

## Engaging with Aboriginal Peoples at the University of Saskatchewan

Prepared by the office of Institutional Planning and Assessment for the Provost

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### Introduction

In 1998, *A Framework for Planning* identified, as one of four priority goals, responding to the needs of Aboriginal peoples by stating “at the University of Saskatchewan, we must dedicate ourselves to making available to all Aboriginal Peoples the full range of our programs, and we must adopt strategies that will improve their ability to succeed” (p.7). Today, Aboriginal engagement is a feature of the university’s second integrated plan, as one of three imperatives that cut across the plan and must be woven into all we do, and as one of 20 commitments—specific areas where the university wants to make considerable change and see visible results by 2012. The plan states that “the University of Saskatchewan needs to embrace the fundamental importance of its relationships with First Nations, Métis, Inuit and Indigenous peoples” (p.5). The University of Saskatchewan must be ready, willing and able to engage with Aboriginal Peoples as partners and work with Aboriginal communities to identify shared issues, to seek solutions through relationships built on mutual trust and co-operation. Ensuring Indigenous knowledge and cultural expression is part of all that we do means that Aboriginal students and faculty feel welcome at this university. This document briefly summarizes the University of Saskatchewan’s history of Aboriginal engagement activities, from student affairs to research to academic programs, and is intended to provide context for the university’s future work in these areas.<sup>1</sup>

### Sense of Place – Saskatchewan’s Aboriginal Population

A sense of place – for the University of Saskatchewan, these four words have significant meaning. A sense of place is one of the defining features in the strategic directions set by the university’s president in 2002 – the only planning document endorsed by University Council, Board and Senate. For the University of Saskatchewan, a ‘sense of place’ means that we strive for academic pre-eminence and international standards while being grounded in provincial, national and international contexts.

A significant component of the Saskatchewan community is its Aboriginal peoples and traditions. Saskatchewan is second only to Manitoba in having the largest proportion of Aboriginal peoples (14.9 per cent).<sup>2</sup> Of the Aboriginal people living in Saskatchewan, the majority are younger than 25 years of age in contrast to less than one-third of Saskatchewan’s non-Aboriginal population who are under 25.<sup>3</sup> It is estimated that by 2017, young Aboriginal adults (20 to 29) may almost double from 18 per cent in 2006 to 30 per cent.<sup>4</sup> The prosperity and future of the province are intimately bound with the prosperity, health and success of everyone, including Aboriginal people.

### University of Saskatchewan Strategic Documents on Aboriginal Engagement

While Aboriginal-focused programs and services began at the U of S nearly four decades ago, it is only in the last 15 years that formalized statements about the university’s goals and direction in Aboriginal work were made. In 1998, *A Framework for Planning* identified responding to the needs of Aboriginal Peoples as one of four priority goals. A *Conceptual Framework for Aboriginal Initiatives* followed, leading to discussions of options and opportunities for U of S engagement with Aboriginal Peoples and communities. In 2003, the university produced

<sup>1</sup> Note: An earlier version of this document accompanied a presentation by Brett Fairbairn, provost and vice-president academic, presented to campus leaders at a workshop held Jan. 19, 2010. A more comprehensive list of U of S Aboriginal initiatives is currently being developed and is available at: [www.usask.ca/ip](http://www.usask.ca/ip)

<sup>2</sup> Statistics Canada, Census 2006

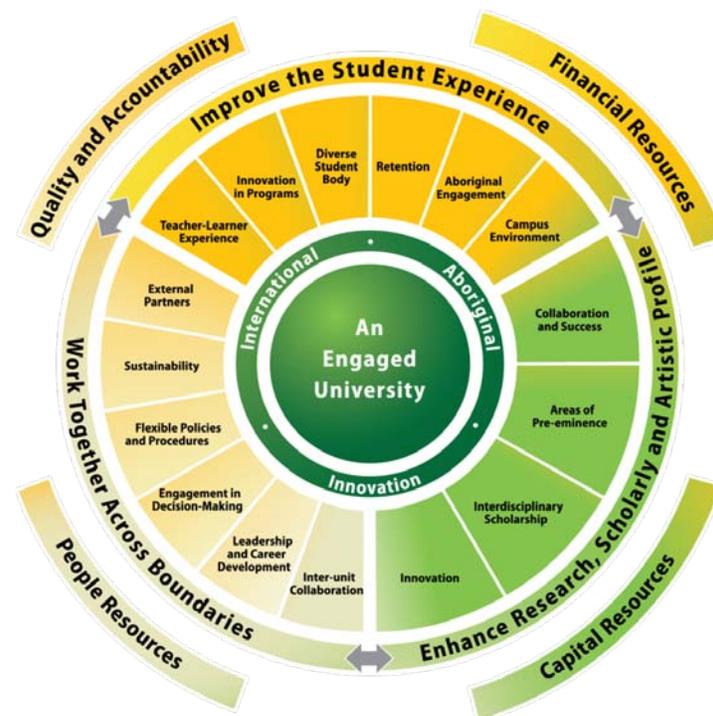
<sup>3</sup> Statistics Canada, Census 2006

<sup>4</sup> Statistics Canada, Census 2001



In 2008, Aboriginal engagement was identified as a commitment and an institutional imperative in the *Second Integrated Plan: Toward an Engaged University (2008/09-2011/12)* as depicted in the diagram below.

*Second Integrated Plan: Toward an Engaged University*



## Aboriginal Engagement at the University of Saskatchewan – An Historical Perspective

The University of Saskatchewan has a strong record of accomplishment in responding to the needs of Aboriginal Peoples based on its academic programs and its people. Our audit of initiatives (2009) indicates a wide range of instructional programs, many leading-edge and nationally acclaimed. Over the past four decades, the University of Saskatchewan has prepared Aboriginal students for the workforce by providing post-secondary education opportunities in areas as diverse as education, law, justice, the arts, business and health science professions. The U of S has one of the highest number of Canada Research Chairs (CRCs) conducting research pertaining to Aboriginal Peoples.<sup>5</sup> The University of Saskatchewan strives to be the number one choice for Aboriginal students and, in that regard, we have one of the largest Aboriginal student bodies anywhere in Canada.<sup>6</sup>

The university's commitment to Aboriginal engagement is not a new one. For decades, the U of S has been a leader in Aboriginal programming and research in Saskatchewan and in Canada. The goals and commitments to improve and expand these areas and to become an institution of choice for Aboriginal Peoples builds on several decades of work by many accomplished staff, faculty, students and community members.

<sup>5</sup> The University of Saskatchewan holds three CRCs who conduct Aboriginal research, second only to the Universities of Manitoba and Toronto who hold four 4 CRCs each. McGill University, the University of Winnipeg and Memorial University also hold three CRCs.

<sup>6</sup> 2009/10 – 1,628 or 8.3 per cent. The University of Manitoba has a larger number of Aboriginal students (1,883) but a smaller proportion (6.9 per cent).

## Historical Highlights to 2003<sup>7</sup>

- 1960 Institute for Northern Studies established
- 1972 Indian Teacher Education Program (ITEP) established by the Saskatchewan Indian Cultural College in partnership with the U of S
- 1973 Program of Legal Studies for Native People first offered
- 1975 Native Law Centre founded
- 1981 Cree language taught for the first time
- 1983 Department of Native Studies established
- Northern Dental Program begins
- 1985 Northern Medical Services established
- Native Access to Nursing Program (NAPN) established
- 1988 Indigenous Peoples Program (IPP) in the then Extension Division, created
- 1991 Aboriginal Justice and Criminology (ABJAC) program established within the Department of Sociology
- Aboriginal Students' Centre established
- 1994 Aboriginal Student Advisor position created in the College of Arts and Science
- 1995 Dr. Danny Musqua receives an honorary Doctor of Laws Degree for contributions as lecturer and Elder-in-residence
- Community Schools Program in Kinesiology, providing inner-city youth with the opportunity to participate in athletic programs at the Physical Activity Complex begins
- 1996 First annual welcoming powwow held
- 2001 Canada Research Chair in Urban Aboriginal Experience (Geography) and in Native Newcomer Relations (History) appointed
- 2002 Memorandum of Understanding between Wanuskewin Heritage Park and the U of S signed
- 2003 *Forging New Relationships: The Foundational Document on Aboriginal Initiatives at the University of Saskatchewan* adopted

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<sup>7</sup> For a more complete listing of Aboriginal Initiatives at the University of Saskatchewan, please refer to the draft list available at: [www.usask.ca/ip](http://www.usask.ca/ip)

## Select Recent Initiatives (since 2003)

### Academic Programs

In addition to the well-established academic programs offered (e.g., Indian Teacher Education Program, Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program, Northern Teacher Education Program, Legal Studies for Native Peoples, Native Studies, Aboriginal Justice and Criminology program), recent years have seen many new developments in other academic areas at U of S. Some are aimed at Aboriginal Peoples specifically and others at the general population, varying from inclusion of indigenous knowledge into the curricula of medicine and nutrition programs, as well as courses with Aboriginal content/focus in anthropology, english, indigenous knowledge, northern studies, prairie studies, psychology, regional and urban planning, and sociology. Recent years have also seen the development of formal academic programs:

- LL.M with a focus on Aboriginal Law
- Indigenous Peoples Resource Management Program
- Aboriginal Business Administration Certificate (ABAC)
- Land-based delivery of M.Ed in Educational Foundations
- Post-graduate diploma in Agriculture in Aboriginal Land Management (proposed)

### Community Outreach

The University of Saskatchewan continues in its tradition of outreach and engagement with Aboriginal communities. Recent initiatives include exciting and innovative aspects, such as student-run clinics, partnerships with the business community and engagement of grade-school children. Highlights include:

- Student Wellness Initiative Toward Community Health (SWITCH) opens its doors at the West Side Clinic
- Various CAPES programs in Engineering (Northern Science Ambassadors; Advocating Math and Science Enrichment; myWISEmentor Program; Light, Sound and Energy Experiments)
- Community Legal Assistance Services for Saskatoon Inner City (CLASSIC) in the College of Law
- SciFi Camps expand to deliver classroom workshops in Northern Saskatchewan
- Pre-health science summer camps
- Community based Indian Teacher Education Program in Big River, Onion Lake, North West Nations Education Council, Makwa Sahgaiehcan First Nation
- Aurora College, Northwest Territories, College of Education
- Masters in Educational Administration, Onion Lake

### Research Programs

Research programs with an Aboriginal focus have been a hallmark at the University of Saskatchewan and recent years have seen expansion and growth in this area. New research programs include, but are not limited to, health research and Aboriginal Peoples; Comprehending and nourishing the learning spirit; Aboriginal-colonial encounters and relations; Canadian Prevention Science Cluster for Children and Youth; Aboriginal resource management; and Cree/Metis ethnology. Research highlights from recent years include:

- Canada Research Chair in Aboriginal Health (Community Health and Epidemiology)
- Aboriginal Education Research Centre (AERC) opens its doors
- International Centre for Northern Governance and Development renamed to reflect its northern focus
- Indigenous Land Management Institute established
- iPortal at the University Library developed
- Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre (one of two in Canada, established through AERC)

### Cultural Programs

A memorandum of understanding signed in 2002 between the University of Saskatchewan and Wanuskewin confirms the intent that we will work together to develop cultural programming and other joint initiatives.

Sensitivity to the cultural needs of Aboriginal people has been a priority of the university. In the last six years, the Aboriginal graduation ceremony has expanded to include graduates from all colleges, an expansion of elder services, and the incorporation of sensitivity training for students, staff and faculty. For example, Beadwork is an established network of scholars in the College of Education with one proposed professional development initiative aimed at helping non-Aboriginal faculty work with Aboriginal students and incorporating Aboriginal ways of knowing into their courses.

## Student Affairs

One of the most significant developments in the area of student affairs is the conceptualization and establishment of the Aboriginal Achievement Model – a multi-faceted model offering a variety of programs and support to Aboriginal students. Cornerstones of this model include:

- Aboriginal First Year Experience Program
- Summer University Transition Program for Aboriginal Students
- Mentorship Program and Aboriginal Community Outreach
- Mathematics and Science Enrichment Program
- Recent expansion of the Native Access Program to Nursing (NAPN) to include Medicine

## Co-ordination

Likely, the most significant development in the area of co-ordination was the creation of the Special Advisor to the President on Aboriginal Initiatives. Since its inception in 2003, this position has identified, initiated and developed many university-wide initiatives that support the engagement of Aboriginal peoples on and off campus.

## **Moving Forward**

The University of Saskatchewan is proud of its Aboriginal graduates, staff and partners who have provided guidance and contributed in all areas of leadership over the years and who helped bring the university to where it is today in this area. In light of the activity and accomplishments to date, there is still more work to do. There remain gaps in our academic programs and student services and in our engagement with the Aboriginal community. Building on the history of work outlined here, this document is meant as a step toward closing these gaps. As we move forward, we need to acknowledge that advancing this area is a collective responsibility.

It is now time to take stock of all the things we do and decide how to move forward strategically. As the university moves into the next phase of its second integrated plan, we need to determine where to focus our energy. The university will pursue a number of initiatives in the remainder of this planning cycle as described below, but other ideas are welcome.

- Graduate programs with Aboriginal focus/content
- Visible symbols and appropriately built infrastructure (e.g., art work, renaming rooms, signage)
- Design and construction of the Gordon Oakes-Red Bear Student Centre
- A recruitment strategy with colleges and SESD for Aboriginal students
- A series of workshops to increase awareness and understanding of First Nations and Métis culture amongst all faculty, staff and students
- Other ideas welcome

## **For More Information**

Please visit [www.usask.ca/ip](http://www.usask.ca/ip) for more information on the foundational document or to view the draft list of Aboriginal initiatives at the University of Saskatchewan. If you have any comments, questions or additional information, please contact Paola Chiste, Research Analyst, Institutional Planning and Assessment ([paola.chiste@usask.ca](mailto:paola.chiste@usask.ca) or 966-6692).