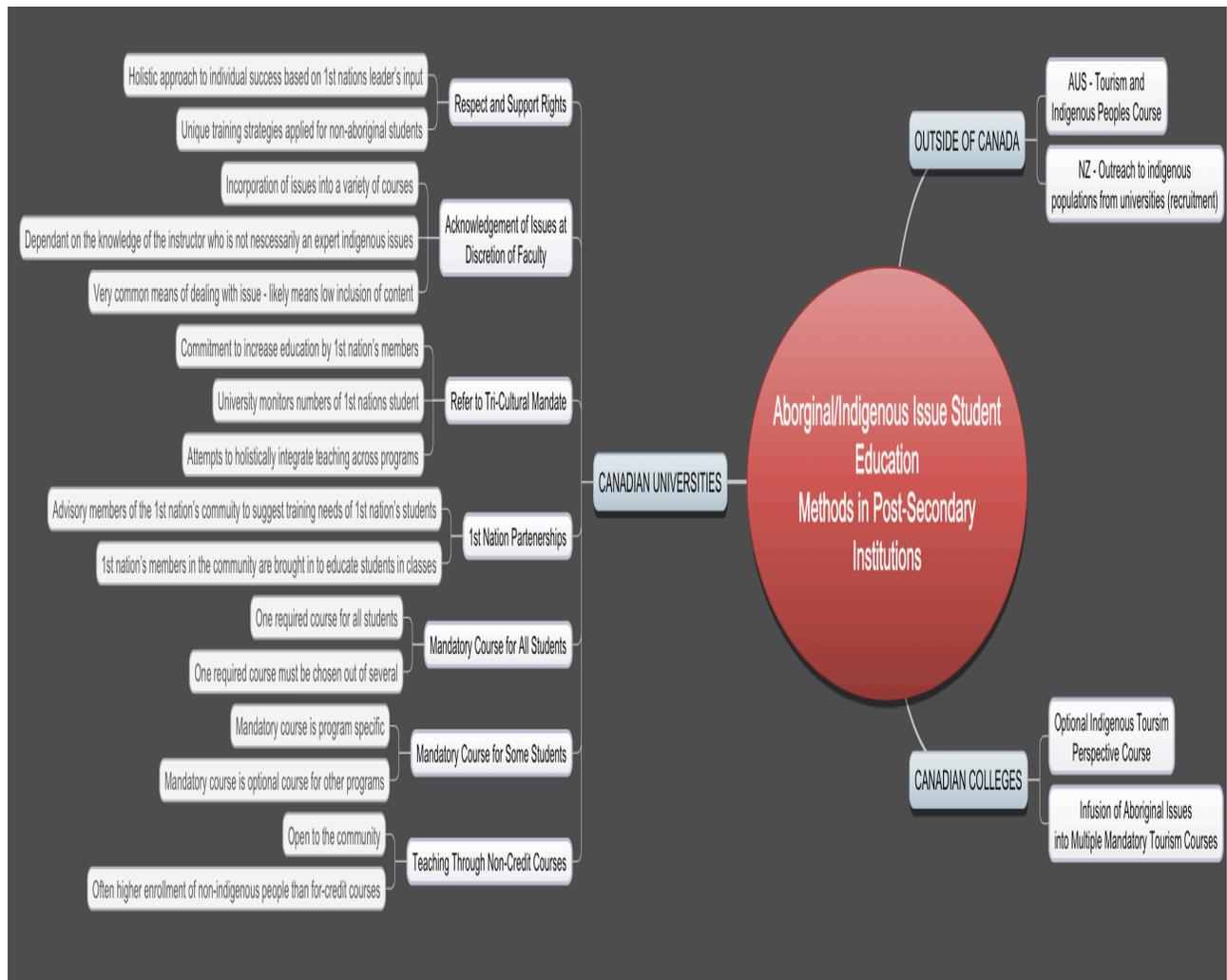


Figure 1: Mind map showing the different method of educating Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students on issues related to Aboriginal Peoples.

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