

Confluence Podcast Transcript: Diana Doan-Crider

Ashby Kinch: This episode is the first in a series featuring faculty fellows in the Willow Grant, which “aims to *increase* success of Native American STEM Faculty and *advance knowledge* about issues impacting their career progression.” The project is in its 6th year of exploring Indigenous Research Methodologies and ways of indigenizing academia while supporting the advancement of Indigenous scholars in various professorial roles at both tribal and non-tribal universities. The Willow Alliance is a collaboration among faculty from Salish-Kootenai College and the University of Montana. The project is led by Dr. Ruth Plenty Sweetgrass-She Kills, from Nueta Hidatsa Sahnish College and funded by the National Science Foundation through its Alliance for Graduate Education and the Professoriate (AGEP). Listeners can learn more about the grant at the link in the show notes.

The Graduate School is pleased to present this podcast series focusing on the experience of individual faculty members and key personnel, who tell their stories of finding their way in an academic context that is not always well-aligned with Native cultural and intellectual values. But their stories demonstrate creative and successful approaches to supporting indigenous research and developing a new cadre of Native faculty, who play a vital role in expanding the intellectual and cultural capacity of the state of Montana.

In this episode, we talk with Dr. Diana Doan-Crider, the grant lead at Salish Kootenai College, who has a fascinating Montana story. She first came to the University of Montana as an undergraduate and has since built a successful career as a research scientist in wildlife, range, and landscape ecology. We start with her reading of a beautiful Spanish poem by Guillermo Rodriguez, “Hacia el Mar,” with a personal significance to her. That poem launches our discussion about her blended identity, with strong roots in both Mexico and Texas, and how that powerful lens informs the questions she pursues in her work. We discuss that in the broader context of indigenous research methods, and the importance of traditional knowledge-keepers as vital resources for understanding the natural world.

Welcome to Confluence, where we attend to immense amplitudes, and follow the river’s course.

Diana Doan-Crider: This is a poem called “Hacia el Mar,” my grandfather's favorite, and it's on his tomb, by Guillermo Ramirez.

Los Mas gratos ensueños son humo...
Todo pasa...el amor, el placer,
Y tan solo nos queda, a lo sumo,
Un recuerdo fugaz del ayer.

Las riquezas que traen egoísmo,
La ambición, la belleza, el afán,
El poder, los honores lo mismo,
Son volutas qu al viento se van.

Sólo quedan brillando cual gemas,
Del espacio en la immense amplitude
Las grandiosas ideas, los poemas
De pureza, bondad y virtud.

La corriente del tiemp nos lleva
Implacable, al preciso final;
Y por más que la mente se eleva
Solo mira el abismo fatal.

Prosegamos sin queja el camino;
Sin proestas, sin miedo el azar,
Como río qu a cumplir su destino
Se desliza, en silencio, hacia el mar.

Ashby Kinch: Welcome to Confluence, Deanna!

Diana Doan-Crider: Thank you so much for having me.

Ashby Kinch: So that poem is beautiful. Thank you so much for sharing it. And I could feel the emotion that, you know, welled up in you as you just, even as you started to think about your, your grandfather. So yeah, tell us a little bit about why you picked the poem and why it matters to you.

Diana Doan-Crider: My grandfather loved this poem because it talks about our dreams are sometimes, you know, just missed. But the ones that are made of love, of pleasure, those tend to keep on going like a river. And the things that are not good tend to just disappear and everything, like a confluence, lets go of itself into the rivers that end up in the ocean.

My grandfather has had such an influence on my life and, um, it's interesting how through my life, you know, all of these, um, comparisons to a river and

how, um, these confluences end up kind of taking us like a current to where we're supposed to be. And I've always felt his power, his influence in my life. I can feel his DNA in my veins and he was an amazing person. He was an Indigenous man from the mountains of old Durango, Mexico. So, of anybody in my life, he's the one that's impacted me the most.

Ashby Kinch: Yeah. So that's incredible. So yeah, it's almost all of the pieces of your story are there, your, your later work on wildlife and which we're gonna get into as we go. But it's a great place to start because, um, first, you know, your career and your work is so, um, perfectly meshed with our theme on this show, right? Which is Confluence and, and bringing to, um, visibility the kind of ways in which research kind of takes interesting courses and, and you know, and, and you just kind of voice that beautifully through the poem and then in your own career kind of, uh, hits that as well.

So one of the things we ask guests to do is to sort of tell their Montana story. But in your case, that's also telling your story of heritage. Right? And, and it's this, it's this interesting back and forth, uh, you know, a funny phrase that you are, uh, that you, you should do it in your own voice about married to Mexico...

Diana Doan-Crider: ...having an affair with Montana. And I think I just told somebody today, I said, I have a larger home range than a male bear. And, um, so yeah, I remember as a young girl when I first moved to Montana in the '80s making a footpath to Montana or to Mexico, going back and forth constantly to see my family, cause I missed my culture so much. But my grandfather sent me, you know, off on this journey to become a wildlife biologist or what I thought that's what I would be. And, um, at the time, we didn't have those programs in Mexico. So my family unusually—you know, not, not in a, in a typical sense of Mexico where women don't do those kinds of things—my family was very supportive. I remember my grandmother gave me a fake fur coat 'cause all she saw was Grizzly Adams on TV. And she said, "You're gonna need this." So I still have the coat.

And um, anyway, I came up north and I knew I had to come to somewhere where people studied bears 'cause that's what I wanted to do is go back to Mexico.

And I came here and found Dr. Charles Jonkel and became of his, a member of his bad rabbit pack, um, still a member of that bad rabbit pack. I bet there's probably a group of 30-40 of us. I was kind of a newcomer. There were people that had been working with the Border Grizzly Project, which he started here at U of M at the School of Forestry in the '70s.

And Chuck and some very dear friends of mine who are now like my best friends, but they were students back then, went to Mexico to look for the grizzly bear. Simultaneously, here I'm graduating from high school and I've got this passion in my heart to go see if there's any grizzly bears left in Mexico, and somehow converge with Chuck and meet this group of people, and he convinced me to move up here.

I had never driven in snow. I had never been up north. I bought a little truck with 175,000 miles on it and moved up here in January. Not knowing how to drive in ice or anything.

Ashby Kinch: Full immersion.

Diana Doan-Crider: Full immersion and fell in love with Montana and it was quite a, a contrast, you know, quite a struggle in my head because I always wanted to be in both places. I wanted to be in Mexico or I wanted to be in Montana. So it was just interesting, um, there's a lot of coincidences to how I ended up here. But regardless, I know that this is part of who I am and my place. And now I have this amazing husband that I've been married to for 29 years who said he's bringing me to a place where I can thrive. So we're moving back to Montana and um, now working with, you know, my, my Indigenous colleagues on the Willow Project.

Ashby Kinch: So, yeah, so that, I mean, that's why we're here. That's how we connected is, um, you know, our colleague Ke Wu is in, in that, uh, grant. Um, and so we're doing this series on the faculty that are engaged in the Willow Project. So let's talk a little bit about that, about how you came to that collaboration and how you came to be the co-PI.

Diana Doan-Crider: Well, there's a little bit of a story to that. It originally started when I met Ruth Plenty Sweetgrass-She Kills. She's a very close friend of mine. And also, um, one of the colleagues on this project. And Ruth and I were going through challenges on our graduate, in our graduate work because we both felt like it was not suited to our community needs. Both of us are very community-oriented. I wanted the bear research that I was doing to, uh, really be focused more on the people that were in the area that were living with the bears. And because I came from a westernized, you know, academic background...At the time I was, I had moved on from Montana. I had started my master's degree NS my PhD in, um, a couple of schools in Texas. And those approaches were very different. And I, one of the things that I learned from that was that the tools that we learned here don't necessarily work in other countries or other cultures. And I found that to be the same here with Indigenous cultures.

Um, within the, you know, within the confines of the United States, you know, they're located here, um, you know, nations within another country. But Ruth and I had a lot of similar complaints, similar challenges, but then similar ideas.

What are we gonna do with this? How do we take these education systems that were not created for us, and how do we adapt them so that they function for our own communities? And we began working on that. Ruth went on to start, you know, the Willow Project. I, um, continued doing some of my work down south. And then last year I came up and she said, "Hey, we're looking for somebody to represent Salish Kootenai College," who I love. I've always worked with that college. I've always loved the people there. And I said, "Heck yeah, I'll take that position."

So what we are focused on doing now is indigenizing education to where it's suitable for different worldviews, different cultural needs, culture and place-based needs. And that's been a very interesting experience, in itself, is getting people's attention to understand that that's a very important thing. It may not be important to a lot of people because Indigenous people make up such a small, um, group within the context of all of the people on this continent. But it's very important. And that's why I think people like Ruth and I, Ke, Jen Harrington, other people, um, that are working with Willow are kind of like these workers that say, "Hey, nobody's taking care of this piece of the wall over here. We're gonna go over here and, and help fix this." And that's what we're doing. It's a very constructive team, very creative team in terms of addressing things that other people haven't quite looked at yet.

Ashby Kinch: Yeah. So let's get into the details of that a little bit. I mean, the Willow Grant's core principle is, is building out these ideas of indigenizing knowledge, but also creating pathways for faculty to enact that in their careers. And that that's such a, you know, that's a piece of it that the ideas, which are gaining a lot more currency, in other words, um, indigenous research methodologies and methods, Um, I'm learning to add that extra 'M,' uh, some of the people I've interacted with, you know, tutored me on that. But they're starting to get a foothold because actually we're realizing that is a productive research framework. It's not just that Western science didn't get it right, it's that there's good science in that new methodology. You're gonna see things differently. You're gonna build out a different set of ideas, and they're also gonna be better for the community 'cause you're gonna be serving them. So, so those ideas are in place, but now Willow comes and it says we have to have faculty career pathways that that make that happen. So talk a little bit about that. How do you see the Willow grant sort of pushing forward a new model of faculty development?

Diana Doan-Crider: One of the most important components of Willow that I love, that I'm most attracted to is the aspect of dissemination. You know, it's a dissemination machine. I mean, we're getting that information out there. We're preaching to people, we're talking about them, you know, to them. And it's now spread into other projects that I work with. So some of the team members from Willow have been helping me on projects with, for example, down in Florida with universities who wanna figure out, you know, how do we do this?

I think one of the most important concepts of Willow, though, is that they are laying the foundation for what's required in terms of respect, um, in terms of, inviting Indigenous people in for what they bring to the table, not: 'oh, we're gonna show you how to do this here. We're gonna make a place for you.'

No, no, no. This is like, look, the world's problems are big. Um, obviously what we've been doing is not working. Indigenous people have knowledge that can help solve those problems. And how do we get that Indigenous knowledge into an academic system that is deeply entrenched in westernized academia that actually came over from the Royal society of England. And no offense against, you know, white men, I'm married to a white man, but, but it was established by that group. And when it came over, when, when the United States was formed, it brought those concepts over that excluded other groups that did things like used publications in peer review journals as the, you know, measuring stick for success, which does not work well in Indigenous communities.

So, what Willow does is it lays all of this out in this really beautiful circular concept that's not linear at all. Bringing understanding to people that, look, if you want to bring native faculty, if you wanna bring native students into your system, it's not just giving 'em a scholarship and putting 'em on a pamphlet. You know, we've caught onto the whole diversity thing. We know that you want the numbers. Okay? So, um, what, what it really is, is, um, and Ruth and I wrote something about this recently, was how do you create good habitat for Indigenous people in a system that's built out of cement? So we often refer to the Columbia River, speaking of rivers. How do you go backwards and restore the Columbia River when it has been so altered and when all of these cement dams are blocking passages for, you know, all of these beautiful species of salmon and so forth? It's gonna take a lot of work. It's gonna take a lot of commitment. It's not just opening the doors and saying, "Okay, you can come back in now." You know, what is it gonna take? And Willow does that very well because it represents two sides. It represents an Indigenous side, but it also represents the western side. And what's really interesting is how we work within that confluence. Within that confluence of where those two cultures meet, obviously we can't throw the baby out with the bathwater on either one, you

know? And we shouldn't want to do that. Both have very powerful, you know, components to it. Perspectives. How do we, how do we work within that confluence, with respect, and then also deciding which things don't belong in the confluence? So for example, we don't wanna water down Indigenous culture at all. But how do we bring it into the center to work alongside western science to where it's, it's, uh, superpower?

So for example, in the work that we did in Mexico, I used three a three-pronged approach. Or I should say, I wished I did. My family, my ancestry see acorns as sacred. Okay. Those people in the Southwest, people in California, Indigenous people have relied on acorns for thousands of years. They know acorns, like they know their own children. They know when they produce. They know how they're affected by wildfire. They know how they're affected by drought. Had I had access to that several thousand-year-old database for my research on bears, because bears eat mostly acorns in Mexico, that would've been incredible. Instead, at the time, what I had access to was local knowledge. I used that heavily. Those people actually provided me more information about bears than I ever got out of my technology or the tools that I learned up here in westernized academia.

So how do we put those three things together so that they really can, can be, you know, um, exponentially powerful compared to, you know, the individual components?

Ashby Kinch: I like that, that phrase 'superpower,' because I think it suggests what, what you're kind of getting at early on, which is that adding Indigenous framework actually amplifies the impact of the research.

Diana Doan-Crider: Absolutely.

Ashby Kinch: Rather than it being somehow kind of this sideler, right? That you add it in, it actually has this energizing effect on all the ideas that are otherwise at play.

Diana Doan-Crider: Absolutely. And one of the most magnificent things about Traditional Ecological Knowledge is you're looking at thousand-year data sets. You're looking at thousands of years of knowledge, whereas in modern science today, we have very short pictures. Look at it. Let's face it, master's degree, PhDs, we're all based on two-year, five-year projects. You know, we don't have those kind of data sets. And so I think that we, we base a lot of, what we know about, like, you know, let's take wildlife for example. We look at bears and we say, "well, bears do this and bears do that. And this is the habitat they use and

this is how many of them there should be. And this is, you know, what they eat.’ But we have no ideas what the, what ideas, what those bears did before colonization. Totally different. A lot of those bears were persecuted, just like Indigenous people. So we don't know where they lived. Well in, in Mexico and Texas, we're observing bears re-expand into their historic ranges. And they're flipping our lid. They're doing things that we completely missed in our publications and in our literature, even though people continue to use those as gospel because it's published. It's incorrect. And we need to understand the absolute foundational power of Traditional Ecological Knowledge because it's such a long-term picture of what things should be, how they are, how they respond. Look at the plains, our prairies. It's tragic that we've lost 90-something percent of our tall grass prairies. You know, that knowledge set of how important those grass species were for bison and the whole relationship between, you know, the microbes and the soil and big blue stem and bison and we're just now re restoring that to where it should be. Bringing it front and center.

Ashby Kinch: Yeah. And these, and these restoration projects, which of course any Montanan who's paying attention around, uh, you know, the edges, especially Blackfoot Nation has a big bison restoration project, which actually crosses the border and it's a really important component. And of course the, uh, CSKT, the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes have a lot of work on bears. And so, you know, you're hitting on two really important species in this area and wolves would be the third, you know, we should throw that in the mix here as well. Um, it's gonna create conflicts with other community stakeholders. Right. And so that, that, that management of that for Montanans is a living topic. But I think, you know, your research really focuses our attention on what we're gonna be able to do if we can hear the right voices and you know, expand the conversation for how we address those issues.

Diana Doan-Crider: Absolutely. And it also draws attention to the very, uh, to the importance of each member of the community—whether it's acorns, whether it's soil, whether it's bears, whether it's humans, whatever. I think it's so important that everybody realizes it's not bears over here, wolves over here, cows over here, bison over here. It's everything as one, um, community and how relevant everybody is in that community. And I just saw a really wonderful film, um, let's see, I think Piikani Health Lodge, um, sponsored this film, but they were talking about that. And even livestock producers have that perspective of, ‘look, you know, bears are one of the members of our community, their relatives.’ You don't shun your relatives and say, ‘okay, you guys have to die, or whatever.’ You know, unless somebody comes in and I was busts up your party or something...

Ashby Kinch: I was gonna say, some of us do [laughter].

Diana Doan-Crider: Yeah. But, you know, um, there are some things you have to, you know, put your foot down on. But, um, for the most part, you know, it's a community aspect and that's what we need to teach our children. I think that's gonna benefit Montana children to understand how systems work. We have obviously really, really messed things up on this planet. We don't have places where our children can get clean water anymore. I used to be able to drink outta streams. I can't do that. I learned that at the top of Glacier there's lead in the water. You know, and so I, I hope everybody wakes up to the fact that, 'look, we really blew it.'

And, and I'll use a quote from one of the elders from Cheyenne Wind River. Um, I was at an Intertribal Buffalo Council meeting and I was, we were doing some range land management training. First of all, you know, they have very strongly implied that management, there aren't many languages that have the word 'management' in it. They prefer 'stewardship.' And he told me, he said this was a, this was a government, um, sponsored project to quote, "train tribal staff in range management so that they could work alongside the BIA." We've learned exactly what not to do when, when you're trying to teach one of the most westernized disciplines that there are. And the elder reminded me, he says, 'you know, that this whole discipline was built on a big mistake. It was built on removing bison over-grazing, destroying the soil. And you guys had to invent a discipline to fix that, to fix the problem.' And I said, 'I totally get that.'

Ashby Kinch: Well, and so to loop back a little bit, staying with the bison range in that area up there, uh, on the edges of the CSKT lands, what was your connection there, um, to Salish Kootenai? How did that evolve? And, and what, what are you gonna be doing there, uh, in terms of advancing this indigenizing education?

Diana Doan-Crider: Well, I've had a relationship with my friends there for a long time, ever since the 1980s. And I have to throw this story in here because it's so magnificent, but Chuck Jonkel brought me up to, um, meet a tribal member, uh, or she was married to a tribal member at the time, her name was Millie. And, um, showed me how she had been coexisting with grizzly bears and how all the other Salish and Kootenai people had been coexisting with grizzly bears and, and they just seemed to, you know, have the magic to get it done. You know, there's so much to learn there. And so he would take me there to, to learn. And eventually she passed away and our tribal colleagues, you know, knew that that was a critical area for grizzly bears. They put it aside and turned it into Millie's Wood. And so, um, we now have a place that, um, we

hope will be, will be allowed to live there and steward, right adjacent to Millie's Wood where we can help restore that back to grizzly bear habitat as well. Um, so since that time, you know, I've just been drawn to the Mission Valley and my friends there. I have been working with Salish Kootenai College for a long time in indigenizing the range curriculum that we were working with. We first went in with this real westernized approach that the agencies wanted us to teach. And it was like, this is not working. Nobody wants this, this way. So I went to Salish Kootenai, um, my colleagues there said, 'let's, let us take a stab at it.' And we started working with it and it's worked out great.

And so since I've been working with them on this Willow project, it's all segued into developing an indigenized curriculum that is placed and culture-based because for native students, this is really important. The tribal colleges are the heartbeat of the community. American Indian Higher Education Consortium was founded on the words of their elders and their elders. I think, if I remember this right, um, Dr. Boham was the president of Salish and Kootenai told this story and that those people who were starting a AIHEC went to their elders and say, 'what do you want?' And they said, 'we want to educate our own children.' And that's such an important component that their students have that cultural input into their lives and have the opportunity to do that. So I'm a huge advocate of instead creating culture and place-based education there at tribal colleges. If they need curriculum for natural resource courses, that's great. We'll bring it in. But we don't just bring it in packaged with the western wrapping. We bring it in and we indigenize it according to how they want it packaged and how they want it delivered. Um, now we don't teach the cultural side, we just kind of prepare it in terms of, you know, uh, terminology and how we approach things. But each tribe adds their own cultural component to it that's very sensitive, very-- obviously, they're the only ones that possess that knowledge.

So now we're working at, uh, indigenizing, you know, um, natural resource curriculum for two main reasons. One is to prepare tribal college students for their own communities and to empower them. But the second is also to provide them with additional opportunities if they wanna go work for the federal government, they will be prepared and have the requirements. The federal government's very hard to qualify, uh, for in terms of those natural resources positions. They're super rigorous. And not all tribal colleges have the faculty to supply all of those courses. Larger universities generally have all of those programs. Like Montana has all the wildlife, and even though Salish Kootenai now has a very strong wildlife program, but Montana has a very strong forestry program that offers all those courses that you need to apply for a federal position. We don't quite have that at Salish Kootenai. They're working toward that. But we need to make sure that our students have every option available to

them for getting a job and for, you know, in terms of working for the federal, government um, we need their voices to influence policy.

Ashby Kinch: Thank you. Yeah. That's exactly what I was gonna turn around and say: that's so important that, you know, of course, tribal capacity is, is huge. It's very important. But so many of the federal lands that are just adjacent to tribal communities also need the voices of Indigenous people to be influencing federal policy.

Diana Doan-Crider: Absolutely. And, and I think now, especially, you know, the tide has turned, at least for now, with, um, you know, our Secretary of Interior. We have a lot of influence there. The president just issued, you know, memos saying that, you know, Traditional Ecological Knowledge now has to be considered, uh, for land management, um, decisions. That doesn't mean people go out and implement that methodology. It's not a methodology. You bring in tribal partners to do that with you.

But now that we have that, everybody's paying attention to it. What does that mean? What do, how do we do that? And it's, it's wonderful because we now see our native students being moved into positions of decision making, which is usually the, the higher-level positions, not the technician positions, which is where they normally end up because they don't have all the classes. But those upper-level positions where they can be promoted and pretty much end up, you know, in, in high, you know, decision making positions, even in Washington DC and we have their voice. I get it. I believe that we need those students in our tribal communities to strengthen those communities and, and help at home. And I think that a lot of people want to be at home. We're caregivers. We're just very gregarious in terms of our communities. We don't like leaving home. I don't like leaving my home. Um, but, they're needed. And now we're seeing that. We're seeing them really moving into some high positions that are now impacting natural resource decision making across the entire continent, really.

Ashby Kinch: Yeah. And I think, I think, um, you know, just speaking from the University of Montana grad school perspective, you know, we've been working on some cooperative, um, agreements with SKC about building out graduate training and we're hearing a lot more of that. I mean, of course they're our regional partner, they're right here. The barriers are a lot lower and, and there's no reason for us not to be doing a lot more joint training and a lot more joint curricular development. And that's of course gonna be very good for the non-Indigenous students that are doing wildlife biology.

Diana Doan-Crider: Absolutely.

Ashby Kinch: Because now you're working with colleagues and you're learning the respect and the importance of that kind of reciprocal relationship on the ground as part of it. So we can build that training out in a deeper way. And, and SKC is such a fantastic model. I mean, four-year degree, they're now adding master's degrees and so they're building a full apparatus of education, culture, place-based, but also training, like you're pointing out, job development. So it's, it's wonderful that you're, so engaged with helping build that full capacity out of that institution.

Diana Doan-Crider: Well, and I think a lot of us learned it the hard way. You know, I was working with students that, you know, we were getting them educated, but we'd, you know, they'd go out and apply for jobs and they couldn't get a job. And it's like, what is wrong? What's wrong with this whole situation? And we had agencies like the Forest Service saying, how come we can't get them in? We started looking at things and tearing it apart.

We actually did a project where we identified all of the disconnects with recruiting a lot of these underrepresented groups into the federal workforce and found 117 very significant disconnects. One of the main ones being the lack of curriculum so that these students could have access to the classes that they need to be able to get into these career paths.

So it is important that we create these bridges so that students do have more of an opportunity to say, 'okay, once I'm done with my tribal college education, I can go over here and end up with a PhD' or whatever. They end up in an, in an institution, uh, you know, an academic institution where they're gonna influence other students. And we're seeing this now, especially with our young, um, professionals. Oh my gosh. They're making huge waves in terms of how they're influencing, you know, the, the students that they're working with.

But I think one of the biggest barriers that we're finding with this research, whether it's Willow and some of the other projects that we've done, is this barrier that we have with westernized science and how, I think they're a little bit unsure of what does it mean to open things up for looking at other worldviews, you know, allowing Native, um, Americans to come in with their perspectives and to talk about things differently than the way that we've normally talked about things in North America, particularly in terms of, of, uh, science, wildlife. You know, we're gonna be objective. You don't connect to your specimens. You don't name them. You don't—and the Indigenous perspective is so very different and--

Ashby Kinch: Yeah. You used that phrase, ‘everybody’ when you were talking and you were talking about acorns. And I didn't interrupt at the time, but it's such a, a beautiful way of thinking that, that, the, the idea that the, the material world is like us. There's, there's no fundamental ontological distinction between them. So that allows you to say things like, ‘we’ and ‘everybody’ when you mean, you know, humans and non-humans and the material makeup of the ecosystem.

Diana Doan-Crider: Absolutely. And I, and I will say, I may say some things that might, you know, rankle some people, but I noticed this during, um, like Covid and other, like climate change, for example. You know, we do wanna rely on facts, you know, and helping people, you know, to improve their lives based on facts. But a P-value is not everything, you know? And I think that because scientists found themselves having to defend what their own system was about, they were afraid to get off that rock. So when you introduce Indigenous perspectives, it doesn't mean you have to think like they do, or you have to, you know, start participating in indigenous ceremonies. That's not what they want at all.

Ashby Kinch: Please do not!

Diana Doan-Crider: Yeah, exactly. Please do not appropriate. What, what I think is how, how do we figure out how to allow those expressions and how to allow Indigenous people to present their views and prove that those tools do work? You know, I mean, I can't say enough about my research in Mexico after 30 years. I'll tell you what, I spent a million dollars on that project and when I went down there, I was like, ‘okay, I'm gonna go save bears and I'm gonna go tell these people how to live with bears.’ And I, I sat down with all these folks and they gave me a list. Okay. You can imagine a young girl just came outta University of Montana, coming down there and they said, ‘well, this is how many cubs the bears have. This is what they eat during this season. This is what they eat after fires. This is how many cows they'll kill and why they're killed, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.’

And I was like, ‘well, yeah, I'll show them.’ A million dollars later checked off every one of those boxes and my thought afterwards was, why wouldn't I believe them? Why did I have to spend a million dollars to come up with a statistical study that really wasn't very powerful? Telemetry is not that powerful, especially with bears. You wanna study rats if you wanna get P-values, but don't study bears. They're really hard to study cuz you wander all over the place. I was gonna say, very few cubs. And it is, and it's, and it's just, it takes forever. Yeah. And um, and I started really questioning my perspectives. I started

listening to my grandfather, the things that he taught me: Always question, always ask why. That's why he spent so much time in jail, I guess. But, um, you know, always challenging the system. And I realized this educational system did not fit what we tried to do in Mexico at all. What really worked in Mexico for bears and conservation was a locked gate. These people who lived there decided to protect bears. They provided them with wayer. Boom, man. Doesn't take a million dollars.

Ashby Kinch: They did fine.

Diana Doan-Crider: Just fine.

Ashby Kinch: Yeah. Well, uh, I don't know. I, I feel like, uh, we've covered a lot of ground.

Diana Doan-Crider: We have been all over the place, like a bear in his home range.

Ashby Kinch: Yeah. And I just wanna make sure like, um, we always pause, we wanna make sure if there's something you really want to talk about that we haven't touched on.

Diana Doan-Crider: I would like to say something.

Ashby Kinch: Yeah.

Diana Doan-Crider: So I wanna talk to the students out there. And I think one of the things that was so frustrating, this is why Ruth and I came up with this project, is 'cause we were really frustrated with our academic experience and it's like, man, this is just not what we thought. And when we got to academia, we were also like, 'this is not what we wanted.' Publications and grants and all of this stuff, just for the sake of, you know, adding it to my resume was not my idea at all. We wanted to make an impact in our communities.

But the point is this, that I tell people as a, as a Mexican, cause I'm a Mexican citizen along with a US citizen and just because you're Mexican doesn't mean you're Spanish, by the way, which I've been told that by many people. You know, you can tailor your education however you want to make it useful to you, to make it relevant to you. And I think that's one of the most important things that I see happening now with Indigenous students is that we're now making the way for them to just like, 'what do you wanna do?'

And we need to work closely with our professional organizations who have a tendency to create templates, professional templates like: you get these letters after your name and you do this and you take the certification program and boom, you're a template just like us. Now go out and go do whatever you do. Unfortunately, for Indigenous students, nobody ever taught 'em about Indian land tenure. Nobody ever taught 'em about cultural relevancy, things like that when it came to your westernized academic experience.

So I encourage students, look, you put your foot down, you stand up, and you tell your advisors what you want out of your project, what you want out of your education. And if somebody doesn't provide that for you. You go find somebody like an advocate. That's what I love about Jen Harrington's job is she's an advocate for her students.

Ashby Kinch: Oh boy is she ever.

Diana Doan-Crider: And she's doing that. She's helping them to kind of, you know, create what they want out of their education. You don't have to accept the template. You know, granted, if you wanna get a range 454 position or a forestry position with us Forest Service, yeah, you gotta check off all those classes, that's fine.

But, you know, creating a, a career that is gonna be really meaningful to you and doesn't fit the template. Don't be afraid—like a river, don't be afraid to create, to meander and to create those, those pathways. That's what I love about rivers versus, you know, irrigation systems, which is basically what we did with the Columbia, was we just created these cement pathways because it's easier if you program everything for everybody, like, assembly line Model T Fords. Well, that's not what Indigenous people are about at all. We're about creativity, we're about expression. We're about, you know, letting people be who they want to be.

Ashby Kinch: And so I'm so glad you're bringing this up because, because of course that's also the case with, um, the highest-level research in almost any field. requires creativity. I mean, everyone knows that, right? So, you know, the traditional way of looking at it is you, you kind of pay your dues and you work your way up and then creativity comes on top of it. But I think the new way of thinking, and it's not, you know, it's not just here, it's in other spheres of graduate education, is to make sure that creativity is threaded all the way through. That people see that the goal is creating new knowledge. That's, that's our goal, right? So, of course, whatever fields you're in, right, you gotta master techniques, at that fundamental level. We get that. But that's, you're not

mastering them just to master 'em, right? You're, you're trying to generate new questions, new ideas, new knowledge.

So I'm so glad you brought that up. And, you know, in, you know, in our podcasts, we, we elevate some of these issues: imposter syndrome, you know, breaking down, uh, the sense that I can't do that. And I think that's a huge change that we've noticed in our Indigenous students that we're seeing growth in that graduate student population where, you know, if, if a student came from a tribe and they were the first in their family to go to college, well, why don't you be the first to go and get your graduate degree too, right? And become a professor or a researcher or come back. So we're trying to open that pathway up so can people can see themselves in the field. And I think that's why, um, the Willow project's so valuable because it allows them to see. Other Indigenous scholars doing this work. And like you put it earlier, opening up pathways.

Diana Doan-Crider: Absolutely. And I think one of the most important things that we can do is to, you know, every time I, I drive along the Flathead River, it's just something new every time. And we need to keep that perspective because even in research we can, we can get dull. Um, I noticed like in, even in the bear world, we do a lot of research because, well, that's what we do. We go and catch bears and we put collars on 'em and we research 'em. Well, you know, at what point do we say 'okay, I think,' you know, I got to that point in Mexico where I decided I've poked on 'em enough, and it's time for me to leave them alone. Because we have, you know, they're obviously reestablishing, they're expanding into, you know, their historic ranges. And let's go on to another problem.

And I think that if you drive along a river enough, you'll forget to look at it. And I think we need to constantly be refreshing our research. And one of the things I think about, um, with Indigenous communities is that we're not just looking at one aspect of it. We're looking at how the whole community affects that one question, or how that one question affects the whole community. So you don't go to people and say: "Hey, we wanna do a bird project on tribal lands." They're gonna say: "Well, how does that impact my, uh, suicide rates? How does that impact my, um, economic, you know, opportunities" and things like that. We have to talk about the whole picture here.

So as researchers, I think we can even learn from that by continuing to open our eyes, look at things in new ways and constantly be asking ourselves, are we asking the right questions? Because now that it feels like this planet is, you know, sinking, um, we need to really start stepping outside and saying, the things that we've been doing don't appear to be working here. What, what do we

really need to be asking ourselves and where do we need to be paying attention? We need to be focusing on education. Um, you know, and, and growing up our young children. I mean, it's obvious they're gonna be the ones who are gonna be solving these problems. Are we putting enough into that and focusing on, um, you know, like I said, the aspects that really matter? S

o when I come back to my bear research, I always tell people it's about the power of an acorn. Um, the only problem about the power of an acorn, that's the most relevant thing, is that's what drives these populations. But I just can't get on the cover of a National Geographic with an acorn. Maybe with a bear head or a lionhead or something, but not with an acorn. That's the problem.

Ashby Kinch: Yeah. That is a problem. We end every episode with our quick hitters. You ready? Morning or night person?

Diana Doan-Crider: Oh, both.

Ashby Kinch: All day, all night?

Diana Doan-Crider: Ask my husband. Poor thing.

Ashby Kinch: Sunrise or sunset?

Diana Doan-Crider: Uh, sunset.

Ashby Kinch: And boy, Central Texas sunsets, huh? Yellowstone or Glacier?

Diana Doan-Crider: Glacier, all the way.

Ashby Kinch: What's your favorite Montana river and why?

Diana Doan-Crider: The Flathead, of course. Every time I go by, whether it's the Middle Fork or the North Fork and I have to say the North Fork mostly because we spent a lot of time up there with Chuck Jonkel. That's where some of his original bear work started with the Border Grizzly Project and we, we took his ashes up there. And so every time I see the North Fork, it's like, aw...

Ashby Kinch: Particular spot where you put the ashes?

Diana Doan-Crider: Um, yeah. I rather would not say no.

Ashby Kinch: No, of course not.

Diana Doan-Crider: It's way out in the middle of nowhere. And we all camped out there last year, uh, about 40 of us, and, and had powerful a ceremony. It was beautiful.

Ashby Kinch: Yeah. What's your favorite Montana mountain range?

Diana Doan-Crider: Missions, of course.

Ashby Kinch: Um, what's your shadow profession? The thing that you thought, eh, maybe I'll try that out, and you just kind of never got around to it?

Diana Doan-Crider: Um, well, the Coast Guard was one of 'em, but then I saw Jaws when I was a teenager, so that blew that. And, um, I do get kind of seasick. So anyway, I stayed, uh, stayed with terrestrial animals.

Ashby Kinch: Yeah. What would your best friend say about you? How would they describe you?

Diana Doan-Crider: I think she would say crazy, but faithful and committed and just in love with people.

Ashby Kinch: Well, that's perfect. What a great place to wrap up. Thank you for joining us on Confluence.

Diana Doan-Crider: Thanks so much.