

## Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education Roundtable, May 24, 2007

### BRIEFING NOTE ABORIGINAL INITIATIVES

#### STUDENT DATA

The University supports and encourages the participation of Aboriginal people at all levels of the University community: students, faculty, staff, and administration. In accordance with a newly implemented data collection process, the University of Calgary can report some preliminary figures, on student enrolment, noting that these figures only represent those students who self-identified from 2004 onwards. On the basis of this, the University of Calgary reports an estimated total of between 400 and 500 undergraduate Aboriginal students, or about 1.3% to 1.5% of the student body. The largest concentrations of students are found in the Faculty of Social Sciences, followed by Communication and Culture and Social Work.

#### ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

- 1) **The Faculty of Social Sciences** established an **International Indigenous Studies Program** in 2003. This program is a very significant component of the program offerings at the University of Calgary and is held in high regard by the Aboriginal community. It is relatively small, but has considerable potential for growth, given adequate resources. It is a unique program of study within Alberta offering a comparative studies approach to regional and global indigenous issues. There are also a number of aboriginal research foci within the Faculty of Social Sciences, notably several studies being undertaken by archaeologists in the Canadian plains as well as active engagement in Linguistics in research with First Nations groups with an emerging emphasis on language recovery and preservation.
- 2) **The Faculty of Communication and Culture** has two major programs that feature a strong focus on Aboriginal peoples. The Faculty's Canadian Studies program examines fundamental themes and problems in Canadian society and studies the nature and expressions of Canada's diverse peoples and identities. In this context, it offers five undergraduate courses devoted entirely to Aboriginal topics, and two more in which such topics are a key component. The Faculty's Development Studies program is unique in examining development issues such as community development, sustainable development, colonialism, social justice and human rights in the Canadian North as well as in international contexts. The program requires its students to take courses on the Canadian North and offers them the opportunity to choose a concentration in either International or Northern Development.
- 3) **The Faculty of Social Work** has built strong community support and an international reputation through its continued capacity-building in Aboriginal communities. The Faculty is home to the BSW Learning Circles program, a satellite program that provides an opportunity for Aboriginal people to obtain their social work degree in proximity to home. The program includes curricula designed and modified to reflect the cultural practices and beliefs within each region. The Faculty has now graduated over 120 Aboriginal BSW social workers from rural, remote and Aboriginal communities across Alberta, including High Level, Peace River, Grande Prairie,

Slave Lake, St. Paul/Lac la Biche, Métis Nation, Red Deer, Hobbema, Medicine Hat, and Standoff. Canada's first-ever class of Métis social work students graduated from the Learning Circles program in 2005. A new satellite site is planned for Fort McMurray in 2008, thanks to the recent signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Faculty and Blue Quills First Nations College. In fall 2005, the Faculty began online delivery of the BSW curriculum through the Virtual Learning Circle. Social Work has experienced numerous other successful Aboriginal community initiatives, such as the 2005 "Bringing Home the Children" project in the Saddle Lake region, which facilitated the reunion of Aboriginal people who had been adopted out of the community or placed in foster care. The Faculty is currently embarking on a Narrative Digital Storytelling project, which will include Aboriginal community partnerships; and is planning an Aboriginal cohort of MSW students at Red Crow College for fall 2007.

- 4) **The Faculty of Education** recently offered the Master of Teaching Program (B. Ed.) on site at Old Sun Community College. This program graduated 12 teachers from the Siksika community in 2005, and will be offered a second time in the Fall 2007, with plans to expand into the Four Bands (Central Alberta) region in partnership with Muskawchees Community College.
- 5) **Other developments** include an Aboriginal Mentor Program in the **Faculty of Law** intended to support academic success in the LL.B. Program. This Initiative is funded by the Alberta Law Foundation. The new **Faculty of Veterinary Medicine** is working on mechanisms to encourage applications from Aboriginal students. The **Schulich School of Engineering** has made a number of overtures to engage Aboriginal students and its Minds in Motion summer camps have had some success.

## SERVICES FOR ABORIGINAL STUDENTS

**The Native Centre** was established in 1974 as part of the community of Student and Enrolment Services. Its mandate is to support the success of Aboriginal students affiliated with the University of Calgary. The Centre provides a variety of support services to current and prospective Aboriginal students. It has an active presence in the Aboriginal community throughout the City, providing academic outreach programming in partnership with First Nations post-secondary institutions, such as Old Sun Community College. Services for students range from academic, cultural, and personal advising to group counseling and peer support activities, such as social and cultural events. Together with the First Nations Student Association, the Centre hosts a variety of social and cultural events and encourages students to become involved through peer support and volunteer opportunities. The Native Centre has also adopted a cross-cultural mandate and is a welcome environment for all members of the University of Calgary community, with special events, programs, and services open to all faculty, staff, and students. The Native Centre's facilities include a computer lab, study rooms, administrative offices, a Board Room, and The Red Lodge Student Lounge. It also houses the First Nation Student Association.

In addition to the Native Centre, many professional faculties, such as Law, Engineering, and Social Work, provide additional faculty-based support services for Aboriginal students.

## OTHER ABORIGINAL PROJECTS AND INITIATIVES

1. **Aboriginal Student Policy** (implemented, June 2003) - The University of Calgary was the second Post-secondary Institution in Canada to have an Aboriginal Student Policy, which was passed by the General Faculties Council and the Board of Governors in June 2003. The policy

addresses issues pertinent to Aboriginal education and Aboriginal students, including recruitment, admission, retention, completion, cultural support, collaborative community partnerships, and Indigenous knowledge and research protocol. This policy is managed by the Aboriginal Student Policy Standing Committee and a number of key Sub-Committees, with the mandate to implement and advance the primary objectives of the Policy. Under this committee structure, a new Aboriginal Student Admissions policy was developed, passed in 2005, and implemented for the Fall 2006 admissions cycle.

2. **Data Collection of Aboriginal Learners** (implemented, Fall 2004) – The University began a data collection process for Aboriginal learners in the Fall of 2004. This process involved a self-identity field attached to undergraduate applications, and in the Fall of 2005, expanded to include graduate studies and professional faculties. The self-identity process allows students to voluntarily self identify as Aboriginal and to further identify as Metis, Inuit, or First Nations, when they apply to the University of Calgary or initiate a program change. The data collection process is new, and therefore only captures the data of the Aboriginal student body, who applied to the University from 2004 onwards. It will take four to five years for the University to begin to get more complete and accurate data on the overall Aboriginal student body. Based on this self-identification data collection process, we currently have 289 self-identified Aboriginal students in our system, and estimate an additional 200 students who entered our system prior to 2004.
3. **Aboriginal Student Admissions Policy** (implemented, Fall 2005) – The Aboriginal Student Admissions Policy was implemented in the Fall 2005. The policy is designed to create avenues for equitable access and to increase the enrolment and participation of Aboriginal students. The policy allows for students, upon admission, to submit additional portfolio information to the Office of the Registrar and to request to be considered for special admissions status under this policy. This allows the student to be identified to their faculty for admissions purposes, and allows faculties to apply further admissions criteria to the applicant file, based on the enrolment goals and targets of the faculty and the institution as a whole.
4. **The Native Ambassador Program Initiative (N.A.P.I.)** – N.A.P.I. began as a small youth outreach program in 2001, and soon expanded into a complex Aboriginal Youth outreach and student leadership training program, involving collaborative partnerships with SAIT, Mount Royal College, Calgary Board of Education, and the Calgary Catholic School District. The program employs and trains Aboriginal students from the three mentioned Post-secondary institutions to present to and mentor Aboriginal youth throughout the City of Calgary and Southern Alberta, including First Nations communities. Since 2002, this program has connected with over 4000 Aboriginal youth in various ways and across Southern Alberta. Program sponsors include: Canada Heritage, Alberta Lottery Fund, Trans-Canada Pipelines, The Calgary Foundation, and the Special Projects Fund / University of Calgary.
5. **Aboriginal Lynx Career and Employment Project** – (in development) This employment-based project is still in its infancy, and has received external funding through The Calgary Foundation, for the development phase. This program initiative is a partnership between Career Services and The Native Centre, and is designed to address the gap between employers and Aboriginal students. The primary goal of the program is to link Aboriginal students to employment opportunities and to provide high quality recruitment services to organizations seeking Aboriginal students for co-operative, internship, summer, and full-time employment. The program will also pursue linkages to Aboriginal students at other select universities in western Canada.

6. **CASTS Conference, 2007** – The Native Centre and International Indigenous Studies Program will be co-hosting the Canadian Aboriginal Science and Technology Conference titled, “It is Up to Us / Ihpipo'tootspa” in 2007 with Treaty 7 and the First Nations Consortium for Higher Education (the primary hosts). The Conference is scheduled to take place on October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> at the Coast Plaza Hotel in Calgary.
7. **Annual Graduation Banquet and Pow-wow** – Every year, the Native Centre hosts a high profile banquet and traditional pow-wow, with ceremonial gifts for University of Calgary Aboriginal grads. Last year, celebrations were for University of Calgary degrees awarded to 75 Aboriginal students, including 12 students from the Master of Teaching / Bachelor of Education Outreach program at Old Sun Community College. This year, the event is scheduled to take place on June 9<sup>th</sup>, 2007 at the Red and White Club. The event is sponsored by 8 – 10 Corporations including: NEXEN, CP Rail, Conoco-Philips, TCPL, RBC Royal Bank / RBC Foundation, Suncor Foundation, Petro-Canada, BP Canada, Pembina Pipeline Corporation, and Peace Hills Trust. To date, the University of Calgary has graduated just under 800 Aboriginal people from various degree programs.
8. **Indigenous Knowledge Centre** – The University advocated for a multi-million dollar proposal to establish an Indigenous Knowledge Centre in Alberta. This proposal included a partnership with the First Nations Association for Higher Education Consortium, which ultimately was successful in securing federal funding and developing a further partnership with Aboriginal post-secondary education in Saskatchewan. This centre is based out of Edmonton and hosted its first Conference in March, 2007.
9. **Aboriginal Peoples Learning Centre** – Plans are underway to develop an Aboriginal People's learning Centre at the University of Calgary. This project is being proposed for location at Centre Campus.
10. **Aboriginal Programs website** – The **Aboriginal Student Policy Standing Committee**, in consultation with IT and External Relations, is working on the development of a virtual Aboriginal home webpage for all University of Calgary Aboriginal related programs, services, research initiatives, and collaborative projects. This website is currently under construction.