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January 2019

Research Practices of Indigenous Studies Scholars at the University of Arizona: An Ithaka S+R Report

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Introduction

This report was completed at the invitation of Ithaka S+R, as part of a multi-university qualitative study on the research practices of Indigenous Studies scholars. The University of Arizona Libraries (UAL) joined 11 other participating academic libraries in conducting interviews with scholars at their own institutions. The results of the local study are synthesized here as well as compiled, along with the other institutions' findings, into the final Ithaka S+R report.

The University of Arizona is a large public research university and land-grant institution, founded in 1885, and situated on the lands of the Tohono O'odham Nation. Its American Indian Studies program was the first of its kind in the country to offer a Master's degree and Ph.D. degree, in 1982 and 1997, respectively. It is home to the renowned [American Indian Language Development Institute](#), the [Native Nations Institute](#), and the [Native American Research Training Center](#).

Methodology

The UAL research team included three library faculty and one graduate assistant. Two of the librarians support students and faculty in American Indian Studies and anthropology, one is Borderlands Curator at the UAL's Special Collections, and the graduate student is pursuing a Ph.D. in American Indian Studies and works as a graduate assistant in Special Collections.

The study methodology was developed and coordinated by Ithaka S+R. Participating research teams attended a two-day workshop on Indigenous research methodology, the IRB process, conducting interviews, coding and theming transcripts, and writing the report. The workshop enabled methodological consistency among participating teams, while still offering a great deal of autonomy and flexibility to each institution to produce a report that addresses local themes and recommendations.

After a sustained effort to identify and contact potential interviewees, five scholars agreed to be interviewed. As "Indigenous Studies" is interdisciplinary, the scholars we approached were affiliated with different academic departments across campus, including American Indian Studies, anthropology, education, law, linguistics, and public health. The research teams were encouraged to reach out to faculty who are of both Indigenous or non-Indigenous backgrounds. However, when possible, recruiting preference was given to scholars who self-identify as Indigenous in recognition of the ongoing underrepresentation of Indigenous voices in academia.

Our research team wanted to follow Indigenous research methodology as closely as possible. As has been suggested by many Indigenous Studies scholars, reaching out to potential study participants without having established any relationships within the community can reflect negatively on the researcher, as a result of the historical exploitation of Indigenous knowledge by Western/mainstream researchers (Smith, 2012, p. 229-230). Members of our research team had relationships with several faculty in the selected departments prior to our email requesting interviews. However, we are also acutely aware that some of our emails were sent to researchers with whom our team did not have

strong connections and that this could be one of the reasons our requests for interviews were declined (or went unanswered).

One-on-one semi-structured interviews were conducted by the three librarian members of the research team. Interview questions were supplied by Ithaka S+R, and the interviews were transcribed by the graduate assistant. We wanted to acknowledge and honor Indigenous culture and communities by doing research in a “good way” throughout the entirety of the process (Kovach, 2009, p. 35). Maintaining relationships throughout the process became one of our main concerns, as did reciprocity. We offered interviewees an opportunity to review their transcriptions and make any desired additions, modifications, or deletions.

Once the transcripts were approved, we moved to the coding phase. Each member of the team read through and coded the transcripts individually. When we came together, we discussed our codes and then moved onto the theming phase. After individual theming we came together and decided upon different areas we wanted to address in the written report. We identified several key areas of discussion, outlined in the report below, and divided the writing accordingly before reshaping the text into one cohesive report. We attempted to focus on and highlight those issues that set Indigenous Studies researchers apart from other disciplines. Our draft was shared with interviewees for review and approval before our final report submission to Ithaka S+R.

The following report is a result of hours of relationship building, collaboration, interviewing, transcribing, coding, theming, writing, and rewriting. We hope that it adds to a collective understanding of the current research practices of Indigenous Studies scholars and sheds light on how academic libraries might be best positioned to incorporate Indigenous approaches to information stewardship and access practices into the future.

Research Methodologies and Approaches to Indigenous Research: Interpreting the Needs of Researchers through a Lens of Colonialism

As defined by Sámi scholar Jelena Porsanger (2004), Indigenous methodology is “a body of Indigenous and theoretical approaches and methods, rules and postulates employed by Indigenous research in the study of Indigenous peoples” (p. 107-108). These methods emerged as a counter to mainstream/Western scholarly practices, which often led researchers to misunderstand, misinterpret, co-opt, or ignore Indigenous practices, often to the detriment of communities under study. For generations, research on Indigenous communities was not conducted by members of those communities, leading not only to the dissemination of erroneous information, but to exploitation and serious harm done at the hands of colonizers. Thus, the “main aim of Indigenous methodologies is to ensure that research on Indigenous issues can be carried out in a more respectful, ethical, correct, sympathetic, useful and beneficial fashion, seen from the point of view of Indigenous peoples” (Porsanger, 2004, p. 107-108).

Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars preference Indigenous methodologies for personal, communal, and political reasons – or for a litany of other reasons – which became apparent during our interviews. Understanding the need for Indigenous methodologies and approaches to research cannot begin contemporaneously, but instead must begin with a historical contextualization of the mistreatment of Indigenous research subjects. As Indigenous peoples across the world were colonized, their colonizers took an interest in their cultures, languages, ceremonies, and daily practices and began recording and disseminating information that was, in many cases, inaccurate. In short, research and reports often depicted a presupposed image of Indigenous peoples rather than representing a genuine ethnographic enquiry. As Goulding, Steels, and McGarty (2016) note, “From the perspective of many Indigenous communities, historically, such putative good intentions have largely resulted in oppressive policies that have led to ongoing poverty, loss of land, language and culture, criminalization of entire communities, and the removal of children from the care of their families to the ‘care’ of institutions” (p. 792).

During the eras of colonization, non-Indigenous researchers spoke on behalf of Indigenous peoples, often silencing them. In many cases, Western scholars were preferred by the Western academy; only white males could earn degrees sufficient to make them experts in their fields, and thus became the only voices of those fields. As Vine Deloria Jr. (1997) notes, “The bottom line about the information possessed by non-Western peoples is that the information becomes valid only when offered by a white scholar recognized by the academic establishment” (p. 35). Thus, perpetuated biases have only recently been challenged by Indigenous methodological approaches. The history of research on Indigenous peoples is something our interviewees are keenly aware of.

As one of our participants noted, there can often be challenges when researching Indigenous communities because source material is not abundant. Older historical documents written about Indigenous peoples and communities appear in library or archival catalogs, but one of our interviewees cautions researchers that use these documents, saying, “The filter – that’s often a common critique by Native scholars about using earlier research that was done by these earlier anthropologists and religious scholars and whoever was doing research. The filters of time, you know, how they looked at that research.” This is not to say that historical documents should be dismissed entirely because Indigenous peoples do not write them, but rather that they should be re-examined from an Indigenous perspective. Our researcher notes, “It has been my position to rethink the archive, and to provide another lens and say ‘we see these acts happening’ so how can we understand this from a framework of Indigenous knowledge?”

Interview participants were also concerned about intellectual and cultural property. Westernized research practices have often disempowered Indigenous peoples, treating them as passive objects (Smith, 1999, p. 61). Their information was recorded and taken from the community to the benefit of the researcher, often becoming the property of that researcher. Indigenous communities did not have the power to correct misinformation nor request that certain information be restricted from publication. Cultural objects were often taken from communities without permission. One of our participants discussed how the 1990 adoption of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) initiated a step in the right direction. This legislation allows Indigenous communities in the

United States to request that cultural materials in federally funded museums be returned to tribes. Cultural materials include human remains, funerary objects, sacred objects, and objects of cultural patrimony.

One of our interviewees explained that intellectual property is an ethical question. This participant suggested that many contemporary researchers are aware that Indigenous knowledge belongs to the people providing that information, and that ethical researchers follow guidelines imposed by tribal authorities. In some cases, this means excluding information from reports that are publicly accessible at the request of a community. For some Western academics, it can be a challenge to understand that some information is privileged and should not be made available to everyone. Donna Kurtz (2013) explains, “An Indigenous approach to research can draw on both interpretative and critical/emancipatory theories. However, it does not easily fit into pre-existing Western paradigms of research” (p. 219). Today, researchers working with Indigenous populations are more likely to understand that they are responsible to the individuals, communities, and the academic world-at-large when writing, researching, and publishing information – they have an obligation to maintain ethical approaches and follow Indigenous guidelines.

Western frameworks are no longer the sole methodological approaches accepted when discussing Indigenous peoples and communities. As one of our participants stated, “There’s been an evolution of Indigenous perspectives on methodology. But that’s because we’ve had more Indigenous scholars now in the field who are changing the framework, or changing the way we talk about research.” One reason many of our participants chose to dedicate their lives to Indigenous Studies is to change perceptions and to conduct more Indigenous-specific research for Indigenous peoples. According to a participant, “we need more of our voices and perspectives to be heard.” Further struggles include “seeking literature written by people of my same background” and finding that “there’s very little out there.” Thus, it becomes a goal to “contribute to the greater base of literature on these issues by Native people.”

One concern that Indigenous scholars face when attempting to add Indigenous voices to the mainstream canon centers on language. As one participant explained, “There’s of course obviously a strong body of literature by First Nations and Indian peoples, Maoris, who have all been colonized by the English language. That’s just kind of the nature of colonization.” An integral concern for colonized peoples focuses on similar sentiments: does the mainstream academic community privilege the English language over Indigenous languages? In terms of publishing, this is often the case. A participant offered the following example of linguistic complications – “It’s harder to have these conversations as scholars across these colonial languages unless everybody speaks English. Right?” – while speaking about wanting to provide students with Spanish-language content, but knowing most of the students would not be able to read that content. As Kurtz (2013) notes, “Indigenous research is a tool used for survival, healing and self-determination” and part of this reclamation of knowledge begins with reclaiming language, English or otherwise, that is colonized in prior research (p. 219).

Indigenous methodology can coexist with Western methodology: one participant is “grounded in postcolonial theory and grappling with the continuing realities of settler colonialism,” but not all

researchers turn to Western theory to support their research. Indigenous methodology, according to our participants, focuses on the following cornerstones when approaching data collection and dissemination: cultural sensitivity, relationship building, reciprocity.

Cultural sensitivity, as with many concepts, has varying definitions but Stafford, Bowman, Ewing, Hanna, and Lopez de Fede (1997) offer the following: cultural sensitivity means being aware that cultural differences and similarities exist and influence values, learning, and behavior. Cultural sensitivity also recognizes historical trauma and its effect on research participants in Indigenous communities. The following experience comes from one of the researchers interviewed and effectively sums up the continued associations that exist between the researcher and the researched: “the moment that something started to be signed there was this feeling of ‘the researched’. Even though that is obviously a protection for the people who are participating in the research, it was so obvious to me that even when you’re trying to do something that is protected, it can be an ‘othering’ experience for people.”

One of our participants notes that one of the best ways for researchers to show their understanding of negative historical research practices is to be “clear” so that “people really understand what it is you’re doing or not doing” while conducting contemporary research. Another participant noted that while it may help a researcher to be a member of the community they research, this is not always a mandatory qualification. Conducting research with individuals also means that when “asking Indigenous people for their stories in research, a researcher must be aware that the choice of this method opens a door for healing associated with decolonization” (Kovach, 2009, p. 125).

Relationship building is therefore key to successful research with Indigenous peoples and communities, and is reiterated throughout the testimonies of our participants. Building relationships with tribal elders is a necessary component to working with a community regardless of whether the elder is part of the research. In some cases, the elder(s) may not be the focus of research, but have the ability to connect researchers with the right individuals for a project, while in other cases elder(s) have the ability to approve/deny research within their community. Relationships are lasting, and our participants noted that the past tendency for researchers to conclude their work and vanish from communities is no longer acceptable. Sometimes, as one participant noted, a researcher may have to meet with community members several times prior to the research in order to make them feel comfortable with the project. Giving an individual enough time to decide if the project is one they are willing to participate in, and making sure they understand how their participation will be documented and shared, is all part of relationship building. Researchers need to take the time to make sure this process is transparent as a way to honor the communities they are working with.

Collaborating with Indigenous peoples is becoming more frequent in research, and this is especially true of the research our participants are working on. Many of our participants expressed interest in co-authoring material with Indigenous individuals that work outside of academia, suggesting that a significant amount of knowledge is held by members of communities that might not necessarily hold academic degrees. Degrees, in short, do not surpass real world experience when it comes to tribal

knowledge. Collaboration is another form of relationship building that allows for unique research opportunities, but also allows more Indigenous voices to be heard.

Reciprocity is also part of relationship building. “A primary consideration in research of this nature with extremely disadvantaged social groups is that one should promise nothing that one cannot deliver, and wherever possible give something back, using the research as a tool for positive social change” (Goulding et al., 2016, p. 792). Reciprocity can begin at the initial stages of relationship building. For example, one participant discussed bringing a gift “as appreciation for people’s time.” Giving a gift may seem antiquated for non-Indigenous researchers who are not familiar with Indigenous value systems, but this is “the Indigenous way of doing it” in many communities. Thus, this sign of respect is also part of the relationship building process and suggests that a researcher has come in a “good way” to conduct research. Reciprocity is part of “trusting and honoring” the experience shared between the researcher and the individuals they are working with. Rather than give financial compensation to individuals to participate in research, gifting is often the most honorable way to express appreciation.

Researchers noted that they would often continue to build relationships by returning to communities with their findings, another form of reciprocity. One researcher often asks tribal elders if the written document(s) that summarize interpretive analysis of Indigenous information is correct, making sure to change areas as necessary if something has been misunderstood. Similarly, this researcher allows tribal elders to ask for culturally significant or ceremonial information to be redacted if it is knowledge not meant to be shared with outsiders. Another researcher prints copies of published articles that pertain to the research within the community and delivers them to the community so that they can see how the final document has been prepared. Another scholar offered a story in which, during their own research, they realized, “Now I must live up to the obligation to tell their story in their words. The advice I’ve been given is, ‘That’s part of Indigenous methodology – you respect the relationship by always sending the transcripts back to the interviewee for further review and input.’” Similarly, one participant reminded us that “sometimes even those tiniest of encounters come back to help you in a big way later when that person remembers you.”

Changing the way in which data is collected is another key factor in understanding Indigenous methodological approaches. Oral histories featured in several of our participant’s responses as a primary source of information. Margaret Kovach (2009) has discussed how Western and Indigenous interviewing techniques diverge, stating, “Conversation as method is unlike standard structured or semi-structured interviews that place external parameters on the research participant’s narrative. An open-structured conversational method shows respect for the participant’s story and allows research participants greater control over what they wish to share with respect to the research question” (p. 124). The open-structured method that Kovach describes is one that some of our participants working with oral histories and interviews use, yet none of them claim to have ‘selected’ this method. Instead, they suggest that this is an Indigenous expectation – it is part of larger relationship building within Indigenous communities – and this is how tribal knowledge has been passed down for generations. Oral histories are privileged in tribal knowledge systems, whereas Western sciences have often been quick to dismiss storytelling, oral histories, and individual recollections of events. “Indigenous knowledge spans across

cultures, histories and geographical spaces,” regardless of the fact that some Western academics dismiss this knowledge (Kurtz, 2013, p. 219-220).

Indigenous methodologies support research that is conducted for Indigenous peoples by Indigenous peoples, although it does not exclude non-Indigenous scholars and researchers from working within these communities. Instead, as our participants explained, the focus is to conduct research that solves problems, answers questions, and creates solutions. Holding to the tenets of relationship building and reciprocity ensures that scholars conduct research in a “good way.”

Research Sources

Faculty who employ Indigenous research methodology use a variety of sources to support their research. They work with tribal communities and use primary and secondary sources available in libraries, as well as self-created and self-published materials from Indigenous scholars. Our interview participants had significant experience working with individuals as primary sources for their research. Primary and secondary sources from the library were used, in addition to primary sources of information found in discipline-based datasets or repositories such as the archaeological database, AZSite.

Primary sources

Primary sources are a significant source of information for the scholars we interviewed. Primary sources include a variety of forms. Materials used range from ethnographic materials, government reports, anthropological reports, codices, and others. Ethnographic materials from the Arizona State Museum as well as Special Collections were used to conduct research. Ethnographic sources by their very nature are problematic, scripted by Westerner colonialists who framed cultures through their own lens, portraying a colonialist viewpoint: “Ethnographers have been known to create or construct the Other as primitive” (Clair, 2012, p. 4). Scholars in Indigenous Studies use them to find data, but also to reframe the colonialist narrative. As mentioned in the research methodology section of this report, one participant stated in reference to using ethnographic materials, “it has been my position to rethink the archive, and to provide another lens...” In this way, primary sources do not only serve as data sources, but as opportunities for Indigenous scholars to reframe the historical narrative.

Elders and other individuals in Indigenous communities are an important source of primary information, thanks to long-standing relationships with tribal communities developed by the participants over time. Through oral histories and interviews, they gather data and elder knowledge, employing both oral history and Indigenous methodology.¹ Conducting oral histories of individuals as a source for research requires cultural sensitivity and deep relationship building. The scholars we interviewed had significant experience in this area.

¹ For more on oral history methodology, please see the Oral History Association’s Principles and Best Practices <http://www.oralhistory.org/about/principles-and-practices-revised-2009/>

Secondary sources

Secondary sources are always an important part of research. Not surprisingly, the interviewees used the following types of Indigenous-specific methodological materials: anthropological literature reporting on primary sources, archaeological site reports, technical reports, journal articles, and books. Resources traditionally regarded as primary sources, such as travel journals and ethnographic materials, were categorized by our interviewees as secondary sources. In response to the kind of secondary information they relied on, one participant said, “It is important to include resources that come from a Western point of view of interpretation, because it produces a holistic perspective – good or bad – on our research.” This scholar also mentioned UA academic units with an Indigenous Studies focus, such as the American Indian Language Development Institute and the Native Nations Institute, as well as librarians, as secondary sources. They were referring to the expertise held by individuals (often of Indigenous backgrounds themselves) whose work focuses on Indigenous Studies and/or methodology.

General findings

There was a recognition from the scholars we interviewed that information search tools and sources are ever changing and dynamic. The challenge in that is keeping up with research tools, especially for those who started their academic careers as students or faculty when card catalogs were still in use. The changing and dynamic information landscape is difficult to follow, and some have trouble keeping up.

There were various challenges echoed by the cohort in using primary and secondary sources, including not knowing how to navigate information tools such as the library catalog or other discovery systems or choosing appropriate resources. It was particularly challenging for scholars who had received their degrees prior to online databases and catalogs. Those who worked in an era of the card catalog have had barriers to overcome. The transition from card catalog to the online catalog was referred to as “scary” by one scholar. Another interviewee noted her transition from card catalog to electronic resources: “Once I learn it, I feel really good about it and it continues to be an ongoing learning experience as the online system continues to improve and even some of the smallest upgrades tend to be intimidating.” In both instances, participants noted the importance of their subject specialist librarian, who guided them with library resources. In reference to a subject librarian, one participant said, “...she was a lifesaver! I worked directly with her every moment I could.”

The lack of information sources from the Indigenous perspective drives researchers to seek self-published works by Indigenous authors and creators. In response to questions about what may facilitate locating and accessing primary sources, a participant noted that there were many self-published works produced by Indigenous scholars to “express their knowledge” that are outside of the established acquisition venues and only found outside of the United States: “To me those are real gems. And you have to go there to find those. So there’s a lot of things that just aren’t available here.”

There are varying opinions on print vs. ebooks. Some like ebooks because they allow for searching within monographs, while some prefer the print book. One participant said, “Anything that I’ve wanted to find, UA usually has it. And they actually have more ebooks, which I absolutely love because you can do keyword searches within the ebook, which just really streamlines the research process. As opposed

to having to read the entire book. I've really found that the amount of ebooks that you guys have is great." Another participant stated, "I also like to physically hold things and have them in my hands. So when I find a really good article or book, I have to have it in my hand. I don't like reading things on multimedia, on my computer. Some people can do that. I can't. I have to have a physical paper in front of me." This participant also recognized that having to pay for printing might be a barrier to some students.

Research Outputs and Sharing Practices

For scholars in the realm of Indigenous Studies, managing, publishing, sharing, and archiving the products of research is governed by a commitment to honoring tribal sovereignty, knowledge, and intellectual property. Many of the interviewees practice community-based participatory research, where communities are involved at every step of the research process and tribal consultation and approval is fundamental. What constitutes appropriate openness around data access and use or research publishing practices is dependent on the needs of the tribal community.

Data management, access, use, and sharing

Depending on the scholar's field, the types of data collected range from field notes, photographs, archaeological site data and documentation, oral histories, and interviews. Qualitative data is incorporated into the research product as quotations, or narrative. Outside of data generated by their studies, other data analyzed and used include site report data, GIS data, oral histories, and government-collected data.

To manage their own research data, two of the interviewees described storing data in multiple copies and multiple forms (on laptops, jump drives, as print copies), but expressed anxiety about the viability of this method. A concern about the long-term stewardship and preservation of data was voiced by one interviewee, who worried about losing knowledge recorded in interview videos when technology degrades or becomes obsolete.

All interviewees emphasized the need for conversations at the individual and/or tribal level to define protocols for research data storage, access, and use. Tribal collaborators review and "sign-off" on everything, including preferences for storing information, as part of their "Indigenous control," in the words of one interviewee. For researchers working with tribal communities on contract archaeological projects, data management protocols are explicitly governed by tribal intellectual property rights: "They go so far as to, when they hire me to do research for them, write a contract that they own all the intellectual property that is created on the project. They own my field notes, the photographs I take, and all the work product that I produce under contract to them. It's all owned by the tribe and they control that. And so we talk about that, obviously, in order to create our research contracts that fund the work, or make the work possible. But beyond that we're concerned collectively, both the tribal communities I work with plus the professional anthropologists I work with on projects, we're all concerned about the long-term archiving of that information and its availability on future projects. So we talk about that a lot."

There are structures in place to facilitate appropriate data sharing, both between and among researchers and tribal communities. Data repositories like the Digital Archaeological Record (tDAR), for example, require permission for access, as do other project-specific databases that are open to tribes and PIs only. The need for tiered levels of access, based on affiliation, emerged from the recognition that not all data should be open to all – especially data that describes or originates from tribal communities.

Publishing practices

All interviewees mentioned the importance of publishing in scholarly journals and books within their fields for tenure and networking purposes. Equally important, however, is the sharing of results of their research with tribal collaborators and other tribal communities. Some of the research described is “technical scholarly work,” related to NAGPRA compliance or government-contracted assessments of national monuments, and so the outputs are not limited to scholarly audiences.

At the publishing stage of the research lifecycle, tribal consultation and collaboration is again critical: “the tribes that I’m working with trust me and I’m not about to start publishing things without their knowledge and consent.” This extends not only to developing and maintaining relationships and securing permission before publishing, but on co-authoring as well. As one interviewee stated, “I’m the last author and they’re [tribal collaborators] the first authors. I did the bulk of the writing. But they approved the writing and they approved what was written.”

The interviewees in general do not consult with tribal communities on where to publish; rather, the tribal review process focuses on the content and interpretation of research findings. As one interviewee stated, “[tribal community] peer review of my reports...is as valuable as the peer review that I would receive when I publish a journal article or anything else, except its coming from the members of the community that I’m writing about.”

Finding appropriate journals to publish in emerged as a theme. On the one hand, one interviewee noted the importance of Indigenous scholars sharing their work in prominent, well established journals “to make sure they are seen as experts.” Others expressed a desire to find journals that would represent a good fit for their research, often interdisciplinary in nature. As one interviewee stated, “it would be really helpful to have guidance on ‘oh I think this might be a better venue to try to push this through than to go this traditional route.’ At least in terms of myself, I only know a couple of venues. But I’m sure there’s actually many more that might articulate better with what I’m trying to accomplish with any given publication. So you know and I know that clearly, *American Indian Quarterly* is a big one. But what else? Particularly internationally. What about journals in Canada? It would be really helpful to have better knowledge of other journals that publish Indigenous-based work.”

Open access

Open access did not factor in as a primary consideration for publishing options; those interviewed were not proactive about seeking open access publishing venues, nor aware of opportunities to do so. Several

interviewees mentioned the importance of publishing in premier journals in their fields, often those associated with their major scholarly associations.

However, as previously mentioned, all the scholars interviewed were dedicated to sharing the results of their research with tribal communities as broadly as possible, whether through providing print copies of journals to the tribe, speaking in public lectures that are geared to general audiences, or publishing in popular magazines. An interesting counterargument to open access was brought up – one interviewee advocated for co-authorship models that ensure royalties to Indigenous authors (in the case of book publishing, for example).

For Indigenous Studies, “openness” is not an assumed or aspirational value, as it might be in other research areas. This is exemplified by the following quote: “I think when you’re an Indigenous scholar you’re so aware that you want to respect your people’s knowledge that you should also follow your own internal compass about being very protective of what is put out there, even when you have permission. You really have to think about what it means to disseminate anything in a public way.”

Networking

Like most academics, Indigenous Studies scholars network through conferences, journals, and scholarly associations within their field. Beyond these conventional disciplinary networks, two of the interviewees use social media to connect with and gain support from national and international scholars working within related fields.

In addition to networking within the framework of academia, each of the interviewees spoke of the importance of developing networks and relationships among the Indigenous communities with whom they work. These networks, based on relationships developed over time, are fundamental, and the potential for research collaboration rests on their long-term maintenance. Several interviewees noted that the time and effort put into maintaining those relationships, through consistent, transparent communication, is often not recognized or factored into the “traditional” academic research publishing clock: “In academia, you know, you need to move fast. And you’re on a timeline. I’m moving really slow and I’m still in that relationship-building phase.”

Overall Challenges For Indigenous Studies Scholars

Speaking to the overall challenges for Indigenous Studies scholars at the University of Arizona, the research group was met with multifaceted and complex topics on how difficulties (both personal and professional) affected researchers from different disciplines. Given the unique perspectives and lived experience of each researcher, it is difficult to fully extrapolate the magnitude of issues facing Indigenous Studies scholars today but this report attempts to distill these challenges for a local cohort of researchers into the following topics: locating appropriate funding, work/life balance, and colonization in academia and in Western culture.

Research funding

The process of locating appropriate funding for research projects was an issue of contention for some of the Indigenous Studies scholars interviewed. Some commented that their work falls out of the scope of many funding proposals, limiting the ability to receive grants, and leading to a feeling that their work is not represented or accepted in mainstream academia. One scholar commented that, "...within major granting institutions like the NSF [National Science Foundation] oral history projects or collection-based projects don't receive funding. So, making sure that we can get funding to actually get projects like this off the ground, that's a challenge." Furthermore, one aspect of pursuing funding brought up the issue of paternalism on the part of funding agencies who often support or solicit research that solely frame Indigenous peoples within narratives of poverty, crime, or disease. One scholar commented, "I don't like that phrase – vulnerable populations – but you still see it in a lot of the RFPs that come out. Native Americans are considered a vulnerable population. Already that gets you started off in a kind of guarded way. So, I think the larger research industry, National Institutes of Health, the Cancer Institute, National Endowment for the Humanities, I mean all of these big federal funding agencies...I think it's time for them to make a shift on how they view these communities. But even just language like that, to me it's a little bit off-putting to describe them as vulnerable because then you're already asserting this position of power, of paternalism. 'We're going to go and help these poor people.'"

One scholar spoke about the difficulty of offering counter narratives to funding agencies that celebrate the achievements of Indigenous peoples rather than relay more accounts of poverty. This practice on the part of agencies and institutions sets up a dangerous narrative that both Indigenous peoples and Indigenous Studies researchers have to counter in their work and daily lives.

Work/life balance

The personal struggles of balancing personal and professional spheres of life was a common theme amongst Indigenous Studies researchers. Practicing self-care and connecting to family and friends was often mentioned, with one scholar asserting "...home (on the reservation) is my protection. But also, it is where I draw strength so I can get back out there and do the work. I wish I had made trips home more often. It would have helped me to deal with a lot of difficult situations with clarity and strength." One of the scholars spoke about the personal cost of pursuing professional accreditation in their field of interest as an economic and familial challenge, requiring relocation and disposition of their children and spouse, and commented that the cost seemed unreasonable, stating, "I wanted to pursue a master's program degree in art conservation, but the programs were few and far between, the fastest degree program was in Canada. How would we pay for a second house in Canada? It was a ridiculous idea for someone in our economic range."

Maintaining relationships, as well as honoring people, was also mentioned frequently as researchers recalled the importance of their support network, mentors, or colleagues. Commenting on their relationship to a colleague, one scholar stated, "I try to meet with her at least once a month...She's just amazing. She held the same position I currently hold and created a sustainable tribal advisory board...I really look to her for guidance and support. I met her when I was a student and have fond memories of

her, now we are friends...So again, Indian Country is small and you try to stick with the people – who are like – ‘this is their life’.”

Scholars also mentioned relationships that inspired them to continue in their academic studies early on in their careers or encouraged them in times of need. One scholar recalled one mentor as both an inspiration and source of knowledge: “I had a really great mentor who was my supervisor...She was doing her Ph.D. in Higher Ed here at the University of Arizona. She talked to me a lot about her work, but also the need for more people of our backgrounds to be in the higher education arena. I would say she is the reason I started taking the Ph.D. journey.”

Academic colonialism and Western higher education culture

Some of the Indigenous Studies scholars spoke about the issues of tribal sovereignty as an issue misunderstood by colleagues or within academics generally. With the details of United States law and policy towards tribal sovereignty requiring focused study and experience to understand fully, Indigenous Studies scholars at the UA found themselves traversing these complex relationships alone or without much support. However, many focused on the act of reciprocity and respect within their research, noting their engagement with Indigenous methodologies. One researcher specifically noted, “The method is always about asking for permission. Checking in with the elders that I’m working with to make sure I’m interpreting things correctly, or I’m pursuing things correctly. With the tribe, it’s all internal knowledge, so the methodology is to respect [that] this is research only for the tribe. It’s not research for the academy.” Another researcher spoke to the importance of establishing relationships as a pathway to permissions: “I think working with the community from the get-go, especially at the beginning of a project that relates to them, is significant to relationship building. That’s what our advisory board is becoming – more local and more informed, of what’s going on here. And so, it’s a slow process, because some of the people from the source communities feel that they don’t have much of a say for some things they may have concerns about. But the younger tribal members who are in those positions to speak up are speaking up.”

Particularly in the context of accepted scholarship in anthropology, much of the research still aligns with colonialism without acts of reciprocity or mutual respect, with one Indigenous Studies researcher offering, “...anthropologists still hold these antiquated ideas up high and these standards are deeply rooted. There are conferences that hold up these standards...They celebrate people like [Franz] Boas, [Bronislaw] Malinowski, and others who ‘grandfathered’ areas in anthropology as great people. BUT what did they ever do for those communities? That’s the frustrating part.”

There is a sense that disciplinary research practices are changing for the better, however. As one scholar described, “I was just in a series of review meetings last week with four tribes, five tribes, in New Mexico. I came away from those meetings actually marveling at how far anthropology has developed as a discipline in the last fifty years. To be able to sit in a Puebloan community and talk about the issues we’re talking about and getting people’s advice about the appropriate level of information to share about certain topics, in an open and direct interchange in a way that I don’t think people fifty years ago, certainly one hundred years ago, would have ever envisioned.”

Conclusion

While progress has been made in recent years within academic institutions on issues such as recognizing tribal sovereignty, repatriating cultural materials and human remains, and stewarding sacred knowledge, much of the work regarding representation, equality, and increased support services is still needed. This report examines the experiences scholars are facing regarding their work within academic institutions, but also points to systemic forms of oppression and a continuing lack of support resources across disciplines. In the interviews, two primary themes on representation and research services indicate how academic libraries could further support and recognize Indigenous Studies scholars and their work.

Indigenous representation in library collections, programming, and policies

Scholars regarded the library as a source of support, but also collaboration. Academic libraries are well positioned to incorporate these scholars in their symposiums and featured collections. Providing a platform for Indigenous scholars to share their work should be a given, but library faculty should also be empowered to decolonize their collections and give preference to Indigenous authors. Libraries should also reach out to Indigenous faculty and staff for consultation and collaboration on policies and guidelines regarding access to sacred knowledge and working with tribal communities. Another significant topic discussed is the issue of access to Indigenous-related materials. There is a general understanding that Indigenous archival collections do need guidelines for access and that restrictions may be necessary. However, this creates a situation in which researchers may not be able to publish works done for hire by tribal communities.

Indigenous research support

While many academic libraries have dedicated liaisons, or subject specialists, to departments that focus on Indigenous Studies and have self-identified Indigenous scholars in their ranks, more work can be done to provide space and time for their librarians to create relationships with Indigenous Studies scholars. Incorporating the evolving needs of scholars must also be considered as new technologies, changing research methods, and funding opportunities become more crucial within the research support services that libraries offer.

UAL's Special Collections has been a consultation resource for faculty and community members and organizations on oral history methodology for several years. Currently, library faculty in Special Collections have begun to formalize documentation and processes for ingesting oral history collections as well as for the preservation of legacy oral history collections, and are planning for future calls for consultation on oral history by having appropriate processes as well as documentation such as release and metadata forms. Special Collections library faculty have also begun to develop guidelines for accessing Indigenous-related archival collections. For researchers working with Indigenous methodologies and employing oral history methodology, Special Collections may serve as a resource. Special Collections may also serve as a resource in the following areas if all creators involved agree to

archive the interviews: metadata creation, long-term stewardship and preservation, and access to interviews with or without restrictions.²

Participants also shared that they were unfamiliar with how to find archival collections within holdings in Special Collections and other local archival collections. Remedying this will require some thoughtful outreach so that we may reach faculty in the best way that works for them.

Ways forward

The systemic and individual challenges facing Indigenous Studies scholars are multifaceted and daunting. Many of the issues outlined previously, such as raising awareness about Indigenous data collection methods, finding venues and securing resources for publishing, and finding and using primary and secondary resources can be mitigated by increased sensitivity and time allotted for librarians to build relationships and work collaboratively. Marginalization and lack of resources, while seemingly out of scope for what academic libraries are able to solve, can still be addressed through the primary tenets of Indigenous methodologies – respect, relevance, responsibility, and reciprocity.

Recommendations

Libraries

- *Construct guidelines and policies that respect sacred knowledge.*
- *Exert influence over publishing vendors by selecting more content by Indigenous authors for library collections.*
- *Provide ample time and space for librarians to build relationships with Indigenous scholars and Indigenous Studies departments.*
- *Review library services and resources for Indigenous Studies to make sure they include evolving research methodologies and technologies.*
- *Steer scholars towards research funding opportunities that align with their work.*
- *Repurpose or supplement open access funding sources to support alternative publishing venues for Indigenous scholarship.*
- *Advocate for and support systems that preserve and manage Indigenous knowledge and scholarship ethically, with a recognition of the unique circumstances guiding “openness” in Indigenous research (see for example [Mukurtu](#), an “open source platform built with indigenous communities to manage and share digital cultural heritage”).*

² In current oral history methodology, “creators,” refers to both the interviewee and the interviewer.

Publishers

- *Include a broader array of Indigenous content in databases and monographs available to scholars.*

Funders

- *Fund scholarship that is consistent with Indigenous research approaches and counters narratives of decline for Indigenous communities.*

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