



Spring 2022 Newsletter

## Decolonizing Experiences

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When I moved to Wisconsin in 1997, my introduction to indigenous people was an exhibit at the Kenosha Public Museum: wax figures of Native women harvesting meat from a woolly mammoth. The message this exhibit communicated to my two children and me was that, like the woolly mammoth, native people are extinct. Years later, after picking up my children from Montessori School, my son asked an unsettling question: “Mama, are Indians still living?” It was November and he was mulling over class discussions about Thanksgiving. Again, he was imagining Native people in the past tense even though one of his friends is Lakota.

In 2020-21, educators from Wisconsin’s public, private, technical, and tribal colleges worked together to organize a statewide professional development conference for post-secondary instructors. What resulted was *Equity in the College Classroom: Educating Ourselves as Educators Conference* on October 1 and 15, 2021 -- the project that received The Way Forward grant from Bringing Theory to Practice. Its aim was to extend a land acknowledgement statement into a deeper understanding of Wisconsin’s First Nations, of which there are 11 Federally recognized tribes. The conference, in part, centered indigenous ways of knowing and communicating. In place of a traditional “keynote address” on October 1<sup>st</sup>, educator-activist *Elder Ada Deer* (Menominee) engaged in conversation with *Dr. Lisa Poupart* (Lac Du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Anishinaabeg) about how educators can make a difference.



Left: Dr. Lisa Poupart (UW-Green Bay) in conversation with Elder Ada Deer (UW-Madison).

Right: Ada Deer at UW-Madison's Alumni Park. Inscribed on the sitting wall is one of her inspirational quotes: *I want to show people who say nothing can be done in this society that it just isn't so. You don't have to collapse just because there's federal law in your way. Change it!*

For many people, Ada Deer is a living hero who led the restoration of the Menominee tribe after it was terminated by the federal government. Conference planner Norman Shawanokasic (College of Menominee Nation) remembers his grandma and aunties working alongside Ada Deer for restoration. The Menominee was the first tribe to be terminated, and the first to regain its tribal status. The cross-generational conversation between Ada Deer and Lisa Poupart touched on a few key themes from Deer's biography, *Making a Difference: My Fight for Native Rights and Social Justice* (2019). The centrality of education for any meaningful social change and higher education's responsibility to tribal communities were two ideas that Ada discussed. She also addressed ways to cope with racial battle fatigue, something that many people have experienced with recent racial uprisings during the Covid-19 pandemic. The statewide Equity in the College Classroom Conference also highlighted student and faculty voices, and a workshop by diversity educator *Lee Mun Wah* who modeled inclusive pedagogy in an online classroom. After the conference, eight instructors were awarded \$500 mini-grants to implement an innovative teaching idea in a Spring 2022 class. Awardees will share their teaching experiences in a Fall 2022 Webinar series.

In mid-March, five educators from Wisconsin attended AAC&U's Diversity, Equity, and Student Success Conference in New Orleans. Our Wisconsin team appeared twice in the program: a poster/[video](#) – *Decolonizing Stories: Student and Faculty Voices*, and a 30-minute presentation *Decolonizing Professional Development*. Leading up to the conference, we had candid conversations with uncomfortable truths spoken. Centuries of colonization and genocide will not be healed by a single conference. We are building relationships, talking to each other, and sharing stories as human beings. This is the gift and value of *Equity in the College Classroom: Educating Ourselves as Educators*.



**New Orleans - AAC&U's Diversity, Equity, & Student Success Conference, March 17-19, 2022.** Pictured left to right: *Odawa White*, Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwe College; *Fay Yokomizo Akindes*, University of Wisconsin System; *Chrystal Seeley-Schreck*, Wisconsin Technical College System; *Kathy Paul*, Wisconsin Association of Independent Colleges & Universities; *Norman Shawanokasic*, College of Menominee Nation.

Our [poster](#) features excerpts from Student and Faculty Voices and is designed in a spiraling motif to evoke the past informing the present.

Decolonizing practices involve uncovering hidden histories, unsettling and reframing, and shifting from past-tense to present- and future-tense when engaging with First Nations people and land. In 2021, Papscanee Island in New York was returned to the Stockbridge-Munsee Band of Mohican Indians, a third of whom live in Wisconsin. This is an example of the fluidity of life, the impermanence of colonization, and the possibility of land reclamation. This, in part, is why we must think of indigenous, First Nations, American Indians in present and future tense. Their stories are still being told.