

# Aboriginal Engagement

## Building an Inclusive Work Environment

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It is clear that there is a role for everyone on this campus to fulfill the aboriginal imperative at the University of Saskatchewan. While we often look to our leaders for direction and inspiration, it is notable that much of our success to date has been through the spirit and determination of individuals at all levels to consider what can be done and to take action to make the university’s aboriginal imperative a success.

The Aboriginal Engagement Commitment has stated: *we may not have all the answers but we have the will to act.* We have seen success in many areas of campus but there are gaps and opportunities to do more.

Our leaders have provided the mandate and resources for initiatives to support aboriginal engagement. The office of the Special Advisor on Aboriginal Initiatives provides a critical connection for the university to aboriginal communities and other post-secondary institutions, leadership on aboriginal initiatives on our campus, and executive sponsorship of the Aboriginal Engagement Commitment. Human Resources (HR) leaders and staff, guided by the university’s HR plan, are engaged in a number of critical priorities that support aboriginal engagement including leadership development, ensuring our culture supports the strategic directions, diversity strategies and working toward a representative workforce with a priority focus on aboriginal recruitment. Together our offices have collaborated to reallocate resources to support a new position—Candace Wasacase-Lafferty was appointed in January as director of aboriginal engagement—

You can make a difference. We all have a role to play in shaping our culture.

a position that will help us engage the campus community and further our collective goals.

So how is all of this relevant to you, and how you can possibly make a difference? We invite you to consider your day-to-day tasks, processes, meetings, projects and other interactions. How can you reinvent these to make them more welcoming and inclusive for your aboriginal colleagues and co-workers? How can you influence or remove the barriers that prevent progress from occurring? You can make a difference. We all have a role to play in shaping our culture.

The information, stories and inspirations shared in this newsletter are intended to celebrate the successes we have had and to stimulate thought, dialogue and ideas that promote a culture of inclusiveness.

Together we are creating a welcoming and inclusive environment for current and future aboriginal employees at the University of Saskatchewan.



**Barb Daigle**

Associate Vice President, Human Resources



**Joan Greyeyes**

Special Advisor on Aboriginal Initiatives

### The Institutional Imperative

*“The University must embrace the fundamental importance of its relationships with First Nations, Métis, Inuit and Indigenous peoples.”*

– Second Integrated Plan



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# Aboriginal Achievement Week On Campus Career Fair

Contributed by Candace Wasacase-Lafferty, Director of Aboriginal Engagement

Aboriginal Achievement Week activities this year included an inaugural on-campus career fair for aboriginal students and the aboriginal community at which 11 campus employers promoted the university as a potential employer.

As outlined in the second integrated plan, *"the university must embrace the fundamental importance of its relationships with First Nations, Métis, Inuit and Indigenous peoples."* With the changing demographics of our province and the university's commitment to aboriginal engagement, it really makes sense to position the university as an employer of choice for the aboriginal community.

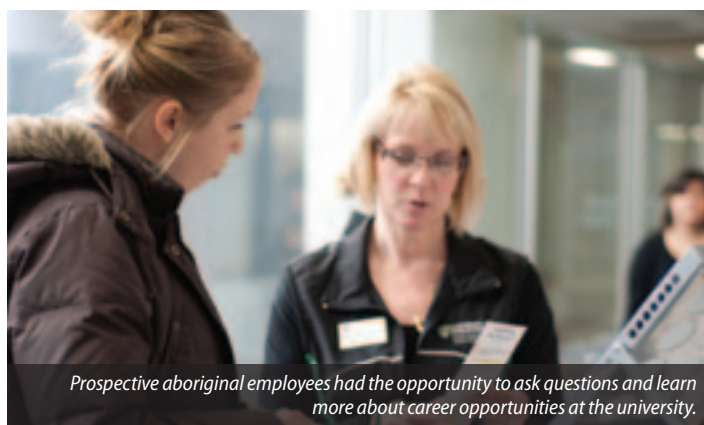
The career fair began as a strategic recruitment exercise, which turned into much more. The event featured current aboriginal staff speaking about their experiences working for the university. Each delivered an impassioned message of courage, support and dedication while describing their unique areas of campus. The obvious talent, passion and commitment in the room further confirmed the importance of aboriginal employment as an opportunity for growth and success for aboriginal people and the University of Saskatchewan.

The career fair was a good start at what we hope will be an annual event associated with Aboriginal Achievement Week. This year's event was just a beginning. It was grand in spirit and gives us a foundation on which to build.

We would like to take this opportunity to recognize the following participants:

Campus Safety, Facilities Management Division, Consumer Services, Student Employment and Career Centre, College of Kinesiology, College of Medicine, Human Resources, Health Sciences Council, Media Access & Production (eMAP), the Library and CUPE 1975.

Special thanks to our speakers Val Arnault-Pellitier, John Ogresko, Leonard Fox, Martin Gonzalez, Yvette Arcand and Richard Florizone.



## Did you know?

The University of Saskatchewan was the first Canadian university to have a Special Advisor to the President on Aboriginal Initiatives. This relationship has led to a deepened understanding of aboriginal culture and a renewed commitment to aboriginal success throughout the university.

## Employee Perspective

Charlotte Ross *Co-ordinator of Academic Programs for Aboriginal Students, College of Arts and Science*

### q What brought you here?

a The numerous elementary school trips we made to Saskatoon from northern Saskatchewan that always included a campus tour! I fell in love with the beautiful scenery and the awesome buildings and architecture that you just don't see anywhere else in Saskatchewan! As I grew into my high school years, it was my love of learning and personal desire to address the cycle of illiteracy and poverty in my family and community that brought me to the U of S along with a few classmates from La Ronge.

### q What keeps you here?

a Interestingly, again, my deeply ingrained attraction and appreciation of higher learning and becoming an agent of change in the dynamic community. I have earned a BA (Hon) degree in native studies (May 1988) along with a master of adult and continuing education from the U of S

(October 2003). I absolutely am in continuous awe of the transformation that aboriginal students go through as they engage with faculty, programs and staff at the U of S. We have a close-knit community on campus of aboriginal student support staff and faculty that work well together.

### q What do you wish everyone knew?

a That anything is possible if you set your mind to it and surround yourself with people who believe in you, who will support you in all ways. Eliminate negativity from your life at all times! Think outside the box! Don't limit your dreams! Don't forget where you came from or forsake your culture for an education. Ahkameyimok in Cree, keep going! E-ka-poyok in Cree, don't give up!

### q What connections have been important for you here?

a My ability to be creative in meeting the needs of aboriginal students, families and



communities. The constant connection to the aboriginal community has been vital to my work at the U of S – I thrive on being connected to the aboriginal community in a multitude of roles. We have a strong communication base among aboriginal staff that is similar to the "moccasin telegraph" in the aboriginal community. We all share the same goals of being agents of change in our communities and families. Where else would be a better place to carry out that role than at the U of S? It is a family for all who wish to fully engage in all aspects of personal and professional development.

# eMAP – Appreciating the Success of Aboriginal Engagement

Contributed by Elizabeth Lulchak, Acting Director, eMAP

Media Access and Production (eMAP) is a unit dedicated to supporting teaching and learning at the University of Saskatchewan. The campus and its communities have benefited from our many talented employees, however, did you know that eMAP also has four employees who are of aboriginal descent representing eight percent of eMAP's current staff (campus representation just over 2%)? The commitment to excellence continually shown by these four individuals has given eMAP an advantage. Opportunities for training and professional development have contributed to their success and benefited eMAP and the university. These self-declared employees who are of aboriginal descent have collectively over 60 years of valued service to the university. This dedication, expertise and background have contributed to the quality of eMAP productions and the operations of our equipment services group. The accomplishments achieved by these individuals are also reflected in their advancement through the unit. Currently, they are mentoring employees and are working in leadership roles including a senior level media developer, technical supervisor, assistant booking co-ordinator and a sound technician.

The integration of aboriginal individuals into our unit has facilitated the development of partnerships between eMAP and the broader aboriginal community. Producing content for the aboriginal community has both provided opportunities for revenue as well as expanding eMAP's awareness of aboriginal culture and practices. Further, the contribution of our aboriginal employees has brought recognition to eMAP and to the university through national and international awards such as the Columbus International Film & Video Festival (CHRIS Awards) for our production entitled "Dancing Circles: Strong Hoop, Strong Spirit." Our aboriginal employees also engage in the outreach initiatives of the University of Saskatchewan with respect to their cultural heritage.

Our employees have developed very close personal relationships and that really is the nature of our workplace. At eMAP, we do not differentiate between aboriginal employees and any other employees. Our employees are all integrated and encouraged to express their individuality regardless of ethnicity. We benefit from the relationships that people build within the workplace and from the positive and accepting work culture that this encourages. ■



Audio Technician Shawn Gelsinger (foreground) working with Mark Behrend, Narrowcast Project Manager and Melissa Hildebrandt, Media and Instructional Developer.

## Employee Perspective

Leonard Fox *Clerical Services, Student Accounts and Treasury, Financial Services Division*

### Q What brought you here?

A I had just graduated from the public admin program at SIIT and a friend of mine, who was also the post-secondary counsellor in North Battleford, told me about this job at the U of S. He suggested that I should apply for it so I did. I got the job and I've been here ever since.

### Q What keeps you here?

A I like the campus environment—I feel a sense of self-worth here. I like the people I work with, I have a very good boss and the work environment is open with good communication.

### Q What do you wish everyone knew?

A I wish people knew how destructive stereotyping is. We're not all the same. We all have different situations and circumstances that have brought us here. This is true for all cultures, not just for Aboriginal Peoples.



### Q What connections have been important for you here?

A My connection and communications with all people, but especially dealing with aboriginal people and having the chance to help other people from foreign countries and cultures has been something I've really appreciated. Because of my own experiences, I don't make judgments about people, I get to know them first.

## Diversity Fatigue: Where Do We Go Next?

Contributed by Trevor Wilson, Author and Global Human Equity Strategist, TWI Inc.

*"I chose to run for the presidency at this moment in history because I believe deeply that we cannot solve the challenges of our time unless we solve them together."*

— Barack Obama

What, you may ask, is diversity fatigue? It is the Herculean effort required by diversity practitioners to keep the momentum going amidst the toughest economic crisis since the depression. It is trying to promote and re-package the business case by showing specific return on investment at a time of limited dollars for any imperative. It is trying to figure out how to creatively communicate diversity in an extremely time-scarce environment when people struggle to do more with less. It also includes the endless task of breaking down silos between groups, who only have interest in their particular dimension of diversity. This is what we call diversity fatigue.

A couple of years ago, *Diversity Journal* ran a fascinating series of essays entitled *The Pioneers of Diversity*. It included the perspective of 30 leading thinkers on diversity. Each pioneer was asked to write a short essay on where diversity came from, where it is now, and where it needs to go next.

Not surprisingly, the pioneers agreed on where diversity started. Interestingly, most also agreed on where we are right now. To borrow another phrase

from Obama, many felt we are at "a stalemate we've been stuck in for years." The most intriguing reading of the essays, however, is the question of "where do we go next?" There was virtually no alignment on that important question.



Wilson

I introduce to you my perspective on the next step, which is about talent differentiation and maximizing on the diverse talents on so called intangibles such as a person's innate strengths, unique abilities, personalities, attitude, life experience and virtues. As shown below, we need to make progress in our workplaces from assimilation and tolerance to complete inclusion and utilization of diverse talents.

### The Required Shift in Focus



As the opening quote explains, we cannot solve the challenges of our time unless we solve them together. And as Einstein once said, "We cannot solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them." Diversity fatigue can be, and must be, overcome. ■

*"Trevor is a great speaker. He is very passionate and his knowledge and presentation style is very powerful!"*

— attendee at U of S Managers Skill Development Workshop 2008

**Trevor will be presenting on diversity in the Fall 2010.**  
Watch for details coming soon.

## Employee Perspective

Margaret Kovach *Assistant Professor in the College of Education*



### Q What brought you here?

**A** I was eager to join the University of Saskatchewan because I was aware of its focus on aboriginal education. I completed my PhD at the University of Victoria and was living in B.C. Once I completed my degree, I knew I wanted to return home to Saskatchewan. That was three years ago.

### Q What keeps you here?

**A** Definitely my connection with both aboriginal and non-aboriginal students in advancing aboriginal perspectives keeps me here. Since my appointment in 2007, the University of Saskatchewan, and in particular the College of Education, has provided me with an opportunity to teach and conduct research in areas that impact aboriginal people. Through internal

University of Saskatchewan research funds, I have been able to maintain my research momentum and have found the University of Saskatchewan to be very supportive in this area.

### Q What do you wish everyone knew?

**A** My hope is that the public is aware of the commitment to aboriginal education here but that there is still much work to reach our goals in this area. A huge challenge is the need to build capacity among aboriginal faculty and staff at the university.

### Q What connections have been important for you here?

**A** I have a joint appointment with (the Departments of) Educational Foundations and Educational Administration and this has offered me an opportunity to

have a significant connection with two different departments within the college, each of which have attracted aboriginal students. I have also been fortunate to have a connection with the on-campus e-learning community through the e-learning sub-committee. There is an intersection between e-learning and aboriginal education as online learning is becoming an increasingly popular way of providing aboriginal students in their home communities access to quality education.

## Hiring Strategies

The hiring and promotion of aboriginal employees has been identified as a strategy in meeting the aboriginal imperative.

Successful strategies for targeted recruitment include:

- Establish a clear understanding of how and why aboriginal engagement will benefit your college or unit – before you can engage others, you need to be clear about the benefit. This can be done through diversity training, reading, and by connecting with aboriginal people and those who have successfully engaged aboriginal employees on campus.
- Incorporate specific language into position postings and advertisements. The type of aboriginal capacity you are seeking should be reflected in the accountabilities of the position.
- Build relationships with the aboriginal community to establish candidate pools and build comfort levels and trust.
- Partner with local aboriginal organizations that provide the skill sets you are seeking.
- Ensure that your workplace is an open and welcoming environment. Educate your current employees and/or encourage diversity training, incorporate welcoming visual symbols into your work space and be aware of and address negative workplace behaviours.
- Ask for assistance! If you are not sure about where to start, contact your Human Resources consultant for assistance.

### The Leadership Challenge

*Make aboriginal recruitment a part of your people plan. For resources to support your plan please contact your Human Resources Consultant.*

## Self-Identification – Why does it matter?

Why should you or anyone bother to self-identify as an aboriginal person and what does the university do with that information?

When you self-identify, the university is better able to plan and determine the services and supports that are needed to ensure positive and healthy work environments. In addition, being able to report accurately on the number of aboriginal people working on our campus signals to the external community that this is a welcoming, inclusive environment.

Currently, the number of self-declared aboriginal persons working on our campus is approximately 75—we're pretty certain this is not reflective of our actual numbers, but we can't report what we don't know.

When you self-identify, the information is kept confidential as per the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* and is used by the university only for the purposes for which it is collected—to provide and improve services and to understand and report summarized demographics data to government agencies.

You may self identify by completing the Workforce Demographic Questionnaire online at [www.usask.ca/hrd/work/diversity.php](http://www.usask.ca/hrd/work/diversity.php)

Please contact Candace Wasacase-Lafferty, Director of Aboriginal Engagement, if you would like further explanation or clarification. ■

## Resources and Training

**Diversity Training** – Training to help you and/or your staff with diversity is available through a variety of options.

**Contact Candace Wasacase-Lafferty at 966-2603 or [candace.lafferty@usask.ca](mailto:candace.lafferty@usask.ca) to discuss the most appropriate training opportunity for you.**



Wasacase-Lafferty

### Did you know?

The University of Saskatchewan's annual Powwow is the largest of its kind in Western Canada. This year, the first ever Graduation Powwow was held on Wednesday, June 16. See details online at: [www.students.usask.ca/powwow](http://www.students.usask.ca/powwow)

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