

Report of the Steering Committee for the Development of UBC Aboriginal Strategic Plan

**Submitted by:
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Introduction

UBC Trek 2010 identifies Aboriginal education as one of its priorities. It recognizes the potential of the University to make an important contribution to the Canadian and global society by creating meaningful educational opportunities for Aboriginal learners through approaches that substantially address Aboriginal issues, accurately represent Aboriginal cultures and histories, recognize the value of Aboriginal knowledge and the rights of members of Aboriginal communities to have equitable access to post-secondary education. It acknowledges that the university has an obligation to support Aboriginal access and success through appropriate policies, programs, and engagement strategies. In order to make progress on the Trek 2010 vision, the University requires the development of an Aboriginal Strategic Plan that clearly articulates and prioritizes expected outcomes, sets attainment targets, and guides a resource allocation process.

In June 2007, on the recommendation of President Toope a Steering Committee for the Development of the UBC Aboriginal Strategic Plan was established, co-chaired by Dr. Anna Kindler, Vice Provost of Associate Vice President Academic Affairs UBC V and Dr. Richard Vedan, Senior Advisor to the President on Aboriginal Affairs and Director of First Nations House of Learning. Members of the Committee included Dr. Alaa Abd-El-Aziz, Associate Vice President Academic and Research, UBC O; Dr. Jo-ann Archibald, Associate Dean for Indigenous Education, Faculty of Education, UBC V; Mr. Ian Cull, Associate Vice President Students, UBC O; Dr. Linc Kessler, Director, First Nations Studies Program, UBC V; and Mr. Darrell McLeod, Chair, First Nations House of Learning President's Advisory Committee. The Committee mandate was to identify key issues/areas that the Aboriginal Strategic Plan should address, formulate questions to guide the development of the Plan, and recommend a process for the Plan development along with appropriate communication strategies and timelines.

This report summarizes the findings and recommendations of the Steering Committee.

Terminology

We use the term "Aboriginal" inclusively to refer to members of First Nations, status and non-status Indians, Métis, and Inuit peoples in Canada, recognizing in doing so that many people prefer the terms that are specific and traditional to their communities. Since the term "Aboriginal" is not used in many other countries, we use the term "Indigenous" to refer to similar peoples in international contexts.

Context

The University's vision statement Trek 2010: A Global Journey articulates nine Aboriginal strategic goals to be pursued within the context of: People, Learning, Research, Community and International. Trek 2010 builds upon the University's long-term commitment to Aboriginal access and scholarship at all levels and complements the First Nations House of Learning's mandate: "...to make the university's vast resources more accessible to First Peoples, and to improve the University's ability to meet the needs of First Nations."

Success Milestones at UBC

We acknowledge that the UBC Vancouver campus is located on the traditional territory of the Musqueam First Nation. The UBC Okanagan campus established in July 01, 2005 is located in the traditional territory of the Okanagan First Nation. UBC V and UBC O have Memoranda of Understanding with the Musqueam First Nation and with the Okanagan Nations Alliance, respectively.

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.”^[1] First Aboriginal academic programs established in 1974 and 1975 included, respectively, the Native Indian Teacher 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.

In 1987, the First Nations House of Learning (FNHL) was established as a unit within the President’s Office following the findings and recommendations of the Berger/Kirkness (1984) *Report of the President’s Ad Hoc Committee on British Columbia Native Indian People and Communities*. The FNHL is dedicated to providing a positive environment for students, staff and faculty, founded upon First Nations, Métis, and Inuit cultures and philosophies. The FNHL facilitates the participation of Aboriginal people in a wide range of study areas by assisting with the development of academic initiatives, providing information on post-secondary opportunities and by offering support services to students on the Vancouver campus.

From its inception, UBC Okanagan has heavily invested in Aboriginal Programming, Services and partnerships with the Aboriginal Community, in particular with the Okanagan Nation Alliance, the En’owkin Centre and the Kelowna Friendship Centre. Additionally UBC Okanagan is supported by a large and engaged Aboriginal Advisory Council. The first Aboriginal initiatives were developed and implemented by the OUC and were subsequently adopted by UBC Okanagan. These included Aboriginal Programs and Services, the Indigenous Studies Program and the Aboriginal Students Centre. The UBC Okanagan Centre, currently under construction, will honor the traditions and cultures of the Okanagan Nation and it will be a resource to Aboriginal communities, students, staff and faculty.

Over a 20 year period, improvements have occurred with more Aboriginal academic programs, new admissions policies and practices, and appointments of more Aboriginal faculty and staff. At present there are 20 Aboriginal Coordinators in Programs and Faculties at UBC Okanagan and Vancouver campuses and centres. Sixteen Aboriginal Faculty members with tenure or tenure track appointments are engaged in teaching, research and community based endeavours locally, nationally and internationally. One faculty member holds a Canada Research Chair.

^[1] *Welcome to UBC*, 2007, p. 3

There are numerous Aboriginal Advisory Councils that include Aboriginal community representatives.

Examples of the wide range and variety of programs and initiatives with specific Aboriginal focus throughout the University include, at UBC V, the Xwi7xwa Library; Institute for Aboriginal Health, First Nations Studies Program and First National Languages Program in the Faculty of Arts, Ts`Kel Graduate Studies program in the Faculty of Education, Aboriginal Residency Program in the Faculty of Medicine, CEDAR Program in the Faculty of Land and Food Systems, Squamish FN BSW program in the School of Social Work, Forest Resources Management Program in the Faculty of Forestry, Chinook Program in the Sauder School of Business, and at UBC O the Indigenous Studies major and minor programs, Summer Graduate Studies Institute Program, and the Aboriginal Access Program.

Some of these programs (e.g., Chinook) employ collaborative models of delivery with other post-secondary institutions and all have benefited from input from Aboriginal communities. To make UBC resources more accessible to Aboriginal learners, UBC has an admissions policy creating unique access opportunities for Canadian Aboriginal students.^[3] UBC O has also been making a strategic use of the Access Studies to facilitate eligibility for admission to degree programs of Aboriginal students who do not meet at the onset UBC admission requirements.

Challenges and Opportunities

While there have been many gains, especially in the area of academic programs reflecting Aboriginal focus, there is still considerable work to be done in order to substantially increase Aboriginal student enrollment and success. UBC Aboriginal enrollment is estimated to be 0.72 % at the Vancouver campus and 7.0% at the Okanagan campus.^[4] Barriers reported by Aboriginal students include separation from the communities, sense of isolation within the university structures, high costs of post-secondary education (increased tuition fees; high cost of textbooks); high costs of living on/near campus; and various forms of racism. Federal funding has been capped at 1986 levels in spite of the increased numbers of Aboriginal students eligible for and seeking opportunities in higher learning, and not all Aboriginal learners (e.g., non-status Indians or Métis students) have been eligible for this targeted funding.

Other contextual challenges relate to the low levels of high school graduation for Aboriginal learners leading to low levels of post-secondary participation, especially in universities. The recently released *Campus 2020 Report* indicates that Aboriginal students' high school completion rate is half that of the rest of British Columbian peers. Furthermore, a relatively high percentage of Aboriginal learners graduate with credentials insufficient for university admission. In some Aboriginal communities, university education has failed to develop a reputation of a worthwhile endeavor, one that can result in tangible benefits to Aboriginal people and their communities. Urban Aboriginal students' participation in post-secondary education is one-third that of the rest of the province and rural Aboriginal students participate at one-fifth of the

^[3] *UBC Vancouver Calendar 2007/2008*, p. 16-17.

^[4] Because of the reliance on voluntary self-reporting, it is currently impossible to accurately measure actual Aboriginal enrollment at UBC

provincial rate. The latter one-fifth participation rate has remained unchanged, despite the significant growth in eligible Aboriginal population since 1990.^[5]

Finally, within the university settings, there continues to be a shortage of role models and mentors for Aboriginal students, with still a very small complement of Aboriginal faculty and staff across both UBC campuses. Aboriginal faculty and staff recruitment and retention continue to be a significant challenge, as are provisions to ensure that Aboriginal faculty and staff are appropriately resourced and supported to fulfill their multiple roles as university researchers and teachers in the context of additional, often substantial, responsibilities and expectations related to their involvement within Aboriginal communities

Campus 2020 has recommended the goal of equitable participation of Aboriginal learners by 2020. UBC will not be in a position to effectively respond to this mandate unless it develops and implements a bold Aboriginal strategic plan that will assert the importance of Aboriginal education within the university; identify and respond to systemic challenges that have created obstacles to Aboriginal access and success; establish tangible goals, priorities, and strategies for the advancement of Aboriginal education at UBC and solidify University commitments necessary for them to be implemented.

Key Issues/Areas and Questions to Guide the Development of the Strategic Plan

The Steering Committee engaged in preliminary consultations on the UBC O and UBC V campuses as well as with members of external Aboriginal communities and the UBC Aboriginal alumni to seek input on the desired scope and focus of the Aboriginal Strategic Plan as well as on the process that should be employed to formulate the Plan. Through focus groups and interviews with individual members of the community, the Committee was able to identify key areas/issues to be addressed, as reflected in the following guiding questions recommended to frame the development of the Plan:

1. What is UBC especially well positioned to deliver in the area of Aboriginal programs? What can be UBC's best contribution at UBC V and UBC O to Aboriginal education in terms of courses, programs and research opportunities? How can the plan address Aboriginal knowledge and concerns and the more general need to support Aboriginal learners across the disciplines?
2. How should the UBC Aboriginal Strategic Plan balance Canadian (local, regional, national) and international foci and scope?
3. What specific goals and expectations should be articulated in the Plan and how should progress towards their attainment be measured?
4. As a research-intensive university, UBC requires a high level of preparation from prospective students. What role, if any, should UBC play in assisting Aboriginal learners to achieve the readiness to benefit from its programs? What strategies should be devised and implemented to support Aboriginal learners' access to education at UBC?

^[5] As documented by the Provincial Advisory Committee on Post-Secondary Education for Native Learners (1990)

5. How should research activities of the university involving Aboriginal communities be developed and supported?
6. What policies and services should be in place and how should they be delivered in order for UBC to recruit, retain and effectively support Aboriginal faculty? How might this differ at UBC O and UBC V?
7. What policies and services should be in place and how should they be organized/delivered in order for UBC to recruit, retain and effectively support Aboriginal students' learning in respectful and safe environments? How might this differ at UBC O and UBC V?
8. How should the plan respond to UBC's two campus structure in order to address their unique circumstances and opportunities that they create in the areas of teaching, research and service?
9. How can we establish an efficient on-going communication process within the university community and with external Aboriginal communities around the Plan? What process should be established for input and reporting on the implementation of the Plan?
10. How should UBC demonstrate its commitment to achieving the goals of the plan? What provisions should be put in place to ensure that the plan can be successfully implemented?

In summary, the Committee recommends that the Plan should, at the minimum:

- define UBC's distinct strengths and opportunities related to Aboriginal education
- specify goals and expectations and mechanisms for measuring attainment of these targets
- suggest a framework to prioritize potential contributions in terms of key programs, courses and research opportunities
- define UBC's role and responsibilities in supporting Aboriginal learners' readiness to benefit from its programs prior to and after admission
- identify policies and services requirements to recruit, retain and appropriately support Aboriginal students, faculty and staff
- provide a framework for research activities involving Aboriginal communities
- propose a model of effective on-going communication, internally and externally, around the Plan and progress in its implementation.
- articulate commitments required for a successful implementation of the plan.

Recommended Process for the Development of the Plan

Through focus groups and interviews with members of Aboriginal communities internal and external to UBC, the Steering committee sought advice on the following process questions:

1. Who in the external Aboriginal communities should be consulted in the process of development of the plan, and how?
2. How to present Aboriginal issues in ways that will generate support? How to turn around negative perceptions and effectively convey the message that Aboriginal education is an opportunity?
3. How to best engage Aboriginal students, faculty and staff in the development of the plan? How to engage non-Aboriginal UBC community?

Based on the feedback received, the Steering Committee recommends that the President establish a UBC Aboriginal Strategic Plan Development Working Group (ASPD). The Group should be convened in January 2008 and its membership should include representation from UBC V and UBC O campuses as well as external Aboriginal communities.

The Steering Committee recognizes the need for this process to be appropriately supported. It acknowledges that Aboriginal representation in the faculty, staff, and student bodies at UBC is still small and that tasks such as this may pose a significant burden on contributors if provisions for effective administrative support are not in place. The Steering Committee thus recommends that the ASPD Working Group be provided for the duration of its activities with a full time Project Manager and part-time secretarial/administrative/technical support. The Project Manager should possess strong research and writing skills to be able to effectively contribute to the analysis of the feedback data and development of the Plan document. The admin/technical support hire should have excellent interpersonal skills and should be able to set up and maintain the project website. These positions should be filled as soon as possible, once the ASPD Working Group has been established.

Development of the Aboriginal Strategic Plan needs to be funded on an extensive consultation process. The Steering Committee recommends that the ASPD Working Group considers strategies for this consultation, as described below.

1. Consultation within the UBC community

This consultation should be inclusive of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal members of the UBC community and involve:

- Broadcast e-mail, publication in UBC Reports and announcement on the UBC webpage from the President to all UBC faculty, staff and students announcing that UBC is undertaking to develop an Aboriginal Strategic Plan and inviting the community to contribute its feedback

- Establishment of an interactive website containing the President's message, guiding questions for the consultation, information about the consultation process and its timeline, opportunity to contribute feedback (with an automatic acknowledgement that it has been received) and disclosure of the number of visits to the website
- ASPD Working Group presentations and consultations at various levels
- Once the feedback has been received and analyzed and the draft plan formulated, broadcast e-mail, publication in *UBC Reports*, on the ASPD website and announcement on the UBC webpage from the President to all UBC faculty, staff and students inviting the community to contribute feedback on the draft
- Communication with the leaders of the previously consulted groups with request for further consultation within their constituencies and written feedback on the draft

2. Consultation with external Aboriginal Communities

- President's announcement posted on the UBC webpage, ASPD webpage and in *UBC Reports* should include explicit invitation for Aboriginal communities to offer input into the development of the Plan.
- Special reference should be made to UBC Aboriginal alumni and an attempt should be made to contact alumni directly through e-mail, as far as possible.
- A number of Aboriginal communities/organizations should be directly approached through a letter from the President inviting their participation in the development of the Plan. The letter should provide contact information to the ASPD Working Group and express UBC readiness to organize consultation sessions either on campus or within the community setting.
- Once the feedback has been received and analyzed and the draft plan formulated, all Aboriginal communities/organizations previously contacted should receive a letter inviting them to offer further feedback on the Plan by a set deadline.

The Committee notes that this consultation process will need to be appropriately resourced to cover the costs of related travel, organizing off-campus meetings, etc. It recommends that a budget be set and made available to the ASPD Working Group to support these activities.