

# **First Nations Access to Post-Secondary Education Yukon College Experience**

## **Leadership**

The Board, President, Management and staff provide the leadership and support to ensure the College is providing the necessary services and programming in working toward First Nations access and success at Yukon College. This commitment is articulated in the Strategic Plan and highlighted in the annual action plan as a number one priority.

## **Student Services**

Student Services is the key division taking the lead on providing greater access and support to existing and potential first nation students. Student services have designated staff, with the position titles of First Nations Counselor and Cultural Development Facilitator, to lead in the recruitment and support to aboriginal students. The staff work together with the Student Services team to accomplish a wide variety of activities, including the following:

First Nations Counselor:

- Attending Career Fairs and other appropriate student events
- Education, Career and personal advising
- Connecting with network of High schools and attend career fairs
- Cultural Awareness to entire student body
- Networking with First Nation communities and governments
- Providing support to students with funding agencies

Cultural Development Facilitator

- Planning and presenting Cultural Events
- Supporting the elders in residence program. (In this program, elders are available to the students to provide ongoing counseling and support. The elders sometimes stay for a period of time in the residence, participating in the daily lives of all students. They are invited to speak to students in classes and participate in all activities of college life.)
- Assisting with is career/personal planning for students

These staff members are taking on an increasingly active role in classroom settings, both participating in and facilitating other First Nation guest and elder participation, in actual program delivery.

## **Developmental Studies**

Many of the First Nation students enter the College through the Developmental Studies Division. Many courses have a particular focus on First Nations' content:

- Working and Leading is a program that works mainly with First Nation students to build both education skills along with practical life skills

- College and Career Preparation program assists students to get the basic education skills to be able to move onto post-secondary programming. Some of the course content is focused on First Nations governance and land claims agreements.
- Apprenticeship preparation (pre-apprenticeship programs) gives the students the pre-requisites to move into specific trades programs.

### **Arts & Science**

Arts & Science have many programs that are specifically designed to benefit Aboriginal students. Within Arts & Science, two degree programs were originally designed to provide opportunities for Aboriginal students. In addition, the division challenges itself to have First Nation curriculum and culture integrated across the division. It is recognized that the First Nations' culture is an important reality for all Yukoners not just First Nations people.

Yukon Native Teacher Education Program (YNTEP) and the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) degree programs partnership with the University of Regina, are set up to ensure that First Nations access without the necessary educational fundamentals to qualify for typical university programming. While entrance requirements are more flexible, graduation requirements remain.

In the past number of years Yukon College is witnessing a decrease in the need to have students take any type of upgrading in order to enter the program. The BSW program still provides prospective students who do not qualify for direct entry a 24 credit preparatory program to ensure students have the necessary fundamentals to be successful in the program.

Arts and Science also works with First Nations Initiatives to build programming specifically for First Nations' needs. The Champagne and Aishihik First Nations Executive Development Program and the Environmental Officer Training Program are two examples of programming that are designed specifically for First Nations.

### **Community and Extension Services**

Community and Extension Services (C&ES) is the division that oversees Yukon College's 12 community campuses. Many of the Communities of the Yukon have a significant Aboriginal population. Consequently C&ES provides many different programs to enable the student to upgrade their skills to ensure increased employability.

Many Yukon First Nations have settled their land claims and all First Nations have increased governance over programs normally administered by the Federal Department of Indian Affairs. Much work still needs to be done. There are basic administrative courses offered in the communities to increase capacity for self governing responsibilities. C&ES provides a variety "skills" development courses and training to match the skills requirements indicated by First Nations input and feedback. Examples of courses and training include health, early childhood, math for water operators, youth employment training, land-based programming, office administration, and leadership and governance.

C&ES is continuing to provide more programming via video conferencing. This enables potential students to take programming in their community without the need to uproot their families and move to Whitehorse. Examples of programming include: Academic preparation for further college studies; Health; Early Childhood; Anthropology; and Education.

Video conferencing also allows face to face communication for meetings without the need for travel. Thus, students can be connected to friends, parents, elders in their home community while attending college in Whitehorse.

### **First Nations Initiatives**

The development of programming and services to meet the needs of Yukon's First Nations is the primary focus of the First Nations Initiatives program area. Programs and courses are developed and delivered in collaboration with the College's Academic Divisions, Community and Extension Services, and Student Services and in accordance with the College's Goals and Priorities.

It is recognized that building partnerships and positive relationships with First Nations enhances the College's ability to meet the educational and cultural commitment to all Yukon First Nations as they bring life to their land claim and self-governing agreements.

One example of this partnership is the creation of the President's Advisory Committee on First Nations Initiatives. This group is made up of senior officials (generally Education) from each of the 14 First Nations, who will advise the President on programming needed by the First Nations to build capacity for the development of their emerging self-government responsibilities.

### **Professional Studies**

Professional Studies has a number of programs designed to provide students with skills that enable them to enter into the workforce. The Trades and Technology division has a set of mobile units and is able to provide training in the communities that focuses on the unique needs and economic environment in each community.

Health and Human Service Programs, such as the Home Support Worker, Early Childhood and Community Support Worker emphasis the social and cultural needs to build healthy communities. Many of these courses are delivered in communities or by distance education.

With video conferencing, the division is growing its distance education opportunities by providing administrative training opportunities to First Nation governments. This helps First Nations by reducing the need for costly travel to participate in training normally only available in Whitehorse.

**Yukon Native Language Centre**

The Yukon Native Language Centre is a training and research facility which provides a range of linguistic and educational services to Yukon First Nations and to the general public. It is located at Yukon College, Ayamdigut Campus in Whitehorse.

The Centre is administered by the Council of Yukon First Nations with funds provided by the Government of Yukon.

In 1977, the Yukon Native Languages Project (YNLP) was begun by the Council of Yukon Indians, now the Council of Yukon First Nations. The Council saw a need for systematic surveys and development work on Yukon languages. Requests for Native Language teaching in the schools began to increase, and the YNLP began to train Native Language teachers and to develop curriculum materials. The number of language teachers and trainees grew steadily during the first years of the project's operation. In 1985, the YNLP was renamed the Yukon Native Language Centre (YNLC).

Today the Centre is actively teaching, documenting, and promoting Yukon Native languages.

In the final analysis, access and success at the post-secondary level starts well before students are expected to enter a post-secondary institution. Programs and activities must begin in the home, in the K-12 system and be defined, designed and implemented in partnership with the First Nations. Once students are in the post-secondary system, there must be an atmosphere of inclusion and support. To achieve the objectives of access and success, all partners must exercise a degree of urgency and patience.