

Office of Aboriginal and Northern Studies: Director's Report 2006

We are pleased to announce the creation of the Office of Aboriginal and Northern Research at the Gorsebrook Research Institute. The creation of this office is a natural expansion of the Labrador Project, our long-term collaboration (since 1998) with the Innu First Nation of Labrador and Environment Canada, which will continue under the auspices of this new office. However, our mandate will now include collaborative research projects with other Aboriginal groups in Atlantic Canada, such as our current Native Dance Project, as well as our ongoing participation in international networks such as the University of the Arctic and our involvement with the Government of Bhutan on research relating to the Gross National Happiness (GNH) initiative. Maintaining our Atlantic Canadian focus within an international perspective has proved highly effective in finding global unity around local concerns, and in strengthening and creating networks of benefit to Aboriginal Peoples and Atlantic Canadians

The Labrador Project

As our longest standing project, the Labrador Project continues to fulfill two mandates: the documentation, mapping, and archiving of Innu environmental knowledge (a.k.a. Traditional Ecological Knowledge or TEK) of Nitassinan, the ancestral lands of the Innu, and the development of a model, cross-cultural, community-based, educational program called the Innu Environmental Guardians Program. Over the past year, the documenting of Innu environmental knowledge has been focused on the Mealy Mountain area of Labrador where a new Federal park is being created and through which the Trans-Labrador Highway extension is being constructed. Environment Canada has designed research blocks within the area to monitor the effects of the highway on migratory bird habitats and wetlands. As part of this monitoring effort, we are also working with Innu tshishenuat (elders) and Innu Environmental Guardians to see the affects of these developments on Innu land use and life styles. The Innu Environmental Guardians Program was developed in response to the Innu Nation's request for assistance in the training of Guardians to protect and manage their ancestral lands in preparation for self-government. The program is co-designed with Innu representatives and reflects Innu concerns to learn environmental sciences and related disciplines while simultaneously preserving and integrating Innu environmental knowledge and values as the foundation of their training. Therefore, the role of tshinnenuat (elders) as advisors and professors of their own knowledge is central to the program. Since Autumn, 2002, members of the Saint Mary's faculty, including the faculties of Atlantic Canada Studies and Anthropology, as well as the Division of Continuing Education, have worked with our project on the development, accreditation, and the delivery of the Guardians Program. Our last educational module delivered within the community focused on the identification of migratory bird habitats and aerial survey techniques in the Mealy Mountain area of Labrador.

The Native Dance Project

This past year, our office was invited by Carleton University to partner in the Native Dance Project, a project to develop a web-based, educational curriculum on First Nations' Dance. Dr. Sable was asked to oversee research on both Innu and Mi'kmaw dances as well as digitize and contribute her collection of

recordings, artifacts, and databases relating to Mi'kmaw First Nations dance history. An important aspect of the project has been the hiring of three First Nations researchers to conduct interviews within Mi'kmaw and Innu communities and undertake background research. The hiring and training of Aboriginal researchers is part of the mandate of the OANR. This project material will serve as the content for the web site which is due to be completed later in the year.