

## **‘Indigenous Ways’: Assessing the Awareness of and Potential Need for Identifying Content on Indigenous Worldview in Educating Libraries/Archives/Museum (LAM) Entry Level Professionals**

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### Abstract:

*Professional associations in the libraries, archives, and museums (LAM) area have developed competency documents that provide guidance on the education and training of new professionals. One competency area that remains unresolved but is of increasing importance is the knowledge base we refer to as indigenous ways. Indigenous ways refer to the traditional lifeways, personal and community protocol or etiquette, and beliefs of Native peoples. Knowledge of indigenous ways is essential in assisting LAM professionals in understanding the boundaries, limits, and intersections between cultural protocols of indigenous communities and professional values. This paper reports on preliminary findings from the “Indigenous Ways” project - an Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) funded collaborative planning grant to acquire benchmark data on the level of awareness of indigenous ways among libraries, archives, and museum (LAM) faculty, recent graduates, tribal LAM professionals, and individuals who have served on committees or work groups that have produced recent professional documents on indigenous ways. The goal of the project is to assess awareness and develop recommendations for curricular material that might assist LAM educators in incorporating the concepts around indigenous ways into their graduate classes.*

**Keywords:** Indigenous ways, curriculum, library science, archival science, museum studies

## **Introduction**

The climate of libraries, archives, and museum (LAM) settings in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is characterized by the presence of wide reaching and deeply impactful issues. These include creating a place at the table for LAM institutions in the creation and delivery of e-content; the need for continued development of digital preservation tools and standards; recognition of LAM settings as first responders to disaster planning and response; a new role in crisis informatics to serve communities during times of need; and the imperative to respond to changing patron demographics. New LAM professionals are called on to develop creative and effective responses to these needs while also demonstrating that they have mastered base level competencies and have the potential to take on a leadership and advocacy role. Professional associations have developed a number of documents that provide guidance on what one might expect in a new LAM staff member and how they might plan their educational programs to be successful in a still challenging job market. One competency area that remains unresolved, but is of increasing importance, is the knowledge base we refer to as indigenous ways. Attention to this area may only increase now that “Awareness of Indigenous Knowledge Paradigms” is included as a core element of library and information science curricula by the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions in the 2012 revised “Guidelines for Professional Library/Information Educational Programs.”

Indigenous ways refer to the traditional lifeways, personal and community protocol or etiquette, and beliefs of Native peoples. These beliefs and daily behaviors are often reflected in expressions of indigenous living such as text of stories, ceremonial objects, images, and media captures of cultural performances such as dance and song. These tangible reflections of indigenous living are found not only as living expressions and material objects found in tribal homeland areas but also as content housed in LAM cultural heritage institutions. Regardless of a LAM professional’s personal view of the world and the location of his/her employment, he or she might have occasion to encounter, describe, organize, and share traditional cultural materials within their collections.

## **Research Question**

In our own experiences through our membership in professional organizations and in the graduate coursework we have both completed and taught, we have become aware that more information is needed to assist LAM professionals in understanding the boundaries, limits, and intersections between cultural protocols of indigenous communities and the professional values we respect and employ. Educators, especially, serve as the point of contact between established professional ethics and the preparation of entry-level archivists, librarians, and museum personnel. Given the acknowledgement of the importance of indigenous ways and the need to extend the discussion regarding the protocols for indigenous ways, we worked with the American Indian Library Association to submit a proposal to the U.S. Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) to fund a one-year collaborative planning grant to acquire benchmark data on the level of awareness of indigenous ways among four audiences: LAM faculty, recent graduates, tribal LAM professionals, and individuals who have served on committees or work groups that have produced recent professional documents on indigenous ways. Our IMLS Collaborative Planning Grant was awarded in summer 2012. This brief paper introduces the “Indigenous Ways” study and foreshadows where the results have taken us so far on the journey to understanding and respecting where we encounter indigenous cultural heritage within our professional lives. The goal of the project is

to assess awareness and develop recommendations for curricular material that might assist LAM educators in incorporating the concepts around indigenous ways into their graduate classes.

## **Methodology**

We chose to design and administer an attitudinal survey to provide benchmark assessments of the current knowledge and attitudes of indigenous ways among key constituents. These target audiences include LAM faculty, recent graduates of LAM programs, LAM professionals involved in the development of key protocol documents, and LAM practitioners in tribal settings. This paper addresses preliminary results from the surveys of LAM faculty and recent graduates.

We designed the surveys using Qualtrics, a commercial online survey service for which the University of Texas at Austin has a campus-wide license. Qualtrics facilitates the collection, analysis, storage, and presentation of research survey data, while satisfying the university's information security requirements. Survey recipients were asked to answer questions about their awareness, experience, and thoughts about the place of indigenous ways for LAM professionals. We defined indigenous ways, also referred to as indigenous worldview, as the approach to conducting everyday life, interaction with others, and philosophical or religious perspectives held by Native or indigenous peoples. The instruments were pretested and comments from those completing the surveys were monitored and incorporated as slight refinements to the surveys.

We used several approaches to deliver the call to participate in the study. We sent direct invitations to 120 faculty members, at least one at each of the programs accredited by the American Library Association. In addition, a message was distributed to the American Indian Library Association electronic and Asian Pacific American Library Association lists for members, on the Society of American Archivists' (SAA) archival educators electronic list, the list for those involved in the Archival Education and Research Institutes (AERI), and SNAP, the SAA lists for new archival professionals. To reach museum educators, emails were distributed to the electronic list of the American Alliance of Museum's Committee on Museum Professional Training, the MUSEUM-L list, to staff at the Western Museums Association and the American Association for State and Local History, and to selected museum studies faculty identified through a search on GradSchools.com. Notices were distributed to our Facebook and LinkedIn communities. Faculty at LAM programs offered to extend the call to recent graduates through their contacts and alumni lists. While we aimed for a wide broadcast of the invitation to complete the survey, we consider the sample of respondents to be purposeful rather than representative. That is, because we shared the invitation largely through existing contacts, it is likely that those who completed the surveys were those who knew us and/or possibly were in support of the study and its aims. We predicted that we would receive a total of 135 responses to all four surveys, or around 35 from each of the four targeted audiences—LAM faculty, recent graduates, tribal LAM practitioners, and members of protocol document committees. With the survey still open at the time of writing, the response rate has exceeded initial projections.

Preliminary findings are described as follows, based on completed responses to the faculty and the recent graduate surveys.

## Overview of Preliminary Findings from LAM Faculty

Of 105 faculty members opening the link to the online survey, 79 (75 percent) completed all questions on the survey, although the number of respondents completing any one question varied. For example, 90 faculty members answered the question, “Given the explanation above, have you heard about ‘indigenous ways’?” Of those, a majority of faculty (78 or 86 percent) had heard of indigenous ways. The context of how they heard of the topic came from personal contacts, their own Native or indigenous heritage, readings, conferences, and professional contacts.

Awareness of the topic, indigenous ways, might also be measured by faculty awareness of key documents that provide guidance on how LAM professionals might interact with Native peoples and their cultural expressions. The survey asked respondents to indicate whether they had heard of three documents—the Protocols for Native American Archival Materials, a report of a Presidential Traditional Cultural Expressions Task Force of the American Library Association, and the protocols statement of ATSILIRN, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Library and Information Resource Network. Of the three documents, an equal number of faculty reported awareness of the ALA Task Force Report (41 faculty or 52 percent of the 79 who completed the survey) and the First Archivist Circle protocols (40 or 51 percent) with fewer faculty aware of the ATSILIRN protocols (31 or 39 percent).

Still, 48 or a slight majority (53 percent) of the ninety-one faculty who answered the question, “In general, how informed do you feel about ‘indigenous ways’?,” reported that they were fairly well or very well informed. The top issues about which faculty felt they lacked information were indigenous protocol or etiquette (72 percent), sacred materials (60 percent), or indigenous philosophies (58 percent). Ninety percent of the faculty who summarized how they felt about indigenous ways indicated that they were interested or curious with half of the faculty reporting feeling hopeful or optimistic. Still some felt confused (10 percent) or sad (16 percent), fearful/afraid (11 percent), angry (7 percent), or powerless (10 percent).

We sought to further define these diffuse feelings, asking respondents to indicate their thoughts about statements that are sometimes overheard in discussions of intersections between the values and roles of LAM institutions and indigenous expressions. Survey response categories to each of these questions followed a three point scale: agree, disagree, or unsure.

1. Opening negotiations with tribal communities opposes my beliefs in intellectual freedom.
2. I am concerned that indigenous communities and others will not only require changes in access to content but will also request return of materials.
3. I am concerned that tribal communities will reclaim materials and then be unable to care for them properly.
4. If tribes ask us to limit access to the material we have about them in our collections, this will lead to reduced options for scholarship and academic study.
5. Accommodating tribal requests will lead to changes in practice that will be burdensome for libraries, archives, and museums.
6. Copyright and patents provide adequate and rightful protection of intellectual content.
7. Opening agreements with indigenous communities will open the floodgates for approaches from other groups that will claim they should have control over traditional cultural expressions.

The three statements faculty had some degree of agreement with were questions four (36 or 41 percent), three (25 or 28 percent), and seven (17 or 20 percent). These results point to concern among faculty of the impact of restrictions on access to traditional knowledge for research and the potential impact of negotiating or accommodating tribal access.

We then directed questions to the place of indigenous ways within LAM coursework. Half (43 or 51 percent) of faculty felt that LAM professionals should incorporate indigenous ways in their classes while nearly as many (39 or 46 percent) thought it should be covered to some extent. Over half of faculty (54 or 64 percent) reported that they already incorporated topics related to indigenous ways in the classes that they teach. These ranged from classes on collection management, information policy, reference services, classification theory, storytelling, multicultural services, materials for children and young adults, ethics, archives administration, curation, collections care, and appraisal, among others. The most frequently discussed topics in courses were discussions on how to balance access to knowledge within the context of cultural protocols (39 or 72 percent of faculty) and intellectual and cultural property rights issues (38 or 70 percent).

### **Overview of Preliminary Findings from Recent Graduates from LAM Programs**

In this study, recent graduates were defined as individuals who had received graduate degrees from LAM programs since May 2008. Ninety percent of those who started the online survey completed it. The most common ways recent graduates heard about indigenous ways was through their formal education studies for their undergraduate degree (50 or 52 percent), graduate degree (42 or 43 percent), or through direct interaction with indigenous peoples (39 or 40 percent). One third (33 or 34 percent) were aware of the First Archivist Circle protocols but many fewer were aware of the ALA Task Force report (15 or 15 percent) or of the ATSIILIRN protocols (11 or 11 percent). When compared with faculty, fewer (2 percent of graduates compared with 14 percent of faculty) recent graduates felt very well informed about indigenous ways and around half (56 or 57 percent) felt fairly or very badly informed. Over half of recent graduates felt that they lacked information, in particular, about indigenous protocol (81 or 85 percent), sacred materials (58 or 61 percent), the place of indigenous language(s) (58 or 61 percent), sacred materials (58 or 61 percent), indigenous philosophies (57 or 60 percent), and traditional cultural expressions (55 or 58 percent).

Like the faculty, at least 90 percent (86 or 91 percent) of recent graduates expressed interest or curiosity in indigenous ways. They also offered similar responses to the seven values statements, with the highest level of agreement with statements four (39 or 41 percent), three (24 or 25 percent), and seven (20 or 21 percent). A strong majority (88 percent) felt that LAM educators should incorporate indigenous ways in their courses. Recent graduates also recalled that the most common topics addressing indigenous ways in their coursework were repatriation (28 or 78 percent of respondents), balancing access within cultural protocols (26 or 72 percent), and intellectual and cultural property rights issues (25 or 69 percent). Students also recalled hearing about indigenous ways in wide ranging courses.

### **Interpretation and Conclusion**

Faculty and recent graduates both have great awareness of the general concept of indigenous ways although one out of four graduates and nearly half of faculty felt badly informed about the topic to some degree. Protocol documents often represent extensive deliberation among professional membership

associations. The degree to which the documents are accepted by and promoted by the association members might impact the degree to which faculty of LAM programs are aware of their existence. Faculty found opportunities in a wide range of graduate courses to introduce the topic of indigenous ways and students encountered the topic in many formal class settings. Some students reflected that what they knew about indigenous ways came from their own heritage and not from their formal education. Some saw this as a gap in their academic preparation or in their teaching: “I think it is a great, gaping hole in the curriculum at the school I attended”; “I am angry that indigenous ways are not often considered in core ways in LIS. Rather, they are treated as a special topic rather than endemic to a knowledge/information discipline like LIS.”

Fear of indigenous ways was expressed as fear of offending Native communities or fear of how one might be viewed or perceived by others. One recent graduate explained, “Sometimes I do not know how the indigenous people will view me and my ways of thinking. At times I have not felt welcome around certain circles, and wondered how we could be on better terms with one another.” At least one faculty member was unsure about how to talk about indigenous ways with his/her faculty colleagues: “I have concerns about broaching the topic of different approaches to collection materials with my peers, senior colleagues, and superiors.” And others carefully reminded us that learning about indigenous ways is a lifelong study, even if one is an indigenous person.

While indigenous ways is not an easy concept to describe or understand, these preliminary results have provided a picture of current thinking among educators and new graduates about to embark upon their careers in LAM settings. We are encouraged by many of the comments we received on open-ended questions from the surveys. A recent graduate added: “I am excited that this survey is being taken and that people are taking the time and effort to do this research giving it the attention it deserves.” And from two faculty respondents: “I am so pleased to see this study underway and hope that it draws attention to much neglected artifacts and culture”; “Good luck with the surveys. This is long overdue.”

This paper is a starting point to pursue further discussions with LAM faculty in designing curricular materials that assist in incorporating content in indigenous ways within existing courses. Such curricular content might be developed through collaborative efforts between indigenous practitioners and faculty members. Data and opinions may also be asked over time as an approach to tracing any changes in attitudes or behaviors. With the support of the respondents and others interested in this topic we will take the next step of following up with selected survey respondents to develop curricular material that might provide greater options of including these discussions in LAM programs.

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