

First Nations University of Canada

Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education Roundtable-Summary

Background

The vision of the First Nations University of Canada is “to be a place of learning where knowledge is respected and promoted...and where students can learn in the context of their own traditions, language, and values”. The mission of the First Nations University of Canada is to enhance the quality of life, and to preserve, protect and interpret the history, language, culture and artistic heritage of First Nations. The Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations entered into a federation agreement with the University of Regina in May of 1976 creating the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College. The agreement provided for an independently administered university-college. On June 21, 2003, the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College officially changed its name to the First Nations University of Canada.

The university offers programs and services on three campuses: Regina, Saskatoon and Prince Albert (Northern Campus). Within the university there are 10 academic departments/schools that offer a variety of programs and courses. The Northern Campus maintains responsibility of coordinating and delivering community based and distance education programs. The Indigenous Center for International Development maintains our international partnerships with other countries for university programming.

The university has increasingly moved into higher cost professional programs in health and science. These have been developed in consultation with First Nations communities who identify areas of demand. In 1996, the National School of Dental Therapy program became part of the university. In 2003 the First Nations University of Canada entered into a partnership agreement with the University of Saskatchewan and the Saskatchewan Institutes of Applied Sciences and Technologies in offering the Nursing Education program of Saskatchewan. In 2006 a Bachelor’s degree in Health Studies was established.

The university has also begun to expand its range of graduate programs. These include a special case masters program in Arts, A First Nations Masters of Business Administration and a Masters of Aboriginal Social Work. Since 1983 the university has entered into over twenty-five agreements with Indigenous peoples institutions in Canada, South America, Central America and Asia.

Academic Programs

The First Nations University of Canada provides an opportunity for students of all nations to learn in an environment of First Nations cultures and values. The university is a special place of learning where we recognize the spiritual power of knowledge and where knowledge is respected and promoted. In following the paths given to us by the Creator, the First Nations have a unique vision to contribute to higher education.

Bachelor of Administration – Indian Business Administration, Indian Gaming,

Bachelor of Arts - English, Cree, Saulteaux, Linguistics, Indigenous Studies

Dental Therapy - Diploma of Dental Therapy

Bachelor of Education – Elementary, Secondary, Indian Languages (after degree)

Bachelor of Fine Arts – Indian Art, Indian Art History

Bachelor of Health Studies – Health Studies

Indian Communication Arts – certificate/diploma

Bachelor of Indian Social Work - Social Work

Bachelor of Science – Science, Applied Science, Environmental/Health Sciences

Bachelor of Science in Nursing – Nursing (UofS)

Graduate Studies (Masters) - Business Administration, Indigenous Studies, English, Linguistics, Aboriginal Social Work

Recruitment

Within the Student Success Services strategic plan for recruitment are five program areas the office have developed.

- (1) *Student Recruitment Program* - Securing funding for a full time recruitment officer
- (2) *Tracking System/Student Database* - developing a student tracking system, which includes methods for measuring and evaluating program and student success.
- (3) *Marketing/Communication* - In addition an effective marketing/communication strategy is being developed

- (4) *Partnerships* – Establishing and maintaining partnerships with secondary and other institutions and organizations (e.g. National Aboriginal Student Services Association, National Association of Indigenous Institutes of Higher learning,).
- (5) *Scholarships* – promoting scholarships as a means of attracting new students.

Retention – New Initiatives

1) *INDG 104.3- Introduction to Indigenous Higher Learning and Development*

INDG 104 targets concepts (P.O.W.E.R. Learning) that allow Aboriginal students to develop critical thinking and analysis essential for higher-level studies. The course allows students to understand themselves as Aboriginal students and to build interpersonal support, which is essential for success especially on campus. Activities and assignments attempt to foster problem- solving approaches.

The course begins with boundary breaking activities designed to speed up the process of building relationships within the class and ease transition from community to campus. As students begin to feel comfortable with each other, they become supports for one another as they share very real everyday problems. Experience has shown that these problems need to be dealt with immediately or students will drop out.

An extensive reading on cultural disintegration and reconstruction provides a springboard for many academic activities such as active reading and responsive writing. The reading introduces students to the destruction of colonialism and also provides an Aboriginal perspective of post-colonialism as it relates to contemporary living. This knowledge allows students to gain perspective of themselves and their culture, which in turn fosters healthy self-esteem and cultural identity. Once such issues are addressed, learning styles analysis allow students to understand how to best build on existing abilities and extend themselves in areas of weakness to ensure academic success. The reading is also used to develop leadership abilities as students move into progressively larger discussion groups, culminating in an oral class presentation.

This course offers a wide range of skill-building opportunities that encourage students to develop problem-solving abilities and critical thinking skills as they encounter issues of time management, test preparation, note taking and presentations. Students will develop and master skills and techniques through a wealth of specific exercises, diagnostic questionnaires, case studies, and journal writings. These skills are introduced in the course and further developed in a practical manner within the tutorial sessions. As students learn to prioritize and make distinctions of urgency and importance, they are able to enhance their efficiency and success in accomplishing academic tasks.

2) *STAR- Student Transition and Retention Program*

The First Nations University of Canada offers a unique first year experience with the Student Transition and Retention (STAR) program. The program is designed to assist students in developing attitudes and aptitudes necessary of academic success by facilitating the process of social and academic integration.

The STAR program offers academic, cultural and social support for first year students. These support services are intergrated into the program and forms part of the students first year schedule.

Students are enrolled as a co-hort that allows the opportunity for student to develop their own social and academic support networks. In addition, it allows the university to better plan and co-ordinate support programs and services.

3) *Career Services*

Career Services is a new initiative whose goal is to help motivate and educate students to take action to achieve current and future goals. Career Services empowers students to take control of their own career planning and job search by providing the following tools and services:

Career Counseling. To make informed decisions, students are provided guidance in self-assessments, career planning and exploration.

Information Resources. Students can meet individually or in groups to learn about occupational trends, job search skills, interviewing skills, resume and cover letter writing, networking and negotiating job offers. The centre also houses print, video, and computer/web-based resources available to students.

Job & Internship Listings. Students can access current job listings on-line, posted on the job board, or through Student Success Services.

Career & Internship Fairs. Exposing students to the diverse range of career options is extremely important in motivating students to pursue their goals. Career Fairs provide opportunities for students to meet potential employers and become more comfortable networking and more aware of skills required for certain positions.

On-Campus Recruiting. Information sessions are held throughout the year so that students can meet with Human Resource personnel from various businesses and organizations. This allows students to gain a better understanding of the labour market and potential future prospects.

Department Crawls. Department Crawls are opportunities for students to make on-site visits to local companies to see the facilities and talk to staff. This allows students to feel

more confident about their career direction, and gain valuable insight into the workings of these companies.

Retention – Continuing Programs

Academic Advising

The goal of student Academic Advising is to encourage, guide, support and promote student endeavours in a respectful, caring, understanding, confidential, and co-operative manner. The theoretical approach utilizes the work of Chickering's Student Development Model as well as Tinto's model of social and academic integration.

Elders

The First Nations University of Canada's holistic approach to post-secondary education begins with the Elders, whose presence, wisdom, and counsel are the mainstay of not only for students but also the university as a whole. Their knowledge of First Nation's traditions, culture and spirituality creates a unique support service. Consultation with Elders takes place in an atmosphere of trust and respect. This tradition helps restore an individual's self-confidence and peace of mind, which in turn, assists in the learning process.

Elders are an integral part of some academic course and are thus utilized within the classroom setting, where in keeping with oral traditions, share their knowledge.

M'mawi-atoskitan – Working Together

This is a program identifies and assists with academic 'at risk' students. Students on academic probation, and those students identified by instructors, will work with the Academic Advisor, Elders, and the Retention Specialist to develop an individual retention strategy for that student.

Orientation

The overall goal of the Orientation Program is to familiarize students with the First Nations University's programs and services. Orientation is aimed at integrating new students into the academic and social communities of the university.

Academic Seminars

Some of these academic seminars include, Note Taking, Time Management, Critical Reading, Critical Writing, Critical Thinking, Exam Preparation and Research Skills which are available to all students.

Non-academic Support Programs

Working in co-operation with Student Associations, Student Success Services will assist in coordinating non- academic support programs. These include but are not limited to Talking Circles, ceremonies, Aboriginal Toastmasters, traditional arts, and cultural teachings.

Writing Center

The Writing Center offers assistance for students at any stage of the writing process. The center helps build an understanding of the writing process and assists in developing writing skills.

Career Planning

The goal is to provide First Nations University students with job search skills, career information and assistance with integration into the labor market.

Math Support Center

Math Support Center offers assistance to students in understanding assigned tasks, problem-solving strategies and the use of principles and formulas. Tutorial assistance is available for one on one consultations and in group settings.