

# Building Reconciliation at the U of S

College of Arts and Science/Department of History

## SHIFTING CURRENTS:

### COAST SALISH WAR CANOE RACING AND COLONIAL CONTROL IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST



#### INTRODUCTION

My ongoing community engaged research explores the dramatic changes in Coast Salish war canoe racing throughout the nineteenth century. Currently, I am working on an MA thesis that argues these changes to war canoe racing were responses to the colonial presence, and that the Coast Salish were adapting to, and often subverting, their new colonial relationship by using war canoe festivals as substitutes for potlatch gatherings (when these were officially banned), and as substitutes for intercommunity conflicts and relationships, which were constrained under colonial control.

#### CONTACT

Davis Rogers, MA candidate in History  
(Supervisor Keith Carlson)  
[davis.rogers@usask.ca](mailto:davis.rogers@usask.ca)

#### ETHNOHISTORY FIELD SCHOOL

In the spring of 2015 I was generously invited to participate in a month-long ethnohistory field school—a biannual collaboration between the Stó:lō Nation, the University of Victoria, and the University of Saskatchewan. Held in Chilliwack, British Columbia—Stó:lō territory—throughout the month of May, student researchers, at the request of the Stó:lō people, complete projects that benefit the Stó:lō community and their own scholarship.

I was given the opportunity to research the origins of Coast Salish war canoe racing, by interviewing and learning from elders who carved, and raced, and skipped their own teams, as well as multiple generations of Coast Salish pullers who have trained and raced most of their lives.



#### COMMUNITY ENGAGED SCHOLARSHIP

Community engaged research projects such as this field school promote mutually beneficial relationships between scholars and the sources of their scholarship: the communities they research and the histories they engage in.

The communities who employ or engage these scholars can direct their research and studies to projects that are beneficial to their people, and the scholars are able to establish lasting connections to communities they often spend years working with.

For example, my research project soon developed into my MA thesis, and with the continued interest and support of the Stó:lō community, I am working on transitioning my research into a PhD proposal.



#### BUILDING RECONCILIATION

Building reconciliation between Canada's indigenous and settler communities is a gradual and fragile process.

Yet efforts to decolonize the history of Canada's many Indigenous communities are strengthened with sustained and supported projects like this ethnohistory field school.

Indigenous directed, guided, and produced research and community engagement projects continue to produce some of the richest and strongest scholarship possible, all while demonstrating (and perhaps proving) what a successful relationship between indigenous communities and researchers and scholars can achieve.

