

The College has introduced a two-year Associate of Arts degree in Peace Studies and a two-year Liberal Arts diploma. Members of the Region's communities attend Mir Centre symposiums, peace cafés, workshops, and presentations. Many presentations are part of the Mir Lecture Series. These are held at the Mir Centre, the Brilliant Cultural Centre, and at other venues around the region.

The Lecture Series has become an important and vibrant part of the Mir Centre's activities and fundamental mission. In seeking to build and understand cultures of peace through learning, dialogue naturally has an important place in the process. It is the goal of the Lecture Series to attract thinkers and speakers who inspire learning with their diverse understandings of cultures of peace.

While the Mir Centre is at Selkirk College, it is equally true to say that it is in and of the community. Selkirk College feels a responsibility, as guardians of the physical asset that is the Mir Centre for Peace, and as the region's public college, to reach out to the larger community and indeed, to the Province and the world to inspire active participation in the understanding and building of cultures of peace through learning. It is our belief that the Mir Centre for Peace at Selkirk College can proudly join the international community of similar centres, and be a focal point in the West Kootenay/Boundary Region for students and interested people from many walks of life.



The Mir Story

On a bluff overlooking the confluence of the Columbia and Kootenay Rivers is a piece of land which has been described by Dr. Myler Wilkinson, in *Mir Centre for Peace at Selkirk College - A Brief Narrative History*, (p.11) as "an historical and geographical location of unique beauty and cultural importance".

Today, this site is home to the Mir Centre for Peace, including a First Nations arbour and smokehouse. The site has a long and rich history and sense of place.

For Selkirk College, the story of this land and the Mir Centre for Peace begins in 1966 when the site and buildings were inherited by the College. The story of this magnificent piece of land and the people who have lived there stretches back for centuries.

The very first inhabitants of the region were members of the Sinixt Nation and other native peoples who hunted, fished and traded on this very site. Evidence of their activities, such as fishing traps and burial sites, are still visible to this day.

In the early 1900's, the first European settlers arrived in the area. These people were Doukhobors, members of a Christian pacifist sect who came to the area from Georgia, via Ukraine, Russia and the Saskatchewan prairies. The Doukhobors established a village on the site called Ostrov, a Russian word meaning 'Island'. The village owed its name to the fact that during periods of extremely high water, this bluff became an island.

By 1966, when the land became part of Selkirk College's Castlegar Campus, all that remained of what was once a thriving village, were a few deteriorating buildings with a small number of inhabitants.

By 1999, an idea had taken root - the idea of establishing a Centre for Peace on this site. Both on this site and in this region of BC, people have created a rich history of closeness to the land, aversion to war and pacifist practices.

Members of Selkirk College staff and the general community, under the leadership of then College president Leo Perra, decided to create a Centre for Peace. Mir, a Russian word, meaning peace, community and world, seemed an appropriate name for this bold undertaking.

In the year 2000, Leo Perra was succeeded by Marilyn Luscombe, the current President of Selkirk College. From the very onset of her presidency, Marilyn expressed a strong desire to continue the work that others had begun.

Over the next three years, a wide cross section of the community and the college collaborated in putting together the funding and the human resources necessary to begin restoration of the property. The outer brick façade of the one remaining communal home was dismantled and rebuilt, and then a First Nations smokehouse and an outdoor arbour with a central fire pit surrounded by seating for up to 100 were constructed. Finally, the interior of the house was reconfigured and reconstructed, such that it became an elegant yet inviting space, perfect for the coming together of people seeking peace and harmony.

By the summer of 2007, work on the house, outer buildings and grounds were complete. On September 21st of that same year, the Centre was officially opened. The speaker for this occasion was Stephen Lewis, Canada's former Ambassador to the UN and a champion of social justice.

Today, the Mir Centre for Peace at Selkirk College is the focal point for many activities, all of which build on the Centre's inspiring statement of mission:

"To understand and build cultures of peace through learning."