

Research 101

There is no shortage of research in the DTES. Sometimes research can be helpful, especially when done respectfully in true collaboration with the community. But research can also hurt. As a researcher, I've heard too many stories of communities and individuals in the DTES who have felt disrespected by research. Research can be exploitative, extractive, and exhausting, benefiting researchers far more than communities and research participants, and often representing the DTES in unhelpful ways.

What can be done to make research less harmful, and more beneficial for communities like the DTES? I and a group of community representatives and university-based allies have been meeting to discuss strategies for empowering communities in the DTES to better protect themselves from harmful research practices. One proposal is "Research 101", a series of facilitated workshops (food and stipends provided) where representatives from DTES organizations that work with researchers could come together and share stories about positive and negative experiences with research, identify common problems encountered when dealing with researchers, and discuss how your organization hopes, and expects, to be treated instead.

As a PhD student, I would provide some brief context from a university perspective on different aspects of the research process (and how they can go wrong in community partnerships) each week, leaving a majority of workshop time for discussion and knowledge sharing co-facilitated with community members. These workshops would help DTES organizations learn from each other how their interests can be better protected in the research process, and facilitate the creation of shareable materials (e.g. research agreement templates, critical questions to evaluate proposed research partnerships) that could be adapted to the unique needs of individual organizations. Furthermore, some consensus around basic expectations for researcher engagement could help inform education efforts for community-based researchers within universities, before they ever set foot in the DTES, removing the burden of responsibility from the DTES community.

Importantly, **this is NOT a research project**. This is a chance to come together and share knowledge in the hopes of empowering community organizations to resist harmful research practices in the DTES more effectively.

If you would like to participate in Research 101, please contact Scott Neufeld (sdn2@sfu.ca, 7783788782) to discuss next steps. We hope to recruit one or two representatives from a variety of DTES organizations involved in research and start Research 101 in approximately February 2018.

Research 101 is supported by:

Hives for Humanity (community partner, space and logistics)
SFU's Vancity Office of Community Engagement (\$5000 funding)
Simon Fraser Public Interest Research Group (facilitation support)

Research

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12-2:30pm, Hives for Humanity Bee Space (580 Powell)

Week 1 (Wed. Feb. 28) – Introduction and the Context of Research in the DTES

We will begin our first weekly meeting with a drum ceremony and territory acknowledgement from Culture Saves Lives followed by a shared meal together. We'll get to know each other, I'll give an overview of Research 101 and some background on research in the DTES, and we'll discuss our experiences and perspectives on research in general, its pitfalls and potential, as well as what we'd like to create together as the outcome of Research 101. This could be a “manifesto for respectful research in the DTES”, research agreement templates for different organizations to adapt to their needs, or something else.

Week 2 (Wed. March 7) - First Contact and the Problem of Timelines

We'll discuss how research first enters the DTES, and the different types of researchers and research projects (e.g. students, faculty, and organizations). We'll also focus on how where researchers are at in their timeline can indicate how open they are to truly collaborating with community and how the pressures of deadlines can sometimes make well-intentioned people violate relationships and throw community ethics out the window.

Week 3 (Wed. March 14) - Research Ethics Boards and Informed Consent

We'll discuss the systems that are already in place to ensure research is “ethical”, the limitations of university-based research ethics boards, and the power of communities to hold researchers accountable by making contact with university ethics boards. We'll also discuss the problem of “consent” in marginalized communities, the possibilities of making consent an ongoing process rather than a one-time event, and the concept of community research ethics boards.

Week 4 (Tues. March 20) – Power in “Community Based” and “Participatory” Research

In response to pushback from communities that feel exploited by researchers, various forms of “community based research” have become increasingly popular. However, these approaches raise ethical issues of their own. We'll discuss “community-based” approaches to research on a continuum of power sharing between communities and researchers, and consider how the same old colonial research practices can be disguised as “participatory” research.

Week 5 (Wed. March 28- Community Feedback and Knowledge Translation

An important way of respecting community contributions to research is bringing that knowledge back to the community in a timely, and relevant, fashion. However, this is rarely done, and rarely done well. We'll discuss ideas for how to make it easier (and compulsory) for researchers to bring their research back to the community in an accessible and meaningful way.

Week 6 (Wed. April 4) – Tying it All Together

In our final workshop we'll draw together what we've discussed over the past five weeks and a work collaboratively to create the final products we agreed on in week one.

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More Info

Facilitator: Scott Neufeld

Contact: sdn2@sfu.ca, 7783788782

Acknowledgement:

I acknowledge that Research 101 is being facilitated on the unceded ancestral lands of the x̣ẉməθkẉəỵəm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and Səlilwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations. Acknowledging the unextinguished sovereignty and ongoing resistance and resilience of the Indigenous peoples of these lands is a crucial background to this work as harmful research practices (from settlers) have long been a source of pain, betrayal, and disrespect in Indigenous communities. Research has often functioned as a tool of colonialism, and colonial research practices continue in the ways that researchers exploit, exhaust, and extract from Indigenous and other marginalized communities. Finally, as Friesen and colleagues (2017) point out, much of the recent energy and innovation in the ethics of protecting marginalized communities from exploitative research emerged first in the resistance of Indigenous communities to colonial research practices. Thus this project is in several ways indebted to Indigenous peoples.

Description:

“Research 101” is a series of facilitated workshops where representatives from DTES organizations that work with researchers will come together to share stories about positive and negative experiences with research, identify common problems encountered when dealing with researchers, and discuss hopes, and expectations, for more respectful researcher engagement.

Goals:

The goals of Research 101 are to:

- Create a space for critical discussion of various aspects of the relationships between university researchers and DTES community organizations/members.
- Provide a space for community members to share together their collective wisdom, experience, and hopes with regards to community-engaged research: what works, what doesn't, and what they would like to see more of.
- Work towards some shared understandings of problems with research in the DTES, and expectations for what might constitute more ethical, and more respectful researcher engagement in the DTES.
- Collaboratively develop shareable materials that could be adapted for a variety of DTES organizations to make it easier for them to evaluate research proposals critically, set up processes that will protect the interests of their organization, and put the onus on researchers to do their own work in learning about issues with research in the DTES before setting foot in the DTES.

General weekly outline:

Each week, we will begin our time together with a shared meal (catered by Potluck Café). Each workshop will focus on a different aspect of the relationship between researchers and DTES

organizations/community members. I will draw from my familiarity with university research processes and the academic literature on ethics in community-based research to provide some brief context for each weekly topic. A majority of workshop time will be reserved for discussion and knowledge sharing from participants. Here is a proposed breakdown of our time each week:

12-12:30 – Catered lunch

12:30-1:25 – Workshop Part 1 – Issues with researcher engagement

- Sharing any reflections on previous week's topic
- Initial check-in and response to weekly prompt
- Brief context from Scott on weekly topic
- Facilitated discussion on weekly topic – What goes wrong in this aspect of research?

1:25-1:35 – Break

1:35-2:30 – Workshop Part 2 – Expectations and hopes for researcher engagement

- Brief context from Scott
- Facilitated discussion – What are best practices for respectful engagement in this area?

Participant Expectations and Guidelines:

Research 101 participants are not expected to engage with any materials outside of the workshop times. However, for those participants who have an interest in learning more about the topics addressed in Research 101, a selection of hard-copy readings will be provided each week to take home (see list below). If requested, I can also make simplified summaries of relevant readings available. At the first workshop, we will agree on a set of guidelines for respectful discussion.

Finally, in order to maximize the diversity of contributions and ideas being heard in our discussions, as a facilitator I will try to make sure each participant has a chance to share a story from their experience or their perspectives on the weekly topic at least once per week.

Participant compensation and accessibility:

As much as possible, I want to create a space with Research 101 that is accessible for participants who may have barriers due to addiction, mental health, literacy, trauma, etc. As a facilitator, I will try as best I can to translate jargon from university research processes and academic literature into language that everyone can understand. Recognizing that past research experiences may have caused participants pain or trauma, I will my also try my best to facilitate workshops with a trauma-informed and anti-oppression lens that is sensitive to how participants are responding to our discussions each week.

All participants will be compensated for their time and contributions to the workshop with a \$20 stipend made available in an envelope at the end of each session. Notebooks and pens will also be provided for all who need them.