

ABORIGINAL PEOPLES AND  
POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION  
WHAT EDUCATORS HAVE LEARNED

---

**JANUARY 2004**



ABORIGINAL PEOPLES AND  
POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION  
WHAT EDUCATORS HAVE LEARNED

---

**JANUARY 2004**

Prepared by:

R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd.

Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation

1000 Sherbrooke West

Suite 800

Montreal, QC

H3A 3R2

Published in 2004 by  
The Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation  
1000 Sherbrooke Street West, Suite 800, Montreal, QC, Canada H3A 3R2  
Toll Free: 1-877-786-3999  
Fax: (514) 985-5987  
Web: [www.millenniumscholarships.ca](http://www.millenniumscholarships.ca)  
Email: [millennium.foundation@bm-ms.org](mailto:millennium.foundation@bm-ms.org)

Does Money Matter: Millennium Research Series  
Number 8

National Library of Canada Cataloguing in Publication

R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd.  
Aboriginal Peoples and Post-Secondary Education:  
What Educators Have Learned

Includes bibliographical references.  
ISSN 1704-8435 Millennium Research Series (Online)

Cover Design: Interpôles  
Layout Design: Charlton + Company Design Group

*The opinions expressed in this research document are those of the authors and do not represent official policies of the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, and other agencies or organizations that may have provided support, financial or otherwise, for this project.*

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary .....	1
Acknowledgments .....	3
Introduction .....	5
Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education Data .....	6
The Aboriginal Population of Canada .....	6
Methodology .....	8
Methodological Challenges .....	9
Lack of Reliable Quantitative Data .....	9
Methodological Limitations of the Current Report .....	10
Barriers to Aboriginal Post-Secondary Success .....	11
Historical Barriers .....	11
Social Barriers .....	11
Geographic and Demographic Barriers .....	14
Cultural Barriers .....	15
Individual/Personal Barriers .....	16
Financing Post-Secondary Education for Aboriginal Students .....	19
Government Funding .....	19
Private Sources of Funding .....	22
Strategies for Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education .....	23
Government Strategies .....	23
Access Programs .....	24
Community Delivery .....	26
Aboriginal Institutions .....	28
Partnerships Between Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Institutions .....	32
Aboriginal-Geared Programs at Mainstream Institutions .....	32
Curriculum Development .....	33
Aboriginal Languages .....	34
Initiatives in the Science and Health Fields .....	34
Support for Students .....	37
Alternative Assessment .....	39
Conclusion .....	41
References .....	42



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper examines Aboriginal post-secondary education through the eyes of stakeholders working in the field, describing practices and initiatives believed to help increase enrolment and completion rates. This qualitative approach—which has evident methodological shortcomings—was used because there is virtually no worthwhile empirical or quantitative evidence on the subject.

Although post-secondary enrolment and completion rates for Aboriginal people have been steadily increasing over the past two decades, they remain significantly lower than those of non-Aboriginal Canadians. In order to contextualize the issues, a first section explains the barriers to Aboriginal participation in post-secondary education. While socio-economic factors such as poverty and unemployment put them at an obvious disadvantage, Aboriginal students also face more subtle barriers such as discrimination, low self-concept and institutional insensitivity to Aboriginal cultures. Many Aboriginal students arrive in post-secondary institutions without adequate high school preparation, others struggle to balance education with family responsibilities. Combined with a history of forced assimilation through educational institutions, the barriers to Aboriginal participation in post-secondary education are formidable.

The next section outlines various initiatives put in place to make post-secondary education more affordable to Aboriginal Peoples—most notably, the federal government’s Post-Secondary Student Support Program administered through Band Councils. While the student support program has made post-secondary education possible for many Aboriginal students, it has shortcomings in terms of the quantity of funding, who is funded and the process used to award grants.

The final section looks at various strategies and initiatives that have been used to make post-secondary education more accessible, relevant and responsive to Aboriginal peoples. The main strategies described are:

- **Access programs:** The access programs, which guide and support Aboriginal people and other under-represented groups, offer transition, support and guidance that has helped to improve Aboriginal success rates in Manitoba.
- **Community Delivery:** Community delivery bridges the gap caused by relocation to urban or distant schools, and promotes Aboriginal 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.
- **Aboriginal Control of Education:** Allowing Aboriginal control of education is intended to overcome the marginalization Aboriginal people feel in the mainstream post-secondary education system, as well as increasing Aboriginal self-determination at the post-secondary level. It includes creation and delivery of curriculum by and for Aboriginal people.
- **Partnerships between Aboriginal Communities and Mainstream Educational Institutions:** By working with Aboriginal communities as partners, educational institutions have developed relevant and accessible curricula and programs, and instated a degree of Aboriginal trust and

confidence in mainstream post-secondary institutions.

- **Student Support that Addresses Aboriginal Needs:** Aboriginal students benefit from personal and academic support such as that offered through the First Nations House of Learning at the University of British Columbia, which offers students a “home away from home” to help alleviate the feelings of isolation and loneliness that many Aboriginal people feel, especially at large urban universities and colleges.

For the most part, stakeholders had positive things to say about all of these initiatives; they generally recommended that such programs be enhanced and expanded. Many gave these strategies some of the credit for increasing Aboriginal enrolment and completion in recent years.

Throughout the paper, comparative examples drawn from Australia, New Zealand and the United States are used to show that the issues surrounding Aboriginal post-secondary education are not unique to Canada, and that educators have learned similar lessons in all four countries.



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This report was prepared by R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. for the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, in partnership with the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC).

As is apparent by the significant participation of educators, Aboriginal education coordinators and others in this project, it's clear many people attach considerable importance to Aboriginal post-secondary education issues. Without their participation and co-operation, this research could not have been successfully completed.



# INTRODUCTION

In Canada more and more Aboriginal students are enrolling in post-secondary programs and completing them. In fact, Aboriginal student enrolment rates are growing substantially faster than those of other demographic groups, albeit from a very low base. Institutions are increasingly committed to helping Aboriginal students. Nevertheless, retention and success rates for Aboriginal students remain much lower than those of their non-Aboriginal counterparts.

At the same time, Canada's economy demands ever-higher levels of formal education for employment; the correlation between educational attainment and employment, economic well being and health has been well established. The low rate of formal education in the Aboriginal population will likely determine the overall state of Aboriginal society's health, wealth and potential for the future.

This paper examines various strategies, initiatives and practices for increasing the number of Aboriginal people in post-secondary education. It provides an overview of the current situation in Canada, with comparative examples drawn from the United States, New Zealand and Australia.

Tracking enrolment and retention is, admittedly, a limited means of gauging the progress of Aboriginal education. Critics point out that many Aboriginal people avoid post-secondary education because of its perceived irrelevance and assimilationist bias. If post-secondary education does not address the social, cultural or economic needs of Aboriginal peoples, then low enrolment may not be a bad thing.

A related argument, raised by Colin Bourke *et al* in a study of Indigenous Australian student performances, is that the idea of educational success is subject to culture.<sup>1</sup> Some students meet their educational objectives by completing part of a course or a program, without completing the entire program. Dropout rates do not take into account that many students return to their studies. Many dropouts actually leave temporarily due to other responsibilities.

These may be valid arguments, but it is important to remember that Aboriginal post-secondary education is not what it used to be. Over the course of the last generation, it has been transforming to meet the needs of Aboriginal communities. Stakeholders interviewed say that these changes have altered what Aboriginal students study and how they relate to their education; they have also boosted the number of Aboriginal students enrolled.

This paper supports the goal of increasing Aboriginal enrolment and completion. Its main concern is to show what strategies help to achieve this goal. It begins by examining the barriers to Aboriginal participation in post-secondary education, then examines funding strategies to overcome Aboriginal student poverty. Finally it scrutinizes various strategies and initiatives to make post-secondary education more relevant, manageable and empowering for Aboriginal peoples.

---

1. 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.

## ABORIGINAL POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION DATA

---

The overall state of Aboriginal education in Canada, especially at the post-secondary level, is poor. Although there have been more Aboriginal individuals in post-secondary programs in the past two decades than in all earlier generations, and many more Aboriginal youth go on to college and university programs after high school or return as adults, Aboriginal people are still significantly under-represented in enrolment at Canadian colleges, universities and other post-secondary institutions. The increasing number of Aboriginal graduates gives the impression that education outcomes are fast improving but there are severe limitations on this growth.

### The Aboriginal Population of Canada

In the 1996 census 799,010 people in Canada reported they were North American Indian, Métis or Inuit, amounting to about 3 per cent of Canada's total population.<sup>2</sup> About two-thirds of this population was North American Indian, one-quarter were Métis and five per cent were Inuit. The Aboriginal population was, on average, 10 years younger than the general population. That will mean large increases within the Aboriginal working-age population over the next decade compared with the non-Aboriginal population. The Aboriginal population is the fastest growing population group in Canada, with a birthrate about 70 per cent higher than for non-Aboriginal Canadians.<sup>3</sup>

The 1996 census also reported that of respondents 15 years of age or older not attending school, three per cent of registered Indians and four per cent of other Aboriginal identity groups had obtained university degrees, compared with 14 per cent of all other Canadians.<sup>4</sup> The percentage of registered Indians with some post-secondary education was 37 per cent—for all other Aboriginal identity groups it was 47 per cent, significantly lower than the rate for all other Canadians at 51 per cent.

Education data reflect a wide gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal education levels. Table 1 compares education data from the censuses of 1986, 1991 and 1996.

Rates of enrolment and completion have improved for registered and other Aboriginal people, part of an overall trend of improvement for all populations. The rate of education for the major working age category of ages 25–44 for registered Aboriginal Peoples has improved by 14 per cent over the decade, compared to non-registered Aboriginal Peoples at 10 per cent, but the rate for non-Aboriginal Canadians has also increased, by eight per cent. The gap has closed, but only slightly.

---

2. Statistics Canada, Total Population by Aboriginal group, 1996 Census.

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

4. Research and Analysis Directorate, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 1996. Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education and Labour Market Outcomes Canada 1996, i.

**TABLE 1: PROPORTION OF CANADIANS WHO WERE TAKING OR HAD COMPLETED POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION**

CENSUS YEAR	AGE	REGISTERED INDIAN	OTHER ABORIGINAL PEOPLE	OTHER CANADIANS
1986	15-24	15%	24%	38%
	25-44	35%	48%	56%
	45-64	15%	28%	37%
	65+	4%	14%	23%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>43%</b>
1991	15-24	19%	28%	40%
	25-44	44%	55%	60%
	45-64	26%	40%	43%
	65+	8%	18%	26%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>48%</b>
1996	15-24	20%	29%	41%
	25-44	49%	58%	64%
	45-64	37%	47%	50%
	65+	10%	20%	20%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>47%</b>	<b>51%</b>

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

### ABORIGINAL EDUCATION RATES IN AUSTRALIA

Approximately 2.1 per cent of Australians are Indigenous and Torres Strait Islanders.<sup>5</sup> According to statistics from the Department of Education, Training and Youth Higher Education in Australia the number of university students from those groups 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 comprise only one per cent of post-secondary enrolment.<sup>6</sup>

Further Australian statistics show:

*...Aboriginal students are retained within institutions at 78 per cent of the rate for non-Indigenous students.<sup>7</sup>*

Other recent reports have noted lower outcomes in terms of success, and provide even more dismal findings.<sup>8</sup>

5. Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1999.

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

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

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

### ABORIGINAL EDUCATION RATES IN NEW ZEALAND

In 2000, New Zealand Māori comprised approximately 15 per cent of the total population and 20 per cent of the total education population, including elementary, secondary and post-secondary. The number of Māori students who enrol in post-secondary institutions is comparatively low, although it is increasing. In 1990, Māori made up six per cent of all students attending New Zealand universities, in 1997 they made up nine per cent. As is the case in Canada, mature students and women made up disproportionately high numbers of those at the post-secondary level. Most Aboriginal post-secondary students were over 25, and just over 55 per cent of them were women. Statistics show that the educational gap between Māori and the rest of the students is getting wider.<sup>9</sup>

### ABORIGINAL EDUCATION RATES IN THE UNITED STATES

The Native American population is underrepresented in post-secondary education. American Indians make up approximately 1.5 per cent of the total American population of the population of two-year institutions, but only 0.5 per cent of four-year institutions.<sup>10</sup> In a recent survey of American Indians at 32 American colleges and universities, it was found that there was only a 25 per cent graduation rate for the American Indians studied and a very low 45 per cent first-year retention rate.<sup>11</sup>

## METHODOLOGY

While by no means an exhaustive study of issues surrounding Aboriginal post-secondary education, this report has employed several research methods.

An extensive literature search and review was conducted to gather information on post-secondary Aboriginal education in Canada, the United States, Australia and New Zealand. Stakeholder suggestions and research documents assisted this review. Members of both government and academic institutions provided less readily available research information. Documents were supplemented with relevant statistical data.

Interviews were conducted with 59 stakeholders, including people at all levels of post-secondary education, from assistant deputy ministers to Aboriginal student support advi-

sors. Stakeholders from the United States, Australia and New Zealand were also interviewed. Most stakeholders were interviewed by telephone or visits. Printed copies of the interview questionnaire were sent to people unable to do telephone interviews. We visited educational institutions across Western Canada chosen 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 that were, or
- individuals at the institutions had extensive experience working in programs and institutions designed to serve Aboriginal post-

9. Smith, Graham Hingangaroa, 2000. Maori Education: Revolution and Transformative Action CJNE Vol. 24, No. 1, 2000

10. U.S. Dept. of Ed, Digest of Education Statistics 1999, Table 209.

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

secondary students.

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

The following organizations and institutions were visited:

- First Nations University of Canada
- 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 attempts to cover the major themes and points raised in the literature review, interviews and site visits. Program- or institution-specific statistics in literature or interviews were incorporated into the general understanding of issues related to the topic, not as a means to conduct a 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 but the speakers are not cited to protect their anonymity.

## METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGES

### Lack of Reliable Quantitative Data

While this project's main objective was to identify practices and issues surrounding increasing retention and, especially, enrolment rates for Aboriginal people at the post-secondary level, existing data do not allow these issues to be quantified. When statistical information is included in the report, it should be seen as indicators of general observations. Statistical comparisons between program enrolment and completion rates were outside of the scope of this work.

While many of the programs and initiatives that were identified as having had positive impacts on improving Aboriginal education rates at the post-secondary 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 on Aboriginal ancestry by program. Many institutions have a limited ability to track Aboriginal enrolment or retention rates. What data there were often depended on student self-identification, which could be based on varying definitions of what it means to be Aboriginal. As a result, numbers for enrolment or completion are often estimates. One stakeholder at college had to go through application forms manually to track Aboriginal status, and still had 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*

The overall statistical picture of the state of Aboriginal education in Canada has been derived from the census, because there is no other coordinated effort to track Aboriginal education levels over time. But census data should be seen as general indicators rather than precise facts. Aboriginal stakeholders say many Aboriginal people distrust the census. Those without an appropriate level of literacy in French or English do not complete census requests; others deliberately avoid giving information to the government. The results may be biased toward those Aboriginal people who have been formally educated and who are less marginalized from the mainstream of Canadian society. A further limitation on census data for the Aboriginal population is that some large reserves were not enumerated for the census.

### **Methodological Limitations of the Current Report**

This study has an over-arching methodological limitation. Much of its information on strategies to increase Aboriginal enrolment and completion rates was collected from stakeholders involved, who are obviously a useful source of information but could be biased. They are often unable or reluctant to criticize existing initiatives and detailing shortcomings or failures of strategies in an area many stakeholders feel is under-nourished may be seen as counter-productive. Also, the professional community of those involved in Aboriginal post-secondary education in Canada is small, which may discourage criticism.

Throughout the site visits and interviews, stakeholders frequently noted the limitations of government funding and educational infrastructure, but they rarely singled out existing practices or initiatives as *unsuccessful* attempts to improve Aboriginal participation. While it is possible that all existing practices and initiatives have been successful, the methodological limitations of this report suggest the need for more comprehensive studies that would include a larger statistical tracking element.



# BARRIERS TO ABORIGINAL POST-SECONDARY SUCCESS

The challenges Aboriginal peoples face in post-secondary education are not unique; many barriers to access and success in the post-secondary system stem from the Aboriginal community's troubled position in Canadian society. One of the main themes of stakeholders and the literature review is that no program or initiative will be effective unless it factors in the entire scope of barriers.

## **HISTORICAL BARRIERS**

---

Before the late 1960s, the barriers to Aboriginal participation in post-secondary education were largely insurmountable. Government policies used schooling to assimilate Aboriginal Peoples into mainstream European-Canadian society. Many Aboriginal students still see assimilation as a prominent feature of post-secondary education, which has led to an over-arching distrust and hostility to education in many parts of the Aboriginal community.

Historically Aboriginal people attained higher education at a price: an 1876 amendment to the *Indian Act* forced them to relinquish their Indian status, a process called enfranchisement. Even when the law changed after World War II, education was powerfully assimilative, and tended to alienate educated Aboriginal Peoples from their families and communities.

Shortly after 1911, the federal government amended the *Indian Act* to make school attendance mandatory 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. The last closed in 1986 and by the late 1990s, the majority of Status Indians attended band-operated primary and secondary schools or mainstream

provincial schools.

The residential school system was the most prominent example of assimilationist government education policies. From the religious and vocational training, to the rules forbidding use of their language and cultural practices, residential schools uprooted Aboriginal culture and history and made many Aboriginal communities distrust educational institutions in general.

The most significant recent report on Aboriginal issues was the federal Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples of 1996 which found 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 disconnect that Aboriginal children experienced as a result of being sent to a residential school. The legacy of residential schools remains a major barrier to Aboriginal participation in post-secondary education.

## **SOCIAL BARRIERS**

---

Lack of academic preparation is a significant barrier to post-secondary education for many Aboriginal people. Canadian census data for 1996 shows that in 1996, 53.6 per cent of Aboriginal populations aged 15+ had less than high school graduation; 8.6 per cent had high school graduation only. There were

110,000 Status Indian students in all levels of public education in 1997–1998, an increase of 10,000 since 1991–92, but the total number of high school graduates actually marginally declined during the same period.<sup>12</sup>

Aboriginal Peoples who do complete high school often have weak skills, but reserve and remote schools typically do not offer the academic preparation required to succeed in post-secondary studies. Hull, Phillips & Polyzoi found in the 1980s that most reserve students were at least one year behind their expected grade level by the age of 13. Reserve school evaluations and studies in northern Ontario and the prairies have consistently confirmed poor academic levels.<sup>13</sup> Poor academic preparation is a significant barrier for Aboriginal post-secondary students and contributes to high Aboriginal drop-out rates at universities and colleges.

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 Aboriginal Peoples 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 university was generally not seen as a viable option 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 post-secondary level reflected a poor foundation at the early and secondary levels of education.<sup>14</sup> Stakeholders interviewed for this research agreed. Said one stakeholder:

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

Many Aboriginal students do not complete high school (in British Columbia, only 38 per cent graduate from high school, compared to 77 per cent of non-Aboriginal Canadians) If they attend post-secondary education it is as mature students. Others graduate from high school but without necessary courses such as mathematics and science, or lacking study skills, time management abilities and computer literacy. One person we interviewed said their institution had raised its entrance requirements and expected Aboriginal enrolment to decrease as a result.

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?*

One stakeholder in an interview said that there should be a financial incentive or award for graduating from high school.

12. Overview of DIAND Program DATA IMB/CIMD June, 2000.

13. J. Hull, 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, XLI: 1 (March, 1995).

14. Hull, J., 2000. *Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education and Labour Market Outcomes Canada*, 1996. Prologica Research Inc.

Researchers Verna Kirkness and Ray Barnhardt argue that the biggest problem Aboriginal university students face is discrimination, which is a significant disincentive to higher learning. To Aboriginal people, the university often represents an impersonal and hostile environment in which their culture, traditions and values are not recognized. Kirkness and Barnhardt write that Aboriginal people are expected to leave their culture behind and assume the trappings of a new form of reality.

*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.<sup>15</sup>*

The 1996 census shows high unemployment among Aboriginal Peoples. Over all age groups, the registered Indian unemployment rate in 1996 was 26 per cent, compared to 19 per cent among others with Aboriginal identity and nine per cent among other Canadians. The unemployment rate among registered Indians in the 15 to 24 age group was especially high at 41 per cent.<sup>17</sup> In many Aboriginal communities the unemployment rate exceeds 50 per cent and in some it exceeds 75 per cent. Social assistance benefits and seasonal jobs are often the main sources of income on some reserves and the majority of Aboriginal families do not have adequate employment income to pay for post-secondary education. The majority of Aboriginal students must rely on assistance from other sources to attend college or university.

### CULTURAL INSENSITIVITY IN AUSTRALIA

In research done in Australia, 43 per cent of Indigenous Australian and Torres Strait Islander students said some staff were insensitive to cultural issues. Student comments, which highlighted the lack of cultural awareness and sensitivity among staff members, particularly in mainstream courses, included the following:<sup>16</sup>

*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 per cent of students identified feelings of isolation or cultural marginalization as important factors influencing them to consider withdrawing from studies.

15. Verna J. Kirkness 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 1991

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

17. Hull, Jeremy, October 2000 *Aboriginal Post Secondary Education and Labour Market Outcomes*, Canada, 1966, DIAND Document.

## GEOGRAPHIC AND DEMOGRAPHIC BARRIERS

*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.*

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

—*from stakeholder interviews*

Research literature emphasizes poverty and lack of financial support as barriers to Aboriginal post-secondary education, but there is little on the specific financial problems of day-care, housing and relocation costs. While financial assistance such as loans, grants and bursaries are calculated to take into account the costs of housing and dependants, they are often underestimates that don't allow for the specific expenses of Aboriginal Peoples.

Aboriginal students often leave financial and care networks to attend universities and colleges. Most of the programs offered that are specific to Aboriginal learners at the post-secondary level, other than those offered through community delivery, are in urban centres where the cost of living is higher, so strategies to improve the enrolment and retention rates of Aboriginal people at the post-secondary level must factor in the additional expenses and burdens that are imposed on Aboriginal people when they move to expensive, urban communities away from the support of family and friends.

*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*

Our statistical evidence and interviews indicate that family responsibilities often keep Aboriginal students from staying in school. In 1997–98, 66 per cent of Status Aboriginal post-secondary students were women.<sup>18</sup> Internationally, Aboriginal women make up the majority of Aboriginal students—in some programs, stakeholders reported that as many as 80 per cent of Aboriginal students were female and are more likely to have dependants than their non-Aboriginal counterparts. A 1999 British Columbia study of former students of colleges and institutes showed Aboriginal students were more likely to have a spouse or partner, to be older than the general population, and to have children.<sup>19</sup> Aboriginal communities also tend to share family responsibilities communally, which can interrupt post-secondary programs.

Aboriginal students are, on average, older than their non-Aboriginal counterparts. This has an effect on the resources they need and how they study. Mature students normally have better life skills than recent high school graduates but may lack basic academic skills. The Brandon University Northern Teacher Education Program (BUNTEP), which has a high mature-student population, has a twelve-week basic skills component.

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

19. B.C. Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology, 1999. *1999 B.C. College and Institute Aboriginal Former Student Outcomes*.

## AUSTRALIA: THE AGE OF ABORIGINAL STUDENTS

A review of the Indigenous student population in Western Australia found that 75 per cent of the students were twenty-five 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 school.

## CULTURAL BARRIERS

Too often, little of what Aboriginal students bring in the way of cultural knowledge, tradition and values is recognized or respected in the post-secondary system. The university world is substantially different from Aboriginal 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.<sup>20</sup>*

Universities typically have long-established practices seen as serving the values and cultural norms of the dominant, non-Aboriginal society. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples 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 enrol. Lack of Aboriginal control, strongly evidenced in the education of children and youth, is also encountered in the education of adults.<sup>21</sup>*

The culture of the post-secondary system was a prevalent theme in the literature reviewed and in the interviews undertaken for this project; universities and colleges are not consistently concerned with the effects of culture on students. Almost all faculty are from different cultural and socio-economic groups than Aboriginal students. Most do not have any depth of understanding of Aboriginal culture, traditions and core values, neither do they recognize the diversity of 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. Often for the Aboriginal student, as Eber Hampton points out, “western education is

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

21. *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, Vol.3 chapter 5.

hostile in its structure, its curriculum, its context, and its personnel.”<sup>22</sup> As one interviewee said:

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

The percentage of Aboriginal staff at the post-secondary level does not reflect the general population. In order to foster a more participatory and welcoming environment, post-secondary institutions must have more Aboriginal staff and faculty.

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
- for 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 teach in ways consistent with Aboriginal experience.

## **INDIVIDUAL/ PERSONAL BARRIERS**

Poor self-concept and motivation were central themes of the literature review and stakeholder interviews. They were manifested in a sense of powerlessness, apathy, poor mental and physical health, anger and frustration. These can in turn lead to alcohol and substance abuse, petty thievery, physical and sexual abuse, even incarceration and a further cycle of despair. These manifestations impact on many Aboriginal students. Their home communities may also have insufficient family or institutional support 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.<sup>23</sup>*

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

23. Unruh, Donald, 1989. *Equality of Access and Equality of Condition Programming for Success*, unpublished paper.

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 concerns are more pronounced in the competitive environment of the university or college. Aboriginal graduates of health programs at the University of Manitoba said they felt significant levels of personal stress while there, and reported negative feelings about school, largely due to feelings of isolation, inadequacy and discrimination. Most respondents said they suffered from stress, panic attacks, headaches and anxiety.<sup>24</sup>

### PERSONAL AND FAMILY ISSUES IN AUSTRALIA

In a study done in Western Australia, key factors impeding Aboriginal success at the post-secondary level were similar to those in Canada: the two major factors identified by over three-quarters of respondents were family and personal issues (82 per cent) and students worrying about failing their courses (75 per cent).<sup>25</sup> At three of the institutions studied, 80 per cent of all withdrawals and referrals were due to “personal or family issues.”

24. 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* Volume 53: Suppl. 2, pp. 152–156.

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





# FINANCING POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION FOR ABORIGINAL STUDENTS

*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.*

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

—Randy Herrmann, director of Access Programs, University of Manitoba<sup>26</sup>

## GOVERNMENT FUNDING

---

Limited support for Aboriginal post-secondary education in Canada is available to Status Indians through Indian and Northern Affairs Canada's Post-Secondary Education Program, which includes the Post-Secondary Student Support Program, the University College Entrance Preparation Program and the Indian Studies Support Program. These programs cover all levels of post-secondary education, including community college diploma and certification programs, undergraduate programs and professional degree programs

The Student Support and Entrance Preparation programs help eligible Indian and Inuit students with tuition, books, travel and living expenses. The Indian Studies Support Program offers financial aid through post-secondary institutions for delivery of special programs for Aboriginal students. Almost 100 per cent of the programs' combined funding is delivered directly by First Nations Bands or their administering organizations.<sup>27</sup> Band Councils define their own selection criteria and policies.

Student Support Program guidelines introduced in 1988 capped funding by placing restrictions on eligibility and removing daycare and rent subsidies.

Not all Status Aboriginal Peoples and no non-Status Aboriginal Peoples are eligible for the Student Support Program, so many Aboriginal Peoples turn to Canada Student Loans and associated provincial loan and grant programs. Under these programs unmarried students without dependents are typically eligible for a maximum of \$275 of assistance per week of studies; most of this funding is through loans. Students with dependants (and in Ontario, married students as well) are eligible for more money, ranging from \$315 to \$500 per week, with the incremental funding available to them largely provided in the form of a grant or a remission-eligible loan. Aboriginal students with tribal grants from Student Support Program funds are usually not eligible for student loans.

---

26. Herrmann, Randy, 2001. "The Funding Myth," University Affairs November, 2001. Ottawa: Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, 11.

27. Department of Indian Affairs Web site, March 2002. [www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ps/edu/ense\\_e.html](http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ps/edu/ense_e.html)

Student loans are often inadequate for Aboriginal student retention and success. Aboriginal students have higher travel and living expenses. Some stakeholders think student debt is therefore higher for Aboriginal students.

*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.*

*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.*

—*Quotes from stakeholder interviews*

The Government of Canada provides Canada Study Grants to students who have permanent disabilities, high-need part-time students, women in certain doctoral studies and student-loan recipients with dependants. Human Resources Development Canada has also provided funding for Aboriginal students through training allowances.

### FUNDING FOR ABORIGINAL POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES

American Indian and Alaska Natives are eligible for special funding through the Bureau of Indian Affairs, which offered over \$30 million dollars 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 Programs, with priority given to those students in business, education, engineering, law, natural resources or health fields. Financial aid for American Indian students is also available through state programs, institutions, private foundations and tribal organizations. Native Americans are also eligible for Pell Grants and the Native American Vocational Technical Education Program. In addition, some American states have separate initiatives, such as the Michigan Indian Tuition Waiver, under which Michigan waived tuition Indians resident in the state. While the program ran between 1976 and 1996 it enrolled 15,000 Native Americans, 70% of who completed a certificate, diploma or degree.

### AUSTRALIA: ABSTUDY

The Australian Aboriginal Student Allowance was established in 1968 to improve Aboriginal students' employment prospects. ABSTUDY grants were available to full- or part-time Indigenous Australian students at universities, colleges and other approved institutions. Full-time students got allowances for fees, textbooks and equipment, travel, living expenses, and dependants' expenses. Part-time students got smaller allowances. In December, 1998, government cutbacks limited ABSTUDY benefits to students most in need of assistance.

Since 1968 ABSTUDY has led to significant gains in participation in higher education for Indigenous Australians. Numerous special programs have been established, mainly in the fields of education, law and health, and other programs have been modified to reflect the needs of Indigenous Australians. Government and independent reviewers have regarded ABSTUDY as successful in encouraging Indigenous Australians to participate in post-secondary education.

Status Indians are theoretically eligible for band funding of their post-secondary education, but many do not receive it. The limited resources of the Student Support Program mean not all interested Aboriginal people can access band funds. The Assembly of First Nations estimates that approximately 8,475 Aboriginal applicants didn't get funding for post secondary education in 2000–2001.<sup>28</sup>

The number of students supported by the post-secondary program has increased from about 3,600 in 1977–1978 to approximately 27,500 in 1999–2000. Funding has not increased since 1994, when \$20 million was added. As of 2000–2001, the program's regional core budgets totaled \$293 million. A comparison by the Assembly of First Nations found that First Nations students receive only enough funding to cover 48% of the estimated average provincial cost per student per academic year.

The Student Support Program has other limitations: it does not fund one-year programs, trades training, computer studies or upgrading, and there are restrictions on choice of institution and age of student.

The Student Support Program does not include non-Status Indians or Métis, except in the Northwest Territories and, to a limited extent, the Yukon. The Northwest Territories funds university education for all residents, including Aboriginal, Métis and Inuit, while the Yukon Territory provides lower subsidies.

Throughout our research, lack of funding for Métis was constantly raised. The Manitoba Métis Federation has the Louis Riel Scholarship for Métis students, but many people believe Métis have fallen through the cracks of the federal system, because they are not eligible for band funding. In 1997, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples recommended that

*a scholarship fund be established for Métis and other Aboriginal students who do not have access to financial support for post-secondary education under present policies, with lead financial support provided by federal and provincial governments and additional contributions from corporate and individual donors.*<sup>29</sup>

“Bill C-31 Indians”—the name often given to people who achieved Indian Status through changes to the Indian Act in 1985—also have problems obtaining Student Support Program funding. Few of them have strong ties to bands, so while theoretically entitled to band funding, they are seldom selected. Those who are selected often have an uneasy relationship with their benefactors. Some bands require students to take a certain number of courses per term or hours per week; others bands don't guarantee funding for the entire length of a program, adding to students' uncertainty. Students who fail or take a leave of absence can have their funding cut off. Some students who had been promised band funding have later had their funding denied.

---

28. Assembly of First Nations Web site, March 2002 [www.afn.ca](http://www.afn.ca).

29. Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 3.5.22.

Band funding can also be delayed; students frequently get into trouble because their band funding is submitted late, causing stress at the beginning of a program, when students are often already dealing with the stress of being new to the institution. Said one stakeholder in an interview:

*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.*

Stakeholders interviewed said nepotism, favouritism and unfairness affect the distribution of band funding. Students often are allocated funds based on their relationship with the band members, and some students feel they must compete for funding. Indian and Northern Affairs believes these issues can best be resolved at the local level, and that guidelines can be developed based on local circumstances. The Assembly of First Nations has recommended that First Nations develop local performance criteria for students applying for band funding, and that national tracking should take place.

Aboriginal students would benefit from funding that would allow them to finish programs of study even after their band funding has been discontinued. One stakeholder interview suggested the federal government reinstate graduation bonuses, which were as high as \$3,500 per graduating student.

## **PRIVATE SOURCES OF FUNDING**

---

While the government has traditionally offered the majority of support for Aboriginal education outside of the Aboriginal community, there is an increased push to develop links and partnerships with the private sector. This would include promoting private donations to Aboriginal institutions, establishing more scholarships and bursaries, and developing links with industry and employers to strengthen training and graduate employment.

Indian and Northern Affairs Canada's *2001 Scholarships, Bursaries and Awards for Aboriginal Students* listed over 400 prizes and awards, totalling over \$2 million, which are available annually to Aboriginal students. Scholarships and bursaries are also available from a variety of groups, including Aboriginal organizations, universities, colleges, corporations and foundations. Information on them is available in books, on the Internet and through educational institutions. Many Aboriginal student scholarships come from the Aboriginal Youth Foundation Awards.

# STRATEGIES FOR ABORIGINAL POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

*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.<sup>30</sup>*

—Verna Kirkness and Ray Barnhardt

In the last 40 years, Aboriginal post-secondary education has been revolutionized by the recognition of students' different needs. Programs have emerged to empower the students and see them in context of their culture. These programs have also tried to take into account fundamental economic disadvantage, and to work in consultation and partnership with Aboriginal people. No single strategy has surmounted all barriers for all students, but part of the gradual increase in Aboriginal enrolment and completion rates must be attributed to these initiatives.

## GOVERNMENT STRATEGIES

---

The relatively poor enrolment and completion rates of Aboriginal students have led to a number of government strategies to improve post-secondary participation and retention, as well as provincial and federal strategies to guide the development of efforts to improve Aboriginal education levels.

One is the Post-Secondary Sector Aboriginal Education and Training Action Plan being developed by Saskatchewan's Department of Post-Secondary Education and Skill Training.

This plan gives short-range (5-year) and long-range (20-year) goals for Aboriginal education in the province and various means to meet them. Specific targets are outlined for literacy, academic skills, life skills, and enrolment/completion rates.<sup>31</sup> Alberta has also tackled the problem with *Strengthening Relationships—The Government of Alberta's Aboriginal Policy Framework*, which has resulted in several initiatives aimed at Aboriginal post-secondary students.

---

30. Kirkness, Verna K. 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 1991.

31. Department of Post-Secondary Education and Skills Training, 2002. Draft: The Post-Secondary Sector Aboriginal Education and Training Action Plan.

## 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.*

*—Aboriginal stakeholder*

Many post-secondary institutions have formal access programs to prepare students for the transition to the life of a post-secondary student. Access programs sponsor university education for people who have traditionally not had the opportunity for university education for either social, economic or cultural reasons, or because they lack basic education. Many access programs actively recruit students and help them get the qualifications and financing they need to get into a post-secondary institution. Once there, the students are supported by including services ranging from a special orientation to the university, dedicated counselling services (for academic, personal and career advice), and assistance with everything from finding housing and daycare to adjusting to urban life. The shift to university life can be difficult for all students, but it presents particular problems for Aboriginal students. As a result many Western universities have dedicated access programs.

Manitoban post-secondary institutions have had access programs since the 1970s. Access staff recruit by going to Aboriginal communities throughout the province of Manitoba to present information about the program. Packages are sent to schools and service agencies; there are newspaper and radio ads and a video that has circulated widely. There are a total of 20 access programs in the province which have served as models for access programs elsewhere in

Canada. While their focus is residents of Manitoba, some exceptions have been allowed. Preference is given to Aboriginal applicants, whether Status, Non-Status, Métis or Inuit. Students can apply to the Manitoba Student Financial Assistance Program to receive bursaries.

The access program offers:

- 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, and
- career counselling.

Consultants KPMG found Manitoba's access programs have been very successful in improving Aboriginal participation in post-secondary education, and a 1987 federal government report gave resounding affirmation for the continuation of the programs. With only 10 per cent of Canada's Aboriginal population, Manitoba has the second highest number of Aboriginal people completing university after Ontario.<sup>32</sup>

32. 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.

Before the Special Premedical Studies Program was introduced at the University of Manitoba, only one physician of Aboriginal ancestry was known to have graduated from the school. In 1987, the first three Aboriginal students to have gone through the access program graduated in medicine. The success rate for the program was 43% in 1992.<sup>33</sup> Graduates of the program said it helped them by funding courses, books and living expenses and by allowing an extra year to finish courses. They also said that the supportive environment and the introduction to medicine before medical school contributed to success.

Another study on the premedical studies program gave questionnaires to Aboriginal graduates who reported they felt they were overall less prepared than their non-Aboriginal counterparts and only 12–20 per cent (depending on the course) felt that they were academically strong upon entrance to the university, but the support they received in the access program diminished their anxiety through the course of their studies.<sup>34</sup> Most of the students felt that the tutors and counsellors have had a positive effect on their program.

The original funding formula for access programs, as laid out in the 1974 General Development Agreement, the 1976 Northlands Agreement and the 1982 Northern Development Agreement, specified a 60/40 federal-provincial split of costs, but when the

development agreement expired in 1990, the federal government off-loaded the funding to Manitoba, which has since had to carry its full weight.<sup>35</sup> Provincial funding has fluctuated.

Loss of federal funding means different students are now accepted into the program. Single parents cannot survive on the current funding, so their numbers have decreased over time. Similarly, as the federal funding for the access program decreased in the 1990s, the number of students with band funding has increased, while the number of Métis students has 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.<sup>36</sup>

The Hikel Report (1994) on Manitoba's access program found that between 1985 and 1994 it had admitted 2,400 students, with an overall graduation rate of 41.8%.<sup>37</sup> Other provinces have therefore tried similar programs, such as the Engineering, Nursing and Education Programs at Lakehead University in Ontario, which has graduated about 35 Aboriginal engineers, and Concordia University's Native Access to Engineering Program. Concordia used science camps, conferences, outreach and a newsletter 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.

---

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

34. Wiebe, Joann, Judy Sinclair, Sheila Nychuk and M.C.C. Stephens. "Assessing Aboriginal Graduates' Perceptions for Academic Success in Health Faculties," *Arctic Medical Research* Volume 53: Suppl. 2 pp. 152–156.

35. Alcorn, Willima 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.

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

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

The University of Alberta offers the Transition Year Program to increase Aboriginal participation. Offered in conjunction with nine faculties, the program is for Aboriginal students who may not qualify for direct entry into a specific faculty. Students who complete the program with a required grade point average may qualify for admission into one of the nine faculties with a complete transfer of all credits earned.

### AUSTRALIA: THE CADIGAL PROGRAM AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY

The Cadigal Program is an access and support program for Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders at the University of Sydney. It 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 pre-semester Orientation program
- the option of a reduced workload in the first two years of enrolment
- the provision of the support programs
- peer tutoring
- study rooms and computer facilities, and
- provision of other resources such as textbooks and anatomical models.

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 its success.<sup>38</sup>

## COMMUNITY DELIVERY

Community delivery is a crucial part of Aboriginal education. Most post-secondary institutions are in urban centres, so most Aboriginal students from reserves have to leave home to attend. Community-based programs allow Aboriginal students to complete some or all of their post-secondary education programs in their home community. The goal is to eliminate much of the financial and social hardship brought about by long-term resettlement to a university campus. These programs have been especially important in allowing access for those

who live in remote areas. Community-delivered teacher education programs have led to more significant gains in teacher education than in all other post-secondary subjects.

One example of community-based education is Brandon University's Northern Teacher Education Program, which operates in Aboriginal or remote communities. The program seeks to involve communities in the planning and delivery of its services and to train participants to satisfy community needs such as education, municipal government, health and recreation.

38. 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.



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

The Native Indian Teacher Education Program was formed with a small group of British Columbia Aboriginal teachers in 1969 and has been offered through the University of British Columbia since 1974. Students begin their studies in a field centre setting in Kamloops, Chilliwack, Duncan or Vancouver and first- and second-year students make orientation visits to the University of 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. Included are Aboriginal studies courses, which explore political, social, and economic issues from historical and contemporary perspectives. Courses allow students to adapt, develop, and evaluate Aboriginal studies curricula.

In Saskatchewan the Northern Teacher Education Program (NORTEP) and the Northern Professional Access College (NORPAC) are teacher-education programs primarily intended for people of Indian and Métis ancestry, both Status and non-Status.

NORTEP is an off-campus Bachelor of Education program alternating two-week periods of university classes with one week of classroom experience. 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 allowance during the northern-based phase of their program, and textbooks, tuition fees and transportation are provided. During the northern-based phase of their program, student accommodation is provided in La Ronge, Saskatchewan.

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. Over 80 per cent of them are employed as teachers or other educational professionals, nearly all of them in the north. The percentage of Indian and Métis teachers in the Northern Lights School Division has increased from three per cent to 25 per cent. Teacher turnover in Northern Lights School Division has declined from 75 per cent to 20 per cent. Northern Band schools, which had no teachers of Aboriginal ancestry on staff in the mid-seventies, now employ over 70 NORTEP graduates, and the Ile-a-la-Crosse and Creighton school divisions employ another nine.

The Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program offers teacher training through the University of Saskatchewan. For the first two years students attend classes either in Prince Albert, Regina or Saskatoon. The final two years include a four-month internship and may include class work at one of the university campuses. There is also a two-year Métis Teacher Associate Program, designed to be delivered on-site in Métis communities.

The teaching program has had over 500 graduates since 1980; some staff are former graduates of the program.<sup>39</sup> In stakeholder interviews, this program was widely held up as a model. The program, unlike most others, offers direct financial support for participants by paying tuition costs.

---

39. [www.gdins.org/](http://www.gdins.org/), Gabriel Dumont Web site, March 2002.

### UNITED STATES: THE UNIVERSITY OF ALASKA FAIRBANKS X-CED PROGRAM

The University of Alaska Fairbanks offers community education to reach traditionally excluded rural Aboriginal populations. Its five rural campuses serve predominantly Native student bodies in their home areas. The X-CED program is designed to train Native people to become teachers in their own communities. Since its beginning in 1970, the program has graduated about 300 students and uses some of the Canadian teacher education programs as models. The program's success has been attributed to its use of community-based Aboriginal faculty and Aboriginal input into the program's design and maintenance. According to reports, using community-based delivery and remote learning has solved many of the problems that plagued Aboriginal education in Alaska.<sup>40</sup>

## ABORIGINAL INSTITUTIONS

One strategy to increase the number of Aboriginal Peoples attending and completing post-secondary education has been to create new institutions, designed and controlled by Aboriginal Peoples themselves. Historically, Aboriginal Peoples have had less control over post-secondary education than other levels. This keeps Aboriginal education dollars from being spent only on universities and programs that are not under Aboriginal control and which may be felt to be assimilationist.<sup>41</sup> In a 1972 paper, "Indian Control of Indian Education," the National Indian Brotherhood emphasized local control as one of the starting points for future reform of Aboriginal education.

Interviews conducted and literature reviewed for this study demonstrated that whenever Aboriginal students 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 First Nations University of Canada, an Aboriginal-controlled university college.<sup>42</sup>

Ray Barnhardt has identified major themes in all of the Aboriginal educational institutional goals or practices around the world.<sup>43</sup> 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.

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

41. Hampton, Eber, 2000. "First Nations Controlled University Education in Canada," *Aboriginal Education: Fulfilling the Promise*, p208–221. UBC Press, Vancouver.

42. Hampton, Eber, 2000. "First Nations Controlled University Education in Canada," *Aboriginal Education: Fulfilling the Promise*, p208–221. UBC Press, Vancouver.

43. Barnhardt, Ray, 1991. "Higher Education in the Fourth World: Indigenous People Take Control," *Canadian Journal of Native Education* Volume 18, No 2.

The literature and interviews gave strong support for existing Aboriginal institutions. Factors said to have contributed to these institutions' success at attracting and retaining Aboriginal students include the high level of Aboriginal staff and the support of other Aboriginal students.

Many stakeholders complained that Aboriginal institutions are under-funded. One stakeholder said that funding at his institution had been flat for a decade. Another said that Aboriginal institutions must often seek additional funding from bands. Stakeholders at smaller Aboriginal institutions said they have waiting lists and turn people away. Many Aboriginal institutions receive no direct provincial funding but would like to create funding links with provincial governments, while other stakeholders said they would like to see direct funding from the federal government. Said one:

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

The largest and best-known of Aboriginal semi-independent post-secondary institutions is the First Nations University of Canada (FNUC—formerly the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College), controlled by the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations. It has more than 1,500 students from First Nations across Canada. Its faculty is approximately 50 per cent Aboriginal.

First Nations University offers bachelor programs in language studies, education, communication, fine arts, Aboriginal studies and business. All courses are provincially accredited through a federation agreement with the University of Regina. In 1995, FNUC, in partnership with the University of Saskatchewan, launched the first Aboriginal MBA program in Canada. It also offers special-case 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.

FNUC's mission is to enhance the quality of life, and to preserve, protect and interpret the history, language, culture and artistic heritage of First Nations. It aims to acquire and expand its base of knowledge and understanding by providing opportunities for bilingual and bi-cultural education. Services offered include academic counseling, Elder services, scholarships, bursaries, awards and tutoring services. The university is the only Aboriginal institution recognized by the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada as offering university-level education.

The Gabriel Dumont Institute of Métis Studies and Applied Research is the educational arm of the Métis Nation—Saskatchewan, and the only Métis owned and operated educational institution of its kind in Canada.

The institutes mandate is to promote, renew and develop Métis culture with a view to making Métis self-government a reality. It researches Aboriginal culture and history in its research institute to develop teaching and training models and curricula, and to disseminate its information through modern communication methods. The institute was praised in interviews for instilling a sense of Métis nationhood in its students. Funded by grants from the Saskatchewan and federal governments, the institute 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.

Many smaller Aboriginal institutions operate in Canada, often through partnerships with larger colleges or universities. Some cross the conventional boundaries of universities, colleges and technical institutes by offering a wide range of courses. The Wilp Wilxo'oskwahl Nisga'a (the Nisga'a House of

Wisdom) in British Columbia has, for example, developed partnerships with the University of Northern British Columbia, Northwest Community College and Open Learning Agency. Its bilingual, bicultural studies 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 religious studies.

One example of a smaller and more locally focused Aboriginal education institutional 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 financial assistance for students in departmentally approved training programs.

### THE UNITED STATES: TRIBAL COLLEGES

The American tribal college movement began in the late 1960s with the establishment of community colleges on reservations. The colleges now have a national advocacy organization and a professional journal. The colleges are given government funding per student under the *Tribal College Act*, as well as funding from corporations and philanthropic organizations. The Tribal College Fund targets specific tasks outlined by individual colleges. As in Canada, funding has been a constant issue for the colleges.<sup>44</sup> It means faculty salaries are low, making it hard to retain faculty, most of whom are non-Aboriginal. Non-Aboriginal teaching staff also find it hard to adjust to life and work on reservations, and this may be another reason for high faculty turnover.<sup>45</sup>

All tribal colleges are controlled by boards of trustees who are nearly all local American Indian community members as are most administrators. The colleges offer associate degrees in arts, science, applied science and one-year certificates. Research suggests the colleges are working on ways to promote closer ties between American Indian communities, institutions and the private sector<sup>46</sup> and that the impact of the colleges can be seen in students' successes at other schools, admission to the workforce, and in the pride and hope these colleges have generated in American Native people. Stakeholders commented on the success of tribal colleges in strengthening their local communities, cultures and languages.

44. Stein, Wayne J., 1999. "Chapter 11: Tribal Colleges: 1968–1998," *Next Steps: Research and Practice to Advance Indian Education*. Eric Clearing House.

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

46. See for example Pavel, Michael, 1999. "American Indians and Alaska Natives in Higher Education," *Next Steps: Research and Practice to Advance Indian Education*. Karen Gayton Swisher and John Tippeconnie III, editors. Eric Clearing House.

### THE UNITED STATES: HERITAGE COLLEGE

Heritage College in Spokane, Washington was created in 1981 after persistent requests for four-year Bachelor's and Master's programs within commuting distance of large agricultural populations in north and south central Washington. This growing population included significant numbers of American Indians. The Yakima Tribe was especially vocal and the main campus is on the Yakima Reservation. Heritage College's master in education and master in teaching programs are delivered at school district sites throughout the United States, approved and monitored by the Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges.

### NEW ZEALAND: TE WĀNANGA-O-RAUKAWA

Māori parents, seeking to offer their children alternative education, have helped develop Whare Waananga, post-secondary sites focused on unlearning the colonial culture and imparting ideas of resistance and cultural pride.<sup>47</sup> Te Wānanga-o-Raukawa, or University of Raukawa, the country's first private university-level institution, is devoted to Māori knowledge. Teaching there takes a holistic approach, based on knowledge and wisdom passed on by Māori ancestors. 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 telecommunications.

### AUSTRALIA: BATCHELOR COLLEGE

Batchelor College provides accredited vocational training and higher education programs. 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, which offers "mixed-mode delivery" to allow mature students to balance school with their family and ceremonial obligations. Its "both ways" philosophy seeks to reconcile mainstream and indigenous Australian cultures in its teaching methods and course materials and the curriculum was developed in consultation with students. There is a network of community study centres in over thirty-five remote communities. Batchelor College also has a number of community agreements with councils, schools and clinics for both course delivery and student support. However, a shortage of Indigenous staff has led to incomplete or inconsistent application of some the college's pedagogy.

47. Smith, Graham Hingangaroa, 2000. "Maori Education: Revolution and Transformative Action," Canadian Journal of Native Education Volume 24, No. 1.

## **PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN ABORIGINAL AND NON- ABORIGINAL INSTITUTIONS**

Some Aboriginal groups have sought to get specialized post-secondary education for their own people by developing joint programs with existing institutions. This allows Aboriginal communities to draw on the expertise of existing institutions while ensuring culturally-relevant study opportunities for their people.

The First Nations Partnership Program, coordinated through the University of Victoria, was developed after a request from a group of First Nations communities in central Canada represented by the Meadow Lake Tribal Council, which sought child-care training that would be delivered in its community and incorporate its cultural practices, values, language and spirituality. An innovative model for ensuring the cultural representation of communities was developed.

In the seven partnership programs, student retention and program completion is twice the national average for Aboriginal post-secondary training. More important, over 95 per cent of graduates remain in their own communities. To date, 65 per cent of program graduates have created new programs for children and youth, 13 per cent have assumed staff positions in existing programs in their communities, and 11 per cent are continuing with their studies.

The Squamish Nation of British Columbia and Capilano College of North Vancouver created a successful transition program for Aboriginal students. Both the Squamish Nation and the college 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:<sup>48</sup>

- Aboriginal control of the education
- basing the program in the Aboriginal community
- student achievement levels determined program placement
- careful monitoring of student progress
- using student performance to determine funding
- Aboriginal Peoples participated in curriculum design, and
- Support services were proactive.

## **ABORIGINAL-GEARED PROGRAMS AT MAINSTREAM INSTITUTIONS**

Many of the larger post-secondary institutions in Canada have been able to offer specific programs at the undergraduate or graduate levels that are designed to meet the specific needs and interests of Aboriginal students.

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 programs, Aboriginal students take the same required courses and are evaluated and graduate on the same basis as the non-Aboriginal students in the school. But both programs permit the law schools to consider factors other than LSAT and university marks in making decisions about admitting Aboriginal Peoples. UBC's program has graduated almost as many Aboriginal law graduates as all other Canadian programs combined.

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

The University of Alberta's program is funded by the Alberta Law Foundation. It advises prospective students on admission procedures and criteria, and it offers personal, academic and career counselling for students enrolled in the Bachelor of Law program.

The Ts'kel Graduate Studies Program at the University of British Columbia was designed to prepare Aboriginal people to work in educational administration but has been expanded to include educational studies, curriculum and instruction, and educational psychology and special education. Regular UBC graduate admission requirements apply. Students in the program take part in a seminar on research related to Aboriginal education as well as a course that simulates administering a First Nations band school. Students have an opportunity for field experience in Aboriginal or Non-Aboriginal public schools.

In 2001, the Faculty of Forestry of the University of British Columbia developed the First Nations Forestry Initiative, focusing on understanding Aboriginal rights as they pertain to forest resource management. The faculty also introduced course content dealing specifically with Aboriginal forestry issues. Its goals include more study of Aboriginal forestry issues, creating strategic links with Aboriginal communities and recruiting from Aboriginal communities.

## **CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT**

Eurocentric traditions, as well as pressure to meet set guidelines, have meant that the curriculum for Aboriginal learning has largely been set by non-Aboriginal Canadians.

Aboriginal educators, however, want control of curriculum development. The National Indian Brotherhood made curriculum development one of its objectives in its 1972 paper, "Indian Control of Indian Education." The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples found that where Aboriginal Peoples have exercised control of education, there have been higher success rates. The vast majority of the literature reviewed and interviews conducted linked Aboriginal control of curriculum development to improved enrolment and retention. Aboriginal curriculum development is also thought to increase support from Aboriginal communities.

The University of Northern British Columbia's Office of First Nations Programming has developed curricula through a collaborative partnership with Aboriginal communities. UNBC requires all of its community-developed curricula to be transferable to other universities, and therefore the courses must meet the academic standards of its mainstream curriculum. One example of this is the Métis Studies program. A committee was formed with Elders, university personnel and leaders and experts in the Métis community. The collaboration has encouraged enrolment from the community.<sup>49</sup>

Aboriginal curriculum development at UNBC has been aided by the strong presence of the Nisga'a, a First Nation with an exceptionally developed infrastructure of self-definition and initiative for self-government. UNBC's Nisga'a Protocol Agreement gives the Nisga'a control over hiring related to Aboriginal programs, and over standards in conjunction with the university. Each staff member must have a Bachelor or Master's degree and be a "current practitioner of the culture."<sup>50</sup>

49. 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*, Volume 23 Number 2, 1999.

50. *ibid.*

Other curriculum development initiatives are supported through institutions such as The First Nations University of Canada and the Gabriel Dumont Institute. The success of UBC's Native Indian Teacher Education Program, First Nations Legal Studies program and Ts'kel Graduate program have all been attributed to the direct involvement of Aboriginal Peoples in the design, development and ongoing assessment of the programs. UBC's First Nations House of Learning has identified the creation of Aboriginal curriculum and research as its next goal.<sup>51</sup>

## ABORIGINAL LANGUAGES

In the 1996 census, one-quarter of Canada's Aboriginal population reported having an Aboriginal language as their mother tongue. As Yvonne Hébert has argued, a key to strengthening Aboriginal education is the development of strong language and literacy skills.<sup>52</sup> While educational institutions were previously associated with assimilative language policies, post-secondary institutions are now embracing the teaching of Aboriginal languages as a way to increase Aboriginal enrolment. More formal support is needed, however, as very little of the organizational and curricular infrastructure required to do so exists at any level of the Canadian educational system.

Stakeholders have argued that the instruction of Aboriginal languages requires traditional teaching that reflects the assumptions inherent in Aboriginal 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.

## INITIATIVES IN THE SCIENCE AND HEALTH FIELDS

In general, Aboriginal participation in education has focused on the immediate needs of the Aboriginal community. Enrolment in education programs has increased, as Table 2 shows, but enrolment in science and health programs remains disproportionately low. This is believed to be caused by poor preparation at the secondary level and young Aboriginal Peoples' minimal exposure to the careers and skills of people who take math and the physical sciences.

It's believed that Aboriginal students in science-based professions, especially health and natural resources, will increase as self-government increases. Anne Mullens wrote in *University Affairs* of a critical shortage of Aboriginal Peoples in scientific fields<sup>53</sup> and Herman Michell of the First Nations University of Canada states that meaningful self-government can only be exercised by a balanced

51. Gardner, Ethel, 2000. "First Nations House of Learning: A Continuity of Transformation," *Aboriginal Education: Fulfilling the Promise*, p190–207. UBC Press, Vancouver.

52. Hébert, Yvonne, 2000. "The State of Aboriginal Literacy and Language," *Aboriginal Education: Fulfilling the Promise*. UBC Press, Vancouver.

53. Mullens, Anne, 2001. "Why Aboriginals Aren't Taking Science," *University Affairs*, November 2001.



pool of educated Aboriginal resource people. Mullens estimated that of the 45,000 students enrolled in the 34 engineering programs in Canada, only 140 are Aboriginal Peoples and reported the Canadian Medical Association finding that only 100 of Canada's 58,000 doctors have Native ancestry.

There are also problems of literacy and underfunding at Aboriginal secondary schools. However, funding does exist to help in the diversification of Aboriginal subject areas. The government of Alberta, for example, offers the Aboriginal Health Careers Bursary, with a budget of up to \$200,000 worth of awards allocated to Alberta Aboriginal Peoples enrolling in health courses.

The Institute of Indigenous Government has recently developed an Associative Science program, in partnership with Kwantlen College, to train students for health and science careers. The University of Saskatchewan has the Cameco Access Program in Engineering and Science. For the first time, in the 2002–2003 academic year, the University of British Columbia's Faculty of Medicine is giving five per cent of its places to Aboriginal students.

Alberta Learning also provides support to the Alberta Aboriginal Apprenticeship Project, a joint industry-Aboriginal initiative to increase Aboriginal participation in Alberta apprenticeship programs. Launched in June 2001 in Edmonton, it could be expanded if the pilot is successful.

**TABLE 2: DISTRIBUTION OF CANADIANS WITH POST-SECONDARY CERTIFICATES, DIPLOMAS OR DEGREES BY PROGRAM OR MAJOR FIELD OF STUDY**

BY PROGRAM OR MAJOR FIELD OF STUDY	REGISTERED INDIAN			OTHER ABORIGINAL PEOPLES			OTHER CANADIANS		
	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
<b>Trades and other non-university certificates</b>									
Education, recreation & counselling services	5.3	12.9	9.4	2.8	8.7	5.7	1.6	8.8	5.1
Fine & applied arts	2.8	7.7	5.5	3.8	10.1	6.9	4.5	10.6	3.7
Humanities & 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 & administration	8.9	32.3	21.5	8.5	36.1	22.2	13.1	38.3	25.6
Agricultural & biological sciences/technologies	5.6	5.2	5.4	5.2	5.4	5.3	5.0	4.2	4.6
Engineering & applied sciences	1.0	0.3	0.6	0.8	0.3	0.6	0.6	0.1	0.4
Engineering technologies & trades	58.6	8.9	31.7	66.7	10.3	38.8	64.6	6.6	35.9
Health professions, sciences & 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 (per cent)	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Total (number)	28,250	33,175	61,420	23,245	22,825	46,075	2,753,585	2,692,765	5,446,355
<b>University certificates and degrees</b>									
Education, recreation & counselling services	25.1	36.6	32.6	18.8	30.6	25.6	11.9	26.4	19.0
Fine & applied arts	1.9	2.1	2.1	3.5	4.0	3.9	1.9	3.5	2.7
Humanities & 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	16.8	18.2	17.5
Commerce, management & administration	16.2	9.4	11.7	14.4	9.7	11.8	20.2	13.8	17.0
Agricultural & biological sciences/technologies	2.7	2.0	2.2	2.6	2.9	2.8	4.8	4.8	4.8
Engineering & applied sciences	6.4	0.7	2.6	8.7	1.5	4.7	17.4	2.4	10.1
Engineering technologies & trades	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.7	0.0	0.3	0.3	0.1	0.2
Health professions, sciences & 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 (per cent)	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Total (number)	4,425	8,655	13,080	4,405	5,850	10,255	1,781,555	1,721,355	3,502,910

## SUPPORTS FOR STUDENTS

Aboriginal students, accustomed to close-knit communities with more one-on-one time with teachers, can find the formal and impersonal atmosphere of large universities intimidating. Support services can help counter this and many post-secondary institutions offer Aboriginal students academic support, personal support, the support of Elders and Aboriginal gathering places on campus. Support can be something as seemingly small as having a staff member speak individually to new students, so they have access to a familiar person if they have questions or concerns, or as major as a daycare centre. The difference that student support makes in terms of retention is not quantifiable, however, and receives little of the analysis or acclaim garnered by specific programs or initiatives.

Support programs include the Institute of Indigenous Government offering smaller classes, so instructors spend more time with each student. The Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies has run addiction workshops during lunch hours and tries to include spouses in student support activities. The Institute of Indigenous Government hires students as mentors and tutors. One stakeholder told of an urban university that had installed a free phone for long-distance calls after Aboriginal students from remote

Northern communities had accrued massive bills calling family and friends. Another told of alumni at a reunion creating an emergency bursary for Aboriginal students having problems with their finances.

Institutions also work to educate staff and faculty about Aboriginal culture. The University of Regina, the First Nations University of Canada and the Gabriel Dumont Institute created *First Nations and Métis Students: a Faculty Guide* to foster cultural sensitivity in the classroom. This guide suggests that “teachers should adopt humility as a teaching style,” become more open-minded and more accepting of First Nations and Métis diversity.<sup>54</sup>

Many stakeholders discussed the availability of Elders as a support mechanism. The participation of elders has been seen as a way to foster Aboriginal ways of knowing and provide support for Aboriginal students.<sup>55</sup> Elders also close the generation gap created by the legacy of residential schools and strengthen the pride and kinship felt by Aboriginal students. Elders are usually not paid for their contributions, which has been controversial. It is argued that elders are a valuable asset to the educational process, and as such should be paid like teachers.

### THE UNITED STATES: ELDERS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ALASKA FAIRBANKS

The Alaska Native Studies Program at the University of Alaska Fairbanks has an Elder-in-Residence program, where prominent tradition bearers from the Aboriginal community reside on the campus for extended periods each semester. 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.

54. Anaquod, Gaylene, et.al. *First Nations and Metis Students: a Faculty Guide*. University of Regina, First Nations University of Canada, Teaching Development Centre, Gabriel Dumont Institute.

55. Medecine, Beatrice, 1986. “My Elders Tell Me,” Indian Education in Canada. Vancouver: UBC Press.

Despite these apparent breakthroughs, the literature reviewed and stakeholders interviewed argue that student support is underfunded. Studies have shown that Aboriginal students often feel alone and socially isolated, and that the lack of personal and academic support networks are a main reason for Aboriginal students' lack of success.<sup>56</sup> Support services are especially necessary when students do not have the basic literacy or numeracy skills required for their courses. The dean of an Aboriginal institution complained that under-funding allowed only two counsellors for 450 Aboriginal students.

There is also a lack of support for Aboriginal women, especially single mothers. Often there is no daycare. Stakeholders also said that the special health needs of Aboriginal people, including problems of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, need to be addressed.

Support programs are in place at larger or more innovative institutions, but need to be extended and promoted. Aboriginal students may not seek support unless it is made visible and accessible. The Assembly of First Nations and others have called for more visible support systems at all levels. One stakeholder said that the Aboriginal students who withdraw from studies are those who never sought support services at all.

*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*

The University of British Columbia's First Nations House of Learning was established in 1987 to draw together and give greater visibility to Aboriginal programs on campus

and coordinate all aspects of Aboriginal support at UBC. Not home to a specific academic program, it provides support services for students and serves as a liaison between the university and Aboriginal communities.

An impressive Aboriginal Longhouse, opened in 1993, is the hub of Aboriginal activities on campus. The Longhouse also helps Aboriginal Peoples to share their cultures with each other, the university community and society in general. The Salish-style Longhouse structure includes Sty-Wet Tan Great Hall, an elders' lounge, S-Takya Childcare, a Sacred Circle, a student and staff lounge, a computer lab, a kitchen, the Xwi7xwa Library and administrative offices. The house of learning was often cited as a model of Aboriginal student support. The Longhouse and the dedicated staff mean students have access to a range of support not found at many other universities. All of the initiatives are run by the four Rs: Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity and Responsibility.

The Office of Native Student Services helps the University of Alberta provide an environment that encourages full access, participation and success for Aboriginal students. The Retention Strategies and Services at the university provide a range of programs:

- the Aboriginal Student Housing Program
- peer support and personal and academic counselling
- a Scholarships and Bursaries Program which distributes a 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

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

- coordinating study skills, one-on-one tutorials, study seminars, and workshops
- distribution of “Moose Call,” an electronic newsletter and Buffalo Yell News which focus on Aboriginal education news and insights
- the Aboriginal Student Handbook, and
- the Community Relations Program which recruits and helps secure employment services.

McGill University has First People’s House to support Aboriginal students and there is a Native Centre 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. Stakeholders interviewed lauded the support offered at the University of Toronto.

## ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT

Alternative assessment programs set different standards for Aboriginal students, in an effort to counter cultural differences which might keep them from a post-secondary education. However, such programs are often regarded with hostility, especially transition programs and alternative entry criteria. In a report on Aboriginal Peoples in health faculties, Aboriginal graduates raised concerns that Access programs were not seen as legitimate courses with the same standards as other university courses. Nor did all stakeholders interviewed agree alternative entry criteria are successful. One said they lead to students (especially mature students) feeling ill-prepared and overwhelmed. However, many other stakeholders felt that Aboriginal Peoples should have lower academic admission criteria because of the challenges they face in even graduating high school.

### ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT IN AUSTRALIA

Alternative assessment sets different admission criteria for Aboriginal Australians. 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. Initially alternative assessment focused on program acceptance and grading, but it has extended to deadline and attendance requirements. In a study of indigenous performance in Western Australia, it was found that 78 per cent of the 268 Aboriginal students analyzed were accepted to university through alternative entry criteria; 48 per cent had year 10 education or less.<sup>57</sup>

However, assessment and learning strategies that focus on participants’ strengths have led to a decreased effort to overcome or evaluate weaknesses, leading to some negative attitudes about alternative assessment. Many non-Indigenous students at the University of Sydney felt Cadigal students succeed is because of their race.<sup>58</sup> Some Australians see alternative assessment as favouritism, or as a watering down of standards.<sup>59</sup>

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

58. 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.

59. 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.



# CONCLUSION

Aboriginal Peoples face a variety of barriers that limit their participation in post-secondary education. While financial hardship was mentioned throughout the research, more than increased funding is required to promote Aboriginal involvement. People we spoke to believe that notwithstanding the wide range of strategies and initiatives which promote the place of Native Canadians in post-secondary education, more must be done. Institutions must develop a greater understanding of Aboriginal people, and the historic and social barriers they face, before a real difference will be seen in the number of Aboriginal people who succeed in pursuing higher education. Demographics show that we are at a crucial time for improving practices aimed at Aboriginal participation, because of the high numbers of Aboriginal children who will be ready for higher education in a few years.

Stakeholder interviews and research literature suggest that there are exemplary practices for promoting and supporting Aboriginal post-secondary education. Programs or initiatives that were singled out for praise by stakeholders had certain common characteristics:

- community delivery, such as offered through the teacher education programs
- alternative admissions criteria and transitional support
- academic and personal support, such as that offered UBC's First Nations House of Learning, and
- support for Aboriginal control of education, either at the program, curricular or institutional level.

All of these must be considered as new initiatives are developed to address long-standing problems of lack of preparation, alienation and isolation.

Other challenges include:

- limited federal and band funding
- limited support for specific Aboriginal groups, such as Métis, mature students and women with children
- the under-representation of Aboriginal Peoples in some subjects such as sciences and the health professions, and
- limited support for Aboriginal control of post-secondary education, including curriculum development and Aboriginal institutions.

There has not been a consistent enough effort to overcome barriers to participation in Aboriginal post-secondary education through special strategies and initiatives and some problems get more attention than others. There are strategies to overcome poverty, for example, but comparatively few attempts to address family responsibilities, abuse or alcoholism.

Finally, it should be said that programs to break down barriers must be based on better data than we have now, which is woefully inadequate for policy-making. Further research to track the success of initiatives on a wide scale is needed, such as statistical evidence on enrolment and completion of specific post-secondary programs. Some limitations of the data could be overcome at the institutional or program level, and more information could be collected on less easily quantified strategies, such as student support services or the use of Aboriginal-developed curricula.

Strategies are in place to address barriers that arise for Aboriginal students in the post-secondary system. The challenge remains to improve on these initiatives, to test and strengthen their effectiveness, while also seeking ways to further address the endemic social and personal barriers that often stop Aboriginal Peoples from even reaching the point where these initiatives can assist them.

## REFERENCES

- 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.
- Alcorn, William and Benjamin Levin, 1998. *Post-Secondary Education for Indigenous Populations*. Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.
- Anaquod, Gaylene, et.al. *First Nations and Metis Students: A Faculty Guide*. University of Regina, First Nations University of Canada, Teaching Development Centre, Gabriel Dumont Institute.
- Assembly of First Nations Web site, March 2002. [www.afn.ca](http://www.afn.ca).
- Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1999.
- Barnhardt, Ray, 2001. "Domestication of the Ivory Tower: Institutional Adaption to Cultural Distance," *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, December 2001.
- Barnhardt, Ray, 1991. "Higher Education in the Fourth World: Indigenous People Take Control," *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, Volume 18, No. 2.
- B.C. Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology, 1999. *1999 B.C. College and Institute Aboriginal Former Student Outcomes*.
- 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.
- 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.
- Department of Indian Affairs Web site, March 2002. [www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ps/edu/ense\\_e.html](http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ps/edu/ense_e.html)
- 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*, Volume 23, No. 2, 1999.
- 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.
- Gabriel Dumont Web site, March 2002. [www.gdins.org](http://www.gdins.org).
- Gardner, Ethel, 2000. "First Nations House of Learning: A Continuity of Transformation," *Aboriginal Education: Fulfilling the Promise, p190–207*. UBC Press, Vancouver.
- Hampton, Eber, 2000. "First Nations Controlled University Education in Canada," *Aboriginal Education: Fulfilling the Promise, p208–221*. UBC Press, Vancouver.



- Hampton, Eber, 1993. "Toward a Redefinition of American Indian/Alaskan Native Education." *Canadian Journal of Native Education*. 20 (2) 1993.
- Hébert, Yvonne, 2000. "The State of Aboriginal Literacy and Language," *Aboriginal Education: Fulfilling the Promise*. UBC Press, Vancouver.
- Herrmann, Randy, 2001. "The Funding Myth," *University Affairs* November, 2001. Ottawa: Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, 11.
- Hikel, R.S, 1994. *A Review of the Access Program: Policy Directions for the Future*. The Department of Education and Training, Manitoba.
- 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*, XLI: 1 (March, 1995).
- Hull, Jeremy, October 2000 *Aboriginal Post Secondary Education and Labour Market Outcomes, Canada, 1996*, Department of Indian and Northern Development document.
- Kirkness, Verna K. 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 1991.
- Krause, R.G. and M.C.C. Stephens. "Preparing Aboriginal Students for Medical School: Manitoba Program Increases Equality of Opportunity," *Canadian Family Physician*, Volume 38, May 1992.
- Krumm, Bernita L., 1995. *Tribal Colleges: A Study of Development, Mission and Leadership*. Information Analyses.
- Medecine, Beatrice, 1986. "My Elders Tell Me," *Indian Education in Canada*. Vancouver: UBC Press.
- Mullens, Anne, 2001. "Why Aboriginals Aren't Taking Science," *University Affairs*, November 2001.
- Overview of DIAND Program DATA IMB/CIMD June, 2000.
- Pavel, Michael, 1999. "American Indians and Alaska Natives in Higher Education," *Next Steps: Research and Practice to Advance Indian Education*. Karen Gayton Swisher and John Tippeconnie III, editors. Eric Clearing House.
- Research and Analysis Directorate, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 1996. *Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education and Labour Market Outcomes Canada 1996*.
- Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, Vol.3 chapter 5.
- Saskatchewan Department of Post-Secondary Education and Skills Training, 2002. Draft: *The Post-Secondary Sector Aboriginal Education and Training Action Plan*.
- Smith, Graham Hingangaroa, 2000. "Maori Education: Revolution and Transformative Action," *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, Volume 24, No. 1.
- Statistics Canada, *Total Population by Aboriginal Group, 1996 Census*.
- Statistics Canada, *The DAILY, 1996 Census: Aboriginal data*.

Stein, Wayne J., 1999. "Chapter 11: Tribal Colleges: 1968–1998," *Next Steps: Research and Practice to Advance Indian Education*. Eric Clearing House.

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

U.S. Dept. of Education, Digest of Education Statistics 1999, Table 209.

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

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

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

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* Volume 53: Suppl. 2, pp. 152–156.

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