

***Made In B.C. – Volume IV***

**A History of Postsecondary Education in British Columbia**

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***Aboriginal Postsecondary  
Education***

***Formal Instruction for the Adult Aboriginal Population***



**Bob Cowin  
Douglas College  
July 2011**

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## Preface

Embarrassment provided the impetus for this report. While I knew of the growing attention and priority that Aboriginal postsecondary education is receiving, could specifically describe a few programs and services, and was vaguely aware that “lots of other stuff is happening,” I did not feel anywhere nearly as well as informed on this topic as I should be. It was high time I filled my knowledge gap.

The internet and networked libraries bring a wealth of information to our fingertips, and colleagues are constantly helping to fill information gaps and point me in promising directions. However, data availability is not sufficient. Without synthesis and organization, without some sort of an overview to help the novice get started, information riches are all too often ignored. It is for a lay audience, people such as me on this topic, that this introductory history is intended.

The more I learn about the evolution of BC’s postsecondary landscape, the more I am coming to appreciate the values held by educators and politicians over the years in shaping the distinctive characteristics of the BC postsecondary system. A recurring theme, especially in the formative years of the various educational sectors, has been concern for learning that goes beyond the content of particular subjects and occupations, learning that makes for well-rounded individuals, and a desire that the activities of colleges and universities contribute to the fabric of healthy communities. BC’s remarkable, although still inadequate, degree of multicultural and social harmony is in part a legacy of such educational values.

As mainstream public postsecondary education in this province drifts towards more of the sorting and stratifying function that one sees in some other jurisdictions and countries, I was heartened by the value system espoused in Aboriginal learning perspectives. I embarked on this project to learn *about* Aboriginal postsecondary education. I ended it looking for ways in which I might learn *from* it.

My journey continues.

*History is full of delightful reverses, where the opposite of what one predicts comes true.*

*- Edmund Carpenter*

Other papers in this series on the history of postsecondary education in British Columbia:

- Overview (2007)
- Faith-Based Institutions (2009)
- Continuing Education in Public Institutions (2010)

The cover logo is from the Justice Institute and was created in 2004 by Haida Gwaii artist James Cowpar in consultation with the Institute's Aboriginal Education Advisory Council. It reflects the concept of social justice and acknowledges the diversity of Aboriginal peoples:

- The top coastal design of a human welcomes and reaches out to everyone in four directions.
- The circle represents wholeness, togetherness and unity.
- The sweet grass, like the use of cedar in the west, represents the cleansing ceremony of the east. Its four points signify a complete connection. Each quarter connects to form a complete circle – the white, red, black and yellow representing the four colours of peoples.
- The copper shield symbolizes the social organization.
- The eagle and raven represent family, belonging and responsibilities, according to the practices of the clan systems. Their supernatural powers bring justice by providing meaning, understanding and solutions to problems people face, both past and present.
- The Métis sash is a woven, woolen belt. Its colours reflect the variety of Métis cultures, traditions and languages; represent the blood that was shed; the depth of the Métis spirit; the fertility of a great nation; the dark period of suppression and dispossession; the prospect for prosperity; and the connection to mother earth and the creator.
- The feathers symbolize strength, balance, vision and peace.

*Used with permission.*

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# Summary

The focus of this paper is on British Columbia institutions, public and non-public, that deliver formal education which is specifically intended to enroll adult Aboriginal students, regardless of whether the students are graduates from secondary school. It describes services as well instructional programs, but excludes courses that may simply cover Aboriginal subject matter. Informal learning opportunities and research initiatives about Aboriginal topics are beyond its scope, as are employment and skills training centres that provide specialized training, sometimes in partnership with other institutions, or that serve particular types of students.

Up until 1970, Aboriginal students as a group were largely invisible in British Columbia postsecondary education. Two national events serve as markers for the beginning of a new era in Aboriginal postsecondary education: the federal government's 1969 White Paper proposing – unsuccessfully and to pronounced opposition – the assimilation of First Nations people into the Canadian population with the status of other ethnic minorities rather than a distinct group under its own legislation, and, secondly, the 1972 policy paper of the National Indian Brotherhood, *Indian Control of Indian Education*.

BC's system of regional community colleges, which were to become important vehicles of access for Aboriginal students, was established mainly between 1965 and 1975 but most public colleges did not address Aboriginal education seriously until the 1990s.

By the 1970s, several isolated initiatives had been launched. The Native Education Centre (now College) was founded in 1967 in Vancouver to serve the urbanizing Aboriginal population. UBC introduced the Native Indian Teacher Education Program in 1974, followed by the Faculty of Law's legal studies initiative the following year.

The 1980s brought the beginnings of broader scale activity, including a cluster of Aboriginal-governed institutions such as the (now public) Nicola Valley Institute of Technology, the Chemainus Native College, and the En'owkin Centre. Some custom programs and services were emerging in public institutions.

It was in the 1990s that programming began to build momentum, moving beyond the initiation and incubation stage. This was a period during which Aboriginal people pushed to create "Indigenous space" (faculty, programming, language and culture) in public institutions.

The decade beginning in 2000 saw greater integration and inclusion, with programming for Aboriginal learners moving from the periphery towards the mainstream.

Although education is a provincial responsibility, Aboriginal peoples and their treaties are under federal jurisdiction. This dual responsibility has been awkward, and has exacerbated a number of funding problems that have led to short term, fragmented initiatives.

Within the public system, it is at some smaller institutions in rural locations, close to Aboriginal communities, where programs and services for Aboriginal learners have been most significant. Northwest Community College, for example, has indigenized and the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology has grown rapidly in recent years.

Adult Basic Education, First Nations Studies, and programs up to two years in duration have been important. The research universities have met with less success in their initiatives, although there are some notable exceptions, especially where the activity has occurred away from metropolitan main campuses.

The three dozen or so non-public institutions that belong to the Indigenous Adult and Higher Learning Association are generally very small, but they serve important preparatory and bridging functions, along

with offering some college-level programs (often in partnership with a variety of public institutions.) Continuing and Community Education courses, often delivered off-campus, have also been noteworthy.

Provincially, the Ministry of Advanced Education introduced the Aboriginal Special Projects fund in 2000. Similar short term funding has continued since then, and earmarked capital funding has ensured that most campuses now have an Aboriginal Gathering Place. A BC Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education and Training Partners group, with representation from federal and provincial governments, institutions and Aboriginal groups, formed in 2005.

### ***Stages of Inclusion***

*Inspired by similar work by the Aboriginal Human Resource Council, the Association of Canadian Community Colleges has proposed the following inclusion continuum.*

#### ***1. Business as Usual***

*College does not interact with Aboriginal communities and have not established policies or structures to specifically serve Aboriginal learners.*

#### ***2. Initiation***

*Some engagement with Aboriginal partners and beginning of more targeted recruitment, program development and delivery. Some support for an Aboriginal learning and services department, but this department relies mostly on project-based funding.*

#### ***3. Incubation***

*A more structured approach, with more formal partnerships. The college also increases commitment by establishing an Aboriginal gathering place.*

#### ***4. Integration***

*The college introduces more integrated recruitment, student services approaches and a more complementary range of programs, and begins looking at how Aboriginal culture and traditions can be integrated into the content of mainstream programs. Proactive practices for hiring Aboriginal faculty and staff and for Aboriginal student voice on campuses.*

#### ***5. Inclusion***

*Embeds traditional knowledge and world views into curriculum. Sustainable funding. The Aboriginal voice is present across the institution. The college integrates inclusion indicators in its performance measurement tools and reports on progress.*

*- Excerpted and paraphrased from Colleges Serving Aboriginal Learners and Communities: 2010 Environmental Scan, ACCC, November 2010.*



## Pretest

1. BC has about three dozen Aboriginal-governed postsecondary institutions, both public and non-public.  
True or false?
2. BC has more Aboriginal language families than the rest of Canada combined.  
True or false?
3. The number of self-declared Aboriginal students in postsecondary institutions is growing rapidly.  
True or false?

## Answers

1. *True, though most are very small*
2. *True.*
3. *True*

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# Introduction

Aboriginal education across Canada has varied significantly over time, but it is helpful to use four categories<sup>1</sup> to describe the evolving postsecondary educational philosophies:

## **Assimilative**

A colonial approach, wherein Aboriginal students were simply expected to fit into fixed programming determined by the dominant culture. This for many years was the policy of federal and provincial governments for students on and off reserve, with the most extreme examples evident in residential schools for primary and secondary students.

## **Integrative**

Recognizes Aboriginal students as a distinct group and adapts the educational institution to serve their needs. This model was first evident in BC postsecondary education in the 1970s, but it really did not become widespread until well into the 1980s.

## **Affiliated**

The institution (usually private) is under Aboriginal control but affiliated with another (usually public) institution, often for accreditation purposes. The degree of control of the partnering institution is sometimes a tension. While this model has been uncommon in British Columbia, a related model wherein institutions partner to deliver particular programs has grown steadily since the 1990s.

## **Independent**

The institution is under Aboriginal control. In BC, only two public postsecondary institutions (one of which no longer exists) have been under Aboriginal control. However, a few small private, not-for-profit institutions established in the 1970s led the way for more institutions in the 1980s and 1990s.

### ***An Understanding of Aboriginal People***

*According to Malatest (2002), the single most fundamental key requirement for successful Aboriginal post-secondary education strategies is for government and the public to have “an understanding of Aboriginal people.” This includes a true understanding of the historic and social factors in which Aboriginal people live in order to appreciate not only the challenges faced but, more importantly, their value-based epistemological perspective (i.e. their way of knowing, seeing, and doing in the world)...These perspectives need to be understood and reflected in post-secondary education.*

*A larger strategy is required that approaches Aboriginal post-secondary education beyond a “recruitment and retention” issue or problem. Aboriginal educators Virkness and Barnhardt argue that “from an institutional perspective, the problem has typically been defined in terms of low achievement, high attrition, poor retention.” Further, they suggest that the issue in more human terms is for a four Rs strategy – a “higher educational system that respects them...that is relevant to their view of the world, that offers reciprocity in relationships...offers responsibility over their own lives.*

*- Review of Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education Programs, Services and Strategies/Best Practices & Aboriginal Special Projects Funding (ASPF) Program, Ministry of Advanced Education, 2005.*

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<sup>1</sup> Holmes, David. (2005) *Embracing Differences: Post-Secondary Education among Aboriginal Students, Students with Children and Students with Disabilities*. Montreal: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation.

## ***Scope of this Paper***

The focus of this paper is on British Columbia institutions that deliver formal education which is specifically intended to enroll adult Aboriginal students, regardless of whether the students are graduates from secondary school. It describes services as well instructional programs, but excludes courses that may simply cover Aboriginal subject matter, e.g. in anthropology, history or the fine arts. The paper is descriptive and does not evaluate nor delve into rationale, policy, philosophy or plans.

To keep the size of the paper manageable, informal learning opportunities and research initiatives about Aboriginal topics and education are beyond its scope. Thus research centres, academic museums and libraries are not described here.

Employment and Skills Training Centres that provide specialized training, sometimes in partnership with other institutions, or that serve particular types of students are also out of scope. These include such organizations as:

- Squamish Nations Trades Centres
- Bladerunners
- Prince George Nechako Aboriginal Employment and Training Associates
- Okanagan/Ktunaxa Aboriginal Management Society
- North East Native Advancing Society
- Cariboo-Chilcotin Aboriginal Training Education Centre.

The two dozen Friendship Centres across BC – components of a national movement that began in the 1950s to support First Nations people moving into larger urban areas – may also offer some courses and programs, but these tend to be more informal or continuing education offerings. In short, the focus is on organizations whose primary function is to be an educational institution that offers ongoing programming for adults.

## ***Glossary***

Terminology referring to Aboriginal or native people is complex and not always what Aboriginal people would call themselves. Some of the following terms are adjectives and, while sometimes also used informally as nouns, respectful usage keeps the noun-adjective distinction in mind.

The federal *Constitution Act* of 1982 defines the Aboriginal peoples of Canada as consisting of three groups:

- **Indian**

Until 1850, people who followed the Indian way of life were accepted as Indians. In that year, a bloodline requirement was introduced in Lower Canada to define who could occupy Indian reserve lands.

The *Indian Act*, dating back to 1876 with the present version passed in 1951, is the federal statute defining Indian status. It, too, was originally developed to determine, among other things, entitlement to live on Indian reserve lands. Amendments to the act in 1985 came to treat Indian status, Band membership and residency as separate issues.

With the *Indian Act's* provisions rooted in colonial ordinances and royal proclamations, the term *Indian* had become offensive to some people by the 1970s. Nevertheless, the term remains enshrined in legislation and is sometimes used for official purposes, as well as in informal communication.

A **Status Indian** is a person included in the Indian Register, the official list maintained by the federal government as to who is entitled to certain rights and benefits. A **Non-Status Indian** is a person who considers him or herself as Indian or a member of a First Nation, but whom the federal government does not recognize under the *Indian Act*.

- **Métis**

Today Métis is broadly used to describe people of mixed Indian and European ancestry who self-identify as Métis, distinct from Indian, Inuit or non-Aboriginal people. Métis are excluded from registration under the *Indian Act*.

Historically, Métis was a catch-all to describe anyone of mixed ancestry but, from a sociocultural perspective, there is substantial controversy as to who qualifies as Métis. Connection to, and acceptance by, a historic Métis community can be additional criteria. Some have suggested that for legal purposes, only descendants of Red River Métis on the prairies should be recognized.

- **Inuit**

Inuit are the Aboriginal people of the arctic. **Inuk** is the singular form of Inuit. The term replaced Eskimo during the 1970s.

**Aboriginal**<sup>2</sup> peoples, the original peoples of North American and their descendants, is used more or less interchangeably with **Indigenous** peoples, **Native** peoples and **First Peoples**.

The 1970s saw **First Nations** come into common usage to replace the term Indian. It is a word with no legal definition and is not used outside Canada. It generally refers only to Indian peoples. It is frequently used to refer to politically autonomous Bands under the *Indian Act*, although it sometimes is used to refer to all Indian peoples, both status and non-status.

*Who is a real Indian? It's a wince-inducing question. For starters, there's that word – INDIAN. Replacing it with Aboriginal or First Nations person, though, is hard if the question is asked in the context of Canadian law, since the reply comes down to how the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs interprets the Indian Act provisions on who qualifies as a registered Indian....Yet there's no way to avoid the question in legal and political debates about the future of First Nations in Canada.*

*- Maclean's Magazine, 7 July 2008*

Certain status Indians have particular entitlements arising from membership in a **Band** or because they are affiliated with a First Nation that has signed a **Treaty** with the Crown. (Treaties are rare in BC but a number are under active negotiation.) Band members and treaty Indians may be entitled to some types of funding for postsecondary education that are not available to other Aboriginal peoples.

Terms such as Canadian Indian, Native Canadian and Amer-Indian are rarely used in BC. Contemporary, informal usage in 2011 includes Métis, Inuit, Aboriginal person, Native person and First Nations person. Reference to an Indigenous person – a recent term in world usage that has a neutral connotation – is less common in BC, but often viewed as appropriate. Indian is a term that tends to be used in contexts arising from legislation, and sometimes informally by Aboriginal persons. In everyday conversation, Indian can now seem dated or inappropriate when used by non-Aboriginal persons.

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<sup>2</sup> The term “Aboriginal,” referring to original people, comes from Latin and seems to have derived from Roman mythology about the oldest inhabitants of the region. It is associated in folk etymology with “from the beginning,” even though the Latin “ab-” typically means “away from” and not simply “from.” There is no definitive etymology. Usage in Australia includes “Aborigine.”

# Context

## Population

The 2006 census showed Aboriginal people as comprising 4.8% of BC's population, and as having a higher growth rate than the non-Aboriginal population. Although Aboriginal people more frequently live in rural communities in northern parts of the province, they are increasingly moving to urban centres. In fact, the national pattern is that half the Aboriginal population lives in large cities and their metropolitan areas.

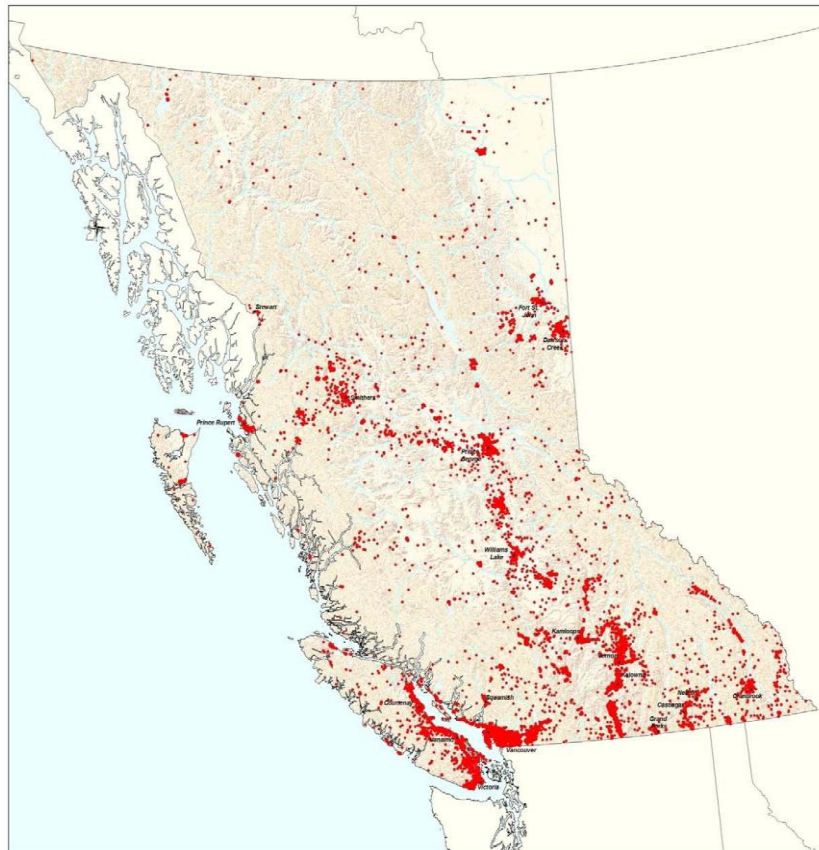
British Columbia is distinctive in terms of the rich diversity of its Aboriginal population, with an unusually high number of languages and cultures located here.

The 2006 census is based on an incomplete enumeration of Aboriginal people. It suggests that of the roughly 200,000 Aboriginal people in BC, two thirds are North American Indian and almost all of the others are Métis. A little over half of those reported as North American Indian were registered under the *Indian Act*. Of registered Indians, 58% were under age 35 (27% were under age 15, 17% were 15 – 24, and 14% were 25 – 34.)

### Aboriginal Population Distribution

Census 2006. Source: BC Statistics

1 dot = 5 Aboriginal people



Historically, Canada's postsecondary institutions have enrolled mainly 18 – 24 year olds in undergraduate programs. While many Aboriginal students are older than this, the age group remains a useful one to monitor, especially as the Aboriginal population structure is younger than the non-Aboriginal one. (Nationally in 2006, the median age of Aboriginal people was 13 years younger than that of the non-Aboriginal population: 26.5 years compared to 39.5 years.)

The 2006 census showed nearly one third of 18 – 24 year old Aboriginal students as residing in three of BC's fifteen college regions; Northwest (Terrace), Thompson Rivers (Kamloops), and North Island (Comox). In terms of the *proportion* of 18 – 24 year olds who are Aboriginal, the Northwest college region is by far the highest at 58%. Five other regions have a moderate proportion of Aboriginal residents in this age range: North Island (24%); Northern Lights, Thompson Rivers and New Caledonia (each 18 - 19%); and Malaspina/VIU (11%). In the nine other regions, mainly in urban and southeastern BC, Aboriginal people average 4% of the 18 – 24 population.

### ***Feelings of Alienation and Exclusion***

*Many research participants spoke of the importance of educators and administrators needing to view this experience through the eyes of Aboriginal people. Some key informants and the literature also underlined the importance of understanding/accepting the history and current examples of racism in our society and in post-secondary education related to Aboriginal people.*

*The project team heard from many Aboriginal people and groups who, despite the positive findings of the research, pointed to a lack of inclusion and cultural sensitivity and recognition on the part of public postsecondary institutions or the "system." This feeling among Aboriginal people varies by community and by institution; and it varies by the individual experiences of Aboriginal people in post-secondary education.*

*Further exacerbating this feeling of alienation is the frustration that many Aboriginal people have expressed that they have discussed and heard these issues before, and they have made suggestions before, but they have seen no follow through on their input to improve Aboriginal post-secondary education.*

*- Review of Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education Programs, Services and Strategies/Best Practices & Aboriginal Special Projects Funding (ASPF) Program, BC Ministry of Advanced Education, 2005.*

## **K – 12 Education**

Although education is a provincial responsibility, Aboriginal peoples and their treaties are under federal jurisdiction. Beginning in the 1840s, the governments of Upper and Lower Canada attempted to force assimilation of Aboriginal people through education. They funded churches to operate residential schools, the last of such schools closing in 1996. Across the country, about 60% were Roman Catholic and 30% were Anglican or United Church.

Amendments to the *Indian Act* in 1884 specified compulsory residential school attendance for status Indians under age 16, a requirement that lasted until 1948. Often underfunded, the schools drew to varying extents on labour from students. Educational standards tended to be low, with high school graduates sometimes functioning at a junior high level. Some students had little or no contact with their families and lived in substandard conditions.

In the 1940s and 1950s, a slim majority of Indian Bands wanted residential schools to remain open because they were seen to be the only viable means of providing an education for their children and as a place for children to live at a time of widespread family breakdown.

In 1969, the Department of Indian Affairs took sole control of the residential system, ending the sharing of responsibility with churches. As decisions were being made in the 1990s to close schools, it was revealed that many students had suffered physical, psychological and sexual abuse by some teachers and school officials. Along with attempts at healing and reconciliation, this situation led to some formal apologies and large compensation payments by government and the churches to former students in recognition of the damaging and lasting impacts of the schools.

Of the 130 residential schools that operated across Canada at one time or another, eighteen were located in BC (see Appendix).

In 2006, the First Nations Education Steering Committee, BC and Canada reached an agreement to recognize jurisdiction of BC First Nations on-reserve. Today, there are over 125 federally-funded Band schools across BC. There is, however, no formal and consistent accountability mechanism for First Nations schools and, as a result, educational standards, facilities, and teacher qualifications are variable. While there is an occasional inspection by federal officials, there are no national equivalents to school boards, or to provincial education systems, that can enforce standards or examine the quality of resources available to support learning. In BC, the First Nations Education Steering Committee was formed, in part, to address this situation. The BC College of Teachers, the professional licencing body under provincial legislation, reports that virtually all teachers in BC's First Nations schools now also hold College certificates of one type or another.

#### ***Impact of Assimilative Education***

*Historical barriers are largely due to the assimilation-focused education policies of the federal government. The 1996 report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples concluded that many current problems facing Aboriginal communities – violence, alcoholism, and loss of pride and spirituality – have been caused by the residential school system. Many Aboriginal learners have developed a feeling of distrust towards education due to their or their families' experiences in residential schools. As a result, the legacy of this system continues to be a barrier to Aboriginal participation in postsecondary education.*

*- Paraphrased from Colleges Servicing Aboriginal Learners and Communities: 2010 Environmental Scan, Association of Canadian Community Colleges.*

#### **Public Schools**

For over half a century, large numbers of Aboriginal students have enrolled as a minority culture in public elementary and secondary schools. With few support or compensatory services, the success of Aboriginal students was very modest. The situation has improved considerably over the past decade, but achievement gaps persist.

All public schools are eligible for additional provincial grants to support Aboriginal students, with funding proportional to Aboriginal enrolment. In terms of curriculum that goes beyond locally developed courses, the Ministry of Education introduced BC First Nations Studies 12 in 2000 as a course that meets the social studies requirements for secondary school graduation. English 12 First Peoples, a course that is also offered at

*In this respect, and to echo a view I heard expressed in many Campus 2020 discussions, perhaps the most important thing we can do for Aboriginal post-secondary learners in 2020 is to enhance their prospects of success in early childhood and primary education today.*

*- Geoff Plant, Campus 2020, April 2007*



the grades 10 and 11 level, was jointly developed in 2008 by the Ministry and the First Nations Education Steering Committee – the first such joint curriculum development.

Along with provincial funding of about \$62 million in the 2010/11 school year for school districts to support students who self identify as being of Aboriginal ancestry, the Ministry of Education’s Aboriginal Education Enhancements Branch oversees the development of Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements between individual school districts and the local Aboriginal community. These agreements, developed for five year periods, involve shared decision-making and the setting of customized, specific goals for the local Aboriginal student population. They emphasize academic performance within the context of traditional culture and language to support student development and success.

## ***Role of Government***

The Canadian constitution assigns responsibility for education at all levels to the provinces but legislative authority for Aboriginal peoples resides federally. Because the federal Indian Act limits federal responsibility for education to Indians between the ages of 7 and 17 who ordinarily live on a reserve, responsibility for postsecondary education rests with the provinces. Nevertheless, the federal government provides some non-statutory postsecondary support to status Indians and to selected postsecondary programs and services.

The federal government also provides funding under its economic development mandate for short term employment training and labour market adjustment, some of which finds its way into public and non-public postsecondary institutions in the form of contracts.

The provincial government is responsible for public postsecondary institutions, institutions which provide their own programs and services for Aboriginal students and which sometimes enter into partnerships with non-public institutions.

The landmark beginning of the current era in Aboriginal postsecondary education was the 1972 policy paper of the National Indian Brotherhood (later the Assembly of First Nations), *Indian Control of Indian Education*. The policy contained a section specifically on adult education and Indigenous leaders have been persistent in requesting the federal government fund all aspects of Aboriginal education. The paper was not only one of the last steps in ending the residential school system, but also an early step in the push for Indigenous self-governance.

### ***Indian Control of Indian Education***

*The philosophy of Indian control of Indian education has its roots in Saskatchewan. Over the past two decades, Saskatchewan Indian leaders have recognized education as a priority and as a result have become pioneers in the field throughout North America. In 1969, the Federation of Saskatchewan Indians undertook the first major education development, the Education Task Force.*

*- National Indian Brotherhood website*

In 2006, the federal government passed *Bill C-34: First Nations Jurisdiction Over Education Act*, establishing the legal foundation for the creation of Community Education Authorities through First Nations’ laws. Provincial enabling legislation, *Bill 46: The First Nations Act*, came into effect in November 2007.

# Organizations

This section describes organizations that have played significant roles in the development of Aboriginal postsecondary education in BC. It begins with community and educational organizations, and ends with government.

Organizations that have a regional, rather than provincial, mandate are not described here. One such organization, for example, is the Coastal Corridor Consortium, founded in 2008 with Aboriginal Service Plan money and consisting of five First Nations, two Aboriginal organizations (United Native Nations and Métis Nation BC) and three postsecondary institutions (VCC, Capilano, and the Native Education College.) The Learning Centre at Mt. Currie is also involved.

## ***BC Association of Aboriginal Post-Secondary Coordinators***

This organization of public postsecondary employees was established in 1992 as the BC First Nations Coordinators Council, with “First Nations” explicitly defined in the broadest sense to include all people of Aboriginal ancestry. It received funding from the provincial postsecondary ministry to support Council functions and to host two annual training sessions. Its scope was the BC public postsecondary system, with four Council positions held by coordinators and the fifth being an advisory position held by a ministry official. The Council was to meet at least four times a year, with one of those meetings attended by senior ministry officials.

Less than a dozen people attended the first gathering of coordinators, but the organization grew over the succeeding years to over fifty members. By 2005, twenty six (virtually all) of BC’s public postsecondary institutions employed at least one Aboriginal education coordinator to provide support services to Aboriginal learners.

## ***First Nations Education Steering Committee***

FNESC (“Fin Esk”) was established in May 1992 to “facilitate discussion about education matters affecting First Nations in BC by disseminating information and soliciting input from First Nations.” It became registered as a non-profit society in 1999.

Over 80 Bands and Tribal Councils are represented on its governing board. FNESC’s postsecondary subcommittee’s mandate concerns students and funding for students, whereas IAHLA (see next page) represents Aboriginal-governed institutions.

With an office in Greater Vancouver, FNESC provides administrative support for the First Nations Schools Association, the Indian Studies Support Program, and the Indigenous Adult and Higher Learning Association.

Indian and Northern Affairs Canada says that the work of FNESC “is recognized nationally as a best practice, and this partnership has proven invaluable for the department and BC First Nations.”

### ***First Peoples Worldviews***

*An effective implementation of English 12 First Peoples will draw attention to recurring themes that are characteristically part of the worldview of many First Peoples such as:*

- connection with the land and the environment*
- the nature and place of spirituality as an aspect of wisdom in First Peoples culture*
- the role of Elders*
- the relationship between individual, family and community*
- the importance of the oral tradition*
- the experience of colonization and decolonization (e.g. residential schools, the reserve system, land claims)*
- humour and its role in First Peoples cultures.*

*- English 12 First Peoples curriculum guide, 2008*

## **Indigenous Adult and Higher Learning Association**

Despite the exceptionally high linguistic and cultural diversity of BC First Nations, BC is unique in Canada in having a consortium, IAHLA (“Eye Al Ah”), to speak with one voice about Aboriginal postsecondary education. BC is distinctive in being a collectivist province in this respect.

The Indigenous Adult and Higher Learning Association was formed in 2003 and is the third generation institutional consortium. Then first generation represented the half dozen or so Aboriginal-governed institutions in BC that received federal funding. As funding moved to more a community-based model, the Association of Aboriginal Post-Secondary Institutions (AAPSI) became the second generation, with membership consisting of fifteen independent organizations registered under the the Society Act and the Private Post-Secondary Education Act. AAPSI’s members included Friendship Centres and organizations providing employment and training services.

In 1995, the combined enrolment at APPSI institutions was estimated to be 1,500 students, mainly from BC but also from Aboriginal communities across Canada. Many had partnership or affiliation agreements with public institutions.

Part of the impetus for forming IAHLA was a perception in the Aboriginal community that the public institutions with which they were partnering were charging excessive amounts for programming. (The public institutions were often delivering programs through their Continuing Education departments, units which had a breakeven or profit-seeking mandate.) IAHLA thus became an advocacy vehicle for publicly-funded Aboriginal postsecondary programming.

IAHLA sees its members as comprising a third educational sector, in addition to public and private (whether profit-seeking or not) sectors. Its members do not necessarily charge tuition fees and their students may not have access to government student loans.

IAHLA members must have an Aboriginal governing board and offer programming specifically for Aboriginal students (although non-Aboriginal students may also enroll in the majority of IAHLA institutions.) With a few exceptions from time to time, all Aboriginal-governed institutions participate in the consortium.

IAHLA receives administrative support from the First Nations Education Steering Committee and, since 2006/07, base funding from Indian and Northern Affairs Canada.

In 2005, forty Aboriginal institutions offered Adult Basic Education or postsecondary programs, half of which opened before 1990. In 2007:

- 25% enrolled more than 100 students
- 30% enrolled 50 – 100 students
- 45% enrolled fewer than 50 students

### ***Terminology Conundrum: Institute or Institution?***

*IAHLA avoids using the term “institution” because of the connotations with residential schools and institutionalization, preferring to refer to its members as institutes.*

*BC legislation for public postsecondary education, however, has a specific meaning for “institute” that distinguishes institutes from other colleges and universities. In this context, an institute (1) has a provincial, rather than regional, mandate and (2) offers programming in only particular fields (e.g. fine arts, protective services, or technology) or to particular populations (e.g. Aboriginal students in the case of NVIT).*

*Not having found suitable wording to reconcile these differing perspectives, and therefore having to choose between them, I have chosen to follow the tradition in my public college of using the restricted meaning for “institute” and a generic meaning for “institution.” While not all readers will agree with this choice, I hope they will see it as one made with awareness and respect for their point of view.*

Two thirds of IAHLA member institutions focus on language, culture and upgrading courses. In addition to these offerings, perhaps a dozen offer various types and amounts of postsecondary programming. Thirty-five institutions were listed on IAHLA's website as of 2011:

a-m'aa-sip Learning Place, Nuu-chah-nulth Employment and Training Program (Port Alberni)  
Burns Lake Native Development Corporation (Burns Lake)  
Cheam Education Centre (Chilliwack)  
Chemainus Native College (Ladysmith)  
Community Futures Development Corporation of Central Interior First Nations (Kamloops)  
En'owkin Centre (Okanagan Indian Education Resources Society) (Penticton)  
First Nations Training and Development Centre (Prince Rupert)  
Fort Nelson First Nations Community Education Authority (Fort Nelson)  
Gitksan Wet'suwet'en Education Society (Hazelton)  
Gitwangak Education Society (Kitwanga)  
Heiltsuk College (Waglista)  
K'ak'ot'latsi School (Coal Harbour)  
Kitamaat Village Council/Kitimat Valley Institute (Kitamaat Village)  
Kwadacha Dune Tiiy (Fort Ware)  
Kyah Wiget Education Society (Smithers)  
Muskoti Learning Centre (Moberly Lake)  
N'kwala School (Merritt)  
Native Education College (Vancouver)  
Neskonlith Education Centre (Chase)  
Nicola Valley Institute of Technology (Merritt)  
Northern Shuswap Tribal Council – Weekend University Program (Williams Lake)  
Nuxalk College (Lip'Alhays School)  
Saanich Adult Education Centre (Brentwood Bay)  
Seabird Island Indian Band (Agassiz)  
Sechelt Indian Band Education Centre (Sechelt)  
Secwepemc Cultural Education Society (Kamloops)  
Skeetchestn Band Education (Savona)  
Snuneymuxw First Nation/House of Learning (Nanaimo)  
Sto:lo Nation (Chilliwack)  
Ted Williams Memorial Learning Centre (Burns Lake)  
Tl'azt'en Adult Learning Centre (Fort St. James)  
Ts'zil Learning Centre (Mount Currie)  
Tsay Keh Dene (Prince George)  
Wah-meesh Learning Centre (Gold River)  
Wilp Wilxo'oskwhl Nisga'a (New Aiyansh)

Adult Basic Education and adult literacy programs at these institutions may be federally-funded through Human Resources and Skills Development Canada or through federal K-12 funding for “nominal roll” institutions. Funding for postsecondary programs comes from a variety of sources.

IAHLA members, as well as the organization itself, undergo an evaluation process on a five to seven year cycle to demonstrate due diligence and good governance. This stands in contrast to the provincial government's abandonment of institutional evaluation for public institutions in 2003. IAHLA most recently commissioned an evaluation of itself in 2011.

### ***Commentary about Aboriginal-Controlled Institutions***

*Aboriginal controlled institutes occupy a distinctive sector in post-secondary education, but the majority of them are struggling for recognition for the excellent work they do. Few Aboriginal institutes have access to secure, long-term funding; many are funded on a course-by-course basis, sometimes for only three months at a time....Many of the institutes began operation over 10 years ago in substandard facilities that are now in urgent need of repair....*

*Aboriginal institutes offer a wide variety of programs. Some are very small Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs, where adult students earn their Secondary School diplomas without leaving their home communities. Other offer ABE as well as college preparatory courses, post-secondary programs for specific occupations, college and university transfer courses and programs, and trades training. All IAHLA institutes are governed by Aboriginal Boards, and they consistently offer culturally appropriate, relevant programs that include significant individual support for adult learners...Several have registered with the provincial government through the Private Career Training Institutes Agency (PCTIA)....*

*Aboriginal students attending urban institutes face not only physical isolation from their families and communities, they also face the additional challenge of cultural isolation....While some colleges and universities have programs to help Aboriginal students adapt to urban life, few attempt to help non-Aboriginal students embrace Aboriginal values and culture...Also, despite the best efforts of many provincial post-secondary institutes, the impact of racism is a reality that Aboriginal students face on a day-to-day basis. Racism may appear in direct or subtle ways, but regardless of the form in which racism is manifested, its effects can be devastating. Aboriginal students are still too often subject to bias and stereotyping....Racism through omission results in curriculum that does not take into account Aboriginal history and experiences. Support programs for Aboriginal students, if they are offered, are too often based on a framework that denies the role of racism in the lives of Aboriginal people.*

*Aboriginal institutes can bring needed courses and programs to remote communities. Allowing adult Aboriginal learners to study in their home communities greatly mitigates the physical and cultural barriers to post-secondary education. With their acute awareness of the problems faced by Aboriginal students and the supportive structures they put in place, Aboriginal institutes can provide environments that are welcoming, collective, and inclusive of the history, culture and experiences of their Aboriginal students. These types of educational communities help Aboriginal adult learners to build confidence in themselves and their cultures....*

*Another common theme is the institutes' emphasis on language and culture promotion...All of the Aboriginal institutes are committed to providing learning opportunities that will encourage all adults to continue developing throughout their lives...Many of the institutes offer courses or general interest to local people...With local people as both instructors and students, the institute helps to develop a "Learning Community."*

*....the accreditation arrangements are as varied and imaginative as the institutes themselves. Sometimes, adult learner classes or individuals follow distance courses with assistance from local tutors. Sometimes courses are purchased outright from another institute, which supplies the instructor and all of the required materials. More often, the accredited institute supplies course materials, marks the examinations, vets the instructors, and oversees the course from afar.*

*- IAHLA Framework, March 2007*

Map as of 2007, from IAHLA website

## INDIGENOUS ADULT AND HIGHER LEARNING ASSOCIATION MEMBERS



Extracted from map Produced for illustrative purposes by Professional and Technical Services, INAC: November, 2006

## **Métis Nation BC**

Formerly known as the Métis Provincial Council of BC, Métis Nation BC is a minor player in the BC postsecondary environment. With a transient population and no land base, it is challenging for the Métis people to organize around a common goal.

Métis Nation BC does not have its own institution, but it does support students in IAHLA institutions. Mainly oriented to short term, job preparation skills, it also administers the federal Métis Human Resource Development Agreement for BC and operates the Métis Skills and Employment Centre in Abbotsford.

## **BC Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education and Training Partners Group**

By 2004, it was evident that while there was considerable activity in BC regarding Aboriginal postsecondary education, a more strategic approach was needed with a clear sense of short and long term priorities at the system level. Over a dozen organizations participated in establishing the Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education and Training Partners Group. Signatories to the March 2005 Memorandum of Understanding included federal and provincial governments, First Nations and Métis groups, college and university presidents, IAHLA and FNEESC. This became the first forum of its kind in Canada.

The group meets a few times each year and issues an annual report. One of the challenges it has faced are changes in the individuals representing the various constituencies, with new personnel sometimes bringing different emphases for the group's work. An external review of the group, completed as scheduled five years after the group's formation, made recommendations for strengthening the group's functioning.

### ***Post-Secondary Education Partners (PSEP)***

*While there are many concerns about how PSEP is operating, everyone indicated that it is an extremely important and invaluable initiative, and further that they are supportive and committed to helping improve effectiveness. Just the presence of PSEP alone is a valuable signal to the larger community that all of the key players are committed to this improving Aboriginal post-secondary participation and success rates in BC....*

*There is a clear belief among groups external to PSEP and even within PSEP organizations that the group has not been successful in getting information out to and obtaining input from the broader network of stakeholders with an interest in Aboriginal post-secondary education including among practitioners in public post-secondary institutions, Band schools and other related organizations....*

*Many PSEP members are concerned about the table's performance at both the strategic (lack of clear vision and direction) and tactical (lack of action and results) levels.*

*-External Review Project, Executive Summary  
September 2010*

*Through the 2010 survey, a new trend has emerged in how mainstream colleges are structuring themselves to meet the needs of Aboriginal learners. A number of respondent institutions emphasized the importance of adopting more holistic approaches to serving Aboriginal learners because Aboriginal services departments or offices cannot do it alone. There is a need for a more institution-wide approach to integrate services and supports more effectively.*

*- Colleges Servicing Aboriginal Learners and Communities: 2010 Environmental Scan, Association of Canadian Community Colleges, November 2010.*

## **Federal Government**

The ambiguity arising from education being a provincial responsibility while “Indians and Lands reserved for Indians” being a federal responsibility is intensified in postsecondary education. Jurisdiction over postsecondary education remains contentious, with many First Nations arguing that it is an inherent right over which they have jurisdiction.

In contrast to the province’s focus on all Aboriginal students, the federal government’s focus has been on status Indians and Inuit. It provides non-statutory funding for both students and programs.<sup>3</sup> The Office of the Federal Interlocutor looks for practical ways to improve federal programs and services for Métis, non-status Indians and urban First Nations people, but none of these groups meet Indian and Northern Affairs Canada funding criteria for postsecondary education.

When the Department of Indian Affairs agreed in the 1970s to devolve education to Bands, it chose to rely on First Nations and the provinces for the design and delivery of appropriate education. In 2000 and 2004, federal auditor generals pointed to flaws in the way that INAC delivers educational services, saying that because the department’s role and responsibilities were unclear, its accountability was weakened. Part of the problem are disputes as to what constitutes treaty rights regarding education; First Nations leaders see their rights as covering all education levels, including postsecondary.

Not until around 1989 did the federal government begin to develop a longer term policy that included postsecondary education. The department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) currently devotes about one fifth of its expenditures to postsecondary education. It provides about \$50 million annually for 3,500 students in BC to receive funding through their Bands, tribal councils or other designated agencies. The local agencies sometimes set maximum amounts per student that are less than the federal guideline to increase the number of students that can receive support.

In addition to funding directed to students in either postsecondary programs or college and university preparatory programs, the department directly administers grants to support course development and delivery under the Indian Studies Support Program. Other time-limited funding is delivered through Human Resources and Skills Development Canada.

In June 2011, Indian and Northern Affairs was renamed Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada.

### ***Accountability for Federal Funds***

*Internal Audit is unable to provide assurance, as key components are lacking, that the Program’s management control framework is adequate and effective in ensuring the achievement of Program objectives....monitoring and compliance auditing activities are not sufficient robust....*

*Internal Audit is of the opinion that:*

- *The funding authorities currently in use, coupled with the limited tracking of how funds are spent, do not support the sound stewardship of Program funds.*
- *Current allocation methodologies do not ensure that eligible students across the country have equitable access to postsecondary education.*
- *The Program’s performance measurement framework does not provide relevant or complete data to properly measure and assess Program results....*
- *Indian Studies Support Program funding is not adequately addressing the expected Program results of the increased availability of post-secondary education programs.*

*- Internal Audit, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 2008.*

<sup>3</sup> Information about federal funding appears later in the Funding section of this report.



## ***Provincial Government***

The provincial ministry or ministries responsible for postsecondary education have undergone numerous name changes and re-organizations over the past generation. Throughout these shifts, responsibility for Aboriginal postsecondary education has remained with education ministries, rather than with the Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation (the latter having only been indirectly involved in postsecondary matters.)

A Provincial Advisory Committee on Post-Secondary Education for Native Learners was formed in the late 1980s to develop a report for the Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology. The committee's report, dated January 1990, came to be known as the "Green Report." A *Status Report on Follow-up Action* was released in 1992 and, combined with input from the Aboriginal coordinators and Aboriginal-controlled institutions, led to the development of the *Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education and Training Policy Framework*, issued in 1995.

The policy framework remained largely unchanged for a decade. It called on public institutions to:

- Employ an Aboriginal education coordinator
- Establish an Aboriginal advisory committee
- Establish an Aboriginal access policy
- Develop Aboriginal programs.

(As of 2005, 26 public institutions had at least one coordinator, 25 had advisory councils, one third had Aboriginal representation on the institutional governance bodies, 23 had programs specifically designed for Aboriginal students, and 21 had entered into partnership or affiliation agreements with Aboriginal communities and organizations.)

In fiscal year 2000/2001, the ministry introduced the Aboriginal Special Projects Fund (described later in the Funding section of this paper) to provide limited, short-term support to public postsecondary institutions and their partners.

In November 2005, the province, the federal government and the BC First Nations Leadership Council signed the Transformative Change Accord ("new relationship") to close the social and economic gap between Aboriginal and other British Columbians, to finalize rights and land title, and to establish a new relationship based on mutual respect and recognition.

The Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education Strategy and Action Plan was to fulfill the postsecondary component of the accord. The BC Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education and Training Partners, described above, provides advice and direction to enhance coordination of the initiatives.

In 2007, the province provided \$15 million to create three-year Aboriginal Service Plans. As of 2008/09, eleven public institutions had collaborated with Aboriginal communities to create such plans. An Aboriginal Service Plan is a three-year strategic and operational plan developed by a post-secondary institution and its Aboriginal communities that outlines goals for Aboriginal learners in terms of access, participation, and success and identifies specific actions to be implemented to meet these goals

## **Industry Training Authority**

Created and funded by the provincial government, the Industry Training Authority (ITA) and its predecessors have responsibility for apprenticeship training in British Columbia. Since 2007, the ITA has focussed on encouraging Aboriginal men and women to participate in trades and apprenticeship training. Preliminary results have been encouraging, due in part to a volunteer Aboriginal advisory committee that works with the ITA to raise awareness among Aboriginal communities about apprenticeships. Another reason has been an infusion of federal funding through the Canada-BC labour market agreement (\$6

million over six years, beginning in 2008/09. In the first year, almost 500 Aboriginal people were beneficiaries.)

In 2009, the ITA transferred ownership of its mobile training unit to the Nicola Valley Institute of technologies to deliver preparatory programs for trades training in communities throughout the province.

In 2006, ITA reported 150 – 200 Aboriginal students participating in apprenticeship training. Five years later, due in part to an infusion of federal money under the Canada-BC Labour Market Agreement, some 350 Aboriginal students are participating in about two dozen communities throughout BC in ITA's Aboriginal Initiatives program.

# Educational Institutions

## ***Public***

The vast majority of BC public postsecondary institutions have programs and services designed specifically for aboriginal students, and many have entered partnerships or affiliation agreements with Aboriginal communities and organizations. Two public institutions, however, have been specifically mandated to serve Aboriginal students and were established as Aboriginal-controlled public institutions. Other public institutions described in this section serve a relatively high proportion of Aboriginal students or illustrate noteworthy commitments to responding to Aboriginal needs.<sup>4</sup>

## **Aboriginal-Governed**

Aboriginal-governed, provincially-supported, public institutions have Boards comprised of Aboriginal people. These institutions have the authority to grant credentials, as well as to receive annual operating and special grant funding from the province. Such institutions are rare in Canada.

BC's policy under the 1995 Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education and Training Policy Framework was that for an institution to be designated as an independent, accredited Aboriginal institution under the *College and Institute Act*, the institution must have had an affiliation agreement with a public institution for a minimum of five years, during which it must have had an enrolment of at least 300 students annually. The only institution to enter BC's public system under these criteria was the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology. (Although the Institute of Indigenous Government was established the same year, in 1995, it was created through a cabinet Order in Council.)

## **Nicola Valley Institute of Technology (Southern BC)**

In May 1983, the five Bands of what was then called the Nicola Valley Tribal Council contracted with the BC Institute of Technology to deliver a program in Natural Resource Technology in the Nicola Valley. Instruction began with 13 students in a basement in Merritt and sought to establish an environment that promoted traditional ways and fostered student success. The following year, the Tribal Association offered the program on its own, in affiliation with the College of New Caledonia in Prince George.

In November 1986, the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology was certified as a private training institution by the BC Ministry of Labour. Soon after, in June 1987, the Coldwater, Shackan, Nooaitch, Upper Nicola and Lower Nicola Bands incorporated NVIT as a society. The society ended when NVIT was designated in September 1995 as a provincial institute, a designation that came with a three year influx of federal funding.

In 1989, NVIT had begun receiving operating funds from the province, channelled through the University College of the Cariboo (now Thompson Rivers University) in nearby Kamloops. When it became a provincial institute in 1995, it began receiving grants directly from the provincial government. By 2001, operating revenues had reached \$4 million, seven percent coming from the federal government, seven percent from tuition fees, and most of the balance from the province.

Despite its name, the institute offers a comprehensive range of programs, including academic, business, social service and college readiness programs. It provides a range of credentials up to the two-year

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<sup>4</sup> This paper provides only examples of initiatives and is not an inventory. A great many significant programs, services and institutions are not described here.

associate degree level, and it also has authority to grant a Bachelor of Social Work degree jointly with nearby Thompson Rivers University. By 2001, NVIT's six main educational departments were:

- College Readiness
- Academic and Indigenous Studies
- Administrative Studies
- Continuing Education
- Natural Resource Technology
- Social Work.

NVIT originally shared facilities in Merritt with Thompson Rivers University's predecessor, the University College of the Cariboo. UCC offered credit and continuing education programming and, despite some collaboration with NVIT in social work, the two institutions operated fairly independently of each other. When it was decided that this co-location of institutions was not working, TRU withdrew in 2002/03 but continued to advertise in Merritt and the Nicola Valley, given that its Kamloops campus is only about an hour's drive away.

NVIT's permanent campus opened in Merritt in 2002, with an enrolment of 300 students, followed by a student residence in 2007. The community education department delivers courses in approximately 23 communities across BC annually. In 2007, the government closed the Institute of Indigenous Government in Burnaby and asked NVIT to offer programs in the Burnaby facility of the former IIG.

NVIT's commitment to Aboriginal cultures and traditions is reflected in the presence of elders on campus to guide and support staff and students. The majority of employees are Aboriginal, as is 85% of FTE enrolment. The focus of the institution, regardless of the field of study and credential, is on developing Aboriginal communities.

In 2000/01, the Merritt campus had 173 FTE students. This rose to 240 FTE in 2007/08 and 478 FTE in 2009/10, generated by 1,300 full and part-time students, two thirds of whom were female. In 2009/10, it received about \$7 million annually in ongoing operating grants from the province. Enrolment at the Burnaby campus, known as NVIT Vancouver, grew from 75 FTE in 2008/09 to 107 FTE the following year.

In 2009/10, 84% of NVIT's full-time equivalent enrolment was Aboriginal. Two thirds of BC's First Nations communities were represented in its student body. Until 1994, the majority of its employees were non-Aboriginal, but by 2001, two-thirds of the 64 employees were of Aboriginal ancestry.

What NVIT calls "continuing education," offered through Continuing Studies, tends to consist of general interest, non-credit courses, first aid and commercial transport. Programs that have been approved by Education Council and delivered around the province, sometimes on a cost-shared basis with the local

#### ***Early Days of NVIT***

*Students in the Lower Mainland might sneer at the facilities, but Premier Bill Vander Zalm described a native Indian-run post-secondary school as fantastic. Vander Zalm and Native Affairs Minister Jack Weisgerber toured the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology before meeting with local native leaders Friday as part of a series of meetings of the premier's advisory council on native affairs....*

*The Nicola Valley Tribal Council asked Vander Zalm to throw his support behind the privately run school, which has not received college status in BC. Fred [sic Gordon] Antoine, chief of the Coldwater Band and spokesman for the tribal council, told the meeting he was angered by Education Minister Tony Brummet's response to a request for accreditation for native-run schools. The chief said Brummet suggested the Bands apply under the same program used for foreign schools operating in BC. Vander Zalm said the end result was more important than the terms of the program, but added: "We should be able to deal with that one."*

*NVIT started in 1983 with eight students. The school now has 300 students studying under 55 instructors at two campuses.... NVIT principal Doug Baker said in an interview the school is lobbying for a permanent facility and full college status. It is currently located in the upstairs of a downtown Merritt hall and outside of town in a former elementary school with several portables.*

*- Vancouver Sun newspaper, May 5, 1990*

community, are provided by the Department of Community Education. The flexible and varied funding arrangements means that the same course could at varying times and places be base funded, funded from other sources, or provided as cost-recovery contract training. The teaching and preservation of local Aboriginal languages is an example of where NVIT might give funding and curriculum to a community organization to hire local instructors.

Looking to the future, NVIT is stating in its official plans that it is seeking designation by the provincial government as a special purpose, teaching university.

### **Institute of Indigenous Government (Greater Vancouver)**

The Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs resolved in 1991 to develop an Indigenous-controlled postsecondary institution. In 1993, the George Manuel Institute was established by the Neskonalith Band in Chase. It offered an adult education program, a First Nations business administration program, a university and college entrance program and an alternate high school.

The Union's motion and the George Manuel Institute (which continued to operate under its original name until just a few years ago) led to the creation of the IIG through an agreement between the Union of BC Indian Chiefs and the province in 1995, with three years of shared funding from the province and the government of Canada. BC agreed to provide basic funding for two additional years and designated the IIG as a provincial institute under BC's *College and Institute Act* in 1995. It authorized the IIG to offer a range of credentials, from one-year certificates to, eventually, bachelor's degrees.

The institute was intended to serve Aboriginal students, with curriculum and services geared to their particular interests and needs to exercise their right of self-determination. The vision was to offer university-level courses in such fields as Criminology, Political Science, First Nations Studies, Science, and Social Work.

IIG was originally located in the Gastown neighbourhood of downtown/east side Vancouver. It officially moved into a renovated wing of the Open Learning Agency building in Burnaby in March 2006.

The institution opened after only nine weeks of planning. A 1998 evaluation commissioned by the federal government concluded that the IIG had experienced financial difficulties in its second and third years of operation, partly due to inadequate planning and financial monitoring and partly because of insufficient funding.

The same evaluation found that "the IIG has encountered two significant barriers that have hampered its implementation: lack of time for adequate planning and insufficient financial resources to fully carry out its plan. As a result, the IIG has not achieved its enrolment targets, has had difficulty providing all the additional student supports, such as elders, needed to deliver its mandate and it has not been able to deliver the extension program in the manner and to the extent originally planned."

IIG's enrolment remained small in the ensuing decade and it never achieved its student enrolment target of 120 (restated to 143) full-time equivalent (FTE) students. Enrolment problems and management issues further complicated the financial situation.

In 2007, the provincial government announced the closure of the IIG and the establishment of a Burnaby campus of the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology, another public postsecondary institution mandated to serve Aboriginal students. As a result, many of the IIG's students, staff and assets moved to NVIT and the IIG's operations were wound up. NVIT was required to maintain separate enrolment reporting for its new Burnaby campus.

The IIG was not a happy institution in a number of respects, a situation exacerbated by a perception, whether or not well founded, that students from some Bands could be disadvantaged. Nevertheless, the IIG was a well intentioned acknowledgement by the province that Aboriginal students had not always been well

served by other public institutions and that a supportive environment was needed. Student feedback in 2000 indicated students were satisfied with instruction and the academic programs, even though employees reported a number of administrative challenges.

### ***Institute Problems***

*The RCMP is investigating financial irregularities at a Burnaby Aboriginal school. A forensic audit at the Institute of Indigenous Government found that out of a total of 104 students, only 20 were Aboriginal. Another 19 were non-Aboriginal, and 65 were international students.*

*The college receives an annual operating grant of \$2 million from the province, to be spent only on Aboriginal education. "They were offering programs for international students, which they weren't able to do through their agreement with the province," said Advanced Education Minister Murray Coell. The audit also found financial problems, but Coell would not elaborate....The college had revenues of \$2.7 million in 2005/06, consisting of the BC government grant and tuition fees....*

*The college is being wound down by public administrator Ruth Wittenberg, and its courses moved to the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology in Merritt, which has taken over the campus. The college opened in 1995, billing itself as Canada's first native-controlled public post-secondary college.... It moved to Burnaby in 2005, where it opened a new campus at a ceremony attended by Coell and a slew of politicians and native dignitaries.*

*Last February, the BC government installed a public administrator, after it received "complaints and reporting irregularities." The ministry suspended the college president ... with pay, firing him two months later. And it disbanded the college's board of directors and council....*

*Grand Chief Ed John of the First Nations Summit said the college may have taken in foreign students to make up the student quotas to qualify for government funding, which it's not supposed to do. "IIG has for some time been under some difficult operating environment," he said. "They tried to make a go of it."*

*- Province newspaper, 4 July 2007*

*Note: Litigation continues as of 2011 and some statements in this news report are contested.*

### **Indigenized**

Indigenization is the process of making Aboriginal culture, values and knowledge more evident and respected throughout the dominant culture. Two examples of indigenization in public institutions are presented here, each reflecting the community and context in which the institution is situated.

Northwest Community College represents a dramatic shift in institutional culture. Developments at Camosun College illustrate a more modest and evolutionary approach.

#### **Northwest Community College (Northwestern BC)**

Northwest Community College's predecessor was a vocational school established with an influx of federal funding for postsecondary facilities in the early 1960s. Following a provincial report in 1973 that recommended a community college for every region of the province, the vocational school in Terrace was transformed into Northwest Community College in 1975.

At its founding, Northwest was arguably the most focussed of BC's colleges on working class and union issues. It is one of two BC colleges that has kept "community" in its name, reflecting a deeply held value that its programs and services are there for the benefit of the communities served, and that all citizens should be able to access educational opportunities where they live and work.

One third of the college region's 75,000 residents are Aboriginal, by far the highest percentage of indigenous people in any BC college region. A First Nations Council was formed in 1996 to help shape the college's cultural and educational relevance to First Nations communities and learners. The college's Nass Valley centre operates in partnership with the Nisga'a House of Learning. Other regional centres include the Haida Gwaii, Hazelton, Kitimat, Houston and Prince Rupert. Terrace continues to be the main campus, serving one third of headcount enrolment, but enrolment is decentralized across eight other locations.

### ***Indigenization of Northwest Community College***

*The enhanced participation of First Nations and Métis learners at NWCC is an outcome of the transformative journey that the College embarked upon five years ago to enhance Indigenous post-secondary access and success. We took to heart the Memorandum of Understanding signed by the Aboriginal Post-Secondary Roundtable Partners in March 2005 and began a process of "recreating" the college. This journey ultimately led to our understanding that in order to "re-create" the college, we necessarily had to engage in a process of decolonization and begin to learn how, knowingly or unknowingly, we have all been participants in colonizing post-secondary education and creating barriers for Indigenous students.*

*The work underway at NWCC has resulted in significant transformation and the emergence of a new, bicultural college which seeks the respectful co-existence of two cultures: Indigenous and non-Indigenous or Euro-Canadian.... The work of decolonization is widespread - we are not "tinkering" with existing policies and procedures, or adding a few facades here and there. As an organization we have internalized a bi-cultural philosophy and culture. First Nations are in the "drivers" seat with us; they are guiding us and working with us towards the goal of biculturalism.*

*....First Nations content is woven into programs and courses. Our facilities are adorned with First Nations art to reinforce the importance we place on our First Nations people and to acknowledge and celebrate the rich, living culture of the First people of this region. Our program mix has been adjusted to include more Aboriginal programs, many of which we have made a priority of delivering within First Nations villages. We have accomplished this through the establishment of effective and respectful relationships and through working in true partnerships with the First Nations communities.*

*- Transmittal letter, NWCC Service Plan, July 2010*

The School of Exploration and Mining began in 2004 in partnership with the Smithers Exploration Group and the provincial government. It operates with guidance from the College's First Nations Council and two thirds of the school's population is Aboriginal. Successful and well funded, it has been able to offer extensive supports for students, including a full-time First Nations elder-in-residence, in its field camps.

With 46% of students in credit-based programs of Aboriginal descent, these 3,100 learners represent one of the largest enrolments of Aboriginal students in BC postsecondary education (and perhaps even in Canada.) Overall college enrolment has grown from 1,300 FTE in 2004/05 to almost 2,200 FTE (including 230 FTE in continuing education) in 2009/10.

To provide appropriate support, the college has increased hours for learning assistance specialists and for First Nations access coordinators, expanded the Elders in Residence program, and developed additional Learning Pathways courses designed to assist potential learners in navigating their way through the assessment, admissions, and application processes. Staff have the guiding circles assessment tool at their disposal to assist students with educational planning, and the college continues to focus its efforts on the development of culturally-relevant assessment tools and methodologies.

## **Camosun College (Southern Vancouver Island)**

Indigenization at Victoria's Camosun College began in 2005. The goals included ensuring every Aboriginal student sees his or her world reflected in whatever program of studies he or she chooses and building relationships of mutual understanding with the non-Aboriginal population at Camosun College. Today, about about a dozen employees work full and part-time in the department of Aboriginal Education & Community Connections

Camosun currently has more than 800 Aboriginal students, representing more than fifty Aboriginal nations plus Métis and Inuit students. They comprise nearly five percent of the total Camosun student population, more than double the regional Aboriginal population of two percent.

Full-time equivalent (FTE) enrolments for Aboriginal students has increased steadily over the last three years, with 464 FTE in 2006-07, 539 FTE in 2007-08, 577 FTE in 2008-09, and an estimated 600 in 2009-10.

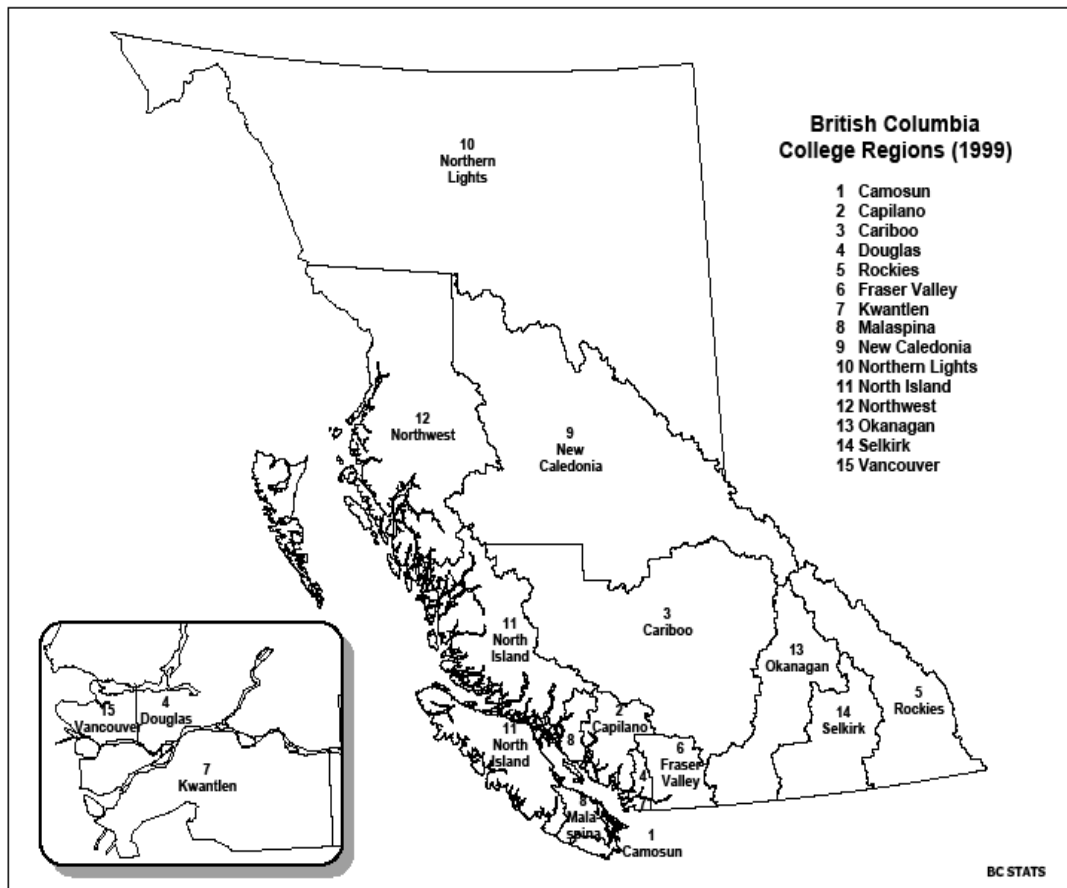
In addition to courses with Aboriginal content, Camosun offers:

- Aboriginal Academic Upgrading (ABE)
- Indigenous Business Leadership Diploma
- Indigenous College Preparatory Certificate
- Indigenous Family Support Certificate
- Indigenous Health Care Assistant Certificate
- Indigenous Human Services Career Access Certificate
- Indigenous Studies Diploma

TTE WILNEW (Understanding Indigenous Perspectives) is a hybrid course for employees that requires 20 to 40 hours of personal time to review content, plus four 2-hour talking circles (the face-to-face component of the hybrid course.) The course's goals include recognizing Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing; understanding the impact of colonization on today's students; helping faculty incorporate elements of an Indigenous worldview into course content or, for non-instructional employees, describing situations where this information will be of use; and describing and explaining the Camosun Indigenization project.



## College Regions in British Columbia



### **Large Aboriginal Student Body**

#### **College of New Caledonia (Central BC)**

The College of New Caledonia has worked closely with Aboriginal communities throughout its region, with programs and service delivery varying according to the local context. The Prince George campus, for example, has provided support and mentoring since the mid 1990s for students moving from rural communities into the city. In regional campuses, such as Fort St. James, where the community's Aboriginal population has been high, the College's Aboriginal service level has been higher. In Quesnel, in contrast, where the Aboriginal population is lower, collaboration with tribal groups has taken a different form.

From 1991 to 2008, the Aboriginal Coordinator position was overseen by the Carrier Sekani Tribal Council. In 2008, the position changed to a Senior Policy Advisor and Manager of the Aboriginal Resource Centre (formally First Nations Education Support Services), reporting directly to the College president.

By 1995, Aboriginal Advisory committees had been established at three campuses. The College's Board of Governors then adopted an Aboriginal Education and Services policy in 1999.

In 2011, the Human Resources Special Program, the outcome of a Human Rights Tribunal award, was initiated to address the need to hire individuals of Aboriginal ancestry for key Aboriginal Service Plan positions. This five year program will have a lasting impact on the number of Aboriginal employees at CNC.

The CNC Aboriginal Service Plan of 2007 consisted of five separate plans, each designed to address the distinctive needs of the diverse Aboriginal communities in the region served by CNC. This regional approach is consistent with the College's history of regionally decentralized delivery of programs and services.

In evaluating the impact of its Aboriginal Service Plan, CNC reported learning that *one size does not fit all*; programs and services for Aboriginal learners must be designed and delivered at the local level with direction provided by the Aboriginal community, and that this process must be responsive, timely and flexible. CNC's establishment of the Yinka Dene Education Council, a college-wide advisory committee, is a first step towards involving Aboriginal partners in College governance.

#### **Consultation**

*While the models introduced at most campuses were very successful, as noted above, this was not universally true. Where the College had preconceived ideas as to which programs and services would be offered there was less engagement by the Aboriginal community. When sufficient time was not invested in relationship building, the long term outcomes were less positive. In general, the College underestimated how much time, effort and commitment would be required to build effective, sustainable, mutually-respectful working relationships. In the future, this will be taken into account when working with Aboriginal partners.*

*- CNC Aboriginal Service Plan Report on Year 3, 2011*

Programming at the College of New Caledonia has included:

Aboriginal Studies Certificate and Diploma

Aboriginal Early Childhood Education Certificate

The AECE has approximately 20 full- and part-time students enrolled in online courses with the College of New Caledonia, Nicola Valley Institute of Technology, Northern Lights College, and Yukon College as the current partners. CNC began its third year of delivery in September 2010. Northern Lights College started offering courses in September 2010, and the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology (NVIT) was targeting a start in January 2011.

Aboriginal Teacher Assistant Certificate

Aboriginal Forest Resource Technology

With the conclusion of the Aboriginal Service Plan of 2007 in 2010, CNC allocated funding to continue the Aboriginal Liaison/Advisor positions at each campus. Since then, the Ministry of Advanced Education has allocated interim funding to CNC and other Aboriginal Service Plan institutions.

#### **Thompson Rivers University (South central BC)**

Then named Cariboo College, Thompson Rivers University's first classes were held at the Kamloops Indian residential school. It was not until 2002, however, that a concerted focus on support service for Aboriginal students emerged, with several reports written and studies conducted over the following few

years. In Fall 2006, a former Simpcw chief and tribal chief of the Shuswap Nation Tribal Council, an educator by profession, was appointed First Nation advisor to the TRU president. This provided the impetus for a variety of initiatives, and the university's strategic plan now calls for TRU to become the university of choice for Aboriginal students and First Nations. There has been no formal declaration of indigenization, but awareness and valuing of the Aboriginal community across the institution is growing.

TRU enrolled roughly 1,000 Aboriginal students in 2010, comprising approximately 10 percent of the student body (up from 4% in 2005.) Two thirds study in Kamloops and one third in Williams Lake. (The Williams Lake campus has a Learning Centre for Aboriginal students and hosts the Weekend University described elsewhere in this paper.) Enrolment has been fairly stable and proportional to the surrounding population at both campuses, although retention of Aboriginal students remains problematic.

The Aboriginal services team consisted of five employees in 2010. In addition to an executive director and a coordinator, there was a transitions planner, a life skills coach, and an instruction and outreach librarian. With the conclusion of the provincial Aboriginal Service Plan funding, some initiatives are threatened, but the University is hoping for replacement funding from the province that will enable some activities to continue.

The Gathering Place, a facility dedicated to serving Aboriginal students, opened in 2003 in what was formerly a house. The facility was expanded in 2010 so that along with academic and student services, it now includes onsite computers, a kitchen and lounge, and serves as a base for four elders. An octagonal pit-house style Gathering Place opened in Williams Lake at much the same time as the expansion of the Kamloops facility.

The House of Learning, a multi purpose building completed in 2011, included better office space for Aboriginal programs and services as well as a culturally appropriate, circular ceremonial space. (A recent handbook for Aboriginal educators explains cultural protocols to engage students and help avoiding offending them.)

Along with participation in the Aboriginal Teachers Education Consortium, TRU's programming in 2010 included:

- Community Aboriginal College Access Program (a university preparation program)
- Certificates in Aboriginal Tourism, Aboriginal Studies, First Nations Applied Economics (Open Learning), First Nation Tax Accounting (Open Learning).
- First Nations English as a Second Language
- Native Studies and First Nation Studies courses.
- Bachelor program in Social Work with NVIT. (It has been offered in Merritt, home of NVIT, since 1998.)
- Pathways program to run in 2011 and 2012 to prepare Aboriginal students to enter a health related program. BSN has 8 dedicated seats for Aboriginal students (10 percent of the current intake)

## Vancouver Island University (Central Vancouver Island)

In the early 1980s, what was then Malaspina College established a First Nations Advisory Committee. By 2005, VIU (then known as Malaspina University College) enrolled about 1,000 Aboriginal students, who comprised over 10% of the student body. In 2007/08, VIU reported Aboriginal students constituted about 8% of the student body – a decline not only in the share of enrolment but also in absolute numbers.

First Nations Studies grew from a handful of students in 1993 to more than 600 by 1999, despite problems in developing the program regarding structures, pedagogy, the mix of First Nations culture and western perspectives, and remarks at the official opening ceremonies in September 1994 that resulted in some attendees leaving abruptly. First Nations Studies became a separate department around 2000.

An 18-credit Arts 1 First Nations program was established in 1994, and a BA in First Nations Studies in 1996, using a learning community model that fostered strong collaboration among students, faculty and support services. Enrolment in the first five years was good, but not to capacity, (enrolment was managed to ensure First Nations students comprised at least two-thirds of the class) with some concerns expressed about the employability of graduates. Some First Nations community representatives felt they had more involvement during program development than during its operation.

### *First Nations Studies*

*At first, it was thought that many students would ladder into other programs from First Nations Studies; in fact, the reverse has occurred. Students from other areas have found areas in the First Nations program that they need to round out their post-secondary education.*

*- Aboriginal Education Coordinator,  
Ministry of Advanced Education,  
Training and Technology in Learning  
Quarterly, Spring 1999.*

Aboriginal enrolment in 2007/08 was about 750 full-time equivalent (FTE) students. 35% of these FTEs were in programs leading to bachelors degrees, and 23% in developmental/preparatory programs. Enrolment in baccalaureate programs, however, had dropped over the preceding five years. The average age was 28, compared to 35 for the university overall. Most students attended the campus closest to where they lived.

Although a smaller regional campus, Cowichan had a high of 750 Aboriginal students in 2004/05 (23% of campus enrolment), dropping to 475 in 2007/08 (17% of campus enrolment.)

Today, the university has First Nations Student Services, plus the Office of Aboriginal Education. Along with the Elders-in-Residence program that has existed for a number of years, it recently introduced Indigenous Teaching Scholars to serve as a resource to faculty planning curriculum and pedagogical methods. Collaborative activities, e.g. with Snuneymuxw House of Learning, Chemainus Native College, Coast Salish Employment and Training Society, Cowichan Valley Metis Nation, are expanding.

### ***Vancouver Island University (originally Malaspina College)***

*As recalls student advisor, Fran Tait, when she started working 25 years ago, there were only 11 First Nations students and she was the only FN staff on campus. Her position was created to respond to the fact that in Malaspina's catchment area there was a 20% First Nations population, but only a 0.02% representation in the college....*

*In the beginning, the College's attitude was: "We hear what you say, and know what you want. We'll do our best."*

*As Ms. Tait recalls, she had to constantly remind the authorities of the existence of the Indian Control of Indian Education policy. This policy was there to stay, and it meant providing FN instructors, counselors and programs.*

*Things started to happen over time. Where there was only a single First Nations staff 25 years ago, now there are a total of 24 First Nations staff and instructors on the four campuses where Malaspina operates.*

*Over the last decade or so, the College has had over 500 First Nations students attending annually. About three-quarters of these students are in academic post-secondary programs, the remaining are in upgrading programs. First Nation students are in all fields, although out of 350 students, for instance, 150 would be in First Nations studies.*

*- Survey of Post-Secondary Education Programs in Canada for Aboriginal Peoples. Prepared in 2000 for UNESCO by the Institute for Child Rights and Development and First Nations Partnerships Program, University of Victoria.*

### **Research Universities**

The national 2006 Aboriginal Peoples Survey found that among those attending postsecondary institutions across Canada, only 16 percent were enrolled in universities. BC's research universities have sought to enrol more Aboriginal students, and have more resources at their disposal than other postsecondary institutions, but their progress in serving Aboriginal students has been modest. This is perhaps due to campus locations (in the urban southwest, except for UNBC and UBC Okanagan), and the types of programs offered. Other contributing factors could be a value system that focuses on entry qualifications rather than on the learning achieved during postsecondary studies, and on individual achievement rather than on collaborative learning.

#### **Simon Fraser University (Greater Vancouver)**

With about two percent (450 students) of its student body self-identifying as Aboriginal in 2005, and despite some longstanding partnerships, Simon Fraser University was slow to devote explicit attention on a university-wide basis to serving the Aboriginal population. Since 2007, however, the situation has changed.

The Faculty of Education has offered First Nations academic programming since the early 1970s. This has included community-based as well as campus-based professional and field programs, along with undergraduate and graduate courses in Aboriginal education.

In 1988, SFU began partnering with First Nations in the BC interior around Kamloops. To date, 450 students have earned certificates, diplomas or degrees through these partnerships. Twenty-three of these credentials were conferred in Fall 2010.

One partnership with the Secwepemc Cultural Education Society came to an impasse in 2004 when negotiating a new agreement. The following year, SFU began partnering with the Kamloops Indian Band. In 2010, SFU reported that the deteriorating trailer site and unsustainable program costs had resulted in the closure of the informal campus. It said, however, that it would continue to offer First Nations language and cultural courses for Tk'emlups members and local First Nations communities on a cost-recovery basis.

*Compared to a number of other British Columbia post-secondary institutions, the participation rate by First Nations students at Simon Fraser University is low.... A recent study has reported that the single most powerful predictor of educational quality for First Nations students is the number of First Nations faculty present at the University. In this regard, Simon Fraser University has a challenging road ahead.*

*- First Nations University-Wide Strategic Plan, SFU, 2007*

At the main Burnaby campus, SFU's First Nations Student Centre, now known as the Indigenous Student Centre, opened in 1996.

The First Nations University-Wide Strategic Plan was adopted in 2007. At that time, staffing in the Indigenous Student Centre had reached 3.5 FTE. The Office for Aboriginal Peoples was established in 2009 to support and coordinate existing initiatives and to break ground on new ones.

Rather than partner with existing college preparatory programs in adjacent institutions, SFU launched its own Aboriginal University Preparation Program at its Surrey campus through the community education department. Tuition is free for the four courses in the full-time, one-semester program. Successful completion of the program leads to conditional admission to SFU.

Other academic programming in 2010 included the introduction of a new major, building on existing courses, for the First Nations Studies Program. First Nations language and Indigenous Education programs are also offered.

In Fall 2011, about fifty new undergraduate students of Aboriginal descent enrolled, fifteen of them under SFU's Aboriginal Undergraduate Admissions Policy, plus 22 new graduate students. The 500 self-identified Aboriginal students was slightly below the previous Fall's enrolment of 535.

### ***SFU Stepping Stones***

*"Aboriginal communities are on the cusp of regaining ownership of their education," says Georgina Martin, a member of both the Secwepemc Nation near Williams Lake, BC and the Lake Babine Nation. "We will no longer be told what to learn and how to learn it."*

*Martin is the curriculum developer for Stepping Stones, an online mixed-mode course being developed through Continuing Studies' Community Education Program. The course aims to deliver academic literacy and essential skills to Aboriginal people living in remote and rural communities.*

*Judy Smith, acting director of the Community Education Program, says her team has held several community consultations to learn about the Aboriginal community's ideas and expectations. "We aren't there as experts," says Smith. "We wanted to hear what the participants thought would work in their communities – an approach they greatly appreciate."*

*- SFU News, 7 October 2010*

## University of British Columbia (Greater Vancouver and South/Central BC)

Aboriginal initiatives at UBC began in the early 1970s but it was the acquisition in 2005 of its Okanagan campus in Kelowna that represented the largest advance. Program initiatives at the post-baccalaureate level, e.g. law and graduate programs in education, have met with considerable success. An initiative to bring more Aboriginal students into undergraduate engineering, on the other hand, was not successful. (As has been the experience in attempts to bring some other under-represented groups into fields where mathematics are important, interventions at senior secondary levels or later may come too late to adequately prepare students.)

The Native Indian Teacher Education Program (NITEP) started in 1974. It had the same degree requirements as UBC's basic teacher education program, but sequenced courses differently so that the first two years of study could be completed in field centres elsewhere in the province. The remaining three years required moving to Vancouver. The Faculty of Law's legal studies initiative began the following year, in 1975.

A 2005 article in the *Longhouse News*, a UBC publication, noted that declining enrolment and limited finances had led UBC to explore cooperative programming with other postsecondary institutions. In 2008, NITEP enrolled a total of 79 students across all year levels, with field centres having operated in Kamloops (with Thompson Rivers University) and in Duncan (with Vancouver Island University). The Nuxalk College in Bella Coola operated for two years as a NITEP centre.

The First Nations House of Learning (FNHL) was established in 1987 as a unit within the President's Office following the recommendations of the Berger/Kirkness 1984 *Report of the President's Ad Hoc Committee on British Columbia Native Indian People and Communities*. At that time, there were still only two Faculties, Law and Education, offering programs for Aboriginal students.

FNHL's purposes were to make UBC's resources more accessible to Aboriginal people and to improve UBC's ability to meet the needs of this population, guided by the principles of respect, relationship, responsibility and reverence. A dedicated facility, the Longhouse, opened in 1993.

The 2001/02 Annual Report of the First Nations House of Learning enumerated almost 400 Aboriginal students:

|     |                  |
|-----|------------------|
| 106 | Arts             |
| 106 | Education        |
| 71  | Graduate Studies |
| 32  | Law              |
| 24  | Science          |
| 53  | Other            |

It estimated another 100 students had not been identified, making for a total of about 500 Aboriginal students. This was half the target of 1,000 Aboriginal students by 2000 that UBC had been striving to achieve over the previous five years.

Partnering with other educational institutions was a feature in 2002 in the design of the Faculty of Commerce's Chinook Program to articulate curricula and ladder students into the developing First Nations Commerce degree. The Squamish First Nations worked with the School of Social Work and Family Studies that same year to allow students to attend classes in their communities outside of regular work hours.

A UBC Aboriginal Task Group was established in 2005 to, in the words of the FNHL director, "determine the means to achieve a more effective relationship between the FNHL and the President's Office for increased Aboriginal consultation and input into the University's planning and decision-making processes." This was in a year in which the FNHL childcare centre enrolled no Aboriginal children, leading to its closure the following year. The university accepted the task group's report in 2006 and the UBC Aboriginal Strategic Plan was completed in 2008.

In 2006, the FNHL estimated that 75 Aboriginal students had completed their programs and graduated that year. The 2008 Strategic Plan reported that there were 20 Aboriginal Coordinators in programs and Faculties at UBC's two campuses, along with sixteen faculty members with tenure or tenure track appointments.

From its opening in 2005 as a campus of UBC, having formerly been a campus of what is now Okanagan College, UBC Okanagan invested heavily in Aboriginal programs and services, and in forming partnerships with local organizations. In June 2010, for example, the \$600,000, 260 square meter Aboriginal Student Centre officially opened. Whereas in 2008, less than 1% of students at the Vancouver campus were Aboriginal, close to 7% at the much smaller Okanagan campus were Aboriginal.

In order to make the Okanagan campus more accessible, an Access Studies admissions policy (similar to the admissions philosophy of all BC colleges) facilitates the eligibility of Aboriginal students who do not meet UBC admission requirements at the onset of their studies.

*In 1948, Chief William Scow of the Kwicksutaineuk Nation officially sanctioned the use of the Thunderbird for varsity teams by presenting the University with the Victory Through Honour totem pole, carved by Kwicksutaineuk artist Ellen Neel. The first Aboriginal academic programs established in 1974 and 1975 included, respectively, the Native Indian Teach Education Program (NITEP and B.Ed. degree) in the Faculty of Education and the Native Law Program (now First Nations Legal Studies, LL.B. degree) in the Faculty of Law....*

*- UBC Aboriginal Strategic Plan, 2008*

UBC reported that in 2010, 630 students had self-identified as Aboriginal and that its Indigenous Academic Caucus, an informal association of faculty members who identify as Indigenous, had 26 members. In Fall 2011, UBC reported 977n Aboriginal students.

Aboriginal programs and services at UBC in 2010 included:

Vancouver campus

Arts: First Nations Studies, First Nations Languages  
Continuing Studies: Aboriginal Health and Community Administration Program  
Education: Native Indian Teacher Education Program, Ts'kel First Nations Graduate Studies. (The Faculty also had an associate dean of Indigenous Education, a position established in 2005/06)  
Medicine: Division of Aboriginal People's Health, Aboriginal Residency Program, and Aboriginal Admissions Stream (target of 5% of first year admissions) for the MD program  
Law: First Nations Legal Studies  
Forestry: First Nations Forestry Initiatives  
Science and Land and Food Systems: Aboriginal Science  
Commerce: Ch'nook Aboriginal Business Education  
Library, Archival, and Information Studies: First Nations Curriculum Concentration Degree Program

Okanagan campus

Aboriginal Access Program

**University of Northern British Columbia (North/Central British Columbia)**

Thirty percent of the 415,000 people in northern British Columbia have self-identified as Aboriginal. Approximately 650 (15%) of UNBC's 4,500 students at its main campus and four regional campuses are Aboriginal.



A small and newer research university in Prince George that is less than twenty years old, Aboriginal education is central to UNBC's mandate to serve the northern communities of the province. It offers a BA and MA in First Nations Studies with a variety of majors and minors, teacher education streams, a First Nations specialization in social work, a BHSc stream in Community and Population Health – Aboriginal and Rural Health, and reserves seats for qualified Aboriginal students in nursing, social work and education.

Certificates are available in First Nations Studies, as well as Aboriginal Community Resource Planning, First Nations Public Administration, Métis Studies, Nisga'a Studies and Traditional Environmental Knowledge. Continuing Studies piloted an Aboriginal and Small Business Leadership certificate in 2008/09.

The First Nations Centre provides comprehensive services for Aboriginal students, as well as academic and cultural support for all UNBC students, including the Northern Advancement Program, a peer support network, and First Nations Counselling Services. The Northern Advancement Program provides a transition year into UNBC for students from smaller and rural communities. Twenty five students per year take special Arts courses on Learning Strategies and Research Writing, plus regular UNBC courses as determined by the degree the student is seeking. Extensive academic and personal supports are provided outside the classroom.

In September 2010, the UNBC Gathering Place opened, providing opportunities for ceremonial and cultural events as well as conferences and workshops for Aboriginal people from across the North.

### **University of Victoria (Vancouver Island)**

Although the University of Victoria has had a fair amount of Aboriginal programming and services over the past five or so years, activities prior to then were more limited and specific. In the early to mid 1980s, Public Administration began offering a certificate in the Administration of Indigenous Governments via distance education. With the hiring of some Indigenous faculty in the late 1990s, the courses and programs moved to another department within the Faculty of Human and Social Development.

A distinctive feature of the University of Victoria is that it seems to be the only institution in BC that has offered a program for Inuit students, the Akitsiraq Law School. The four year program began in 2001 with one-time funding for 15 students at Nunavut Arctic College in Iqaluit. It led to an LL.B. from UVic. The law school also offers an Indigenous Law Program in Victoria.

The Office of Indigenous Affairs was established in 2007, replacing the longstanding Aboriginal Liaison Office.

With 800 undergraduate and 100 graduate Aboriginal students in 2009, the university estimates that its Aboriginal student body had grown seven times over the previous decade. It passed the 3% mark around 2005.

The 12,500 square foot First Peoples House officially opened in January, 2010. Built at a cost of \$7 million, only \$2.6 million came from the provincial government. A number of private donors, including corporations, contributed to its cost.

Education and Social Work each offer Aboriginal specializations and initiatives. Nursing reserves eight seats for Aboriginal applicants. Humanities and Social Sciences provide a minor in Indigenous Studies. Graduate offerings include MEd programs in counselling for Aboriginal communities and in environmental and First Nations science education. The MSW has an indigenous specialization. The Faculty of Human and Social Development provides an MA in Indigenous Governance. At the certificate and diploma level, offerings have included indigenous fine arts, Aboriginal language revitalization, and administration of Indigenous government.

### **Examples from Other Public Institutions**

All public institutions are paying attention – some more than others – to the Aboriginal students and communities they serve. Some initiatives, such as student advisors and dedicated office space, are widespread while other initiatives are distinctive to a place or institution. Rather than attempt to inventory an extensive, changing, and sometimes repetitive array of activities, the following examples help to illustrate what is happening in BC's public postsecondary system.

#### **Justice Institute of BC (Southwestern BC)**

Established in 1978 to train public safety personnel, the Justice Institute began explicitly taking into account the culture, issues and concerns of Aboriginal peoples in the mid-1980s. In 1990, a First Nations Advisor position was created to provide input on Aboriginal issues for all programs. However, it was not until 2002 that a twelve-member Aboriginal Education Advisory Council, representing Aboriginal communities throughout BC, was appointed.

In addition to supporting students, the Centre for Aboriginal Programs and Services offers courses that are designed to address capacity building within Aboriginal communities.

In 2007, the JI launched Aboriginal Leadership certificate and diploma programs for leaders and aspiring leaders within and outside Aboriginal communities. The following year, 2008, the institute undertook to enhance its indigenization. Then in 2009, the centre began a one-year preparatory program for Aboriginal learners seeking to enter a justice or public safety career. This program is based at the institute's Chilliwack campus in the upper Fraser Valley.

#### **North Island College (Northern Vancouver Island)**

Serving a scattered and remote population, North Island College emphasized distributed learning in its early years. (In fact, for the first fifteen years, until 1992, NIC did not have a permanent campus.) Instruction in learning centres in towns and villages included mobile learning units and distance learning. The college became a provincial leader in the use of interactive television, and remains so today with a full complement of online learning opportunities. Today, NIC has four campuses and four smaller centres.

Thirty-five of the communities in NIC's service area are Aboriginal. With a total headcount enrolment of 5,000 students in credit courses and another 5,000 course registrations in continuing education, contract training and community education, over 1,000 students, from 30 different First Nations, self-disclosed as being Aboriginal.

A second Aboriginal Gathering Place at Campbell River will complement the first in Port Alberni. The college's core of ongoing Aboriginal education include:

- Indigenous Focus Certificate in Education Assistant/Community Support
- Aboriginal Administrative Skills Certificate
- First Nations Associate of Arts Degree
- Cultural Heritage Resource Management Certificate
- First Nations Transition Program (located in Port Alberni)

NIC has had a director of Aboriginal Education for a number of years. With provincial funding in 2008/09, NIC established Aboriginal student advisor positions at each of the four campuses, implemented an Elder in Residence program for the Bachelor of Science in Nursing, piloted a peer tutoring program, and funded several First Nations community programs.

Training Services works with First Nations communities, industry and employers to design and deliver customized training on a cost recovery basis. Continuing Education offerings are an important component

of the College's efforts, and interactive television continues to be significant in the delivery of university level Indigenous literature courses at three locations.

Plans for the future include more integration of Aboriginal education across all divisions, expansion of community programming, expansion of access/pathways programming, and expansion of Elder in Residence programming.

*The number of Aboriginal students enrolled in public post-secondary institutions is gradually increasing. In the past six years, the percentage of Aboriginal students receiving a BC Certificate of Graduation from a public school has also increased.*

*Despite these improvements, however, only four out of 10 Aboriginal people in British Columbia complete post-secondary education, compared to six out of 10 non-Aboriginal students. A non-Aboriginal person is five times more likely to have a university degree than an Aboriginal person living on-reserve, and almost three times more likely to have on than an Aboriginal person living off-reserve.*

*- Geoff Plant, Campus 2020, April 2007*

# Public Postsecondary Institutions

Source: Ministry of Advanced Education



## ***Non-Public Institutions***

The following descriptions are a representative sample of institutions outside the BC public system to illustrate the characteristics of this educational sector. The majority, but not all, are members of IAHLA. They were chosen simply because they were the first ones for which I found websites.

The institutions are private in that they are not part of the public postsecondary system administered by the provincial government. They are, however, not-for-profit organizations, frequently incorporated as societies, and administered by boards of directors to meet educational needs in their communities. Most are located outside metropolitan areas.

These institutions are not so much an alternative or parallel system to public institutions, but rather serve more of a bridging, transitional and remedial function, sometimes also serving as local delivery sites for programs originating at other institutions. Nevertheless, a few do offer degrees in their own name.

Non-public, Aboriginal-governed institutions across Canada are not supported by provincial policy and do not have the authority to grant credentials, and must therefore partner with mainstream institutions. Those who see Aboriginal-governed institutions as expressions of self-determination may see the need to partner with mainstream institutions as a lack of respect from federal and provincial governments.

Neither are non-public, Aboriginal-governed institutions eligible for continuing operational funding from the province. From the perspective of First Nations, education funding is part of the umbrella of rights negotiated with the federal government years ago. They do not agree that federal educational funding is limited to elementary and secondary education.

The IAHLA website reported a survey in 2008/09, to which 22 of its 25 eligible institutions responded. The survey revealed the total enrolment in the responding institutions to be about 1,400 students. Two thirds of the institutions offered programs that ladder directly into a degree program. One third offered postsecondary Aboriginal language courses and one third reported a decrease in funding since the previous year.

A subsequent report to the Postsecondary Education Partners group in January, 2011 revised the 2008/09 enrolment upward from 1,400 students to 2,650 students at twenty institutions:

|       |                                  |
|-------|----------------------------------|
| 550   | Multiyear postsecondary programs |
| 650   | 1-year postsecondary programs    |
| 750   | Adult Basic Education            |
| 700   | Other courses and programs       |
| <hr/> |                                  |
| 2,650 | Total enrolment                  |

### ***Cariboo Chilcotin Weekend University (Central BC)***

In 1995, the Cariboo Tribal Council invited Thompson Rivers University and the University of Northern British Columbia to partner to bring bachelor degree opportunities to working members of the fifteen First Nations Bands in the Williams Lake area. These Bands have a population of around 8,000, half of whom are under age twenty-five, scattered in a region roughly the size of the province of New Brunswick. The first courses began in September 1997.

The courses are open to anyone, but most students are working First Nations adults. Entrance requirements are flexible and high school graduation is not needed. Students from the fifteen Cariboo Chilcotin Bands attend tuition-free, and some onsite daycare and reimbursement for travel and accommodation are provided.

Courses are offered Friday afternoon and all day Saturday, twice a month. During the summer, some courses move to the main campuses of the partner institutions.

More than four hundred adults have taken at least one of the courses offered regularly at Williams Lake in classrooms supplied by Thompson Rivers University. The first Associate of Arts degree was awarded by TRU's predecessor, the University College of the Cariboo, in 2001, the same year as UNBC awarded its first Certificate in First Nations Studies. UNBC awarded the first bachelor's degree in 2003.

The Northern Shuswap Tribal Council is discontinuing the Cariboo Chilcotin Weekend University in August 2011 following cancellation of funding from the Indian Studies Support Program of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada.

*The late Sister Mary Alice Danaher was the founder of CCWU, working closely with First Nations communities in its development....Her efforts establishing CCWU were recognized in her prestigious appointment to the Order of Canada in 1999.*

*Dixon was on the co-ordinating committee with Danaher when the original CCWU degree programs were selected, ranging from accounting to political science, he explains. "I can't thank Sister Mary Alice Danaher enough for being a mentor for this program. A lot of times we wanted to quit, and she kept pushing and pushing us. She urged us on and challenged us."*

*- 100 Mile House Free Press, 17 August 2011*

### **Chemainus Native College (Southern Vancouver Island)**

Chemainus Native College was founded in the late 1980s and has adopted many courses developed by the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology (an articulation agreement has seen NVIT instructors teach such courses with the assistance of Chemainus instructors.) It has also affiliated with Vancouver Island University and collaborated with the now defunct Open Learning Agency.

A tense moment occurred in September 1994 when the Ladysmith school laid off about sixteen employees and sent more than one hundred students home due to lack of funds. The cutbacks were at least partially motivated by internal Band politics (the Chemainus Band was receiving around \$750,000 annually in federal funding for K – 12 and postsecondary education) and were reportedly tied to a move by the college administration to be more independent of the Band.

Today, the College offers English and Math at the Adult Basic Education Level (Grades 11 and 12), two First Nations Studies courses, a career planning course, and both credit and community language courses (Hul'qumi'num)

*In an Aboriginal context, respect and ownership of Aboriginal knowledge is a very sensitive issue. If Aboriginal communities do not feel ownership of the curriculum, they will not buy into the academic programs that use the curriculum.*

*- Moving Forward: National Working Summit on Aboriginal Postsecondary Education, Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, 2010*

### **En'owkin Centre (Southern BC)**

The En'owkin Centre started in 1981 in partnership with Gonzaga University, a Catholic institution in Spokane, Washington, that was then engaged in several extension activities in British Columbia. The

Centre then moved into partnerships with the University of Northern British Columbia and what is now Thompson Rivers University. Its programming emphasis has remained relatively constant. Provincial funding for 20 FTE students flows to the Centre through Okanagan College.

The En'owkin Centre is an indigenous cultural, educational and creative arts institution in Penticton that offers university/college transfer diplomas and certificates. Its publishing company, Theytus Books, was the first Aboriginal owned and operated publishing house in Canada. By the mid 1990s, the self-financed International School of Writing and the En'owkin Visual Arts Program were major programs of the Centre. (The writing school was the first credit-granting school of creative writing to be operated for and by native people. Some of Canada's finest writers, including Margaret Atwood, were on the steering committee with the goal of eventually putting themselves out of a job.)

The Centre has partnered with a variety of public institutions to deliver postsecondary courses, most recently:

- University of Victoria: one year certificate in Foundations in Indigenous Fine Arts
- Nicola Valley Institute of Technology: college readiness and Okanagan language
- University of British Columbia (Okanagan) : bachelor's degree in Indigenous Studies

Other educational partnerships have included the Okanagan Language Authority/BC College of Teachers to provide certification for Nsyilxcen language speakers.

### **Gitksan Wet'suwet'en Education Society (Northwestern BC)**

What was originally called the Gitksan Carrier Education Society was established in 1982 in Hazelton to reduce the demand on the Tribal Council for community services so that the Council could concentrate on constitutional talks, comprehensive claims and litigating the land title action. The Education Society's mandate includes education, social services, health and child welfare.

The society has worked with a number of partners over the years to offer such applied programs as fisheries technician, carpentry apprenticeship, addictions resource worker, journalism, teacher education, territory management, and Aboriginal justice. Recent offerings have included licenced practical nurse and trades and technology bridging programs.

Some academic courses in support of the Associate of Arts degree have also been offered.

### **Gitwagak Education Society (Northwestern BC)**

In 1989 when the Chief's House of Learning opened in Kitwanga, it was BC's first Gitksan immersion school. The Gitwagak Education Society was incorporated the following year and began to administer the school and develop curriculum. The following year, in 1991, the House of New Beginnings opened to provide Adult Basic Education.

Today, the Adult Basic Education and post-secondary departments operate in their own buildings. Offerings have included home support/resident care and cultural tourism/small business.

### ***Aboriginal-Controlled Institutes as Stepping Stones***

*Feedback from both current and former students reveals that, prior to enrollment at public post-secondary institutes, completion or near completion of previous programs in Aboriginal-controlled institutes is a barometer for success. Former students indicated that the greatest contribution an Aboriginal-controlled institute makes is serving as a 'stepping stone' to further education. It is the moving away from the conventional linear education journey, to one that is grounded in Aboriginal epistemology and ontology, which has proven to be the most successful for Aboriginal learners.*

*Aboriginal-controlled institutes allow for flexible, semi-structured program changes. There are also less administrative issues hindering students who must temporarily withdraw from studies. Student support services are delivered in a culturally sensitive environment, which embraces the uniqueness of each student.*

*- Transitions from Aboriginal-Controlled Post-Secondary Institutes to Public Post-Secondary Institutions, Office of Indigenous Affairs (University of Victoria) and IAHLA, 2009*

### **Kwadacha Nation Adult Education (Northeastern BC)**

The Kwadacha Nation Adult Education centre is located at Fort Ware in the Rocky Mountain Trench, almost 600 kilometres north of Prince George. It offers Adult Basic Education using the BC college model, as well as high school completion leading to the secondary school Dogwood certificate. It currently cooperates with the College of New Caledonia to offer such short courses as various levels of First Aid, Foodsafe, specialized driver education and industrial safety courses. It also supports learners enrolled in online and distance education courses.

### **Native Education College (Greater Vancouver)**

The Native Education College (Centre until 2007) was founded in 1967 in response to the need that several chiefs identified concerning the migration of Aboriginal people to the Lower Mainland. It opened as a one room facility on East Hastings Street. The College moved in 1985 into a West Coast longhouse-style facility in the Mount Pleasant neighbourhood of Vancouver that can accommodate up to 250 people. Today, it advertises as BC's largest private (not-for-profit) Aboriginal college.

The NEC Native Education Society, a registered charitable organization, was formed in 1979 to govern the College. It succeeds the Urban Native Indian Education Society.

The College developed affiliations with Vancouver Community College (which used to include what is now Langara College) and had Criminal Justice programming delivered under contract by Douglas Colleges. Having registered with the Private Post Secondary Commission of BC, it also sought to broaden the scope of the institution to include academic postsecondary courses. Programs receive credit through an affiliation with Vancouver Community College and other public institutions. It also works with other organizations to deliver programs elsewhere in BC.

In recent years, the College has offered programming from basic literacy to certificates, diplomas and university transfer. Fields of study have included applied business, human services and allied health,



jewellery, justice studies, tourism and land stewardship. As many as 70 students have graduated at the same time, for a total of about 2100, mainly female, graduates between 1967 and 2007.

The Board of Directors decided to cease operations in July 2007, despite having registered 260 students that year. The college had received \$1.4 million a year from the BC government, an amount that had remained unchanged for six years despite rising costs and inflation. The decision was reversed at the eleventh hour when the Ministry of Advanced Education committed to develop a new funding formula for private Aboriginal colleges in late 2007.

In 2010, the college was advertising for both a new president and an academic dean. It signed a Memorandum of Understanding with SFU in January 2011.

### **Saanich Adult Education Centre (Vancouver Island)**

The Saanich Adult Education Centre is located in Brentwood Bay and is part of the Saanich Indian School Board. The Centre's governing board consists of two dozen representatives from four Bands.

The Centre's offerings have included early literacy programs, adult upgrading, and post secondary programming, all supported by onsite childcare and a hot lunch program. The First Nations Family Support Worker certificate is delivered in partnership with Camosun College and has had an average enrolment of twenty-five students, many from beyond the local region.

### **Secwepemc Cultural Education Society (Central BC)**

The Secwepemc Cultural Education Society in the Kamloops area, formed in 1983, and representing 13 of the 17 Secwepemc communities in the region, seeks to preserve and enhance Secwepemc language, history and culture. Along with archival work, publishing, and its primary function of language preservation, it brokers apprenticeship, adult education and university collaborative programs.

A partnership with SFU began in 1988/89 with about two dozen students. It came to involve twelve academic departments in SFU's Faculties of Arts, Science and Education, eventually serving 50 full-time and 300 part-time students, but the partnership focused on the humanities and social sciences such as sociology and anthropology. The relationship dissolved in 2004 when the SCEC sought more "bread and butter" programs, such as forestry, that were relevant to the local economy and social conditions. SFU agreed to the dissolution now that the agreement was up for renegotiation, saying that it could not accommodate the level of academic control the Society was seeking.

Two years later, in 2006, SCEC signed an agreement with the local Thompson Rivers University. SFU maintains a relationship with the Kamloops Band.

### ***Haahuupay'ak Adult Education Program***

*The haahuupay'ak Adult Education Centre is located in Tseshah First Nation's territory and the doors opened in 1976 as a G.E.D. program. In 1999, we aligned with North Island Distance Education School with Ministry of Education curriculum (fundamental to advanced Math and English courses.) We also offer the Language Proficiency Index so learners can prepare and test right here, in Port Alberni. The centre operates with funding and educational support from Nuuchahnulth Employment and Training Board, Tseshah First Nation, and the Society of haahuupay'ak School....*

*The regular program includes: Math, English, First Nations Studies, computer skills, career exploration, traditional arts, peer support, gym time, and academic and cultural resource speakers and field trips. This year we are adding a number of short term courses in computer training, Internet research skills and online learning platforms, as well as himw'ica (origin stories of Nuuchahnulth people.)*

*Our program is based on Nuuchahnulth principles of respect, family, interconnectedness and kindness. Each week starts with a group circle. Each year unfolds with continuous recognition of learners, through an incentive program and month-end acknowledgements. We also hold individual graduation ceremonies as each person completes a course. One learner presents the graduating learner with a blanket or Native silver jewelry. These gifts are laden with the respect and honour of our achievements.*

- IAHLA Newsletter, Fall 2006

### **Vancouver School of Theology**

The Vancouver School of Theology is an affiliated theological school of UBC established under its own provincial legislation. It is not a member of IAHLA, nor is it eligible for membership.

VST offers the only degree program for persons engaged in ministry in First Nations communities that is accredited by the Association of Theological Schools in Canada and the United States. Students take between five and six years to complete the Native Ministries Master of Divinity by Extension program, with students studying at various times in their own community, at regional sites, and in annual summer schools.

As of 2008 it had awarded 30 MDiv degrees, the professional degree for those seeking to become ordained clergy, to students from western Canada and the USA. As of 2010, VST's Native Ministry Program had 30 students enrolled.

In 2010, VST announced two new graduate degrees: MA and ThM in Indigenous and Inter-religious Studies, to be delivered in conjunction with the Iona Pacific Centre.

### ***Native Ministries Program***

*In the early 1980's, as Native communities became stronger and more self-aware, they began to form regional church groups who would represent their concerns. By the mid 80's the Native Ministries Consortium was born, consisting of four partners: VST, the Anglican Diocese of Caledonia, the United Church of Canada Coastal Regional group and Charles Cook Theological School in Arizona.... The NMC Summer School served as a strong catalyst for the development of further Native programs, ones which would accommodate different learning styles, honour oral cultures, be ecumenical, and in which excellence and quality prevailed.*

*Leaders from the Nisga'a Nation urged VST and the consortium to look at developing an extension degree program. A proposal for the Master of Divinity Degree by Extension was approved by the VST Board of Governors, and in the fall of 1988, the Native Ministries Program was initiated.*

- Vancouver School of Theology website

### **Wilp Wilxo'oskwhl Nisga'a Institute (Northwestern BC)**

The Nisga'a were the first native Band to run their own school board for elementary and secondary education, starting in 1976. They had offered adult and postsecondary education from much the same time, but it was not until 1993 that the Wilp Wilxo'oskwhl Nisga'a Institute was incorporated as a non-profit society. It was an initiative of what was then known as the Nisga'a Tribal Council to "provide quality post-secondary education and training to people within the Nisga'a community, and to ensure the survival of the Nisga'a language and culture."

WWNI's Board of Directors consists of one representative from each of the four villages of the Nass Valley and a chair elected at large. It is affiliated with UNBC, Northwest Community College, Royal Roads University and, most recently, the Justice Institute of BC for the delivery and accreditation of its offerings. (Arrangements have been made over the years with some other institutions, such as Malaspina Community College – now Vancouver Island University – the BC Institute of Technology, and the Vancouver School of Theology.)

Located in the village of New Aiyansh, it offers academic, vocational, technical and continuing education for adults. The institute has an endowment that exceeds \$1 million, seeded by a \$100,000 contribution from Nisga'a Economic Enterprises and later, along with the BC government and the University of Northern BC, a further \$250,000 donation.

The WWIP used to operate out of two classrooms in half of a former church., offering few optional courses beyond the prerequisites for the First Nations degree. In 1998, the Nisga'a Treaty led to the provincial Ministry of Advanced Education funding the WWIP, with additional funding provided through an agreement with the University of Northern British Columbia.

The Nisga'a Lisims Government enacted legislation in 2004, modeled on the *BC College and Institute Act*, that authorized WWNI to award credentials in its own name. 2007 was the launch date for a Master of Arts degree.

Continuing Community Education has delivered a wide array of courses, ranging from moose tanning through first aid to creative writing. Industrial certification courses, such as flagging, first aid, and Transport Endorsement are also provided.

In recent years, the most popular individual courses have been in language and culture. The mainstay program is the BA in First Nations Studies (which includes certificate options for Nisga'a Studies, General First Nations Studies, First Nations Language, and Public Administration.)

Along with with Adult Basic Education courses, vocational programs have been provided in such fields as carpentry, basic mining, and licenced practical nurse.

***Challenges Facing an Aboriginal Institution (Case Study)***

(not the Wilp Wilxo'oskwhl Nisga'a Institute)

*Significant emphasis is placed on short-term programming – mostly band-aid training....Another issue for the Adult Centre relates to the students themselves. In general, students arrive unprepared. Most have no established career goal, and have not thought about the prerequisites and skills needed to pursue a career...*

*A major impediment to success continues to be attendance rates. The causes include lack of child-care, transportation and alcoholism. The Centre has addressed the problem of child-care – a real need given the fact that they are dealing with families and single mothers. The median age of those attending the Centre is 25 years and the average student has three children.*

*The major limitation for the Centre's development is funding. The Centre receives no core funding from government; it is entirely project funded. Some of the post-secondary dollars of the community feed into the Centre to cover administrative personnel expenses, but the programs as such are proposal-driven. This leads to uncertainty and impedes on the First Nations control....*

*One of the problems with the School Board is their limited understanding of how a school actually operated. Many of the Board members themselves dropped-out of school, or are still wrestling with the scars of residential school. The Board's capacity to provide direction and leadership to programming is limited.*

*- Survey of Post-Secondary Education Programs in Canada for Aboriginal Peoples. Prepared in 2000 for UNESCO by the Institute for Child Rights and Development and First Nations Partnerships Program, University of Victoria.*

# Other Topics

## **Data Collection**

The BC government implemented an Aboriginal Administrative Data Standard in 2007 so that comparable data could be collected across government. Standardized wording permits Aboriginal people to self-identify as Aboriginal on administrative forms, as well as to specify their Aboriginal identity group: First Nations, Métis, or Inuit. The standard is administered by the Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation.

Legislation enabling public postsecondary institutions to use a Provincial Education Number, assigned by the Ministry of Education for postsecondary as well as for K – 12 students, has permitted the linkage of data bases in a privacy protected manner to track the flow of students among provincially-funded educational institutions. Where students have self-identified as Aboriginal, regardless of their mix of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal ancestry, this information can be passed in encrypted form among provincial data bases for statistical analysis (but not for storage in the student’s record; only information disclosed by the student at the current institution can be recorded at that institution.)

Around 14,000 of the 400,000 students in BC public postsecondary education in 2008/09 self-identified as Aboriginal (“currently Aboriginal”). However, data linkages using the Provincial Education Number revealed that a further 8,000 had self-identified at a previous institution. Thus 22,000 of a total 400,000 students who took one or more postsecondary courses sometime that year were Aboriginal (“ever Aboriginal”).

### **Aboriginal Students in Public Postsecondary Institutions 2008/09**

|                                                                      |              |                               |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|-------------------------------|
| Currently identified as Aboriginal                                   |              |                               |
| Only in the current postsecondary institution                        | 6,000        |                               |
| <u>In current institution AND previously in BC K-12 education</u>    | <u>7,800</u> |                               |
| Subtotal                                                             |              | 13,800                        |
|                                                                      |              |                               |
| Previously identified as Aboriginal (but not in current institution) |              |                               |
| In another postsecondary institution                                 | 800          |                               |
| <u>Only in BC K -12 education</u>                                    | <u>7,200</u> |                               |
| Subtotal                                                             |              | 8,000                         |
| <u>Total (“ever Aboriginal”)</u>                                     |              | <u>21,800</u>                 |
|                                                                      |              | <i>(5.4% of all students)</i> |

*Source: Student Transitions Project*

The “ever Aboriginal” measure is one that frequently appears in government reports about postsecondary education. It is the broadest measure, including students who currently have not told their institutions that they are Aboriginal. It also includes students who may view their Aboriginal ancestry as an additional or secondary identity; one urban college found that only one quarter of the respondents to a college-wide survey of students who said they were Aboriginal viewed their Aboriginal heritage as a primary identity.

The fluidity of measures of Aboriginal status based on self-identification is also reflected in Ministry of Education data for the public K-12 system in BC. In 1998/99, Aboriginal students comprised 6.7% of total enrolment. This percentage rose steadily for the next six years, reaching 10.8% in 2004/05 and then stabilized. This rapid growth in Aboriginal students probably has as much to do with data collection as with changes in the Aboriginal population.

Some provincial data sets include enrolments in the numerous short, non-credit courses offered through Continuing and Community Education. The almost 22,000 Aboriginal students in public institutions in 2008/09 included 5,000 who had enrolled in programs that lasted less than 15 days.

It is difficult to untangle the different types of enrolment, but the November 1 “snapshot” of all students enrolled on that single day gives a reasonable indication of enrolments that is not unduly affected by courses of short duration. The “academic year” measure gives a sense of how many students take a course of any duration at any point during a twelve month period. (The academic year measure is especially sensitive to Continuing Education courses of varying durations.) Taken together, the two measures provide a helpful indication of enrolment patterns.

**Public Institutions\* with the Largest “Ever Aboriginal” Enrolment  
2008/09**

| <b>Institution</b>                    | <b>November 1</b> | <b>Entire Academic Year</b> |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------|
| Northwest Community College           | 900               | 2,800                       |
| College of New Caledonia              | 900               | 2,100                       |
| Vancouver Island University           | 900               | 1,800                       |
| Thompson Rivers University            | 800               | 1,400                       |
| Northern Lights College               | 300               | 1,400                       |
| North Island College                  | 500               | 1,200                       |
| BC Institute of Technology            | 500               | 1,100                       |
| Okanagan College                      | 400               | 1,000                       |
| Nicola Valley Institute of Technology | 400               | 900                         |

\* Excluding research universities because they do not report Continuing Education enrolment. Their academic year, credit enrolments ranged from around 600 at each of UBC Vancouver, the University of Northern British Columbia, and the University of Victoria, to 500 at SFU and 300 at UBC Okanagan.

Another measure of the “volume” of instruction is Full-Time Equivalent enrolment. The 4,600 FTEs of instruction to Aboriginal students in 2003/04 in public postsecondary institutions (excluding research universities) grew to 5,600 in 2009/10.

***Data about Enrolment and Programs in Private Institutions***

*In 2008/09, IAHLA, at the request of the Ministry of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development, agreed to undertake research to create a “map” of Aboriginal-controlled institutes in BC, indicating where the institutes are located and what types of programs and services they provide. Given funding irregularities and fluctuations in student populations and needs, outlining this information and keeping it current is a complex endeavour.*

*- 2008/09 Annual Report, BC Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education and Training Partners Group*

## ***Funding***

Funding for Aboriginal students and Aboriginal programs and services has been an area of concern and often confusion. In BC around 2008, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada and the First Nations Education Steering Committee created an allocation process for federal funding wherein each community receives some funding based on past need, with additional funding accessed through a proposal process to address current needs. This has occurred against the backdrop of concern about limited tracking of how postsecondary education program expenditures and associated difficulties in terms of program planning (see, for example, the March 2009 INAC Post-Secondary Education (PSE) Program Audit Review.)

Overall, coordination among funding agencies has been limited and long-term funding is often lacking. Since the mid 1980s, annual increases in federal funding have been limited to two percent – less than the rate of inflation. The population of young Aboriginal adults has grown and high school graduation rates are rising. The result has been a significant drop in postsecondary buying power from federal sources.

### **Funding For Students**

#### ***Sponsored Students (funded by Bands or Métis organizations)***

*For the first time, such students can now access their student records and see two things: exactly how much their sponsor is paying and what specific costs they are covering. Such records are invaluable at letting students know these particulars as soon as possible.*

*- UBC Longhouse News, 2008*

The federal Post-Secondary Student Support Program provides some funding for tuition, travel and living expenses for status Indians and Inuit only. The University and College Entrance Preparation program supports students to enable them to attain the academic level required for entrance to degree and diploma credit programs. The grants to students do not always meet their needs; the Assembly of First Nations found that students only receive enough funding to cover half the estimated average provincial cost per student per academic year. Non-status and Métis students, as well as status Indians living off-reserve, face greater financial barriers.

INAC currently allocates approximately \$300 million of its \$325 million for Aboriginal postsecondary education across Canada to the Post-Secondary Student Support Program. There is, however, no national funding formula, with each regional office using different formulas to distribute funds to Bands. The Bands can use the funds for other purposes than supporting students, e.g. to pay for an education coordinator in their community. The funding model is currently seen by some as static and inflexible in that it allocates a pre-determined amount of funding to each Band, regardless of need.

Non-public institutions report that the majority of their students get their funding from federal grants that are administered by their Bands. Students in public institutions may also obtain government student loans. Some special project money is sometimes available to support students who are on employment insurance or meet other criteria, but such funding is not consistent nor sustained.

Studies have found one of the main barriers to youth on reserves completing postsecondary education was insufficient and sometimes slow funding from Bands and a reluctance to take on a student loan.

For the most part, Métis have access only to the same types of student financial support as non-Aboriginal students.

## Funding For Programs and Institutions

Historically, designated funding was generally not available for trades and apprenticeship training for Aboriginal students. This was ironic in that it was the federal *Technical and Vocational Training Assistance Act* of 1960 that led to the establishment of vocational schools in BC (subsequently melded with community colleges.) Today, some apprenticeship and trades program are eligible, especially if their entrance requirements include completion of Grade 12.

The federal Indian Studies Support Program supports development and delivery of postsecondary programs designed for First Nations students, both in Aboriginal-controlled and other institutions. In the mid 1990s, the federal funding target for both public and Aboriginal organizations was that every dollar provided through the Indian Studies Support Program would be matched by three dollars through the provincial government. BC's position in 1995, consistent with the federal position, was that the province would not provide more than 75% of funding to Aboriginal institutions. The Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada concluded in 2010 that the Indian Studies Support Program is valued and should be continued and enhanced.

Another source of federal funding has been through Human Resources and Skills Development Canada. HSRDC has provided some funding for project-based, skills training programs that promote increased participation of Aboriginal people in major economic developments. Some programs, such as the Aboriginal Skills and Employment Partnership Program (ASEP) provided no more than 50 percent of the required funding. Funding through the Aboriginal Human Resources Development Strategy was replaced in 2010 by the Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy (ASETS). Early in 2011, ASETS advertised for expressions of interest from Aboriginal organizations in northwestern BC.

There has been a fair amount of fragmentation among communities in their efforts to pursue trades training, amplified perhaps by apprenticeship programs being funded by a different branch of the provincial government than some other vocational training.

The provincial Ministry of Advanced Education introduced the Aboriginal Special Projects Funds (ASPF) in 2000/01. It was intended as limited, short-term support for projects in public institutions, but partnerships of public institutions with private Aboriginal institutions and organizations was encouraged. Funding started at \$1.9 million, but dropped immediately to \$1.3 million for the next three years. It recovered by 2005/06 and reached \$3.0 million when the fund ended in 2008/09. In contrast to these relatively small amounts, the province provided \$1.6 million over two years for Aboriginal transitions research to explore transitions into higher levels of study. Other targeted strategy funding that ended in 2009/10 included a total of \$15 million over three years to eleven institutions under Aboriginal Service Plans.

The province does not fund private institutions, but indirectly makes some money available to them by funding public institutions to deliver programs at partner institutions. Vancouver Community College, for example, has been explicitly told in its annual budget letter to devote certain funds to programming at the Native Education College. In exchange, VCC is able to count enrolment in those programs towards the enrolment target that government sets for it.

*Funding is an issue at every level of education for Aboriginal people, particularly First Nations (and, to some extent, Inuit) people, who see funding for postsecondary education as a treaty right.*

*First Nations individuals face a number of funding barriers that may include issues related to their relationships with their Band councils and communities, the arbitrary nature of postsecondary education funding in individual First Nations communities, time and program limits attached to the funding, and funding amounts that are not sufficient to cover postsecondary education costs realistically....*

*Funding problems with Indian and Northern Affairs Canada's postsecondary education programs have been well documented, yet changes are slow to be made.*

*- Literature Review, Council of Ministers of Education Canada, 2010*



## **Survey of Former Students**

All BC public institutions, except the research universities, participate in a survey of former students from certificate and diploma programs. In 2001, the project reviewed the results<sup>5</sup> from 2,600 Aboriginal respondents from the previous five year period. While these results represent only those students who successfully completed the better part of a year or more of postsecondary studies in a public college, university college or institute, their feedback and experiences are significant. By and large, the findings were positive. The weakest area was employment after leaving college.

In the 1995 survey, 2.8% of respondents self identified as Aboriginal. By 2001, the figure had grown to 4.1%, the same percentage of BC residents in the 15 – 44 age group in the 1996 census who were reported as Aboriginal.

### Demographics of Aboriginal Survey Respondents

- Older (median age was late 20s at the end of the studies, compared to mid twenties for non-Aboriginal students).
- Often had children (27% were part of a couple with children and 21% were single parents).
- 65% were female.
- Rate of reported disabilities (10%) was double that of other students.
- 45% had some prior postsecondary education.

### Educational Experiences

- Programs tended to be of shorter duration, but the fields of study were typical of other students. One third were in the Arts & Sciences. The main difference were that Aboriginal students enrolled in legal (e.g. criminal justice), social (e.g. social work), and construction programs at rates a little above average.
- 40% studied in the Lower Mainland, compared to 64% of non-Aboriginals. The highest concentrations of Aboriginal students at that time were in Nanaimo (Malaspina University-College, now Vancouver Island University) and Kamloops (University College of the Cariboo, now Thompson Rivers University.)
- Completed credentials at similar rates as other populations.
- 86% were completely or mainly satisfied with their studies.
- Former Aboriginal students were a little more likely to give good ratings to specific aspects of their program than non-Aboriginal students. Their most frequent suggestions for improvement was to say that classes should be smaller and that more time with instructors was needed. Another frequent suggestion was for more practical or hands-on experience.

### Subsequent Experiences

- Higher unemployment rates than non-Aboriginal former students, but more likely to say that their education had been useful to them in performing their jobs.
- 42% had taken some further education in the year after leaving their college or institute program. While this rate was similar to that of other students, Aboriginal students were less likely to go on to a university.

To put the BC data in context, national data show Aboriginal women as completing university at higher rates than men, but Aboriginal men are more likely to enrol in vocational programs. The educational attainment of Aboriginal people is lowest among those living on-reserve, intermediate in rural areas and towns, and highest among those living in cities (similar to patterns for the non-Aboriginal population.)

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<sup>5</sup> **2001 BC College and Institute Aboriginal Former Student Outcomes**, jointly published by the BC Ministry of Advanced Education, the Outcomes Working Group, and the Centre for Education Information Standards and Services, Fall 2002.

The BC Baccalaureate Graduate Survey encompasses only students who have successfully completed all four years of study for a bachelor's degrees, a small subset of all Aboriginal students who enter postsecondary education, but it too has found positive outcomes for the Aboriginal students who were eligible for the survey. The 2002 survey of the graduating class of 2000, for example, found:

- 72% of Aboriginal graduates were female.
- They were older (53% age 30 or older, compared to 24% for non-Aboriginal graduates).
- They tended to reside outside the Lower Mainland after graduation.
- They feel just as positively about their university experiences as their non-Aboriginal peers.
- They had a lower rate of unemployment.
- Fewer (46%) had incomes below \$40,000 and more were in professional positions (75% compared to 66% for all graduates).

A five year follow-up survey conducted in 2007 of BC's 2002 baccalaureate graduates had fairly similar findings. Satisfaction was higher than for non-Aboriginal respondents. However, salaries for Aboriginal respondents working full-time were slightly lower than the overall group of respondents. This may have reflected the differing mix of programs, and hence earnings potential, studied by Aboriginal students: 63% Aboriginal graduates were in Humanities or Social Science fields, compared to 40% overall. (None of the Aboriginal graduates had been in Health or the Physical Sciences.)

## ***Transition of High School Graduates into Public Postsecondary Institutions***

BC's Student Transitions Project has the ability to track students in a privacy-protected manner from the public and independent secondary school systems into public postsecondary education. Thus far, it has examined only the trajectories of high school graduates. It also has the ability to identify those students who have self declared as Aboriginal at some point in the public education system.

Although the rate at which Aboriginal students graduate from public high schools within six years of entering grade eight is much lower than the non-Aboriginal population (47% compared to 79%), the rate at which those who do graduate eventually enter the public postsecondary system is similar (about 70%).<sup>6</sup> The main difference in the transition rate is that Aboriginal graduates more frequently delay their entrance to a public BC postsecondary institution, taking up to five years before their transition rate matches that of non-Aboriginal students. Part of the reason for the delay is that Aboriginal students are more mobile, more frequently having to leave their home region to continue their studies.

## ***Facilities***

Dedicated space, including longhouses and other gathering places, for Aboriginal students, services and programs are now present at most public institutions. Although dedicated space is not new, a significant increase came in 2007 when the provincial Ministry provided \$15 million over three years to create more gathering places at public postsecondary institutions that reflect Aboriginal culture. The number of such facilities now totals 27, with some institutions, e.g. Thompson Rivers University, having more than one because they have multiple campuses. The nature of these facilities varies, ranging from stand alone facilities to centres within multipurpose buildings, and inspired by pit houses through longhouses to modern architecture. Many of the facilities are still too new to know their impact, or even their usage.

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<sup>6</sup> Student Transitions Project, Educational Achievements of Aboriginal Students in BC. March 2009. [http://www.aved.gov.bc.ca/student\\_transitions](http://www.aved.gov.bc.ca/student_transitions)

Facilities for the entire Merritt campus of the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology are significant in that the master facilities plan for the 17-hectare campus incorporates Aboriginal themes. The plan calls for a circular scheme and incorporates the paradigms of orienting to the points of the compass, a main entrance that faces east and a non-hierarchical arrangement of rooms and departments. The first building, semi-circular in form, opened in January 2002 with sophisticated environmental systems.

Facilities in non-public institutions are variable, ranging from substandard or marginal – a reflection of the tenuous funding arrangements under which they operate – to new and professional. Classes may be held in portables and trailers, former public schools, and purpose-built longhouses and educational spaces.

#### ***NVIT Merritt Campus***

*It has been the opportunity afforded by a rural site and the cultural prerogatives of an Aboriginal client that have served as the inspiration for Busby + Associates most stimulating project to date. The Nicola Valley Institute of Technology presents a new and refreshing perspective on our First Nations and the contribution they make to our collective contemporary culture.*

*- The Canadian Architect, August 2002*

## **Language and Culture Preservation**

BC is home to seven Aboriginal language families that encompass close to thirty languages. In contrast, the rest of Canada has only half a dozen other Aboriginal language families and only about thirty-five other distinct languages and dialects. The linguistic density of BC is high and given the close association between language and culture, preservation and revitalization of languages is a priority for many communities.

There has been a concerted effort in BC to preserve language and culture in an academic sense, which implies crediting learning. The general pattern has been for communities in southern BC to work with the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology and the University of Victoria on language initiatives. Central and northern BC Bands have tended to partner with the University of Northern BC.

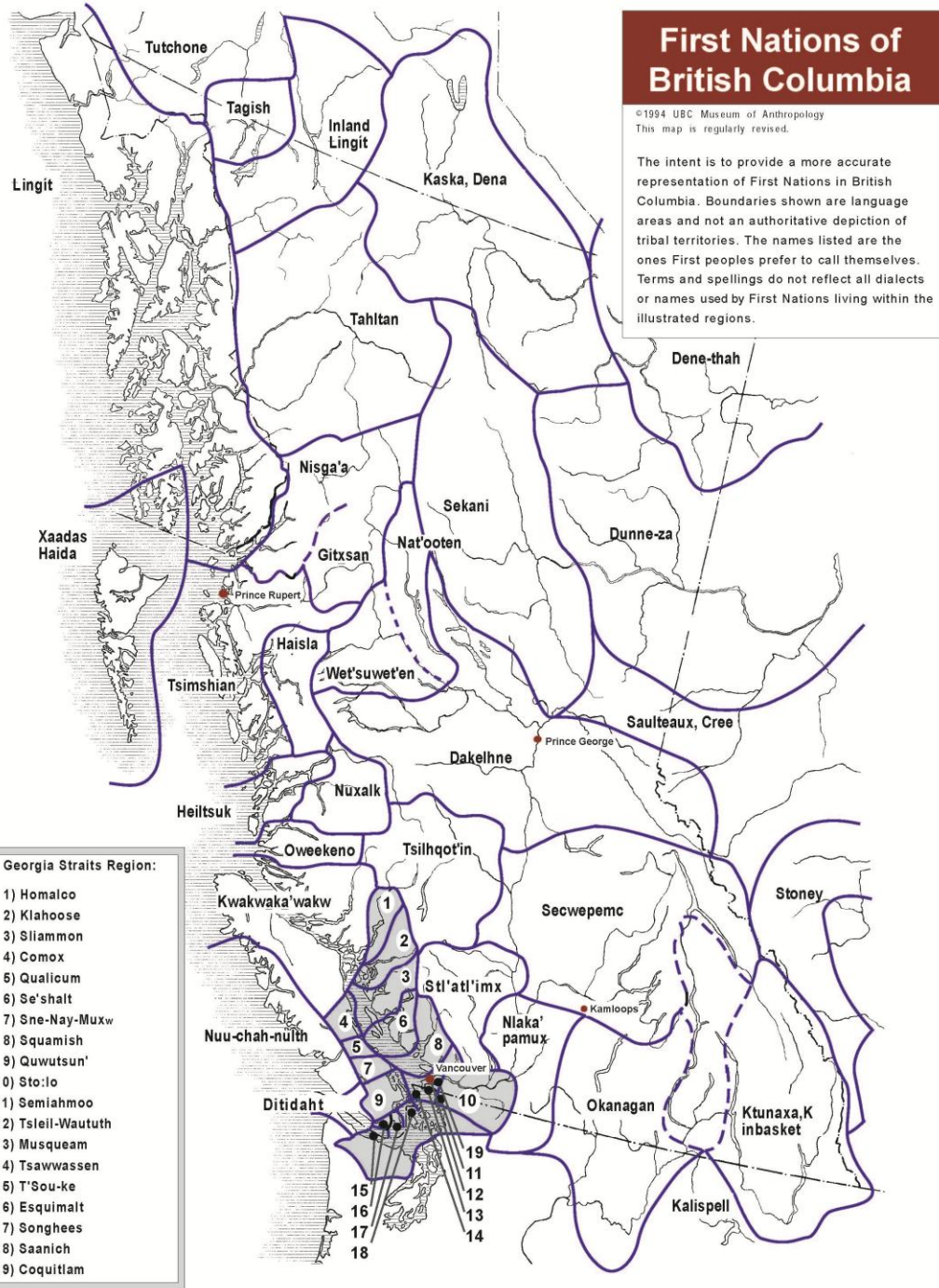
#### ***Cultural Preservation through Language Acquisition***

*I enjoyed Mark Cardwell's piece on the precarious situation of First Nations languages in Canada and ongoing revitalization projects....there seems to be some confusion between two fundamentally distinct types of revitalization programs....*

*Language nests are preschool immersion programs, in which small children are exposed exclusively to the indigenous language throughout the day, on a daily basis....However, language nests are not a feasible option in cases where very few fluent speakers remain or where the remaining speakers are elderly....In such situations, the only option is to first increase the number of fluent adult speakers in the community.*

*This is the goal of master-apprentice programs, which pair up a fluent speaker, usually an elder, with a somewhat younger adult learner. In this kind of one-on-one "immersion" scenario, the master-apprentice team commits to spending a considerable amount of time together (10 to 20 hours per week) pursuing various kinds of everyday activities, during which all communication takes place in the indigenous language. Given the dire situation of endangered languages in BC, in particular, great emphasis is being placed on the master-apprentice approach at this stage.*

*- Letter from Gunnar Olafur Hansson, University Affairs, February, 2011*



## Continuing Education and Off-Campus Delivery

Continuing and Community Education have a variety of meanings and structures across BC postsecondary institutions. The courses that they offer tend to come and go, contingent on student demand and cost-recovery funding. They are typically open access, quick response operations that can be flexible in responding to the educational needs of a particular student population. Funding for student supports in community-based education may be lacking; on the other hand, fewer supports may be needed when the student is learning in his or her home community.

An example of outreach activity into Aboriginal communities were the First Nations Education Centres operated by Open Learning Agency. OLA, originally the Open Learning Institute, was BC's public distance education postsecondary institution. The provincial government decided to disband it in 2005, and portions of its operations were distributed among other public institutions.

Since at least the mid 1990s, OLA had delivery agreements with twenty First Nations communities to enable students to take college and university courses without leaving their communities. Courses were offered in a classroom setting and supported by onsite tutors.

Unlike other OLA Learning Centres, subsequently renamed Skills Centres, the First Nations Education Centres were partnerships exclusively with Bands. Any course offered by OLA was available to students, although the majority of course registrations came in Adult Basic Education courses to achieve Grade 12 graduation. Exams were administered and invigilated through Band offices, with several students writing at the same time.

By way of other examples of community-based programming, North Island College has recently offered:

- Residential Building Maintenance Worker (in collaboration with BC Hydro, Homalco Band, Cape Mudge Band, Campbell River Band, and the BC Construction Association)
- Retail Training (in collaboration with Wal-Mart and three Bands)
- Carpentry Foundation (on reserve in Campbell River and planned for Ahousaht)
- Transport Canada Marine Training (in collaboration with Ahousaht First Nations. Previously offered in Alert Bay and Bella Coola.)
- Natural Resource Occupational Skills Training (in partnership with Natural Resources Sector Employers and Strategic Management)
- Standing Tree to Standing Home Project (led by the EcoTrust in collaboration five First Nations, with programming delivered by North Island College and Vancouver Island University)
- Language revitalization (in collaboration with the University of Victoria and three First Nations)

### **Community-Based Programs**

*Through the 2005 survey, colleges affirmed the importance of community-based programming as one of the most effective ways of meeting the learning needs of Aboriginal students. Colleges are well positioned to deliver community-based and on-reserve programs because they are already in close proximity to many Aboriginal communities and reserves. Community outreach and partnerships are also at the core of how colleges do business... Community-based delivery enables Aboriginal learners from more isolated communities to begin postsecondary education within their own community... community-based programs can often ladder or bridge into higher level college programs, or even university programs....*

*Fifty percent of colleges [across Canada] offer community-based programs for Aboriginal learners. These programs are typically offered through colleges' continuing education or contract training services. The programs designed specifically for Aboriginal students are done in cooperation with Aboriginal communities...*

*One key area for community-based training is related to trades and apprenticeship training. An increasing number of colleges... have acquired mobile trades training trailers that are equipped to provide trades training in rural and remote communities.*

*- Colleges Serving Aboriginal Learners and Communities: 2010 Environmental Scan, Association of Canadian Community Colleges, November 2010.*

- Cultural Heritage Resource Management (piloted near Gold River)
- Health Care Assistant (in Port Hardy and for a Nuu-chah-nulth student cohort in Port Alberni)

Other activities that resemble Continuing Education are operated by associations that fall outside the scope of this paper because they are not educational institutions. Nevertheless, their work needs to be acknowledged.

One such organization is the BC Aboriginal Mine Training Association. Based in Kamloops and Dease Lake, it partners with the BC Institute of Technology, Thompson Rivers University and Northwest Community College. The association is one of sixteen Aboriginal Skills Employment Programs operating across Canada in 2010 with federal funding for Aboriginal training-to-jobs initiatives under Human Resource Services Development Canada. The Aboriginal Mine Training Association opened in April 2010 with a mandate until 2012, drawing upon \$22 million in in-kind contributions from mining companies and associations and \$4.5 million from the federal government.

# Concluding Thoughts

Given that this paper was a professional development project, I'll follow good educational practice by providing some personal reflections as to the meaning of what I have learned. My thoughts are a work in progress, and I would welcome feedback that helps me further develop or modify them.

Two things strike me, each of which I see as positive but with a vulnerable underbelly. The first is simply the amount of activity across all regions of the province, and in a wide range of institutions, to serve the Aboriginal population. Often overdue and perhaps sometimes more token than substantive, a great deal of programming has nevertheless occurred over the past twenty years.

The vulnerable aspect of these initiatives is that they have been piecemeal and opportunistic (in the best sense of the word), often as a result of short term funding from a variety of sources and reflecting the visions of changing individuals in leadership positions. This rich ecology has some advantages, but now that the obvious initial programming is well launched, sustained progress might require a more strategic and systematic approach. My worry, perhaps poorly founded, is that the whole could prove less than the sum of the parts.

Specialized postsecondary programs need a large population from which to recruit students. A strength of the BC postsecondary system has been a robust transfer system and collaboration among independent institutions, allowing economies of scale to be achieved while remaining nimble – insofar as higher education can ever be described as nimble – and responsive to local conditions. This seems a good foundation for considering the future of Aboriginal postsecondary education.

*Both the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada and the National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation have identified the crisis of First Nations, Inuit and Métis education as one of the most compelling national issues Canada must face. The two organizations are working together to bring about transformative change for Aboriginal students seeking a postsecondary education.*

*- Moving Forward: National Working Summit on Aboriginal Postsecondary Education, Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, 2010*

Over the past few years as funders have become concerned about duplication of effort, IAHLA has focused increasingly on offerings that accumulate into credentials and it has sought to establish more sophisticated partnerships. Best practices are being shared and inventories of programs and services are emerging in the public system. Perhaps a new phase has begun in which fragmentation will be less of an issue.

My second overriding impression is of widespread good will and a genuine desire to serve Aboriginal learners. Views diverge, sometimes sharply, on how this might best be achieved, but all want to do better. The conversations in which I participated, and there were a great many people who helped me with this paper, were invariably respectful and constructive.

Yet dialogue is not always easy. Aboriginal people continue to experience power imbalances – relations that start in a reciprocal manner may become one-sided over time – as well as misunderstandings or repudiations of their values and cultures. Political correctness can lead non-Aboriginal people to stifle questions they might have about student absences due to community events, gift-giving culture, rates of fetal alcohol syndrome, the job performance of individual employees, and other topics for fear of being perceived as stereotyping or of being racist. So beneath a veneer of good intentions, currents of fear and watchfulness persist.

I am in no position to assess whether healthy, open and respectful discussion about Aboriginal postsecondary education is increasing, but my experience on this project gives me hope that it might be. Nevertheless, building trust, understanding and respect takes time after a history in which these attributes were in short supply.

A few other thoughts and observations have stayed with me as I draw this paper to a close:

- British Columbia seems uncertain about the “third educational sector,” i.e. the private, not-for-profit institutions such as belong to IAHLA or which are faith-based. Many of the faith-based institutions have their own legislation, may award credentials (perhaps only in specified subjects), and their students may be eligible for student loans. Non-public Aboriginal-governed institutions operate in quite a different environment, perhaps because they receive direct and indirect government funding and have different quality assurance considerations. In any event, public policy seems to be more implicit than explicit, and not entirely consistent. I’m not sure whether this is desirable or not.
- Accountability for both money and student outcomes would seem helpful in building trust in government and the public. Part of transparency depends on good data, and steps have recently been taken in this regard. The province’s Aboriginal data standard is one such step, but it is so inclusive that sometimes it is hard to interpret the data for people of mixed ancestry who see their Aboriginal heritage as just one of their many identities. IAHLA has started a data initiative in recent years, but headcount data about the number of students served could be enriched with Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) numbers about the volume of instruction delivered. So while efforts are being made to improve data collection, more remains to be done.
- It seems especially challenging to know how best to respond to the educational needs of Métis and urban Aboriginal people.
- With large immigrant populations in metropolitan areas and a variety of under-represented populations throughout the province, public institutions are hard pressed in responding to the plethora of valid needs that they encounter. Prioritizing these competing claims is a question of values, and this is where governing boards and government will need to provide direction to public institutions. I wonder if a postsecondary tension in the future will be not so much an unwillingness to respond to particular populations and needs, but rather the balancing of multiple initiatives that might pull institutions in differing directions. In particular, budgetary guidance from high level decision makers about the importance of serving Aboriginal learners could be helpful.

Overall, I feel enriched by what I have learned, and cautiously optimistic about the future of postsecondary education for the Aboriginal population. The challenges remain substantial, but a good many capable and dedicated people are working to overcome them.

#### ***Federal Funding***

*...deficiencies in federal funding consistently emerged as an issue. Failure to resolve this could impair the potential for continued progress at the provincial level and there is a clear need to come to some form of understanding that would help to reduce the ambiguities that currently limit the capacity of some of the IAHLA institutes to be as effective as they could be.*

*- Evaluation of the BC Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education Strategy, 2011*



# Appendix

*I received contradictory advice as how best to report the important topic of residential schools. Each perspective seemed to me to have merit.*

*One view was that some readers will have only a nebulous concept of these schools, and that the schools need to be made concrete by listing details such as names and locations. Another perspective was that unexpectedly encountering such details could be very painful for some Aboriginal readers.*

*I have attempted to respect both viewpoints by placing the school details in an appendix.*

## Residential Schools in BC

Recognized by the Government of Canada Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement (as of March 2011)

|                                        |                                                             |
|----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| Ahousat (Flores Island)                | Lejac (Fraser Lake)                                         |
| Alberni IRS                            | Lower Post                                                  |
| Anahim Lake Dormitory (1968 to 1977)   | Port Simpson (Crosby Home for Girls)                        |
| Cariboo (St. Joseph's, William's Lake) | St. George's (Lytton)                                       |
| Christie (Clayquot, Kakawis)           | St. Mary's (Mission)                                        |
| Coqualeetza                            | St. Michael's (Alert Bay Girls' Home, Alert Bay Boys' Home) |
| Cranbrook (St. Eugene's, Kootenay)     | Sechelt                                                     |
| Kamloops                               | St. Paul's IRS (Squamish, North Vancouver)                  |
| Kitimaat                               |                                                             |
| Kuper Island (near Chemainus)          |                                                             |

A listing in Wikipedia separates boys and girls schools at the same location and includes some early schools whose closing date is unknown:

- Alberni Indian Residential School: Port Alberni, 1920 – 1973 (Presbyterian)
- Ahousaht Indian Residential School: Ahousaht, 1901 – 1950 (Presbyterian)
- Christie Indian Residential School (Kakawis Indian Residential School): Tofino (Meares Island), 1900 – 1983. New school built in 1974. (Roman Catholic)
- Cowichan Catholic Convent School: Cowichan, 1863 – closing date unknown (Roman Catholic)
- Friendly Cove Day School: Yuquot, 1930 – 1964 (Roman Catholic)
- Greenville Mission Boy's Boarding School: Nass River, 1863 – closing date unknown (Methodist)
- Kamloops Indian Residential School (St. Ann's Academy): Kamloops, 1890 – 1978 (Roman Catholic)
- Kamloops Indian Residential School (St. Louis Mission Indian Residential School): Kamloops, 1890 – 1978 (Roman Catholic)
- Kitimaat Indian Residential School (Elizabeth Long Memorial School for Girls): Kitimaat, 1883 – closing date unknown (Methodist)
- Kootenay Indian Residential School (St. Eugene's Indian Residential School, St. Mary's Indian Residential School): Cranbrook, 1898 – 1970 (Roman Catholic)
- Kuper Island Indian Residential School: Chemainus, 1890 – 1975 (Roman Catholic)
- Lejac Indian Residential School: Fraser Lake, 1910 - 1976. New building in 1922. (Roman Catholic)

- Lower Post Indian Residential School: Lower Post, 1940 – 1975 (Roman Catholic)
- Methodist Coqualeetza Institute: Chilliwack, 1886 – 1937. Later became the Coqualeetza Hospital (Methodist) and is now the Coqualeetza Cultural Education Centre
- Metlakatla Indian Residential School (Metlakatla Indian Girl's School): Metlakatla, 1891 – 1962 (Other denomination)
- Port Simpson Methodist Girl's School: Port Simpson, 1863 – 1950 (Methodist)
- Presbyterian Coqualeetza Indian Residential School: Chilliwack, 1861 – 1940 (Presbyterian)
- Roman Catholic Coqualeetza Indian Residential School: Chilliwack, 1890 – 1941 (Roman Catholic)
- Sechelt Indian Residential School: Sechelt, 1912 – 1975 (Roman Catholic)
- Squamish Indian Residential School (St. Francis Indian Residential School; St. Paul's Indian Residential School): North Vancouver, 1898 – 1959 (Roman Catholic)
- St. George's Indian Residential School (Lytton Indian Residential School): Lytton, 1901 – 1979. New school built in 1928. (Anglican)
- St. Mary's Mission Indian Residential School: Mission, 1861 – 1984 (Roman Catholic).
- St. Michael's Indian Residential School (Alert Bay Indian Residential School): Alert Bay, 1929 – 1975 (Anglican)
- Thomas Crosby Indian Residential School (Thomas Crosby Girls Home Indian Residential School): Port Simpson, 1879 – 1950 (Methodist)
- Thomas Crosby Indian Residential School (Thomas Crosby Home for Boys Indian residential School): Port Simpson, 1879 – 1950 (Methodist)
- Victoria Catholic Convent School: Victoria, 1863 – closing date unknown (Roman Catholic)
- Williams Lake Indian Residential School (Williams Lake Industrial School): Williams Lake, 1890 – 1981 (Roman Catholic )
- Yale Indian Residential School: Yale, 1900 – closing date unknown (Anglican)
- Yuquot Indian Residential School: Yuquot, 1901 – 1913 (Roman Catholic)