

Introduction to International Indigenous Knowledges Conference Proceedings

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The International Indigenous Knowledges Conference: Transforming the Academy was hosted by the Interinstitutional Consortium for Indigenous Knowledge (ICIK), and took place May 27–29, 2004, at the Pennsylvania State University. The conference was the culmination of more than two years of planning and preparation that involved PSU faculty and administrators, donor organizations, and PSU Outreach staff. Approximately 100 attendees from sixteen countries in Europe, Asia, Africa, South America and Oceania were joined at the conference by individuals from eighteen of the U.S. states, including Alaska and Hawaii.

A call for conference presentation proposals resulted in the submission of nearly seventy-five abstracts in four thematic areas: food, wellness, nature, and the generation and transfer of local knowledge. After review of the abstracts by faculty panels, the final conference program included forty-one competitively selected oral and poster presentations that were featured in eight concurrent sessions and a poster session. Five additional presentations were included in a unique Walkabout Session that featured an interactive basket-making demonstration by Annie Cookie, an Inuit elder. Eighteen invited speakers were showcased in three concurrent panels and three plenary sessions, including a memorable opening session that featured Alaskan elders Elaine Abraham and Angayuquq Kawagley as well as Patricia Cochran, Director of the Alaska Native Science Commission.

Meals and refreshment breaks, prepared by Chef Kenneth Stout and his staff, were designed to reinforce an understanding of the cultural importance of food and foodways in traditional societies. The first day's luncheon speakers, Madhu Suri Prakash and Koushik Seetharaman, selected a menu that included traditional dishes from several regions of India. Greg Ziegler, the second day's luncheon speaker, identified dishes that were made from wheat, rice and millet—grains that are basic staples for many of the world's cultures. Refreshment breaks featured traditional foods of Native Americans and Alaskans as well as Hawaiians and the cultures of South America. An African Evening featured not only foods from East and West Africa but also presentations and performances that highlighted the visual and performing arts. The important roles of drummers and griots in West Africa were illustrated by performances featuring Clemente Abrokwa from Ghana and Alhaji Papa Susso, a Mandinka jali from The Gambia.

The keynote speaker for the conference was Wade Davis, anthropologist, author, ethno-botanist, photographer, and National Geographic Society Explorer-in-Residence. His talk on "The Ethnosphere and the Academy" vividly illustrated the

dynamic interrelationships of global environments and indigenous cultures. He challenged the academy to give the same importance to preserving cultural environments (the ethnosphere) as it gives to preserving the natural environment (the biosphere). Following a participatory session that highlighted various cultural leave-taking rituals, a number of Wade Davis' photographs were displayed at a gala closing reception where artwork created by tribal children from India also was on view.

The results of facilitated small group discussions held on the second day of the conference were shared with all participants through drawings and concept maps that were used as input for an Invitational Study Session on Day 3. During the Study Day, participants engaged in intense and animated discussions facilitated by Fred Loomis, that ultimately led to a consensus on several Action Steps that could be taken collectively to make indigenous knowledges a respected and valued component of higher education curricula.

Participants who did not take part in the Study Day could select to learn about either Amish small businesses in a modern world or the native botanical wealth represented in the forest plants of Pennsylvania by joining tours that were planned and led by Penn State faculty.

Also available through the website are conference images captured by Stacie Bird, photographer with the College of Agricultural Sciences, and a video produced by Charles Gudeman, from WPSX public television. This video features excerpts from interviews conducted with Conference participants.

We are proud to announce that in October 2004, "Indigenous Knowledges: Transforming the Academy" received an Award of Excellence in Noncredit Program Development from the Mid-Atlantic Region of the University Continuing Education Association.

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