

Reflections From the Field



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Positionality Statement

I come to this work from multiple intersections and edges. I come from wetlands and cornfields of Kansas where the prairie meets the rolling hills and woodlands of the Ozark Mountains. I come from western education systems and our resurgent Ioway knowledge systems they seek to erase. These identities shape my lens as a bi-cultural, Ioway man from the Midwest who works at the intersections of environmental, cultural and community health. I have been doing this for the past 6 years as an appreciative, uninvited guest among Coast Salish lands and waters.



Overview

The Doris Duke Conservation Scholars Program @ the University of Washington aims to change the face, practice, and future of conservation. DDCSP is a land-based program that supports emerging scholars to strengthen connections across nature conservation, environmental justice, and cultural identities. I was asked to create this document to make visible the principles and practices I led through during my time as Director of DDCSP from 2016-2019. This was created *from* and *with* these specific contexts in mind.

Ultimately, the work reflected here is about **reclaiming and upholding healthy relationships and responsibilities to lands and waters. A conservation practice that *Indigenizes*, or otherwise unsettles dominant narratives requires supporting young people to identify and reaffirm their individual and collective roles and visions for the work.** The following principles are how I envision supporting that aim. They are offered as I understand them today, in these contexts, and will continue to grow and shift as the needs of the world do, too.

In the pages that follow, I offer my *Design Politic*¹ and *Design Principles* with core framings for each, followed by ways in which each of these principles are woven through core DDCSP *Program Elements*.

“...through our work, we are trying to create a new world. We are making and remaking our creation stories right now, preparing the world for the people yet to come.”

- Roger Fernandes, Lower Elwha Band of the S’Klallam Tribe

Design Politic:

Reclaim and Uphold Healthy Relationships and Responsibilities to Lands

- **Thrive in the world as it exists;** Support young people to navigate through dominant systems and ways of being- in conservation and beyond.
- **Build new worlds;** Reclaim, reinstate, and restore paths to healthy *intergenerational* and *interspecies* relationships and solidarities.
- **Justice for Land, Justice for People;** Name and disrupt structures that inflict harm on *all* our relations. Elevate voices and practices of peoples who are leading a way forward for everyone and everything - especially Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC).

Land is made up of the nuanced stories and systems of relationships with human and more-than-humans across time, practices, histories, and hopes. It includes *all* plants, animals, waters, ancestors, and other relations who presently inhabit, who have inhabited, and who will continue to inhabit a place. It refers both to the: (1) *Physical geography* and (2) *Philosophies*, the living teachings, affective experience, and ways of being of a place².

Design Principles:

Design principles hold values that are central to moving forward the Design Politic. The following principles provided the foundation for our work: *Center Land*, *Storywork*, *Process Orientation*, *Multiple Ways of Knowing*, and *Center Community*. They are deeply intertwined and they extend and add on to each other.



Design Principle: **Center Land**

Learning environments should be contextualized by the lands they are among. It ensures the unique teachings embedded within lands, including those of peoples and more-than-human peoples, are leading the way forward. **Centering stories and lineages of land is not just about being a gracious guest- whether in Indigenous territories, predominantly immigrant neighborhoods, or temperate rainforests - it is also good science and must be foundational to any land-based work.** Beginning with stories of lands we are in, we can then layer our own stories into the lineage of a place in appropriate, respectful, and helpful ways.



Core Framings:

- **Land leads;** Land is iterative and adaptive and shows us how to be so, too. Design should be land-driven, not solely learning objective driven.
- **Right Relations with place;** Honor sovereignty and self-determination of all peoples- human and more-than-human; Shift baseline understanding of natural world towards one of *relationships, not resources*³.
- **Know lands through Story;** Elevate layers of stories of human and more-than-human relatives- across place and time.

*Land is, therefore we are.*⁴

- Megan Bang (et.al), Ojibwe

* Photo: Martha's Beach at Swinomish Indian Tribal Community

Design Principle: **Storywork**

Knowing through stories - of lands, communities, and self - is central to the work of being in healthy relationship with places. Storywork - storytelling and listening - can forward a narrative of right relationships with lands into everyday ways of being. It supports connections to land, waters, and each other.⁶

Core Framings:

- **Land tells stories;** Land-centered story can re-shape dominant notions of what it is to be in right relationship- to be a good relative.
- **We tell stories;** Our stories take multiple forms – including *spoken, written, and other artistic expressions/making*. Stories tie us with our pasts and provide continuity for future generations.
- **Many stories matter;** Stories re-organize power hierarchies to refuse singular narratives of our lives and our communities, and who gets to tell them.⁶ Lead *through* these stories. Provide alternatives to settler narratives.

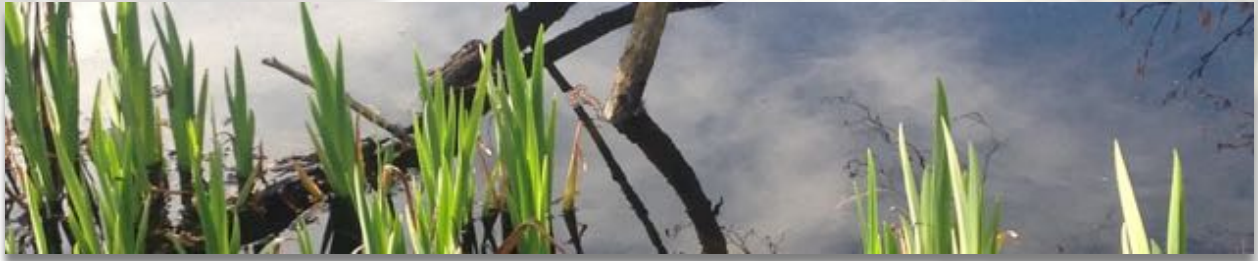


THE GIFT OF EACH ENRICHES ALL

Every story is important. The bow, the stern, the skipper, the power puller in the middle – everyone is part of the movement. The Elder sits in her cedar at the front, singing her paddle song, praying for us all. The weary paddler resting is still ballast. And there is always that time when the crew needs some joke, some remark, some silence to keep going, and the least likely person provides.

- Canoe Teaching

**Photo: Salmonberry at Daybreak Star Indian Cultural Center; Seattle, WA*



Design Principle: **Process Orientation**

The process of designing with lands and each other matters. How things are set in motion, and the practices and collaborations that sustain them, hold as many teachings as the end goal. *The pace and pathways we take towards change are non-linear and iterative*⁷.



Core Framings:

- **Many paths to the same destination;** The journey is variable depending on where you're coming from and where you're trying to go. Paths look different for everyone, whether navigating through a career or across a river valley.
- **Trust in process;** Open *and* close with intention. Be ok with land guiding details in the middle. The best teachings often emerge through *intentionally unplanned* moments.
- **Circle back;** Life operates in cycles, not straight lines with finite end points. Land leads us forward, back to our beginnings.

THE JOURNEY IS WHAT WE ENJOY

Although the start is exciting and the conclusion gratefully achieved, it is the long, steady process we remember. Being part of the journey requires great preparation; being done with a journey requires great awareness; being on the journey, we are much more than ourselves. We are part of the movement of life. We have a destination, and for once our will is pure, our goal is to go on.

- Canoe Teaching

*Photo: Elwha River from the former site of the Glines Canyon Dam; Olympic National Park

Design Principle: **Multiple Ways of Knowing**

Building healthy futures for all life requires moving away from singular stories of science (and conservation). *“Western science is a powerful approach, but it is not the only one... We envision a productive symbiosis between Indigenous and Western knowledges that serve our shared goals of sustainability for land and culture. This symbiosis requires mutual respect for the intellectual sovereignty of both Indigenous and Western sciences.”⁸*

Core Framings:

- **Center land-driven perspectives;** Make visible and operate *through, with, and from* knowledge systems of impacted communities - especially Indigenous and those that enact *relational, responsible, and reciprocal* ways of being. Do so respectfully in partnership and accordance with protocols of that community.
- **De-center settler normativities and whiteness;** Refuse inclusion/assimilation into dominant ways of being *as an end goal*. Utilize the tools and practices as helpful - on your own terms.
- **Some teachings are not for everyone;** It’s ok to not know everything all the time. Not all personal and/or cultural knowledge needs to be shared or translated.



Tribal Sovereignty

Native peoples and governments (in the U.S. context) have inherent rights and a political relationship with the U.S. government that does not derive from race or ethnicity⁹. Native peoples are not simply a racialized group or identity. Instead, 573 distinct Indian Nations have unique government to government political status afforded through treaties (there are also state-recognized Nations and unrecognized Nations). This status affords a viable political structure to counteract, supplement, or circumvent state and federal government actions (or inactions) on conservation issues. As such, **supporting Tribes’ efforts to uphold sovereignty and self-determination should be a foundational tenet of any organization doing land-based work in the United States.** *Tribal Sovereignty should not necessarily be conflated with Indigenous Knowledge systems, though they may be employed as desired by particular Tribes and peoples.

**Photo: Swinomish Elder Larry Campbell & scholars at the site of the Treaty of Point Elliot signing; Mukilteo, WA*

Design Principle: **Center Community**

DDCSP is comprised of and connected to many layers of community. Each of the core communities of *scholars*, *staff*, and our many *partners* is part of larger constellation of communities - each holding unique histories, present needs, and visions for their futures. The relationships across and among these respective communities is the foundation through which DDCSP supports scholars - during their time in the program and beyond.



Core Framings:

- **Strength of our relationships is the foundation for building new worlds;** Self Determination is based in and realized through radical interdependence¹⁰. How we be in relationship is how we create new worlds.
- **Intergenerational learning and collaboration;** Look to Elders for guidance. The future of conservation will be grounded in intergenerational community and family histories and practices that have been excluded from dominant narratives.
- **Cross-cultural/sector solidarities and story making;** Work together and connect across identities in support of healthy lands and waters. Honor and elevate the gifts of our respective individual and collective communities.

WE ALL PULL AND SUPPORT EACH OTHER

Nothing occurs in isolation. When we aren't in the family of a canoe, we are not ready for whatever comes. The family can argue, mock, ignore each other at its worst, but that family will never let itself sink. A canoe that lets itself sink is certainly wiser never to leave the beach. When we know that we are not alone in our actions, we also know we are lifted up by everyone else.

- Canoe Teaching

Scholars

It's necessary for the scholars to see themselves among this constellation of communities as they develop their conservation identities. It infuses an appreciation for how they are in community with others. It supports being grounded in notions of interdependence, rather than individualism.

*Photo: Scholars at low tide on the beach below Daybreak Star Indian Cultural Center; Seattle, WA

How Centering Community is enacted with scholars:

- **Everyone has a different role, and they're all needed**
 - Knowing our place and roles within the constellation of the movement is paramount. Some scholars will work within dominant institutions/organizations and seek to “change from within”. Some will embed within, and perhaps in support of dominant systems. Some will be on furthest edges building something different altogether. Representation within *all* roles and positions on that spectrum are valued and needed across the whole group. Naming that is important.
- **"Professionalism"**
 - Many notions of professionalism are based on settler normativities. They are used to silence voices and reinforce existing power dynamics. Instead, operating through an ethic of *integrity*, *humility*, and *intentionality* can model a respectful way forward as we work together to rewrite what constitutes “professionalism”.
- **Shared *and* Individual teachings**
 - If we all learn the same things we don't need each other.¹¹



Staff

A team is strongest when a range of ways of knowing/being, interests, and practices are represented among them. Similarly, a range of affiliations and connections across the range of communities DDCSP intersects with is necessary to ensure strong, enduring relationships.

How Centering Community enacted with staff:

Practices:

- **Being together; Mixture of agenda-driven and open meeting spaces**
 - Meeting inside or outside, with and without agendas is equally beneficial.
 - **Presume co-facilitation, unless deemed not necessary or possible**
 - Effective co-facilitation is necessarily preceded by co-design. Effective co-design is preceded by being in practice of being together- in both structured and unstructured spaces. This models collaboration for the scholars.
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Composition:

- **Titles reflect paradigm**
 - A move from “Lead Instructor” to “Learning Facilitator” re-organizes presumed hierarchies of knowledge and power. Considering “Co-Directors” could signal a similar intention, and better reflect shared leadership that exists among staff.
- **Representation among staff from communities DDCSP intersects with**
 - Continue striving for a range of racial, ethnic, gender, class, academic, grassroots, locals, and transplants that reflects scholar composition and broader communities. As a land-based program, there should be at least one Native staff member, preferably from a local/regional tribe.

Partners

Deepening relationships with conservation partners is part of “preparing the (conservation) world for those to come”. Our partners provide us direct connection to on the ground conservation work, thus ensuring scholars have practitioners in the field to learn from and with.

How is Centering Community enacted with partners:

- **Connect across broader movements;** Partnerships provide grounding in movements, not just institutions. They can catalyze sharing and strategizing across positionalities, lands, and communities represented among DDCSP.
- **Drive Curriculum Priorities;** Conservation practitioners know what’s happening on the ground and can help identify emerging needs and opportunities.
- **Centering partners is centering the scholars;** Partners provide scholars access to physical places and knowledge. More importantly, it signals to scholars the necessity of enacting reciprocity when part of a community.



Program Elements

The following pages outline five primary Program Elements: *Application & Recruitment*, *Convenings*, *Curriculum Design and Delivery*, *Partnerships*, and *Scholar Support*. Explanations are offered for each one, followed by examples of how each Design Principle is woven through each Program Element.

Application & Recruitment

Presenting the broader program contexts and framings supports applicants understanding of the program, and if it is a mutually beneficial fit.



- Recruitment materials present framings consonant with land-forward program principles
- Application and interview conversations inquire on applicant interests and values towards health of lands



- Stories are offered by applicants through essays and interviews
- Recruitment materials and practices reflect DDCSP story
- Program framings and overview are shared during interview



- Co-led interviews demonstrate type of relationships we seek to foster
- Live out collaboration, not competition, through recruitment practices



- Interview practices intentionally do not reinforce normative power dynamics
- Applicants are interviewing staff as much as staff is interviewing them
- Privilege applicants and reviewers who hold varied approaches and perspectives on conservation



- Ask applicants to reflect and share on their ties to “community”, and why that matters to their work
- Robust review committee includes local and national partners; provides inlet for engagement and gives reviewers an opportunity to meet their future colleagues/partners

Convenings

Convenings bring people together. They also provide a platform for scholars and partners to share their work and stories and connect across our range of partners.



- Follow appropriate welcome and land acknowledgement(s) protocols of community you're in
- Locations Matter: Seek a mixture of campus and community spaces



- Scholars' stories are foundational to the Conservation Scholar Summit
- Name our place in lineage of histories/stories of lands and venues as appropriate
 - e.g., how we benefit from the history of struggle that led to El Centro de la Raza, and how we can respectfully add layer to that story



- Honor and celebrate culminations of scholar journeys
- Embrace time fluidity during events (operate on "Indian time", "multicultural peoples time", etc.)



- Respectfully lead with and through protocols of peoples/communities whose land/neighborhood we're in (e.g., Elders eat first)



- Hold event at community-accessible spaces
- Procure food from BIPOC-owned and operated businesses
- Create space for partners to connect with each other and share work, and not just for *immediate* benefit of scholars

Curriculum Design & Delivery

Land is dynamic and iterative. It provides parameters to work from within and across seasons, though the specifics vary from one day to the next. Similarly, a curriculum begins with presumed parameters though is responsive to shifting and emerging opportunities in micro and macro-moments- taking direction from the needs and dreams of scholars, staff, partners, and lands.



- Design in place (where the activity will occur)
- Land offers context for activities/lessons, even when not place-specific
 - e.g., when doing “PPIA”¹² readings in Skagit, how can they be contextualized through local examples? Doing so makes the lesson “real”, while also deepening understanding of place
- Land as actor; Have lessons be *land driven*, not *learning objective driven*
- Preference operating on *sun time* when possible, rather than *clock time*



- Begin design sessions with story, in one or more of its many forms
- Privilege stories of minoritized peoples - human and more-than-human
- De-center presumed normativities and narratives of dominant systems
- Make visible varied types of storytelling (verbal/written, glacial/seismic)
Enact future stories, in design and practice



- Launch with intention. Close with intention
- Be guided by emergence in between launch and close
- Take the “scenic route” when moving locations. It can support introduction to physical and cultural landscapes of a place



- Seek guidance on priorities and practices from conservation practitioners/partners
- Design with cohort-specific needs/interests/gifts in mind. Assume co-design among staff as baseline



- Hold event at community-accessible spaces
- Procure food from BIPOC-owned and operated businesses
- Create space for partners to connect with each other and share work, and not just for *immediate* benefit of scholars

Partner Engagement

DDCSP @ UW's location among the lands and waters of Western Washington/Coast Salish territories provides tremendous opportunities to partner with a broad range of conservation practitioners. As a university-based program not engaged in day to day conservation practice, DDCSP leans heavily on these partnerships for grounding. As such, there is a responsibility to reciprocate by leveraging social, intellectual and financial resources in service to the movement.



- Make visible the long histories of place, including layers of human inhabitation and contributions- beginning and continuing with Indigenous communities
- Acknowledge and carry forward lineages and histories of struggle that DDCSP engages with and benefits from, when appropriate (e.g., “Gang of Four: Danny Woo Garden, Daybreak Star, El Centro de la Raza)



- Embed histories and practices of partnering orgs and communities into curriculum, as appropriate
- Make visible the work of our partners through events and communications



- Enact reciprocity in interactions during and beyond the summer
 - i.e., ensure scholar engagements are mutually beneficial
- Circle back and reconnect with partners regularly



- Make space for varied perspectives and approaches to conservation- especially those from non-western paradigms and those that challenge dominant notions of conservation (yet achieve similar aims¹³)



- Show up for partners when asked, and even when not *if appropriate*
- Seek ways to connect across partners, if supportive to their work

Scholar Support

All the Program Elements directly connect to supporting scholars. The below are worth explicitly noting.



- Intentionally support connections between DDCSP and “home”
- Model ways scholars can surface layers of histories and futurities of places - including all human and more-than-human relatives



- Offer encouragement to explore personal and community stories of land and conservation
- Work alongside scholars to re-write settler narratives of conservation/relationships to land



- Forward, validate, and encourage non-linear life and career paths
- Encourage noticings across seasons and locations



- Unsettle presumed normativities of what is correct and true
- Present varied knowledge systems as equally valid and necessary
- Support thriving in current systems while building new ones
- Encourage exploration and integration of unique family and community practices and knowledge systems



- Encourage collective thinking and conviviality within and across cohorts (i.e., movement building)
- Encourage collaborative project design and implementation
- Work with colleagues to prepare the field for scholars to enter

Closing

The future of conservation will be grounded in community and family histories and practices that have been excluded from the dominant narrative. The future of conservation will be artists, aunts, and healers working alongside ecologists trained in western science. All roles and perspectives will be needed- especially those that have long been marginalized or silenced.

I center Indigenous practices because that is the grounding I come from. And, we all have conservation practices in our histories and lineages to bring forward, even if they weren't called that. Being in right relationship with lands and waters has always been a function of being human. It's time to reaffirm what that means for each of us and our respective communities.

Acknowledgements

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Canoe Teachings: These are respectfully offered in interest of centering the lands DDCSP emerges from. They are borrowed from “*The Ten Rules of the Canoe*” developed by the Quileute Canoe contingent for a Northwest Experimental Education Conference in 1990.

** All photos, layout, and text are by the author. Please utilize and share the contents of this document if you find it supportive to your work. And, do so with the same respect and attribution it was created with. To cite:* Ramey, B. (2019). *Reflections from the field*. Seattle, WA: Doris Duke Conservation Scholars Program, University of Washington.

¹ A Design Politic invokes the political agenda or goal associated with the design focus of your work

² Styres, S.D. (2017). *Pathways for remembering and recognizing Indigenous thought in education: Philosophies of Iethi'nihténha Ohwentsia'kékha (land)*. Toronto; Buffalo; London: University of Toronto Press.

³ Wildcat, D. Haskell Indians Nations University

⁴ Bang, M. et al. (2014). *Muskat theories, tobacco in the streets, and living Chicago as Indigenous land*. Environmental Education Research, 20:1, 37-55

⁵ Archibald, J. "Q'um Q. X. (2008). *Indigenous Storywork: Educating the Heart, Mind, Body, and Spirit*. Vancouver: UBC Press.

⁶ Meixi. (2019). *Stories across the landscapes of home and school: Towards Indigenous futures in Thailand*. University of Washington, Seattle, WA.

⁷ brown, a. m. (2017) *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds*. Chico, California: AK Press

⁸ Kimmerer, R.W. et. al. (2017). *Let Our Indigenous Voices Be Heard: Indigenous Statement at the March for Science*

⁹ NCAI. (2019). *Tribal Nations & the United States: An Introduction*. Retrieved from National Congress of American Indians website: <http://www.ncai.org/about-tribes>.

¹⁰ Illich, I. (1973). *Tools for conviviality*. New York City, NY: Harper & Row

¹¹ Fernandes, Roger. Storyteller & Educator, Lower Elwha Band of the S'Klallam Tribe

¹² PPIA refers to “Power, Privilege, Identity, and Agency” – a guiding framework DDCSP at the University of Washington uses to address concepts of equity and justice

¹³ Schuster, R. et al. (2019). *Vertebrate biodiversity on indigenous-managed lands in Australia, Brazil, and Canada equals that in protected areas*. Environmental Science & Policy, 101, 1–6.