An intimate interconnection: Linking traditional Indigenous knowledge and earth science research

Researcher receives new funding for pilot project on fostering interest about earth sciences among Indigenous students.

By Katie Willis on April 2, 2019

A new pilot program to foster interest and enthusiasm about earth sciences among Indigenous students is taking shape at the University of Alberta. The project, called the Geosciences Education Outreach Program, is designed to inspire and encourage enthusiasm about earth sciences among Indigenous students.

“Traditional Indigenous knowledge comes, in part, from an intimate relationship to the land and the natural environment through living in, and interacting with, complex systems,” said Kurt Konhauser, professor in the Department of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences and project lead. “In many ways, this traditional knowledge parallels that which an earth sciences researcher acquires during their studies.”

Konhauser will work collaboratively with Elders and community educators from the Fort MacKay First Nation in northeast Alberta to build a rich, collaborative partnership, resulting in the development of a program to engage Indigenous students with earth sciences programming.

“In order to avoid the mistake of earlier paternalistic approaches and assume that we in the academy know best how to proceed, the project will begin with a consultation process through which Indigenous people can advise the academy on the best pathway to success,” explained Konhauser.

In the coming weeks, all collaborators will meet on campus to begin the consultation process. Discussions will include the most suitable point of entry for Indigenous students, be it elementary, secondary, or post-secondary students. Seminars will include traditional knowledge, delivered by Elders.

“Students in the Faculty of Science, and in earth sciences in particular, will benefit not only from sharing classrooms with Indigenous students and learning about their experiences, but they would obtain a better understanding of the importance of all peoples’ interconnectedness with the land and our shared responsibility for its stewardship,” said Konhauser.

Konhauser is the recipient of the 2019 McCalla Professorship, an award issued by the University of Alberta to support outstanding academics who contribute to the integration of teaching and research, as well as educational leadership.

Source: Faculty of Science