The Purdy Crawford Chair in Aboriginal Business Studies was established at Cape Breton University in 2010 in response to Aboriginal community leaders’ expression of the need for entrepreneurship, business investment, and corporate skills training for the purpose of creating a model of self-reliance.

Named in honour of Canadian lawyer and corporate boardroom leader, the late Mr. Purdy Crawford, the Chair aims to promote interest among Canada’s Aboriginal people in the study of business at the post-secondary level.

The Purdy Crawford Chair in Aboriginal Business Studies focuses its work in four areas:
• Research on what “drives” success in Aboriginal Business
• National student recruitment in the area of post-secondary Aboriginal business education
• Enhancement of the post-secondary Aboriginal business curriculum
• Mentorship at high school and post-secondary levels

“Meaningful self-government and economic self-sufficiency provide the cornerstone of sustainable communities. My wish is to enhance First Nations post-secondary education and research to allow for the promotion and development of national Aboriginal business practices and enterprises.”

Purdy Crawford, C. C.
(1931-2014)
MOONLIGHT WORKS B

Mi’kmaw artist Killa Atencio’s jewellery had been well-received at various powwows and events across Atlantic Canada. Consequently, in September 2014, she began thinking about launching an Etsy shop to complement her e-commerce website and make her products more widely known. After participating in an Etsy pop-up event in Halifax, however, she was unsure if Etsy was the right market for her product.

BACKGROUND

Moonlight Works was established by entrepreneur Killa Atencio in 2012. Though she has lived in Halifax, Nova Scotia since 2007, Killa is originally from Listuguj First Nation, located on the Gaspé Peninsula of Québec. Killa is proud of her Mi’kmaw heritage, as well as her Quechua heritage (her father is from South America), and incorporates both into her craft.

Originally, the jewellery business focused primarily on earrings; however, it later expanded into other products, such as medallions, medicine bags, poppies for Remembrance Day, and, most recently, framed beadwork pieces. All beadwork sold by Moonlight Works is handcrafted by Killa Atencio, a self-taught Indigenous artisan who specializes in beaded jewellery. Her work is very colourful with bold designs, which appeal to her Aboriginal clientele, as well as other clients who have an appreciation for Aboriginal culture. In addition to her bolder designs, she produces items with more neutral colours and patterns that cater to the tastes of non-Aboriginal customers.

Killa has recently developed a partnership with a silversmith in Peru. She is teaching him about Mi’kmaw culture and symbols, such as the flag and the eight-point star, which he is incorporating into sterling silver pieces in a fair-trade process as part of a product line called IndigenUs. This initiative is part of Killa’s overall goal for her business, which is to bring together Indigenous peoples from all over the world through art. With a particular interest in uniting Indigenous cultures from the North and South, she hopes to use her business as a cultural tool that encourages exchange and skill sharing between artists all over the Americas.

Since starting her business in 2012, Killa has participated in many business development workshops and programs to improve her knowledge of business practices and continue expanding her business. She has sold her products primarily at powwows, conferences, and other events, using a mobile point-of-sale (POS) to accept major credit cards.
MARKET

Killa sold her products primarily at powwows, conferences, and various other events. The powwow trail, a network of events that occurred in a different community each weekend during the summer, proved to be the most successful for sales. In the Atlantic region, many of these events are held in Mi’kmaq communities, given that the traditional territory of the Mi’kmaq spans Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, and parts of northern Maine. These powwows are frequented by Aboriginal peoples, non-Aboriginal tourists, and members of nearby communities. Aboriginal participants establish “powwow families” that they look for and reconnect with at each powwow they attend over the summer months. Because of this, many vendors see returning customers throughout the season in the various communities on the powwow trail.

Killa also enjoyed vending at conferences, which provided a different, more formal sales environment in contrast to the powwow environment. Conferences also allowed her to access a wider Canadian and international market. With success at conferences, she had recently decided to expand her business further into the international market with the launch of an e-commerce website. With her e-commerce website still in development, she was considering other e-commerce options, such as Etsy, to expand her market and make her products more widely available.

ETSY

Etsy is an online marketplace that creates a global community of entrepreneurs who set up shops within the Etsy marketplace to sell their products. It aids local markets and places value on craftsmanship.

On September 27, 2014, Etsy Canada held “Made in Canada” pop-up markets in 22 Canadian cities with the goal of profiling Etsy shops in each local community. Killa was part of the pop-up market held in Halifax, having set up, but not yet launched, her Etsy shop. It was held from 10am-3pm at the Halifax Forum and sought to increase awareness of the handmade movement in Nova Scotia by showcasing vendors, having vendors host craft workshops, and holding giveaways.

Killa noticed that the Etsy pop-up market was not attended by her typical customers; rather, it attracted a largely non-Aboriginal audience. The market itself featured predominately non-Aboriginal vendors whose products seemed to target a similar market and non-Aboriginal audience. She felt as though this was not her niche, as she differed significantly from the other vendors in terms of the style of her jewellery and other products, and noted that she was an “unexpected” booth for shoppers. Because her products were outside the norm for Etsy customers, she noticed a decrease in sales at the event in comparison to other venues.
CONCLUSION

In September 2014, Mi’kmaw artist Killa Atencio was thinking about launching an Etsy shop to complement the e-commerce website she was developing, thereby making her jewellery more widely available. After participating in an Etsy pop-up event in Halifax, however, she was uncertain if there would be significant value in pursuing this e-commerce solution for her business.
The Purdy Crawford Chair
In Aboriginal Business Studies