



Aboriginal Service Plan

Malaspina University-College

January 30 • 2007

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INTRODUCTION

Malaspina currently serves more aboriginal students than any other BC public post-secondary institution. In 2005/06 we reported 2,168 self-identified aboriginal students to the Ministry of Advanced Education, or fully 11% of our total student head count, and higher than the proportion of aboriginal people in the region's general population (5.9%). Our aboriginal students are not just local students: we attract students from all over the Island, other parts of B.C., including the North, and across Canada.

When aboriginal students come to Malaspina, they benefit from our current status as a comprehensive university-college. They also enjoy a wide range of diverse programs at all educational levels, from Adult Basic Education, to various "bridging" or transition programs, to trades and career programs, right on up to degree programs in a wide variety of disciplines. As one of our students puts it:

"Malaspina has so much to offer. It's like an all-in-one campus: ABE, trades, university-level courses. I went through the ABE program here and then went into [First Nations] studies."

— First Nations student

Some examples to illustrate the broad range of programming include the following:

Programs addressing specific needs of aboriginal communities

- The Aboriginal Sports Management Certificate delivered at the Cowichan campus (Duncan is hosting the 2008 Indigenous Games).
- Early Childhood Education and Care-First Nations is delivered at several sites.
- The Developmental Standard Term Certificate is a 90-credit program with a credential approved by the B.C. College of Teachers; the program was collaboratively developed by Malaspina University-College and the Chemainus Native College, and is delivered at the Chemainus Native College.
- First Nations Studies courses and programs: Arts One - First Nations provides a supportive, interdisciplinary, team-taught experience to first-year students. As well, there are BA Minor and Major degree options in First Nations Studies.

Bridging and transitioning programs

The Pathways to Learning bridging program in the Faculty of Education supports aboriginal learners in their first year of academic study.

Trades programs

Residential Carpentry has been delivered to the Sliammon Band near Powell River and Cowichan Tribes.

University courses with aboriginal content

There are dozens of courses in many disciplines that reflect our efforts at indigenizing the curriculum.

Conferences, events, and other activities with an aboriginal focus

- The *Heart of the Matter* Conference held 2001, 2003, 2005, 2007 (upcoming)
- Aboriginal Speakers' Series 2004-05, 2006-07

Contract and short-term training

In addition, Malaspina is highly responsive to immediate community needs and delivers a great deal of contract and short-term training and education to First Nations and other aboriginal groups throughout the province. The reports from Continuing Studies and the Science and Technology Faculty give some idea of the number of First Nations and other aboriginal groups with whom we have worked together and have provided training, both within our region (Nuu-Chah-Nulth, Cowichan, Snuneymuxw) and well beyond (Okanagan Band, Sto:lo Nation, Haida, Shuswap).

Laddering

Given the comprehensive mission of Malaspina, many of our programs are also specifically designed to allow aboriginal learners to “ladder” from one level to the next. An example would be a student completes a short-term workshop in shellfish training, who then decides to pursue a higher qualification: a bridging course would help prepare the student for the academic work required for either a Diploma in Resource Management or a full Bachelor’s degree in Resource Management or Fisheries and Aquaculture.

Support networks

In addition to our broad range of quality programming, we have established a reputation as the “school of choice” for aboriginal learners. Our institutional commitment to undergraduate education and faculty-student interaction is augmented by a good aboriginal student support network that contributes to a welcoming atmosphere.

PARTNERSHIPS


Malaspina University-College has a number of ongoing relationships with various Bands, Tribes, First Nations, and other aboriginal groups. These agreements and partnerships date from Malaspina’s beginnings. For example, the creation of the Arts One First Nations program, first offered in 1994, was in response to community activism for an interdisciplinary, culturally-sensitive, university-level “core” course that would both respect aboriginal ways of being and prepare aboriginal learners for further university study.

“I like that people in the First Nations Department care about how I’m doing, people in my classes notice when I’m not there and the instructors notice when my assignments are not up to the usual standard. This is the best part about going to Malaspina, especially being so far away from home. I needed a new network and it’s already here.”

**– Crystal Easton,
Bachelor of Arts First Nations Studies**

Malaspina University-College has a First Nations Advisory Committee with representatives from various aboriginal groups from our region. Currently, 18 groups are identified as our ongoing partners through the work of this committee, which meets regularly to provide input to the University-College on the communities’ needs and to suggest ways Malaspina can respond. The Committee provides advice on programming, support for special project funding, cooperation in student recruitment, advising, and retention initiatives, and more.

We also have many examples of individual agreements and partnerships related to specific collaborations. A unique feature of Malaspina’s regional campus in Duncan, as an example of this historical and ongoing partnering, is that it opened in 1988 on Cowichan Tribes land, and serves a large proportion of aboriginal students (33% of students attending the Cowichan campus are aboriginal).



Other examples of the broad range of individual partnerships and agreement include the following:

Agreements to deliver specific trades or career training

- Our Powell River campus has partnered with the Sliammon First Nation to offer Carpentry and Tourism Industry programming.
- Malaspina's Centre for Shellfish Research, with funding from the provincial government, is working with First Nations communities to develop the First Nations Shellfish Aquaculture Training program, a five-year initiative. The funding will be used to reach out to First Nations communities coast-wide to coordinate, facilitate and deliver training in shellfish farming.

Standing cooperation agreements for developing curriculum and delivering courses

- An Affiliation Agreement with Chemainus Native College allows Malaspina to support the College by delivering courses in support of their programs.

Agreements to foster aboriginal language and culture

- A Prior Learning Agreement with Cowichan Tribes for first-year Hul'qumi'num provides the granting of Malaspina credit to students who have completed the Cowichan Tribes' community-delivered language courses.
- The Hul'qumi'num Stakeholders Group brings together First Nations, School Districts 68 and 79, and a representative from the Malaspina Education department, working together to promote language in the schools.
- An Agreement between the Malaspina University-College department of First Nations Studies and the University of Alaska-Fairbanks to explore adapting Alaska's repository of oral culture, and to explore Alaskan First Nations' governance and economic development.

Community support for aboriginal research initiatives

Partnerships with local communities even inform our research priorities. For example, Malaspina University-College has been granted a B.C. Research Chair in Aboriginal Early Childhood Development. As we continue to raise matching funds for this \$1.25 million dollar project, we enjoy considerable support from local communities, and provincial and federal aboriginal organizations.

COMMITMENT

We believe Malaspina University-College has demonstrated a serious commitment to Aboriginal Education through time and across the range of our activities. That commitment has been demonstrated in both our allocation of resources and our institutional planning.

As outlined above, we have been committed for many years to providing programming that is responsive to our aboriginal communities, and that commitment extends to the number and types of courses and programs.

An additional example of commitment through programming is the pedagogy of the Arts One - First Nations Studies program and the core curriculum at years three and four in the First Nations Studies program. These courses are taught by teams of two faculty, who also maintain connections with local communities.

As well, both the Arts One and the degree programs incorporate the presence and teachings of Elders into the curriculum – our Elders-in-Residence program. Although the team teaching model and the inclusion of the Elders makes the program more expensive to run than other disciplines, Malaspina sees this as an investment that provides for a rich and rewarding experience for the student, and we remain committed to making that investment.

Of course, the presence of the Elders on campus is a benefit for all aboriginal learners. In a recent focus group discussion, a student spoke directly to this advantage: “Knowing that there were Elders here and that they were available to me [helped in my decision to attend Malaspina]. Before I came here Elders were a concept rather than a reality and once I heard about them being here and available, I wanted to experience that.” The Elders are an integral part of the teaching teams in the First Nations Studies department, but are also spiritual guides, mentors, and role models for all aboriginal students.

“Over the past couple of years when learning about culturally sensitive issues such as colonization, residential schools, Land Claims and the politics of aboriginal self determinations, I discovered a wealth of support from faculty, staff, elders and my own peers at Malaspina. They provided for my emotional, spiritual and intellectual well being.”


**Monica Wysotski,
Bachelor of Arts First Nations Studies**

We also devote significant resources to a range of student services for aboriginal learners, from recruitment of aboriginal students to various activities aimed at integrating aboriginal students into campus life. Once students are here, we have a welcoming and helpful First Nations Student Services (FNSS) Centre, Shq’apthut, that can provide program advice, but also facilitates that integration into the larger Malaspina community and helps students succeed in their studies. Retention of students continues to be an important consideration, and retention initiatives include mentoring, sending out letters to students who achieve a grade of “B” or better, and cultural events aimed at making aboriginal students more welcomed and comfortable on campus. Resources devoted to student services for aboriginal learners at Malaspina totals 5.3 full-time equivalent staff. These staff make the Centre an identifiable resource for students, and the wide range of campus activities the staff take part in makes them highly visible role models for aboriginal students at Malaspina.

Another recent development demonstrating our continuing commitment has been the creation of the position of Director, Aboriginal Education. The Director, Aboriginal Education is a full member of our Management Committee with the vice-presidents, instructional deans, and service directors. Her leadership has been instrumental in the development of an Aboriginal Service Plan, and will ensure communication with our aboriginal partners so the plan coordinates well with their needs and goals.

As well, our formal committee structures reflect the ongoing contribution of aboriginal constituencies to Malaspina’s operation. Our First Nations Advisory Committee meets regularly to continue the dialogue with community partners. Malaspina’s representatives include the Vice-President, Academic; the Director, Aboriginal Education; and the Dean responsible for the First Nations Studies department in order to ensure the advice from the communities translates into appropriate institutional actions. Recently, the Director, Aboriginal Education also revived a smaller, internal Aboriginal Education Steering Committee to provide her with broad input from the Malaspina community on direction and initiatives for aboriginal education. And our Students’ Union has the position of First Nations Student Commissioner; an elected office filled every year and providing an aboriginal voice in student affairs.

Our own continuing planning processes demonstrate further our commitment to aboriginal learners. In our



2004/05 Institutional Service Plan, we identified a specific project to create the First Nations Student Services team and to house them in a central location. These goals were achieved in 2004 with the creation of Shq'aphut. The following year, we submitted a Service Plan that identified the goal of creating a preliminary Aboriginal Education Strategic Plan, and that goal was achieved in 2006.

In 2005/06, Malaspina undertook a campus-wide, three-year planning initiative called SignPosts. Aboriginal Education was approached from three different but complementary directions: a departmental plan from each of First Nations Student Services and the First Nations Studies department, with a stand-alone Aboriginal Education plan. Further, Malaspina's top strategic priority emerged as "Enhance the Student Experience and Campus Life," and a key sub-set of that was related to Aboriginal Education: "Expand activities to support aboriginal student recruitment and success." Some of the proposed activities to achieve this goal are:

- Develop targeted recruitment strategies for aboriginal students
- Incorporate and value aboriginal ways of knowing across the institution
- Improve aboriginal student success rates by providing culturally-based student services, personal support, cultural support, and an integrated approach that includes elders, students, families, and communities
- Increase support to assist aboriginal students with transition from K-12 through post-secondary
- Consider construction of a First Nations Long House or Big House as a focus for aboriginal activity

"The Arts One program developed my passion and direction and I also found that the younger students were willing to help the older students and they value the opinion of the older students."

— First Nations student

We would like more input from our aboriginal students and communities as we pursue these plans, consider new ideas and proposals, and set priorities for the future. Our Director of Aboriginal Education is already developing plans for further consultations with students, leaders, and community representatives to identify underlying values and set priorities for development.

The full SignPosts plan for Aboriginal Education can be found at www.mala.ca/EducationalPlanning/SignPosts/PlansSERVICEDEPTsandOTHER/Aboriginal2005.pdf

SUCCESS

As the foregoing examples of attracting students, offering a wide range of responsive and diverse programs, working with aboriginal partners over many years, and institution-wide commitment to aboriginal education demonstrate, Malaspina University-College is successful in attracting and retaining students, and in helping them to meet their educational and training goals.

We celebrate the success of our aboriginal students each year with events such as Aboriginal University-College Student for a Day which attracted 550 students from across Vancouver Island this year, and our year-end ceremony which honoured 69 graduates in 2007.

We are proud of the fact that over 2,000 aboriginal students already choose Malaspina, and that they register into the full range of our programs. The number of aboriginal students receiving degrees, diplomas, and certificates each year from all programs (degrees, diplomas, and certificates) has increased by 53% over the period 2003-2005.

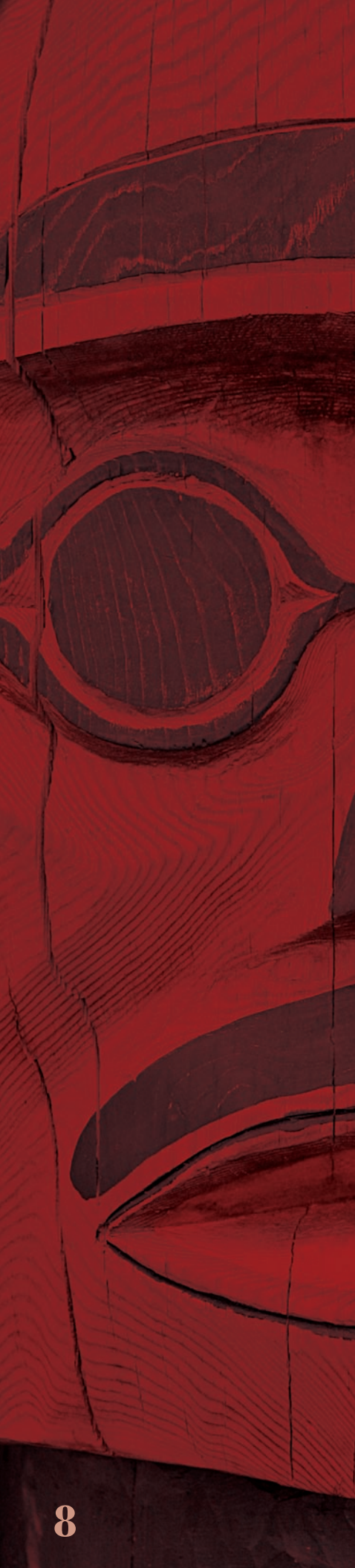
“Malaspina is a close-knit community. The instructors are wonderful.”

Rocky James graduated from Malaspina in April, 2006 with a Bachelor of Arts, First Nations Studies. He is currently pursuing graduate studies in Human and Social Development.

CONCLUSION

Here at Malaspina, the aboriginal presence enriches our lives and informs our decision-making, from course content, to curricular and program design, to student services issues, to Coastal research themes, and even the selection of our new President. A highlight of the academic year is Convocation, which not only celebrates student success, but features aboriginal students and staff in their regalia, recognizing their heritage and contributing to the vibrancy and diversity of Malaspina life.

We have the commitment, the track record, and the capacity to create and deliver quality aboriginal programs that partner with aboriginal communities in a meaningful way, and provide Malaspina expertise and resources to work with communities to enhance educational opportunities and initiatives that support aboriginal people and their right to self-determination.



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