



ABORIGINAL STUDENT POPULATION

Given that education is the surest way to develop human capital, the University of Manitoba is committed to attracting Aboriginal students and prides itself on being an institution of choice for students of Aboriginal ancestry. In 2006, 6% of graduating students self-declared to be of Aboriginal ancestry compared to the national average of 3%. In 2005, 6% of undergraduate students self-declared to be of Aboriginal ancestry compared to 3% at comparable universities.

RECRUITMENT INITIATIVES

General Recruitment

Most Aboriginal students enter the University of Manitoba through the conventional route, with high school marks that qualify them for entry. University faculties actively recruit these students using a variety of recruitment initiatives including:

- Hosting a Science & Technology Symposium;
- Offering the Curry BizCamp in Entrepreneurship, targeting young people between the ages of 13-20 who have an interest in business but often lack the necessary resources and role models;
- Developing and distributing Aboriginal-specific brochures, posters, videos and displays;
- Reserving seats for qualified Aboriginal applicants in special consideration categories;
- Participating in rural communities' career, education and counsellors' symposiums and conferences;
- Assisting with the Annual Manitoba First Nation Science Fair;
- Visiting Northern Manitoba communities and meeting with school trustees, administrators, teachers and students;
- Forming an Aboriginal Education Recruitment Task Force to discuss priorities in areas of recruitment, retention and programming;
- Hiring of Aboriginal instructors, professors and student recruiters;
- Liaising and partnering with the University College of the North;
- Providing culturally-appropriate science and math materials to elementary school teachers;
- Partnering with Northern Regional Health Authorities to promote cooperatively opportunities in the health sector;
- Partnering with Aboriginal communities for the delivery of community-based transition year programs; and
- Hosting focus groups and task forces.

ACCESS Program Recruitment

For almost three decades, the University of Manitoba has welcomed students through ACCESS programs that are designed for people who do not meet normal entry requirements but who have the capacity and desire to learn.

The University of Manitoba's ACCESS programs are designed to help students overcome the cultural, social and economic barriers that otherwise may prevent them from pursuing higher education. The ACCESS approach consists of a mix of academic upgrading, if required, before the first university-level course is attempted, and personal counselling linked with peer-support throughout the student period. ACCESS students meet exactly the same academic standards as do students who enter university through the conventional route and there is no stigmatization of ACCESS students.

The University of Manitoba offers specific ACCESS programs in many areas, including: medicine, nursing, engineering, physical education and recreation studies, business, and social work.

The University's ACCESS Programs won the 2001 Conference Board of Canada's national award for fostering Aboriginal learning and achievement. In fact, the impact of the University's programming and its success rate is significant.

University of Manitoba ACCESS Programs' Graduates

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| Business | 43 |
| Education | 282 |
| Engineering | 59 |
| Law | 69 |
| Medicine | 30 |
| Social Work | 812 |

ACCESS programs provide an opportunity for the University and governments to work together to ensure better access to post-secondary education for all Canadians. Yet despite commitments to access, direct federal funding has been scarce. The University of Manitoba programs were profoundly affected by the discontinuation of direct federal funding in the mid-nineties. The University would like to see the federal government renew its direct funding for ACCESS-type programming.

STUDENT RETENTION INITIATIVES

Overall, Aboriginal student retention at post-secondary education institutions is a serious issue. The reasons are many, including:

- Isolation from family and community support network;
- Culture shock;
- University size and strangeness;
- Lack of academic preparation;
- Lack of culturally appropriate guidance and counselling;
- Shock of being in a large and strange urban centre; and
- Baby-sitting and other family problems.

The University of Manitoba strives to create an encouraging environment where students can turn to faculty, staff and fellow students for support and guidance.

Organizational Structure to Enhance Learning

The **Aboriginal Student Centre (ASC)** is responsible for academic counselling, student personal support, liaising with Manitoba Aboriginal communities, organizing the annual Graduation Powwow and annual Elders and Traditional Teachers Gathering, organizing and delivering other university-wide awareness and teaching programs, and general retention initiatives.

The University of Manitoba was the first university in Canada to have an **Elder-in-Residence** available for advice, traditional teachings and spiritual leadership for all students.

Learning Spaces

The University of Manitoba believes that Aboriginal students benefit tremendously from having a ‘home away from home’ during their studies. This sense of community contributes to greater numbers of Aboriginal students completing undergraduate degrees, moving on to successfully complete graduate and professional programs, and achieving employment success.

In October 2005, the University of Manitoba opened the **William Norrie Centre**, a newly constructed facility on Selkirk Avenue. Housing the University’s Inner City Social Work ACCESS Program (as well as the University of Winnipeg’s Bachelor of Education ACCESS Program), the Centre allows students to receive an education in an accessible and welcoming environment right in their own community.

As well, the University of Manitoba has established a **Centre for Aboriginal Health Education** at the University’s Bannatyne campus. The primary roles of the Centre are:

- To support Aboriginal students enrolled in health education degree programs through culturally relevant academic and social support;
- To offer ongoing professional development and enhanced networking opportunities for future career opportunities; and
- To provide practitioners with education on ways to become a better practitioner to the Aboriginal community and other non-traditional communities.

Wishing to strengthen its commitment to help Aboriginal students succeed, the University is in the process currently of constructing a new \$6 million, 13,000 square feet facility for the ASC in the heart of the University’s Fort Garry campus. Presently housed in cramped quarters in University Centre, the ASC is expected to move to its new location in the early spring of 2008.

Learning the University Road Map: Channels of Opportunity and Accountability

Seven years ago, concerned with retention rates, the ASC and the University’s Native Studies Department came together to offer a three credit hour Native Studies course offered in the last three weeks of August. The course is designed to help new Aboriginal

students from northern and isolated communities to get to know the University before the start of the academic year. Mornings are taken up with the course program and afternoons with academic writing skills, library skills, study skills, and, most importantly, networking skills with ASC staff and others who can help students in their academic careers.

Learning Skills to Enhance Academic Performance

While this course has been extremely successful, retention rates are still low because of insufficient preparedness in academic writing, basic math skills and appropriate life skills. To address this issue, steps are currently under way to begin teaching an English three credit hour course in September 2007 designed to improve writing skills. Another course is also being prepared for offer in January 2008 which will deal with basic communications skills. Additional future courses will include basic math and science courses, and other writing courses.

On the matter of life skills, other retention initiatives used by some University of Manitoba faculties and programs include:

- Hosting welcoming events for new students;
- Hosting holiday events for students;
- Coordinating a cultural retreat with professors for students and their families;
- Offering classes for graduating students which cover topics such as personal development and training, resume and interview skills, and public speaking instruction;
- Regular meetings with student advisors;
- Developing curricula and programs relevant to Aboriginal students;
- Establishing mentorship programs;
- Monitoring student progress throughout their program and providing remediation or counselling to those students in need of assistance; and
- Limiting class sizes for students enrolled in certain ACCESS programs and providing additional class time with instructors.

ADDITIONAL ABORIGINAL STUDENT SERVICES

The Aboriginal Student Association gives students the opportunity to meet with peers for socializing and presenting their perspectives on issues that matter to them. Other featured programs and initiatives include:

- Enrolment Services, Aboriginal Student Recruitment Office;
- Faculty of Education, Aboriginal Student Recruitment Task Force;
- Faculty of Law, Aboriginal Academic Support Program;
- Faculty of Social Work, Education Equity Initiative and Mentorship Program;
- Human Resources, Equity Services Office;
- Library Services, Neil John Maclean Health Sciences Library, Aboriginal Health Collection; and
- Library Services, Native Studies Bibliographer.

EDUCATION COSTS AND FUNDING SOURCES

For many students, thinking about going to university can mean worrying about money and student loans. The cost of education is more than just tuition and books. Many students have to pay for child care, trips back to their communities, food, shelter and other family expenses. The University of Manitoba's traditional commitment to accessibility includes providing many services and financial supports so that money is not a barrier to realizing a dream.

Financial Assistance

Every year, the University of Manitoba offers millions of dollars in scholarships and bursaries to new and continuing students. There are a variety of funding programs and many awards that are of particular interest to Aboriginal students. The Financial Aid and Awards Office at the University helps students with their applications. In addition, this Office handles federal and provincial student loans, emergency financial aid and a student food bank.

As well, the ASC has application information for many scholarships, prizes, and aid available through outside agencies, including First Nations and Métis funding agencies. The University's Department of Native Studies also provides support for Aboriginal students and has information on scholarships and programs of interest.

Specific Issues: Childcare, Housing, Career Guidance

Furthermore, the ASC has information on financial issues such as childcare subsidies, housing and job postings.

In terms of childcare, there are two licensed day care centres on the University's Fort Garry campus with full-time, part-time and occasional spaces. These day cares also provide information about off-campus licensed child care spaces, as well as information about childcare subsidy programs. For accommodations, the University's Housing and Student Life helps students find a place to live on or off campus.

Career and Employment Services at the University offers workshops, serves as a career resource centre, and is the campus hub for job postings.