



U of S announces UNESCO Chair in biocultural diversity, sustainability, reconciliation and renewal

Saskatoon, April 17, 2018 – The Canadian Commission for UNESCO (CCUNESCO) and the University of Saskatchewan (U of S) are pleased to announce the creation of a UNESCO Chair in Biocultural Diversity, Sustainability, Reconciliation and Renewal.

The U of S chair joins an international network of 700 chairs related to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The UNESCO Chair will work in partnership with international organizations and communities across Canada, Latin America and South Africa to effectively combine Indigenous and western knowledge to promote productive and biodiverse landscapes and territories.

The chair is held jointly by Professor Maureen Reed and assistant professor James Robson, two faculty members in the School of Environment and Sustainability. They are both recognized as distinguished scholars in the fields of environmental governance and sustainability and in fostering relationships with Indigenous peoples to advance sustainability. Since 2010, Professor Reed has helped lead the Canadian Committee on the Man and the Biosphere Reserve—which advises the CCUNESCO on managing the 18 Biosphere Reserves designated by UNESCO in Canada.

“The work of our co-chair is rooted in ‘action research’. This type of research is purpose-led, with the desire to put results to work immediately,” said Reed. “We are working closely with our partners, who include First Nations, Biosphere Reserves and model forest communities to ask relevant questions, implement projects and determine how, and by whom, research outcomes will be used.”

Robson brings expertise and experience in Indigenous community engagement in Mexico, other parts of Latin America and Canada. His work strives to understand how communities respond to global change through adaptation and innovation in systems of governance and resource use.

Research themes of the chair include engaging youth and women more effectively in governance about environment and sustainability in rural and Indigenous communities, and identifying innovative strategies to provide livelihood opportunities for people in their communities. Reconciliation and renewal are pillars of the work of the chair.

“It is important to have renewal in the work of the chair because we believe it’s forward looking and optimistic. True reconciliation means working together in a renewed relationship that is collaboratively created and mutually beneficial. We see it as walking a pathway side by side, rather than one behind another,” said Robson.

The UNESCO chairs program builds connections among universities, civil society, local communities, researchers and policy-makers. The Canadian Commission for UNESCO facilitates a Canadian network of 23 chairs in 17 post-secondary institutions.

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