

Bringing Research to LIFE

In brief

New Appointment

Digvir Jayas, vice-president (research) and an internationally-recognized grain storage scientist, will share his extensive knowledge about doing research – in Canada and overseas – as a newly appointed member of a prestigious council.

Jayas was recently named to the Research Council of the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research (CIFAR), a not-for-profit organization that helps connect top researchers from around the world so they can undertake intensive projects together.

More than 350 researchers are affiliated with CIFAR's dozen research programs, including Nobel Prize Laureates, Guggenheim Fellows and Royal Society Fellows.

Through these programs, the organization provides leading scholars with the resources and direction to tackle some of today's toughest research questions.

"CIFAR is excited to have Dr. Jayas join our research council given his outstanding research record, wide range of fields of study, and the depth of understanding of the Canadian and international research environment he brings to the council," says Chaviva Hošek, CIFAR's president and chief executive officer. "We look for council members who are able to give advice on how the institute can best strengthen the Canadian research environment, and we believe Dr. Jayas will do just that."

Upcoming event

Prairie Perspectives on Indian Residential Schools, Truth and Reconciliation

A conference during the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada First National Event

Featuring prairie university and community-based researchers

Thursday, June 17, 2010 (beginning at 9 a.m.)

The Forks

Organized by: the University of Manitoba Centre for Human Rights Research Planning Initiative

For more information: www.umanitoba.ca/law/newsite/chrr/index.htm

Reversing the Trend

Professor aims to figure out what challenges new teachers face when bringing Aboriginal education to the classroom

BY KATIE CHALMERS-BROOKS

While in university, aspiring teachers learn how to teach their students about Aboriginal history and culture – yet many appear to be reluctant to do so once they graduate and begin working in Manitoba schools.

Last year, education professor Frank Deer launched a research project to find out what's stopping them from tackling this topic in their classrooms, and hopefully uncover ways to reverse the trend.

"It's really important for our youth – both students in elementary and secondary school – to have genuine exposure to the Canadian Aboriginal experience," Deer says.

He discovered a number of factors getting in the way. These newly graduated teachers say they're afraid they don't know enough or their knowledge isn't specific enough, considering how many different Aboriginal groups exist.

"They feel afraid that they're going to get something wrong," Deer says, noting in some instances backlash from parents and students can result.

Spirituality 'difficult to manage'

They're also unsure how to deal with lessons of spirituality in their classrooms since schools for the most part have removed religion from curriculum.

"One can't talk about Aboriginal education without exploring history and spirituality. Now the problem with this is the public school system has veered away from religion, from offering a Christian spin on education," says Deer. "So some find it difficult to explore the spiritual side because other sides of spirituality have become taboo. So that is difficult to manage."

Many of the newly graduated teachers interviewed for the study also said they don't feel they are the right person to provide students with an Aboriginal education since they themselves are not Aboriginal.

"In a public school system, where there are precious few Aboriginal teachers, we really have to shift our focus away from that idea," says Deer, noting only a handful of the nearly 150 education students in his classes last year were Aboriginal.

Another big misconception? That only Aboriginal kids need to learn about their heritage. Aboriginal kids experience a boost in confidence and new sense of pride in their identity when learning about their culture. But Deer says it's vital to introduce non-Aboriginal kids to this content as well, since it provides them with a better understanding of what happened in



Photo by Katie Chalmers-Brooks

The Faculty of Education's Frank Deer (assistant professor within the Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning) identified "dimensions of apprehension" among new teachers when it comes to including Aboriginal content in their curriculum.

the past and how it relates to issues still not fully resolved today – for example, residential school compensation and treaties.

Difficult to convince

His study, which is ongoing, showed it has also been difficult to convince more seasoned teachers and administrators that this new approach is the way to go, as has finding the resources to provide kids with hands-on experiences (like having them visit a sweat lodge or meet with an Elder.)

Deer teaches the course Integrating Aboriginal Perspectives in Curriculum, which gives him the opportunity to

dispel education students' myths about who should provide and receive Aboriginal education.

The course was created two years ago and was in response to a national report card on Aboriginal communities – addressing concerns about health, living conditions, and education – published more than a decade ago, in 1996. The province released an Aboriginal curriculum in 2003 that Deer describes as "a good starting point" but there are still only a few professors across Canada who formally train future teachers on the subject.

"This research is exciting to me because Aboriginal education is a brand new field of study," he says.