

***Best Practices in
Increasing Aboriginal Postsecondary Enrolment Rates***

Prepared for

The Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC)

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May 2002

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Aboriginal postsecondary enrolment and completion rates are significantly lower than those of non-Aboriginals in Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand. In Canada, statistical data indicated that the level of Aboriginal postsecondary education attainment was as low as a third of that of non-Aboriginals, and levels are especially low for Registered Indians. *Best Practices in Increasing Aboriginal Postsecondary Enrolment Rates* was undertaken to research the barriers to higher rates of postsecondary participation facing Aboriginal people, to define existing initiatives in the area of Aboriginal postsecondary education, and to identify successes and problems with current initiatives and practices.

Interviews undertaken with key stakeholders, as well as an in-depth review of the literature on Aboriginal postsecondary education, demonstrated that significant barriers exist with respect to Aboriginal participation in postsecondary education, including

- A legacy of distrust in the Aboriginal community of the education system due to residential schools and other historic practices seen as having a negative and assimilative effect on Aboriginal communities;
- Lack of preparation for university or college at the secondary education level;
- Feelings of social discrimination, isolation, and loneliness at postsecondary institutions;
- Unemployment and poverty in Aboriginal communities, which can make the financial obligations of postsecondary education difficult to meet;
- A lack of respect for Aboriginal cultural and cultural differences at the postsecondary level;
- Significant family demands that act as financial and time restraints to postsecondary education.

Existing initiatives and programs have sought to overcome the barriers to Aboriginal postsecondary education. While initiatives in the four countries studied have varied, common approaches include

- Government funding of Aboriginal postsecondary education through programs such as the PSSSP program in Canada and ABSTUDY in Australia;
- Grants, scholarships, and bursaries specifically for Aboriginal people;
- The creation of Aboriginal educational institutions, whether affiliated with larger institutions, such as the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College, or independently operated, such as the American tribal colleges;
- The creation of programs at universities and colleges that actively promote and support Aboriginal postsecondary education through support aids like active recruitment of Aboriginal people, transition courses, widening of entrance criteria to include non-academic factors, and ongoing support throughout programs of study. The Access programs at postsecondary institutions in Manitoba are examples of these programs;
- The use of community delivery to allow postsecondary education to be offered within or closer to Aboriginal communities, such as in the case of Teacher Education Programs;
- The creation of programs geared specifically to Aboriginal people, such as Aboriginal law, health, and education programs;

- The provision of support services that focus on the particular needs of Aboriginal people at the postsecondary level, such as through the use of Elders;
- The development and usage of Aboriginal curriculum and culturally sensitive materials and pedagogies;
- The use of alternative assessment for Aboriginal students;
- The strengthening of Aboriginal literacy and language skills, both in traditional Aboriginal languages and in English and French.

While each of the initiatives studied has improved the participation rates of Aboriginal people, there were significant themes in the various practices that were found to be particularly effective in promoting Aboriginal postsecondary education. These included

- Community delivery: Community delivery has been found to bridge the gap often caused in Aboriginal relocation to urban or distant schools, and to promote community awareness in faculty and staff. It was also shown to promote recruitment of often under-represented groups such as Aboriginal people in northern and remote communities.
- Access programs: The Access programs, which serve to guide and support Aboriginal people and other under-represented groups, offer the transition, support, and guidance that have helped to improve Aboriginal success rates in Manitoba, for example, in the areas of health and engineering.
- Partnerships between Aboriginal communities and mainstream educational institutions: By working with Aboriginal communities as partners, educational institutions have not only developed relevant and accessible curriculum and programs, but have also instated a degree of Aboriginal trust and confidence in mainstream postsecondary institutions.
- Aboriginal control of education: Allowing Aboriginal control of education is often seen as a means to overcome the marginalization that Aboriginal people have generally felt in the mainstream postsecondary education system, as well as a means to facilitate Aboriginal self-determination at the postsecondary level. This control also entails the creation and delivery of curriculum that has been developed by and for Aboriginal people.
- Student support that addresses Aboriginal needs: Aboriginal students have benefited from personal and academic support that is proactive and relevant. Institutional support like that offered through the First Nations House of Learning at the University of British Columbia offers students a “home away from home” and can help to alleviate the feelings of isolation and loneliness that many Aboriginal people feel, especially at large urban universities and colleges.

Overall problems or limitations of practices in Aboriginal education at Canadian universities or colleges include

- A lack of information and initiatives that factor in such things as gender or family responsibilities for Aboriginal people: While most Aboriginal people face significant barriers to postsecondary education, further or particular support should be made available to groups with special financial and support needs such as Aboriginal women, who make up a higher percentage of Aboriginal postsecondary students with family responsibilities; Aboriginal men, who may require particular support and recruitment strategies; mature Aboriginal students, who make up a disproportionately high percentage of Aboriginal students in many programs and have particular financial and support needs; and Métis,

non-Status, and Bill C-31 Aboriginals, all of whom may not be able to access the financial support required for postsecondary education.

- Lack of initiatives to address daycare, housing, and transportation needs: Aboriginal people are often unable to enrol in postsecondary education or to complete their studies, because of the costs associated with living away from their communities or supporting families. Research indicated that this was especially true for many students who must relocate from remote communities to cities to attend university or college.
- Limitations of funding: While there is a commonly held belief that all Aboriginal people have access to free postsecondary education, often the limitations of federal and band funding impede the ability of Aboriginal people to attend. Stakeholders noted that this was true for a variety of reasons, including limitations in band funding and the lack of support from the federal government for Aboriginals with little or no connection to bands. It was also noted by many stakeholders interviewed that the funding for Aboriginal institutions was seen as too low relative to the needs of the Aboriginal communities they supported.
- Limitations of Aboriginal staffing and curriculum development: Aboriginal staffing and curriculum development is still seen as too limited to allow Aboriginal people to feel equally represented in institutional education at the postsecondary level.
- Shortcomings in Aboriginal diversification of subjects taken at the postsecondary level: Initiatives and support were said to be needed to address the under-representation of Aboriginal people in certain areas such as the sciences and health fields.
- Need for increased community support for students and potential students: It was noted throughout the research that, while government and institutional supports were fundamentally necessary for increasing Aboriginal postsecondary enrolment and completion rates, more support was needed at the community level to address many of the cultural and social barriers. Further needed support included increased promotion of trust in the education system, further treatment and awareness of chemical/alcohol dependence and abuse in Aboriginal communities, and further input and support for Aboriginal students from families.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was prepared by R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. for the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC).

Contract management for *Best Practices in Increasing Aboriginal Postsecondary Enrolment Rates* was provided by Fiona Deller, CMEC. The research team utilized for this project consisted of the following organizations:

Prime Contractor: R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd.

Sub-Contractor: Dr. Kenneth Whyte

As is apparent from the significant participation of educators, Aboriginal education coordinators, and other individuals, it is clear that many individuals attach considerable importance to Aboriginal postsecondary education issues. Without the participation and cooperation of those individuals, this research could not have been successfully completed.

This report was funded with contribution agreement funding through the Learning Initiatives Program of Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC).

SECTION A: INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

In each of the four main countries studied in this project — Canada, United States, Australia, and New Zealand — research indicates that Aboriginal student enrolment and completion at the postsecondary level has been increasing. Generally, Aboriginal student enrolment rates are growing more quickly than other student demographic groups. Further, there exists growing institutional commitment to aid Aboriginal students. Despite these progressive developments, retention and success rates have remained much lower than those of their non-Aboriginal counterparts.

Aboriginal education in Canada has been transformed in the last generation. Overall changes to Aboriginal education in recent decades include

- Changes to the types of schooling Aboriginal people are attending at the elementary and secondary levels: By the late 1990s, the majority of Status Indians attended band-operated primary and secondary schools or mainstream provincial schools, rather than the federally operated schools of the previous generation;
- A host of special postsecondary programs including transition and preparation models have been established in all regions of Canada. These programs began in education and law, and have expanded to health, science, and business fields;
- Some Aboriginal communities have established postsecondary education institutions in cooperation with Canadian universities and colleges.

Outside of Canada, major steps have been taken to increase the enrolment and completion rates of Aboriginal students. Among these steps are the following:

- In the United States, tribally operated colleges have allowed Aboriginal students to begin their university education at or near their home.
- Since 1982, the Māori in New Zealand have developed several alternative education innovations in a variety of education sites, at all levels. All of these initiatives of the Māori have been based on traditional Māori underpinnings.¹
- Since the introduction of the ABSTUDY assistance program in 1968 there have been significant gains in access and participation in higher education for Indigenous Australians. A host of Australian special postsecondary programs have been established, mainly in education, law, and health fields, and existing programs have been modified to better reflect the needs of Indigenous Australians.

All of these changes have altered the number of Aboriginal students enrolled in postsecondary institutions, what they study at these institutions, and how Aboriginal students relate to their education. They have not, however, solved the problems of a clear under-representation of Aboriginal students at the postsecondary level, or of the social and academic barriers that affect Aboriginal participation in postsecondary education.

¹ Smith, Graham Hingangoroa. 2000. Maori Education: Revolution and Transformative Action. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, Vol. 24, no.1.

This report is an overview of the current situation of Aboriginal postsecondary education in Canada, with an international context provided from the United States, New Zealand, and Australia. Examined are the barriers and issues that prevent full Aboriginal participation in postsecondary education and the programs and initiatives that exist to ameliorate the situation. Following an examination of these problems and practices, the report will outline in general terms how these programs and initiatives have fared, and what problems continue to be encountered.

METHODOLOGY

This report is the result of research that has encompassed several information-gathering methodologies. While no means an exhaustive study of Aboriginal issues surrounding best practices in improving enrolment and retention at the postsecondary level, this report has incorporated the feedback and opinions of a broad range of experts and stakeholders in the field.

An extensive literature search and review was conducted to gather a comprehensive body of information relevant to Aboriginal education at the postsecondary level in Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand. Stakeholder suggestions and existing research documents assisted this review. Members of both government and academic institutions were extremely helpful in providing some unpublished or less readily available research information. Literature documents were supplemented with relevant statistical data.

Stakeholder contributions were coordinated primarily through telephone interviews and site visits. When requested, faxed and mailed copies of the interview questionnaire were sent out to stakeholders who were unable to complete telephone interviews.

Interviews were conducted with a total of 59 stakeholders in the field of Aboriginal postsecondary education. Interviews were conducted with stakeholders at all levels of postsecondary education, from assistant deputy ministers of education to Aboriginal student support advisors. Stakeholders from the United States, Australia, and New Zealand were also interviewed.

Site visits and in-person interviews were conducted with Aboriginal postsecondary program representatives from institutions across western Canada. These institutions were selected for the following reasons:

- They had pioneered unique strategies or initiatives to retain and attract Aboriginal students.
- The institutions had delivered specific programming for Aboriginal students for extensive periods of time.
- The institutions were Aboriginal controlled and were among the first institutions to be governed in this manner.
- Individuals from the institutions had extensive experience working in programs and institutions designed specifically to serve Aboriginal postsecondary students.

In addition, several of the professionals interviewed were graduates of programs designed specifically to retain postsecondary students, and most were of Aboriginal ancestry.

Site visits were conducted with the following organizations and institutions:

- Saskatchewan Indian Federated College
- Federation of Saskatchewan Indians
- Indian Teacher Education Program, University of Saskatchewan
- Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies
- Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program, Dumont Technical Institute

- Gabriel Dumont Institute of Native Studies
- Teaching Development Centre, University of Regina
- University of Regina
- University of Alberta
- University of British Columbia

This report was an attempt to capture the major themes and points raised in the literature reviews, interviews, and site visits. Where program- or institution-specific statistics were given in literature and interviews, they were incorporated into the report's general understanding of issues related to the topic, rather than used as a means to conduct an extensive quantitative analysis of programs or practices, which is outside the scope of this report.

Throughout this report, the term Aboriginal has been used to describe, in general, First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people of Canada. The term Aboriginal was also used when referring to the original Native people of all countries studied in this report. When particular reference is made to particular Aboriginal people, such as Alaska Natives or the Māori, those terms have been used.

Quotations from stakeholders have been interspersed throughout the body of the report. Individual stakeholders have not been identified to protect the anonymity of those interviewed.

METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGES

While the main objective of this project was the identification of practices and issues surrounding increasing retention and, especially, enrolment rates for Aboriginal people at the postsecondary level, the barriers and solutions are not easily quantified or compared using existing data. Actual statistical comparisons between program enrolment and completion rates were outside of the scope of this work. When statistical information is included in the report, it should be seen as an indicator of general observations.

While many of the programs and initiatives that were identified as having had positive impacts on improving Aboriginal education rates at the postsecondary level had quantitative data of their success rates, this data was collected either internally or from varying sources with different assumptions and methodologies.

One methodological shortcoming is the lack of statistical data tracking of Aboriginal ancestry by program. As a result, when enrolment or completion numbers of Aboriginal students by program were given in stakeholder interviews, they were often estimates. One stakeholder from a college said that she had to manually go through application forms to track Aboriginal status, and that process came up with incomplete findings.

They keep trying to get me to do different measurements [on enrolment and retention rates] but I don't have the resources to do them.

- An Aboriginal advisor, in interview

In general, it was found that for many institutions, there was a limited ability to track Aboriginal enrolment or retention rates. Additionally, students are asked to self-identify their ancestry, which can lead to incomplete or inconsistent information being gathered given that there are many definitions of Aboriginal ancestry.

Consistent statistical monitoring is done at some institutions. At one institution in New Zealand, detailed records of Aboriginal enrolment and completion were kept by each department, which were in turn used to create mandatory reports of the performance of Aboriginal students. A stakeholder from the institution in interview said,

We monitor all Aboriginal-related activity in the institution by setting policies that reflect the needs and aspirations of indigenous people, and then requiring performance indicators from our deans. Every dean of every department has to make an annual report of performance on certain criteria for indigenous students, staff and teachers...

The overall statistical picture of the state of Aboriginal education in Canada has been provided by the census. As there exists no other coordinated effort to track Aboriginal education levels over time, the census has been used throughout this report. Census data should also be seen merely as general indicators, rather than as truly precise data. Aboriginal stakeholders have indicated that there exists a significant degree of distrust and indifference to the census among Aboriginal people: the results may contain a bias based on Aboriginal responses coming more frequently from those Aboriginal people less marginalized from the mainstream of Canadian society. Those who are better educated and employed tend to complete such information; those without an appropriate level of literacy in French or English do not complete census requests; and some Aboriginal individuals avoid providing the government with such information. A further

limitation on census data for the Aboriginal population is that some large reserves were not enumerated for the census.

The tracking of statistics on enrolment and retention is, arguably, a limited means of gauging the progress of Aboriginal participation at the postsecondary level. One argument raised by Colin Bourke et al in a study of Indigenous Australian student performances is that the idea of educational success is culturally dependent.² Some students can meet their educational objectives by completing components of a course or a program, without intending to complete the entire course or program at that time. Dropout rates do not take into account the fact that many students return to studies after initially dropping out. Many dropouts are temporary leave-of-absences due to other responsibilities. This has been seen as especially true in Australia, which has reported an especially transitory Aboriginal population vis-à-vis enrolment.

² Bourke, Colin J., Jennifer K. Burden, and Samantha Moore. 1996. *Factors Affecting Performance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students at Australian Universities: A Case Study*. Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs, Higher Education Division.

SECTION B: THE STATE OF ABORIGINAL POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

ABORIGINAL EDUCATION ATTAINMENT DATA

The overall state of Aboriginal education in Canada, especially at the postsecondary level, is poor. Aboriginal people are significantly under-represented in terms of enrolment in Canadian colleges, universities, and other postsecondary institutions. While the existing data on enrolment and graduation rates demonstrate a consistent improvement in Aboriginal postsecondary participation across time, the overall outlook reflects a marginalized population with severe problems of educational access and support.

The statistical data of the four main countries examined indicate there have been more Aboriginal individuals in postsecondary programs in the past two decades than has been the case in all other past generations. Many more Aboriginal youth go on to college and university programs after high school. Adults who left school early or who interrupted their education to care for families are increasingly returning to school as mature learners and going on to professional careers. The increasing number of Aboriginal graduates gives the impression that education outcomes are fast improving. However, there are severe limitations on this growth.

The Aboriginal Population of Canada

According to the 1996 Census, there were 799,010 people in Canada who reported that they were North American Indian, Métis, or Inuit, amounting to about 3% of Canada's total population.³ About two-thirds of this population were North American Indian, one-quarter were Métis, and one in 20 were Inuit. The Aboriginal population in 1996 was on average 10 years younger than the general population. Over the next decade this will be reflected in large increases within the Aboriginal working-age population compared with the non-Aboriginal population. The Aboriginal population is the fastest growing population group in Canada, with a birthrate about 70% higher than in the non-Aboriginal population.⁴

Aboriginal Education Rates in Canada

The demographics of the Aboriginal population of Canada indicate that improvements in enrolment and retention are imperative.

The 1996 Census reported that among the population of respondents 15 years of age or older and not attending school, 3% of Registered Indians and 4% of other Aboriginal identity groups had obtained university degrees, compared with 14% of all other Canadians.⁵ The percentage of Registered Indians with some postsecondary education was 37%; for all other Aboriginal identity groups it was 47%, significantly lower than the rate for all other Canadians at 51%.

Education data for the Aboriginal population demonstrate a marked improvement in Aboriginal education levels over the course of the recent Canadian censuses. Unfortunately, these levels are still low and reflect a wide gap in the Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal education levels in Canada. Table 1-1 below demonstrates a comparison of the education data from the censuses of 1986, 1991, and 1996.

³ Statistics Canada. Total Population by Aboriginal Group, 1996 Census.

⁴ Statistics Canada. The DAILY, 1996 Census: Aboriginal data.

⁵ Hull, Jeremy. October 2000. *Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education and Labour Market Outcomes Canada, 1996*. DIAND document.

Table 1-1
Proportion of Canadians Who Were Taking or
Had Completed Postsecondary Education

		Registered Indian	Other Aboriginal People	Other Canadians
Census Year	Age			
1986	15-24	15%	24%	38%
	25-44	35%	48%	56%
	45-64	15%	28%	37%
	65+	4%	14%	23%
	Total	23%	36%	43%
1991	15-24	19%	28%	40%
	25-44	44%	55%	60%
	45-64	26%	40%	43%
	65+	8%	18%	26%
	Total	31%	43%	48%
1996	15-24	20%	29%	41%
	25-44	49%	58%	64%
	45-64	37%	47%	50%
	65+	10%	20%	20%
	Total	37%	47%	51%

Source: Hull, Jeremy. October 2000. *Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education and Labour Market Outcomes Canada, 1996*. DIAND document.

As the table indicates, while the rates of enrolment and completion had improved for Registered and other Aboriginal people, they are part of an overall trend of improvement for all populations. The rate of education for the major working age category of 25–44 for Registered Aboriginals had improved by 14% and for non-Registered Aboriginals by 10% over the decade, but the rate for non-Aboriginals had similarly increased by 8%. The actual rate of education has improved therefore by 40% for registered Aboriginal people, 21% for non-registered Aboriginal people, and 14% for non-Aboriginal people.

Aboriginal Education Rates in Australia and New Zealand

Australia and New Zealand report similar trends in Aboriginal education rates at the postsecondary level. While data sometimes vary, general trends have been noted regarding an increase in Aboriginal students and a decreasing gap in the growth rate of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal completion rates.

Approximately 2.1% of Australians are Indigenous and Torres Strait Islanders.⁶ According to statistics from the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs in Australia (DETYA), the number of Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander university students has doubled in recent years, and Indigenous student access to higher education is growing at a faster rate than for other Australian students. Still Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander students constitute only 1% of postsecondary enrolments.⁷

⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1999.

⁷ Bourke, Colin J. and Jennifer K. Burden. December 1996. *Factors Affecting Performance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students at Australian Universities: A Case Study*, DETYA document.

Further statistics from the Department of Education, Training and Youth Higher Education state that

...the apparent retention rate of Aboriginal Australians nationally is 0.78 against a reference value of 1. This means that Aboriginal students are retained within institutions at 78 per cent of the rate for non-Indigenous students.⁸

Other recent reports have noted lower outcomes in terms of success and provide even more dismal findings.⁹

In 2000, Aboriginal New Zealanders, the Māori, constituted approximately 15% of the total population of the country and 20% of the total education population, including elementary, secondary, and postsecondary. The number of Māori students who enrol in postsecondary institutions is comparatively low, although it is increasing. In 1990, Māori made up 6% of all students attending New Zealand universities; in 1997 they made up 9%. As is the case in Canada, women and mature students made up disproportionately high numbers of those at the postsecondary level. Most Aboriginal postsecondary students were over the age of 25, and just over 55% of them were women. Examination indicators show that the educational gap between Māori and the rest of the students is not improving but widening.¹⁰

Aboriginal Education Rates in the United States

In the United States the Aboriginal American Indian population suffers from a lower than average representation in the postsecondary area. As a general population, American Indians make up approximately 1.5% of the American population. While American Indian students make up 1.5% of the population of two-year institutions, they make up only 0.5% of four-year institutions.¹¹

In a recent survey of American Indians at 32 American colleges and universities, it was found that there was only a 25% graduation rate for the American Indians studied and a very low 45% first-year retention rate.¹²

Overall Conclusions on Aboriginal Education Rates

While completion rates for Aboriginal people in postsecondary education have edged upward over the recent past, the relatively lower levels of program completion reported throughout the literature and interviews indicate that this population faces considerable barriers in terms of accessing postsecondary education.

The present economy demands ever-higher levels of formal education for employment. Similarly, the correlation between educational attainment and employment, economic well-being, and health has been well established. Educational data reflect not only the state of formal education in the Aboriginal population, but will also likely reflect the overall state of Aboriginal society's health, wealth, and potential for the future.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Walker, Roz. August 2000. *Indigenous Performance in Western Australia Universities: Reframing Retention and Success*, DETYA document.

¹⁰ Smith, Graham Hingangaroa. 2000. Maori Education: Revolution and Transformative Action. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, Vol. 24, no. 1.

¹¹ U.S. Department of Education. *Digest of Education Statistics 1999*, Table 209.

¹² Wells, Robert N. Jr. 1997. *The Native American Experience in Higher Education: Turning Around the Cycle of Failure II*.

BARRIERS TO ABORIGINAL POSTSECONDARY SUCCESS IN CANADA

Aboriginal postsecondary education data demonstrate the relative disparities that have resulted from the unique challenges of Aboriginal peoples. This section will outline barriers that have been cited in terms of enrolment and retention rates. The literature and interviews used in this report have provided information of varying levels of detail on a host of such barriers. This section attempts to provide a summary of the barriers to student retention and success.

In order to understand the effectiveness of postsecondary initiatives and programs in increasing Aboriginal postsecondary participation rates, it is necessary to have a comprehensive knowledge of Aboriginal education barriers. Enrolment and completion barriers are not isolated problems but are components of a complex pattern of inter-related conditions. While many of the barriers to access and success that Aboriginals face in the postsecondary system stem from the Aboriginal community's troubled and complex position within Canadian society, and are thus difficult to isolate, for the purposes of this report the barriers will be delineated under the following headings:

- Historical Barriers
- Social Barriers
- Cultural Barriers
- Family-related Barriers
- Individual/Personal Barriers

One of the main themes of the stakeholder interviews and the review of programs and initiatives has been that no program or initiative will be effective unless it factors in the entire scope of barriers. Institutional attempts to overcome one barrier to Aboriginal access will inevitably face the entire pattern of barriers.

While practices have varied from country to country, Aboriginal peoples in all the countries noted have experienced similar historical, social, and cultural conditions. A common history of colonization, marginalization, and oppression of Aboriginal peoples has resulted in a host of similarities. While barriers detailed below are primarily for Canada, the overall themes remain the same for all countries studied.

Barriers to Success: Historical

In Canada, prior to the late 1960s, the barriers to Aboriginal participation in postsecondary education were largely insurmountable. Primarily because of government policies, the schooling of Aboriginals was oriented toward assimilation into mainstream European-Canadian society.

The Residential School System

The most prominent example of these government policies in Canada — and the one that had a most debilitating and destructive effect on Aboriginal individuals and communities — was the residential school system and its legacy. Shortly after 1911, the Department of Indian Affairs, which had previously not made school attendance compulsory for Aboriginal children, concluded that the system of voluntary recruitment that was in place at that time was not effective. The Indian Act, which governs federal policies and rules for Aboriginals in Canada, was amended to make attendance compulsory for every child between the ages of seven and fifteen. Residential

schools were set up in all areas of Canada. The number of residential schools reached its peak in 1931 at 80 operating schools. The last residential school closed in 1986.

The residential school system, while designed to provide a universal education to Aboriginal students, has been seen as a major barrier to participation in postsecondary education owing to the negative experiences of Aboriginal students in such schools. From the religious and vocational training to the rules forbidding use of their language and cultural practices, residential schools did little to promote self-awareness of Aboriginal culture or history. These often negative experiences in residential schools resulted in many Aboriginal people having deeply rooted distrust of educational institutions in general.

The most significant recent report on Aboriginal issues was the federal Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples of 1996. A major theme of the federal government report was that many of the problems encountered in Aboriginal communities today — violence, alcoholism, and loss of pride and spirituality — can be traced back to the sense of disconnection that Aboriginal children experienced as a result of being sent to a residential school.

Assimilative Nature of Postsecondary Education

Historically, postsecondary education for Aboriginal people has come with a heavy price. An 1876 amendment to the Indian Act forced Aboriginal people who attained higher education to relinquish their Indian status, a process called enfranchisement. Even since World War II, when enfranchisement was no longer a consequence of attending university, the intensity of the assimilative forces of public and higher education tended to alienate educated Aboriginals from their families, communities, and origins.

Information obtained from interviews and the review of research materials indicates that strong assimilative forces are still seen as a prominent feature of postsecondary education for many Aboriginal students. This has led to an over-arching distrust of and hostility to education in many parts of the Aboriginal community.

Barriers to Success: Social

Lack of Academic Preparation

The poverty of Aboriginal communities and the distrust of or indifference to education that is a strong characteristic of the Aboriginal community have been factors in poor secondary education performance. Lack of academic preparation is a significant barrier to access to postsecondary education for many Aboriginal people. Canadian census data for Aboriginal populations aged 15+ indicate that, in 1996, 53.6% had less than high school graduation, and 8.6% had high school graduation only. Statistics from the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs indicate that although the enrolment of Status Indian students in all levels of public education in 1997–98, at approximately 110,000, has increased since 1991–92 by approximately 10,000 students, the total number of high school graduates actually marginally declined during the same period.¹³

While secondary levels of attainment show a poor rate for Aboriginals, they do not demonstrate the often weak skill levels of many of those who do complete high school. Academic under-

¹³ Overview of DIAND Program DATA IMB/CIMD. June 2000.

preparation is a significant barrier for Aboriginal postsecondary enrolment and a contributing factor to high Aboriginal dropout rates at universities and colleges.

Reserve and remote schools typically do not offer the academic preparation required for a successful transition to postsecondary studies. Hull, Phillips, and Polyzoi found that, in the 1980s, by the age of 13 most reserve students were at least one year behind their expected grade level. Reserve school evaluations and school enrolment projection studies in northern Ontario and the Prairies have consistently confirmed poor academic levels.¹⁴

In interviews done with Aboriginal university graduates for a 1992 report on a transition program at the University of Manitoba, respondents felt that among the key factors that dissuaded Aboriginals from entering university were the lack of role models who had undertaken university programs and inadequate schooling before university. Respondents felt that the lack of role models meant that university was generally not seen as something to prepare for or even a viable option to consider for Aboriginal people.

A recent report commissioned by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada also concluded that the relatively weak standing of Aboriginal groups at the postsecondary levels reflects a poor foundation at the early and secondary levels of education.¹⁵ Stakeholder interviews conducted for this research frequently noted the same lack of academic preparation. A typical comment on the topic:

The quality of education on the reservation for secondary school does not prepare them for postsecondary life. They have to take make-up courses when they get here; some get frustrated and drop out.

Aboriginal students who are seeking to enrol or who do enrol in postsecondary institutions do not have the necessary academic prerequisites for success in the programs. They are often mature students who did not have the opportunity to complete high school; or they may be young graduates who did not obtain the academic skills necessary at the postsecondary level. Thus, Aboriginal students may not have the necessary mathematics and science courses required for success in college or university programs; or they may not have acquired study skills, time management abilities, or technological skills needed to allow them to be successful at the postsecondary level.

Social Discrimination

Verna Kirkness and Ray Barnhardt argue that the most compelling problem that Aboriginal students face when they go to university is discrimination. This problem is a significant disincentive to higher learning. To Aboriginal people, the university often represents an impersonal, intimidating, and hostile environment, in which little of what they bring in the way of cultural knowledge, traditions, and core values is recognized. Aboriginals are expected to leave the cultural assumptions of their world upon entrance and assume the trappings of a new form of reality, a reality which is often substantially different from their own.¹⁶ Kirkness and Barnhardt state

¹⁴ Hull, J., R. Phillips, and E. Polyzoi. 1995. Indian Control and Delivery of Special Education Services to Students in Band-operated Schools in Manitoba. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 41: 1 (March).

¹⁵ Hull, Jeremy. October 2000. *Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education and Labour Market Outcomes Canada, 1996*. DIAND document.

¹⁶ Kirkness, Verna J. and Ray Barnhardt. 1991. First Nations and Higher Education: The Four R's- Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity, Responsibility. *Journal of American Indian Education*, Vol. 30, no.3 (May).

Students who come to the university are expected to adapt to its *modus operandi* if they wish to obtain the benefits (usually translated to mean better, higher-paying jobs) of the knowledge and skills it has to offer, the desirability and value of which are presumed to be self-evident. From this point of view, when particular clusters of students, such as those from First Nations backgrounds, do not readily adapt to conventional institutional norms and expectations and do not achieve levels of "success" comparable to other students, the typical response is to focus on the aberrant students and to intensify efforts at socializing them into the institutional milieu. The lack-of-performance issues in such circumstances tend to be defined by the university in terms such as "low achievement," "high attrition," "poor retention," "weak persistence," etc., thus placing the onus for accommodation on the students and fortifying the entrenched nature of the university as an institution.¹⁷

In research done in Australia, 43% of Indigenous Australian and Torres Strait Islander students indicated that some staff were insensitive to cultural issues in their dealings. Student comments, which highlighted the lack of cultural awareness and sensitivity among staff members, particularly in mainstream courses, included the following:¹⁸

The majority of mainstream staff are ignorant of Indigenous culture and history.

Some staff have veiled prejudices — comments made in my presence, unaware of my Aboriginal descent.

In the same study approximately 43% of students identified feelings of isolation or cultural marginalization as important factors influencing them to consider withdrawing from studies.

Unemployment and Poverty

In the 1996 Canadian Census, 43% of Registered Indians and 56% of all others identified as Aboriginal were employed, compared with 62% of other Canadians. Employment rates are especially low among Registered Indians in the 15–24 age group. Over all ages, the Registered Indian unemployment rate in 1996 was 26%, compared to 19% among others with Aboriginal identity and 9% among other Canadians. The unemployment rate among Registered Indians in the 15–24 age group was especially high at 41%.¹⁹

Despite the already high numbers reported in the Canadian census unemployment statistics, census unemployment figures are likely too low. In many Aboriginal communities the unemployment rate exceeds 50%; in some it exceeds 75%. Social assistance benefits and seasonal jobs are often the main sources of income on some reserves.

These employment statistics are noted to underline the fact that the majority of Aboriginal families do not have adequate employment incomes to provide funds for themselves or their children to attend postsecondary education institutions. In short, the majority of Aboriginal students must rely on assistance from other sources to attend college or university.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Walker, Roz. August 2000. *Indigenous Performance in Western Australia Universities: Reframing Retention and Success*. DETYA document

¹⁹ Hull, Jeremy. October 2000. *Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education and Labour Market Outcomes, Canada, 1996*. DIAND document.

This is further exacerbated by the high rate of lone-parent families. Almost one-third of all Aboriginal people under the age of 15 in 1996 Census families lived in a lone-parent family, twice the rate of the non-Aboriginal population. In census metropolitan areas, almost a half of Aboriginal children were in lone-parent families.

While many Status Indian students have access to funding from the Post-Secondary Student Support Program there are a considerable number of students do not have access to these funds. Even among those with funding, the amount provided seems inadequate to cover all the real costs of living in a city, away from home. The greatest barrier is for Non-Status and Métis students. Unless they come from the northern territories in Canada or are accepted into a program that provides tuition and support allowances, they must rely on their own resources or Canada Student Loans, which often do not provide adequate financial resources for Aboriginal student retention and success. Stakeholder interviewees comments on the subject include

For white families, student loans are a supplement; for Natives they are the entire income.

Loans are designed for white 18-year-olds who don't have to travel or support families.

Barriers to Success: Cultural

Cultural Differences Faced by Aboriginal Students at Postsecondary Institutions

Too often, very little of what most Aboriginal students bring in the way of cultural knowledge, traditions, and core values is recognized or respected in the postsecondary system. The reality of the “university world” is substantially different than the Aboriginal personal and community reality. As stated by Barnhardt:

Students must acquire and accept a new form of consciousness, an orientation which not only displaces, but often devalues the world views they bring with them. For many, this is a greater sacrifice than they are willing to make, so they withdraw and go home, branded a failure. Those who do survive in the academic environment for four or more years often find themselves caught between two worlds, neither of which can fully satisfy their acquired tastes and aspirations, and therefore they enter into a struggle to reconcile their conflicting forms of consciousness.²⁰

Universities typically have long-established practices, norms, and policies seen as serving the values and cultural norms of the dominant non-Aboriginal society. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples similarly reported,

There is the question of the training and education programs themselves. Many ignore Aboriginal perspectives, values and issues and give scant attention to the work environment in which students will use their professional knowledge and skills. In the informal culture of the institution, there may be little or no affirmation of Aboriginal identity, and the environment may replicate the negative features that led students to drop out of school in the first place. Aboriginal support systems — peer networks, family activities, financial, personal, and academic counselling, or daycare services — may not be in place. The lack of institutional readiness to develop these supports is a significant deterrent to the completion of programs for students who do enroll. Lack of Aboriginal

²⁰ Barnhardt, Ray. 2001. *Domestication of the Ivory Tower: Institutional Adaptation to Cultural Distance*. Unpublished paper.

*control, strongly evidenced in the education of children and youth, is also encountered in the education of adults.*²¹

The culture of the postsecondary system was a prevalent theme in the literature reviewed and in the interviews undertaken for this project. Universities and colleges do not consistently concern themselves with the effects of culture on their students. Almost all faculty are representatives of a different cultural and socioeconomic group than Aboriginal students; most faculty do not have any depth of understanding of Aboriginal cultural knowledge, traditions, and core values; most faculty do not recognize the diversity and complexity within the Aboriginal communities or understand that not all Aboriginal student needs are the same. There is little recognition and understanding of the different cognition and learning styles. All these factors are institutional barriers to the retention and success of Aboriginal students in postsecondary education programs. Often for the Aboriginal student, as Eber Hampton points out “western education is hostile in its structure, its curriculum, its context, and its personnel.”²²

Barrier to Success: Family-Related

Many of our students are single parents and do not have the financial resources to attend school and look after their families.

Many Aboriginal students have family responsibilities and need additional financial support to carry them through the time it takes to attend college.

- Quotes from stakeholder interviews

Statistical evidence and information gathered from interviews has demonstrated that family responsibilities are often barriers to retention for the Aboriginal population. Statistics reported in 1997–98 for Status Aboriginal postsecondary enrolment indicate that the overall ratio was 66% female to 34% male students.²³ A 1999 BC study of college and institute former students also reflected the fact that Aboriginal students were more likely to be in a couple, to be older than the general population, and to have children.²⁴ These statistics, along with evidence from interviews, indicate that there are generally twice as many Status Indian female students in postsecondary education programs as males. In some programs, this rate can be much higher.

These female students are more likely to have dependants than their non-Aboriginal counterparts, which in turn demands a host of other requirements in terms of day-care, babysitting, transportation, and family demands. Additional requirements and costs are a very real barrier for Aboriginal female retention and success.

Further, Aboriginal communities tend to focus more on communal responsibilities, including those related to the family, than mainstream Canadian society, which can act as a barrier in completing projects and programs without interruption.

²¹ Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, Vol. 3, Chapter 5.

²² Hampton, Eber. 1993. Toward a Redefinition of American Indian/Alaskan Native Education. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, Vol. 20 (2).

²³ Overview of DIAND Program DATA IMB/CIMD. June 2000

²⁴ BC Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology. 1999. *1999 BC College and Institute Aboriginal Former Student Outcomes*.

Barriers to Success: Individual/Personal Barriers

Self-concept and motivation are central themes of the literature and stakeholder interviews. This can manifest itself in a host of ways including a sense of powerlessness, poor self-concept, apathy, poor mental health, poor physical health, anger, and frustration. These can in turn lead to alcohol and substance abuse, petty thievery, physical and sexual abuse, and for some to incarceration and a further cycle of despair. These manifestations impact on many Aboriginal students. Often there isn't adequate family support or institutional support in their home communities to assist them in the development of a healthy mind and body.

Donald Unruh, speaking of Aboriginal programs at the University of Manitoba, notes,

*By far the most difficult area, and the area in which, despite our best efforts, we continue to face the greatest problems, is the area of personal and family supports. More students drop out of the programs for "personal reasons" than all other reasons combined. (In fact, academic failure comes last as a reason for leaving.) ...Family stress, discrimination, loneliness, and an alien environment combine to overwhelm students.*²⁵

Stakeholders interviewed also echoed similar concerns:

Dislocation for rural students, the further away or more remote, the harder time they have.

Loneliness, as they are away from their home community. No family or community support.

Many of these individual concerns become more pronounced in the competitive environment of the university or college. Aboriginal graduates of health programs at the University of Manitoba expressed significant levels of personal stress while enrolled in postsecondary studies. Respondents reported that, overall, they had a negative feeling about school, largely due to feelings of isolation, inadequacy, and discrimination. Most respondents said they suffered from feelings of stress, panic attacks, headaches, and anxiety.²⁶

In a study of Aboriginal performance in Western Australia, key factors impeding Aboriginal success at the postsecondary level were seen to be similar to those in Canada: the two major factors that were identified by over three-quarters of respondents as impeding retention and success were family and personal issues (82%) and students worrying about failing their courses (75%).²⁷ The study found that at three of the institutions studied, 80% of all withdrawals and deferrals were due to "personal or family issues."

²⁵ Unruh, Donald. 1989. *Equality of Access and Equality of Condition Programming for Success*. Unpublished paper.

²⁶ Wiebe, Joann, Judy Sinclair, Sheila Nychuk, and M.C.C. Stephens. 1994. Assessing Aboriginal Graduates Perceptions for Academic Success in Health Faculties. *Arctic Medical Research*, Vol. 53: Suppl. 2, pp. 152–56.

²⁷ Walker, Roz. 2000. *Indigenous Performance in Western Australia Universities: Reframing Retention and Success*. Curtin University of Technology.

EXISTING INITIATIVES OR PROGRAMS

Although the federal government has responsibility for many Aboriginal programs including health, education, and social development, Aboriginal participation in postsecondary education has been well below that of the non-Aboriginal population. Notwithstanding the growth in Aboriginal participation in postsecondary education, both participation and completion rates remain well below those of the general population.

As highlighted in this section, there are a number of financial and non-financial initiatives and programs that are currently in place to help Aboriginal populations succeed in the postsecondary area. This section attempts to gather the initiatives and programs thematically and is not an attempt to provide a comprehensive detailing of all existing strategies. The themes do, however, identify the major findings of both the existing literature and of the stakeholder interviews conducted for this report. This summary includes substantial descriptions of initiatives in Canada, with major initiatives and programs of relevance in the United States, Australia, and New Zealand. While the major findings tend to focus on programs west of Ontario, this is indicative of the strength of western programs and their relatively longer histories.

Government Strategies

The relatively poor enrolment and completion rates of Aboriginal students have led to a number of government strategies over the years to improve postsecondary participation and retention. Several provincial and federal strategies have been implemented to guide the development of initiatives and programs to improve Aboriginal education levels.

One such initiative has resulted in the Post-Secondary Sector Aboriginal Education and Training Action Plan being developed by Saskatchewan Learning.²⁸ This strategic plan looks at short-range (5-year) and long-range (20-year) goals for Aboriginal education at the postsecondary level in the province and identifies various means to meet these goals. The strategy framework, which also identifies the barriers that are being faced by Aboriginal people in obtaining postsecondary education, is to be implemented in the next five years. The draft framework identifies the following goals, with actions and partners for each:

- Work on successful kindergarten to grade 12 education for Métis and First Nations.
- Prepare Métis and First Nations to participate in a “representative workforce.”
- Ensure representative Métis and First Nations workforce in the provincial economy.

Performance measurements are to be implemented and specific targets are outlined in terms of increasing Aboriginal rates of literacy, academic upgrading, life skills, and enrolment/completion rates.

The Alberta government has also developed a policy framework. Endorsed by the government in September of 2000, the Aboriginal Policy Framework, *Strengthening Relationships — The Government of Alberta’s Aboriginal Policy Framework*, has resulted in several initiatives aimed at Aboriginal postsecondary students.

²⁸ Saskatchewan Learning. 2002. Draft: The Post-Secondary Sector Aboriginal Education and Training Action Plan.

For information on the HRDC commitments relating to Aboriginals in postsecondary education, please refer to Canada's Innovation Strategy Web site at www.innovationstrategy.gc.ca.

Existing Funding Sources

The Post-Secondary Student Support Program

Postsecondary education in Canada is accessible to Status Indians through limited support from the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND) through the Post-Secondary Education Program (PSE), which includes the Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP), the University and College Entrance Preparation (UCEP) Program, and the Indian Studies Support Program (ISSP). These programs are valid for all levels of postsecondary education, including community college diploma and certification programs, undergraduate programs, and professional degree programs such as medicine and engineering.

DIAND provides support to eligible Indian and Inuit students through the PSSSP and the UCEP Program to assist Aboriginal students with the cost of tuition fees, books, travel, and living allowances. Financial aid is offered through postsecondary institutions for the development and delivery of special programs for Aboriginals through the ISSP.

The PSE Program is operated under the authority provided through the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development Act. Therefore PSE funding is under the direction of the federal government, which has the authority to increase or decrease funds available and change the eligibility criteria for students. Nationally, almost 100 percent of the combined PSSSP, the UCEP Program, and the ISSP is delivered directly by First Nations Bands or their administering organizations.²⁹

Inuit and Status Indian students residing on or off reserve in Canada are eligible for the PSE program. Support is subject to the selection criteria defined in the respective Band Council policies. These policies vary by Aboriginal band/tribe.

Prior to 1987, funding for PSE was allocated in accordance with DIAND's Post-Secondary Education Assistance Program (PSEAP). Funds were available for all Aboriginal students who aspired to pursue postsecondary studies. In 1988, the PSEAP guidelines were replaced by the PSSSP guidelines. Under PSSSP, funding for Registered/Status and Treaty First Nations was capped: restrictions were placed on students' eligibility, and daycare and rent subsidies were removed.

Other Sources of Federal Funding in Canada

Non-Status Indian and Métis students residing in the Northwest Territories receive tuition and living allowances to attend postsecondary programs.

Human Resources Development Canada has been able to provide funding for Aboriginals in its training allowance.

²⁹ Department of Indian Affairs Web site, March 2002. http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ps/edu/ense_e.html

Canada Student Loans

As not all Status Aboriginals can make use of the funds available from the PSSSP, and those funds are not accessible to non-Status Aboriginals, many Aboriginals make use of Canada Student Loans. Through the government of Canada, the Canada Student Loans Program can provide eligible students 60% of a student's assessed need, up to a maximum of \$165 per week of study. In addition to a federal student loan, students are sometimes eligible for a student loan from their respective province or territory. Each of these provincial programs has somewhat different requirements. Ontario and Saskatchewan have their provincial student loan programs integrated with the federal Canada Student Loans program. Students are eligible for student loans based on set criteria. Aboriginal students with tribal grants from PSSSP funds are usually not eligible for additional funding through Canada Student Loans.

Stakeholders noted that Aboriginal students often had considerably higher financial requirements than non-Aboriginal students owing to the need to travel to attend college/university, and incur additional living expenses. As a consequence, it was felt that student debt among Aboriginal students was higher than that of non-Aboriginal students.

Canada Study Grants

The government of Canada provides Canada Study Grants (CSG) to students who have permanent disabilities, high need part-time students, women in certain doctoral studies, and student loan recipients with dependents. Unlike student loans, Canada Study Grants do not have to be repaid. Aboriginal students who are not eligible for Canada Student Loans are also ineligible for Canada Study Grants, despite financial need.

Scholarships and Bursaries

According to the *2001 Scholarships, Bursaries and Awards for Aboriginal Students* released by the Department of Indian and Northern Development Canada, there were over 400 scholarships, bursaries and awards, totaling over \$2 million, available annually for Aboriginal students. Aboriginal groups, universities, colleges, corporations, unions, churches, religious institutions, service groups, and foundations offer scholarships and bursaries. Information on the host of scholarships and bursaries that are available for Aboriginal students is listed in commercially available books, on the Internet, and through each educational institution. Many Aboriginal student scholarships come from the Aboriginal Youth Foundation Awards.

The United States

American Indian and Alaska Natives are eligible for special funding through the Bureau of Indian Affairs, which offered over \$30 million in 1994 to 15,000 Native American students through grants averaging \$2,412. Money is also available for American Indian and Native Alaska students through the Special Higher Education Grant Program, with priority given to those students in the fields of business, education, engineering, law, natural resources, or health. Financial aid for American Indian students is also available through state programs, institutions, private foundations, and tribal organizations. Pell Grants are grants given to Native Americans for education. American Aboriginal students have access to the Native American Vocational Technical Education Program, which pays the tuition of Aboriginal students in the United States in vocational programs.

The Michigan Indian Tuition Waiver

The American states have also initiated separate initiatives for American Indians. One of the most significant was the Michigan Indian Tuition Waiver.

In 1976, the State of Michigan instated a tuition waiver for those who met the criteria of being "Indian," over the age of 18, and residents of the state. The program was phased out in 1996 as the Governor of Michigan was strongly opposed to the initiative. While it was in place, the program enrolled 15,000 Native Americans, 70% of whom completed a certificate, diploma, or degree.

Australia: ABSTUDY

The Australian government has developed a funding program, like the PSSSP in Canada, to promote Aboriginal access to postsecondary education. ABSTUDY, the Australian Aboriginal Student Allowance, was established in 1968 to improve Aboriginal Australian students' employment prospects. ABSTUDY grants were available to full-time or part-time Indigenous Australian students at universities, colleges, and other approved institutions. Full-time students could receive a living allowance and allowances for textbooks and equipment, travel for studying away from home, payment of compulsory fees, and dependents' allowances. Part-time students were eligible for a small annual allowance and payment of compulsory educational fees. Because of extensive government cutbacks, in December 1998, the government announced changes to ABSTUDY to take effect from January 1, 2000, which intended to target ABSTUDY benefits to those students most in need of assistance.

The main objectives of the ABSTUDY policy are to encourage Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander people to take full advantage of the educational opportunities available, promote equity of educational opportunity, and to improve educational outcomes.

Semi-Independent or Independent Aboriginal Educational Institutions

While the development of funding programs to assist in Aboriginal access to postsecondary education has been instrumental in increasing Aboriginal success rates over the past decades, the creation and development of educational institutions specifically for Aboriginal education has been seen as an equally important step. While the size, level of autonomy, and Aboriginal content and design differ, all the following institutions have been seen as key initiatives in the strengthening of Aboriginal communities.

This strengthening has been undertaken in all Aboriginal communities studied. Other Aboriginal cultures have exerted degrees of Aboriginal autonomy in postsecondary education: Norway has developed the Saami College of Education, an independently administered institution; Greenland's University, Ilisimatusarfik, also contains significant native Greenland subject matter, though not as its sole focus.

Ray Barnhardt has identified major themes in all of the Aboriginal educational institutional goals or practices around the world.³⁰ He views these broad themes as encompassing the following:

- Commitment to community
- Integration of functions
- Sustained local leadership
- Participation of Elders
- Spiritual harmony
- Use of local languages
- Traditional ways of knowing
- Traditional teaching practices
- Congenial environment
- Participatory research

One of the major themes that he has identified in his overview of Aboriginal programs and institutions is the conflict and interaction of addressing “local” versus “universal” concerns at the postsecondary level. This is the dichotomy between knowledge that is practical in the immediate circumstances for students and knowledge that is broader and more theoretical.

The Saskatchewan Indian Federated College

The largest and best-known of Canadian semi-independent postsecondary institutions is the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College (SIFC), controlled by the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations and accredited as a member of the Canadian Association of Universities and Colleges. SIFC has more than 1,500 Aboriginal students from First Nations across Canada.

SIFC offers bachelor programs that include language studies, education, communication, fine arts, Aboriginal studies, and business. All SIFC courses are provincially accredited through a federation agreement with the University of Regina, Saskatchewan. In 1995, SIFC, in partnership with the Business College of the University of Saskatchewan, launched the first Aboriginal MBA program in Canada. SIFC offers master of arts programs in English, Indian languages, literature and linguistics, and Indian studies through the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, University of Regina.

The Mission of the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College (SIFC) is to enhance the quality of life and to preserve, protect, and interpret the history, language, culture, and artistic heritage of First Nations. The college aims to acquire and expand its base of knowledge and understanding in the best interest of First Nations by providing opportunities for bilingual and bicultural education under the mandate and control of the First Nations of Saskatchewan. Student services offered at the college include academic counselling, Elder services, scholarships, bursaries, awards, and tutoring services.

³⁰ Barnhardt, Ray. 1991. Higher Education in the Fourth World: Indigenous People Take Control. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, Vol. 18, no. 2.

The Gabriel Dumont Institute of Native Studies and Applied Research

The Gabriel Dumont Institute of Native Studies and Applied Research (GDI) is the educational arm of the Métis Nation — Saskatchewan. The institute is the only Métis owned and operated educational institution of its kind in Canada. Its mandate is

- The promotion, renewal, and development of Métis culture through appropriate research activities and curriculum development. Through the GDI, Saskatchewan Métis are trained with the required skills to make the goal of Métis self-government a future reality. Other goals of the institute include establishing a Native cultural institute controlled by Native people to conduct research, produce curricula, and develop language training programs; to design, develop, and implement teacher and other training models; and to design and develop innovative methods of revitalizing and strengthening Native culture;
- To conduct research of an historical and contemporary nature, toward the development of a factual record of native history and culture. All research is to be conducted through an independent GDI research unit;
- To disseminate cultural–historical and contemporary information by utilizing modern communication methods, by developing curricula for use throughout the entire education system, by training teachers to use the new Native Studies, and by "popularizing" Native Studies for use in both Native and non-Native communities.

The GDI is funded by grants from the province of Saskatchewan and the federal government. The GDI serves nearly 1,000 students every year and also oversees the Dumont Technical Institute, which is associated with the Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology (SIASST).

Other Aboriginal Institutions

Many other Aboriginal institutions operate in Canada, but without the level of financial support of the Gabriel Dumont Institute and the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College. These institutions, while smaller in scope, often operate through partnerships with larger colleges or universities.

This type of institution, for example the Wilp Wilxo'oskwhl Nisga'a (the Nisga'a House of Wisdom) in British Columbia, often crosses the conventional boundaries of universities, colleges, and technical institutes by offering a wide range of courses. It has, for example, developed partnerships with the University of Northern British Columbia, Northwest Community College, and the Open Learning Agency. Its bilingual, bicultural studies are wide ranging and include training for forest rangers/technicians, fishery technicians, biologists, and scientists and training in hospitality and tourism, social services, trades, and financial planning. Cultural services include Nisga'a language, contemporary Nisga'a arts, and Nisga'a religious studies.

One example of a smaller and more locally focused Aboriginal education institution serving primarily the members of a tribal council or a regional area is the Yellowhead Tribal Council in Alberta, which offers preparatory and university programs to its local community.

Many of these smaller schools rely on small program grants that are short-term, project-specific, and may be subject to change. The provincial governments generally do not support smaller institutions, although they may provide student financial assistance to learners if they are in departmentally approved training programs offered by such institutions.

The United States

American Tribal Colleges

In the United States the Tribal College movement began in the late 1960s with the establishment of fledgling community colleges on the Navajo and Sioux reservations and on an abandoned missile base in Northern California. The colleges now have a national advocacy organization, the American Indian College Fund, and a professional journal, *Tribal College: Journal of American Indian Higher Education*.

Tribal colleges are given government funding per student as prescribed by the Tribal College Act, as well as funding from corporations and philanthropic organizations. They also have their own Tribal College Fund, which targets specific priorities outlined by individual colleges. As in Canada, funding has been a constant issue for the colleges. The 1983 congressional reauthorization of the Tribal College Act allots \$5,280 US per American Indian full-time-equivalent student, which, adjusted with the Consumer Price Index, would be over \$8,000 US. At present, however, the 1996 federal budget allowed only \$2,900 US. The average cost of a mainstream non-resident student at a community college has been estimated at \$7,000 US.³¹

All tribal colleges are controlled by boards of trustees who are nearly all local American Indian community members. Most administrators are American Indians, but most faculty members are non-Indian. Degrees offered by the colleges include associate degrees in arts, science, and applied science and one-year certificates.

In the research reviewed on the American tribal colleges, there was a prevalence of recommendations and initiatives to promote closer ties between American Indian communities, institutions, and the private sector.³²

Heritage College

Heritage College is an example of an American college that has been transformed to meet the needs of the American Aboriginal community. Located in Spokane, Washington, the college was created in 1981 as a result of persistent and outspoken requests for four-year higher and master's education within commuting distance of large agricultural populations in north and south central Washington. This growing population included significant numbers of American Indians and Hispanics. The Yakima Tribe was also very vocal in requesting the college. On July 1, 1982, Heritage College began operation as a private independent non-profit college with its main campus on the Yakima Reservation. The college received full academic accreditation in 1986.

Numerous school district sites throughout the United States are also used to deliver Heritage College's master in education and master in teaching programs. These sites are monitored and approved by the Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges.

³¹ Stein, Wayne J. 1999. Tribal Colleges: 1968-1998. Chapter 11 in *Next Steps: Research and Practice to Advance Indian Education*. Eric Clearinghouse.

³² See, for example, Pavel, Michael. 1999. American Indians and Alaska Natives in Higher Education. In *Next Steps: Research and Practice to Advance Indian Education*. Eric Clearinghouse.

New Zealand

Te Wānanga-o-Raukawa

In New Zealand, Te Wānanga-o-Raukawa (TWOR), or University of Raukawa, was the country's first private university-level institution. It is a unique centre of higher learning devoted to Māori knowledge. The method of teaching at Te Wānanga-o-Raukawa is based upon knowledge and wisdom passed on by Māori ancestors and is a holistic approach to learning and teaching. Courses are based on group learning, or "hui," rather than individual learning. The three core subjects are Māori language, Iwi and Hapū studies, and information technology and telecommunication.

Australia

Batchelor College

Batchelor College is a specialist postsecondary institution providing accredited vocational education and training and higher education programs for Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander people. Most of its students come from remote communities in Australia's Northern Territory. A council of predominantly Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander people governs the college. The college has developed several strategies and pedagogies to assist in Aboriginal success at the postsecondary level. These include

- **Mixed-Mode Delivery:** Batchelor College's "mixed-mode" delivery is a form of flexible delivery able to respond to the requirements of mature age students, including their family and ceremonial obligations.
- **"Both Ways" Philosophy:** The mixed mode of course delivery supports the college's "both ways" philosophy of education, designed to provide programs that support the respective Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander cultures and languages. The "both ways" philosophy is a pedagogy that seeks to reconcile and use both mainstream and Indigenous Australian cultures in its teaching methods and course materials.
- **Community Study Centres:** To support curriculum practices, the college has established a network of Community Study Centres in over 35 remote Northern Territory communities. It has also entered into a number of community agreements with councils, schools, and clinics, which establish the basis under which the college utilizes locally owned premises for both course delivery and student support facilities.

The college has gained further success through its use of the Remote Area Teacher Education (RATE) program, which facilitates discussion on culturally appropriate teaching styles and curriculum for students.

Access and Transition Programs

Many postsecondary institutions have implemented programs designed to prepare students for the transition from community living to that of a postsecondary student. This transition is often difficult for mainstream students, but is especially difficult for Aboriginal students, many of whom need special support to overcome the barriers discussed previously.

Programs available for Aboriginals include the Access programs developed in Manitoba. Access programs have been as successful and innovative in Manitoba and have been copied by other areas in Canada.

Since their beginning in the 1970s, the Access program has included 20 programs at several Manitoba postsecondary institutions. Access programs are offered at the University of Manitoba, Red River Community College, Keewatin Community College, and Brandon University. Access programs are funded through Manitoba Education and Training, Advanced Education and Skills Training Division.

Access programs sponsor university education to persons who have traditionally not had the opportunity for university education owing to social, economic, or cultural reasons or to a lack of formal basic education. Applicants are, in general, residents of Manitoba, though some exceptions have been allowed. Preference is given to Aboriginal applicants, whether Status, Non-Status, Métis, or Inuit.

Students with insufficient outside funding have applied to the Manitoba Student Financial Assistance Program and received non-repayable Access bursaries.

Access staff actively recruit throughout the province of Manitoba by going to Aboriginal communities and presenting information about the program. Recruitment packets are sent to schools, organizations, and service agencies; newspaper and radio ads have been used along with a short video that has been developed and widely circulated.

The various supports offered through the Access programs include

- An extensive pre-university orientation held for students prior to fall classes
- Individual academic advising
- Introduction to university courses for degree credit
- Tutorials
- Regular consultation with academic advisors
- Personal support/counselling
- Housing assistance
- Childcare assistance
- University/urban adjustment assistance
- Communication and personal development workshops
- Career counselling

The University of Alberta's Transition Program

The University of Alberta also offers a transition program to increase Aboriginal participation. Its Transition Year Program (TYP) is a one-year university Access program offered by the University of Alberta's Native Support Services in conjunction with nine faculties. TYP is for Aboriginal students who may not qualify for direct entry into a specific faculty. Students who complete this program with the required minimum GPA may qualify for admission into one of the nine faculties with a complete transfer of all credits earned.

Australian Access Program: The Cadigal Program at the University of Sydney

The Cadigal Program is an access and support program for Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who want to undertake their first degree at the University of Sydney. It has been operating since 1992 as a strategy for improving equity of access and participation for Indigenous students. The Cadigal Program allows a differentially lower University Admission Index score for students and considers other attributes like motivation, capacity to succeed, and life experience for mature applicants.

Features of the program include

- A two-week presemester orientation program
- The option of a reduced workload in the first two years of enrolment
- Provision of the support programs
- Peer tutoring
- Study rooms and computer facilities
- Provision of other resources such as textbooks and anatomical models

Community Delivery

Community delivery has been a crucial initiative in the development of Aboriginal education. European-based education's focus on the needs and geographic convenience of mainstream, non-Aboriginal students has largely resulted in the establishment of postsecondary institutions in urban centres. Traditionally, for Aboriginals who sought to gain postsecondary education, the process of moving to a centre of learning also meant leaving behind their Aboriginal community. This has been especially true for Aboriginals on reserves.

This situation has been altered by the creation of community-based programs that allow Aboriginal students to complete some or all of their postsecondary education programs in their home community. Many residents of northern and remote communities are unable to attend a university campus, largely because of location and lack of financial resources and educational preparedness. Community-based programs attempt to eliminate much of the financial and social hardships brought about by long-term resettlement to a university campus. These programs have been especially important in allowing Aboriginal access to postsecondary education-training programs in remote geographic areas. Some examples of successful programs incorporating community delivery are detailed below.

The Brandon University Northern Teacher Education Program (BUNTEP)

The Brandon University Northern Teacher Education Program (BUNTEP) is a community-based program offering training in the field of education. This program presents an alternative to traditional campus-based teacher training. By offering the program in Aboriginal or remote communities, BUNTEP contributes to both the educational and economic development of northern and rural Manitoba communities.

The BUNTEP goals are to

- Deliver postsecondary services to people in communities who traditionally have not had the opportunity for such experience;
- Develop a system of delivery of services utilizing all available resources wherein the community and participants in BUNTEP are directly involved in the planning and implementation of the system;
- Ensure the participants are trained to satisfy peoples' service needs through employment in the public sector, e.g., education, municipal government, health, recreation; and
- Develop innovative techniques for delivery of services in the Northern and rural communities.

Brandon University also offers the Program for the Education of Native Teachers (PENT). This community-based teacher education program from the Faculty of Education combines work in community schools with courses from Brandon University. Students are allowed to complete distance education during the winter. The program also offers 50 months of internship interspersed throughout the program.

Native Indian Teacher Education Program (NITEP)

Native Indian Teacher Education Program (NITEP) was formed with a small group of BC Aboriginal teachers in 1969. The community-delivered teacher education program has been offered through the University of British Columbia since 1974. NITEP students begin their studies in a field-centre setting in Kamloops, Chilliwack, Duncan, or Vancouver, British Columbia. Coordinators are available in each centre to counsel the students in professional and academic development, to facilitate school experiences, to teach, and to arrange for local resource people and activities. Students also participate in seminars to prepare for school experiences in public and band schools. Aboriginal studies courses that explore political, social, and economic issues from historical and contemporary perspectives are included. Aboriginal education policies, curricula, and schooling are also examined. Courses allow students to adapt, develop, and evaluate Aboriginal studies curricula.

First- and second-year students make orientation visits to the University of British Columbia. Many students attend summer session on campus following their first and second years in NITEP. Seminars are held throughout the on-campus years to explore resources available to UBC students, discuss issues as Aboriginal educators, and build relationships with NITEP student colleagues.

The key to NITEP's success has been community delivery, which allows students to remain in their home communities to study at field centres for the first two years of the program. Support

centres at the University of British Columbia and at the field centres have also helped students overcome course-related and personal difficulties.

The Northern Teacher Education Program (NORTEP) and the Northern Professional Access College (NORPAC)

NORTEP/NORPAC is another teacher education program that primarily targets people of Indian and Métis ancestry for selection, both Status and Non-Status. NORTEP/NORPAC classes are offered under the aegis of, and in cooperation with, the University of Saskatchewan and the University of Regina. NORTEP/NORPAC is overseen by a Board of Governors that consists of 17 elected northern officials representing the NORTEP Council Inc., the Prince Albert Grand Council, the Meadow Lake Tribal Council, and the Creighton and Île-à-la-Crosse School Divisions.

Similar to NITEP, NORTEP offers a bachelor of education program through community delivery. NORTEP is an off-campus bachelor of education program in which students alternate two-week periods of university classes with one week of classroom experience. Graduates qualify for a Professional A Teaching Certificate. During their time at a southern campus, students are provided academic and personal counselling by NORTEP/NORPAC faculty members.

Students have access to the faculty at all times for counselling and support, and the program uses the services of other local support agencies. Students receive a NORTEP/NORPAC Student Allowance during the northern-based phase of their program, and textbooks, tuition fees, and transportation are provided for.

During the northern-based phase of their program, student accommodation with kitchen facilities is available in La Ronge, Saskatchewan. Students provide their own meals and bedding.

SUNTEP

SUNTEP is a program administered through the Gabriel Dumont Institute that offers teacher education training through the University of Saskatchewan. It is similar to the NITEP and NORTEP programs.

For the first two years of their studies, SUNTEP students attend classes at a SUNTEP location. The final two years include a four-month internship and may include class work at one of the university campuses. SUNTEP is offered in three locations: Prince Albert, Regina, and Saskatoon. Also offered is the two-year Métis Teacher Associate Program. This certificate program is based upon a foundation similar to that of SUNTEP with strong professional, academic, and practicum components. The program is designed to be delivered on-site in Métis communities.

Between 1980 and 1990, SUNTEP graduated 370 students, 80% of whom were female.

The University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) and the X-CED Program

As with the Canadian teacher education programs, the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) has developed community education in order to reach traditionally excluded rural Aboriginal populations. UAF's five rural campuses serve predominantly Native student bodies in their

home areas. The university provides education programs through distance learning at its rural campuses.

The University of Alaska's X-CED program is designed specifically to train Native people in their own communities to become teachers. Since its beginning in 1970, about 300 students have graduated from the program, which has been very successful in using distance education and remote campus learning to help those in rural and remote areas.

According to reports, using community-based delivery and remote learning has solved many of the problems that have plagued Aboriginal education in Alaska.³³

First Nations Partnership Program

The First Nations Partnership program was developed in response to a request from a group of First Nations communities in central Canada represented by the Meadow Lake Tribal Council. In 1989, this council sought child-care training for community members that would be delivered in their own communities and that would incorporate and ensure the continuity of their own cultural practices, values, language, and spirituality. It had rejected mainstream programs of training because they did not address these two requirements: namely, community-based delivery and cultural representation throughout the training. Through the partnership between the University of Victoria and the Meadow Lake Tribal Council, an innovative model for ensuring the cultural representation of communities was developed. Using this model, the training program has been delivered with eight First Nations organizations to date.

Aboriginal-Geared Programs

Many of the larger postsecondary institutions in Canada have been able to offer specific programs at the undergraduate or graduate levels that are designed and coordinated to meet the specific needs and interests of Aboriginal students, but are offered at mainstream institutions. These programs have been developed to further broaden the range of services to Aboriginal people, to diversify the skills and knowledge of the Aboriginal community, and to create a more equitable distribution of Aboriginal people across subjects.

The University of British Columbia and the University of Alberta are two examples of institutions that have successfully done this.

Indigenous Legal Studies at the University of Alberta and the First Nations Legal Studies Program at the University of British Columbia

Both the University of British Columbia and the University of Alberta offer programs that are designed to increase Aboriginal involvement and knowledge in legal studies.

In both the University of British Columbia's First Nations Legal Studies program and the University of Alberta's Indigenous Legal Studies program, Aboriginal students take the same required courses and are evaluated and graduate on the same basis as the non-Aboriginal students in the school. Both programs permit the law schools to consider factors other than LSAT and university marks in making decisions about Aboriginal people's admissions. This is done in recognition of the need to have a greater representation of Aboriginal people in law

³³ Barnhardt, Ray. 2001. Domestication of the Ivory Tower: Institutional Adaption to Cultural Distance. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* (December).

school and in the legal profession, and the need to consider cultural bias and educational obstacles that some Aboriginal students may have encountered.

The University of Alberta's program is funded by the Alberta Law Foundation and advises prospective students on admission procedures and criteria, offers academic counselling for students enrolled in the LL.B. program, and provides career and employment counselling. Student services provided to Aboriginal students through this program include

- Personal and Academic Counselling Services
- Academic Support Services
- Orientation Program
- Summer Work and Placement Coordination
- Aboriginal Law Students Association
- Part-time Law Program

The Ts`kel Graduate Studies Program at the University of British Columbia

The Ts`kel Graduate Studies Program was designed to prepare Aboriginal people for the field of educational administration. Since then, Ts`kel Graduate Studies has expanded to include educational studies, curriculum and instruction, and educational psychology and special education. Regular UBC graduate admission requirements apply.

Students in the program are

- Provided with a seminar in which they can develop their own interpretations and applications to educational research related to Aboriginal education;
- Provided with a simulation course that addresses issues related to administering a First Nations Band School;
- Provided with opportunities for a field experience in either an Aboriginal or a public education setting;
- Provided with Ts`kel Graduate Studies faculty support for major papers, theses, or dissertations, in collaboration with other faculty advisors;
- Provided with First Nations House of Learning facilities, student services, and library services; and
- Able to interact with all students and faculty in respective departments and both contribute to and benefit from the wide variety of backgrounds and interests that this provides.

First Nations Forestry at the University of British Columbia

The First Nations Strategy was developed in response to the growing realization that the Faculty of Forestry of the University of British Columbia must become an active participant and leader in increasing the knowledge and understanding of First Nations and Aboriginal rights as they pertain to forest resource management. This strategy was adopted in 2001.

To facilitate this strategy, the Forestry Faculty developed a First Nations Forestry Initiative, as well as introduced course content dealing specifically with Aboriginal forestry issues. The

initiative has outlined the goals of opening up the existing curriculum for more study of Aboriginal forestry issues, creating strategic links with Aboriginal communities, and actively seeking ways to recruit from the Aboriginal community.

Support Services

Support services have played a central role in the development of an Aboriginal postsecondary student infrastructure in Canada. While support services vary by postsecondary institution, general areas of support offered Aboriginal students have included

- academic support
- student personal support
- the support of Elders
- the provision of Aboriginal spaces on campus

The Support of Elders

The support and availability of Elders is a much-discussed element of Aboriginal support in stakeholder interviews. The presence and wisdom of Elders have been seen as an effective way to preserve and foster traditional Aboriginal ways of knowing, and provide social and cultural support for Aboriginal students.³⁴ Elders also close the generation gap created by the legacy of residential schools and strengthen the pride and kinship felt by Aboriginals.

Elders are usually not paid for their contributions, which has been controversial. It is argued that Elders are contributing time and are a valuable asset to the educational process and as such should be paid like teachers.

Contemporary Aboriginal people value the contributions of Elders but see them usually as a source of inspiration rather than the source for all practical knowledge. Elders are seen as vital supports and points of reference for Aboriginal society as it changes and strengthens its place within the dominant mainstream society.

Elders have been used in institutions in Canada and the United States. An academic centerpiece of the Alaska Native Studies program at the University of Alaska Fairbanks is its Elder-in-Residence program. Prominent tradition bearers from the Aboriginal community are invited to reside on the Fairbanks campus for extended periods each semester. Under the direction of Native studies faculty, students enrolled in a particular Native studies class receive direct instruction from the Elders. The course is designed to maximize student-Elder contact inside and outside the classroom and to facilitate student learning about Aboriginal life.

University of British Columbia's First Nations House of Learning

The First Nations House of Learning (FNHL) at the University of British Columbia seeks to coordinate all aspects of Aboriginal support. The FNHL was established in 1987 to serve as a vehicle to draw together and give greater visibility to the increasing number of Aboriginal programs that had emerged on the UBC campus.

³⁴ Medicine, Beatrice. 1986. My Elders Tell Me. Chapter 8 in *Indian Education in Canada, Vol. 2., The Challenge*. Vancouver: UBC Press.

The role of the FNHL is not to serve as the academic home for any respective programs, which remain the responsibility of the appropriate faculties/departments, but to coordinate existing efforts, stimulate new initiatives, provide support services for students, and serve as a liaison between the university and Aboriginal communities.

The FNHL is located in an impressive Aboriginal longhouse, opened in 1993, which is the hub of Aboriginal activities on campus. The longhouse serves as a "home away from home." It is a place where Aboriginal students can study and learn in surroundings that reflect their heritage and culture and where Aboriginal people can share their knowledge and cultures with each other, with the university community, and with the larger society. The Salish-style longhouse structure includes Sty-Wet Tan Great Hall, an Elder's lounge, S-Takya Childcare, a Sacred Circle, a student and staff lounge, computer laboratory, kitchen, the Xwi7xwa Library, and administrative offices.

The House of Learning, as an Aboriginal focal point for the campus, has also been the centre for the development of many other supports and services for the Aboriginal student population. These services have included childcare, the coordination of a journal and newsletter, the organizing of conferences, and many other services.

The University of Alberta's Office of Native Student Services

The University of Alberta also provides an extensive network of support services to Aboriginal students. The Office of Native Student Services (NSS) helps the University of Alberta provide an environment that encourages full access, participation, and success for Aboriginal students as outlined in the university's 1991 Aboriginal Student Policy.

The Retention Strategies and Services (RSS) at the university provides support services aimed at retention and improved success of all Aboriginal students on campus. These services and programs include

- The Aboriginal Student Housing Program
- A variety of support services, including peer support and personal and academic counselling
- Scholarships and Bursaries Program, which collects and distributes an Aboriginal-based directory of scholarships and bursary information
- Providing advocacy for Aboriginal student concerns
- The Wahpahtihew: Aboriginal Tutor and Role Model program
- A day-long Aboriginal Student Orientation
- Coordinating study skills, one-on-one tutorials, study seminars, and workshops
- The distribution of the e-newsletter "Moose Call" and *Buffalo Yell News* — both publications focus on Aboriginal education news and insights. This service also designs and distributes the annual Aboriginal Student Handbook.
- The Community Relations Program: This program provides linkages between the Aboriginal community on campus, Aboriginal students, and off-campus relations. This program provides both substantial recruitment work and assistance in securing employment services.

Aboriginal Curriculum Development

Aboriginal control of curriculum would seem to be only indirectly related to the issue of increasing Aboriginal enrolment and success rates. It is, however, an instrumental factor in changing the role of Aboriginal communities to become shapers of their own academic knowledge. By fostering Aboriginal control of curriculum development, Aboriginal people are encouraged to take more participatory roles at all levels of the postsecondary system.

Aboriginal control of curriculum development has long been a primary goal of Aboriginal educators. This goal is not fully realized, though Aboriginals have come a long way since the release of *Indian Control of Indian Education*, a position paper by the National Indian Brotherhood of 1972 that was an early outline of this goal. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) makes the point that where the Aboriginals have exercised control of education, there has been a markedly higher success rate. Throughout the report, RCAP recommends increased Aboriginal control of curriculum development.

Curriculum development in Canada is supported through institutions like the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College, the Gabriel Dumont Institute, and the University of Northern British Columbia, as well as other institutional efforts across Canada.

At Australia's Batchelor College, curriculum has been partially set through dialogue with students. The college has developed curriculum that incorporates both Indigenous and Western knowledge.

Language and Literacy

According to the 1996 Census, one-quarter of Canada's Aboriginal population reported having had an Aboriginal language as their mother tongue. Through efforts to support and develop Aboriginal languages, as well as English and French literacy, postsecondary education is offering relevant and necessary education for Aboriginal people. This development is seen as still weak but is a move away from the assimilative practices that had often served to weaken the learning of traditional Aboriginal languages.

As Yvonne Hébert has argued, a key to strengthening Aboriginal education is the development of strong language and literacy skills.³⁵ The teaching of Aboriginal languages and literacy is seen as a key way to develop Aboriginal participation in the education system. More formal support is needed, however, as there exists very little of the organizational and curricular infrastructure required at any level of the education systems in Canada to facilitate the development of stronger language and literacy skills.

Alternative Assessment

In Australia, a major issue surrounding the subject of Aboriginal enrolment in that country has been the practice of alternative assessment. Currently being used in some universities in Australia, alternative assessment allows for a different set of admission criteria for the Aboriginal Australian applicants to postsecondary programs. Alternative assessment also, more controversially, includes measuring students in different ways, recognizing diversity, shifting to more oral means of assessment, and accommodating Aboriginal learning styles.

³⁵ Hébert, Yvonne. 2000. The State of Aboriginal Literacy and Language. Chapter 3 in *Aboriginal Education: Fulfilling the Promise*. UBC Press, Vancouver.

Alternative assessment has come about as a result of views that mainstream assessment puts Aboriginal Australians at a disadvantage. While initially alternative assessment focussed on assessments undertaken for program acceptance and grading, it has extended to deadline and attendance requirements.

Much of the debate around the merits of alternative assessment has been fundamentally centred on the issue of whether or not Aboriginals learn in different ways. Aboriginal members in the debate have been very conscious of having the assessment of applicants be different, but not less rigorous. One of the major problems identified with alternative assessment is that it is viewed by some Australian employers or members of the general population as favouritism, or as a watering down of the standards.³⁶ Another problem has been that some traditional education is not easily measured through alternative assessment.

Stakeholders in Canada did not all believe that using alternative entry criteria was successful. One interviewee made the point that, especially for mature students, using alternative entry criteria leads to students feeling ill-prepared and overwhelmed.

³⁶ Christiansen, Peter and Ian Lilley. 1997. *The Road Forward? Alternative Assessment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students at the Tertiary Level*. Australian Government Publishing Service.

SECTION C: BEST PRACTICES: LESSONS AND SHORTCOMINGS

BEST PRACTICES: LESSONS LEARNED

Through a study of the interviews undertaken and the literature reviewed, key themes emerged in identifying best practices that increase Aboriginal participation rates. The following sections will outline many of the factors in success and the problems encountered.

There is no single strategy that has surmounted all barriers for all students. While there exists a broad range of initiatives and programs, successes in improving Aboriginal participation rates have been hard-won and have been the result of seeing Aboriginal students or would-be students within the total context of their culture and social situations. Writing of low Aboriginal education rates in general, Verna Kirkness states,

From an institutional perspective, the problem has been typically defined in terms of low achievement, high attrition, poor retention, weak persistence, etc., thus placing the onus for adjustment on the student. From the perspective of the Indian student, however, the problem is often cast in more human terms, with an emphasis on the need for a higher educational system that respects them for who they are, that is relevant to their view of the world, that offers reciprocity in their relationships with others, and that helps them exercise responsibility over their own lives.³⁷

The successful initiatives and programs described in this section are a sample of efforts that have met the challenges of allowing Aboriginal people to access programs that are empowering. Without such programs, the Aboriginal community will not be able to achieve its goals in the postsecondary education system.

Factors in Success

Success of Community Delivery

Community delivery has been widely successful in bridging the social, cultural, and financial gaps that separate many Aboriginals from postsecondary education in Canada.

Community delivery has also been significantly instrumental in addressing concerns about availability of Aboriginal education professionals. By using community delivery as a means to reach out to Aboriginal communities, especially in the North, the teacher education programs have led Aboriginal people to make more significant gains in the area of teacher education than in all other postsecondary areas. As an example of the degree of success of community-delivery programs, the NORTEP program, offered through the University of Saskatchewan, has had a remarkable record of Aboriginal attendance and completion rates. Since NORTEP began,

- The program has offered over 571 university credit classes with on-site instructors in La Ronge to students drawn from 35 communities across the North.
- The program has graduated 192 northerners as teachers, most of them of Aboriginal ancestry.

³⁷ Kirkness, Verna J. and Ray Barnhardt. 1991. First Nations and Higher Education: The Four R's- Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity, Responsibility. *Journal of American Indian Education*, Vol. 30, no.3 (May).

- Over 80% of these graduates are currently employed as teachers or other educational professionals, nearly all of them in the North.
- The percentage of Indian and Métis teachers in Northern Lights School Division has increased from 3% to 25%.
- Teacher turnover in Northern Lights School Division has declined from 75% to 20%, meaning more stability and continuity in school programs.
- Northern Band schools, which had no teachers of Aboriginal ancestry on staff in the mid-70s, now employ over 70 NORTEP graduates, and the Île-à-la-Crosse and Creighton school divisions employ another 9.

SUNTEP records that it has had approximately 500 graduates since 1980; some staff are former graduates of the program.³⁸ In stakeholder interviews, this program was widely held up as an example of a program that had excellent access for Aboriginal students. This was due in part to the fact that SUNTEP, unlike most other teacher education programs, offers direct financial support for participants through its covering of tuition costs.

McGill University has served the majority of its Aboriginal students through distance learning. It offers several programs, including the Certificate in First Nations and Inuit Education, which, according to interviews, has had over 380 graduates.

Teacher education programs have been used in the United States as well as Canada. The X-CED program at the University of Alaska has used many of the models of the Canadian teacher education programs to offer remote and rural education programs. The X-CED program has brought an end to many of the problems that have plagued Aboriginal education in that state. The key factors that have been identified as contributing to the program's success are Aboriginal faculty based in their communities and Aboriginal input into the design and maintenance of the program.

Success of Access Programs

Quite frankly, in my estimation, I don't think there's anything that comes close to the Access programs across Canada. There's nobody else who coordinates funding and supports to respond to the needs of the students as well as them.

- An Aboriginal education stakeholder, in interview

A review of the Access programs in Manitoba by KPMG revealed that the programs have had a high level of success in improving Aboriginal participation in Manitoba. Similarly, the 1987 Salasan Report of the federal government gave a resounding affirmation for the continuation of the programs. Through the Access programs, Manitoba has been able to raise enrolment and completion rates significantly for Aboriginals. A review of the Access programs found that Manitoba, with only 10% of Canada's Aboriginal population, had the second highest number of Aboriginal university completions after Ontario.³⁹

³⁸ www.gdins.org/, Gabriel Dumont Web site, March 2002.

³⁹ Alcorn, William J. and J. Michael Campbell. 1997. *Access Programs: An Integrated Support System for Non-Traditional Students at the University of Manitoba*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba.

Stakeholders interviewed from Manitoba and elsewhere were very supportive of the Access programs and the Aboriginal recruiting efforts that have been made in northern Manitoba communities.

Prior to the development of the health care Access program, the Special Premedical Studies Program (SPSP) at the University of Manitoba, only one physician of Aboriginal ancestry was known to have graduated from the University of Manitoba. In 1987, the first three Aboriginal physicians graduated in medicine from the program. According to a report on the SPSP, the total success rate for the program was 43% in 1992.⁴⁰

In the same report of the SPSP, interviews were undertaken with graduates of the program. The factors that were said to have contributed to their success in the program were the funding of courses, books, and living expenses. Additionally, the opportunity to take an extra year to finish courses, the overall supportive environment and the introduction to medicine before medical school contributed to success. Since this study was undertaken, funding has been drastically cut for the program.

In another report of the SPSP and the University of Manitoba's Health Faculties, Aboriginal graduates were given a questionnaire for feedback on their experience. Respondents felt that they were overall less prepared than their non-Aboriginal counterparts and only 12–20% (depending on the course) felt that they were academically strong upon entrance to the university. Thanks to the support they received in the Access program, this anxiety diminished throughout the course of their studies.⁴¹ Most of the students felt that the tutors and counsellors have had a positive effect on their program.

The Access programs in Manitoba have served as models for successful programs elsewhere such as the engineering, nursing, and education programs at Lakehead University. ENGAP, which has graduated approximately 35 Aboriginal engineers, has been a model for the Native Access Program to Engineering at Lakehead. The Hikel Report (1994) on the Access programs found that between 1985 and 1994 the Access program had admitted 2,400 students, with an overall graduation rate of 41.8%.⁴²

The Native Access to Engineering Program at Concordia University has also been successful and has used science camps, conferences, outreaches, and a newsletter aimed at grade 7 and 8 classes to reach Aboriginal students in the elementary and secondary levels. All of the strategies in use by the program are founded on combining Aboriginal traditions and technology with Western scientific principles, such as the structural engineering of an igloo.

Success of First Nations Partnership Program

In the First Nations Partnership Program, coordinated through the University of Victoria, student retention and successful program completion across the seven partnership programs is twice the national average for Aboriginal postsecondary training. More importantly, over 95% of program graduates remain in their own communities. To date, with three programs just completed in 1999, 65% of program graduates have created new programs for children and

⁴⁰ Krause, R.G. and M.C.C. Stephens. 1992. Preparing Aboriginal Students for Medical School: Manitoba Program Increases Equality of Opportunity. *Canadian Family Physician*, Vol. 38 (May).

⁴¹ Wiebe, Joann, Judy Sinclair, Sheila Nychuk, and M.C.C. Stephens. Assessing Aboriginal Graduates' Perceptions for Academic Success in Health Faculties. *Arctic Medical Research*, Vol. 53: Suppl. 2, pp. 152–56.

⁴² Alcorn, William and Benjamin Levin. 1998. *Post-Secondary Education for Indigenous Populations*. Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.

youth, 13% have assumed staff positions in existing programs in their communities, and 11% are continuing with educational studies.

Success of Capilano College and Squamish Nation Partnership

The Squamish Nation of British Columbia and Capilano College of North Vancouver created a successful partnership in which the Squamish Nation initiated a transition program for Aboriginal students. Squamish Nation stakeholders contributed to the steering committee, and both the college and the Nation were actively involved in developing the structure and content of the transition program.

The success of the program has been attributed to the following factors, among others:⁴³

- There was Aboriginal control of the education.
- The program was based in the Aboriginal community.
- Actual student achievement levels determined program placement.
- The college carefully monitored student progress.
- Student performance determined funding.
- The curriculum design included Aboriginal participation.
- Support services were proactive.

Tribal Colleges

The impact of tribal colleges is seen in successful transferees, in admission into the workforce, and in the pride and hope these colleges have generated in American Native people.

Stakeholders interviewed commented on the success of tribal colleges in strengthening their local communities, cultures, and languages. One stakeholder commented that the success of the tribal college movement in the United States had, however, prevented the development of a secondary level of programs and institutions, such as affiliated institutions in Canada.

ABSTUDY and Australian policies

ABSTUDY and similar programs have been regarded by successive Commonwealth Parliamentary Committees, the Commonwealth Department of Education and its successors, and independent reviewers as successful programs that have been a major factor in encouraging and enabling Indigenous Australian students to access and participate longer in education.

Australia has also used alternative entry criteria to a large degree to improve Aboriginal enrolment rates. In the study of Indigenous performance in Western Australia, it was found that 78% of the 268 Indigenous students analysed were accepted to university through alternative entry criteria; 48% had only year 10 education or less.⁴⁴

⁴³ Wright, Dennis A. 1998. Preparing First Nations Students for College: The Experience of the Squamish Nation of British Columbia. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, Vol. 22, no. 1.

⁴⁴ Walker, Roz. 2000. *Indigenous Performance in Western Australia Universities: Reframing Retention and Success*. Curtin University of Technology.

The Cadigal program at the University of Sydney in Australia improved access to programs that students would not have been able to enter otherwise. The program has allowed students to continue when they may have otherwise been discouraged and withdrawn from their course of study. A recent article pointed to the program's use of a reduced course load for the first few years and the existence of support and other Aboriginal students as factors in the program's success.⁴⁵

Successful Programs at UBC

The Native Law program at the University of British Columbia has graduated almost as many Aboriginal law graduates as all other institutions in Canada combined. Affirmative action mechanisms and the support of the First Nations House of Learning have helped Native students in both NITEP and the Native Law Program. The success of the NITEP, Native Law Program, and the Ts`kel graduate program has been attributed to direct involvement of Aboriginal people in the design and development of the programs, support for students and their family and friends through the First Nations House of Learning, and ongoing assessment of the programs.

Success of Aboriginal-Controlled Education

Eber Hampton has argued persuasively that while Aboriginals have been consistently pressured in recent history to attend postsecondary institutions, it is indicative of a general feeling of exclusion that they largely do not.⁴⁶ He argues that this feeling of exclusion comes from the assimilationist focus of postsecondary education institutions. The key to solving this problem is the establishment of more areas of Aboriginal educational control, including Aboriginal-controlled institutions.

When in 1972 the Indian Rights Organization the National Indian Brotherhood issued its paper *Indian Control of Indian Education* as a response to the 1969 federal White Paper, the group was outlining its main principals for reform in Aboriginal education. According to the report, one of the necessary bedrocks of future reform was the policy of local control of education.

While Aboriginal people have begun to exercise a degree of control of postsecondary education, Aboriginal people have had less control over education at the postsecondary level than at any other level. Almost all Aboriginal education dollars are spent on universities and programs that are not under Aboriginal control. Many of the interviews conducted and much of the literature reviewed for this study demonstrate that whenever Aboriginals are given control of their own programs or institutions, there have been higher rates of success in Aboriginal enrolment and graduation. As an example, the University of Regina has an Aboriginal enrolment rate of 15%, in a province where overall Aboriginal people make up 14% of the population. This equal enrolment is due to the University of Regina's association with the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College, an Aboriginal-controlled university college.⁴⁷

Based on the success of SIFC, the government of Manitoba is considering the development of a university college for Aboriginal people in northern communities.

⁴⁵ Farrington, Sally, Kristie Daniel DiGregorio, and Susan Page. 1999. "The Things That Matter: Understanding the Factors that Affect the Participation and Retention of Indigenous Students in the Cadigal Program at the Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Sydney." Paper for 1999 Annual Conference of the Australian Association for Research in Education.

⁴⁶ Hampton, Eber. 2000. First Nations Controlled University Education in Canada. Chapter 12 in *Aboriginal Education: Fulfilling the Promise*. Vancouver: UBC Press, pp 208–221.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

Success of Aboriginal Institutions

The literature reviewed and interviews conducted for this report contained nothing but the strongest support for the existing Aboriginal institutions. Some of the factors that were said to have contributed to the success at attracting and retaining Aboriginal students at these institutions was the high level of Aboriginal staff (the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College has approximately 50% Aboriginal faculty) and the supportive atmosphere of other Aboriginal students. As well, the Gabriel Dumont Institute of Métis Studies (GDI) was praised in interviews as having instilled a stronger sense of pride in Métis nationhood in its students.

Aboriginal control has successfully extended to the development of curriculum and the hiring of staff at mainstream postsecondary institutions. For example, the successful development of a strong Aboriginal voice in the development of curriculum and Aboriginal studies at the University of Northern British Columbia has included establishing the Nisga'a Protocol Agreement with UNBC. This gives the Nisga'a control over hiring related to Aboriginal programs and over standards in conjunction with the university. Criteria for development of Aboriginal curriculum require staff to have a bachelor's or master's degree and to be a "current practitioner of the culture."⁴⁸ The UNBC Office of First Nations Programming has been very successful in developing curriculum on Aboriginal languages, cultures, and contemporary issues.

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) had recommended the development of an Aboriginal People's International University, which would further facilitate Aboriginal control of education at the level of an independent institution. RCAP recognized that this development would be a long-term goal, but it highlighted the centrality of Aboriginal control of education.

The Māori culture of New Zealand has seen a transformation largely as a result of Māori parents seeking to offer alternative education to their children. This facilitated the development of Whare Waananga (postsecondary sites) that have fostered the Māori culture. The Māori philosophy of praxis has led to a strong belief in unlearning the colonial culture and imparting ideas of resistance and cultural pride.⁴⁹

Best practices for Aboriginal postsecondary enrolment and retention strategies depend upon Aboriginals exerting control over their own education. A fundamental shift in Aboriginal participation in the postsecondary system would depend on the initiation of increased Aboriginal control at the institutional level.

Success in Student Support

Student support has been key to improving Aboriginal performance and morale at the postsecondary level. The difference that student support makes is not quantifiable, however, and often receives little of the analysis or acclaim garnered by specific programs or initiatives.

Student support has been seen to have a positive effect on student retention. Often, this support can take the form of something as seemingly small as having a staff member speak

⁴⁸ Ewans, Mike, James McDonald, and Deanna Nyce. 1999. Acting Across Boundaries in Aboriginal Curriculum Development: Examples from Northern British Columbia. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, Vol. 23, no. 2.

⁴⁹ Smith, Graham Hingangaroa. 2000. Maori Education: Revolution and Transformative Action. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, Vol. 24, no. 1.

individually to new students during orientation, to ensure that students have access to a familiar person if they have questions or concerns.

The University of British Columbia's First Nations House of Learning was often cited as a model of extensive Aboriginal student support. The Longhouse and the dedicated staff have ensured that students have had access to a range of supports that are absent at other universities. All of the House of Learning's initiatives are run by the four "R"s: Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity, and Responsibility.

UBC's Longhouse is a good model for an Aboriginal centre. It is a place to simply be who you are on campus.

- Stakeholder from New Zealand

McGill University's First People's House has also been seen as very helpful for Aboriginal students, and stakeholders in interview have lauded the support offered at the University of Toronto and Concordia. Similarly, a Native Centre was created at Concordia University, which has the highest population of Aboriginal students in Quebec. The Native Centre was praised by one stakeholder as a long-overdue support that has assisted in enrolment and retention.

Postsecondary institutions also attempt to retain students through creative support efforts. The Institute of Indigenous Government has smaller classes, which means that instructors are able to spend more time with each student. The Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies has run successful addictions workshops during lunch hours. They also try to include spouses in student support activities. The Institute of Indigenous Government hires students as mentors and tutors so that much of their budget goes back to the student. To combat expenses and loneliness, one university stakeholder said that their urban institution had installed a free phone for long-distance calls, after Aboriginal students from remote Northern communities had accrued massive expenses calling family and friends.

Involving alumni is also seen as important. One stakeholder interviewed said that at their university, the alumni at a reunion created an emergency bursary for Aboriginals having problems with their finances.

Support has also been effective in educating staff and faculty on Aboriginal culture. Guides like the *First Nations and Métis Students: a Faculty Guide*, created through a partnership of the University of Regina, SIFC, and the Gabriel Dumont Institute, offer information related to Aboriginal culture that allows for increased cultural sensitivity in the classroom. This guide suggests that "Teachers should adopt humility as a teaching style," and become more open-minded and accepting of First Nations and Métis diversity.⁵⁰

Support from institutions in Australia for the unique circumstances of Aboriginal students has led to many alternative assessment arrangements. Faculty at the University of Southern Australia have allowed for interruptions in study, allowing up to eight years for the completion of a three-year degree. Batchelor College allows for leaves of absence for Aboriginal students, as well as alternative assessment models for awarding students credit. Both of these practices have been seen to be part of the country's best practices for improving Aboriginal success.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Anaquod, Gaylene, et al. *First Nations and Metis Students: A Faculty Guide*. University of Regina, Saskatchewan Indian Federated College, Teaching Development Centre, Gabriel Dumont Institute.

⁵¹ Lampert, Jo and Ian Lilley. *Indigenous Australian Perspectives at the University of Queensland*, Vols. 1 and 2. The University of Queensland.

Several institutions have demonstrated unique and creative strategies for recruitment: one stakeholder said that their institution had staff go to Aboriginal community events like feasts, funerals, and meetings, to demonstrate that they were not an “ivory tower.”

Success of Work Study Programs

Many stakeholders in Canada claimed that there needed to be more work study programs offered to postsecondary students and that Aboriginal students who would not normally be eligible for them, such as those who had received band funding, should be allowed access. When in place, these programs have been felt to have a beneficial effect on the personal debt-load of Aboriginal students.

This type of program has been successful in the United States, where at tribal colleges like the Little Big Horn College, students are able to work to pay off debt to the college through the Financial Debt program.

According to an interview undertaken, the staff at Malaspina University College petitioned the Student Services Branch of the British Columbia government to allow Aboriginal students to do work study who would not otherwise have been eligible. They were successful in May 2000. One interviewee commented

Work study should be made available to all Aboriginal students, even those with band funding.

Successful Curriculum Development

A main element that affects both interest in enrolment and retention is the fostering of curriculum and an environment that emphasizes Aboriginal identity. One of the goals of Aboriginal education has always been Aboriginal curriculum development.

The First Nations House of Learning at the University of British Columbia has identified the creation of Aboriginal curriculum and research as its next goal.⁵²

The University of Northern BC has an Office of First Nations Programming, which has been successful in developing curriculum that has met the needs of the Aboriginal community. For example, it developed Métis studies programs through a strategy of allowing a partnership between Aboriginal communities and the academic structure of the university. The Aboriginal community has fostered ownership and control of the subject matter of all courses developed through the Office of First Nations Programming. The key to the institution’s successful curricular development has been its facilitation of a collaborative community partnership. This partnership has seen curriculum developed through a joint effort by the Aboriginal communities and the academic institution. For example, in the development of the university’s successful Métis studies programs, a committee was formed with Elders, university personnel, and leaders and experts in the Métis community. As a result of this collaboration, including a broad range of Métis organizations on the curriculum committee, many of the details of the programs spread through word of mouth throughout Métis and Aboriginal communities, and most of the enrolment

⁵² Gardner, Ethel. 2000. First Nations House of Learning: A Continuity of Transformation. Chapter 11 in *Aboriginal Education: Fulfilling the Promise*. UBC Press, Vancouver, pp. 190–207.

has been from the community.⁵³ UNBC requires that all its community-developed curriculum be transferable to other universities, and therefore the courses must meet the academic standards of its mainstream curriculum.

One of the stakeholders interviewed felt that a good example of cultural curriculum development was at Little Big Horn College in Montana, a tribal college with a requirement of proficiency in the Crow language. Students at the college have been asked to research and learn protocols for cultural ceremonies and traditions. When the project is completed, the college hosts a ceremony where it is reintroduced to the community.

In Australia, the Remote Area Teacher Education (RATE) program, in using culturally appropriate pedagogy and curriculum, aims to reduce the barriers between schools and communities by creating a dialogue between tutors, schools, and communities. It has sought more creative solutions for the design of curriculum.

The development of Aboriginal curriculum development has a positive effect on the level of support and enrolment afforded by Aboriginal communities.

⁵³ Ewans, Mike, James McDonald, and Deanna Nyce. 1999. Acting Across Boundaries in Aboriginal Curriculum Development: Examples from Northern British Columbia. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, Vol. 23, no. 2.

WHAT HASN'T WORKED, OR PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED

As demonstrated, the gradually increasing numbers of Aboriginal students enrolled in and completing postsecondary education is the result of many strategies, programs, and initiatives. Each of these components must take into account the most fundamental problem with enrolment and retention of Aboriginal populations: Aboriginal people are among the most economically disadvantaged group in Canada. Unless the social and economic conditions change for Aboriginals, problems of enrolment and retention will persist.

While the following sections look at some of the problems or barriers to success that certain programs, initiatives, or strategies have encountered, the most fundamental factor in limiting the success of these efforts has been the inability to place the initiatives within broader social contexts.

This has largely been seen as a problem of context and knowledge and demonstrates the first imperative in the development of financial or social strategies to improve the Aboriginal participation: any work to be done in the future to improve the enrolment and success rates of Aboriginal people at the postsecondary level first and foremost must be done in consultation with, and in partnership with, Aboriginal people.

Lack of Specific Social Initiatives

Academic initiatives have not consistently isolated the social and demographic factors that have contributed to the limiting of Aboriginal education in Canada. General indications have been provided by the statistics, literature, and interviews collected for this report, but there is little in the way of specific research or broad initiatives to look at defining demographic factors that affect Aboriginal enrolment and retention rates.

Gender in Aboriginal Postsecondary Education

To date, there has been no widespread research or efforts to isolate the particular issues that are unique to the experiences of Aboriginal men or women, including Aboriginal women with children, within the postsecondary area. Internationally, Aboriginal women make up the majority of Aboriginal students. Some of the stakeholders interviewed stated female students represent as high as 80% of the total Aboriginal program student body. Women make up a disproportionately large percentage of Aboriginal students and have problems of funding and support that are distinct. Female Aboriginal students often face higher costs than other students and have the burden of studies combined with raising families. Still there are few formal strategies to provide particular supports that could be put into place across institutions or at the provincial/federal levels, financial or otherwise.

Many of the interviews mentioned the lack of support for Aboriginal women, especially for Aboriginal single mothers, in the postsecondary education system.

The financial burden of postsecondary education on Aboriginal women, especially women with families, as well as the different social supports needed for Aboriginal women, should be analyzed and factored into any effort to help enrolment and retention.

Other research may be undertaken to determine a strategy for increasing the level of male participation at the postsecondary level. In Australian universities the attrition rate is higher among male Indigenous students. For example, in the case study of Indigenous Australian students at Australian universities, it was determined that the attrition rate was highest among males living alone who had not attended any education the year before enrolling in their course.⁵⁴ No reasons were given to explain this finding.

Mature Aboriginal Students

Aboriginal students are, on average, older than their non-Aboriginal counterparts. This has an effect on the resources that they require and on how they study generally.

Many of the stakeholder interviews noted that the age of students of Aboriginal descent was higher on average than for non-Aboriginals. In a study of Western Australia, a review of the Indigenous student population found that 75% of Indigenous university students were twenty-five years old or older, compared with mainstream students who were mostly under twenty-five. Many of the mature students there, as in Canada, had not completed secondary studies.

While mature students often have the life skills absent from recent high school graduates, they may lack the basic academic skills. BUNTEP, with a high mature student population, has had to put a basic skills component in place as many mature students did not have the required skills to be successful in the program. The basic skills component is a twelve-week course designed to prepare students for university.

Further research and support to improve enrolment and retention rates for Aboriginal people should factor in the high rate of mature and returning students and the lack of basic skills of returning/mature students.

Lack of Research and Initiatives for Métis

Despite the efforts of initiatives like the Gabriel Dumont Institute, there exists very little research on the performance and needs of the Métis people in Canada. As they are generally not Registered or Status Indians in Canada, they often fall through the cracks of the postsecondary system as they do not have access to band funding.

The Manitoba Métis Federation has set up the Louis Riel Scholarship for Métis students, and other initiatives exist, but more research and initiatives are required for Métis students.

The Métis people need further financial support for postsecondary education, as they typically do not qualify for band funding.

Lack of Research and Support for the Development of Partnerships of Funding from Private Sector

While the government has traditionally offered the majority of support for Aboriginal education, there is an increased push to develop links and partnerships with the private sector. This would include promoting private donations to Aboriginal institutions, the further development of

⁵⁴ Walker, Roz. 2000. *Indigenous Performance in Western Australia Universities: Reframing Retention and Success*. Curtin University of Technology.

Aboriginal scholarships and bursaries, and developing links with industry and employers to strengthen training and graduate employment.

Day-care, Housing, Transportation, and Relocation Issues

Tuition and books are often not the barrier. The barrier is expenses for daycare, transportation, housing, food, and family expenses.

Pay for simple bus passes, top up for day-care beyond provincial subsidies. The cost of textbooks has gone through the roof, and students tend to beg, borrow, and photocopy texts.

- From stakeholder interviews

While much of the literature reviewed has emphasized the poverty and lack of financial support that characterize the Aboriginal experience in relation to postsecondary education, there is little literature devoted to the specific financial problems of day-care, housing, and relocation costs for Aboriginal postsecondary students. Housing and relocation costs were often central problems identified in the interviews undertaken for this report. While many of the financial allowances provided at the level of loans, grants, or bursaries are calculated to take into effect the costs of housing and of dependants, these are often underestimated and do not take into account the specific expenses of Aboriginals.

The Aboriginal student is still in the world of survival and not able to give full energy to learning.

- From a stakeholder interview

Aboriginal students are often leaving financial support networks and support networks of care to attend universities and colleges that do not offer the same standard of support. Most of the programs that are offered that are specific to Aboriginal learners at the postsecondary level, other than those programs offered through community delivery, are in urban centres that have higher costs of living. An extreme but indicative example is Vancouver. One of the foremost centres of innovative programs and support for Aboriginal students is the University of British Columbia, located in one of the most costly suburbs of, arguably, the most costly city in Canada. Stakeholder interviews of respondents in larger urban centres mentioned that with low vacancy rates and high rents, the monthly band funding for Aboriginal students often covers only accommodation.

While some support systems developed by postsecondary institutions provide for day-care, such as the Longhouse at the University of British Columbia, more support for day-care would be beneficial. Aboriginal single mothers are not able to access the day-care services they need, which places a huge burden on a growing student demographic group. One stakeholder said that the staff at the Native Centre on the university campus often ends up suddenly babysitting while parents are in class. They mentioned also that the local city day-care for Aboriginal children has a three-year waiting list.

Any strategy or initiative that exists to improve the enrolment and retention rates of Aboriginal people at the postsecondary level must factor in the addition expenses and burdens that are imposed on Aboriginals through relocation to expensive, urban communities where they typically lack the traditional financial supports of family and friends.

Problems of Funding

Do all Aboriginal students get a free university education? That myth is rampant, but simply not true. "For every 100 that want to go, only 50 get funding," explains Randy Hermann, director of the ACCESS Program at the University of Manitoba.

Also, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada provides funding only for eligible Status First Nations and Inuit students to cover tuition, books, travel expenses, and a living stipend. "In most universities the stipend is barely enough to live on," says Mr. Hermann.

- Anne Mullens⁵⁵

Aboriginal Concerns with the PSE Program

The number of students supported by the PSE program has increased from about 3,600 in 1977–78 to approximately 27,500 in 1999–2000. As of 2000–01, regional core budgets of the program totaled \$293 million. The Assembly of First Nations estimates that approximately 8,475 Aboriginal applicants were not able to access funding for postsecondary education in 2000–01.⁵⁶

The Assembly of First Nations has been lobbying to have the level of funding increased for Aboriginals, citing proportionally faster growing Aboriginal populations, increasing numbers of Aboriginal students interested in postsecondary education, and increasing tuition and living costs. Funding has not been increased since 1994, when \$20 million was added. An examination by the Assembly of First Nations of the estimated average cost per student per academic year compared to the national amount allocated per First Nations student shows that the federal government provides only enough funding to cover 48% of the costs per student per academic year.

Limitations of Federal Funding

More First Nations students are applying for student loans and then getting into trouble. They are not able to pay them back and not able to get back into training.

- From a stakeholder interview

Although the federal government has been the most important source of financial assistance for Aboriginal students, it does not meet the needs of all Aboriginal people seeking postsecondary education. For Métis and Aboriginal people without strong ties to their communities of origin, federal funding is limited. Most must take out student loans or hope that they might be lucky enough to be given a bursary or scholarship.

The funding of Aboriginal education through the PSSSP program has limitations that impact on the fair and equitable distribution of education through Aboriginal communities.

Federal funding through bands is not available to non-Status Indians or Métis, except in the Northwest Territories and, to a limited extent, Yukon. The Northwest Territories had funded

⁵⁵Mullens, Anne. 2001. Why Aboriginal Students Aren't Taking Science. *University Affairs*. Ottawa: Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, 11 (November).

⁵⁶ Assembly of First Nations Web site, March 2002. <http://www.afn.ca>.

university education for all residents, including Aboriginal, Métis, and Inuit, while Yukon provides lower subsidies. Outside of the territories, federal funding through bands is not available for non-Status, which means that non-Status Aboriginals must seek other sources. This is often done through accessing loans through Canada Student Loans.

While Status Indians are theoretically eligible for band funding of their postsecondary education, many do not receive it. Aboriginal people are increasingly vocal about the limited resources of the PSSSP transfers, which necessitate a limited number of interested Aboriginal people being able to access band funds.

Limited Band funding

The limited nature of band funding has meant that often band-funded students have an uneasy relationship with their band funding. Band funding can be cut off for students who fail or who do not continue directly through their programs without gaps. Some bands have made requirements such as students having to take a minimum of five courses per term, some making hours-per-week requirements, either of which can be difficult for students, especially in the beginning of programs. Similarly, band funding may not come through for some students who have already relocated for education, or who have expected and been told that they will be eligible for funding.

Band funding can also be late in coming. Several interviews related the fact that students frequently get into trouble because their band funding is submitted late. This causes undue stress and problems at the beginning of a program, when students are often already dealing with the stress of being new to the institution. One comment from the stakeholder interviews is as follows:

For Native people who do not have much contact with their bands, there needs to be an alternative to going to the band to ask for funding. This is a big one because most of the Native people going to university are urban.

Band funding is extremely vague and discretionary.

Likewise, since bands control the distribution of the educational funds, students often are allocated funds based on their relationship with the band members. Stakeholder interviews brought up the issues of nepotism and unfairness in allocation of band funding. Issues of transparency and favouritism in allocation of PSSSP funds ran through much of the literature and stakeholder interviews. Often Aboriginal people feel they must compete with other members of their band for funding. DIAND has determined that these issues can best be resolved at the local level and that guidelines can be developed based on local circumstances. In the current situation, even for those Aboriginals who initially qualify and receive band funding, band funding is often not ensured for the duration of a course of study. The Assembly of First Nations has recommended that Aboriginal First Nations develop local performance criteria for students applying for band funding and that national tracking take place.

Similarly, the PSSSP does not allow for one-year programs, trades training, computer studies, and upgrading. There are also PSSSP restrictions on choice of institutions and age of student.

Aboriginal students would benefit from funding that would allow them to finish programs of study even after their band funding has been discontinued. Many students are forced to quit programs mid-way through because their band funding is cut off.

One stakeholder interview suggested that DIAND reinstate its graduation bonuses, which had been as high as \$3,500 per graduating student.

Re-instated Status Indians

In Canada, Bill C-31 (1985) was introduced to remove discriminatory sections of the Indian Act. This bill allowed many previously unregistered people to become registered Status Indians. People given status through Bill C-31 often do not have strong ties to their tribal bands; as a consequence, though theoretically entitled to band funding, they are seldom selected to receive the limited PSSSP funds through their bands.

Métis support

Throughout the project, the topic of a lack of Métis funding was constantly raised. Many people believe that the Métis have fallen through the cracks of the funding system, since they are not eligible for band funding.

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples had made the following recommendation in 1997, which is still valid today:⁵⁷

A scholarship fund be established for Métis and other Aboriginal students who do not have access to financial support for postsecondary education under present policies, with lead financial support provided by federal and provincial governments and additional contributions from corporate and individual donors.

Aboriginals who do not get band funding also often have the added problem of bad credit, in some cases, which is common of people in lower income groups. This makes it sometimes more difficult to get loans for education.

Federal efforts must take into account the limitations of funding that all Aboriginals face, especially those who are unable to access federal funding through band funding. This is especially vital for Métis people.

Problems with Funding at Aboriginal Institutions

Common to many of the stakeholder interviews was the complaint that Aboriginal institutions are underfunded. One stakeholder said that funding at his institution had been flat for a decade. Another said that often Aboriginal institutions are forced to go to bands to seek additional funding.

SIFC is the only Aboriginal institution recognized by the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC) as offering university-level education. According to stakeholders, it is also the most poorly funded of that group, a fact that SIFC has stated publicly many times. One stakeholder said:

⁵⁷ Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 3.5.22.

With the present policies, SIFC or anything like it would never get going today.

Many stakeholders in interviews stated that they would like to see the federal government directly fund Aboriginal programs and institutions. An example of one comment on the subject from the stakeholder interviews is the following:

The federal government has to recognize that it has a real role to play in Aboriginal postsecondary education. The federal government says it does not want to encroach on provincial turf. This is a serious problem.

Many Aboriginal institutions receive no direct provincial funding. Many of these institutions are looking to create funding links with provincial governments. Stakeholders at smaller Aboriginal institutions have said they have waiting lists and have to turn people away.

Problems of funding have largely impacted faculty at tribal colleges in the United States. Faculty problems usually fall into three areas: finding and keeping science and math instructors; high turnover of staff due to cultural adjustments related to living and working on reservations; salaries that remain low even though student populations grow. Underfunding impacts recruiting, hiring, and retaining faculty, administrators, and support staff. There is a high turnover of faculty as many find the isolation and cultural difference of the reservation communities to be difficult. The fact that tribal colleges cannot afford to pay high faculty wages has been seen as another disincentive for staying on at the colleges.

Problems with Access

While external reviews of the Access programs have confirmed their usefulness and success, the Access programs have been the victim of decreased funding since government cutbacks in the 1990s. The funding formula for Access programs was originally 60% federal, as laid out in the 1974 General Development Agreement, the 1976 Northlands Agreement, and the 1982 Northern Development Agreement. When the NDA expired in 1990, the federal government off-loaded the funding to the Manitoba government, which has since had to carry the full weight of funding.⁵⁸ Provincial funding has also fluctuated.

Since the Access programs at the University of Manitoba cannot offer student funding, students are left to develop their own support through such avenues as band funding, the Manitoba Métis Federation, or Canada Student Loans.

The elimination of federal funding from the program has meant that the type of student that has been accepted into the program has also changed since the program's inception. For example, single parents cannot survive on the current Access funding provided, so their numbers have decreased over time. Similarly, as the federal funding decreased in the 1990s the number of students with band funding increased and the number of Métis students decreased. The program has also had progressively more qualified entrants, who require less academic and personal support, which has weakened the primary goal of helping to serve the disadvantaged.⁵⁹ Similarly, since the cutting of federal support, only the most needy students are able to access financial support directly through the Access programs.

⁵⁸ Alcorn, William J. and J. Michael Campbell. 1997. *Access Programs: An Integrated Support System for Non-Traditional Students at the University of Manitoba*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba.

⁵⁹ Hikel, R.S. 1994. *A Review of the Access Program: Policy Directions for the Future*. Department of Education and Training, Manitoba.

Shortcomings in Student Support

It has been argued throughout the study, in the literature reviewed and in the interviews undertaken, that more financial resources are needed to foster support for Aboriginals in the postsecondary system. Of studies done on Canadian Aboriginal and Native American students within the postsecondary sphere, the main reasons given for lack of success are more often based around the need for personal and academic support networks.⁶⁰

While financial issues play a strong role in blocking the full representative participation of Aboriginals at the postsecondary education level, support networks for students in postsecondary institutions are key to fostering higher rates of success.

While many of these supports are in place at many of the larger or more innovative institutions, there must continue to be efforts to extend and promote these supports and to be more proactive in supplying this support where it is available. Aboriginals often feel alone and socially isolated and may not seek the support that is available unless that support is offered in a progressive and accessible manner. Stakeholders often spoke of the need to support Aboriginal students' participation in the world, including through support of family involvement.

Many of the supports are invisible to those who need them most. The Assembly of First Nations, among others, has expressed the need for more visible support systems at all levels. This may require more promotion of available programs and initiatives in Aboriginal communities or more accessible means of accessing support services. One stakeholder said in interview that in their tracking of Aboriginal students, the ones who withdraw from studies are those who do not seek support services at all.

Support services are especially necessary when students do not have the basic literacy or numeracy skills required for their courses. Often, mature students who have been out of the education system for a period of time do not have the necessary skills or require support to brush up on their skills.

Support should also include the special health needs of Aboriginal people. Stakeholders have said that problems of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and other health concerns need to be addressed in order to allow Aboriginals full access to education.

Under-funding exacerbates these shortcomings. A dean of an Aboriginal institution interviewed for this report complained of under-funding allowing only two counsellors for 450 Aboriginal students.

Support also means that initiatives must be funded to educate non-Aboriginals about Aboriginal culture. This includes students, faculty, and support staff. One interviewee said,

[Non-Aboriginals] are allowed to be ignorant of Aboriginal people. Thus we exercise racism unconsciously.

⁶⁰ See, for example, Krumm, Bernita L. 1995. *Tribal Colleges: A Study of Development, Mission and Leadership*. Information Analyses.

Shortcomings in Support for the Transition from Secondary School

One of the issues that may affect Aboriginal students in the postsecondary system is the transition in support levels from secondary to postsecondary levels. Stakeholders interviewed spoke of the formal and impersonal atmosphere of large universities being intimidating for students used to close-knit communities with more one-on-one time with teachers.

It has been argued that the most basic key to increasing the postsecondary enrolment and retention rate of future generations of Aboriginal people is to better preparing students at the secondary level. If students are unprepared for the challenges of university or college, they will balk at enrolling. In BC 38% of Aboriginal students were found to finish high school, compared with 77% of non-Aboriginal students. These findings were presented in a report to the BC Human Rights Commission, which highlighted reasons for this disparity. The legacy of residential schools, of distrust or indifference to the school system, which is seen as antagonistic to their culture, and the lack of reflection of an Aboriginal perspective in the secondary system were all cited as factors in the poor performance and completion of Aboriginals in the secondary system.

The figures that demonstrate a low retention rate among Aboriginal students at the postsecondary level indicate a lack of student preparedness at the secondary level.

One stakeholder in an interview said that there should exist some kind of financial incentive or award for graduating high school.

Often the level of ability of literacy or numeracy for mature students is too low for the requirements of the programs entered. Recently, one institution has had to raise its entrance requirements. The interviewee said they expected enrolment numbers to decrease after that.

Often Aboriginal students are aware of the limitations of their secondary education. One interviewee said,

In many cases Native students come from areas of the city where the educational system is not as effective as other places, and many Native students are non-confident learners. They have not had the system of support that indicates they can do it. When you're not sure university is going to be successful and you are faced with a significant loan, the two in combination are significant disincentives. Why would you incur that kind of debt if you don't know you will succeed?

Shortcomings in Aboriginal Staffing

The presence of Aboriginal staff and faculty cannot be understated in its importance for Aboriginal learners. Aboriginal representation in faculty and support staff is important for a number of reasons:

- To provide Aboriginal expertise in academic areas
- To serve as role models and mentors
- To act as advisors to students
- To reflect general equity

Aboriginal teachers at all levels demonstrate teaching and support strategies that have proven effective in attracting and keeping Aboriginal students. They are able to initiate more participation and interaction through the kinship of common experience and background. They also employ pedagogies that are consistent with Aboriginal experience.

Unfortunately, internationally and in Canada, the percentage of Aboriginal staff at the postsecondary level does not reflect the overall representation of those groups in the general population.

The fact that the majority of faculty at tribal colleges in the United States are non-Aboriginal/American Indian has led to the problem of faculty not being in touch with or instrumental in the communities in which they teach.⁶¹ This again demonstrates the need for Aboriginal staff teaching Aboriginal education. Non-Aboriginal teaching staff often find the adjustment to life and work on reservations to be a disincentive to staying at that staffing position for longer periods of time.

At Batchelor College in Australia, the issue of not enough Indigenous staff has led to incomplete or inconsistent application of the college's policies of incorporating Indigenous knowledge and pedagogy.

In order to foster a more participatory and welcoming environment, postsecondary institutions must have more Aboriginal staff and faculty.

Shortcomings in Curriculum Development

The vast majority of the literature reviewed and the interviews conducted indicate that one of the key routes to improving enrolment and retention rates is the strengthening of Aboriginal content and control of curriculum. It has been argued that if students do not see their culture reflected in the curriculum or in the larger culture of the postsecondary institution, they are less likely to want to enrol.

Pressure to meet set guidelines, as well as the traditionally Eurocentric curriculum of Aboriginal learners has meant that, to a large degree, the priorities that have been set for Aboriginal postsecondary learning has been set by non-Aboriginals. This has included the area of curriculum development. While initiatives such as the University of Saskatchewan's equity initiative of the mid-90s have promoted the idea of the development of Aboriginal curriculum, more work needs to be done in the area.

Stakeholders have argued that the instruction of Aboriginal languages requires a more traditional pedagogy, one that reflects the assumptions inherent in Aboriginal languages, and not those of Western languages. Currently, the instruction and furthering of Aboriginal language and literacy instruction, valuable for the preservation of traditions and the building of Aboriginal pride, is hampered by the isolation and the minimal support offered to teachers and instructors in the area.

Aboriginal curriculum development is important outside of Canada as well. In noting that American Indian enrolment and retention rates were low compared with the mainstream non-American Indian population, a national conference on the retention of Native American students

⁶¹ Krumm, Bernita L. 1995. *Tribal Colleges: A Study of Development, Mission and Leadership*. Information Analyses.

concluded that there was a need to develop more curricula for American Indian learning styles and content.⁶²

Effective curricular development must happen through partnerships and through the expertise of Aboriginal community members. Such partnerships depend on developed infrastructure and expertise that must come from Aboriginal communities. The University of Northern British Columbia has been successful in developing a collaborative model for developing Aboriginal curriculum; its development was aided, however, by the strong presence of the Nisga'a First Nation, a First Nation with an exceptionally developed infrastructure of self-definition and initiative for self-government.

Problems of Public Perceptions of Aboriginal Programs and Alternative Assessment

Aboriginal students and educators have expressed concern throughout the literature reviewed and the stakeholder interviews at the often poor or hostile public perception of programs and initiatives geared toward Aboriginal people. This has especially been true in the areas of transition programs and alternative entry criteria and assessment.

In a report on the opinions of Aboriginal graduates of the health faculties, concerns were raised that the Access programs were not seen by non-Aboriginals as legitimate courses at the same standard of quality and rigour as mainstream university courses.

Still, many stakeholders felt that academic criteria for admission should be decreased for Aboriginal people since those Aboriginal people who do make it to the postsecondary level have done so under extremely difficult circumstances.

The Australian model of alternative assessment has effectively been used to allow for more culturally sensitive pedagogies for the country's Indigenous population. The problem has been that in incorporating assessment and learning strategies that focus on participants' strengths, there has been a decreased effort to overcome or evaluate weaknesses. This challenge, combined with racist attitudes, has led to negative attitudes about alternative assessment. Participants of the Cadigal program at the University of Sydney have faced negative attitudes, which have been a major discouragement to students. Many non-Indigenous students have felt that the only reason Cadigal students have succeeded is racial.⁶³

Shortcomings in Diversification of Subjects Studied by Aboriginal Students

In general, Aboriginal participation in education has reacted to the immediate needs of the Aboriginal community. While gains have been made in the areas of education and health, there are significant disparities in enrolment and completion in certain subject areas. While specific programs have been developed at mainstream and semi-autonomous institutions to diversify the subjects undertaken by Aboriginals at the postsecondary level, as shown in Table 2-1 below, there is still significant work to be done in the area.

⁶² Various authors. 1996. *Proceedings, Retain '96: Retention in Education for Today's American Indian Nations*. University of Arizona.

⁶³ Farrington, Sally, Kristie Daniel DiGregorio and Susan Page. 1999. "The Things That Matter: Understanding the Factors that Affect the Participation and Retention of Indigenous Students in the Cadigal Program at the Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Sydney." Paper for 1999 Annual Conference of the Australian Association for Research in Education.

Table 2-1
Distribution of Canadians with Postsecondary Certificates, Diplomas, or Degrees
By Program or Major Field of Study

Type of Program & Major Field of Study	Registered Indian			Other Aboriginals			Other Canadians		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Trades and other non-university certificates									
Education, recreation and counselling services	5.3	12.9	9.4	2.8	8.7	5.7	1.6	8.8	5.1
Fine and applied arts	2.8	7.7	5.5	3.8	10.1	6.9	4.5	10.6	3.7
Humanities and related fields	1.9	2.6	2.3	2.0	2.2	2.1	2.5	3.4	3.0
Social sciences and related fields	10.5	11.7	11.1	6.1	8.5	7.3	4.0	4.9	4.4
Commerce, management, and administration	8.9	32.3	21.5	8.5	36.1	22.2	13.1	38.3	25.6
Agricultural and biological sciences/technologies	5.6	5.2	5.4	5.2	5.4	5.3	5.0	4.2	4.6
Engineering and applied sciences	1.0	0.3	0.6	0.8	0.3	0.6	0.6	0.1	0.4
Engineering technologies and trades	58.6	8.9	31.7	66.7	10.3	38.8	64.6	6.6	35.9
Health professions, sciences, and technologies	4.4	17.6	11.5	3.4	17.6	10.5	2.8	22.0	12.3
Mathematics and physical sciences	0.4	0.3	0.4	0.4	0.6	0.5	1.1	0.9	1.0
Other or no specialization	0.4	0.6	0.5	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2
Total (percentage)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total (number)	28,250	33,175	61,420	23,245	22,825	46,075	2,753,585	2,692,765	5,446,355
University certificates and degrees									
Education, recreation, and counselling services	25.1	36.6	32.6	18.8	30.6	25.6	11.9	26.4	19.0
Fine and applied arts	1.9	2.1	2.1	3.5	4.0	3.9	1.9	3.5	2.7
Humanities and related fields	10.2	6.8	8.0	11.4	10.3	10.9	9.9	13.3	11.6
Social sciences and related fields	30.3	33.3	32.3	28.3	29.6	29.0	16.8	18.2	17.5
Commerce, management, and administration	16.2	9.4	11.7	14.4	9.7	11.8	20.2	13.8	17.0
Agricultural and biological sciences/technologies	2.7	2.0	2.2	2.6	2.9	2.8	4.8	4.8	4.8
Engineering and applied sciences	6.4	0.7	2.6	8.7	1.5	4.7	17.4	2.4	10.1
Engineering technologies and trades	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.7	0.0	0.3	0.3	0.1	0.2
Health professions, sciences, and technologies	3.1	6.5	5.4	3.6	8.6	6.7	6.8	13.0	9.8
Mathematics and physical sciences	4.0	1.8	2.5	7.0	1.8	4.0	9.9	4.3	7.2
Other or no specialization	0.3	0.5	0.4	0.0	0.4	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.1
Total (percentage)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total (number)	4,425	8,655	13,080	4,405	5,850	10,255	1,781,555	1,721,355	3,502,910

One of the general areas that requires further promotion is the sciences. While the University of British Columbia and the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations have both taken steps to address this disparity, Aboriginal students make up a small portion of the science student bodies, especially in the physical sciences. This is believed to be largely a result of the poor preparation given Aboriginal students at the secondary level and the minimal exposure given to young Aboriginals on careers and skills used by those who take mathematics and the physical sciences.

It has been argued that science-based professions require higher Aboriginal participation, especially in the area of resources and health professions, if Aboriginal communities are to gain further self-sufficiency. As land claim settlements and self-government increase, the need for qualified and knowledgeable Aboriginal people in these areas increases.

Anne Mullens has recently written on the subject of Aboriginals and science.⁶⁴ She believes, with Herman Michell of the SIFC whom she discusses, that there is a critical shortage of Aboriginals in the fields of health and science. Michell states that meaningful control of programs pertaining to self-government can be taken only by a balanced pool of educated Aboriginal resource people. Mullens estimates that of the 45,000 students enrolled in the 34 engineering programs in Canada, only 140 are Aboriginals. She also claims that according to the Canadian Medical Association, of the 58,000 doctors, only 100 are of Native ancestry.

Studies have shown that the problems surrounding diversification of Aboriginal knowledge areas are similar to those faced by women a generation ago: lack of role models and a lack of mentoring. There are also problems of literacy and underfunding at Aboriginal secondary schools.

Aboriginal funding does exist to help in the diversification of Aboriginal subject areas. In Alberta, for example, the government of Alberta offers the Aboriginal Health Careers Bursary. The budget of this bursary is up to \$200,000, and awards are allocated to Alberta Aboriginals enrolling in a health field. Similar scholarships exist in the United States as well, such as the Sequoyah Scholarship and the Everett Scholarship for students in pre-med.

The Institute of Indigenous Government has recently developed a Science Program, in partnership with Kwantlen College, to train students for health and science careers. The University of Saskatchewan also has the Cameco Access Program in Engineering and Science (CAPES). The Faculty of Medicine at the University of British Columbia is giving 5% of its places to Aboriginal students for the first time in the 2002–03 academic year.

Alberta Learning also provides support to the Alberta Aboriginal Apprenticeship Project, which is a joint initiative between industry and Aboriginal representatives designed to increase Aboriginal participation in Alberta apprenticeship programs. Phase 1 of this five-year pilot project was implemented in June 2001 in Edmonton; success of the pilot may see the project expanded.

⁶⁴ Mullens, Anne. 2001. Why Aboriginals Aren't Taking Science. *University Affairs* (November).

Shortcomings in Support at the Community Level

While many of the shortcomings in Aboriginal postsecondary enrolment and completion rates may be ameliorated or eliminated at the government and institutional levels, cultural, social, family-related, and personal barriers to enrolment and completion can also be addressed through community-level initiatives. While research undertaken for this report focused on the “best practices” in increasing enrolment and success rates for Aboriginal students, shortcomings of support at the community level were raised in the literature reviewed and, especially, in the stakeholder interviews undertaken.

Many of the interviewed stakeholders indicated that strategies for the improvement of Aboriginal postsecondary rates must also include the increased input and support of Aboriginal communities, both on and off reserve. As it was frequently argued that Aboriginal conceptions of success are, overall, more community-driven and less individualistic than those of the mainstream, stakeholders noted that Aboriginal communities must promote and foster awareness of community postsecondary success and potential. The need for Aboriginal role models was a frequent theme of interviews. As one stakeholder recommended, there needs to be increased opportunities “to see other Aboriginal people’s success.” While some support for the linkage of the Aboriginal and postsecondary education system has been successfully developed, such as through the Community Relations Program at the University of Alberta, further support at the community and educational levels was seen to be important.

The need for increased family involvement in Aboriginal education was put forward by stakeholders as another means of fostering success at the postsecondary level. Students need to be prepared at the elementary and secondary levels for postsecondary life, and it was frequently noted that this preparation should also come from families and communities. One stakeholder suggested that initiatives should be put in place for the promotion of increased family involvement in a student’s academic life, at all levels.

Stakeholder interviews and the literature on the subject also brought forth the idea that certain social issues need to be addressed in the Aboriginal community to lay the foundation for a strong community that supports postsecondary enrolment and completion. Specifically, issues of addiction and distrust of the mainstream education system arose. Many stakeholders stated that the potential of Aboriginal communities is not being met because of issues of abuse and chemical and alcohol dependency. More treatment centres and awareness programs on issues of abuse and addiction were argued for. Teachers, students, and the general Aboriginal community need further education on issues related to drug and alcohol abuse. Aboriginal communities also need to foster more trust in the postsecondary education system. The common distrust of the mainstream education system is a major disincentive to Aboriginal enrolment in colleges and universities. As one stakeholder noted: “Many [Aboriginals] fear that after getting a [postsecondary] education, they will not be accepted by their community.” Given the potential benefits of more education and skills for Aboriginal communities, Aboriginal distrust and wariness of postsecondary education, though certainly with cause, was seen as a major roadblock to increasing enrolment and success rates.

SECTION D: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Low levels of Aboriginal enrolment and completion suggest that, notwithstanding the wide range of strategies and initiatives that exist to address these Aboriginal postsecondary levels, more needs to be done in the area. Demographics also demonstrate that it is an especially crucial time to improve practices aimed at Aboriginal participation in universities and colleges, considering the high numbers of Aboriginal youth of postsecondary and working age, both now and in the next decade.

Aboriginal people face a variety of barriers that limit their participation in postsecondary education. While financial hardship was mentioned throughout the research as a major obstacle, there was deemed to be more required to promote Aboriginal involvement in postsecondary education than simply the distribution of increased funding. An understanding of Aboriginal people — and the barriers that are faced by them owing to historic and social factors — was repeatedly found to be a key requirement of practices aimed at increasing Aboriginal participation at the postsecondary level, according to the literature and stakeholder interviews. For this reason, increased partnerships and control were seen to be a key recommendation from much of the sources for this project.

Stakeholder interviews and literature research suggested that exemplary practices do exist in the promotion and support of Aboriginal postsecondary education. Still, it was suggested repeatedly that more must be done to support this group and that new initiatives must be developed to address longstanding problems in fostering equitable Aboriginal participation at the postsecondary level.

Among programs or initiatives that were singled out for praise by stakeholders, common characteristics included

- Community delivery, such as offered through the Teacher Education Programs
- Transitional support and support through alternative admissions criteria
- Academic and personal support, such as that offered through the University of British Columbia's First Nations House of Learning
- Support for Aboriginal control of education, either at the program, curricular, or institutional level

Further research and support for initiatives were deemed to be needed in the following areas:

- Overcoming limitations of existing federal funding and band funding: There was found to be more support needed for Aboriginal people who do not have full access to federal funding through the PSE program for the entire duration of their programs, such as Métis, Bill C-31 Aboriginals, and Aboriginal people who do not meet the criteria of their bands for funding.
- Overcoming limited support for specific Aboriginal groups: Statistics, literature, and stakeholder interviews all pointed to the significant trends in Aboriginal demographics at the postsecondary level and suggested that more research and support should be undertaken on specific Aboriginal demographic groups. Among those identified were Métis people, mature Aboriginal students, Aboriginal women with children or family responsibilities, and Aboriginal men who are further under-represented in postsecondary education, especially in specific programs.

- Overcoming under-representation of Aboriginal people in some specific subject areas such as the sciences and the health professions: While Aboriginals in the past decades have made advances in the areas of education and law, it was suggested throughout this study that more work should be done to promote Aboriginal participation in areas with a clear under-representation of Aboriginal people and in areas that require increased Aboriginal participation to ensure the strength of Aboriginal communities, such as the health and science fields.
- Overcoming the limitations of support for Aboriginal control of their own education: It was suggested that further support could be used to foster increased Aboriginal participation and control of education at the level of curriculum development. It was also argued that there is a need for increased levels of Aboriginal staff and faculty and further support for Aboriginal institutions like the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College.
- Overcoming the limitations of support at the community level: While further institutional and government supports for Aboriginal students at the postsecondary level made up the vast majority of the recommendations given by stakeholders in the course of this research, stakeholders also suggested that more could also be done at the Aboriginal community level to address specific barriers. Stakeholders suggested that increased community promotion of Aboriginal postsecondary success stories would offer role models for young Aboriginal people, both on and off reserve. It was also suggested that more programs and treatment centres for alcohol, chemical, and abuse problems, at the community and postsecondary institutional levels, would support some students and potential students. Increased positive family support for — and involvement in — education at all levels was also argued to be a crucial next step. As well, given the frequency of comments regarding the high level of Aboriginal mistrust of education, community support for the promotion and encouragement of postsecondary enrolment for Aboriginal young people may be useful.

Addendum to *Best Practices in Increasing Aboriginal Postsecondary Enrolment Rates* in light of new Census data of 2001

This addendum draws on the newly released 2001 Census data to provide additional information on some of the statistical information contained in the report.

In *Table 1-1, Proportion of Canadians Who Were Taking or Had Completed Postsecondary Education*, the following addition from the 2001 Census year data occurred:

Census Year	Age	Registered Indian	Other Aboriginal	Other Canadians
2001	15-24	20%	26%	43%
	25-44	52%	58%	69%
	45-64	45%	48%	56%
	65+	14%	20%	32%
	Total population 15+ yrs	40%	45%	55%

Source: Statistics Canada, Special tabulations, 2001 Census

1986	15-24	15%	24%	38%
	25-44	35%	48%	56%
	45-64	15%	28%	37%
	65+	4%	14%	23%
	Total population 15+ yrs	23%	36%	43%
1991	15-24	19%	28%	40%
	25-44	44%	55%	60%
	45-64	26%	40%	43%
	65+	8%	18%	26%
	Total population 15+ yrs	31%	43%	48%
1996	15-24	20%	29%	41%
	25-44	49%	58%	64%
	45-64	37%	47%	50%
	65+	10%	20%	20%
	Total population 15+ yrs	37%	47%	51%

Source: Research and Analysis Directorate, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 1996. **Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education and Labour Market Outcomes Canada 1996.**

As the table indicates, while the rates of enrolment and completion had improved for Registered and other Aboriginal people, they are part of an overall trend of improvement for all populations. The rate of education for the major working age category of 25–44 for Registered Aboriginals had improved by 17 percentage points and for non-Registered Aboriginals by 10 percentage points over 15 years, but the rate for non-Aboriginals had similarly increased by 13 percentage points. The actual rate of education has improved therefore by 49% for Registered Aboriginal people, 25% for non-Registered Aboriginal people, and 14% for non-Aboriginal people.

Unemployment and Poverty

In the 2001 Census, 43% of Registered Indians and 58% of all others identified as Aboriginal were employed, compared to 67% of other, non-Aboriginal Canadians. Employment rates are especially low among Registered Indians in the 15–24 age group. Over all ages, the Registered Indian unemployment rate in 2001 was 23% compared to 15% among others with Aboriginal identity and 7% among other Canadians. The unemployment rate among Registered Indians in the 15–24 age group was especially high at 33%.

The Aboriginal Population of Canada

According to the 2001 Census, there were 976,305 people in Canada who reported that they were North American Indian, Métis, or Inuit, amounting to 3.3% of Canada's total population. Of this population, 62.4% were North American Indian, 30% were Métis, and 4.6% were Inuit. The Aboriginal population in 2001 was, on average, 13 years younger than the non-Aboriginal population. Over the next decade, this will be reflected in large increases within the Aboriginal working-age population compared with the non-Aboriginal population. The Aboriginal population is the fastest growing population group in Canada, with a birthrate about one and a half times higher than in the non-Aboriginal population.

Aboriginal Education Rates in Canada

The demographics of the Aboriginal population of Canada indicate that improvements in enrolment and retention are imperative.

The 2001 Census reported that among the population of respondents 15 years of age or older and not attending school, 5% of Registered Indians and 6% of other Aboriginal identity groups had obtained university degrees, compared with 18% of all other Canadians. The percentage of Registered Indians with some postsecondary education was 38%; for all other Aboriginal identity groups it was 44%, significantly lower than the rate for all other Canadians at 54%.

Lack of Academic Preparation

The poverty of Aboriginal communities and the distrust of or indifference to education that is a strong characteristic of the Aboriginal community have been factors in poor secondary education performance. Lack of academic preparation is a significant barrier to access to postsecondary education for many Aboriginal people. Canadian census data for Aboriginal populations aged 15+ indicate that, in 2001, 48.1% had less than high school graduation (a decrease from 52.6% in 1996 data) and 9.9% had high school graduation only, compared to 8.6% in 1996.

The high rate of lone-parent families has increased from one-third in 1996 to over 35.4% in 2001 for Aboriginal people under the age of 15. This is approximately twice the rate of the non-Aboriginal population at 16.9%. In census metropolitan areas, the number of Aboriginal children in lone-parent families increased to 45.6%.