

Colleges Serving Aboriginal Learners and Communities

2010 Survey Highlights



Aboriginal Educational Gaps

The 2006 Census shows a wide gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples' high school completion rates.

However, the percentage of Aboriginal people with a college certificate or diploma is almost at par with the non-Aboriginal population, and the percentage of Aboriginal people with apprenticeship or trades certification is higher than for the non-Aboriginal population.

Results from the 2006 Aboriginal Peoples Survey indicate that a much higher proportion of First Nation, Métis and Inuit people pursuing post-secondary education attend colleges (42%) and technical institutes and trade schools (20%) than universities (16%).

Aboriginal peoples' access to post-secondary education, inclusion and community development has been one of ACCC's key advocacy priorities since the creation of the Association in 1972, and has been addressed through numerous ACCC conferences and initiatives.

ACCC's 2009-10 environmental scan of Aboriginal programs and services demonstrates that colleges, institutes, polytechnics and cégeps are expanding their services for Aboriginal learners and working with communities to ensure effective delivery of post-secondary educational programs.

Student Recruitment

Improving student recruitment processes is essential for increasing the proportion of Aboriginal learners going to college. Colleges reported using a variety of strategies to attract Aboriginal students including career days, targeted marketing and partnerships with high schools.

Colleges emphasized the need for recruitment to be more integrated in community relations and tied to Aboriginal student services. Colleges need recruitment strategies which link Aboriginal students to programs and provide laddering opportunities from adult upgrading to college preparatory programs in fields related to careers in Aboriginal communities.

One of the key barriers to recruiting Aboriginal students was the application process. Many colleges have developed approaches to assist in this often complex and cumbersome process including assistance with completing application forms and open admissions policies.

Funding Sources and Challenges

Colleges continue to report that the cap on funding of the Post-secondary Student Support Program of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada is a severe constraint to Aboriginal students. There are more students qualified than the funding can support. Other key funding challenges include:

- the lack of financial assistance for students in adult upgrading
- funding amounts that do not recognize the additional costs of support services and upgrading programs required by many Aboriginal students before beginning post-secondary education
- unstable project-based funding for Aboriginal program development and delivery
- lack of funding for student supports for community-based programs
- lack of coordination among federal funding agencies.

A Success Story from Lethbridge College

The EnMax First Nations Wind Turbine Technician Award is the largest at Lethbridge College, with a value of \$10,000. The award provides a living allowance, books, tools and supplies for a First Nations student in the Wind Turbine Technician program. Ty was this year's recipient, and was already registered in the program when the award was advertised. He had secured funding from his Band for tuition costs, but was concerned about a living allowance. Through this scholarship, Ty was given the opportunity to move into his program of choice with all the financial support needed for success.

Colleges reported that they offer the following types of Aboriginal-specific financial assistance:

- Aboriginal-specific bursaries (69%)
- scholarships and small emergency loans (48%)
- support to complete financial assistance applications (65%).

Education Programs

Eighty colleges, including the three in the territories and two Aboriginal institutions (Nicola Valley Institute of Technology-NVIT and Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies-SIIT) offer education and training programs specifically for Aboriginal students. These programs include adult upgrading, college preparatory, post-secondary certificate and diploma programs, apprenticeships, university transfer and degree programs, and community-based and distance learning programs. In 2008-09, the highest proportion of Aboriginal students were enrolled in adult upgrading programs (23%) and post-secondary certificate and diploma programs (26%). Over one-third of mainstream institutions offer programs in partnership with Aboriginal-led institutes.

A Success Story from NVIT

Rhonda, from the Soda Creek Band, completed her Business Diploma at NVIT and then received her Bachelor of General Studies through an agreement between NVIT and Simon Fraser University. She is employed as the Co-coordinator for her Band's Economic Development Department. Rhonda says she wasn't just a number at NVIT and found those at NVIT went above the call of duty to ensure the students' needs were met.

Canada's two publicly-funded Aboriginal institutes have seen enormous enrolment growth in the past five years. Total enrolment at SIIT more than doubled and that at NVIT tripled. The highest Aboriginal student enrolments are at mainstream institutions. Northwest Community College in B.C. reported 3,933 Aboriginal students in 2008-2009, Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology (SIAT) had 2,369 and Red River College had 2,284. The College of the North Atlantic has seen the Aboriginal student population grow by 58% at its Happy Valley-Goose Bay campus in Labrador with 82% of students self-identifying as Innu, Métis or Inuit.

Colleges continue to report challenges in having Aboriginal students self-identify. Colleges have developed measures to improve self identification including promoting Aboriginal-specific programs and services, improving data collection, developing more user-friendly forms, and clarifying terminology.

Student Services

Eighty-seven colleges offer targeted Aboriginal student support services (85 mainstream and 2 Aboriginal institutes). These services help students to feel welcome and connected and to succeed in their studies.

Key components include:

- having targeted and visible Aboriginal student services
- providing one-on-one support through Aboriginal advisors and Elders
- offering a welcoming place to meet, study and learn.



The support of Elders is central to offering a welcoming environment to Aboriginal learners. Sixty-eight percent of colleges provide this service.

Colleges highlighted the importance of having a dedicated Aboriginal Student centre on campus. Seventy-three percent of institutions provide this service.

Other key services for supporting Aboriginal students include support finding housing, transportation, daycare services, financial counseling, and support transitioning to the labour market.

Exemplary Practice Working with High Schools

Northern College has a "Go to College Initiative," an intervention at Grade 8 level that introduces college programs and services to students, teachers and parents through interactive activities. Students learn about careers available and high school courses required for entry into college programs. Students come to a Northern College campus and a team also travels to James Bay Coastal communities to deliver the activities to the students in their own community or on reserve.

Lessons Learned

Aboriginal community engagement is fundamental for the effective delivery of Aboriginal programs and services. Colleges emphasized that Aboriginal students are most successful in programs that have strong Aboriginal community engagement and supportive Aboriginal leadership.

The Aboriginal voice must be heard across institutions. This includes having Aboriginal representation at senior administrative levels, content and curriculum which is culturally relevant, hiring practices to increase Aboriginal faculty and staff, inter-cultural training for college faculty and staff, and providing Aboriginal students opportunities to celebrate their culture.

A success story from Nova Scotia Community College

Travis, a student of Mi'kmaq descent is currently enrolled in NSCC's Deckhand Training Program. After a few years working as a deckhand, Travis was ready to become captain of his own fishing vessel. This past winter, he returned to NSCC to obtain his Fishing Master Four Certification. Today Travis is a proud captain and operator of a lobster fishing boat.

Support services are key for Aboriginal student retention and success. They are pivotal in creating a culturally-appropriate, welcoming and supportive learning environment.

In the 2010 survey, a new trend has emerged. Colleges are adopting holistic approaches to serving Aboriginal learners because Aboriginal services departments cannot do it alone. An institution-wide approach integrates the delivery of education programs and support services more effectively.

A Success Story from Aurora College

After her first year electrical apprenticeship at NAIT, Tyra came to Aurora College for her second year. She felt the smaller class size and hands-on approach at Aurora suited her better. The environment helped Tyra learn more easily, and she enjoyed the supportive community. She will return to her job as an apprentice electrician at the Diavik Diamond Mines in a few months, but she looks forward to continuing her studies at Aurora.