

2021 Pounamu Taonga Award Recipient



Bev Best

Bev's journey at UNBC is one that began in 2006 to pursue her Bachelor of Education degree in the elementary stream in Prince George. She was previously working as an Aboriginal Education worker at Fraser Lake Elementary High School. In facing not only academic struggles but the challenge of finding a place to live in the face of racism, Bev completed four degrees at UNBC in 15 years with her MBA being the most recent.

Growing up, Bev Best always knew she wanted to make a difference for not only herself but to inspire a future generations of First Nations youth. Tired of the hurtful comments she received as a youth, being placed in lower-achieving classes because she was Indigenous, Bev seeks to prove she is more than a stereotype through education and leadership.

Bev received her Master of Business Administration degree during the University of Northern British Columbia's virtual Convocation in 2021 as the only person to have received four degrees in the University's 34 year history. In addition to the MBA, Bev holds Bachelor's degrees in Education, Arts (Major in First Nations Studies, minor in English), and an MA in First Nations Studies.

"The last MBA degree was a huge opportunity afforded to managers, and I jumped at it, knowing it was another Masters and not a PhD. That door is still an option but for now, I am happy with my education that I get to use every day at work. I have always been and will continue to be an advocate for Indigenous learners. It is my passion to see Indigenous women succeed," she says. As a Dakelh woman, it is very important for me to be a good role model and to provide as much support as I can to upcoming students to help them see the advantages an education gives to someone. I never could have imagined myself here today, but I am and I want all Indigenous learners to know it is possible. It just takes time, courage and dedication."

"After my experience in school, I knew I wanted to make a difference in First Nations students' school experience. My mother is a residential school survivor and I have always felt an obligation to pursue the opportunities that were denied to people like my mother and the many children who never came home from residential schools. It was too high a price to pay by them but my education is not nor will it ever be wasted. I dedicate my life to using my education to educate others and make positive change in systems designed to oppress."

During her studies, Best became a UNBC employee. First as a Teaching Assistant in the FNST department, then as a sessional instructor for the School of Education teaching Indigenous Epistemology. She started as the Interim Director First Nations Centre in 2015 and successfully attained the position of Manager Aboriginal Student Engagement a year later. She finished her first master's degree and started the MBA while working full-time in the Centre.

Bev encourages students to always seek out supports, whether they feel they need it or not, having a community of supports they can lean on always helps the journey be a little easier.

"The First Nations Centre is one example of how a community helps student succeed, even if that means to just come, sit and listen to other student's stories, Elders stories, or your own," she says. "Everything is always easier when you are not alone, and the university provides a lot of opportunities to not be alone."