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Principles-Based Budgeting: Resources for Revisioning Academic Planning

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Résumé de l'article

In working toward a budgeting framework that responds to the often harmful impacts of neoliberal accounting practices on people and places, this research has been guided by deep-rooted principles that were gifted to the University of Saskatchewan, through a rigorous Indigenous-led community consultation process which interpreted institutional strategic principles, using Cree and Michif terms: naᴋateᵞihtamowin | nakaatayihtaamoowin (sustainability), nihtāwihcikēwin | nihtaooshchikaywin (creativity), nanāᴛohk pimaᴛisowina | nanaatoohk pimatishoowin (diversity), and āniskōmohcikēwin | Naashkoopitamihk (connectivity). This consultation demonstrated the pressing need to redefine what a successful budgeting framework might mean by looking beyond the role of a financial plan and adopting a more broad-based approach using socially and environmentally responsible lenses that incorporate new directions based on Indigenous knowledges, world views, and values invested in creating a more inclusive and productive campus in targeted, incremental, and structural ways. This exploratory study builds on information gathered internally from the university's student governance structures, broad conversations within an ad hoc advisory group, and relevant literature. An important role of budgeting is that it can guide performance measurement and management; our exploration included looking for ways to identify potentially "new-old" measurements of success as they pertain to the university's stated objectives and aspirational goals. Current challenges of resource allocation faced by the university were reviewed to identify bottlenecks based on funding limitations that cause barriers to accessibility to academic and non-academic supports, and undesirable environmental effects. Our study raises more questions than answers, but provides insight into potential future processes, which we anticipate in this field report.

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Principles-Based Budgeting: Resources for Revisioning Academic Planning

Dante Carter, Tasnim Jaisee, Lorelei Nickel, Suresh Kalagnanam

Abstract In working toward a budgeting framework that responds to the often harmful impacts of neoliberal accounting practices on people and places, this research has been guided by deep-rooted principles that were gifted to the University of Saskatchewan, through a rigorous Indigenous-led community consultation process which interpreted institutional strategic principles, using Cree and Michif terms: nākatēyihtamowin | nakaatayihtaamoowin (sustainability), nihtāwihcikēwin | nihtaooshchikaywin (creativity), nanātohk pimātisowina | nanaatoohk pimatishoowin (diversity), and āniskōmohcikēwin | Naashkoopitamihk (connectivity). This consultation demonstrated the pressing need to redefine what a successful budgeting framework might mean by looking beyond the role of a financial plan and adopting a more broad-based approach using socially and environmentally responsible lenses that incorporate new directions based on Indigenous knowledges, world views, and values invested in creating a more inclusive and productive campus in targeted, incremental, and structural ways. This exploratory study builds on information gathered internally from the university's student governance structures, broad conversations within an ad hoc advisory group, and relevant literature. An important role of budgeting is that it can guide performance measurement and management; our exploration included looking for ways to identify potentially "new-old" measurements of success as they pertain to the university's stated objectives and aspirational goals. Current challenges of resource allocation faced by the university were reviewed to identify bottlenecks based on funding limitations that cause barriers to accessibility to academic and non-academic supports, and undesirable environmental effects. Our study raises more questions than answers, but provides insight into potential future processes, which we anticipate in this field report.

Keywords Deep-rooted principles, budgeting, resource allocation, performance measurement

In seeking to develop a budgeting framework that responds to the potentially harmful impacts of neoliberal accounting practices on people and places, this research has been guided by deep-rooted principles that were gifted to the University of Saskatchewan (USask) through a rigorous Indigenous-led community consultation process which interpreted institutional strategic principles using Cree and Michif terms: nākatēyihtamowin | nakaatayihtaamoowin (sustainability), nihtāwihcikēwin | nihtaooshchikaywin (creativity), nanātohk pimātisowina | nanaatoohk pimatishoowin (diversity), and āniskōmohcikēwin | naashkoopitamihk (connectivity). These are outlined in Figure 1 below with expanded definitions provided in the Appendix included at the end of our field report.
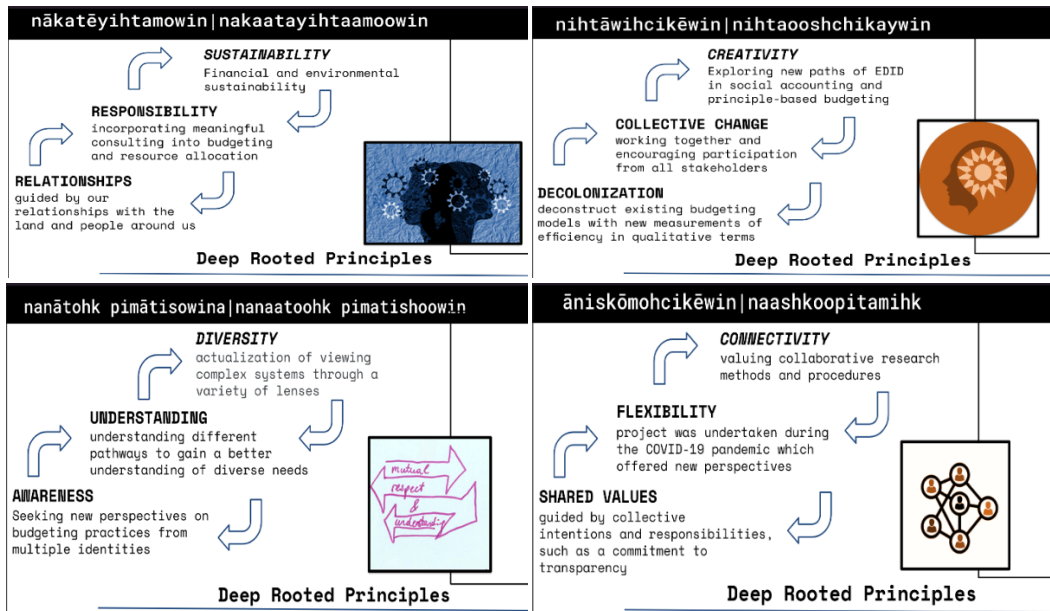
Figure 1. The University of Saskatchewan's Deep-Rooted Principles

Our exploration seeks innovative ways to reconsider measurements of success as they pertain to the university's stated objectives and aspirational goals. One way to demonstrate the living impact of values-based budgeting is to measure their impacts at multiple levels throughout the organization, for example, by reorienting employee evaluations; establishing sustainability-centered budget practices that support emerging scholars; engaging critical minoritized perspectives in curricula; rewarding students who actively seek out pluralistic perspectives; and emphasizing services that reduce disparities. Some of these approaches would be very low cost to to implement, and yet, could produce measurable results in shifted institutional emphases and student employability in labour markets that are increasingly invested in sustainable futures.

However, confining commitments to the deep-rooted principles to low stakes shifts would be a disservice. Deeper structural transformations are required for maximum effect. While, across the nation, barriers to financial stability in higher education are well known, cohesive planning to reshape them in more decolonizing, equitable, inclusive, and pluralizing directions can help correct for the harms caused by standardized practices of externalizing costs. We propose that the challenges that currently face our university may be narrowed down to four bottlenecks, namely: uncertain availability of external resources; incomplete information about accessing internal resources; limits imposed by a provincial Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on higher education funding; and the need for greater attention to resource distribution that provides academic and non-academic supports for diverse campus constituencies who can contribute to more substantive revisioning of planning processes. Our research is a first step in exploring how budgeting can enable the institution: to (1) integrate

the deep-rooted principles in its operational planning; (2) live by the values articulated in related formal statements; and (3) deliver on its stated goals and objectives (Fairbairn, 2017).

Resource allocation is often identified as a reason for organizations struggling to meet their objectives. In April 2021, USask and the provincial government agreed to a four-year MOU with stable base funding and a separate two-year innovation grant of $31 million to initiate vital changes. The provincial performance framework laid out for the university in the memorandum includes five criteria: (1) accessibility; (2) responsiveness; (3) quality; (4) sustainability and (5) accountability. While the MOU aligns university development with the Saskatchewan Growth Plan, it requires tens of millions of dollars in budget cuts in order to address ongoing deficits. Finding ways to enact change while meeting the criteria provided in creative ways is our challenge.

The Research Journey

Early in 2021, the newly appointed Provost decided to seek ways to incorporate the deep-rooted principles into the university's budgeting and resource allocation systems. She authorized the establishment of an ad hoc advisory committee, comprised of a diverse group of individuals from across the university, invited to brainstorm and explore pathways forward. The composition of our research team reflects diversity in terms of role, discipline, research (areas, backgrounds, and methodologies), social location, and experience. Our group proposes that practices of accounting and budgeting could be revised to support meaningful change, in part by challenging how prevailing financial systems often interpret sustainability without substantive accountabilities to lands and peoples. Following the deep-rooted principle of creativity, our research focuses on unexplored areas for purposeful action. COVID-19 has presented its own unique challenges and opportunities to become more flexible. Through the principle of connectivity, our research encourages understanding the needs of the campus community and how our networks—both living and virtual—can aid in allocating resources more effectively.

The journey thus far has raised several critical questions. What does it really mean to say that deep-rooted principles are the foundation for how the university will function, including in its allocation of resources? How do the university's existing structures and processes align (or not) with its aspirational goals? What would an intersectional analysis of current budget practices reveal about the university's commitments to lands and peoples? What, then, would an intentionally principled budget include and who might be invited to contribute to budgeting planning processes with a view to enacting those principles at all levels of the organizations? What are the boundaries that must guide principles-based budgeting in a decolonizing frame? What does success mean and how should it be measured and is quantification always the only or best approach?

Literature Review: Some Promising Practices

"A budget is … a medium to communicate–quantitatively–management's objectives … and the instrument that guides and coordinates … the firm's activities…." (Brewer et al., 2020,

p. 272). According to Merchant and Van der Stede (2007), budgeting typically serves the purposes of planning, coordination, top management oversight, and motivation. An important criticism levelled against traditional hierarchical budgeting approaches is that they encourage 'command and control' mentalities, have no link to organizational objectives and/or strategies, encourage dysfunctional behaviour, and become an end in themselves, rather than a well-articulated, flexible, and evidence-based means to an end (Libby & Lindsay, 2003a, b). Such criticisms led to the development, 25 years ago, of the Beyond Budgeting Roundtable (BBRT) which suggested that traditional budgeting has no creative role in modern organizations (Libby & Lindsay, 2003a, b). Despite such calls, standardized budgeting is very much alive and integral to how organizations are managed (Libby & Lindsay, 2010), and indeed, are part of the provincial MOU. More recent research suggests that budgeting practices and the primary reasons for their deployments vary across Canadian universities (Kenno et al., 2021), with both constructive and infamous examples in recent memory.

That the world's budgeting landscape has changed significantly in recent decades is perhaps an understatement. Achieving the sustainable developmental goals (SDGs), establishing meaningful quality of life measures, and the importance of making substantive investments in Indigenization, equity, diversity, inclusion, and decolonization simply cannot be ignored. Policies such as the United Nations' 2030 agenda for sustainable development and the Canadian federal government's Quality of Life Strategy (DFC, 2021) show a need to measure more than traditionally understood economic factors, which have too often failed to account for harmful market impacts.

There is growing evidence that the vital factors outlined above are being more frequently incorporated into budgeting and/or performance measurement frameworks. For instance, according to Kavanagh and Kowlaski (2021), "[w]ith equity permeating the national conversation, it's important to understand the concept for budgeting: why it matters, how it might realistically be applied, and practical concerns and challenges" (p. 19). They suggest the use of five guiding principles to help with budgeting for equity: (1) avoid creating zero-sum games; (2) avoid either/or thinking and encourage both/and thinking; (3) create procedural justice; (4) decompose outcomes; and (5) encourage stakeholders to participate in the conversation. Sharp (2003) highlights the importance of gender responsive budgeting and notes that equity should be added as a fourth 'e' in addition to economy, efficiency, and effectiveness within frameworks for performance-based budgeting. Frameworks for intersectional budget analysis are emerging to assist with these endeavors (Khosla, 2021).

The OECD's green budgeting framework, developed by the Paris Collaborative on Green Budgeting (OECD, 2017) suggests "using the tools of budgetary policy-making to help achieve environmental and climate goals" (p. 2). The framework proposes that an "… effective approach to green budgeting is underpinned by four key building blocks that are mutually reinforcing: a strong strategic framework, tools for evidence generation and policy coherence, reporting to facilitate accountability and transparency and an enabling budgetary framework" (p. 2). Stronger indicators of biospheric flourishing are needed.

New Zealand's Wellness Budget is not limited to economic data, because success is measured

through the values of fairness, environmental protection, and community strengths (NZG, 2021). This system's resource allocation focus areas include mental wellbeing, challenging poverty, improving incomes, skills development and opportunities, digital advancements, and sustainability. The framework looks beyond fiscal and economic priorities by considering social, environmental, cultural, and intergenerational outcomes (NZG, 2021). It pairs fiscal spending with targeted wellbeing initiatives, where every financial decision incorporates Māori perspectives, input, influence, and information (NZG, 2021). The wellness budget model does not aim for perfection, but rather establishes a program of change through bids for funding that require a wellbeing analysis consistent with stated priorities.

Canada's Alternative Federal Budget (AFB) is another monetary and social accountabilities-based budget framework. It accounts for the social aspects of arts and culture, gender equality, mental health, immigration, post-secondary education, and sustainable development goals (CCPA, 2018). Arts and culture are viewed as a common element that connects humanity, and so this component is evaluated through consideration of social return on investment from increased funding of culture and the arts (CCPA, 2018). Gender inequality is also addressed within the AFB, which further recognizes that the *National Action Plan Against Racism* has not been updated since 2010 and requires more adequate data to better allocate resources to meet current and growing racial inequalities (CCPA, 2018).

A budget that communicates objectives for equity and mutual flourishing of lands and peoples can be enabled using broad-based approaches such as the balanced scorecard (BSC) (Kaplan & Norton, 1996) and social return on investment (SROI Network, 2012) to develop its objectives. Cooper and Ezzamel (2016) integrate technical BSC approaches with a social perspective which attempts to examine how individuals perceive organizations, co-manage them, and understand their implications for society. They further emphasize the importance of using a dialogic process involving all relevant stakeholders, while centering the perspectives of those most affected by decisions. Three key underlying principles that inform the SROI framework are: (1) involve stakeholders; (2) value what matters; and (3) be transparent. Combining insights from these forward-looking frameworks can provide guidance and inspiration in revising academic budgeting and measurement frameworks, establishing consultation with Canada's Indigenous peoples as a foundational practice for measuring both qualitative and quantitative outcomes, responsibly.

Student Governance and Initiatives

Larger institutional change cannot take place without engagement from all levels of governance operating within an institution. Envisioning an inclusive and equitable campus is a critical objective among student groups at USask; therefore, student governance holds a key role in enacting change. 2019 marked the launch of the University of Saskatchewan Student Union's (USSU's) strategic goal, *Path Forward*, with a vision to promote education, revitalize community, decolonize systems, and facilitate leadership. That same year, the USSU embarked on hiring an Indigenous Knowledge Keeper to support student-focused commitments to decolonization, reconciliation, and Indigenization. The following year an MOU was signed

with the university on Anti-Racism, setting out a list of commitments for both parties to follow. These changes carry forward the values of ratified USSU campus groups at USask, including the establishment new resources for campus groups through the Anti-Racism and Anti-Oppression grant process.

Many ratified groups on campus seek to improve the quality of education and student-life by identifying and responding to gaps in meeting student needs. College-based groups like the Edwards Business Students' Society (EBSS) and the Indigenous Business Students' Society (IBSS) have created an Indigenous Initiatives strategy focused on six areas of improvement, and ways to measure them. The strategy is referred to as CIRCLE, which stands for change, inclusion, recognition, collaboration, learning, and equity. Driven to decolonize their own resource management processes as a student group located on Treaty 6 territory (EBSS) and as an Indigenous student society (IBSS), respectively, both are taking steps to design budgets that allocate resources in responsible, respectful, and transparent ways that support inclusion.

Moving Forward

We believe that it is important to develop a budgeting framework that circles back to the critical questions about accountabilities raised earlier in this report. Initial actions require educating the university community so that all constituencies have a good understanding of the four deep-rooted principles, which extend the meaning of the English words through interventions drawn from the knowledge networks of local Indigenous and Métis peoples. Providing open communication with and teachings from Elders and Knowledge Keepers on campus and in the community, including in conversations with government, are a key component in building understanding. Newly aligned quantifiable and qualitative goals could aid in establishing design and measurement frameworks for resource allocations driven by the deep-rooted principles, helping to ensure that multiple stakeholder needs are recognized and met.

Frenz & Vega (2010) have identified equity as a measurement of success that requires careful attention to both horizontal and vertical inequalities, which illuminate inefficiencies in the system under review. Horizontal inequalities are differences of access among individuals with different circumstances (differences between groups), which can be rooted in discrimination (Reimer & Pollak, 2010). They often set up unhealthy internal competition for resources that favour the status quo. This type of inequality requires greater connectivity and emphasis on diversity, achieved by assessing relationships between groups and recognizing the distinct paths and interfacing journeys among them to create corrective guidelines when allocating resources to meet diverse needs. Vertical inequalities reflect differences among individuals with similar circumstances (differences within a group) which can be assessed by learning how to improve the creativity and sustainability of resource allocations (Reimer & Pollak, 2010). Resource allocation that prioritizes sustainability can contribute to both financial and ecological sustainability by nurturing relationships that prioritize mutual flourishing through social return on investment (Dei, 2016). Creativity involves recognizing the need for inviting diverse perspectives, based on Indigenous practices of consultation to engage faculty, staff, administrators, investors, the environment, communities, educators, and current and future students.

Factors influencing service coverage depend on the availability of a service to the stakeholders who should benefit from it (Marra & Espinosa, 2020). Understanding service coverage involves assessing a variety of factors, such as availability of resources (commodities, facilities, personnel), people's attitudes to the service (acceptance, social norms, religion), as well as the actual quality/success of the service (Stewart et al., 2009). Measurement of coverage includes several stages. Each service is first identified with an apparent rationale for its provision. A coverage measure is then defined for each stage (usually through a ratio between the number of people for whom the service condition is met and the target population). Evaluation of coverage is based on five measurements that help to mitigate bottlenecks in resource allocation (Marra & Espinosa, 2020). Availability Coverage refers to the amount of service that can be made available to the target group as determined by the bottleneck of essential resources required to provide the service. Accessibility Coverage is the amount of service made accessible to the target group, which mitigates bottlenecks of geographical and financial accessibility (Marra & Espinosa, 2020). Acceptability Coverage refers to acceptance of any service by the target group(s) through reducing barriers of religious, cultural, economic, or other inhibiting factors. Contact Coverage refers to the volume of services accepted by users, which can be limited by the quantity of the actual coverage. Lastly, Effectiveness Coverage measures the quality of the intervention related to users' needs, as limited by the quality of actual coverage.

An equity-based indicators framework can also provide qualitative sources of measurement in both university practices and resource allocation, by expanding the focus on diversity, equity, inclusion and decolonization to incorporate sustainability (Sasakamoose et al., 2020). Adopting an anti-racist methodology allows educational institutions to address current bottlenecks of university supports and services not reaching groups that face disproportionate barriers to resources and opportunities. Colonial influence and precedent are heavily deconstructed through qualitative measurement of resource allocation and educational practices, using four progressive indicators that rank practices and behaviors within institutions. The initial assessment category evaluates processes invested in "maintaining colonial processes and structures" with a view to implementing equitable practices supported by constituencies most affected by "culturally safe/anti-racist/anti-oppressive processes and structures" (Sasakamoose et al., 2020). Actualizing qualitative measurements like these, together with quantitative indicators of services coverage, could help direct both the design of a principles-based budgeting system and the measurement of its success, as aligned with respectful enactment of the four gifted principles.

A multi-dimensional approach is needed to move forward. First, a transparent consultation pathway creates a community sustained by horizontal leadership, which can solidify innovative change (Pape & Lerner, 2016). We must include perspectives that are too often missing, due to structural inequities. It is critical for institutions to find ways to thrive without harming vital services or emergent critical knowledge systems. Secondly, a thorough communications strategy would make budgeting information accessible to staff, students, faculty, and community in information formats that are translatable across diverse levels of understanding. Finally, budgeting must recognize sustainability as a multi-layered concept. Environmental and fiscal sustainability must be intertwined with social inclusion initiatives and sustainable

development goals to build a meaningful principles-based budgeting framework. As just one example, the sciences are more frequently building costs to natural environments into budgeting frameworks.

Figure 2: The Deep-Rooted Principles as Mutually Constituting

To be effective and efficient, it is critical that new strategies, measurable indicators of success, and revised criteria be established to track the implementation of guiding principles. The idea of more sustainable practices, such as establishing a carbon exchange, could model reducing staff and faculty travel and allocating those resources toward student learning experiences. Such approaches could challenge current privileging processes, fostering more inclusive and mutually sustaining ways of thinking. Including minoritized perspectives in the curriculum (e.g., discussing environmental racism as an effect of current economic disparities) could introduce new generations to the importance of sustaining peoples and places, together. Placing the deep-rooted principles on course outlines, so that they are always front-and-centre, also seems a productive intervention. Communicating the principles to all stakeholders is key to developing a university budget framework that is truly rooted in the values it claims to embrace.

This project was designed to gather resources to help orient an ad hoc group of community constituents from a wide range of social and scholarly communities to help establish a framework that allocates resources based on the four deep-rooted principles through a principled budgeting system revisioning process. Participating students explored qualitative and abstract ways to measure the success of a principles-based budget design by considering categories of measurements identified in the literature. Further research and project development can help us determine how to mobilize principles-based allocations that improve higher education and the wellbeing of all stakeholders, including the lands which sustain us.

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About the Authors

Dante Carter is a proud nêhiyâskwew from Onion Lake Cree Nation. She is fueled by her passion about all things EDID (equity, diversity, inclusion and decolonization)! Growing up in rural northern Saskatchewan in Indigenous communities has greatly influenced her world perspective and shaped how she views sustainable development.

Tasnim Jaisee (she/her) is a Desi woman of colour with disabilities. Former USSU President specializing in Political and Gender Studies, as Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Project Specialist with the Provost and Vice-President Academic, she brings an intersectional feminist lens to accessibility, gender, and racial issues in governance, using community-engaged approaches.

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Appendix 1 – Deep Rooted Principles (from strategic planning documents)

Indigenous peoples have shaped the University of Saskatchewan's strategic plan with generous spirit and patient resolve—sustained by faith that things will happen when they're supposed to happen. After generations of forced irrelevance, the Indigenous traditions, languages, and systems of knowledge imbue our university's future in ways that were unimaginable even a few years ago. At last, this plan draws together parallel paths and uplifts all traditions in a space of peace, respect, and friendship. This plan is both a description of our university's future and a framework for mutual learning and reconciliation. And for this, we will all be immeasurably stronger.

nākatēyihtamowin | nakaatayihtaamoowin

The principle of sustainability ensures that we take care of the relationships with which we've been entrusted—with the land, with the air and water, with our students, colleagues, and neighbours—guided by mindfulness, respect, and reverence. In Cree and Michif, the idea is much bigger, extending to the attention we pay to protecting and honouring the wellness of all humanity and creation, the integrity of our cultural identities, and the stories embedded within language—the baskets of stories—our students, staff, faculty, and partners bring to our community. For the University of Saskatchewan, nākatēyihtamowin | nakaatayihtaamoowin is a cultural and ecological touchstone.

nihtāwihcikēwin | nihtaooshchikaywin

At its core, our university is a creative organism. **The principle of creativity** testifies that we are curious about the unexplored possibilities for growth, enrichment, and justice around us; attentive to the needs and opportunities for change that inspire imagination, and invention; and intentional about the future to which we aspire to contribute. The creative spirit is experiential; it invites participation in individual and collective journeys to discover truth and seek balance within the chaotic dynamism of the universe. nihtāwihcikēwin | nihtaooshchikaywin requires both discipline and optimism—knowing that our efforts can bring to fruition the possibilities we envision for learning and discovery.

nanātohk pimātisowina | nanaatoohk pimatishoowin

Life is perpetual movement and change—an unscripted journey of expanding awareness, understanding, and "coming to know"—and no two journeys follow quite the same path. Through the **principle of diversity**, our university is a meeting place for diverse journeys. Our strength derives from our respect for and belief in the tapestry of identities, traditions, and ways of knowing and being that enrich our humanity and bring us closer to an enlightened understanding of the world around us.

āniskōmohcikēwin | naashkoopitamihk

The principle of connectivity requires the University of Saskatchewan to be a global village. Our vibrant community is tied together by shared values, shared intentions, and a commitment to sharing our diverse stories in a place of mutual respect and learning. Our connectivity is our source of resilience, and the interactions that bring us closer together are energized by wonder and a playful spirit. Together, we have the flexibility to flourish in the face of change—and the confidence to take our place among leaders, emboldened by the unity of the community we carry with us.