

# UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF THE NORTH

## ABORIGINAL INITIATIVES – MAY 2007

University College of the North (UCN) is Manitoba's newest University College established on July 1, 2004. UCN evolved from the Northern Manitoba Vocational Centre, established in 1967 which then became Keewatin Community College as educational needs changed. The University College of the North has a strong history of responding to the needs of Aboriginal and northern learners.

The Installation ceremony to welcome and recognize our first President and Vice Chancellor, Dr. Denise Henning, occurred in October 2006.

UCN is a fast growing educational institution that is committed to quality service to our students as well as our internal and external customers. UCN has a large Aboriginal student population of approximately 70% throughout its two main campuses in The Pas and Thompson and the ten Regional Centers. UCN is in the midst of recruiting and increasing Aboriginal personnel in faculty and staff to reflect the make up of our student population.

Aboriginal Initiatives at UCN are addressed in two major areas including both academic programs and student life. While these initiatives in no way complete all of our goals for future plans and changes, they are critical to supporting student success.

It is well known that a student is more liable to be successful when the support and activities offered are closely related to the home and community environment. With this in mind the following information will give a snapshot of what has been accomplished to date.

### **Academic Programs**

Delivery of programs occurs on the major campuses and in the ten Regional Centers which have high Aboriginal populations. Tradition and Change: An Aboriginal Perspective is a mandatory one credit hour course for all programs and degrees at UCN. An important goal for UCN programs is the inclusion of Aboriginal content in course materials.

The specific needs of our Aboriginal students are addressed as follows:

### **Diploma Programs**

1. Aboriginal Self Government Administration
2. Early Childhood Education – curriculum incorporates core Aboriginal teachings
3. Restorative Justice and Conflict Resolution

## **Degrees**

1. Bachelor of Arts – 3 & 4 year Aboriginal and Northern studies degree
2. Baccalaureate Nursing in partnership with University of Manitoba – 4 year degree. Curriculum includes two 3-credit Aboriginal studies courses and a 3 credit course in Native Medicine and Health.
3. Kanaci Otinawawasomwin Aboriginal Midwifery Baccalaureate – 4 year degree – this program is unique in Canada.
4. Brandon University Teacher Education Program (BUNTEP) - UCN will take on the mandate for northern teacher preparation effective July 1, 2007. The current BUNTEP program will continue until the final cohort is completed in 2012. In the meantime, UCN will begin a separate B.Ed. degree program in September, 2008. An Aboriginal and northern focus will underpin this degree program, to meet the needs of Northern Manitobans.

Two Institutes are in the early stages of development: Aboriginal Language Institute and the Northern Boreal Forest Research Institute.

## **Student Life**

UCN addresses students' transition from their home and community environments, as well as attending to educational success in a variety of ways. This includes personal growth and perseverance in a new education setting.

1. In prior years, the Aboriginal voice was, in most years, non-existent at the Student Association Council (SAC) level. An Aboriginal Student Council (ASC) was established to meet this need of Aboriginal representation. Interestingly, in the 2006/07 Academic year, a majority of the SAC positions were filled by Aboriginal students which is a first for UCN. The ASC provides a venue for feasts throughout the year, a cultural event, story telling, family events, etc. These have proven popular and help Aboriginal and northern students with transition issues. A family atmosphere is created and is supportive for struggling students.
2. UCN's Aboriginal Cultural Centre called Mamawechetotan has a Coordinator and provides a variety of classes which are conducted throughout the year. These include moccasin making, bannock baking, Elder teachings, fundraising for activities and the ASC, etc. The usual holidays are also celebrated, for example pictures with Santa and a Christmas party. The centre has a microwave, coffee, comfortable sitting space, a T.V., and free local telephone use. It is open to all UCN students.
3. UCN has an Elder on staff whose office is in the Mamawechetotan Centre. He provides guidance and traditional teachings. He also conducts a variety of ceremonies as needed or requested. For those students who do not practice Traditional ways, there are Pastors or Ministers available once a week at Residence or who can be directly contacted if needed on other days.

UCN is unique in the sense that it continues to evolve into an institution that truly meets the needs of Aboriginal and Northern peoples. It is an exciting time in Northern Manitoba's history as UCN will continue to grow, provide for, and represent the voices and goals of its Aboriginal and Northern peoples through education and participation with partners in industry, health care, education and other sectors of the community.

For more information about UCN, please visit [www.ucn.ca](http://www.ucn.ca)