**Promising Practices:
Increasing and Supporting Participation for Aboriginal Students in Ontario**

Prepared by R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd.
for the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario

Table of Contents

Terms and Acronyms Used in This Report

Aboriginal ....The descendants of the original inhabitants of North America (includes First Nations, Inuit and Métis people)

ACCC ....Association of Canadian Community Colleges

AEC................Aboriginal Education Council

AEI ....Aboriginal Emphasis Initiative

AESP ....Aboriginal Enriched Support Program

AETS.............Aboriginal Education and Training Strategy

ATCP ....Aboriginal Teacher Certification Program

FNTI ....First Nations Technical Institute

FNUC ....First Nations University of Canada

HEQCO ....Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario

Indigenous .....This term is used in this report only as an adjective modifying a proper noun (e.g., Indigenous Studies)

MTCU.............Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities

MYAA ....Multi-year accountability agreement

NCADP ....Native Classroom Assistant Diploma Program

NEC ....Native Education Council

NSEADP ....Native Special Education Assistant Diploma Program

OSAP ....Ontario Student Assistance Program

PLAR.............Prior learning assessment and recognition

PSE ....Postsecondary education

SAGE ....Science and Arts Gateway for Education

SGFNP..........Seven Generations First Nations Polytechnic

Stop-out ....Refers to students who have temporarily discontinued their studies

Glossary of Terms

The following terms are used throughout the report. While there can be some degree of overlap, particularly where multiple programs are offered at the same institution, the terms are used in this report to refer to specific groupings of program features.

Aboriginal Access Programs:
This refers to college or university preparation programs that provide Aboriginal students with the postsecondary education (PSE) skills necessary to be successful across a range of academic programs. These skills can include English, math and basic studying skills. Access programs assist students who have not completed their secondary education, as well as students who need to complete prerequisites to enter their desired program of study.

Aboriginal Student Services Programs:
This refers to programs that provide Aboriginal students with the culturally sensitive support and encouragement they may require to complete their PSE.   These programs are often characterized by a holistic approach to the recruitment and retention of Aboriginal students and may include advice and direction to help Aboriginal students access academic, financial, emotional and social support.

Aboriginal Studies and Designated Programs:
This refers to programs that are designed to raise awareness about Aboriginal culture among both the Aboriginal and the non-Aboriginal student populations. These programs can include courses that focus on Aboriginal language, culture, history, art and issues of importance to the well-being of Canada's Aboriginal Peoples, as well as ways in which Canada's Aboriginal Peoples are perceived both within Canada and at a global level.

Aboriginal Healthcare Programs:
This refers to programs that are designed to facilitate enrolment and graduation of Aboriginal students in academic programs in the healthcare field. These types of academic programs may include the teaching of traditional Aboriginal healing methods and may be based specifically on the healthcare needs of the surrounding Aboriginal community.

Aboriginal Teacher Education Programs:
This refers to programs focused on graduating qualified Aboriginal teachers who are certified to teach in Aboriginal schools or the province's public school system. These programs recognize the need for Aboriginal teachers to provide instruction to Aboriginal students, and they typically integrate an Aboriginal perspective into the curriculum.

Executive Summary

This study reviewed over 40 programs in Ontario colleges and universities that were designed to increase recruitment, participation and retention of Aboriginal students in postsecondary education (PSE). It involved a literature review, site visits to 6 postsecondary institutions and qualitative interviews with program administrators and coordinators at 28 institutions across the province. Qualitative interviews were also conducted with students at selected institutions. A summary of the research findings is presented below.

Overall, researchers found that, relative to only five years ago, colleges and universities in Ontario have made significant progress in developing support programs for Aboriginal students. In 2004, a pan-Canadian study (Malatest, p. 23) looked at best practices in Aboriginal support programs. At that time, Ontario was in the formative stages of developing programs, particularly when compared with Manitoba and other Western provinces. Virtually all colleges and universities in Ontario now have some form of support program. Furthermore, many postsecondary institutions have taken a holistic approach and have implemented a number of programs, each targeting different underlying causes of the lower incidence of PSE success among Aboriginal students.

Among the programs offered are the following:

- Aboriginal student services programs,

- Aboriginal access programs,

- Aboriginal studies and Aboriginal designated programs,

- healthcare programs, and

- Aboriginal teacher education programs.

It should be noted that the research compiled in this report is largely qualitative. There is widespread agreement among the stakeholders interviewed that these types of programs are valuable; however, there was a distinct lack of outcome data available to allow the researchers to state that the programs reviewed had a "measurable" and positive impact on Aboriginal students' postsecondary success. Nevertheless, where student outcomes were measured, the results were promising.

Despite the lack of quantitative evidence to support the impact of the programs, the researchers were able to infer that progress has been made on a number of fronts. In addition to the large number of institutions offering one or more of the above programs, in other institutions, Aboriginal management bodies are in place to help inform the design and implementation of the programs. Aboriginal Elders are being consulted and are playing a more active role on college and university campuses. The number of courses being offered in the native languages of Ontario's First Nations Peoples has increased, and the number of Aboriginal teachers available to teach and serve as role models has also increased.

Nonetheless, there are areas of friction that speak to the need for preparation when introducing support programs for Aboriginal students. According to anecdotal evidence, non-Aboriginal students and faculty in the province's PSE institutions may resent the fact that resources are being directed to such a small portion of the student body.

The researchers also found that, in some cases, seats in specific programs had been reserved for Aboriginal students but were sitting empty. This suggests that merely providing access is not sufficient: colleges and universities must also incorporate communication strategies into their programs to publicize the existence of these seats. Outreach efforts at the high school and community level should emphasize the availability of these seats. Aboriginal elders could also be kept apprised of the remaining number so that they could play a role in identifying potential candidates.

Overall, the learning derived from offering these programs has been constructive and promising. There was consensus among the stakeholders interviewed that designing a financially sustainable program was challenging. However, that challenge resulted in innovative partnerships, which left the institutions with less future financial risk. These partnerships, particularly those among the postsecondary institutions, led to the exploration of alternative delivery systems and a better understanding of regional interdependencies. They also met a core need of Aboriginal-controlled PSE institutions. Until they are fully accredited in their own right, they need agreements with accredited colleges and universities in order to bestow diplomas and degrees upon their graduating students.

Based on currently available information, the following promising practices aimed at increasing Aboriginal recruitment and retention were identified. (The reader is cautioned that, while some of these practices were selected from well-developed programs, many of them have been implemented only within one institution and lack the critical inter-institution review that is required for practices to mature. Furthermore, many of the initiatives rely on technology that is still being developed or is still unavailable in parts of the province.)

- Programs should solicit the input of the communities they intend to serve. Program designers should work within the Aboriginal community to nurture an environment that supports and encourages students to continue their PSE. This includes identifying role models within the community and soliciting the support of Elders to counsel students both within the community and on campus.

- Programs should be designed to meet the needs of the local population.

- Programs that take a holistic approach should be offered (emphasis should be spread across cultural knowledge and understanding, academic skills and employability). If necessary, multiple programs should be offered.

- The majority of Aboriginal students are female and predominantly mature students, so programs should support their roles in their families and communities in order to increase student retention levels.

- Consideration should be given to offering programs that allow students access to degree programs and the resources to pursue those programs, even if those students do not fit the usual college and university requirements.

- Aboriginal students should have access to programs that minimize the time spent outside their communities, as these are very attractive to Aboriginal students (particularly those who live in remote areas). So, too, are modular programs of study that allow Aboriginal students to earn seasonal livelihoods.

- Students should be recruited from within their communities through networks created between postsecondary institutions, the Aboriginal Band council, Elders and local high schools. The role of Native recruitment officers should also be explored.

- Students should be provided with a sense of pride in their own culture through the development of course materials that are culturally relevant and culturally sensitive. This type of curriculum is best provided by an Aboriginal teacher who can serve as an additional role model. Ideally, the program should be delivered in whole or in part in the local Aboriginal language, which, in turn, helps bolster the cultural integrity of the community. This delivery method also creates a demand for PSE Aboriginal educators.

- Wherever possible, programs should be launched with a physical presence on campus (e.g., an Aboriginal student services centre). A student services centre provides Aboriginal students with a "safe place," where they can reaffirm their culture and receive personal and counselling support. It also generates awareness of the Aboriginal student program and of Aboriginal issues both among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students and among faculty members.

- Academic skills courses should be considered where there are significant numbers of students who could benefit from improving their performance in all their courses. These types of courses could be offered to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in a combined setting as a means of facilitating exposure between the two groups with the hope of decreasing resistance to Aboriginal services among the non-Aboriginal student population.

- Partnerships should be initiated and nurtured both within the academic community and with local business groups. Wherever possible, local economic interests should be addressed so that employment opportunities for program graduates are optimized. If possible, field placements should be included to enable graduates to obtain valuable work experience in preparation for the job market.

- Collaboration between Aboriginal student services and Aboriginal access programs should be ensured. Each can reinforce the other, and students attending one can become aware of the other through friends using the services.

- If an institution is considering launching an Aboriginal access program, it should consider supplementing it with childcare services to ensure program uptake. (Childcare services appear to encourage use of Aboriginal access programs.)

- Exit interviews with students who are leaving college or university should be considered. This initiative entails minimal cost and could identify program areas in need of enhancement.

- Newly created Aboriginal access programs should be promoted and awareness should be generated through events and in-person communication and by word of mouth.

- Investment in distance education should be considered, including collaboration with other institutions on course design and e-delivery infrastructure. Existing resources such as Contact North[1] should be used to provide better access to both course designers and students.

- The impact of the program should be measured. It is important to emphasize that program designers and administrators must factor in the necessary resources to monitor and assess the impact of their programs. Currently, very few of the programs reviewed underwent formal evaluations.

It appears that significant opportunities exist for the replication of programs across PSE institutions. However, care must be taken to ensure that imported programs are adapted to the needs of local Aboriginal students and their community. Institutions are willing to share materials and exchange best practices, but they may need a forum in which to do this.

Government could play an important role in a number of areas. This includes refining evaluation standards for each program type, as well as refining minimum data collection requirements. Accountability through measurement needs to be standardized across the province and allowances need to be made for regional differences in both program implementation and outcomes. Government could also facilitate knowledge transfer between institutions by sponsoring regional conferences on best practices. (Regionalized conferences are important, as both accessibility and delivery issues vary with geography.)

---

[1] Contact North is a not-for-profit corporation funded by the Government of Ontario, whose mandate includes providing access to secondary and postsecondary education for people living in northern Ontario. It currently has 92 access sites offering different forms access, such as Internet access, audio conferencing and videoconferencing, depending on the site.

Background

The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) is an independent agency of the Government of Ontario that was established to conduct research on postsecondary education. In July 2008, HEQCO commissioned R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd., a national research firm, to undertake a study to identify practices in Ontario colleges and universities that encourage and support Aboriginal people's participation in postsecondary education (PSE). The majority of PSE institutions in Ontario offer some form of support for Aboriginal students. This paper examines the practices of those stakeholders and institutions that have had demonstrable success in attracting Aboriginal students to PSE and in supporting them as they complete their education.

Historical Perspective across Canada

The history of Aboriginal PSE across Canada is clouded by the disturbing legacy of the implementation of the residential school system. A multitude of political, legal, social, cultural and financial factors contributed to both the scope and the duration of the problem. The use of residential schools as a political tool to assimilate Aboriginal Peoples is widely believed to have been the linchpin of a system aimed at isolating status and non-status Indians alike and removing them from their communities, Bands and families. The last residential school was closed in 1986, more than 70 years after the first of 80 schools was opened. The 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (Government of Canada, 1996) shone significant light on the extent of the problems caused by residential schools: a loss of cultural identity and pride had led to poor mental health compounded by substance abuse, community breakdown and violence. Education, the means of improving the lives of Canadians and of making stronger, more participatory communities, had been a source of social upheaval for the Aboriginal peoples of Canada. On June 11, 2008, the prime minister of Canada made a statement of apology to former students of Indian residential schools.

In an effort to address the problem, federal and provincial monies were allocated to develop programs and practices that would overcome the barriers to full Aboriginal participation in Canada's PSE system. Initially, programs focused on methods of assisting Aboriginal students in making the transition to college and university, and Manitoba was a leader in developing these "access" programs, many of which began in the 1970s. Access programs typically offer Aboriginal students academic and social support and often include a recruitment strategy that provides outreach to surrounding Aboriginal communities. These programs have been widely studied and have been shown to have a positive impact on Aboriginal student participation (Alcorn & Campbell, 1997; Hikel, 1994; Malatest, 2004). The more progressive and better-funded access programs offer additional student supports such as those for housing, childcare and career counselling.

Examples of specific programs designed to increase Aboriginal students' access to PSE opportunities include the leading access program in Manitoba and the First Nations University of

Canada (FNUC) in Saskatchewan. The access programs[2] located at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg include a support network designed to increase student success. Academic and personal supports include individual academic advising, extensive orientation for new students, tutorials, housing assistance, childcare assistance, communication workshops and career counselling. Access program participants are also encouraged to identify outside funding options, such as Band sponsorship, scholarships and bursaries; some students receive non-repayable access bursaries. One issue that initial access programs did not address was the remoteness of Aboriginal communities from the PSE institution and the fact that Aboriginal students often had to leave their communities to obtain an education. This problem was partially addressed by institutions supporting "community-delivery" programs that allowed students to complete part of their PSE requirements within their community. The goal of community-delivered PSE was to eliminate much of the financial and social hardship created by long-term resettlement to a university campus (Malatest, 2004).

In some cases, community delivery took the form of distance education, whereby students accessed course materials and assignments through the Internet or by correspondence, with either books or CD-ROMs. In other cases it involved providing teacher training, through distance education, to students who were willing to return to their communities to teach in the classroom. However, both access programs and community PSE delivery lacked Aboriginal control. As a result, a non-Aboriginal PSE system had to make efforts to provide for and accommodate Aboriginal students. In order to provide more Aboriginal control, Aboriginal PSE institutions first appeared in the 1970s in Western Canada, where they had great success not only in recruiting Aboriginal students, but also in helping to increase graduation rates. They addressed the need to ensure that institutions, curricula, course materials, professors and administrators were all Aboriginal. "Universities typically operate on the assumption that Euro-centric content, structure and process constitute the only legitimate approach to knowledge. First Nations history, culture, knowledge and language are largely ignored (Hampton, 2000, p. 210)." A representative at the Shingwauk Training Institute affirmed that "the curriculum must reflect our world view, our politics and connection to the land." In addition to the efforts to ensure Aboriginal control, Aboriginal-controlled PSE institutions led to the introduction of traditional teaching methods, the participation of Band Elders and an institutional commitment to the community.

The First Nations University of Canada in Saskatchewan is an example of an institution supported by community commitment. It is led and controlled by the Aboriginal community and provides bicultural education under the mandate of the First Nations of Saskatchewan. Programs offered by the FNUC, including the Aboriginal cultural awareness program, are designed to raise awareness of First Nations and Métis cultures within the business community, government and the general public.

---

[2] Three access programs are currently offered at the University of Manitoba. The University of Manitoba Access Program is available to all residents of the province, but preference is given to Aboriginal students. The health careers access program is available only to Aboriginal residents of Manitoba who wish to pursue a career in a medical field. The Education Access Program is available to all residents of Manitoba who wish to complete a bachelor of education degree.

While Aboriginal PSE institutions have a vision of how education can serve the student and the student's community by building in both capacity and pride, they lack accreditation. This has led to the development of partnerships with non-Aboriginal-controlled colleges and universities, so that students of the Aboriginal-controlled institutions may obtain diplomas or degrees bestowed by the accredited college or university. These partnerships, in turn, have led to non-Aboriginal institutions showing interest in offering Aboriginal studies and in providing student support services on campus that would give Aboriginal students a greater sense of belonging. It is now not uncommon on Canadian campuses to see Aboriginal friendship centres and facilities in which Aboriginal culture is displayed and local Aboriginal languages are spoken and studied.

Over the past 20 years, increased funding has been made available for programs and research aimed at improving PSE attendance and completion among Aboriginal youth and young adults. The research shows that in different jurisdictions, stakeholders have taken different approaches to meeting the challenges faced by Aboriginal students considering PSE. It also shows that while systemic problems remain, successful inroads are being made into meeting these challenges.

Ontario Context

According to the most recent (2006) census, there are 1,172,790 Aboriginal people living in Canada. Of these, a total of 242,500 Aboriginal people live in Ontario, comprising 20.7 percent of Canada's total Aboriginal population. The cities in Ontario with the largest number of Aboriginal residents are Toronto (26,575), Ottawa (12,250) and Thunder Bay (10,055).[3]

In Toronto, the Aboriginal population is, on the whole, younger than the non-Aboriginal population, and between 2001 and 2006, that population grew by 31 per cent. In 2006, Aboriginal youth aged 15 to 24 living in Toronto had lower school attendance rates than non-Aboriginals (64 per cent versus 73 per cent), and these figures are virtually identical to those for Thunder Bay (Germain, Costa & Kelly-Scott, 2009). The most commonly reported reason for young Aboriginal men between the ages of 15 and 34 not completing high school was that they "wanted to work," while "pregnancy/taking care of children" was the reason most commonly cited by young Aboriginal women in the same age group (Statistics Canada, 2006a).

Although Aboriginal people do have a slightly greater tendency to return to school later in life than do non-Aboriginal people, the majority of Aboriginal people in Toronto have completed PSE. Over half of Torontonian Aboriginal men (53 per cent) and women (55 per cent) aged 25 to 64 had completed postsecondary education, compared to about two-thirds of their non-Aboriginal counterparts (66 per cent of men and 65 per cent of women, respectively). The percentages are slightly lower in the Thunder Bay area, although the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people is the same (approximately 12 per cent).

---

[3] As a percentage of the total population of each of these cities, Aboriginal residents represent 0.5 per cent (Toronto), 1.5 per cent (Ottawa) and 8.3 per cent (Thunder Bay).

2006 census data indicate that, in Ontario, within that same age group (25–64), only 48 per cent of the Aboriginal population has attained postsecondary credentials, compared to 62 per cent of the general population. Aboriginal students are also more likely to go to colleges or trade schools than to universities, and only 9 per cent of Aboriginal students aged 25 to 64 had completed a university degree, compared to 26 per cent of non-Aboriginal students (see Chart 1-1).

Chart 1-1
Percentage of the Ontario Population Aged 25 to 64 by Highest Level of Education, 2006
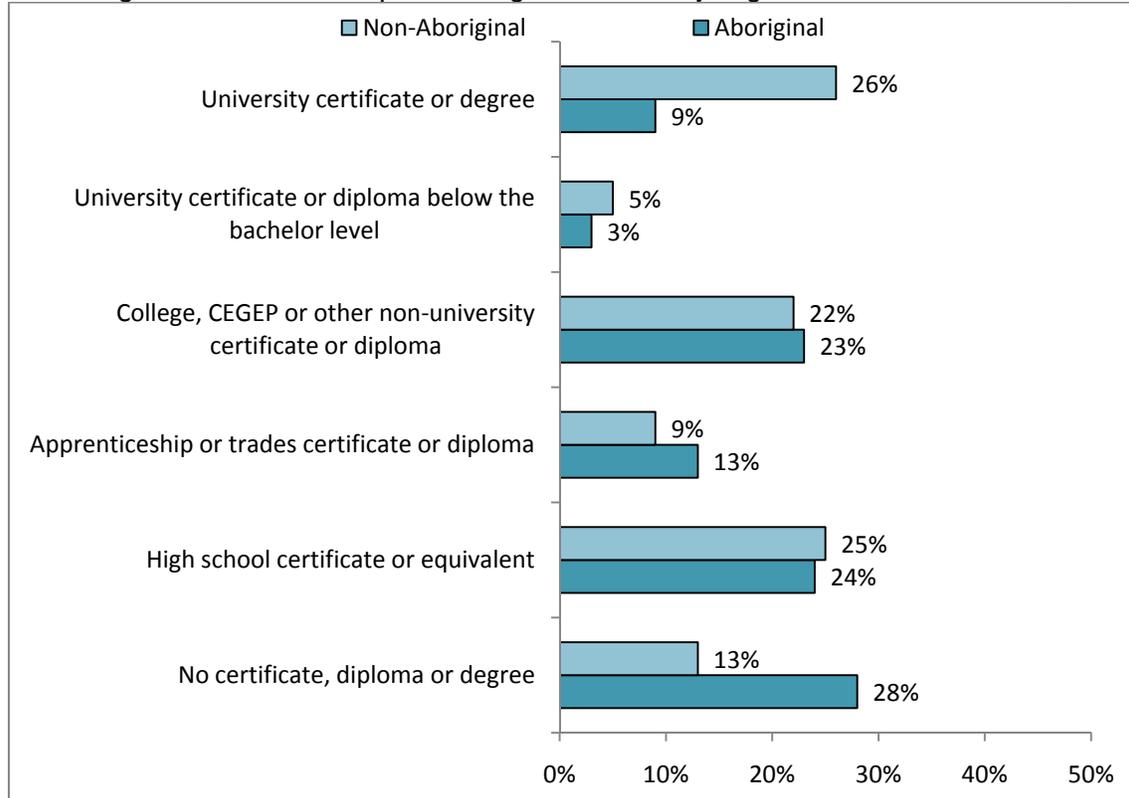
Source: Statistics Canada, 2006a Census

The Importance of PSE

Research indicates that the PSE attainment rates of Aboriginal people remain significantly lower than those of the overall Canadian population (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007, 76). Although census data show that completion of PSE by Aboriginal people has been steadily increasing for the last 20 years, full participation in the benefits of PSE remains elusive for many Aboriginal people. As time goes on, this gap will have more serious consequences, since, with the ongoing transition to a knowledge-based economy and continued global competition, national economic sustainability will depend partly on Canada's PSE system and its ability to

educate and reach out to an increasingly diverse population. Furthermore, the current economy depends partly on the research and innovation represented by the PSE system, and this extends to developments in social structure and participation arrangements.

There is also growing awareness in Canada and elsewhere that the benefits of PSE extend beyond economic factors and actually enhance quality of life. The 2007 Canadian Council on Learning (CCL) study found that people with PSE are more likely to engage in civic life, read newspapers, make charitable donations and volunteer. PSE also contributes to improved health outcomes, as people with higher levels of education use preventive medical services more frequently, make fewer multiple visits to doctors, have better knowledge of healthy behaviours and have better general health status. PSE attainment is important to personal economic prosperity, the social cohesion of communities and, from a broader economic perspective, the country as a whole.

With an aging population, young people are increasingly being called into occupations that require sophisticated skills and education. According to the CCL study, approximately 70 per cent of all new and replacement jobs now require PSE qualifications.

In the 2006 census, 48 per cent of Aboriginals were under the age of 25, compared to only 31 per cent of non-Aboriginals. However, the population of Aboriginal young adults between the ages of 20 and 24 is expected to peak in 2011 (Holmes, 2005). As these young Aboriginal people grow older and represent a growing proportion of the Canadian population, their educational success will have important implications for the country.

Project Objectives

The objective of this project was to identify promising practices in Ontario colleges and universities that encourage and support increased participation in PSE by Aboriginals. The majority of PSE institutions in Ontario offer some form of support for Aboriginal students, such as a full-time Aboriginal counsellor, a specialized transition program or an accommodating mode of program delivery (e.g., satellite campuses in remote communities or distance learning opportunities). However, the main goals of this research were not simply to document and categorize the existing programs, but also to identify which of the programs were experiencing success and to detail which practices could be duplicated at other colleges and universities.

Barriers to Accessing and Completing PSE

Several studies have identified the many challenges faced by Aboriginal students in accessing and completing PSE. These challenges are detailed below.

Language Barriers

The first language of many Aboriginal people is not English or French. However, in Ontario, English and, to a lesser extent, French are the languages of instruction. This includes in-class lectures and almost all printed course material.

Financial Barriers

Based on the 2001 census data of Aboriginal households in Ontario, the total cost of education was about one-third of median family income. Many Aboriginal students need to work to pay for higher education, and one in three mentioned financial challenges as a primary reason for not completing their postsecondary education (Forbes, Brown & Ahulwalia, 2005).

Discrimination

Research completed by the Centre for Education Information at the British Columbia Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology has shown that former Aboriginal PSE students were less likely to report experiencing a "climate free from harassment or discrimination" than non-Aboriginal students.

Family/Other Responsibilities

Personal challenges and family responsibilities were consistently cited to explain why Aboriginal students are unable to enter or continue with their PSE. Stress, lack of family support, problems related to substance abuse, childcare and family concerns are a few examples of these challenges and responsibilities (ACCC, 2005; Malatest, 2004).

Lack of Role Models

Because relatively few Aboriginal people have pursued PSE in the past, particularly at the university level, Aboriginal students have fewer role models and supports in place to encourage them to continue their schooling.

Rural/Remote Communities

Aboriginal communities are often geographically remote, and as a result, students must leave their communities and/or families to study in an unfamiliar urban environment. Limited high-speed Internet access in these communities exacerbates the difficulties students face when transposed to urban campuses.

Like many students with rural backgrounds, Aboriginal students may not move back to their communities after graduation, deciding instead to reside in urban regions, where their earning potential would be significantly higher. This would be even more likely in the case of students who incurred significant debt while completing their PSE. This can cause problems both for Aboriginal graduates (who find themselves living away from friends and family) and for Aboriginal communities (which would benefit more from the graduate's knowledge and success if that graduate moved back home).

This study is an effort to identify the college or university programs that have proven records in attempting to reduce some or all of these barriers and in retaining Aboriginal students in Ontario postsecondary institutions, and this report focuses specifically on "promising practices" in Ontario. The report also categorizes various types of programs and services that are available in Ontario and documents the program strengths and weaknesses of each type.

Methodology

This project was completed in stages. Initially, an environmental scan was completed to assess the scope of available programs and services. Factsheets were compiled for each program, and stakeholders (recognized experts in program design and delivery) were identified and interviewed. Site visits were also completed at six colleges and universities.

Environmental Scan

The researchers completed an environmental scan, using both the Internet and a literature search. These activities identified more than 70 practices and programs in Ontario colleges and universities that address barriers and support increased recruitment, participation and retention of Aboriginal students in PSE. The scan also identified potential key contacts to be interviewed for the study. This involved a "snowball sampling" approach to recruiting knowledgeable subjects, who, in turn, referred the researchers to other stakeholders who had expertise in other areas of program delivery and the Aboriginal PSE experience.

The scan of college and university programs in Ontario resulted in the development of a database that includes programs at 16 public colleges and 12 public universities (see Appendix A). In addition, interviews were conducted at four private colleges.

Key Stakeholder Interviews

Based on the number of programs and practices identified by the environmental scan, the researchers conducted 43 interviews with program directors, Aboriginal counsellors and Aboriginal support workers. An additional two interviews were completed with other stakeholders – a representative of Health Canada (Ontario region) and a representative of the Aboriginal Education Office (Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, MTCU).

The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix B). With the exception of one interview, which was conducted onsite at Carleton University, all the interviews for the project were conducted by telephone. All interview notes were entered into an MS Access database for further analysis.

Using the information provided by each college and university's staff and website, program factsheets were created. These serve as profiles of each of the programs and services reviewed (see Appendix C).

Creation of Criteria

Building on the information gathered from the environmental scan and the interviews with key stakeholders, the researchers developed criteria to guide the site visits (which were made in order to gather in-depth qualitative information related to promising practices and programs in Ontario). The criteria, which were also used to measure the success and transferability of reviewed programs and practices included the following:

1. proven success in attracting and retaining Aboriginal students, including any quantitative and qualitative data that supported such success;
2. affordability of PSE for Aboriginal students, including the provision of adequate funding;
3. accessibility of Aboriginal students' services (e.g., visibility on the campus, providing distance education);
4. community connection/partnership: whether there was a strong connection with local Aboriginal communities (to facilitate the integration of Aboriginal culture into the academic environment);
5. control/empowerment: whether the services gave power and control to Aboriginal students or their communities to play a role in the academic environment; how the program or service was positioned in the universities/colleges that were part of the study;
6. ability to address individual factors: whether the program's delivery was sensitive to the personal experience of Aboriginal students, including their family responsibilities, physical and mental health and negative feelings associated with having to leave their communities in order to study; and
7. unique strategies and initiatives: whether the programs employed unique delivery strategies that, if known, could be adopted by other colleges or universities.

Site Visits

A total of six site visits were conducted in order to gather in-depth qualitative information about the types of programs being offered in Ontario. These sites were located throughout the province and consisted of the following:

- Carleton University
- Negahneewin College, Confederation College
- Sault College
- Shingwauk Kinoomaage Gamig
- Trent University
- University of Toronto

The choice of the above sites provided the researchers with a geographically dispersed group of urban and rural PSE institutions. Accordingly, the programs offered were quite diverse, as were the needs of the student populations served.

Carleton University and University of Toronto are large, public universities in metropolitan areas in southern Ontario. Trent University is located in Peterborough, in the heart of a rural area. Sault College is located in Sault Ste. Marie in northern Ontario, while Shingwauk Kinoomaage Gamig is a smaller Anishinabe (Aboriginal)–run institution in the same area. Negahneewin College is an independent unit within Confederation College in the Thunder Bay area.

Researchers worked with HEQCO and an Aboriginal project advisor to develop and refine a site visit guide (see Appendix D). The duration of the site visits was between three and five hours, and the actual time spent depended on the number of programs and services offered, as well as the amount of documentation and the number of facilities available for viewing. The visits involved a tour of the facilities, a review of all relevant program documentation and promotional material, interviews with staff and discussions with students and faculty. An addition interview guide was developed and was used by the researchers while they were on site to interview students. A total of eleven students were interviewed with this guide (see Appendix E).

Multi-Year Accountability Agreements

When the Ontario government announced $6.2 billion in funding for postsecondary education in 2005, it also developed an accountability framework to keep track of access and quality measures and the degrees to which institutions of higher learning were attaining these measures. Four years into the initiative, yearly grant contributions are allocated by the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, and institutions report on the outcomes of the funding. These reports become part of the public record and are typically posted on institutional websites.

Under the auspices of the MYAAs, the government is committed to ensuring greater access to PSE for graduate students, Aboriginal Peoples, Francophones, persons with disabilities and persons who are first in their family to take PSE (first generation students). In cooperation with the MTCU, institutions are to develop Student Access Guarantees to show how they are ensuring that no qualified student will be prevented from attending PSE due to lack of financial support programs. As part of these agreements, institutions are required to develop tracking protocols to measure the number of self-identifying underrepresented students. These numbers are available through publicly posted report-back documents produced by the institutions in question, and this process makes the institutions answerable to both the MTCU and relevant stakeholders. The reports also outline the measures being taken by colleges and universities to increase the numbers of underrepresented students. Conceivably, this information would be of interest to prospective Aboriginal students seeking admission to colleges or universities or seeking help from Aboriginal student service providers and community groups. At the same time, MYAAs may be used by program coordinators and others at the institutional level to obtain the necessary supports.

Colleges and universities are held to their access and quality objectives through participation in MYAAs. Specifically, the government requires that colleges and universities develop and review multi-year action plans to establish strategies, indicators and results designed to help reach system-wide goals. Institutions report to the ministry via the MYAA report-back document, which is signed by the president/executive of the university/college and the minister. As such, the agreement obtains clear support from the top management and various institution staff within the system, and this process specifically makes Aboriginal student support initiatives official and legitimate. In the stakeholder interviews, stakeholders consistently indicated that obtaining support from top university management and different departments was crucial for Aboriginal

student services and programs to be successful, whether in terms of obtaining resources or obtaining cultural support, acceptability and visibility on campus.

Insofar as the report-back document simply offers an overview of the numbers, measures and initiatives facilitated by each institution, it does not commit the institution to delivering increased supports. This observation was borne out by the site visits and stakeholder interviews conducted for this report, as none of the interviewees highlighted or emphasized the MYAA in their responses. However, the MYAA does bind both the government and institutions to various commitments under the substantial provisions of the agreement. As such, a lack of awareness surrounding the document and its policies may mean that funding opportunities for Aboriginal programs, services and supports go unfulfilled within the scope of the agreement.

Case Study – Lakehead University

Under the terms of the MYAA, Lakehead University reported a total of 456 self-identifying Aboriginal students in the 2008/09 academic year. In order to increase access and retention of Aboriginal students, the university developed a broad range of strategies and programs. In the first place, they recruited college graduates, adult learners and workplace transition students to increase Aboriginals' participation in the university system. This strategy was augmented by increasing transfer agreements and Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) to recognize workplace learning and informal training. Efforts to increase participation were further supplemented by outreach to youth in urban and remote communities where university participation is low.

In order to measure their success over the years, Lakehead developed a baseline enrolment for Aboriginal students. As of 2006/07, this participation rate stood at 9.8 per cent. Two voluntary surveys that asked Aboriginal students to self-identify were incorporated into the registration process, in addition to the National Survey of Student Engagement. Just over 60 per cent of Lakehead's Aboriginal students opted to complete the voluntary survey.

Using 2007/08 data, Lakehead also developed a baseline for the number of programs in which Aboriginal students participate. The initiative to increase participation was facilitated through the introduction of the Science and Arts Gateway to Education (SAGE) program, which includes access and gateway courses, and Aboriginal students are now broadly represented in all major program categories. Participation is monitored and reported yearly to the Aboriginal Management Council under the terms of the multi-year accountability agreement.

Lakehead also provides personal counselling and academic advising for Aboriginal students in a culturally sensitive environment. Liaison with Band councils and funding and support agencies is

also provided through regular contact and on an ad hoc basis. According to the most recent report, Lakehead provided an average of 68 counselling sessions per month, and students also have access to academic counselling through program-specific counselling services. The report also indicated that interventions through counselling are thought to assist students in adjusting to the academic environment and to improve success in their academic programs.

In keeping with their objective of promoting engagement in university life, Lakehead holds feasts, pow-wows and regular cultural gatherings to welcome and support Aboriginal students and families. In the same vein, the university sponsors an Aboriginal women speaker series and an Aboriginal speaker series, for which Elders are invited to speak on cultural issues and protocols such as pow-wows, medicine wheels and drumming. These events are reported to the Aboriginal Management Council on an annual basis.

Aboriginal Education and Training Strategy

The Aboriginal Education and Training Strategy (AETS) was implemented in 1991 to meet three specific goals:

- to increase the participation and completion rates of Aboriginal students in postsecondary institutions;
- to increase the sensitivity and awareness of postsecondary institutions to Aboriginal cultures and issues; and
- to increase the extent to which Aboriginal people participate in decisions affecting Aboriginal education.

The AETS has provided funding to eligible colleges and universities for Aboriginal counselling initiatives, specialized support services, curriculum development, community-based program delivery and Aboriginal-designated programs that are developed in cooperation with the MTCU. Specifically, the MTCU requires that publicly funded colleges and universities submit documentation concerning their proposed programs, services and initiatives.

Originally, the funding was competitive in nature and conditional upon the institution creating an Aboriginal Education Council (AEC) to oversee the institution's implementation of the funded program. These councils were to be instrumental in meeting the ministry's third AETS objective – that of increasing the participation of Aboriginal people in decisions affecting Aboriginal education.

In 1996, the AETS was modified, and according to the new configuration, funding was provided to colleges and universities based on a fixed share of the funding that reflected participating institutions' previous competitive share (Educational Policy Institute, 2007, p. 3). Within the new AETS, Aboriginal institutions were also able to access funding to support the development and delivery of recognized postsecondary programs offered in partnership with colleges and universities. This funding is accessed through a competitive process through which institutions submit proposals which comply with specific MTCU requirements including:

- Institutions must maintain an Aboriginal Education Council that was involved in the decision-making processes related to the provision of Aboriginal programs and services on the college and university campuses where the program is targetted. This council must be representative of the Aboriginal community

- Representatives from Aboriginal communities have direct access to the board of governors and, in the case of universities, the senate – by means of board membership or through the university president being a member of the Aboriginal Education Council.

- The AEC must develop an action plan approved by both the AEC and the board of governors/senate.

- Colleges and universities must ensure that Aboriginal students have access to Aboriginal counselling services.

The AETS fund covers a multitude of programs and services targeted to Aboriginal students and the Aboriginal community. The MTCU specified that counsellors must be drawn from members of the Aboriginal community and that curriculum development and start-up must be Aboriginal-specific and culturally relevant. The required specialized support services include a range of activities and facilities, such as student meeting places, peer tutoring, Elders on campus, cultural activities and cross-cultural workshops. The fund also allows for the provision of programs delivered in Aboriginal communities and Aboriginal-specific programs with significant Aboriginal content that lead to degrees, diplomas or certificates. In short, many of the programs and services outlined in this paper have been eligible for funding through the AETS, and many of the colleges and universities used as case studies and examples in this paper did, in fact, receive funding from the AETS.[4] A list of institutions that received funding from the AETS in 2008/09 is provided in Table 2-1.

---

[4] Beginning in 2009/2010 a new funding approach for Aboriginal PSE will consolidate funding formerly provided under AETS and Access to Opportunities into a single fund. This approach will extend funding to additional PSE institutions.

Table 2-1
Colleges and universities receiving AETS funding

Colleges	Universities
Algonquin	Algoma
Cambrian	Brock
Canadore	Lakehead
Confederation	McMaster
Fanshawe	Nipissing
George Brown	Queen's
Georgian	Trent
Lambton	Western
Loyalist	Ottawa
Mohawk	Waterloo
Niagara	Windsor
Northern	York
St. Clair	
St. Lawrence	
Sault	
Sir Sanford Fleming	

It should also be mentioned that there are other government programs from which Aboriginal students and institutions can benefit. For example, in 2005, as part of the Reaching Higher Plan for Postsecondary Education, the MTCU developed the Access to Opportunities Strategy to give four targeted groups of students (Aboriginal people, Francophones, persons with disabilities and first generation learners) access to and success in PSE. From 2005, colleges and universities across the province have been implementing programs aimed at increasing access to and participation in PSE for these underrepresented populations. Although Access to Opportunities included targeted funding for Aboriginal-specific initiatives, many postsecondary institutions have supported Aboriginal students by utilizing funding intended for first generation students (students who are the first in their family to attend PSE) to support Aboriginal students, as they may also be first generation learners.

Findings

The findings are presented below, and they describe the range of programs colleges and universities are currently utilizing to increase Aboriginal participation in Ontario PSE. The findings also identify the program and service strategies that show promise in encouraging participation.

General Description

All the programs and practices reviewed attempt to address the systemic challenges that Aboriginal students face during PSE. In many cases, the programs take a holistic approach, providing multiple services and support that work in harmony with each other. Depending on the financial resources available to and from colleges and universities, multiple programs are made available that target particular needs.

The key stakeholders interviewed in this study identified six broad categories of need:

Financial supports:	These include financial assistance with the costs of tuition, books, daycare, travel and day-to-day living.
Academic supports:	These include faculty consulting, peer tutoring and academic upgrading.
Individual supports:	These include personal counselling and personal health promotion.
Cultural supports:	These supports encompass activities and programs that reinforce the importance of language, traditions and pride. They may incorporate role modelling and partnerships with Aboriginal organizations.
Social supports:	These supports may consist of student liaising and peer mentoring.
Employment support:	These supports include pre-apprenticeship programs, contract training, trades readiness and work placement opportunities in the community. Such supports are not commonly provided by universities. Colleges offer them as part of co-op programs, and they are not specific to Aboriginal students.

Limitations of the Research

This report does not provide an exhaustive list of all the services offered to Aboriginal students by Ontario colleges and universities. There is a high degree of integration among the different Aboriginal support programs at each institution; however, there is also sufficient specialization that, for logistical reasons, these programs are often placed in different faculties or departments. The stakeholders interviewed provided detailed information about their areas of expertise but may have been unaware of the other services, staff and funding available within other programs at the same institution.

Although this report was not intended to provide a complete inventory of all existing programs, because the needs of Aboriginal students within Ontario colleges and universities are subject to complex variables (socioeconomic, cultural and geographic), the researchers attempted to

describe as wide an array of programs as possible. As a result, some programs detailed in this report may have had their origins in innovative pilot programs developed at other institutions (though the historical evolution of these programs is not explored in this report).

Another limitation of this report is that the participation rates within Aboriginal programs, like those reported by Statistics Canada for Aboriginal participation in PSE in general, may be understated due to a tendency among Aboriginal people to not participate in census and survey data collection, as well as a reluctance to self-identify as Aboriginal students.

In addition to the practices that the researchers learned about during their interviews with the 44 stakeholders, this report highlights the promising practices observed by the researchers while on site.

The Structure of the Report

In preparing this report, the researchers found that Ontario PSE institutions often had more than one program aimed at increasing Aboriginal students' successful completion of PSE. Given the number of programs and PSE institutions investigated, the researchers decided to organize the report by program type rather than by institution:

- Aboriginal student services

- Aboriginal access programs

- Aboriginal studies and Aboriginal designated programs

- healthcare programs

- Aboriginal teacher education programs

For this reason, the reader will find that the programming efforts of individual colleges and universities will not be described in sections devoted to each college or university. Instead, the different programming efforts at each university will be addressed in various areas of the report. Whenever possible, these program types will be subdivided into the following categories:

- design and delivery,

- participation and retention,

- service expansion,

- challenges,

- replication at other PSE institutions, and

- promising practices.

The report also provides a toolkit for institutions that are interested in implementing similar programs.

Aboriginal Student Services

These types of programs and practices are intended to provide academic, financial, emotional and social support for Aboriginal students at universities and colleges. The objective is to take a holistic approach to the attraction and retention of students. The specific combination of services varies between institutions, but the array of services provided includes:

- outreach and recruitment initiatives,

- assistance with the application process,

- assistance with course registration,

- guidance on program selection,

- guidance on career planning,

- peer mentoring,

- assistance with writing and study skills, and

- personal counselling.

Many, but not all, of the programs reviewed included outreach components. Outreach efforts included activities such as visits to high schools, to territorial vocational centres and colleges, and to Aboriginal communities on reserves. The program directors who launched these initiatives feel that they are a necessary part of the overall Aboriginal student services program, as the visits encourage potential students to apply. Outreach is also believed to help instil confidence in future students by letting them know they will have support and guidance if they choose to take PSE. However, these types of initiatives are costly, as they require staff and resources for travel.

Other outreach initiatives are campus-based and focus on enhancing awareness of available supports among new and existing students. These types of outreach often have secondary impacts, including making non-Aboriginal students aware of, and therefore more receptive to, Aboriginal culture and traditions. As a result of outreach, awareness may also increase among faculty members, particularly if the Aboriginal student services centre is located in a highly visible area on campus.

Design and Delivery

Approximately half the public institution representatives interviewed by the researchers had facilities for an Aboriginal student services centre in addition to other specific programs. These institutions were Algoma University, Lakehead University, Ryerson University, Trent University, University of Guelph, University of Toronto, University of Windsor, Wilfrid Laurier University, York University, Canadore College, Georgian College, Loyalist College, Northern College and Seneca College.

Many of the stakeholders interviewed stated that these centres were necessary, particularly after research was conducted by their respective institutions, identifying the need for Aboriginal student services. This aspect of the research indicated that Aboriginal students need specialized support to overcome some of the endemic barriers that hamper their ability to apply to PSE institutions and complete their studies. In some instances, the centres were opened in response to increasing Aboriginal student enrolment and an increasing awareness at the institutional level that the needs of Aboriginal students are unique. There was consensus among the stakeholders at the institutions offering these programs that the primary goals of the centres are to increase Aboriginal student enrolment through recruitment initiatives and to support Aboriginal student retention and graduation rates.

These centres aim to provide a sense of belonging and guidance to students who may find that the university environment is very different from, or alien to, environments in which they had previously lived. As stated by one of the stakeholders, they [the centres] focus on making the transition to PSE and, in some cases, city life easier, especially for those coming from distant reserves and remote areas. The centres provide culturally sensitive support by ensuring that Aboriginal counsellors are available for students. All the Aboriginal student services centres reviewed aim to create a warm and supportive environment, where students feel comfortable engaging with their peers and forming friendships, thereby creating a sense of belonging.

Another set of vital services offered by the student centres consisted of mentoring and tutoring services and academic counsellors. These service providers help students navigate through the university system and form connections within and beyond their own community.

In some instances, Aboriginal student services centres are designed to help students overcome financial barriers by providing information concerning scholarships and bursaries. They can also assist with non-financial barriers such as isolation, racism and health issues, which require specialized services. These centres also try to provide academic and leadership opportunities for Aboriginal students.

In addition, Aboriginal student services centres work on campus to raise awareness of Aboriginal people, their cultures and their issues. The centres often organize cultural and other social events on and off campus, thus fostering sensitivity toward Aboriginal issues within and beyond the campus community. This type of outreach also helps Aboriginal students form networks both within and outside the university and college communities.

Unique Features

Aboriginal student services programs are located throughout the Province of Ontario and serve both rural and urban communities. In each case, the size of the institution, the amount of available program funding, the degree of Aboriginal ownership and direction and the number of Aboriginal students attending the institution have a profound impact on how an Aboriginal

student services centre materializes and on which services it offers. While there is some degree of cross-pollination, it is only natural that unique approaches to student support should occur.

Sault College mentioned that students often hear about their services through word of mouth. They have open houses with specific First Nations groups and information sessions where potential students can come by and learn about their program. They also do community outreach by facilitating local events and setting up booths there (e.g., at pow-wows). In addition to taking these measures, they initiate traditional media coverage such as publicity through newspapers and TV.

Sault College is also in the process of implementing a "role model program." This program allows a panel of current Aboriginal students to converse via videoconference with high school students in Moose Factory. The college students provide a realistic view of what college life is like for Aboriginal students. Another program, the "Get Connected" program, invites new students to come and visit the college during the summer. Counsellors help them find apartments, childcare and other amenities and services that will help them prepare for the upcoming term and feel comfortable when classes begin.

One of the unique features of Aboriginal student services centres is that they all naturally developed partnerships and networks within the PSE institution as well as within the surrounding community. Unlike most student services centres for the general student population in colleges and universities, the Aboriginal student services centres had insufficient funding and were therefore obliged to reach out to others within the PSE institution and the surrounding community to access resources. There was consensus among stakeholders who manage these centres that partnerships and networks are invaluable to students. This was also true among the Aboriginal-controlled institutions, such as Oshki-Pimache-O-Win, which has partnerships with Negahneewin College at Confederation College and Cambrian College, as well as with institutions as far away as Acadia University in Nova Scotia. Oshki-Pimache-O-Win also has an educational partnership with Contact North (See footnote 1.)

First Nations House (FNH), located at the St. George campus at the University of Toronto, maintains strong connections to the Aboriginal Studies academic program, to the extent that one of the academic program's courses is presented on the FNH site. These close connections have led to several benefits, such as greater knowledge among Aboriginal students about their own culture, better connections with professors and better utilization of services non-Aboriginal students. Besides reaching out to the student and university population, the FNH actively seeks to form strong partnerships with community organizations external to the academic world and has developed strong relationships with the Toronto Police Service, Aboriginal Peace Services and the Aboriginal Fair Committee, thereby providing valuable networking opportunities for students. As part of its strategic plan the University of Toronto intends "to expand distribution of First Nations House internal and external communications on all campuses" (Epiitiiyan: Aboriginal Presence and Educational Excellence at the University of Toronto 2009-2011, p 31).

At Trent University, the Indigenous Student Services (ISS) program is part of the Indigenous studies department. It is located in the First Peoples House of Learning, which provides a meeting place for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students to interact with Aboriginal faculty, as well as with other Aboriginal students. The ISS program makes active efforts to network extensively within the university and increase its presence while creating a more culturally supportive environment for Aboriginal students. As a result, the ISS program has student representatives in a number of different departments and student organizations.

The majority of Aboriginal student services centres actively form partnerships with other universities and colleges to give their students access to different or higher-level PSE options, to share resources and to plan new programs. Ryerson University, for instance, has a joint program with the First Nations Technical Institute (FNTI), an Aboriginal-owned and -controlled PSE institute that gives Aboriginal people access to PSE programs. FNTI operates according to a community-based education model, and adult education is one of its main priorities. Through this partnership, students from FNTI are able to attend classes at Ryerson and obtain a degree through Ryerson. These partnerships are not restricted to the academic world, nor are they focused merely on traditional academic subject matter. Iohahiio, the Aboriginal-controlled Akwesasne Adult Education College, has partnerships with Carleton University but also maintains a network of local business contacts.

Other unique strategies, which do not involve the formation of partnerships, are used as well. Algoma University, due to its proximity to two very large reserves, has a dedicated Native recruitment officer who travels to career fairs, high schools and community events to recruit students and encourage them to study at Algoma. At Georgian College and at the University of Toronto, students are given access to Aboriginal Elders who can serve as role models. Students hold these program features in high regard.

Most directors of the Aboriginal student services programs that were reviewed indicated that the programs provided their students with career counselling and work experience opportunities to help ensure their success after graduation. Loyalist College in Belleville, for instance, offers portfolio and career assessment services as a part of its "Bridges to Success" program, while the University of Windsor offers a work/study program as part of its student services.

Aboriginal student services programs at a number of institutions also provide peer counselling and one-on-one student services, which contribute to higher retention rates. For example, the program coordinator of the First Peoples House of Learning at Trent University helps operate the Naadinaagewin program, which is essentially a peer-tutoring program. It also organizes workshops to provide students with academic support. At Seneca College, the Aboriginal student services program offers the SCORE program, which specifically targets at-risk students who do not have a General Education Diploma. One counsellor is dedicated to these students. The SCORE program also has a laptop-lending program, in which a laptop is lent out on a weekly/48-hour basis. This program is particularly beneficial for single mothers who cannot stay at school after hours in order to complete their assignments. This relatively low-cost initiative demonstrates sensitivity to the stresses that time constraints impose on a single mother. It has a direct impact on the quality of her assignments and therefore her success in her program of

study. The SCORE program also sends out monthly e-mails, posts college news on the online student portal and makes presentations around the campus to raise awareness of Aboriginal issues.

The Structure of Aboriginal Student Services Programs

As previously mentioned, the structures of Aboriginal student services programs vary greatly, depending on the location and size of the institution, its available funds and the needs of its students. The common facilities available at student services centres include a student lounge, where social events are held; a computer laboratory; and an academic centre to assist students with their writing. The sentiment expressed by different program coordinators was that, regardless of the services offered, the centres provide a needed meeting space that encourages dialogue about Aboriginal affairs.

Aboriginal student services programs also provide administrative services, such as writing letters of support for students, and they offer academic support in the form of advocacy efforts by making referrals to admissions offices and by working with faculty. Aboriginal student services programs also offer transition services such as providing on-campus orientation for Aboriginal students. At Lakehead University, the Aboriginal student services centre provides information on available housing. It also runs a food bank and provides childcare resources, both of which meet the practical and financial needs of students who are single parents. In addition, the program at Lakehead encourages Aboriginal students to self-identify and undertakes recruitment activities to attract them to PSE. Recruiters are also called upon to liaise with human resource officers on reserves, to attend career fairs, to administer mail-outs and to attend community events.

The program administrator at Kenjgewin Teg Educational Institute, located on the M'Chigeeng First Nation, stated that one-year programs are more successful because they allow students to have a successful experience in the short term, even though they are coming from the traditional system, which hasn't served them well. This short-term success secures their long-term interest. If applicants lack certain skills or requirements, there is the possibility of mentoring and setting up a plan for them to meet the appropriate requirements. In contexts in which education is delivered by teleconference, videoconference or online, students physically attend the college for one to two weeks in order to meet with instructors and make new friends before going back home to begin their distance education. These blended approaches to content delivery help facilitate success and continued PSE learning.

In programs at colleges and universities where the supporting Aboriginal community is far away, student services centres create a necessary sense of cultural pride and belonging by organizing traditional events such as drumming and dancing. At some colleges and universities, the centres had resources such as a library or literature that provided information about Aboriginal culture. Most Aboriginal student services centres are open for the full school year, but some are also open during the summer, when they provide employment opportunities to the community through a work/study program. Other programs conduct outreach activities to high school students and on reserves in May and June or provide consulting services during that period.

Over half the institutions reviewed that provide Aboriginal student services programs serve Aboriginal students only (First Nations, Inuit and Métis). The remaining centres offer their services to all students. As expressed by a representative of the First Nations House at the University of Toronto, for instance, the FNH provides services that are "open to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in order to create a feeling of support and inclusiveness for their organization among the general student population." In both cases, financial help, academic programs and computer facilities are available only to students who are registered at the university.

Participation and Retention

The participation rates in Aboriginal student services programs vary greatly, depending on the size of the university and the number of Aboriginal students present on campus (and in the surrounding area). Table 4-1 shows the number of students who used the services of Aboriginal student services centres at selected institutions. The numbers presented may not be precise; they were provided by the stakeholders at each of these institutions during interviews with them.

Table 4-1
Number of Students Who Accessed Aboriginal Student Services Centres

PSE Institution	Approximate number of students
Lakehead University	600
Loyalist College	400
Fanshawe College	300
University of Toronto	250
Trent University	150
Algoma University	135
Northern College	95
Ryerson University	75
Seneca College	50
University of Windsor	30
York University	20
Wilfrid Laurier University	18
University of Guelph	15

Note: Data are only from those institutions that have supplied statistics.

It was clear from the comments of the stakeholders interviewed that some students had accessed the Aboriginal student services centre after they had been referred there by their professors, who thought that they could benefit from academic and transition supports. This is a positive sign, as it indicates that these professors were aware of the existence of these centres on campus. More profoundly, it means that these faculty members recognized the unique needs of Aboriginal students and identified the centres as valuable supports for them. Several of the stakeholders interviewed felt that this evolution in faculty awareness and behaviour was directly attributable to the physical presence on campus of the Aboriginal student services centres. Both the stakeholders and students noted that the centres provide Aboriginal students with the opportunity to meet other Aboriginal students on campus and to access a "safe space," where their cultural identities can be affirmed. The personal support and counselling services available at the centres are also compelling attractions for students.

Besides providing services, Aboriginal student services programs aim to teach students skills and attitudes that will continue to benefit them after they have graduated. The stakeholders interviewed said that their goal is to give their students a sense of empowerment and confidence so that they will be able to transition from their community to a college, university or city. By undertaking cultural activities, service providers also encourage students to develop their social and leadership skills, advocate for Aboriginal people and become problem solvers. Aboriginal student services programs also provide networking opportunities, so that Aboriginal students can connect with other Aboriginal students, academics and the local community.

The student services programs also play an instrumental role in attracting and retaining Aboriginal students and in helping them graduate from colleges and universities. They have evolved from providing basic services, such as academic guidance, to offering more advanced services, such as community outreach and cultural or ceremonial services. Of the 16 program coordinators and directors interviewed, 14 felt that they had been fairly successful in helping students graduate, given the financial and resource constraints of their programs. Some stakeholders indicated that they deal with their students individually on a continual basis and take extra steps to help them where needed. Others stated that they felt they could not do much more without additional resources.

Rationale for Early Exit

Among the stakeholders interviewed from institutions offering Aboriginal student services programs, there was consensus that there are five broad categories of reasons why Aboriginal students drop out:

1. Family Obligations and Childcare Responsibilities: Family emergencies often compel Aboriginal students to leave partway through a semester to go to their homes, which might be far away from the institution, particularly if they live on a reserve. Moreover, many stakeholders pointed out that Aboriginal students in PSE tend to be mature students, thereby increasing the likelihood that they have multiple responsibilities, such as having to take care of their parents and children at the same time as studying. They also often have full-time jobs while attending school. This is particularly true of female

mature students, who frequently make up the bulk of the student Aboriginal population. Interviews with both program directors and students, as well as information from site visits, confirmed that it was difficult for students with children to find affordable childcare facilities close to either school or home.

2. Financial Difficulties: Poverty and lack of consistent funding from their Bands makes it difficult for Aboriginal students to pay for childcare, books, living expenses and/or safe accommodations.

3. Lack of Academic and Technological Skills: Some of the stakeholders stated that Aboriginal students may not have the best grades and may not be academically ready to attend university. Students stated in their interviews that academic support received through workshops, tutoring and peer counselling were extremely useful in helping them succeed during college and university. It was reported that Aboriginal students were sometimes technologically challenged and struggled to use the computer facilities. However, these issues were often remedied with the help of staff at the Aboriginal student services centre and were usually not the main reason why students left their programs. It should be noted that this discomfort with new technology among Aboriginal students is not consistent with the unanimous claims of Aboriginal-controlled institutions that additional computers and technological resources are needed to provide access to students in remote areas.

4. Personal Issues: Poor mental health, substance abuse and personal problems do pose a challenge for some Aboriginal students who are pursuing PSE. Aboriginal student services centres often provide counsellors or Elders to help students who have these difficulties.

5. Differing Goals: A number of stakeholders felt that students often drop out because they feel that studying is just not the right choice for them. In such instances, they are encouraged to go to a smaller college or trades school that would be better able to help them meet their goals in life. Others, who have previous college education or skills, often find a job in their area of interest, and this leads to them leave before completion.

Data collected from stakeholders and from the site visits suggest that students facing family and/or financial difficulties often returned after the problem was resolved (generally within a year). Moreover, students who leave to pursue other career choices are not viewed by program administrators as failures or dropouts. There was general agreement that the PSE institution and the student services program enabled these students to find the right path for success in life.

Supporting Data

All study participants were asked if they tracked their program and service outcomes. None had formal evaluations or reviews in place, but ten of the public institutions reviewed had informal tracking mechanisms. All the institutions in this study attempted to maintain relationships with their students after they graduated, in order to keep track of their situations. Many stakeholders stated that they were moving in the direction of gathering statistics and keeping records;

however, some indicated that they did not have the resources to do so. None of the directors interviewed at Aboriginal-controlled institutions were aware of any formal tracking of service outcomes.

Lakehead University keeps a record of the number of students who visit their offices and attend their workshops. The university has also taken steps to formally track the number of Aboriginal students attending classes, as well as the number of Aboriginal graduates from each program. In addition, students are able to evaluate services by means of a student survey that is e-mailed to them.

The Aboriginal-controlled institutions in this study have close ties with the communities they serve. Program directors felt that the anecdotal evidence provided by the community Elders, suggesting that the programs were having a positive impact on both the students and their communities, was reliable.

The majority of the Aboriginal student services programs had not been subjected to a formal review or evaluation; however, a few did undertake self-evaluation periodically. This lack of formal evaluations is problematic. In particular, it is difficult to isolate the impact of the support programs on increased Aboriginal enrolment, enhanced Aboriginal student transitions and Aboriginal graduation rates. The lack of outcome data at the institutional level prevents comparisons between Aboriginal students who receive the services and those who do not, and it also means that comparisons cannot be made between Aboriginal students and non-Aboriginal students or across institutions.

Resource Demands

All the stakeholders stated that students could use student services free of charge. They indicated that their programs received funding from a variety of sources, including the college or university, student tuition, the MTCU and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. Just over half the programs received funds from the Aboriginal Education and Training Strategy (AETS. However, all the stakeholders pointed out that they were still confronted with a major shortfall of the funds needed to provide their students with essential services. Some of the additional resources required by existing Aboriginal student services programs at colleges and universities include:

- The need for physical space and other resources – especially classrooms, computers and facilities for social, cultural and ceremonial events. These needs were expressed repeatedly in student interviews, site visits and stakeholder interviews.

- Human resources: tutors, counsellors, administrative staff, more academic support from other departments and recruitment officers.

- Funds: stable, multi-year funding for:
    - Aboriginal awards, bursaries and scholarships,
    - Aboriginal librairies/resource centres,
    - computers/study facilities,

- o   cultural/social events, and
- o   Distance education and e-learning initiatives.

It should be noted that the need for infrastructure to support distance education and e-learning initiatives was more pronounced among the Aboriginal-controlled institutions – those in the more northern and remote areas. Distance education allows students, particularly those with community and family obligations, to remain in their communities. While some of the required resources require capital expenditures (e.g., computers, routers and broadband access), the sharing of curriculum suitable for distance education (which does not require capital expenditures) was mentioned repeatedly by these smaller PSE institutions. It is therefore somewhat surprising that virtually no mention was made of Contact North by any of the colleges or universities that participated in the research, especially since many of them – including Algoma, Cambrian, Canadore, Confederation, Lakehead, Nipissing, Northern, Oshki-Pimache-O-Win and Sault – are listed as Contact North educational partners. (As previously stated, Contact North is a provincially funded not-for-profit organization that can provide access to distance education opportunities through its 92 access sites in northern Ontario.) It may be that within the PSE institutions who partner with Contact North, greater efforts are required to make internal programs and departments aware of the existence of this partnership and of the benefits it can provide.

Expansion of Aboriginal Student Services

A majority of the colleges and universities indicated in the stakeholder interviews that they would like to add to, or make some changes to, their programs. Funding was an issue, and some colleges and universities indicated that they had no budget to expand their programs. Others described how they would prioritize future program expansions by taking initiatives such as the following:

- Hiring Aboriginal recruitment officers as well as student risk management officers to better support students. Emphasis was also placed on developing the capacity to support students with disabilities. In addition, stakeholders wanted to maintain consistency in their service delivery by being able to hire staff on a long-term basis.

- Developing or expanding mentorship programs in order to guide Aboriginal students.

- Launching new programs for students during the summer, including an Aboriginal orientation program (to help students prepare for the transition).

- Creating more partnerships with First Nations communities.

- Building an e-meeting room. This would be a place where students could use and learn about technology in a comfortable environment.

- Securing a commitment and long-term funding to build a specialized residence to house Aboriginal students in cities where vacancy rates are low.

Directors and program coordinators from 13 of 16 public institutions were concerned that their organizations faced funding shortages, particularly with respect to staffing their Aboriginal student services programs. Direct funding for students is also difficult to obtain. According to Junor and Usher (2004), Aboriginal students were less likely than non-Aboriginal students to receive student loans. In addition, some Aboriginal students do not qualify for the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP). Furthermore, according to Malatest and Stonechild (2008), First Nations youth have considerably less information and lower motivation than do non-Aboriginal students to explore the full range of student financial assistance options available for PSE programs.

Challenges

One-third of stakeholders expressed concern about negative attitudes (both on and off campus) in relation to the need for Aboriginal-specific resources and services. One stakeholder stated that the resistance could stem from ignorance of the history of Aboriginal education and the damage that residential schools had on the Aboriginal community:

> *There is a lack of understanding on the campus as to why Aboriginal services are even needed and the purpose that they serve. People have questioned the value of forming partnerships with such organizations. Some student service programs are fighting to raise their profile on campus, and finding, for instance, that classroom space which had been allocated to them is constantly encroached upon by the University for Non-Aboriginal programs/services.*

These problems are obviously less extensive in Aboriginal-controlled institutions, where the focus is on Aboriginal students and their surrounding communities.

In the view of one study participant, at least part of the challenge arises from the negative perception that large amounts of money are being spent on programs and facilities for a student population that is small relative to the total student body. There was consensus among study participants that greater awareness of, and exposure to, Aboriginal culture on Ontario campuses will give rise to more positive and inclusive attitudes. Such programs should target both postsecondary institutions and organizations that deal with Aboriginal students (e.g., student funding agencies, community organizations).

Replication at Other PSE Institutions

Almost all the public PSE institutions indicated that their Aboriginal student services program could be replicated at other institutions. However, there was consensus that every area is different, particularly in terms of geographic location, demographics and institutional culture. For example, colleges and universities located closer to reserves are able to obtain community support more easily than can urban PSE institutions, and this has a significant positive impact on their program execution relative to those urban institutions. A number of respondents

stressed the importance of building strong relationships with Aboriginal community circles. This applies to both urban and rural institutions.

Again, the idea of networking within the institution was presented as a factor that could affect replication. Some college and university student services have strong ties with the other faculty and administrative departments within the institution and some are a part of an Aboriginal studies department (which strengthens their position and the range of services they can offer to their students). Others maintain an inclusive approach, whereby they serve both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. This helps create awareness of Aboriginal issues within the college or university, and such awareness is often a necessary precursor to support and access to resources. Service modelling is generally based on a type of approach rather than specific linkages or networks, although there are particular cases of partnerships that proved to be effective in one instance and that were transferable to other programs.

Among the Aboriginal-controlled PSE institutions, there was also agreement that their Aboriginal student services programs could be replicated, although at these locations, the emphasis was on sharing "flexible" program features that could be integrated into existing supports. Module-based programs, in particular, seem to have success with working people. In addition, programs aimed at addressing the needs of a specific target group can generally be replicated at other institutions that want to reach out to a similar population.

Promising Practices

A number of promising practices emerged from the discussion of Aboriginal student services programs. The following list is intended for those PSE institutions interested in starting or expanding an Aboriginal student services program. Readers are encouraged to consider the following practices but are advised that the evidence to support their efficacy, while widespread, is largely anecdotal.

- A physical program presence on campus (i.e., an Aboriginal student services centre) appears to provide a number of benefits. It helps provide Aboriginal students with an immediate sense of belonging and helps guide students to the appropriate services both on and off campus. It is a forum for showcasing Aboriginal culture and provides non-Aboriginal faculty with a consistent resource to which they can refer students who are in need of assistance. Over time, these centres may help build awareness of Aboriginal issues and have a positive impact on the environment in which Aboriginal students study.

- Programs do not have to be wide in scope to have a noticeable impact. Meeting a specific need (e.g., night classes) of an identifiable population (e.g., working mothers) can increase student retention.

- Programs that enlist the support of Elders and Aboriginal community leaders are reported to encourage future student enrolment. These initiatives can take place both on campus, where Elders can act in a counselling capacity, or on reserve, where they can serve as role models and advisors. Outreach programs designed with the input of Aboriginal Elders are more likely to be successful.

- Distance education and programs that allow Aboriginal students to stay connected to their families and communities will mitigate many of the factors that contribute to an early exit from PSE. Retention may also be increased through offering intensive courses that do not require prolonged stays at the institution.

- Closer integration with existing resources such as Contact North has enabled many PSE institutions to make their courses available to learners in remote areas. However, there appears to be a need for greater communication between Contact North's educational partners in order to more effectively expand the program's reach.

- Partnerships between PSE institutions can help cover gaps in infrastructure. This could include sharing physical facilities and equipment, and it could also involve sharing intellectual property. These types of partnerships increase the return on the investment in distance education.

- Building networks outside of PSE institutions, such as with local employers, helps to bind the institution to the surrounding community. In addition, it creates a direct linkage between the benefits of PSE and economic opportunity.

- A holistic approach to student support appeals to Aboriginal students, particularly those who are mature students with family responsibilities. This could involve offering childcare, assistance with housing and personal counselling.

- Peer counselling and mentoring are considered valuable programs by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations. For institutions that would like to develop their Aboriginal student services but are concerned about negative feedback from larger interest groups on campus, this type of program is non-threatening. It may also increase interaction and thereby decrease resistance to future program expansion.

Aboriginal Access Programs

The low attainment rate of Aboriginal students in PSE has been linked to the lack of academic and social readiness of students before they enter postsecondary institutions. This lack of preparedness often results in students not qualifying or even applying for the limited number of available seats. Aboriginal access programs are offered as a means of encouraging Aboriginal students to attend PSE and optimizing their chances to experience academic success. Most of these programs are based on the principle that the first year of PSE is the most difficult for students in general and for Aboriginal students in particular. Aboriginal access programs are of particular importance to mature students, who often require additional academic preparation and study skills to prepare them for admission. Upon successful completion of an access program, students are eligible to continue their studies in a postsecondary program. Specific supports provided through this type of program may include the following:

- courses in English, mathematics and science,
- tutoring,
- academic counselling,
- training workshops, and
- an Aboriginal support network.

The term "access program" has been used to encompass a wide range of activities and educational endeavours by colleges and universities that help Aboriginal students gain entry into PSE. For the purposes of this report, the description given by the Association of Canadian Community Colleges will be used. It appeared in their 2005 report *Meeting the Needs of Aboriginal Learners* and states: "For most institutions, access programs are the Adult Basic Education and upgrading programs" (Association of Canadian Community Colleges, 2005, iii).

After extensive efforts and lobbying by a number of colleges and universities in Ontario, access program coordinators are now able to obtain a list of students who voluntarily identified themselves as Aboriginal applicants and were either not accepted or left their applications incomplete through the Ontario University Application Centre and the Ontario College Application Service. It was learned through site visits that some institutions contact these applicants individually to make them aware of the access programs and other PSE options at their institutions. This approach could be considered successful and highly efficient in terms of targeting students who are already motivated to pursue college and university education.

Design and Delivery

Eight of the institutions interviewed indicated that they had Aboriginal access programs in place to help Aboriginal students gain entry into college or university. (These were Carleton University, Lakehead University, Queen's University, Royal Military College, University of Western Ontario, Mohawk College, Confederation College and Seneca College.) These

programs are designed to break down the barriers faced by Aboriginal students when they apply for admission and to address issues such as academic preparedness. Ontario colleges and universities are increasingly embracing their role in the movement toward implementing such programs. Lakehead University's mission statement even commits that institution to support its Aboriginal students in this way.

Access programs at some institutions have evolved from existing programs within the university. For example, Carleton University had an enriched support program in place to help all students whose high school grades and performance did not reflect their academic potential. The idea was to work diligently with those students to ensure that, over the first year, their grades, study habits and self-confidence were sufficiently strengthened to meet the university's standards. In the third year of the enriched support program, the university became aware that Aboriginal students had specific needs that could benefit from a program like this and it therefore started the Aboriginal enriched support program. Lakehead and Carleton are only two of a number of PSE institutions in which Aboriginal access programs have been designed specifically to address the needs of the Aboriginal community.

Some institutions could actually be referred to as Aboriginal access colleges. A case in point is Negahneewin College in the Thunder Bay area, which was designed to be more responsive to the needs of the region's Aboriginal Peoples. The original plan was to develop a separate Aboriginal Institute, but according to the dean, that was not feasible. As a result, a "college within a college" model was created. Negahneewin College operates within Confederation College and actively seeks partnership with other institutions to provide a culturally relevant education to Aboriginal students, in which they can see themselves reflected in the course material.

Program Objectives

Generally, the main objective of an Aboriginal access program is to increase the number of Aboriginal students in PSE. Specifically, this type of program provides opportunities for students who do not qualify for regular degree programs because they lack the prerequisites. Aboriginal access programs are designed to facilitate the admission process and give students the option to explore and make informed decisions about the program or career choice they should pursue. They also provide continued academic support by way of workshops and extra classes to enable students to experience success in their studies. The program coordinators and advisors help students navigate through the university, so they are able to enter the degree program of their choice. In the Aboriginal leadership opportunity program at the Royal Military College, for instance, the goal isn't merely academic success. The program aims to help students acquire leadership skills and develop positive life experience. Others, such as the apprenticeship, workforce development and training program at Northern College aim to train Aboriginal people who will remain in their community and thereby increase the capacity of the local labour force.

Unique Features

Case Study – Carleton University

The Aboriginal enriched support program (AESP) at Carleton University, which offers personalized support to Aboriginal students, is unique in terms of both its organizational structure and its service delivery. It is ancillary to the university-wide enriched support program (ESP), a full-time program that helps students qualify for university admission by offering courses enabling them to earn first-year credits. Students who achieve the necessary grades (C+ for most arts and social science programs) by the end of their ESP year are eligible for acceptance into full-time study in many degree programs at Carleton, and these credits are accepted by other colleges and universities as well. Moreover, the AESP is part of the Centre for Initiatives in Education, an academic unit within the faculty of arts and social sciences. As such, it benefits from strong faculty support and has access to better resources.

The program coordinator highlighted the motivational benefit of offering credits toward degrees as opposed to simply offering preparatory courses by pointing out that

> *Students invest the time and effort to finish the Aboriginal*
> *Enriched Support Program.*
> (Carleton University)

Students are integrated into the mainstream institution from the very first day, which further increases their confidence levels, as they actually have the potential to earn credits that can be applied to a degree. Students in the AESP programs also benefit from two mandatory weekly support workshops, which have very small class sizes. These workshops supplement the regular classes, thereby giving students the advantage they need to achieve excellence.

All AESP students are also required to take an Aboriginal studies course taught by an Aboriginal instructor, an initiative undertaken to counteract the assimilative nature of Western education. The course itself aims to expose students to their history early in their PSE experience and to give them a sense of pride before they start taking other courses at the University. The program coordinator suggested that students would like to see themselves and their knowledge reflected to a greater degree in mainstream courses. Although this type of link to the rest of the university is weak in the view of students, the program does have

have strong connections on and around campus. These provide students with access to a network of instructors, academic subject facilitators and writing and study skills coaches. The AESP also has a mentorship program, whereby graduates of the AESP who are still at Carleton pursuing different programs are hired to help current students.

Another distinctive feature of the AESP is the fact that the program conducts its own admissions and intake of students. Unique opportunities for one-on-one contact between students and program advisors are thus provided as students register applicants and undertake functions such as course add, course drop, deferrals and withdrawals(thereby creating a holistic unit). Each year, 10 to 15 students enrol, and about 8 to 10 complete the program.

Case Study – Negahneewin College

Negahneewin College was created through extensive efforts of the Negahneewin Council, which pushed for the creation of the college and continues to be involved in its operations. Strong ties to the Aboriginal community are the key to the college's success, and this relationship has evolved and matured over time. The members of the Aboriginal Council were also members of the local friendship centre and members of other Aboriginal teaching institutions within Thunder Bay, so these council representatives provided a strong connection to the community. They wanted an institution that would reflect the Aboriginal culture and needs of the local population, which was not necessarily reflected within the larger, mainstream university structures. They also wanted Negahneewin College to provide the specialized supports and services that Aboriginal students need. Because Negahneewin College was created as a unit within Confederation College, the duplication of administrative services and the corresponding costs were avoided.

To quote from their website:
> Negahneewin College of Academic & Community Development
> is a college 'within and throughout' Confederation College in
> Thunder Bay, Ontario.

The college incorporated elements of Aboriginal culture and experiences into its curriculum so that students would see themselves in the topics being taught:
> It is a step forward from solely exhibiting sensitivity toward
> Aboriginal issues. Moreover, students are hired as a part of a
> work/study program to conduct community outreach so as to
> raise awareness. In many instances, people were surprised
> that such colleges and supports even exist. They have

> *Aboriginal counsellors on staff who are well-versed . . . [in] the community issues and are able to understand and provide a comfortable environment for students to share their concerns.*
> (Dean of Negahneewin College)

Besides focusing on outreach and curriculum programming, Negahneewin College is undertaking unique measures to ensure that its students continue with their education. They contact every Aboriginal student who leaves the college to determine their reasons for leaving. Staff members then work with the students to identify and address their reasons for leaving college and to see if they would return to school. Often, students cite family responsibilities or problems with finding affordable housing as reasons for dropping out of school, since they view these as insurmountable problems. However, these issues can be overcome; staff members act as student advocates and work toward accessing the necessary supports. In addition, Negahneewin College was created through the efforts of local Aboriginal community leaders and Elders who are well connected to an array of services such as childcare and housing centres. Students' problems can often be solved relatively easily by accessing this network.

Negahneewin College, as was evident from the site visit and interviews with staff and students, has experienced great success. It is also one of the few Ontario colleges that is actively collecting data to evaluate the efficacy of its efforts. This includes collecting data on the number of Aboriginal students in each program, the number of students who exit from the program and the reasons for the departure of students in the latter group.

Distance education forms a major part of Negahneewin College's delivery model. This has made it easier and cheaper for Aboriginal students to access higher education and to minimize the disruption of family and community life caused by their involvement in postsecondary education. The college has a continuing education initiative that consists partly of links to other schools, including satellite classrooms, and it also has links with Ontario Works. The college is hoping to develop distance education further through a virtual college that will also serves as a recruitment tool. At present, Negahneewin is using the Ontario Model for e-learning and is attempting to develop varsity programs on iTunes. The college is also currently exploring opportunities that might exist for providing educational services in provincial jails.

The Structure of Aboriginal Access Programs

In general, Aboriginal access programs last approximately 8 to 12 months, with options for extensions if needed. As previously indicated, students take general courses in math, English and other first-year topics to prepare them for pursuing more advanced courses. On attainment of a minimum grade decided by the program coordinators, they become eligible to apply to other degree programs at their university. They also receive a number of other supports, such as career counselling, free tutoring services and education planning.

A number of programs have been launched by different colleges and universities in response to the needs of the Aboriginal population. These programs offer services and include partnerships that are specific to student needs. Negahneewin College, for example, partners with a number of mainstream institutions such as George Brown College and Seneca College as well as with the Oshki-Pimache-O-Win Education and Training Institute. Distance education is a large part of the delivery model, and a variety of programs and services are offered, including the following:

Diploma Programs

- Aboriginal law and advocacy (two years)
- general arts and science
- Native child and family services (two years)

Certificate Programs

- Aboriginal transitions
- general arts and science
- pre–health sciences
- pre-technology

They also plan to offer a new applied degree program in Indigenous leadership and development.

Northern College offers a wide variety of programs, including pre-apprenticeship programs, certificates of qualifications, college certificates and contract training. In general, the structure of the programs is as follows:

- academic upgrading (12 weeks)
- trades readiness/health and safety (4 weeks)
- Level 1 apprenticeship (8 weeks), followed by a work placement in the community

The Aboriginal leadership opportunity program offered through the Royal Military College provides training while students live on campus. Students initially learn the basic functions of the military, after which they are taught the academic components of the program based on their own background. Students have the option to join the Royal Military College on completion of the program; however, they are not obliged to do so.

Seneca College has a liberal arts and sciences access program for students who have not graduated from high school. It is operated through the counselling and disabilities department, as these students generally need additional supports.

Participation and Retention

Just over half the Aboriginal access programs reviewed are open only to Aboriginal students. To be eligible for enrolment, Mohawk College requires their students to self-identify as First Nations and to provide proof of their status. The remaining programs are open to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students.

Mohawk College has a Facilitated Admission Process, which is an add-on to the regular admission form. It is detailed below. (This process places less weight on academic scores and a greater emphasis on skills such as work and volunteer experience – and the rest of the colleges follow a similar admission procedure.) The following are the components of Mohawk College's admission process:

- The student must provide a letter including their mission statement and a written statement indicating their understanding of the program.

- The student must provide two to three references.

- The student must be interviewed by the program advisors.

- Basic testing is also done on computer, writing and math skills to help determine the applicant's level of education and their preparedness for college and to identify any specific student needs that the program should address. Depending on results, academic upgrading and preparatory programming may be offered to students.

Participation rates vary, based on the size of the program or institution, the demand for it and the level of promotion within the local community. In an access program at Carleton University, for example, 10 to 15 students enrol each year, with 8 to 10 completing the program. Similarly, at Lakehead University, between 10 and 15 students enrol ever year, while Seneca College has about 20 students participating in its Aboriginal access program. Royal Military College had 20 students enrolled at the time of the interview, with a maximum capacity of 30 students. At Lambton College, students are currently participating in the pre-degree program. At Mohawk College, as much as 75 per cent of the Aboriginal student population accesses the college's Facilitated Admission Process.

Negahneewin College has about 500 students. This number includes students in their regional campuses, as well as those who are taking courses offered in partnership with other institutions. Northern College is an apprenticeship training partner in the Victor diamond mine operation located in Attawapiskat First Nation. Northern College has about 800 students. An estimated 120 to 130 people graduated from their apprenticeship training program in the last three to five years. For this program, there is a minimum class-size requirement of 10 to 12 students.

Negahneewin College accommodates the needs of their students regardless of whether they intend to pursue a degree program or "stop-out" (students who may wish to stop their education temporarily to pursue it at a later time). Negahneewin College has a track record of producing active and successful graduates. On the academic front, they offer several unique programs, such as the Aboriginal law and advocacy program and the applied degree program, which are not offered anywhere else in the country.

Northern College highlighted that they conduct very intensive recruitment and outreach efforts into First Nation communities. For example, in some cases, they had hired a chartered plane to pick up youth in remote communities to bring them to Northern College so they could see, first hand, the opportunities available for them at a PSE institution.

The Aboriginal access programs offered by colleges and universities are seen to have a positive impact on their students' academic careers and personalities. The access program at Carleton University is designed to help students reassess their goals, to help them learn whether a degree program is right for them. Students learn about the work required and the different support systems they can use to succeed at PSE. They also learn how to navigate the university bureaucracy. For example, many students leave for personal emergencies without letting the school know and come back to find out that they have failed by default. The access program at Carleton aims to avoid such situations.

Many of the program administrators who were interviewed from colleges and universities offering Aboriginal access programs suggested that students should take advantage of their programs because they offer extra, needed support. Some students may have attempted PSE before and failed, while others may have previously applied but fell short of the institution's admission requirements. Other students are looking for a program specifically for Aboriginal students that will provide a comfortable environment. These students feel that they need the access program year for the support and foundation that it provides in order to make the transition to campus life away from the reserve.

There is growing awareness among Aboriginal people that access programs do give them opportunities to better their own economic future while at the same time bringing capacity to their community.

> *It helped align my goals with those of my community.*
> (Student – First Nations House)

> *Helped me find work. Well, not just find a job. I fit in better. I found my place.*

(Student – Native Education and Training – Sault College of
Applied Arts and Technology)

This motivates them to enrol in apprenticeship programs, such as those at Northern College. Most of the programs have a training allowance, which acts as an incentive to students. The regional director at Northern College highlighted that students learn to make a long-term commitment to succeed as they gain an understanding of the importance of education and the opportunities that become available to them in life after successful completion of the program. Students are encouraged to develop their academic skills (such as critical thinking and writing), so as to be prepared to transition to a degree program. They are given the chance to explore different opportunities at the college or university. Since access programs also focus on personality development, students gain self-confidence and develop a sense of independence and responsibility through the opportunity to experience and learn in a supportive environment, and this helps them tackle university studies.

> *We provide the skills and training to empower the students to be*
> *more productive and successful members of their community.*
> (Dean of Negahneewin College)

Program directors and coordinators were asked their opinions concerning the extent to which their programs were successful in meeting their objectives – in terms of attracting, retaining and graduating Aboriginal students. Five of the eight PSE institutions offering Aboriginal access programs felt that their programs were qualified successes. It is important to understand the different perspectives on the meaning of "success." The administration of most colleges and universities see success as the successful completion of a diploma or degree program. The administrators of Aboriginal access programs see success as the number of students who successfully complete the access program and go on to enrol in a degree, diploma or certificate program.

> *The students are mixing-in well on the campus, coming together*
> *as a group and developing a sense of pride and achievement.*
> (Staff Officer, Royal Military College)

At Carleton University 7 out of 13 students proceeded to a degree program in 2007/08. The Royal Military College representative mentioned that fewer students were dropping out. Other stakeholders stated that even though the programs have been successful, there is room for improvement. One Aboriginal counsellor put forward the idea that even though students had dropped out of the access program, it had given them the knowledge and skills (e.g., attending employment programs) to proceed in a constructive direction in their lives. They were now meeting their objectives in other ways, making the first positive steps in changing in their lives.

> *We may start a program with 22 students and in the end only*
> *graduate 8 students. But these 8 students go on to do great things*
> *for themselves and their community so we really view it as a big*
> *success for us and them. You can't simply look at the numbers.*
> (Program Coordinator)

While some access programs had qualified success, others could demonstrate substantial achievement, particularly as the programs matured.

> *We offered an academic skills course in September and our retention rates have risen. We used to graduate only 4 of 20. This year we are graduating 17 of 20. These classes have really helped.*
> (Program Coordinator, Seneca College)

Nevertheless, program success is generally measured against the ability of the program to produce the outcomes it was designed to produce. In measuring the success of Aboriginal access programs, a clearer understanding of program goals may be required.

Rationale for Early Exit

Common themes emerged among the responses of program coordinators and both college and university directors, and these explained why some Aboriginal students do not complete Aboriginal access programs. These themes were as follows:

- Financial/Funding problems: Students have had funding problems with their Band or the OSAP. Housing, particularly the high rent in urban areas such as Toronto, can create a financial burden.

- Complex family responsibilities: Many program coordinators stated that the typical access program student is usually a mature student with family responsibilities. Lack of affordable childcare and family support is another major problem.

- Health reasons compounded by high stress levels. Mental health problems and substance addiction issues were also cited by program advisors.

- Undiagnosed learning disabilities.

- Exit into the job market: Some students realize that university is not right for them and pursue other avenues in their life.

It is worth noting that academic difficulties were the least-cited reason, while childcare was consistently cited as the primary reason why students leave the program. This was supported by interviews with students. Mature female Aboriginal students are most affected by this issue, clearly indicating that universities and colleges should consider taking more active measures to arrange for childcare facilities either on or off campus.

Supporting Data

Half the Aboriginal access programs reviewed formally track their program outcomes.

> *Typically, if a student were not to show up for class, or were to drop out of the program, we conduct an interview. We talk to*

> *graduates and also track students who have transferred from their*
> *program into another college program.*
> (Counsellor, Seneca College)

Northern College has a formal tracking system in place to follow up with their students at three-month, six-month and one-year milestones. Mohawk College is also starting to track outcomes of their students formally. Negahneewin College is starting to track the number of Aboriginal applicants, graduates and students taking distance education and the number of students who come from northern/remote communities. Evidence of these systems was observed during the site visits.

Almost half the Aboriginal access programs reviewed have been subjected to a formal review and evaluation. The Aboriginal enriched support program at Carleton University uses a formal student satisfaction survey, and as of 2009, the university is beginning a strategic planning process. AESP students participate in program evaluation during, and at the end of, the academic year, an evaluation that includes formal instructor evaluations and satisfaction surveys in the first-year seminar classes. The evaluation looks at program successes and potential improvements for the following academic year.

The pre-degree program at Lambton College is evaluated indirectly through the Student Engagement Survey and the Student Perception of Learning Survey, which is administered at the college.

Resource Demands

Students in Aboriginal access programs usually pay tuition, which, in some cases, may be reduced or subsidized. Besides being funded by tuition, grants and donations from alumni, access programs are funded from a number of other sources, such as Chiefs of Ontario, Health Canada and various provincial grants.

At the Royal Military College, students pay for accommodation, but they are paid to go to school and also receive a stipend.

Negahneewin College receives funds from its partners, such as the AETS, the MTCU's Access to Opportunity Fund, FedNor, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada and some small private donations.

Northern College has partnerships with the MTCU's Apprenticeship Branch, First Nation's (FN) Education Authorities, FN Development Corporation, Ontario Women's Directorate, Canada Women's Foundation and Service Canada.

In addition to the need for more physical resources such as classrooms and human resources (including staff), the different colleges and universities consistently pointed to the need for more marketing and promotion of their program to Aboriginal communities. This was particularly true of programs serving students in remote areas.

Program Expansion

Some colleges and universities are planning to expand their programs. For example, the Royal Military College hopes to expand its program to St-Jean-sur-Richelieu. RMC envisions having a maximum capacity of 30 students at that campus as well.

Northern College tries to work with the community to determine what types of programs are needed. Some of the planned or expected changes are a shared responsibility between the college and the community.

Challenges

Some of the programs that require students to self-identify are finding that students are reluctant to do so due to perceived stigma and this suggest that they may not want to register for the access program. This problem is compounded by other, more specific challenges that students experience once they have complied with program requirements. For example, at Carlton, the average age of AESP students is 30 to 35 years, and one of the challenges that Aboriginal access programs face is the lack of specific supports at the institutional level for mature students of any ethnicity. Some service coordinators suggested there was a lack of knowledge and acceptance of the Aboriginal access program at the institutional level. Even in their formative years, program administrators felt pressure to provide a variety of services that they were not necessarily equipped to provide for students.

Replication at Other PSE Institutions

All the program coordinators and directors of colleges and universities interviewed stated that elements of their service model could be replicated across other institutions, given the right conditions (with the exception of Mohawk College as it is inapplicable to their situation). For example, the program representative at Carleton University explained that, in order to replicate their program, a large Aboriginal population would be needed. In their situation replication might not have been seen as a priority, since they are ancillary to the enriched support program (ESP), they are able to access all the resources and facilities that are available to the ESP. The leveraging of existing programs and resources while cost-effective is not always a straightforward process.

> *Be prepared. It takes a lot of negotiation with various university bodies to create and implement such a program.*
> (Carleton University)

Seneca College echoed a similar view stating that, in order to support the program, it is necessary to have the support systems within the institution in place. Representatives from Seneca also added that it is important to have dedicated staff members who are committed to being advocates of the program and the students.

The dean of Negahneewin College noted that the college benefits from having a large Aboriginal student population in their geographic area. It strengthens their capabilities and enables them to be responsive to the needs of their students, while at the same time being a unit within a larger institution. However, structurally, it is also possible that a mainstream institution where there is a smaller Aboriginal student population can be responsive to the needs of the Aboriginal students.

Northern College's program revolves around partnerships with the community and training individuals with the right skills to meet the labour force needs of the community. It was felt that this focus could be easily replicated in any setting.

Promising Practices

A number of promising practices emerged from the discussion of Aboriginal access programs, and the following list is intended for those PSE institutions interested in starting or expanding an Aboriginal access program. Readers are encouraged to consider these practices. While only eight institutions offered these programs, each made efforts (formal and informal) to measure their success.

- Offering an academic skills course provides those students who need it with the opportunity to improve their performance in all their other courses.

- Partnerships between Aboriginal student services and Aboriginal access programs appear to benefit students. Each can reinforce the other, and students attending one can become aware of the other through friends using the services.

- Partnerships between the access program and other university departments are an effective way to multiply success. For example, Carleton University has access to resources of the enriched support program and to resources within the faculty of arts and sciences. As a result, the program is better equipped to meet Aboriginal student needs, as opposed to being a stand-alone unit.

- Having an Aboriginal counsellor on campus to provide advice and personal guidance can make the difference between keeping and losing an Aboriginal student.

- Newly created Aboriginal access programs should promote themselves and generate awareness through in-person communication, by word of mouth and by hosting events.

As is the case with Aboriginal student services, partnerships and networking will help an access program offer a great variety of service. It is easier and less costly, for example, to develop and promote services for Aboriginal students at institutions that already offer these services to non-Aboriginal students. Conversely, the development of services for Aboriginal students where similar services do not currently exist for the general student population, can be a more time consuming and expensive proposition. The sharing of resources, both physical and intellectual, helps to disseminate the most effective practices. This is particularly true in the field of distance education.

Aboriginal Studies and Aboriginal Designated Programs

Aboriginal studies programs are designed to raise awareness about Aboriginal culture among both the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal student populations. They focus on Aboriginal language, culture, history, art and issues of importance to the well-being of Canada's Aboriginal Peoples as well as highlighting how Aboriginal Peoples are perceived both within Canada and on a global level.

Some Aboriginal studies programs are certificate programs. Aboriginal students can take these credit courses and benefit from other academic supports such as access to seminars, consultations and workshops. Upon program completion, students are eligible for acceptance into full-time study in PSE programs such as arts, science and nursing. For example, Shki-Miikan (New Roads) is a one-year certificate program at Georgian College that was developed in partnership with the Anishnabe Education and Training Circle.   Students who graduate may be admitted to the second year of Georgian College's Native community and social development program.

Aboriginal designated programs are related to Aboriginal studies. However, while Aboriginal *studies* programs focus on the language, history and culture of Aboriginal students, Aboriginal *designated* programs focus on a particular knowledge area, such as social services, community and justice services, and Aboriginal wellness and addictions counselling – all from an Aboriginal perspective. They are designed as stand-alone programs that enable students to obtain jobs, but they also provide a solid foundation on which to work toward a degree.

There can be a fair amount of interplay between Aboriginal studies and Aboriginal designated programs, as both make extensive use of Aboriginal culturally relevant content and examples. Together, these programs help address the needs of Aboriginal communities by graduating students in subject areas that fill gaps in those communities and by graduating students who are aware of, and respectful of, Aboriginal culture. The hope is that the students who graduate will stay within their community and become community leaders and role models, thereby helping their culture to flourish and their community to become more self-reliant and sustainable.

Design and Delivery

Researchers reviewed Aboriginal studies and designated programs at seven of the colleges and universities (Algonquin, Fleming, Georgian, Laurentian, Sault, University of Toronto and Wilfrid Laurier). While these programs are different from each other in both content and delivery, each is open to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students and they all respond to specific needs of their respective local Aboriginal communities.

Georgian College offers three PSE education programs on different campuses. The Native education – community and social development (NATV) program (offered at the Barrie campus) is a two-year program that helps students obtain employment in the health and social service settings. The second program, "Shki-Miikan," is a one- or two-year program that acts primarily as a portal to other college programs. The third is the two-year Aboriginal tourism program,

which caters to Aboriginal students from Manitoulin Island, where the graduates receive a Georgian College certificate. All these programs are open to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, and their objective is for students to find employment within the Aboriginal community. According to the dean, students are motivated to join the programs to learn about and participate more fully in their culture. This is especially true of students who have been raised in a different environment. In addition, students who have difficulty in an academic setting benefit from the extensive support that is linked to the programs.

> *The students obtain pride in their culture. They attain personal growth and self confidence. They become lifelong learners with a great education.*
> *(Dean, Aboriginal Studies and Liberal Arts, Georgian College)*

Non-Native students interested in learning more about Aboriginal culture also join the programs. Furthermore, as a part of their outreach efforts, they have one classroom that is decorated with Aboriginal cultural motifs, which can be accessed by all students and programs. The pow-wow, a cultural event organized by the program coordinators, has now become a college event. It helps increase awareness about Aboriginal culture among the college and community population, and it has also been credited with increasing the retention rate of Aboriginal students.

The programs mentioned above include a co-op component, to give students skills to compete in the job market. Georgian College has a partnership with Laurentian University, which gives students the option of continuing their degrees there. The college also offers a non-PSE program that aims to meet the needs of Aboriginal women in colleges and universities. The program aims to help women develop self-confidence and to acquire life and academic skills as a way of getting them ready for PSE within a college or university setting.

Similarly, University of Toronto initiated its Aboriginal studies program in response to a request by the local Aboriginal community, which saw a need to have its perspectives reflected in academia. It is an undergraduate unit that is part of the faculty of arts and science, and it offers minor, major and specialist programs.

> *The focus is on critical analysis, logic and creative thinking. Students are encouraged to examine their own knowledge and experiences from different perspectives.*
> *(Director of Aboriginal Studies, University of Toronto)*

At Algonquin College, the Aboriginal studies program aims to enhance students' knowledge of Aboriginal Peoples and their contemporary issues. The areas of study are culture and heritage, contemporary issues, Aboriginal languages, community development strategies and Aboriginal law and government.

> *It [the program] helps students select a career and further their education.*
> *(Aboriginal Studies Coordinator, Algonquin College)*

Sault College started its Ojibwe language program to revitalize the language's use within the local Aboriginal community, and the community Elders see it as an important area of focus. Language, particularly in a culture rooted in oral tradition, is an essential tool in the transfer of knowledge, culture and traditional teachings. Ninety-five per cent of the course content is taught in Ojibwe and is considered to be an immersion program. Storytelling and song are also involved. The students range in age from 18 to 70 years. Some of the younger students chose to take the course in order to enhance the skills acquired from another program, while the more mature students took the course for personal growth and connection to their heritage.

Fleming College started the Aboriginal Emphasis Initiative (AEI), whereby students are enrolled in six different programs: community and justice services, police foundations, drug and alcohol counsellor, educational assistant, social service worker and ecosystem management technician. Students take a mandatory AEI course in their first semester, but after that, they can decide whether or not to continue in the AEI stream. The AEI stream also includes a field placement in the social services and counselling area to give students a competitive edge in the job market.

The masters of social work, Aboriginal field of study at Wilfrid Laurier University is highly distinct, as it is the only Aboriginal curriculum program at the graduate level in Ontario. The program is designed to make use of Aboriginal literature, traditions and knowledge, and it begins with a culture camp, which is a full-credit, land-based course, in which students engage in cultural activities (e.g., singing, smudging and praying]).

> *It is a very holistic program with the focus being on understanding how students can impact others, understanding what they stand for and finding their inner values to create a holistic healing process. Students learn to understand the needs of their community to come out as leaders. The program is not just academic; it is a balance of nature, spirit and intellect. (Program Coordinator, Wilfrid Laurier University)*

The programs detailed above have different goals, but all respond to specific needs of their local communities. For this reason, they range in duration from 10 months to 3 years.

Each of the programs features components and elements that range from program-specific courses and course delivery mechanisms to services that are offered to students. Georgian College has a 560-hour co-op program as a part of its Aboriginal studies program. The faculty at Georgian is almost all Aboriginal, and there are two mandatory courses through which students learn the Ojibwe language.

Similarly, all five programs at Fleming College include a mandatory field placement component, and efforts are being made to increase partnerships with Aboriginal communities in order to develop co-op opportunities. This is a unique and important measure, as it not only provides a focus on cultural awareness, but also gives students the skills they need in order to succeed in the job market.

The one-year Anishinaabemowin Language program at Sault College is the only MTCU-accredited Aboriginal language program discovered in this study. As a part of its community delivery model, Sault College tries to hire teachers from the local area.

The Aboriginal studies program director at the University of Toronto explained the importance of networking with other services at the university. This program is unique in that faculty work closely with First Nations House, where students have access to Elders-in-residence. The students also have the opportunity be involved in Aboriginal Awareness Week, which is held at the university every year.

Algonquin College has an extremely flexible and innovative teaching style. For example, Talking Circles – a framework derived from Aboriginal culture – are used as a method of teaching. Participation in ceremonies is also encouraged, and a cooperative environment is promoted. This results in team building among students. Students also have the opportunity to become involved in programs that support community members. They can interact with Elders and are taken on outdoor trips to help build relationships.

Participation and Retention

The admission requirements for each of the programs varied, depending on the program goals. Some required completion of mandatory courses as well as a letter of interest. Others, such as the Aboriginal studies program at the University of Toronto, had no specific requirements. The participation rates of the different programs at colleges and universities are detailed below:

- Fleming College – 100 students within the 5 programs; however, enrolment fluctuates every term.

- Sault College – 30 students as of 2004; however, there has since been a decline in numbers for several reasons. The director of the program stated that many Aboriginal Bands no longer sponsor (fund) students for the one-year certificate program. They would rather sponsor a student who will enrol in a program that will result in the attainment of a diploma and support employment.

- University of Toronto – 303 registered students across all Aboriginal studies courses.

- Wilfrid Laurier University – 18 full-time students as of 2007/08 and 14 full-time students and 10 part-time students as of 2008/09. The program has a maximum capacity of 20 full-time students.

- Algonquin College – 30 or more students as of 2008/09.

All the programs described are open to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. It is interesting to note the similarities and dissimilarities in their motivations for enrolling in these programs. As the program directors have explained, students participate to gain a sense of their cultural identity. Many who come from urban areas are unaware of their history and would like to learn more about their background in a safe and supportive environment. In other cases, students come to the program to further their knowledge and improve their existing skills.

> *Students who participate either already had or developed a strong interest in Aboriginal teachings, culture and history. The college facilitates several activities such as healing circles and smudges. Therefore the students develop an appreciation for the culture. Also, this additional credit gives them an edge with employers.*
> *(Dean of School of Law, Justice and Community Service. Fleming College)*

Aboriginal students do not take these programs merely because they are interested in their roots. They participate in these programs to learn about the issues surrounding the Aboriginal Peoples in Canada. They want to understand the needs of their community and the employment potential associated with meeting community needs.

In addition, students want to learn and carry on their language. This gives them a sense of confidence and pride. It also fosters a feeling of community, with the more advanced students helping the others. In contrast, non-Aboriginal students take the program in order to learn about Aboriginal Peoples and to better understand the people they are living and working with.

Apart from the cultural aspects of Aboriginal studies programs; students enrol to acquire a foundation in order to prepare for other programs. For example, the Aboriginal studies one-year certificate program at Algonquin College includes courses in English, computer applications and career planning. After successful completion, graduates from the certificate program can apply to another program at the college, or they may continue their studies in the second year of the general arts and science program. Credits for some of the courses may be transferred to a university degree.

Aboriginal studies programs generally take a holistic approach to student education. They teach the academic skills and knowledge that students need to be successful at PSE and also in the community. At the same time, students develop their sense of self-confidence and cultural identity through their learning. Some program coordinators have stated that students feel transformed in mind and spirit after learning about their language, culture and traditions. Another very important function of these programs is that, like Aboriginal access programs, they open up the possibility of higher education to students who would normally never have considered pursuing this path.

> *The students take away a solid academic base of the language, its structure and orthography. They leave with a sense of pride and accomplishment. Many students never imagined they would graduate from any PSE program.*
> *(Director of Native Education and Training, Sault College)*

These programs are not just about getting in touch with one's own community. They also help students learn to build a network of relationships both within and outside the Aboriginal community. This serves them well in the future.

> *Arguably, the meeting of people at a common place develops a synergy for the cultivation of respectful relationships that guide the collective teachings, partnerships and research projects between Aboriginal Studies, the Centre for Aboriginal Initiatives, First Nations House and the Aboriginal community at large.*
> *(Director of Aboriginal Studies, University of Toronto)*

In the Shki-Miikan program at Georgian College, 50 per cent of the courses are culturally based. However, in this program, students also gain some administrative experience and proposal writing skills. This is also the case at Algonquin College, where students are educated in a variety of subjects. The main focus of the optional second year is to provide career-related studies from a selection of college programs.

> *Students develop a variety of skills such as writing, research, oral and communication skills. Students learn to ask questions and become good at learning.*
> *(Aboriginal Studies Coordinator at Algonquin College)*

It should be noted that the program objectives and the skills transferred to students vary across both programs and institutions. The anecdotal evidence collected from faculty, program administrators and students suggests that the experience of all stakeholders was empowering and rewarding. The programs are seen as a significant step forward in changing the perceptions of PSE in the minds of both Aboriginal students and their community. This is an important consideration for PSE institutions interested in attracting Aboriginal students, since word-of-mouth communication among Aboriginal students and communities is a primary method of referral and recommendation. Institutions offering Aboriginal studies programs that create a positive image in the minds of students are likely to attract more students.

The Aboriginal studies program at Algonquin College has been successful in attracting, retaining and graduating Aboriginal students, and a number of graduates from the Algonquin program are now registered for degree programs. Those students have all made positive comments about the role of the Aboriginal studies program in their success. The coordinator also stated that when students leave, they usually return to resume their studies at a later date.

All the stakeholders from the six institutions offering Aboriginal studies programs felt their program had been very successful in meeting their objectives. The director of Aboriginal studies at the University of Toronto stated that the university's program had grown in size in terms of both students and faculty over the years. He also believes that there is a better completion rate on the part of the Aboriginal students. Moreover, the program is a leading factor in attracting Aboriginal students to the university irrespective of whether they actually take courses in Aboriginal studies.

It is unlikely that any one primary program component is responsible for attracting and retaining students. According to those involved in the delivery of these programs, a holistic approach, which provides Aboriginal supports to Aboriginal students, has the best chance of generating positive outcomes.

*The amount of support, the facility, the art work and the programs
that are preserved in the institution says something to the greater
community on the importance of Native education. We support our
students and are governed by community members.
(Program Administrator, Native Education and Training, Sault
College)*

Rationale for Early Exit

The primary reasons given for early termination of students in Aboriginal studies programs were family commitments and/or lack of community support. This was a recurring theme, since Aboriginal students are very attached to their communities. If there is a death within a student's community, for instance, it would not be uncommon for that student to be absent for two weeks.

Other reasons for early exit include poor health or obtaining work. In addition, some students have difficulty adjusting to the city, especially those coming from rural or remote areas. This problem can compound other reasons for early exit or contribute to program termination on its own.

Supporting Data

Evaluation data for Aboriginal studies programs are not overly reliable. Much of the available information is anecdotal and provided by stakeholders. Feedback from students was relied on extensively, in part because testimonials are seen as a valuable tool in the outreach process. Algonquin College solicits feedback from employers of its graduates. All seven of the colleges and universities offering these programs point to the number of Aboriginal graduates that are working in the community as the primary indicator of program success. Wilfrid Laurier University's master of social work does provide a holistic evaluation of students in the program. The other institutions' appeared to have only informal evaluation processes.

Resource Demands

All seven of the programs reviewed are funded through student tuition. Two of the universities also receive funding from the AETS (Aboriginal Education and Training Strategy).

Service Expansion

Based on interviews with stakeholders and students, the Aboriginal studies programs at each of the institutions that offer these programs appear to be working well and are in some stage of expansion. Some of the programs were in the process of conducting a curriculum review and had plans to work with Elders and the advisory committee to either enhance or expand the program.

Sault College was looking to develop more partnerships with Aboriginal communities for on-site delivery of their program. They would also like to partner with universities to develop a joint studies program. Similarly, Algonquin College was planning to reach out to more Aboriginal organizations. Others were planning to offer more advanced degrees. For example, University of Toronto is in the process of developing a graduate program, while Wilfrid Laurier University is considering a PhD program with an Aboriginal plan of study.

Georgian College has capacity for the Native education – community and social development (NATV) program to increase enrolment. Currently, 30 students are enrolled, but there is capacity for 45 students. The dean at Georgian College noted that the college is in the process of revising the NATV program. This revision is expected to be completed by the fall of 2010. The college would also like to create a new Aboriginal health program. Georgian College partnered with the Anishinabe Education and Training Circle in 1992 and sees future partnerships as an integral part of program expansion.

Challenges

All the program managers cited shortage of funding as a problem, especially with programs that have limited student numbers. In addition, some of the programs do not fit into the classic PSE model. Concepts such as holistic evaluation and some Aboriginal philosophies and approaches have encountered a lack of understanding and resistance at the university level. Resources such as textbooks can be difficult to find as they must be tailored to courses taught and must be approved and credible at the same time. Fleming College is experiencing challenges convincing Aboriginal youth to take AEI (Aboriginal Emphasis Initiative) courses due to the nature of the courses. For example, not many Aboriginal youth want to take police foundations.

At Georgian College, the programs are facing challenges in obtaining consistent resources, as federal funding has not increased since 1990. As part of the Student Access Guarantee, colleges and universities are obliged to provide tuition and book funding for students in need, but these programs have been unable to support some of their students and therefore have been unable to meet their obligations under this agreement. The program coordinators at Georgian are also aiming to obtain more funding for the pow-wow and for one more Aboriginal counsellor.

Georgian College experienced problems with the Aboriginal designated programs when they were first introduced, as some non-Aboriginal students felt that the Aboriginal students were receiving special services. However, that friction appears to have been limited to the launch of the programs. Since then, the programs have gained acceptance at the college, and the dean at Georgian now considers the programs very successful.

Replication at other PSE Institutions

The program coordinators interviewed stated that their programs were replicable at other institutions. However, they did point out that each community is unique. Therefore, programs

must be tailored to the needs of each community, and the community must also be involved in the process. In some cases, the program may not attract high numbers of students, so resources – and specifically funding – could be a problem.

> *As every community has different needs, it is important to*
> *understand what the community needs before any program is*
> *started. Therefore it is possible to replicate successful practices*
> *but it would have to be altered to the local specifications.*
> *(Dean, Aboriginal Education Program, Georgian College)*

Georgian College recommends a good deal of dialogue with other PSE institutions and the local community before these types of programs are offered.

The project coordinator at Georgian College suggested that there should be multiple entry points for students, to allow easy access to PSE. Other respondents also emphasized the importance of having full support from the PSE institution and of building partnerships. Ideally, there should be open communication with other college departments such as the registrar, so that program coordinators and career counsellors can learn about how Aboriginal students are entering other PSE institutions and adjust their programs and outreach strategies. This in turn allows students to be made aware of their options. The program leaders also expressed a need to engage people who are respected at the university and in the community. The director at Sault College mentioned that communicating with previous graduates of the program is beneficial, in order to find out what they liked and what they did not like about the program. Algonquin College reviews its program quality by meeting with employers, current students and graduates, all of whom are encouraged to provide their opinions. As follow-up, the instructors at Algonquin have adapted their style of teaching to respond to Aboriginal needs.

Promising Practices

Six PSE institutions offered Aboriginal studies programs, and all have had some form of evaluation and have records to support the positive outcomes of the programs. The following promising practices should be considered by other PSE institutions that are considering similar programs:

- Ground the program in the immediate needs of the local Aboriginal community.
- Network with other college departments, university members, Elders, Aboriginal services departments and community leaders. For example, at the University of Toronto the First Nations House, the Centre for Aboriginal Initiatives, the Indigenous Education Network, the Aboriginal Law Students Association and other groups all work with each other.
- Set admission requirements to suit the population the program is designed to serve.
- Consider offering programs allowing mature students or students who do not fit the usual university requirements access and resources to pursue degree programs.
- Where appropriate and logistically possible, include field placements to enable graduates to obtain valuable work experience in preparation for the job market.

- Offer programs that take a holistic approach (spread the emphasis across cultural knowledge and understanding, academic skills and employability).

At each of the PSE institutions that offer Aboriginal education programs, the institution had previously made a commitment to other Aboriginal student services programs. For example, Aboriginal student services are offered at all three of Georgian College's main campuses. They range from Aboriginal counsellors, community liaison (recruiting), visiting Elders, student mentors and Aboriginal student mentors. The student services centres are considered to be a safe place, where Aboriginal students can have access to a range of supports.

Stakeholder interviews, site visits and student interviews offered substantial evidence of the importance of word-of-mouth recommendations in attracting students to any program or institution. This was particularly true of recommendations coming from former students. Programs that solicit testimonials from graduates and incorporate them into their marketing will increase their success in attracting new students through their enrolment strategies.

Healthcare Programs

Aboriginal communities need to have Aboriginal healthcare practitioners, and in order to fill this gap, more Aboriginals must graduate from healthcare programs. To facilitate enrolment and graduation of Aboriginal students in academic programs in the healthcare field, colleges and universities have developed programs that meet both the needs of Aboriginal students and those of their communities.

The researchers reviewed five programs that offer Aboriginal student access or facilitated admission to healthcare programs (at Canadore College, Fanshawe College, Loyalist College, Queen's University and University of Western Ontario). The programs offered by the universities were open to Aboriginal students only, while those offered by the colleges were open to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students.

Counsellors, program coordinators and instructors consistently stated that there is a serious lack of Aboriginal healthcare providers in Aboriginal communities, and this problem led to the creation of these programs. A search of Contact North's website shows that over 50 healthcare courses are available.

Design and Delivery

The design and delivery of each of the healthcare programs is unique to the goals of the program and to its objectives in meeting the needs of students and their communities. The University of Western Ontario, for instance, partnered with Fanshawe College to create a nursing program that would address the underrepresentation of Aboriginal students in this profession. As a result, each institution now reserves two seats for Aboriginal students. Similarly, the faculty of arts and science at Queen's University reserves five seats for Aboriginal students in the school of nursing, as there are insufficient numbers of Aboriginal nurses available to work in their communities. Policies were also implemented to allow more Aboriginal students to be admitted to nursing and to the faculty of arts and science in general. Queen's University also has a facilitated admissions program in their School of Medicine, as there are few Aboriginal doctors in Canada. The structure and duration of the programs vary, depending on the needs of the local student population. The degree programs are usually four years long, while others vary in duration from two to three years.

As mentioned earlier in this report, students who live in remote areas or smaller cities often find the cost of travelling and moving to a larger city to complete their PSE a daunting experience. In order to mitigate this problem, Loyalist College partnered with the First Nations Technical Institute to offer a "Practical Nursing Program" in Bancroft. It is an innovative concept, as the college aims to have a campus on the island in order to let the students learn from home so that they can stay with their families. Furthermore, the courses are offered on a part-time basis over a three-year period, which makes it easier for students to balance work, family responsibilities and their education. The program coordinator highlighted the fact that there is a shortage of practical nurses on the island for both hospitals and retirement homes. This program was designed to allow Aboriginal Elders to receive treatment without leaving the island.

The Indigenous wellness and addictions program at Canadore College was started after the college was approached by the Indian Friendship Centre from the surrounding First Nations community. The intention was to create a program that would help the community deal with a growing drug and alcohol problem in the North Bay area. The result was this two-year diploma program, which offers students an Indigenous Wellness and Addictions Prevention diploma. Graduates also have the option of completing a third year to receive a diploma in social work. The goal of the program is to teach traditional counselling techniques and healing methods, in addition to mainstream social work methods. According to the program instructor, in addition to learning healing techniques, students go through a healing process of their own.

Participation and Retention

In order to be admitted to any Aboriginal healthcare program in Ontario, a student must have completed Grade 12. They must also provide a letter of intent and go through academic testing and an interview. During the interview process, the counsellor/admissions officer assesses the student's background and capabilities, and at the same time, the student learns about the program. Students generally apply for these programs if they are already motivated to work in healthcare.

As an example of student participation, Bancroft Campus at Loyalist College has 14 students in its program, with six graduating over the coming year. Currently, two students are enrolled through the facilitated admissions program at Queen's University; they are in their third and fourth year, respectively. At Canadore College, 20 students were admitted into the Indigenous Wellness and Addictions Program in 2008/09.

Aboriginal students are attracted to these programs for a host of reasons. The program coordinator at Loyalist College mentioned that the convenience of the location and the fact that the college is close to their family/community encourages students to enrol. Some students also utilize the program in order to upgrade their skills. It was also learned through the interview at Canadore College that students are attracted to the Indigenous wellness and addictions program because of its emphasis on Aboriginal culture. Moreover, students are interested in healing themselves and/or their community.

An instructor at Canadore College stated that as students progress through these programs, they develop their skills as well as their self-confidence. It was also noted that graduates experience great success in finding jobs. The programs at Bancroft campus and Canadore College have been very successful at enrolling, retaining and graduating students.

> *A number of our graduates are now working at addictions centres across Canada and some have even started their own centres. (Instructor, Indigenous Wellness and Addictions Program, Canadore College)*

On the other hand, the recruiters and counsellors at University of Western Ontario and Queen's University all stated that they struggle to fill the allotted seats due to lack of promotion. In some

cases, no deliberate marketing or communication strategy is in place to let students know that such services even exist. The office administrator at Queen's University also emphasized that Aboriginal students often do not self-identify, and this results in the allotted seats remaining empty. These students often gain admission through the regular channels.

Rationale for Early Exit

Lack of academic skills or knowledge was seldom cited as the reason why Aboriginal students leave healthcare programs. The most common reasons were family commitments, lack of funding and stress-related causes. The coordinator of alternate studies at Bancroft stated that some students leave after obtaining a certificate instead of pursuing the whole program. At Canadore College, exiting students may be recovering addicts who suffer a relapse. In such an instance, they don't drop out completely but usually just take some time off and eventually come back to complete their studies.

Supporting Data

None of the programs is formally tracked by the institutions that offer them. Although Queen's University tracks self-identified Aboriginal students, no personal follow-up is carried out. Canadore College uses informal methods, which produce data of limited quality (e.g., anecdotal information or self-reports). In terms of formal review, the BA in nursing at University of Western Ontario is being reviewed by the Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing, and the "Practical Nursing Program" at Loyalist College is currently being evaluated by the College of Nurses for accreditation.

Service Expansion and Challenges

Three of the five programs reviewed are not planning program expansions. On the other hand, the Bancroft campus of Loyalist College would like to add more workshops and also more cultural aspects, such as traditional medicine and holistic healing. Similarly, the facilitated admissions program at Queen's School of Medicine has reworked its interview process to make it more welcoming and is interested in engaging Aboriginal leaders to help with this transition.

Each of the programs has faced challenges. As previously mentioned in this report, there is a lack of information and knowledge about the access process, particularly at Queen's University. Either students have generally not known about the facilitated admissions program or they did not have sufficient information regarding the application. Finding information on college and university websites is not straightforward either. Other barriers include the scepticism Aboriginal students feel about the process, as they are concerned they will be treated differently if admitted through this policy. Students who qualify to enter any PSE institution through a facilitated process feel that they will not be seen as equally deserving of admittance in comparison to other students and that they will therefore be viewed as less capable students.

The program coordinator at Loyalist College noted that program requirements sometimes act as a barrier. The lack of space and equipment on some campuses is similarly a barrier, and as a result, coordinators have to be innovative in scheduling access to labs and equipment. Another

challenge that these programs have reportedly encountered is a lack of awareness among college and university faculty and administrative staff outside the program.

Replication at Other PSE Institutions

Coordinators at three of the five health programs reviewed felt that their program could be replicated at other institutions. Canadore College's Indigenous wellness and addictions program has already been replicated at Aurora College in the Northwest Territories and at Seven Generations Education Institute (SGEI) in Fort Francis. Students receive a diploma from Canadore College upon completion of the program. Because the need for healthcare graduates is widespread in Aboriginal communities, there is a high degree of cross-pollination from one institution to another. One program that was mentioned as a model for others was the Native nursing entry program at Lakehead University. While it is not one of the five programs reviewed, Lakehead University's program was noted for its practicum in Aboriginal communities, for the support services provided to its nursing students and for the cultural sensitivity of the faculty.

There was consensus that other institutions considering similar programs should make attempts to remove the stigma of the alternative access program as perceived by Aboriginal students. It was also noted that the application and admission process needs to be understandable and "user friendly." The coordinator of alternate studies at Loyalist College suggested that students in health-related programs need support balancing school and family, and Loyalist College responded to this problem by changing the delivery format of the program. The chair of Loyalist's Medicine Admissions Committee recommends involving Aboriginal student services during the initial interview process to show greater cultural sensitivity and openness.

Promising Practices

Distance education and community-based education offer several advantages:

- Financial risks are lower and relocation costs are avoided.

- Culture shock and isolation are not issues, as students continue to stay within their families and communities and are thus able to access their support.

- Family responsibilities and childcare issues are minimized (these issues have been consistently cited as the reason why Aboriginal students leave higher education).

- Students continue to stay in their communities to provide much-needed essential healthcare services. It was mentioned in site visits that once a student relocates to an urban area and adapts to the lifestyle there, they are much less likely to move back to their communities after graduation. This was especially true of students who came from smaller cities and remote areas.

At Canadore College, Aboriginal knowledge and teaching techniques are synthesized with the Western education model. This approach helps students provide appropriate care to their

communities and also helps overcome any resistance that Aboriginal students might have toward PSE. Once students graduate, they have the right skills to be effective in their communities.

Partnerships bring benefits for both the PSE institution and their students. The University of Western Ontario partners with Fanshawe College, while Loyalist College (Bancroft campus) obtains supports such as equipment, rentals and staff members through their partnership with the First Nations Technical Institute (FNTI). Loyalist College also has a partnership with the Huronia District Hospital in Midland, where students obtain practical knowledge (e.g., clinical experience and access to laboratories).

Aboriginal Teacher Education Programs

Like the healthcare programs described in the previous section, Aboriginal teacher education programs are focused on meeting a need for professionals within Aboriginal communities and specifically within local school boards. This focus is embedded in the Ministry of Education's *Ontario First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework* (2007, p. 13), which describes one of its performance measures as follows: "Significant increase in the number of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit teaching and non-teaching staff in school boards across Ontario."

These programs are aimed at graduating qualified Aboriginal teachers, with certification to teach in Aboriginal schools or in the province's public school system. Increasing the number of Aboriginal teachers has multiple impacts on the future number of Aboriginal students attending PSE because Aboriginal teachers serve as role models for Aboriginal students; Aboriginal teachers are better able than non-Aboriginal teachers to provide an Aboriginal perspective on the curriculum being taught; and, finally, Aboriginal teachers are advocates of integrating Aboriginal material into the curriculum.

Education programs at two PSE institutions were reviewed: Nipissing University and Queen's University.

Design and Delivery

Nipissing University has three different teacher education programs: the Aboriginal teacher certification program (ATCP) and the Native classroom assistant diploma program (NCADP), as well as the Native special education assistant diploma program (NSEADP), which is run only over the summer months. In all of these programs, students are required to have a practical work placement of approximately 200 hours. The ATCP program is undergoing an accreditation review by Ontario College of Teachers, while the rest are subjected to internal reviews on a regular basis.

Since Nipissing University is located in North Bay, it services many remote and isolated communities. It is often difficult for these communities to attract qualified teachers. It is equally difficult for Aboriginal youth to leave their communities to attend PSE. One of the goals of these programs is to address some of these gaps in these remote areas. The courses, however, are offered only in North Bay, so interested students may have to travel to attend school. Admission is restricted to Aboriginal students.

Queen's University offers its Aboriginal teacher education program (ATEP), which has been providing teacher training exclusively to Aboriginal students since 1991. The ATEP actually consists of a full-time, on-campus program and a part-time, community-based program. The community program allows students to participate while continuing their jobs. Based on the success Queen's has had with the ATEP, it has begun to offer Aboriginal education programs for Aboriginal students in arts and culture, in master's programs and in public policy and administration programs.

Queen's University's approach to developing the program was rooted in its Aboriginal Council's structure. The council's community members help identify needs in the surrounding communities and then approach Queen's with a request to establish a program to meet those needs. This link with the community embeds a symbiotic need to see the program succeed. The community must provide a steering committee to advice on the delivery of ATEP in their particular area.

The Aboriginal Council aims to use a community-based model, with partnerships, to provide Aboriginal people with more opportunities to obtain higher education both within and outside Queen's University. To be admitted, a candidate must supply two letters of reference from respected members in their Aboriginal community to confirm that they have community connections and support. There is also an interview process. Currently, community-based programs exist in the Manitoulin North Shore area (this program was the first community-based project initiated with Queen's in 1991), Western James Bay and Fort Frances. Admission to Queen's ATEP is not restricted to Aboriginal students, although they are given priority placement over non-Aboriginal students.

The co-chair of Queen's Aboriginal Council highlighted that community-based delivery is costly due to travel expenses of the instructors. However, the students receiving community-based delivery do not pay any extra fees, as the programs are funded by general government grants (both federal and provincial) and tuition fees. Students who enter the program are eligible to applying for funding from a pool of $400,000 available every year from the Aboriginal Education and Training Strategy, and, in some programs, other individual grants are available.

Participation and Retention

Nipissing University expects approximately 26 students to graduate from the Aboriginal Teacher Certification Program (ATCP) in 2009. While not a formal requirement, within the Aboriginal education programs at Nipissing, students are expected and encouraged to obtain both a bachelor's degree and a diploma through the program. Students can pursue both concurrently or sequentially.

To enter a program at Nipissing, students must have a minimum of Grade 12 equivalency. The requirements are more relaxed for mature students. The university also conducts English testing (written and oral) with potential students. Tutoring and counselling services are available at the university for those who need these services.

On average, Queen's University has from 50 to 100 students enrolled in the Aboriginal teacher education program. This program is community-based, and to date, it has successfully trained more than 300 Aboriginal teachers. Some students are attracted to the idea of being a "Queen's student" and therefore choose the on-campus model. The community-based model serves students who might not be able to attend university due to work or family commitments.

Program Expansion

It is not expected that the Aboriginal education programs at Nipissing University will be expanded to other subject areas. According to a representative of the program, expansion is not financially feasible:

> *When we consider whether or not to offer a program in addition to the cost to the university of course design and delivery we have to take into account the cost to the students of affordable housing and childcare. We need to be aware that many students do not qualify for OSAP funding.*
> *(Principal, Aboriginal Education Program, Nipissing University)*

Administrators at Queen's University are developing a new master's program in education focused on distance learning, and they are also looking into specific Aboriginal studies for the university. In fact, the Aboriginal Council at Queen's University is looking to develop its distance education capabilities generally, to enable students to stay in their communities. According to the stakeholders interviewed, these programs are accepted by the Aboriginal communities. This, in turn, leads to a positive impression of the institution. The Aboriginal Council also has strong partnerships within the university with other staff and faculty. The expansion of distance education over community-based delivery is evidence that a program's financial viability may supersede the considerations of its outcomes.

> *The in-class, community-based delivery structure has been much more successful than distance education. The ATEP flies instructors to these communities to conduct the classes. These travel arrangements are expensive, but well worth the results.*
> *(Program Advisor, Aboriginal Teacher Education Program, Queen's University)*

Challenges

The challenges of offering Aboriginal education programs are similar to those of offering Aboriginal access and student services programs. Students' early exits from such programs are typically due to a combination of financial stress and difficulty adjusting to being away from their families. Another challenge facing the programs offered by both Nipissing and Queen's is obtaining consistent resources because federal funding has not increased since 1990. Inconsistent program funding has meant that it has been more difficult to retain qualified faculty.

At Queen's University, administrators have noticed that there has been a decrease in community interest in Aboriginal education programs. The co-chair believes that this may indicate that the program has met the needs for which it was designed but adds that the program may have to be reviewed to determine whether it can address other community needs. To communicate with communities and monitor their programs, the university's Aboriginal Council works through program management partnerships. The council meets twice a year with

community representatives to look at issues and programs. It also tracks the number of students participating and the retention rate. All units are required to undergo an internal review.

The 12-week practicum at Queen's can also be a challenge because students cannot get time off work or can't afford to take the time. Others are unable to complete the math co-requisite. The university has tried to address these issues with tutorials and mandatory study halls. Another main concern is the fact that most of the funding for the Aboriginal education programs at Queen's is year to year. As a result, the university cannot make any long-term commitments. Instructor contracts, for example, are negotiated every year. The program advisor stated that more teachers would join if they were promised a longer-term, secure position.

Replication at Other PSE Institutions

The nature of these programs is that they are a reflection of the communities whose needs they hope to meet. For that reason, program administrators have suggested that each program may be replicated only at institutions that have identified similar community needs.

Nipissing University believes that its education programs can be replicated at any other college or university with a significant Aboriginal population, but given the difficulty Nipissing has experienced in trying to make these programs financial viable, replication at other PSE institutions should be undertaken with caution and perhaps with limited scope.

Promising Practices

A number of practices at Nipissing and Queen's have apparently made these programs successful. For instance, the Native Classroom Assistant Diploma program at Nipissing University allows students to take courses over the summer and makes it possible for people who work on a full-time basis to attend school. Travel to Nipissing University from remote communities at other times of the year would be a barrier to successful program completion.

The practical components in each program are beneficial to students, as they provide them with opportunities to apply the knowledge/tools they learn in the classroom in a hands-on way.

> *The program is successful because the graduates can easily find employment within our First Nations communities.*
> *(Principal, Aboriginal Education Program, Nipissing University)*

Queen's University has had a great deal of success with the creation of its Aboriginal Council. The council has facilitated communication between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people both inside and outside the university. It has led to increased partnerships with community-based businesses and organizations, which, in turn, have made the program more responsive to its surrounding communities. This approach takes time to establish but provides a sound

foundation on which to build the program.

It creates a shared responsibility for the program.
(Program Advisor, Faculty of Education, Queen's University)

Conclusions

Ontario colleges and universities have made clear progress in attracting Aboriginal students to PSE and supporting them in order to optimize their chances of graduation. Progress has occurred on a number of fronts. The number of colleges and universities offering Aboriginal access and student services programs has increased. Throughout the Province of Ontario, PSE institutions are more sensitive to the needs not only of Aboriginal students, but also of their communities. Efforts are being made to recruit students and make them aware of the supports being put in place for them. Recruitment efforts are increasingly being conducted on reserve and by Aboriginal recruitment officers, and programs are being offered to prepare Aboriginal students for the academic and social challenges of living away from their communities.

Many Aboriginal students who previously would not have met PSE entry requirements are now being accommodated under innovative programs. Many campuses in Ontario also now provide Aboriginal student services centres that give Aboriginal students a sense of belonging and an opportunity to continue their cultural traditions. These centres have had a positive impact on the attitudes of non-Aboriginal students and faculty by increasing their exposure to Aboriginal customs and issues. This appears to mitigate tension arising from the perception that academic resources are being diverted to serve a small percentage of the student body. At colleges and universities that have Aboriginal student services centres, there is a belief that the centres are instrumental in preparing a more receptive and nurturing environment for future Aboriginal students.

There is also awareness that Aboriginal students, particularly women with children, have social needs that, if not met, will seriously impede academic program completion. Efforts are therefore being made to provide affordable housing and childcare services.

There has also been a significant change in PSE institutional management regarding Aboriginal affairs in general. This includes setting up Aboriginal-owned or -managed colleges and universities. These institutions have played an important role in developing Aboriginal-specific curricula and in employing Aboriginal faculty. They have also served as examples for non-Aboriginal-managed colleges and universities as to how best to structure programs to meet the needs of surrounding communities and engage community Elders in campus life.

Efforts are increasingly being made to address the economic needs of Aboriginal students, particularly in the northern parts of the province, where seasonal work cannot be sacrificed for studies. For instance, innovation in program delivery and scheduling has allowed Aboriginal students to continue their PSE while working. Distance education and in-community delivery are also more common now than they were in the past, although lack of financial resources continues to limit the availability of these innovative approaches.

Most of the programs reviewed are still evolving, and many are experiencing challenges. For example, programs that reserve a minimum number of seats for Aboriginal students do not always fill those seats, suggesting that seat availability may not be the underlying problem. Some Aboriginal students also choose not to self-identify and thereby miss out on program

supports. Another challenge faced by nearly all the colleges and universities is that Aboriginal students tend to be older, and this mature population has different student support needs, which many of the PSE institutions had not anticipated when first introducing their programs. Without sufficient financial resources to assist students with these needs, funded programs may not acquire the anticipated uptake.

Despite these issues, stakeholders involved in the development and delivery of these programs universally believe that their programs are having a positive impact. There was also consensus that a holistic approach – one that synthesizes the benefits from a number of support programs – provides the best student outcomes. However, outcome measurement is lacking for almost all the programs reviewed. PSE institutions would benefit from formal tracking mechanisms for Aboriginal student services programs, particularly if those mechanisms could be standardized across PSE institutions. However, very few have even informal mechanisms in place. The need to provide practical support to students, coupled with significant fiscal constraints, makes it unlikely that any more than a few colleges and universities will be collecting reliable data on program usage and efficacy in the near future. A long-term strategy for developing a province wide capacity to collect rudimentary program data (usage and outcome) would help not only government, but also PSE institutions and Aboriginal communities to identify where and how resources should be allocated.

While some of the initiatives that could play a role in increasing Aboriginal participation in PSE entail significant costs, many do not. Assisting colleges and universities in building partnerships and networks that could help make their programs sustainable may involve organizing small regional conferences or workshops that facilitate the transfer of knowledge about promising practices between institutions. This would likely have the additional benefit of introducing promising practices from one institution to others within the same region.

In the more remote areas of the province, assistance with establishing and maintaining the e-learning capabilities of Ontario's northern PSE institutions would provide educational opportunities to Aboriginal students whose chances of graduation are reduced the moment they leave the support of their local community. Distance education is one possible remedy. To some degree, access to PSE training via the Internet already exists, partly through the efforts of Contact North. Annually, over 10,000 PSE students in the northern region of Ontario make use of Contact North's infrastructure and services in continuing their education. Contact North is a not-for-profit corporation funded by the Ontario government. Its mandate is to improve access, collaboration and innovation in providing educational opportunities to residents of northern Ontario.

The purpose of this study was to identify promising practices in Ontario colleges and universities that encourage and support increased participation in PSE by Aboriginals. Future research needs to be more quantitative in nature and more outcome-focused. Consideration should be given to a random assignment study, evaluating the impact of both Aboriginal access programs and student services programs. However, such a study must ensure that the participating colleges and universities have the capacity to collect sufficient and reliable data.

Toolkit

This section is presented as a toolkit for PSE institutions that are considering offering programs aimed at increasing the PSE enrolment of Aboriginal students and enhancing those students' overall PSE experience. The toolkit begins with a series of questions that the institutional champions of proposed initiatives should ask themselves. A series of tables follows, detailing a number of programs that may be under consideration. The tables list a variety of initiatives, the benefits they would bring, the resources that should be in place for the initiatives to be carried out and the challenges and solutions that should be considered by any institution that would like to implement those initiatives. These tables do not represent an exhaustive list of program features, as new programs and innovations are being developed each year by institutions across the province.

Assessing an Institution's Knowledge Gaps

An institution's ability to answer the following questions may determine how ambitious its goals are in relation to introducing programs that increase PSE participation by Aboriginal students. However, institutions are encouraged to accurately assess the state of their knowledge prior to launching initiatives that will place varying demands upon their resources.

About the Institution

- Has the institution undertaken an environmental scan or needs assessment with respect to Aboriginal student services?

- Has the institution held focus groups or surveyed its Aboriginal student population?

- How many members of the institution's faculty are Aboriginal? (in which departments)

- How many members of the institution's staff are Aboriginal?

- Does the institution have:

    o An Aboriginal counsellor?

    o An Aboriginal student services centre or a safe place for Aboriginal students to meet?

    o An Aboriginal Education Council or body consisting of Aboriginal community members and/or Aboriginal staff/faculty/students?

- Does the institution have Aboriginal Elders on campus? (where and in what capacity?)

- Does the institution offer night courses?

- Does the institution have a distance education program?

- What other PSE institutions have already implemented programs and can advise and transfer knowledge from their experience?

- What other student services exist within the institution that could be used to support Aboriginal students?

- Do targeted financial supports exist for Aboriginal students (e.g., bursaries, scholarships)?

- How open is the institution's administration to accommodating alternative program offerings? (modular, short-term programs)

- Has the institution made a commitment to increasing awareness among its faculty and staff regarding the issues faced by Aboriginal students?

- Do the institution's strategic plan, multi-year agreement, vision and mission statements include the need to improve the access and academic success of Aboriginal students?

- Does the institution ask students to self-identify as Aboriginal students so that it can track and measure student uptake of support programs? (Is the question appropriate?)

About the Surrounding Aboriginal Communities

- From which surrounding communities do the institution's Aboriginal students come (e.g, First Nation, Métis, urban, rural and remote)?

- Does the institution have an established relationship with those communities? (Who are the primary points of contact?)

- Do members of the surrounding Aboriginal communities play a formal role in the PSE institution's governance or program development?

- What are the primary sources of employment within the surrounding communities? (Who are the primary employers?)

- Have members of the surrounding Aboriginal communities been approached:

  o to be role models or mentors on campus?

  o to support outreach initiatives on and off reserve?

  o to assist in understanding what social and economic gaps in their communities need to be filled?

- Has the institution consulted with Aboriginal communities and organizations about developing a self-identification policy?

About the Students

- How many students within the institution are Aboriginal? (How is this determined? through self-identification?)

- Is the institution aware of the number of First Nations students who are receiving funding through the Post-Secondary Student Support Program to support their studies?

- What is the diversification among Aboriginal students? (Number and types of languages, First Nation, Métis, Inuit, gender, urban or rural/remote, etc.)
- What percentage of the Aboriginal students in your institution:
    o live away from their family to take PSE?
    o are parents?
    o work?

Initiatives to Consider

The tables that follow detail initiatives that have been suggested by the various participants in this research. They are offered to facilitate discussion and lead to improved program design.

Table 10-1
Table of Considerations for Implementing an Aboriginal Student Services Program

Type of Initiative	Benefit	Resources	Challenges	Mitigation/Solution
Aboriginal recruitment officers	Optimizes outreach initiatives Reinforces community connections	Full- or part-time staff Ideal candidate should be Aboriginal with strong connection to community	May not have suitable candidate	Solicit involvement of Aboriginal faculty or staff If the institution has existing connection with Aboriginal community, solicit input from community Elders
Flexible program design	Helps control fixed cost of programs by offering them (and withdrawing them) where numbers warrant	Requires more effort at the design level	Difficult to maintain faculty interest in programs that start and stop	Monitor and record shifts in program demands to facilitate resource planning
Community partnerships	Reinforces community connections Potentially offers employment opportunities	Requires institutional champion	Work placements (co-op) should be aligned with program goals Alignment not always possible with willing participants	Carefully consider community partners and fully disclose program goals Carefully scrutinize the first co-op placement with each partner to optimize outcome
Aboriginal student services centre	Creates awareness of Aboriginal culture and issues among both Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals Creates a safe and welcoming environment Provides a support structure for other support services	Requires physical space on campus Ideally implemented with onsite staff	Potential negative reaction from non-Aboriginal staff and students (initially)	Consider implementing (in tandem) other programs that are available to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students Encourage faculty to make referrals

Type of Initiative	Benefit	Resources	Challenges	Mitigation/Solution
Modular courses and programs	Shorter programs (e.g., less than one year) allow experience of early success Builds self-confidence	Requires more effort at the design level	May be perceived as a program of lesser value	Communicate the longer-term benefits of bridging programs Implement in tandem with other supports such as mentoring
Enlist the support of Aboriginal Elders	Adds value to each of the other initiatives, particularly recruitment Develops valuable advisory network Provides role models	Requires institutional champion Requires knowledge of, and connection with, Aboriginal communities	If the resources do not currently exist, it may take time to establish them broadly	Solicit involvement of Aboriginal faculty and staff Empower Elders to play a role on campus
Peer counselling and mentoring	Builds self-confidence Helps orient new students early Assists in directing students to appropriate services Non-threatening to non-Aboriginal students and faculty	Requires program coordination	Maintaining a supply of mentors (they are lost as they graduate)	Acknowledge mentors and communicate the rewarding nature of the relationship Encourage protégés to become mentors

Type of Initiative	Benefit	Resources	Challenges	Mitigation/Solution
Holistic supports for: - Mature student - Single parent - Working students	Addresses scheduling and non-academic concerns of willing students Facilitates continued focus on studies	Multiple programs Support staff Coordination	Potential negative reaction from non-Aboriginal students experiencing the same needs	Focus (initially) on one specific need and build support within the institution for additional services Do not deny access to non-Aboriginal students but offer through Aboriginal student services centre Investigate funding for complementary programs (e.g., First Generation Initiative)
Distance education	Allows access to greater selection of programs Allows students to remain in their communities Minimizes disruption to families	Hardware IT staff Course design Requires faculty who know how to teach using this vehicle	Lack of high-speed Internet access in remote areas Lack of courses designed for this mode of delivery	Increase use of existing resources, such as Contact North Share designed courses with other institutions Communicate regularly with other institutions
Program evaluation	Demonstrates program efficacy Identifies processes that could be improved	Program coordinator	Difficult to identify and track Aboriginal students	Outreach and on-campus communication initiatives need to clarify that self-identification leads to program access and support services

Table 10-2
Table of Considerations for Implementing an Aboriginal Access Program

Type of Initiative	Benefit	Resources	Challenges	Mitigation/Solution
Academic skills	Provides students with an opportunity to improve their overall performance	Course design Faculty (ideally Aboriginal)	Students may be reluctant to self-identify as needing support	Solicit the support of Aboriginal Elders Integrate course with other support services aimed at building self-confidence
Partnership with Aboriginal services	Enhances all available supports for Aboriginal students	Aboriginal student services centre Program coordinator	None	n/a
Partnership with other departments within the institution	Leverages existing learning and resources Expands communication network Expands faculty awareness of the program	Interdepartmental planning meetings	Requires awareness of issues in other departments Requires champion to ensure successful integration Potential resistance from other departments (increased time demands)	Non-Aboriginal faculty should be invited to attend Aboriginal student services centre events so they can get a better understanding of the need for partnership Use existing institution-wide communication vehicles to solicit interest and involvement

Type of Initiative	Benefit	Resources	Challenges	Mitigation/Solution
Integration of Aboriginal content	Engages students, leading to more relevant educational outcomes	Collaboration with Aboriginal advisor/Elder/AEC Curriculum developer	Must be done on a course-by-course basis – takes time to overhaul an entire program	Solicit input from Aboriginal faculty Commit to integration of Aboriginal content Provide an Aboriginal perspective on existing course materials – ideally provided by an Aboriginal instructor
Increase the proportion of Aboriginal faculty	Makes learning experience more relevant Provides Aboriginal students with role model	Hire Aboriginal faculty	Limited number of Aboriginal teachers	Encourage uptake of Aboriginal teachers training
Communicate childcare program (if exists)	Encourages uptake of access programs Facilitates continued focus on studies	Aboriginal recruitment officer Program coordinator	Requires integration with outreach activities Best communicated on reserve	Solicit the input of Aboriginal Elders and resources within the Aboriginal student services centre
Aboriginal counsellor	Provides advice and guidance to Aboriginal students who are at risk of dropping or stopping out	Aboriginal counsellor	Counselling requires a safe environment in which to develop a trusting relationship	Solicit the input of Aboriginal Elders and resources within the Aboriginal student services centre
Communication	Generates awareness of the programs, which is a precursor to program uptake	On-campus events Word-of-mouth Student paper Website	Coordination of awareness activities and events.	Solicit the input of Aboriginal Elders and resources within the Aboriginal student services centre

Type of Initiative	Benefit	Resources	Challenges	Mitigation/Solution
Program evaluation	Demonstrates program efficacy Identfies processes that could be improved	Program coordinator	Difficult to identify and track Aboriginal students	Outreach and on-campus communication initiatives need to clarify that self-identification leads to program access and support services

Table 10-3
Table of Considerations for Implementing an Aboriginal Designated Program

Type of Initiative	Benefit	Resources	Challenges	Mitigation/Solution
Research and review existing programs	Provides a good foundation for program design that can be tailored to the surrounding community's needs	Collaboration with Aboriginal advisor/Elder/AEC Curriculum developer Faculty to teach the program	It is important that the program be matched with the community's needs. A needs assessment is required.	Solicit the input of Aboriginal community – include a broad spectrum of professionals Communicate regularly with other PSE institutions
Partnership with other departments within the institution	Leverages existing learning and resources Expands communication network Expands faculty awareness of the program	Interdepartmental planning meetings	Requires awareness of issues in other departments Requires champion to ensure successful integration Potential resistance from other departments (increased time demands)	Non-Aboriginal faculty should be invited to attend Aboriginal student services centre events so they can get a better understanding of the need for partnership Use existing institution-wide communication vehicles to solicit interest and involvement
Integration of Aboriginal and Western approaches	Allows graduates to synthesize knowledge and develop locally relevant practice	Collaboration with Aboriginal advisor/Elder/AEC Curriculum developer Faculty to teach the program	Difficult finding course materials with Aboriginal content	Initiate sharing of materials with other institutions that offer similar programs Let other institutions who do not offer the program know that materials are available

Type of Initiative	Benefit	Resources	Challenges	Mitigation/Solution
Holistic supports for: - Mature student - Single parent - Working students	Addresses scheduling and non-academic concerns of willing students Facilitates continued focus on studies	Multiple programs Support staff Coordination	Potential negative reaction from non-Aboriginal students experiencing the same needs	Focus (initially) on one specific need and build support within the institution for additional services Do not deny access to non-Aboriginal students but offer through Aboriginal student services centre Investigate funding for complementary programs (e.g., First Generation Initiative)
Facilitated access	Seats reserved for Aboriginal applicants Provides more welcoming environment	Admissions	May require communication to generate awareness Potential stigma related to lower entry requirement	Integrate program communication with outreach activities Involve institutions' Aboriginal faculty or Elders in the admissions process Set admission requirements to suit the needs of the population the program is intended to serve
Work placements	Provides practical knowledge Ties student to the local community Provides confidence that career path will have economic benefit	Liaison with Aboriginal community	Students generally required to meet minimum academic standards that surrounding communities may not have	Outreach and recruitment efforts should communicate as early as possible to surrounding high schools and Aboriginal communities what the program's entry requirements are

Type of Initiative	Benefit	Resources	Challenges	Mitigation/Solution
Program evaluation	Demonstrates program efficacy Identifies processes that could be improved	Program coordinator	Difficult to identify and track Aboriginal students	Outreach and on-campus communication initiatives need to clarify that self-identification leads to program access and support services

Table 10-4
Table of Considerations for Implementing an Aboriginal Healthcare Program

Type of Initiative	Benefit	Resources	Challenges	Mitigation/Solution
Research and review existing programs	Provides a good foundation for program design that can be tailored to the surrounding community's needs	Collaboration with Aboriginal advisor/Elder/AEC Curriculum developer Faculty to teach the program	It is important that the program be matched with the community's needs. A needs assessment is required	Solicit the input of Aboriginal community, particularly those involved in frontline healthcare Communicate with leading institutions such as Lakehead University prior to program design
Distance education	Allows Aboriginal students to study without leaving their communities or family responsibilities Minimizes the loss of Aboriginal graduates to urban centres Reduces significant travel costs, particularly in the more remote areas of the province	Hardware IT staff Course design Requires faculty who know how to teach using this vehicle	Lack of high-speed Internet access in remote areas Lack of courses designed for this mode of delivery	Increase use of existing resources, such as Contact North Share designed courses with other institutions Communicate with leading institutions such as Lakehead University prior to program design
Integration of Aboriginal and Western approaches	Allows graduates to synthesize knowledge and develop locally relevant practice	Collaboration with Aboriginal advisor/Elder/AEC Curriculum developer Faculty to teach the program	Difficult finding course materials with Aboriginal content	Share designed courses with other institutions

Type of Initiative	Benefit	Resources	Challenges	Mitigation/Solution
Facilitated access	Seats reserved for Aboriginal applicants Provides more welcoming environment	Admissions	May require communication to generate awareness Potential stigma related to lower entry requirement	Integrate program communication with outreach activities Involve institutions' Aboriginal faculty or Elders in the admissions process
Work placements	Provides practical knowledge Ties student to the local community Provides confidence that career path will have economic benefit	Liaison with Aboriginal community	Students generally required to meet minimum academic standards that surrounding communities may not have	Outreach and recruitment efforts should communicate as early as possible to surrounding high schools and Aboriginal communities what the program's entry requirements are
Partnerships with hospitals	Provides practical knowledge to students Hospitals become receptive to receiving graduates	Medical equipment Program coordination	Program intensity may cause work/study/life imbalance	Ensure that students entering the program are aware of the institution's available support services
Program evaluation	Demonstrates program efficacy Identifies processes that could be improved	Program coordinator	Difficult to identify and track Aboriginal students	Outreach and on-campus communication initiatives need to clarify that self-identification leads to program access and support services

Table 10-5

Table of Considerations for Implementing an Aboriginal Teacher Education Program

Type of Initiative	Benefit	Resources	Challenges	Mitigation/Solution
Research and review existing programs	Provides a good foundation for program design that can be tailored to the surrounding K-12 schools	Program coordinator	Math co-requisite may be a barrier to successful completion	Communicate program demands during outreach initiatives and again during admissions Ensure students are aware of the available tutoring programs and support services
Community-based program	Taught in and targeted to the needs of the community	Extensive administrative involvement Review by Aboriginal Education Council Curriculum design Faculty willing to travel	Community-based program expensive to run	Establish minimum number of entrants to ensure cost recovery Consider requiring community letters of support both for the program and for applicants
Summer program	Students can complete their education while pursuing seasonal employment	Summer faculty Curriculum design Program coordination	In-school practicum difficult to arrange	Establish connections with surrounding K-12 schools Solicit the input of Aboriginal community, particularly those involved in local school boards
Admission preparation	Ensures students meet the necessary admissions requirements	Aboriginal recruitment officer Program coordinator Admissions	Students may require prior volunteer experience	Establish connections with surrounding K-12 schools Solicit the input of Aboriginal community, particularly those involved in local school boards

Type of Initiative	Benefit	Resources	Challenges	Mitigation/Solution
Incorporate Aboriginal content	Allows graduates to synthesize knowledge and develop locally relevant teaching style	Collaboration with Aboriginal advisor/Elder /AEC Curriculum developer Faculty to teach the program	Difficult finding course materials with Aboriginal content	Communicate regularly with other PSE institutions offering similar programs
Holistic supports for: - Mature student - Single parent - Working students	Addresses scheduling and non-academic concerns of willing students Facilitates continued focus on studies	Multiple programs Support staff Coordination	Potential negative reaction from non-Aboriginal students experiencing the same needs	Focus (initially) on one specific need and build support within the institution for additional services Do not deny access to non-Aboriginal students but offer through Aboriginal student services centre Investigate funding for complementary programs (e.g., First Generation Initiative)
Program evaluation	Demonstrates program efficacy Identifies processes that could be improved	Program coordinator	Difficult to identify and track Aboriginal students	Outreach and on-campus communication initiatives need to clarify that self-identification leads to program access and support services

Works Cited

Alcorn, W. J. & Campbell, J. M. (1997). *Access Programs: An Integrated Support System for Non-Traditional Students at the University of Manitoba.* Winnipeg: University of Manitoba.

Association of Canadian Community Colleges. (2005). *Meeting the needs of Aboriginal learners – An overview of current programs and services, challenges, opportunities and lessons learned.* Retrieved March 14, 2009 from http://www.accc.ca/ftp/pubs/200507_Aboriginal.pdf Page iii.

BC Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology – Centre for Education Information. (1999). *Highlights, 1999: Aboriginal student outcomes.* Retrieved March 5, 2009 from http://outcomes.bcstats.gov.bc.ca/Publications/aboriginal/ab_highlights.pdf

Canada. Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. (1996). *The report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples.* Retrieved March 3, 2009 from http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/webarchives/20071115053257/http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ch/rcap/sg/sgmm_e.html

Canada. Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. (2008). *Statement of apology – To former students of Indian residential schools.* Retrieved September 2009 from http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ai/rqpi/apo/sig-eng.pdf

Canadian Council on Learning. (2007). *State of learning in Canada: No time for complacency.* Report on Learning in Canada 2007. (Ottawa:2007). Page 76.

Educational Policy Institute. (2007). *Evaluation of the Government of Ontario's Aboriginal education and training strategy* (Unpublished report to the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities). Ontario: Government of Ontario.

Forbes, A., Brown, N., & Ahulwalia, B. (2005). *Aboriginal students in Ontario's post-secondary education system* (Policy Paper for the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance). Retrieved March 15, 2009 from: http://www.ousa.ca/uploaded_files/pdf_files/Policy%20Papers%20and%20Statements/ABORIGINAL%20STUDENTS%20POLICY%20%20final%20for%20website.pdf

Germain, M., Costa, R., & Kelly-Scott, K. (2009). *2006 Aboriginal population profile for Toronto.* Statistics Canada – Cat. No. 89-638-X.

Hampton, E. (2000). *First Nations controlled university education in Canada, Aboriginal education: Fulfilling the promise*, Vancouver: UBC Press. Page 210.

Hikel, R.S. (1994). *A review of the Access Program: Policy directions for the future*. Winnipeg: The Department of Education and Training, Manitoba.

Holmes, D. (2005). *Embracing differences: Post-secondary education among Aboriginal students, students with children and students with disabilities*. Montreal: The Canadian Millennium Scholarship Foundation.

Junor, S., & Usher, A. (2004). *The price of knowledge 2004: Access and student finance in Canada*. Montreal: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation. Available from Renouf Publishing Company Limited (www.renoufbooks.com).

Malatest, R.A. (2004). *Aboriginal peoples and post secondary education: What educators have learned.* Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation. Millennium Research Series (Online). Retrieved March 2, 2009, from http://www.millenniumscholarships.ca/images/Publications/aboriginal_en.pdf

Malatest, R.A., & Stonechild, B. (2008). *Factors affecting the use of student financial assistance by First Nations youth*. Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation. Millennium Research Series (Online). Retrieved March 20, 2009, from http://www.millenniumscholarships.ca/images/Publications/MRS_AB_11JLY2008_EN.pdf

Malatest, R.A. (2007). *The class of 2003: High school follow-up survey*. Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation. Millennium Research Series (Online). Retrieved March 20, 2009, from http://www.millenniumscholarships.ca/images/Publications/070614_class_of_03_en.pdf

Ontario, (2007). *Ontario First Nation, Métis, and Inuit education policy framework*. Toronto: Ministry of Education.

Ontario, (2008). *Aboriginal education and training strategy: Fixed-share fund – Guidelines for colleges and universities*. Toronto: Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities.

Rae, B. (2005). *Ontario: A leader in education*. Toronto: Queen's Printer.

Statistics Canada (2006a). *Aboriginal identity population by age groups, median age and sex: 2006 counts for Canada, provinces and territories*. Retrieved March 3, 2009 from http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census06/data/highlights/Aboriginal/pages/Page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo=PR&Code=01&Table=1&Data=Count&Sex=1&Age=1&StartRec=1&Sort=2&Display=Page

Statistics Canada (2006b). *2006 Aboriginal population profile for Toronto*. Retrieved March 13, 2009 from http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-638-x/2009001/article/10825-eng.htm

University of Toronto. (2009). *Epiitiiyan: Aboriginal Presence and Educational Excellence at the University of Toronto 2009-2011*. Page 31. Retrieved September 2009 from http://www.aboriginalstrategicplanuoft.com/images/POSTstrategicplan_v11.pdf

Appendix A: List of Programs

The following 42 programs were identified in this study's environmental scan and were the subject of this report.

Name of College/University	Program/Department
Algoma University	Anishinabe Student Services
Algoma University	Shingwauk Kinoomaage Gamig
Algonquin College	Aboriginal Studies
Canadore College	Aboriginal Learning Unit
Canadore College	Indigenous Wellness and Addictions Prevention
Carleton University	Aboriginal Enriched Support Program
Fleming College	Aboriginal Emphasis Initiative
Georgian College	Aboriginal Studies
Georgian College	Anishnabe Education and Training Circle
Georgian College	Shki-Miikan
Lakehead University	Native Access Program
Lakehead University	Office of Aboriginal Initiatives
Lakehead University	Office of Aboriginal Cultural and Support Services
Lambton College	Pre-Degree First Nations Program
Loyalist College	Aboriginal Resource Centre
Loyalist College	Nursing in Partnership with First Nations Technical Institute
Mohawk College	Facilitated Admission Process for First Nations Students
Negahneewin College	Aboriginal Access Program
Nipissing University	Native Classroom Assistant Diploma Program
Nipissing University	Aboriginal Teacher Certificate Program
Nipissing University	Native Special Education Assistant Diploma Program
Northern College	Apprenticeship, Workforce, Development and Training
Northern College	Native Assembly – Aboriginal Programs and Services Department
Queen's University	Aboriginal Education Council
Queen's University	Aboriginal Teacher Education Program
Queen's University	Alternate Admission Process – Faculty of Arts and Sciences
Queen's University	Alternate Admission Process – School of Nursing
Queen's University	Facilitated Admission Process (School of Medicine)
Royal Military College	Aboriginal Leadership Opportunity Year
Ryerson University	Aboriginal Student Services
Sault College	Ojibwe Language Program

Seneca College	Aboriginal Student Services
Seneca College	Seneca Centre for Outreach Education
SirWilfrid Laurier University	Master of Social Work Aboriginal Field of Study
Trent University	First Peoples House of Learning
University of Guelph	Aboriginal Resource Centre
University of Toronto	Aboriginal Studies
University of Toronto	First Nations House
University of Western Ontario	Western-Fanshawe Collaborative Bachelor of Science in Nursing Degree Program
University of Windsor	Aboriginal Education Centre
Wilfrid Laurier University	Native Student Services
York University	Aboriginal Student Community

Appendix B: Key Stakeholders Interview Guide

Promising Practices: Increasing and Supporting Participation for Aboriginal Students in Ontario

Stakeholders Interview Guide

The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario has commissioned R. A. Malatest & Associates Ltd., private research firm, to undertake research to identify promising practices in Ontario colleges and universities that encourage and support increased participation in postsecondary education for Aboriginal people.

The majority of PSE institutions in Ontario offer support for Aboriginal students. The goal of this research is to identify those supports that have demonstrated proven success in attracting and retaining Aboriginal students in Ontario postsecondary institutions. Our research will highlight "promising practices" in Ontario as well as identifying specific successes (i.e., "what is working") and challenges of existing and future programs.

The information collected in this interview will be used to inform this important study. The information collected will not be linked to any specific names of individuals. Your responses to all questions of opinion will be anonymous and confidential and not linked to any specific institution. Information of fact about your institution's program(s) or service(s), such as the number of enrolled students and duration of program, may be reported with the name of your institution.

For more information about the project, please contact Mr. Chris Boughton, Project Manager, from R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. at 1-888-689-1847 (toll-free).

Thank you very much for your participation in this important research.

Please provide the name and job title of the person participating in this interview:

Title: Mr.   Mrs.   Miss   Ms.   Dr.

Name: _____   Surname: _____

Job Title: _____   E-mail: _____

Telephone: _____   Fax: _____

Organization/Institution: _____

Name of Program/Service: _____

SECTION A: RESPONDENT INFORMATION

A1.   The following section asks detailed questions about the [NAME OF PROGRAM OR SERVICE] offered by your organization. This information will be used primarily to develop an inventory of Aboriginal supports and programs. Do we have your consent to include any factual information you provide in this interview about your program or service?

☐   Yes

☐   No

☐   Don't know/No Response

SECTION B: PROGRAMS OR SERVICE DESCRIPTION

B1.   Please describe your job position and role in the program/service at your institution.

B2.   Briefly describe the program/service at your institution.

a) What is the overall structure and/or content?

b) How many students participate?

c) What is the duration of the program/service?

B3.   What is the objective or goal of the program/service?

B4.   Is the program/service available only for Aboriginal students?

☐   Available only for Aboriginal students (First Nations, Inuit and Métis)

☐   Available for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students

☐   Other

_____

B5.   Are there any planned or expected future changes to the program/service? For example, are there any expected curricular changes or planned partnerships with other institutions?

B6.   What are the origins of the program/service? Why was it initiated? What gaps or needs was it expected to address?

B7.   Are there any particularly unique features associated with the program/service? For example, does the program/service partner with any other institutions? Is there a hands-on learning or off-campus component?

B8.   What are the specific requirements for admission into/use of the program/service? Is an interview process or letter of reference required?

SECTION C: ASSOCIATED COSTS AND FUNDING

C1.   What are the costs associated with the program/service? Are there any fees for participating students?

C2.   How is the program/service funded?

C3.   What are some of the other resources required by your program/service? For example, empty classroom space and/or participation from other staff working at the institution?

SECTION D: EVALUATING SUCCESS

D1.   For what reason(s) do students typically participate in the program/service?

D2.   What skills, attitudes and/or knowledge do you feel Aboriginal students take away from the program/service?

D3.   What are common reasons for Aboriginals not completing the program/service? Are there specific reasons why some students drop out or fail?

D4.   In your opinion, how successful has your program been at meeting its objectives? Has the program/service achieved any proven success in attracting, retaining and graduating Aboriginal students?

D5.   What are some of the barriers the program/service has faced?

D6.   What are some of the lessons learned from the development, implementation and/or evolution of the program/service?
   a)   Development
   b)   Implementation
   c)   Evolution

D7.   Does your institution formally track program/service outcomes?

D8.   Has the program/service ever been subjected to a formal review or evaluation? If so, what were the results?

D9.   To what extent do you feel this program/service could be replicated in another PSE institution?

SECTION E: ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

E1.   In your opinion, are there any other promising Aboriginal programs/services offered at your institution that we should be aware of?

E2.   Are there any statistics, documents, or literature of relevance to this program/service that you could share with the research team?

E3.   Do you have any other comments you would like to add?

E4.   **Thank you very much for your participation in this interview.** We will be using the information you provided today to complete a profile of the program/service. Once the program/service profile is complete, would you be willing to review the information to make sure that all details are accurate and up-to-date?

    Yes   E-mail Address:

☐   _____

☐   No

Appendix C: Program Factsheets

Name of Program/Service	
Institution	
Location	
Type of Program/Service	
Program Description	
How to Apply	
Eligible Program/Service Participants	
Description of the Program/Service	
Unique Configurations	
Origin(s) of the Program/Service	
Program Costs/Resource Requirements	
Associated Costs?	
Resource Requirements?	
Sources of Funding?	
Contact Information	
First Name	
Last Name	
Job Title	
Organization	
Address	
City	
Province	
Postal Code	
Telephone Number	
E-mail	
Website	
Evaluating Success	
Proven success in attracting, retaining and graduating Aboriginal students?	
Lessons learned for program development, implementation, evolution?	
Extent to which the program/service can be replicated in other PSE institutions?	

Appendix D: Site Visit Guide

Site:
Contact:
Date of Visit:
Notes:

Staff
- Number of staff:
- Types of staff:
  - · Admin
  - · Academic
  - · Other
- Distribution of full-time, part-time, volunteer staff:
  - · Full-time
  - · Part-time
  - · Volunteer

Capacity and Operations
- Location (i.e., stand alone, in other building, basement, main floor)
- Hours of operation
- Type of assistance provided (e.g., financial, non-financial, both)
- Type of model/governance structure (board members, management council, etc.)
- Existing partnerships

Participants
- Number of participants (i.e., part-time, after-school, full-time):
- Age groups served:
- Marital status (If data are not available, ask for the status of majority of participants):
- Living Conditions (e.g., on campus, off campus, living with parents, living with spouse) (If data are not available, ask for the condition of majority of participants):
- Where do the students typically come from? (If possible note: rural or urban reserve? Large city or small town? Graduate of reserve high school?)

Governance
- What is the governance structure of the program/service?
- How is it related to the governance of the college/university?

Unique Configurations
- What makes this program/service different from other, similar programs/services in Ontario? Canada?
- What program/service, in Canada or internationally, do you compare your program/service to?
- What do you think the communities outside of the college/university would know about your program/service?

Recruitment and Retention:
- How do Aboriginal students hear/learn about the program/service?
- Evidence of active recruitment of Aboriginal students (e.g., open houses, visits to reserves, presentations, summer programs)?
- How does the program/service contribute to an "Aboriginal voice" on campus?
- What additional supports are needed for the program/service to function as intended?

Success/Impacts
- Was the program/service modelled after another existing program/service in Ontario/Canada? If so, which one?
- How is the program/service being evaluated?
- Are there any formal mechanisms in place to measure/monitor success (e.g., suggestion/comment boxes, student satisfaction survey, etc.)?
- What advantages do students gain from their involvement/interaction with the program/service?
- Have there been any unintended impacts or outcomes (positive or negative) that resulted from the program/service? Any anecdotal story?
- What other existing Aboriginal support systems or networks exist within the college/university? Town or city? For example, is there a Friendship Centre where students can meet and socialize with other Aboriginal students? Is there an education authority active within the city?

Other *[To be completed after site visit is complete.]*
- General perception of program/service
- Evidence of ease with which program/service can be replicated in other postsecondary institutions

Appendix E: Student Interview Guide

First Name:
Date and Time:
Program/Service

The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario has commissioned a research team consisting of R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. to undertake research to identify promising practices in Ontario colleges and universities that encourage and support increased participation in postsecondary education by Aboriginal people.

The majority of PSE institutions in Ontario offer support for Aboriginal students. The goal of this research is to identify those supports that have demonstrated proven success in attracting and retaining Aboriginal students in Ontario postsecondary institutions. Our research will highlight "promising practices" in Ontario as well as identifying specific successes (i.e., "what is working") and challenges of existing and future programs.

<u>**Confidentiality**</u>
Interviews with students are an important component of this research. Your responses to interview questions will remain <u>confidential</u>. No one will have access to your responses except the research team. Responses to the interview questions will not be linked to individual respondents in any project reporting.

<u>**Further Questions**</u>
Thank you for your participation in this research. If you have any further questions about the study, please contact Ms. Fataneh Zarinpoush, Research Manager, R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd., at 1-800-598-0161.

A1. How did you hear about the program/service?

A2a. What types of supports/services have you received through the program/service?

A2b. How long have you been using the program/service?

A3a. How satisfied are you with the supports and services you have received through the program/service?

○ Very Satisfied
○ Mostly Satisfied
○ Neutral (neither satisfied nor dissatisfied)
○ Mostly dissatisfied
○ Very dissatisfied
○ Don't know/no response

A3b. Why?

A3c. Do you recommend this program/service to your friends/other students?

A4. Do you have access to all the supports or services you would like through the program/service?

A5. What other services or programs, if any, do you think would be useful?

A6. What do you like best about the program/service?

A7. What degree/diploma are you currently pursing? What is your major? Minor?

A8. Do you have any other comments you would like to add?

Thank you for your participation