

News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 14, 2020



University College of the North

University College of the North Faculty Members Create Swampy Cree Textbook

(The Pas, MB) – University College of the North (UCN) faculty members have collaborated on a Cree language textbook in hopes of maintaining northern culture. It is anticipated that *Beginning Cree for Swampy Cree Speakers* will officially be published by the University Regina Press in the near future.

UCN Arts, Business and Science Faculty Member, Eileen McKay Thomas, teaches a specific dialect of Cree: Swampy Cree. McKay Thomas quickly noticed the lack of a textbook focused on this dialect. McKay Thomas turned to long time Cree language educator, Solomon Ratt for guidance. While his teachings are in a different dialect, Ratt’s *Beginning Cree* text proved to be a valuable resource in getting started on the creation of the Swampy Cree (N dialect) text. The project took on new life when she formed a partnership with Dr. Ying Kong from UCN’s Faculty of Arts, Business and Science. McKay Thomas drew upon Dr. Kong’s experience in teaching and creating resource materials for the Mandarin language at the Universities of Manitoba and Winnipeg.

“Over the years of teaching Indigenous literature at UCN, I understand that it is important for Indigenous people to maintain their mother tongue for their own identity and culture. Having a resource like *Beginning Cree for Swampy Cree Speakers* will help build the intimacy that comes from shared beliefs and understanding among Swampy Cree speakers,” said Dr. Kong.

UCN Seed Funding launched their research project, “Innovation in Cree Language Learning and Teaching: Highlighting the Cree Language Spoken in Manitoba.” The goal was to launch a Cree language textbook for Swampy Cree Speakers. McKay Thomas and Kong were able to visit Solomon Ratt, at the University of Regina (UofR), who happened to be McKay Thomas’ Cree Language teacher while she was a student at SIFC (First Nations University of Canada) and UofR. Ratt permitted the use of *Beginning Cree* as a template to organize the content of their proposed Swampy Cree resource text and from there, *māci-nēyinowēwin omaskēkōmowakohci Beginning Cree for Swampy Cree Speakers* was created.



McKay Thomas says it was important to create this textbook. “First and foremost, I wanted to do this book to honor my professor Solomon Ratt,” said McKay Thomas. “He has been the key to my higher learning of our language. Having this text published and available for future generations of Swampy Cree teachers and speakers will increase retention of the language, something critically important for our people.”

Ricky Hamilton, a local artist, Swampy Cree speaker and relative of McKay Thomas, was commissioned to design the cover art. UCN student, Elizabeth Tritthart worked with the authors as a research assistant on this project.

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