



**Presentation to the
Academic Planning Committee**

June 10th, 2010

Aboriginal Programs and Services

at

Vancouver Island University



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Aboriginal Students at VIU

In 2008/09, VIU reported an Aboriginal headcount of 1819 students (10%). The following includes highlights of recent data collection of Aboriginal students attending VIU:

- As of mid 2009, the Ministry has been providing information on a new group of self-declared Aboriginal students: those that self-declare at other post-secondary institutions. This new information adds approximately 100 students per academic year to our institution's Aboriginal student headcount.
- Our Aboriginal students remain younger than our overall student population with 43% being in the 18 to 24 age bracket compared to 39% of all students being in the 16 to 25 age bracket. There are fewer Aboriginal students over 30 years old: 37% compared to the 48% of all students who are over 30.
- There are proportionally more Aboriginal students at our Cowichan campus (18%) than our Nanaimo campus (8%)
- According to the Central Data Warehouse standard reports, VIU has the third highest Aboriginal headcount of public BC institutions at 1,819. VIU, along with Northwest Community College, and College of New Caledonia, account for 34% (6,689) of Aboriginal students in the province.
- At 10% of total student headcount, this is higher than the 6% of Aboriginal people in our region population (BC Stats) and higher than the 4.8% provincial average of Aboriginal students in public post-secondary institutions (ALMD).
- The majority of Aboriginal students are enrolled in Degree (35%) and Developmental programs (23%) at VIU (2007-08 Snapshot report).

Aboriginal Student Headcount

2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09
2,050	1,980	1,812	1,657	1,702	1,752

2006 Statistics:

- In 2006, Aboriginal people in Canada - First Nations, Métis and Inuit - surpassed the one-million mark, reaching 1,172,790.
- Between 1996 and 2006, the Aboriginal population grew by 45%, compared with 8% for the non-Aboriginal population.
- In the 2001 and 2006 census, Aboriginal youth represent the fastest growing segment of Canada's population.

Funding Trends

In the last twenty years, Vancouver Island University has developed a variety of instructional programs, student services, and special projects aimed at enhancing educational opportunities for Aboriginal students. A major contributor to these programs has come from Aboriginal Special Project Funding (2001- 2008). The following are examples of some of the projects developed and delivered:

- First Nations Capacity Building: Housing Managers Training Program
- First Nations Bridging Program: Centre of Continuing Studies
- Aboriginal Sport & Recreation Management course project
- Learning Circles to Support Aboriginal Nursing
- Aboriginal Speaker Series: Campus Career Centre
- First Nations Forest Education Bridging Partnership Program: Science & Technology Department
- Enhancing Learning In Aboriginal Communities: Effective Video-casting Practices
- Snuneymuxw House of Learning: Pilot Adult Basic Education program

The Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education Strategy and Action Plan that was initiated in 2007 have also provided a funding impetus that has greatly advanced work in this area. VIU has never experienced a higher degree of community partnerships, articulation agreements, outreach programs, and capacity for providing Indigenous knowledge. Unfortunately, Aboriginal Service Plan funding is coming to an end in December 2010. Widespread provincial lobbying is taking place to support sustaining and expanding funding for the ASP process as a shared responsibility between post-secondary institutions, educational partners, and the Ministry of Advanced Education and Labour Market.

Current inquiry into the possibility of ongoing funding is met with ministry representatives referring to a new policy framework that is being developed by the new Deputy Minister. The framework is intended to inform the work in the area of Aboriginal Education beyond the Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education Strategy and Action Plan. ALMD is working with Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education & Training Partners Table to consult on this framework.

Instructional Programs (core programming)

VIU has two First Nations programs: First Nations Studies and First Nations Child and Youth Care. These programs are core activity at VIU. In addition there are numerous courses spread across the various faculties, especially in the faculty of Education and Health and Human Services, which incorporate Indigenous content, pedagogy, theory and topics.

Special Projects (soft funding)

The following list includes special projects that have been initiated and supported by external funding sources and are therefore limited in terms of program duration.

- Aboriginal University Bridging Program
- Ta'Tul'ut Shqwaluwun Program
- Walking Strong
- Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Program with Cowichan Tribes and Saanich Indian School Board
- Aboriginal Carpentry Program
- First Nations Shellfish Aquaculture Training (FNSAT)

There are a number of additional courses and programs which are currently in development. These courses have been provided with seed money from the ASP to work with community advisory boards, consult with Elders, host focus groups and collect primary and secondary data into the viability and content and structure for program development. At present the following projects are delayed and in search of funding to support curriculum development and delivery:

- Indigenous Science Courses in Biology
- Indigenous Tourism Experience Course
- Aboriginal Management and Leadership
- Community Health Representative Training

Partnership and Community Outreach Programs

An essential component for creating opportunities to increase Aboriginal student enrollment at VIU, is in developing relationships with Aboriginal communities. One of VIU longest standing relationships is with the First Nations Advisory Committee. FNAC is a valued advisory board consisting of 18 representatives of Aboriginal communities and organizations on Vancouver Island. These representatives hold the education profile for their communities. Aboriginal students educational funding are accessed and administered through their local communities for the most part. Education coordinators therefore play a significant role in guiding and directing Aboriginal students in their pursuit of higher learning. FNAC's role and mandate is currently being reviewed and is anticipated to be reorganized to ensure VIU's accountability and relationship to its Aboriginal community partners.

In addition to the relationship VIU has established with FNAC, a recognized practice for promoting access and achievement of Aboriginal students is in the development of outreach and community partnerships and programs. A number of these partnerships, such as the articulation agreement between Tillicum LeLum and Chemainus Native College, have been in place for 20 years. More recently, the practice of community collaboration with Aboriginal partners has been modified to accommodate a necessary first step – the development of Learning Partnership Agreements or Memorandum of Understanding. Prior to entering into joint curriculum development projects and/or program development, interested parties must endeavor to start a conversation involving expectations, concerns and most importantly anticipated outcomes for Aboriginal learners. Transparency of process is essential to strengthening the relationship between parties to successfully promote collaborative projects

that promote our organizations mutual goals. The following is a list of partnerships in place or in development:

- Chemainus First Nation – Learning Partnership Agreement
- Snuneymuxw First Nation - Learning Partnership Agreement
- Cowichan Valley Métis Nation - Learning Partnership Agreement
- Inter Tribal Health Authority (ITHA) - Learning Partnership Agreement
- Tillicum LeLum House of Friendship – Articulation Agreement
- Chemainus Native College (CNC) – Articulation Agreement
- Snuneymuxw First Nation’s House of Learning (HOL) and School District #68 – Memorandum of Understanding
- Coast Salish Employment and Training Society (CSETS) – Draft Memorandum of Understanding
- First Nations Technology Council – Draft Memorandum of Understanding
- Tl’Amin First Nation – Developing Partnership Agreement
- Cowichan Tribes - Developing Partnership Agreement

The Centre for Continuing Studies has developed extensive programming to serve Aboriginal learners. In a recent presentation to the Regional Strategy and Academic planning committees, thirty plus programs serving First Nations Learners were identified. The report clearly identified Career & Academic Preparation Programs and the Centre for Continuing Studies as an essential area that provides access as well as capacity building opportunities for Aboriginal students and communities

First Nations Student Services: Shq’ apthut

An imperative resource for supporting Aboriginal students in their pursuit of higher learning at VIU is First Nations Student Services. From a First Nation context, student support and learning are indivisible. The academic success of Aboriginal students is enhanced when the physical, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual well-being of each student is considered and supported. First Nations Student Support Workers at each of the three regional campuses provide one-on-one support for Aboriginal students and offer a diverse range of services that include: listening and providing support to students with academic or personal concerns; provide information or referrals to community services, personal counseling, assist new students with applications, registration and timetabling, and provide information about Aboriginal bursaries, scholarships, student loans, and funding.

The new Gathering Place being built on our Nanaimo campus will also be a great resource for students and provide a home away from home as well as enhance a sense of belonging which is essential for retention of our learners. Phase one is estimated to be completed by the fall of 2010 and includes expansive student and Elder space. Phase two will include ceremonial and teaching space.

Elders-in-Residence

The Elders-in-Residence at VIU is a unique program that was first established in the First Nations Academic programs of First Nations Studies and First Nations Child & Youth Care. The Aboriginal Service Plan funding assisted VIU in expanding this program and hiring four new part-time elders-in-residence positions, bringing the total of Elders available to faculty and

students to seven. We now have Elders on each one of our regional campuses as well as an elder representing the Métis Nation. To date, the elders have been very active in advising faculty, staff and administration on matters related to Aboriginal education and Aboriginal issues as well as providing invaluable cultural teachings. The elders also play a pivotal role in supporting the retention of Aboriginal learners as they provide encouragement and understanding for students struggling to balance their academic studies and their cultural and family obligations.

Research and Inquiry into Indigenous Knowledge at VIU

Indigenous knowledge is a growing field of inquiry. Through our extensive ASP consultations, the question of “What is education for Aboriginal peoples?” was identified. The challenge in answering the question is complex as finding ways to support and develop a blended educational context that builds on both Indigenous and Eurocentric knowledge takes time and extensive resources. What has become evident through the Aboriginal Speaker Series, presentations from our Indigenous Teaching Scholars and on-going protocol workshops by Elders, is a growing interest from faculty and staff in the area of including Aboriginal ways of knowing and being in their teaching and programs. To date we have four unique projects in development:

- "Transformational Learning: Elders-in-Residence at VIU"
- Aboriginal Early Childhood Education Research Chair
- Call for papers: Canadian Research Chair Aboriginal Community Engagement, Education and Leadership
- Snuneymuxw First Nation and the Nanaimo River Estuary

Concerns

Funding will continue to be a challenge for VIU in finding sustaining flexible backing to support the longevity of Aboriginal programs. By direct comparison, limited funding available for Aboriginal students who are continually subjected to funding restrictions will persist. Aboriginal students have many barriers and challenges to accessing and remaining in post-secondary education. While specifically identified cohort's and outreach programs targeting Aboriginal learners are necessary to break down these barriers, they will take time to build, develop and produce high numbers of completion rates. Advocacy, support and creativity to explore new ways of increasing access must be engaged.

Efforts to enhance and expand further inclusion of Aboriginal content in programs and courses need to be seen as integral to curriculum and pedagogy, not as “add-ons”. Opportunities to increase awareness as how best to support Aboriginal students with extensive family, community and cultural responsibilities for faculty must be available and accessible. In addition, professional development and resources in the way of building capacity for infusing Indigenous knowledge should be incorporated and supported through a centralized area. Currently the Elders-in-Residence are contracted positions classified as “technicians” which does not adequately describe or recognize their experience or role as traditional knowledge keepers in their communities. Continued Elder involvement and guidance are critical for further expansion at VIU in relation to Aboriginal initiatives.

VIU's continued success and opportunity will evolve as we continue to persevere in providing quality accessible education for all across all program areas. A focus on continuing to build

transparent processes with local Aboriginal community partners based on mutual trust and respect will also assist in maintaining and deepening our relationships and endeavours in this direction. Formalizing the role FNAC will play within the institution is the first step to achieving this success.

Opportunities

A high number of Aboriginal student enrolments at VIU have been consistent and evidence appears to indicate that this trend will continue. Lobbying by Aboriginal people in the area of health, research, economic development and education will persist. The BC Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education and Training Partners are a strong provincial body that directly communicates with the Ministry on all matters relating to Aboriginal education. As the population continues to increase, Aboriginal leaders will in turn, continue to advance in their efforts to build capacity for self-determination and self-governance provincially, nationally and internationally. VIU in consideration of all the above, combined with its diverse program offerings, small class sizes, regional location, unique Elders-in-Residence program and a Chancellor who is also the National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, is well positioned to be considered a major educational supporter for these initiatives.