

Fund for Innovative Teaching FINAL REPORT

Project Title: Expanding the Creative Process Through the Art of Shinrin-yoku (Forest Bathing)
(Course was listed in the Calendar as “Creativity and the Outdoors”)

Project Lead: Melanie Jones, MFA, Assistant Professor, School of Creative Arts, University of the Fraser Valley

Project Description: The vision for this course is to immerse the student in the unique and varied landscapes of the Fraser Valley, with the intent of stimulating the creative process while engaging in physical fitness and self-care. The course is built around a series of "excursions" (or field trips) that will provide the opportunity to practice outdoor and survival skills, spend time in nature, and practice new methods for idea generation by keeping a detailed journal. The final outcome of the course will result in students preparing a capstone project - a self-directed form of artwork that can be experienced or viewed outdoors. For the instructor, the course will provide an opportunity to explore atypical teaching methods and engage in physical activity along with the students and provide a unique and deliberately gentle pedagogical approach.

The project was launched for Early Summer Session in 2019 running May to July. It was completed July 2, 2019 with a public presentation of student work on campus and in the S'eliyemetaxwtexw Gallery.

Individuals involved in the delivery of the planned project activities and outcomes:

This course was taught by the Project Lead, Melanie Jones.

Implementation of this course included consultation with Shirley Hardman (Indigenous Affairs), Mark Goudsblom and David Shayler (Facilities Management), and Christine Jones (Grounds Supervisor.)

Elise Goertz (Practicum & Internship Coordinator) and Stephen Gaspar (Legal Counsel) both provided support in creating the Field Trip Waivers and Risk Assessment for the field trips. The course was supported heavily by Visual Arts and the College of Arts Dean's Office with assistance from Department Head Shelley Stefan and Samantha Pattridge in situating it within the existing course number VA395 and timetabled quickly for Summer enrollment.

Nicole Cullen provided support in booking bus transportation for the field trips.

Anoop Dhaliwal provided in class support for documentation of the class excursions.

Proposed Learning Outcomes:

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Build a tool kit of diverse methodologies for nurturing and enhancing their creative process.
2. Develop and practice a variety of creative skills to create a final art project.
3. Integrate creative output with self-care, physical fitness and outdoor skills.
4. Demonstrate ingenuity, resourcefulness and self-reliance when facing challenging circumstances.
5. Apply problem-solving skills and work confidently with others in collaborative projects.

Summary of Learning Activities, Implementation and Outcome

The learning activities proposed in the grant application were designed to offer students specific tools to engage with the creative process with a focus on mindfulness and the benefits of self-care, physical activity and rest as crucial elements within that process. Visual Arts courses regularly set out to challenge students' preconceptions about art and the creative process. The design of this course upholds these ideals of creativity, but focuses on an often-neglected aspect of focused study - the need for rest, recuperation and reflection.

Some of the activities and creative processes that were proposed and implemented during the course include: exploring UFV campus and immediate surrounding area through walking, field trips to locations further away within the Fraser Valley (Downes Bowl, Clayburn Creek, Othello Tunnels, Cultus Lake and Greater Vancouver Zoo), a blindfolded walk on campus (heightened sensory experience), Meditation and Forest Bathing practice (both on and off-campus), agricultural engagement and live animal experience (Zoo and Maan Farms), Swimming (Cultus Lake), Increased physical activity through progressively difficult walks and hikes (Downes Bowl, Clayburn, Teapot Hill etc.), mapping environments through memory, first person videography, film photography, writing, life/nature drawing, sound recording, and storytelling. There were many other smaller activities incorporated into the field trips and walks including a class garden, journal exercises, a clay texture project, collecting plants to create pigments to paint with, hand sewing a blindfold for the blindfolded walk, a short yoga lesson (led by a student), and more. Ultimately students documented nearly all of their experiences in their journals (some images/examples are included at the end of this report.)

Some proposed activities were not able to be implemented such as: cycling and basic bike repair (not all students owned bikes), Camping (an overnight trip was planned, but most students were not able to attend and plans fell through last minute), shelter building (would have been part of the camping trip), and most regrettably, Visiting Artists (a local indigenous artist was found and invited to come speak with the class, however the visit fell through due to the artist being called away as a firefighter. There was not enough time to reschedule.)

In addition to the proposed activities, an important element that I wished to develop and include was an Indigenous component to the course. I found this to be a particularly difficult part of the truncated prep time. I consulted with Shirley Hardman and investigated the possibility of doing the Sto:lo Place Names Tour, however there were not enough funds to cover this field trip as it was not part of the original budget. As mentioned above, I also tried to schedule an Indigenous artist as a visitor which fell through and could not be rescheduled. However, I did give the class a reading from the recommended book *Be of Good Mind: Essays on the Coast Salish* (Edited by Bruce Granville Miller) called "We Have to Take Care of What Belongs to Us," and we had a meaningful discussion about it and the practice of Land Acknowledgment. If offered again, the course would benefit from more prep time to increase the opportunity to include Indigenous knowledge in a meaningful way that also fits with the specific learning outcomes.

The most unique aspect of the course to implement was the delivery format as a fully *outdoor* course. Within the first ten minutes of the first day the class set up our "classroom" tents as a group. This was coordinated with Facilities who were extremely generous and open to the idea as I wanted the tents to remain a fixture on campus for the duration of the course, rather than putting

them up and down each week. The majority of the funds received for the course went to the purchase of these tents and booking three field trips that required bus transportation for 24 people. This produced an unexpected result, as many students preferred to drive themselves (since the UFV student body is so spread out across the Fraser Valley, it was often more convenient for some students.) Due to the need to travel to some of the intended destinations, the unusual time slot (5 hours) was extremely necessary. In some cases we only had 2.5 hours at the destination because of travel time. I do feel that these trips were worth the money and effort, as many students had never been to places like Othello Tunnels or Teapot Hill because they don't have cars/access on their own and were extremely inspired by getting to see and be in those locations. A healthy balance was struck between trips further afield and trips within Abbotsford or within walking distance of UFV.

I can safely say that the intent and outcomes of the course were met. Students were engaged on a level that was refreshing to observe. I was regularly inspired by how much they were using and getting out of their journal work. I myself felt more engaged and rested, even as I was guiding 23 students through a challenging hike while making sure no one got lost, or gathering everyone to safety during a sudden thunderstorm. For the final capstone project I left things very open and up to the students to synthesize their experience of the course. This resulted in a wide variety of work and responses including a zine-like cookbook, a painted poem detailing the activities of the 9 weeks of the class, paintings and drawings, a handmade wooden plein-air painting box, a quilt made from found fabrics, and one student who picked berries and baked an item to bring and share with the class/public. The projects were a healthy reflection of the wellness and mindfulness-based activities we shared in class and demonstrated the extent to which students had internalized the lesson that self-care and time spent in nature could energize their creativity. I have included more detail on this in the section below.

Description of the degree to which the goals of the proposal were achieved:

Despite some challenges in the accelerated timeline and prep, this course was a huge success. It was offered in the Early Summer session with an unconventional timeslot (5 hour classes over 9 weeks) and still filled with a large waitlist. This is uncommon for Visual Arts courses especially in Summer. Students taking the course came from a range of disciplines within UFV including Visual Arts, Theatre, Biology, Environmental Education, and International students. Even before the course started, many students expressed interest in the course but weren't able to enroll due to other summer commitments but inquired as to whether it would be offered again in the future. Several students were especially excited by the idea of an experiential course offered as a Credit/No Credit without letter grades.

Students were asked to fill out anonymous questionnaires at the end of the course to gain an understanding of the impact the course activities had on students' connection with the outdoors, with self-care and wellness and with their creativity.

Student responses to the course were overwhelmingly positive. Out of 21 questionnaires returned, every student replied "yes" when asked if the course met their expectations and 7 students commented that the course *exceeded* their expectations. Many students noted how much it helped their anxiety and stress levels, and several students commented on the unexpected benefit of feeling more connected to each other and making friends.

Excerpted student comments:

- *"I feel like I have active strategies to connect and communicate with nature."*
- *"I've created more in this class that I have in years."*
- *"I have come to realize the accessibility of experience in nature. In simple words, I am more likely to connect with nature in my day to day life thanks to my exposure in this course."*
- *"[This course] taught me to slow down, enjoy the trees. Its very helpful for mental health and stress, which is a problem all students face."*
- *"I feel more relaxed and stress free when I walk in the woods now. Being able to take in the peace and beauty of nature just washes away my anxieties."*
- *"Most university classes are mostly indoors, at tables involving reading and writing. Here there is still some writing but the atmosphere is so free that stress is never an issue."*
- *"Any student who is stressed should take this course. The simple yoga day or forest bathing would go a long way in helping stressed students"*
- *"For people who have anxiety, this would be an excellent calming environment."*
- *"I've already been exploring and being more active. I was able to see new sights I didn't know about."*
- *"I spent more time looking at each part of nature in detail. Admiring it all, recognizing that Mother Earth is the greatest artist in existence. "*
- *"I don't judge my art now. I just let it flow. Its for fun and enjoyment not a grade."*
- *"I feel a greater connection to nature. Taking care of the environment around me."*
- *"The forest bathing really made me feel more connected with nature. I felt that I absorbed more detail and more awareness of the nature that surrounds us."*
- *"I do feel an increased connection to the outdoors. I am more peaceful when I am hiking somewhere."*
- *"This should be taught every year and students should be able to take this more than once. It should be like a field trip funded by the university. It would help students refresh their minds, get inspired by nature, know your peers."*
- *"You get the opportunity to bond with classmates in ways you otherwise wouldn't. (Most interconnection I've ever experienced on campus.)"*
- *"I felt increased connection to other students because we had to work together. This class is good to make friends."*

In response to the question **"What is your biggest takeaway from this course?"** students commented:

- *"I feel more at ease and more creative."*
- *"I feel better about myself and happier."*
- *"I will find more time to be in nature. I have acknowledged that nature doesn't wait for the weekend, it can be the everyday."*
- *"I would like to go do outdoor activity on my own time."*
- *"I start to touch environment. I wasn't this kind of person before."*
- *"Weekly forest bathe practice. Love all. But never be afraid to speak up. Be who you are."*
- *"Becoming one with and respecting nature."*
- *"Inspiration is everywhere you look."*
- *"To slow down and really allow myself to process things before creating."*

- *“My journal! Oh my god I love my journal.”*
- *“Getting out into the wild and amazing areas.”*
- *“Journals are a worthwhile exercise. Get outside with purpose more often.”*
- *“Slow down, get outside, be in nature.”*
- *“To take more time for self-reflection by forcing myself to go to a park.”*
- *“Hard effort is worth it even if it hurts. Its also okay to make friends with people even if you don’t know everything about them.”*
- *“Knowing great relaxation techniques and locales.”*



Students Forest Bathing on UFV Campus



Blindfolded Walk on UFV Campus



Students at the Zoo

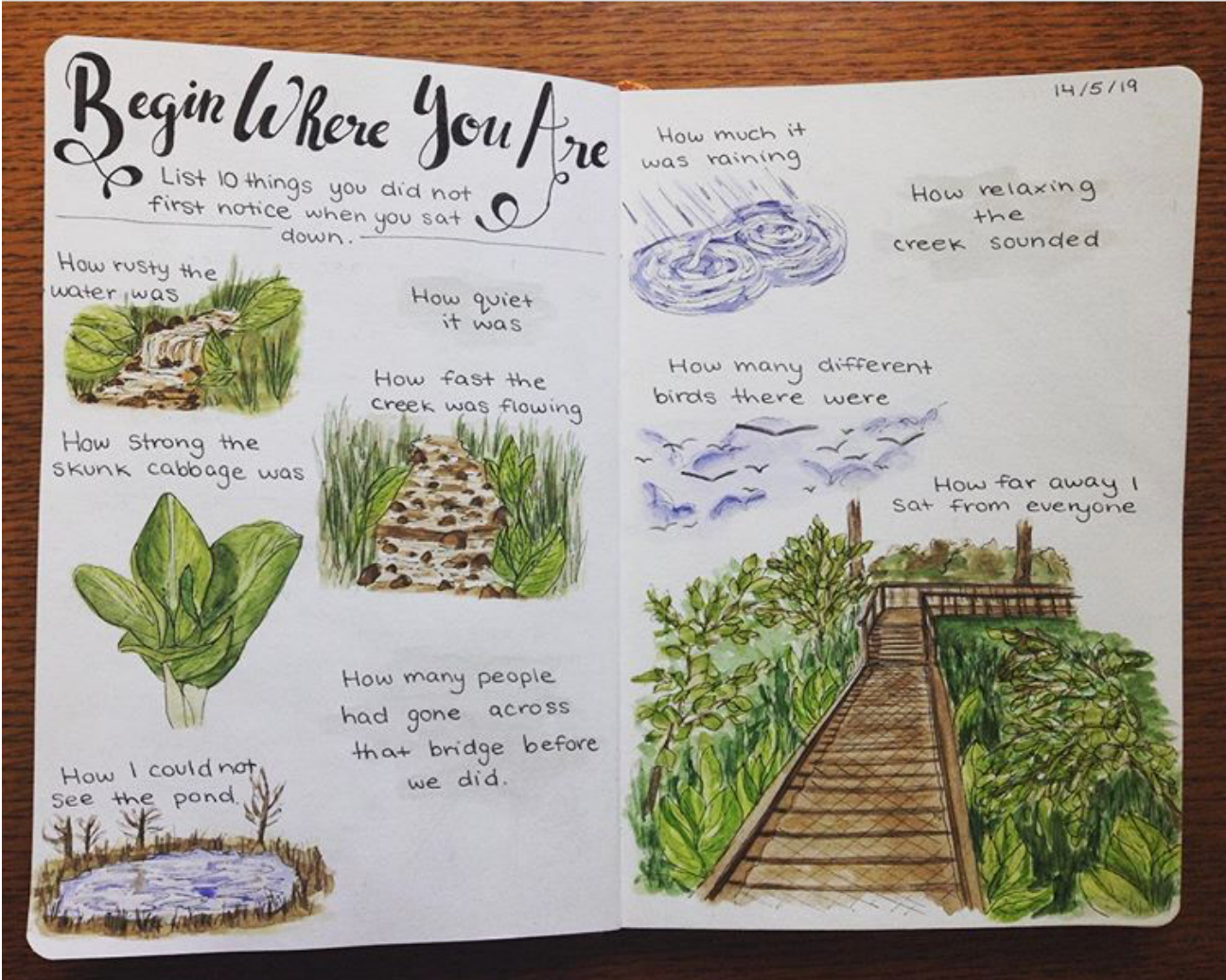


Downes Bowl Hike

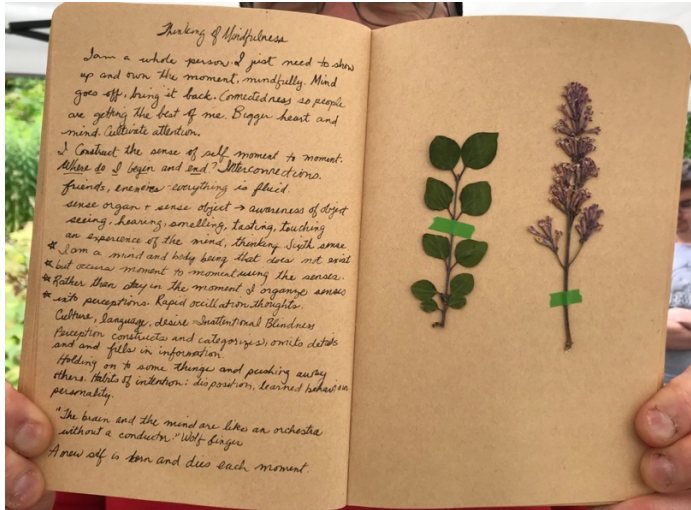
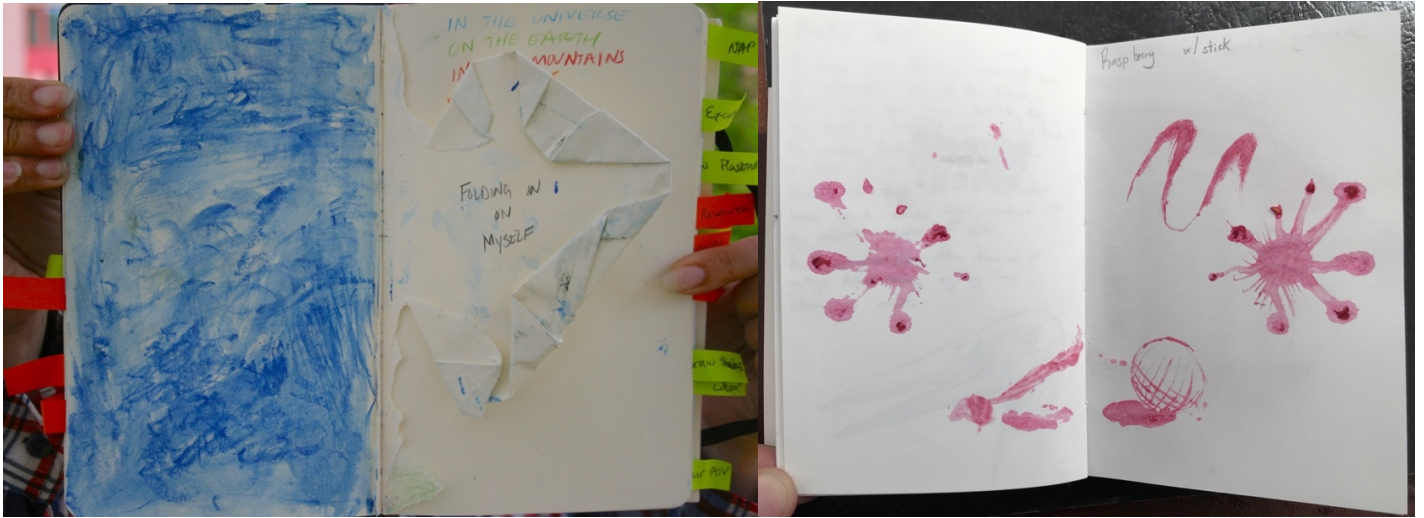


Othello Tunnels (Hope)

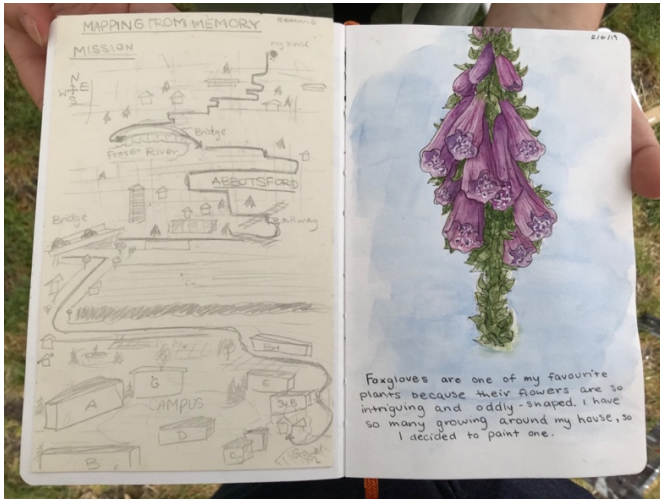
EXAMPLES OF STUDENT WORK (JOURNALS)



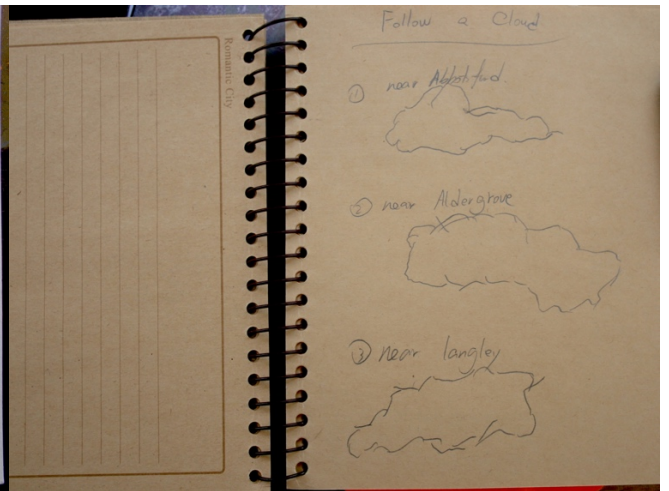
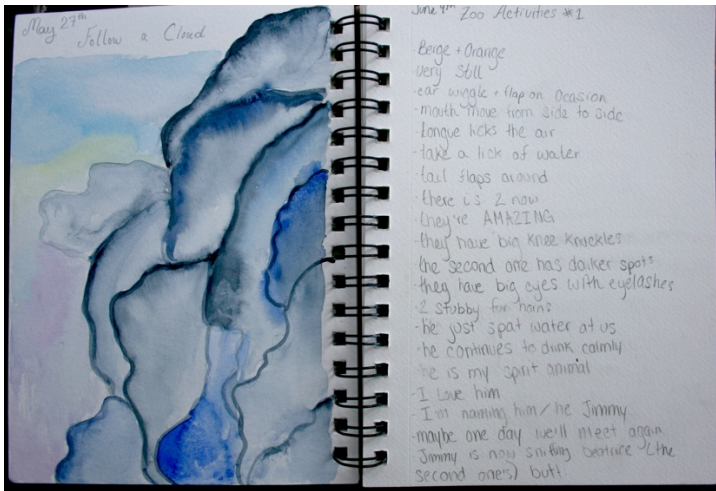
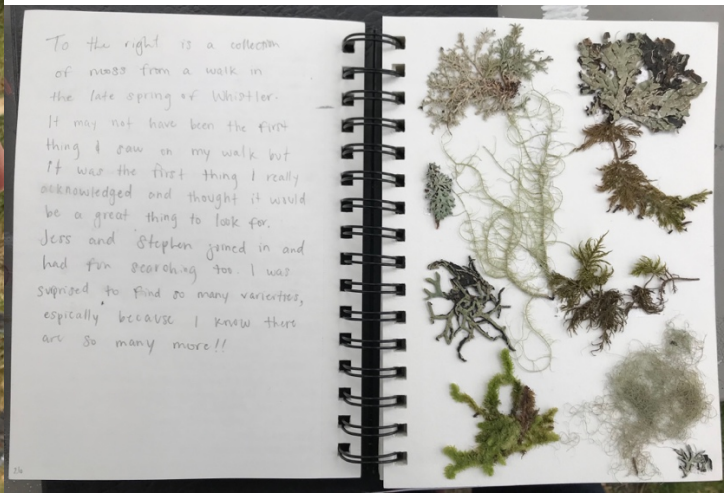
EXAMPLES OF STUDENT WORK (JOURNALS)



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Foxgloves are one of my favourite plants because their flowers are so intriguing and oddly-shaped. I have so many growing around my house, so I decided to paint one.



*A short video documenting the course is in progress and will be made available once completed.

FIT Process

I am extremely grateful to my Department Head, College of Arts Dean and the FITAC committee for the opportunities this grant provided to experiment and test innovative and atypical ideas of experiential learning and process-based teaching.

The overall timeline of the Fund (from deadline to notification of funds awarded) had an impact on the implementation of the course in several ways. Notification of funding happened at the end of February, two months away from the start of the early Summer Session (the course was proposed as a Summer offering since it is an outdoor course.) As a result, there was not enough time to get the course approved by the Deans and UEC in time to be offered by May. Funding also could not be extended past the fiscal year to allow the course be to implemented the following summer. This required the course to be fit into a pre-existing course number (that I was fortunate could accommodate this course) within the Visual Arts. Taking the course from proposal to implementation in the space of just two months also forced an accelerated prep that impacted the development of the course content itself. There wasn't enough time to get everything arranged and planned to the degree I would have liked in the time I had (alongside other teaching, service and research activities through the end of April.)

Comments on the application process:

- The FITAC committee commented "some members of the committee felt the application could have been improved with the addition of a course outline." I did not include this because the questions within the application form included learning outcomes and proposed activities and was limited to ten pages. I also anticipated having more time to develop the course outline if granted funding. However, if I'd known it would have strengthened my application, I would have willingly added this component. For clarity, I think the application process should include a required course outline as part of the package.
- I applied for the full amount. The FITAC committee wrote "The applicant asks for \$10,000 but FITAC recommends that the project receive \$3,250 (for the classroom tent, bus rental, and visiting scholar fee) but does not recommend that the project receive funding for the instructor costs (first aid training, a first aid kit, and a course release for the applicant)." It was not clear in the FIT guidelines that instructor fees (salary/course release) should not be included as part of the budget. This affected the way the rest of the course budget was put together as I could have asked for more funds for other items if I knew not to include faculty pay. There was no opportunity to submit a revised budget with this knowledge.
- The committee also did not cover the first aid training and first aid kit (a total of just \$150). I found the rationale on why this was denied to be unreasonable, since A) the amount was so small and B) I was planning on taking students off campus on strenuous hikes in remote areas. I felt these two items were so crucial to the safe offering of the course outcomes and activities that I paid for my own first aid training with PD funds.
- The FITAC committee commented "the applicant could have included Indigenous components." I agree completely and made efforts to do so, however the accelerated timeline did not afford enough time to make the necessary connections. The budget could also have reflected additional funds in this area (such as the Sto:lo Place Names Tour) if budget expectations were clearer, or a revised budget had been possible.