



EXPLORING IDEAS ABOUT RECONCILIATION

Building on its success in Skidegate, the Haida Gwaii Higher Education Society has extended its semester program into Massett with an innovative semester in Reconciliation Studies. One of the first courses of its kind to be offered in Canada, the Reconciliation Studies Semester has already attracted a full class of students from universities across the country. The program, which started in September and will wrap up in December, is exploring ideas about reconciliation and restitution, including an international perspective, as well as a focus on Haida Gwaii.

The course brings together indigenous and non-indigenous instructors to offer wide-ranging perspectives on a variety of content. As the Higher Education Society explains, "In the local context, students are exposed to perspectives of reconciliation on Haida Gwaii through engagement with local guest lecturers both inside the classroom and out in the field, and through the close examination of protocols, shared decision-making processes, and co-management systems specific to Haida Gwaii."

The new semester complements the other two semesters already offered by HGHEs, which focus on natural resources and are taught in Skidegate, in partnership with the Faculty of Forestry at UBC. HGHEs says that Haida Gwaii offers a microcosm of the world, allowing students to learn first-hand about social, cultural, political, ecological and economic issues facing natural resource managers, as well as offering opportunities to engage with the community and immerse themselves in the lifestyle of the islands.

While these semesters have been successful, HGHEs continues to look at ideas for new programming to ensure its long-term sustainability. In 2016, the Gwaii Trust board approved a grant of \$25,000 to help the society work on its new business plan, as well as up to \$100,000 to fund the Reconciliation Studies pilot project. The Gwaii Trust recognizes the social and economic benefits that this kind of educational programming is bringing to our communities, and we applaud HGHEs's efforts to build a strong and sustainable post-secondary presence here.

To help attract local students to the Reconciliation Studies semester, Gwaii Trust directors also approved a request from HGHEs for two \$10,500 scholarships (a total of \$21,000). One of the Gwaii Trust scholarships was awarded to Joel Richardson of Skidegate, who is in his third year of studies at Vancouver Island University, and hopes to return to the islands after he graduates and work with the Haida Nation. In a message to the Gwaii Trust, Joel told us he was grateful for the opportunity to take the Reconciliation Semester, which is allowing him to focus on what he cares about most: the wellness of Haida Gwaii and the people who live here. "I have nothing but gratitude to the committee," he said. "Thank you for your contribution."

The other scholarship was awarded to Marijke Vanderlinden, who is originally from Masset and is now studying law at Dalhousie University. She wants to eventually work in government, law and policy on behalf of the indigenous and environmental communities. Marijke told us the course so far has been completely life-changing. "There's so much pain and passion and strength here, and there's so much to learn," she said. "Thank you so much, I wouldn't have been able to do this without you."