

The contribution of the Collège universitaire de Saint-Boniface to Aboriginal post-secondary education: the example of French-speaking Métis in Manitoba

Presentation by Denis Gagnon, CRCMI, CUSB, to the Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education Roundtable, University of Winnipeg, May 24, 2007

The vast majority of Métis now speak English, but it has not always been so. In the past they spoke French, French-Mitchif, Saulteux and Mitchif, but the Métis nation has been subjected to many injustices which have threatened its culture and its very existence, and the treatment they have received from government authorities remains a black mark on Canadian history. In the racist context of the first half of the 20th century, the Métis were doubly stigmatized; either as Métis in a predominantly French-speaking society or as Métis and French speakers in a predominantly English-speaking environment. As a response to this discrimination, many Métis families tried for several decades to hide their identity, while others chose English as a first language.

Nowadays, several communities continue to use mostly French, including Saint Georges, Saint Malo, La Broquerie, Sainte Anne and Richer, and it is used in several areas of Winnipeg (Saint Boniface, Saint Vital and Saint Norbert), and the people of Saint Laurent who speak also French Mitchif. Students from these communities comprise an important part of the Métis population of the Collège universitaire de Saint-Boniface. The Collège is the oldest French language university in Western Canada, and it contributes to the vitality and the development of the French speaking community by means of teaching, research and outreach. Deeply rooted in its community, the Collège is involved in several projects related to Métis and Aboriginal issues through teaching, research, the dissemination of knowledge, establishing a social space which encourages the emergence

and the affirmation of a strong Francophone Métis identity, and by funding Métis students' studies through an assortment of bursaries.

Teaching

In the area of teaching, two courses about the Métis, one in anthropology and one in history, will soon be officially offered. Until now, these courses have been offered under general headings: *Regional Ethnology* in anthropology and *Selected Topics* in history.

The Department of Anthropology also offers five courses on Aboriginal Peoples: 1- *Peoples of the Arctic*; 2- *Peoples of South America*; 3- *Native North American Ethnology*; 4- *Natives of North America: a Sociocultural Survey*; and 5- *Religion among Native North Americans and Inuit*. Further, the Faculty of Education is in the process of designing a course on prospects in education for Native People. This course will be compulsory for students doing career training in the Bachelor of Education program. Last, thirty Metis students are registered at the École technique et professionnel (ETP), the CUSB's technical and professional college division, in nursing, business administration, computer programming, and tourism.

Research

The Canada Research Chair on Métis Identity, the only research chair on the Métis in Canada, was created in September 2004, and provides students with a rich research environment. Its main objectives are to explore the complex processes of creating one's personal identity for various Métis groups, and to offer students training in conducting research. Although the Research Chair focuses mostly on the Manitoba Métis, its three research streams (identity and history, identity and culture, identity and territory) take these issues into account at a national and international level using a comparative

approach. Since 2004, the Research Chair has taken on one postdoctoral fellow, two students doing doctoral studies, five research assistants at the Master's level and seventeen undergraduates, for a total of twenty-five students, six of whom are Métis students at the Collège. The Collège also hosted the Gabriel Dumont Conference in September 2006, the first of its kind on the Métis in Canada, organized by the Research Chair, the Collège and the University of Brandon. The proceedings of the conference, which attracted over forty researchers, will be published next year. The Research Chair also organized a series of five talks by Métis leaders, in collaboration with the Métis student association. Lastly, the CUSB submitted a project to Community-University Research Alliances through SSHRC entitled *Identités francophones de l'Ouest canadien : définition, valorisation et transmission*, (Francophone identities in Western Canada: definition, reinforcement and transmission), one of whose components includes the Francophone Métis communities of Manitoba.

Student Life

The Collège is the perfect meeting place for Francophone Métis students. Since 2002, they have been able to identify themselves as Métis at registration, and in September 2003 they founded a student association, *Regroupement étudiant métis*, in order to give meaning to Métis culture within the institution and their communities by organizing various cultural and academic activities. Approximately half of the four hundred Franco-Manitoban students may be of Métis origin, but few are aware of it. Only one hundred and twenty-five students are registered as Métis, and the association has approximately forty members, twenty of whom are active and registered in the Elzéar-Goulet Council of the MMF.

Bursaries

The CUSB administers two endowment funds for Métis students. The first is the Louis-Riel Fund, created by the MMF in 2000 to support academic excellence and to offer financial assistance to Métis students. Thanks to the contributions of the MMF and the College's 100% matching, this fund holds over a million dollars. The second is the Neil-Gaudry Fund, which now holds over \$70 000. This fund rewards academic excellence and supports the projects and initiatives of the College's Métis student association.

Challenges and solutions

Despite the success of the CUSB's Gabriel-Dumont Colloquium which highlighted Metis issues, one of our continuing challenges involves recruiting Metis students as research assistants. Too few of these students pursue university studies at the graduate level at the Collège. There are also few role models that students can emulate and leadership among the Metis students lacks continuity. Nevertheless, we believe that the CUSB can surmount these challenges. The academic courses presently offered on the Metis and on aboriginal issues, generally, in the FASAA (our Arts faculty), the course development project on aboriginal perspectives and worldviews which is underway at the Faculty of Education, the bursaries and research stipends targeting Metis students, and the research and outreach activities occurring under the leadership of the Canada Research Chair on Metis Identity all contribute to a rich educational environment for enhancing the development of skills and competencies among these students. In our view this is a legacy for the future.