Research Office
1 University Drive
Athabasca, AB T9S 3A3

Research Assistant Opportunity

Ethical Protocol development for engagements with the ayahuasca biocultural complex

Start Date: January 4st, 2027
End Date: May 4th, 2027

Overview:

The ayahuasca biocultural complex has become a rapidly expanding site of global tourism, academic research, pharmaceutical development, and bioprospecting (the search for useful biological resources for potential commercial or scientific applications) creating new forms of access to Indigenous medicines, knowledge, and biocultural resources while also generating significant risks of cultural and intellectual extraction. These activities can create opportunities for cultural exchange and economic benefit but can also reproduce colonial patterns of extraction when Indigenous knowledge, cultural practices, and biological resources are engaged without appropriate relationships, consent, reciprocity, or recognition of Indigenous authority. There is a need for approaches that support more equitable and respectful engagement with Indigenous Peoples and knowledge holders.
The purpose of this project is to establish the relationships, knowledge base, and collaborative framework needed to develop an ethical protocol for engagements with ayahuasca.

Specific activities include, but are not limited to:

The primary job duties for the field research assistant **(GRA-2)** will include …

- contributing to a literature and policy review of Indigenous research ethics protocols (the literature and policy review will occur in the two months prior to the trip to Peru), traditional knowledge governance, biocultural rights, benefit sharing, and relevant approaches to ethical engagement with plant medicines and ayahuasca;
- assisting with the planning and organization of collaborative ethics-protocol development workshops, including supporting the identification of appropriate methodologies and methods for subsequent community-engaged research;
- contributing to the synthesis of the outcomes of the workshops and incorporating these into the iterative development of the initial ethical protocol and methodological framework.

The successful candidate will work with, and directly report to, Dr. Keith Williams at Athabasca University. Dr. Keith Williams will provide adequate training for the duties required.

This position is for 56 hours over roughly three months. There is flexibility regarding the hours, which can be discussed upon hire.

Qualifications:

Successful candidates will have a prior credential or expertise in a field relevant to this study such as naturopathy, herbalism, psychedelic-assisted therapy (PAT), anthropology, or cultural studies as well as significant lived experience working with plant or plant-derived medicines. Experience working in Amazonian contexts or with Amazonian traditional knowledge systems, especially with the ayahuasca bio-cultural complex, is desirable. A deep interest in the subject as well as an ability to meet deadlines is also required.

How to apply:

Qualified individuals are encouraged to submit their application by email to kwilliams@athabascau.ca. Applications should include (as a single PDF file) a brief cover letter that summarizes your skills, interests and experience; a current resume or curriculum vitae; an unofficial copy of your transcript; and the contact information for 1-2 references.

Evaluation of applications will begin immediately and will continue until a suitable candidate is found. All applicants are thanked for their interest in this position; however, only candidates selected for an interview will be contacted.

Athabasca University and the researchers are committed and seek to support equity in employment and research opportunities. We strongly encourage applications from Indigenous people, people of colour, people with disabilities, 2SLGBTQ+ people, women, and other historically marginalized groups. Applicants are welcome, but not required, to self-identify in their letter of application.

For more information on this Research Assistant Opportunity, please contact Keith Williams, PhD at the coordinates below, on or before **December 11th. 2026**.

Hours per week are approximate and may vary based upon activity in the course. The hourly wage for this position is $18.50 -$20.78 per hour.

Dr. Keith Williams
kwilliams@athabascau.ca