

Diana Wasaanangokwe Seales, Ph.D.

Teaching Specialist | Environmental Justice & Storytelling Scholar
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Research Statement

My scholarship bridges environmental journalism, Indigenous storytelling, and decolonial media practices to explore how communities narrate resilience in the face of climate change. I study how environmental communication rooted in relational accountability, solidarity journalism, and ethics of care can transform public trust, shape policy discourse, and cultivate sustainability imaginaries. My current work with the Nokomis Cultural Heritage Center and the emerging Red Cedar Rising Story Lab integrating participatory research, narrative infrastructure, and visual storytelling to advance Indigenous-led climate solutions and inclusive science communication.

Academic Appointments

Teaching Specialist, Department of Community Sustainability, Michigan State University (2024–present)

- Teach undergraduate and graduate courses in *Sustainability, Resilience, Systems Thinking, Environmental Justice, and Indigenous Knowledge Systems*.
- Co-lead development of the *Red Cedar Rising Story Lab*, an MSU–Nokomis partnership on Indigenous storytelling, ethics, and sustainability.
- Serve as Pro Bono Grant Consultant and Research Partner with Nokomis Cultural Heritage Center, securing funding for Indigenous-led climate and storytelling initiatives (Vibrant Communities, Native Food Sovereignty, and Capital Area Community Foundation grants).
- Chair, Nokomis Programs & Evaluation Committee and member of Indigenous Food Sovereignty Conference Planning Committee (2026).
- Mentor undergraduate and graduate students in research, creative media, and community partnerships emphasizing decolonial journalism and environmental ethics.

Assistant Director, Undergraduate Programs, School of Social Work, University of Michigan (2019–2024)

- Directed the *Community Action & Social Change (CASC) Minor*, overseeing curriculum design, staff supervision, and student engagement.

- Designed and taught courses integrating **environmental journalism, grassroots storytelling, and justice-oriented organizing**.
- Established and managed undergraduate grantmaking programs supporting student-led environmental and social impact initiatives.
- Facilitated public storytelling collaborations with Detroit-based movements and university media teams.

Lead Faculty, University of Michigan School of Social Work (2016–2019)

- Taught *Environmental and Social Movements, Resistance, Resilience, and Gender Justice*, emphasizing Detroit case studies and media analysis.
- Core faculty for *Semester in Detroit*, mentoring students in participatory media and place-based storytelling.
- Led community partnerships between U-M and local organizations on environmental communication and movement-building.

Lead Faculty & Professor, M.A. in Social Justice, Marygrove College, Detroit, MI (2014–2019)

- Developed curriculum integrating *Environmental Justice, Feminist Economics, and Community Media*.
- Partnered with Detroit media and community leaders to develop field-based storytelling projects and applied research initiatives.

Professional Leadership

Executive Director, East Michigan Environmental Action Council (2005–2016)

- Directed strategic communications, public storytelling, and environmental justice campaigns.
- Spearheaded **Detroit Climate Justice Alliance** and youth journalism programs linking community narratives to policy reform.
- Published op-eds and editorials in *The Michigan Citizen*, *Transform*, and other outlets.
- Secured multi-year funding from Ford, Kresge, and Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan.

- Served on national steering committees for **Climate Justice Alliance** and **Building Equity and Alignment Initiative** (Overbrook Foundation).

Development & Communications Roles

- *Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan* – Grants Management & Strategic Philanthropy
- *Comunidade Catalizadores, Rio de Janeiro* – Sustainable Favela Network Development Manager

Education

Ph.D., Community Sustainability – *Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI*
Dissertation: Grassroots Climate Justice Innovation: Feminist & Indigenous Frameworks

- Sustainable Michigan Endowed Project Scholar

M.S., Natural Resources & Environment – *University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI*
Thesis: Community Innovation in Resource Management, Itajaí Watershed, Brazil

- Graduate Certificate, Latin American & Caribbean Studies
- Foreign Language Area Studies (FLAS) Fellow, Portuguese

B.S., Tribal Natural Resources Policy – *The Evergreen State College, Olympia, WA*
 Minor: Japanese Language & Literature

Publications

Books & Chapters

- Seales, D.W. (in press). *Detroit's Climate Justice Journey: Centering Community Empowerment in University Partnerships*. In C. Bird (Ed.), *Exploring Equitable Community–Campus Relationships*. Routledge.
- Seales, D.W. (2024). *Grassroots Climate Justice Innovation Theory*. ProQuest Dissertations, Michigan State University.

Peer-Reviewed & Invited Works

- Seales, D.W. (2024). *Activating Change: How Feminist-Led Movements Are Transforming Climate Action*. *Proceedings of the Twenty-Fifth International Conference on Knowledge, Culture, and Change in Organizations*.

- Seales, D.W. (2007). *Watershed Management, Participatory Decision-Making, and Indigenous Innovation*. University of Michigan.

Selected Journalism & Storytelling Features

- *The People's Movement: A Community Response to the Detroit Works Project, The Michigan Citizen* (2011).
- *Transformation in Detroit, Transform Magazine* (2013).
- *Decolonizing Detroit through Higher Learning: Universidad Sin Fronteras, The Michigan Citizen* (2013).
- *Women in Collaborative Leadership, The Michigan Citizen* (2013).
- *Building Solution City: The Potential for Green Innovation in Detroit, Healing Garden Journal* (2010).

Research & Creative Projects

Red Cedar Rising Story Lab (2024–present)

- Emerging partnership MSU–Nokomis partnership fostering Indigenous storytelling and environmental journalism. Highlighting stories and oral histories highlighting land-based learning, ecological restoration, and climate justice leadership.

Nokomis Cultural Heritage Center Expansion (2025)

- Lead grant writer and research consultant; developing participatory evaluation framework.
- Secured \$150,000 (Vibrant Communities) and \$40,000 (Native Food Sovereignty) for Indigenous-led storytelling, youth media, and sustainability programming.

Indigenous Food Sovereignty Conference 2026 (Planning Committee)

- Lead program design and media engagement strategy, including community podcasting and live storytelling sessions.

Selected Grants Secured

- Vibrant Communities Minnesota Foundation – \$150,000 (2025)

- Native Food Sovereignty – \$40,000 (2025)
- Ford Foundation – \$200,000 (2015)
- Kresge Foundation – \$250,000 (2010, 2014)
- Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan – \$120,000 annually (2013–2016)
- Federal Grant for Detroit Food Justice Organizations – \$300,000 annually (2011–2014)
- City of Detroit – \$150,000 (2018)

Workshops & Presentations (Selected)

- “Putting Sustainability Research to Work for Community & Higher Education”, *Second Annual National Sustainability Society conference*, Notre Dame University (10/25)
- “Activating Change: Women Climate Justice Leaders,” *International Conference on Knowledge, Culture & Change in Organizations*, Lisbon (2024).
- “Round-Dance Methodology: Indigenous Resistance & Climate Change,” *Anishinaabe Healing Justice Conference* (2018).
- “Decolonizing Detroit through the Arts,” *Our Power Gathering*, Detroit (2014).
- “People Power and Community Solutions in the Climate Justice Movement,” *COP-20*, Cancun, Mexico (2010).
- “Collaborative Impact between Indigenous Communities and Environmental Policymakers,” *Anishinaabe Healing Justice Conference* (2021).

Honors & Awards

- *Spirit of Detroit Award*, Detroit City Council (2010)
- *Sustainable Michigan Endowed Projects Scholar*, Michigan State University
- *Twink Fey Feminist Activist Scholar in Residence*, University of Michigan
- *Foreign Language Area Studies Fellow* (Portuguese), University of Michigan

Affiliations & Service

- EAGLE MSU – Educating Anishinaabe Faculty Member (2024–present)
- Nokomis Anishinaabe Cultural Center – Evaluation & Programs Chair (2024–present)
- MLK Spirit Award Committee, University of Michigan (2019–present)
- Grassroots Global Justice Alliance – Board President (2013–2023)
- Building Equity and Alignment (Overbrook Foundation) – Communications Chair developed community snap shots (2015–2020)
- Center for Story Based Strategies - Facilitator (2011 - 2013)
- Center for Whole Communities - Facilitator Detroit Based Initiatives (2014 - 2015)
- Gender Studies & Women in Leadership Advisory Board, U-M Dearborn (2014–2020)

Languages

Portuguese (Fluent) | Japanese (Intermediate) | Ojibwe / Anishinaabemowin (Intermediate)

Media & Storytelling Portfolio (Selected)

- *Detroit Women Speak* (Film Series, 2013–2016) – Co-producer and facilitator of women-led environmental justice stories.
- *Red Cedar River Oral History Project* (2024–present) – Co-director, MSU Story Lab collaboration.
- *Transform Magazine* (2013–2015) – Contributor on environmental justice and transformative social change.
- *The Michigan Citizen* (2007–2014) – Editorial and features on environmental justice, gender, and Indigenous leadership.
- *Public Radio Appearances* – Guest on regional programs discussing environmental storytelling and grassroots climate justice (2009 - 2019).