

Trent University: Aboriginal Initiatives Summary for the Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education Roundtable

Background

Trent University was the first university in North America to establish a department dedicated to the study of Aboriginal Peoples. Established in 1969 as the Indian-Eskimo Studies Program and later in 1972 as the Department of Native Studies, the program led the way for other programs in Canada. In 2006, the Department changed its name to Indigenous Studies.

The program, from its earliest times, set as its mission the education of students about the realities of Aboriginal life in Canada and abroad. The goal was to create a cadre of leaders and allies who would work over the course of their lifetimes to create new realities for Aboriginal peoples in this country and elsewhere. Our goals remain unchanged.

The initial offering of the Department was a three year general Bachelor of Arts degree. This course of study provided students with a foundation in Aboriginal history and politics, Haudenosaunee and Anishnaabe culture, tradition and language as well as opportunities for practical study within local Aboriginal communities.

In 2006 the Board of Governors of the university approved the **Statement of Affirmation and Support**, a declaration that captures the essence the relationship between the university and the Aboriginal peoples of Canada.

Statement of Affirmation and Support

Trent University honours the land upon which it is built, and its traditional occupants. It celebrates the imaginations of Aboriginal peoples, their survival throughout the centuries, their knowledge developed over generations and their strength to endure.

Trent University has a long and distinguished history in the education of Aboriginal peoples and in the education of others about Aboriginal and Indigenous peoples. Trent's efforts and initiatives since its founding have demonstrated leadership and commitment to the creation of places of dignity and respect for Aboriginal peoples and their knowledge and to the fostering of dialogue and discussion about indigenous issues.

Trent intends to continue to lead by example and to remain at the forefront of higher education with respect to Aboriginal peoples, by fostering their development, their cultures and their knowledge within the University and in society.

Trent expresses pride in the achievements of Aboriginal graduates. It seeks to attract Aboriginal students, staff and faculty, supporting them in their studies and their paths to their chosen careers. The University encourages them to recognize the contribution that they in turn can make to their communities, to Canada and the world.

Trent University established the Aboriginal Education Council in 1993 to provide guidance and advice in these undertakings.

Trent has always been at the forefront of education about aboriginal peoples. All of our programs are at the leading edge and have set the foundation for programs in other Canadian universities. Throughout its 40 year history, Indigenous Studies at Trent has consistently shown the way through its innovative and trailblazing programs.

Specific Commitments and Accomplishments

Institutional:

- Appointing Aboriginal Elders and traditional people to faculty positions recognizing their traditional knowledge, wisdom and skills as the equivalent to university graduate degrees since 1975;
- In 1991 established the Aboriginal Education Council which reports to both the Senate and the Board of Governors;
- A number of community committees mandated to oversee departmental programs such as, the Native Studies PhD Council in 1998 and the Indigenous Environmental Advisory Board in 1997;
- The first dedicated Indigenous theatre NOZHEM and Indigenous Performance Program in Canada in 2003;
- The Condolence Cane and drumming at convocation in 1993;
- In 2004, A Canada Research Chair in Aboriginal Arts and Literatures was established. The first holder of this chair is Professor Marrie Mumford, formerly the Director of Aboriginal Programs at the Banff Centre for the Arts;
- In 2005, The First Peoples House of Learning was officially opened. Located in the Enweying Building along with the new Peter Gzowski College, the FPHL consists of Nozhem: the First Peoples Performance Space, the First Peoples Lecture Hall, the First Peoples Gathering Space, two outdoor teaching and ceremonial areas and an indoor gallery for art exhibits.

Cultural Events:

- The annual elders and traditional peoples gathering;
- Tipi Open House-Weekly gathering around the fire where Native and non-Native students can meet and develop relationships;
- Traditional Teachings-Weekly sessions;
- E-BIMISAY is an electronic newsletter sent out bi-monthly (sometimes only monthly) to all students, faculty and alumni from the Department of Indigenous Studies at Trent;
- Annual Pow-Wow;
- The annual Pine Tree Lectures;
- The annual Indigenous Women's Symposium.

Recruitment and Admissions:

- Full participation in the Aboriginal Postsecondary Information Program-Student information sessions held across the province of Ontario(APSIP);
- An internal advocacy program for Indigenous applicants that includes an admissions/liaison specialist in the Office of the Registrar;
- Training for liaison officers with respect to Indigenous student issues;
- Develop specialized recruiting materials;

- Focus of on-going recruitment through the University Information Program (UIP).

Academic Programs:

- Offer the Bachelor of Arts in Indian-Eskimo Studies in 1969
- The establishment in 1975 of the Native Studies Diploma Program (now the Foundations of Indigenous Learning Program), an affirmative action program for Aboriginal students;
- The first Native Studies graduate program in Canada (the Frost Centre) in 1978;
- The Native Management and Economic Development Program in 1986;
- The Native Studies Thailand Year Abroad Program in 1993;
- The Indigenous Studies PhD Program in 2000;
- The Indigenous Environmental Studies Program in 2000;
- In conjunction with the First Nations Technical Institute, a diploma in Mohawk Language, delivered at the Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory.

Student Support:

- Staffing: Aboriginal Counselor, Cultural Advisor, Elder;
- Naadimaagewin (the art of helping) Program—A peer mentoring program for students;
- Aboriginal Issues Commissioner(a student government position);
- Trent University Native Association.