Retention of Aboriginal Students in Post-Secondary Institutions in Atlantic Canada: An Analysis of the Supports Available to Aboriginal Students

A collective project between Cape Breton University, Dalhousie University, the University of King's College, Memorial University, the University of Prince Edward Island, Saint Mary's University and Saint Thomas University

Principal Investigator:
Vianne Timmons, Ph.D.

Co-Investigators:
Patti Doyle-Bedwell, LL.M., Laurel Lewey, Ph.D., Lindsay Marshall, BA, Bernadette Power, M.Ed., Trudy Sable, Ph.D., Frederic Wien, Ph.D.

Research Assistants:
Dina Bernard, Thomas Robert Cameron, Danielle Jeddore, Alana Lee, Garett Murray, Julie Puiras

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Preface

This study was completed with the support and guidance of the Association of Atlantic Universities, in particular the AAU Working Committee which co-ordinated the study. Funding for the project was provided by the Canadian Council on Learning, enabling the necessary research and analysis for the study to be performed. Dr. Stephen King at the University of Regina and Shelley Gordon at the University of Prince Edward Island are commended for their provision of organizational support to the project team. Lastly, the Aboriginal interviewees who provided invaluable input cannot be thanked enough. Without their comments, opinions and shared experiences this study could not have been completed.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary: Retention of Aboriginal Students in Post-Secondary Institutions in Atlantic Canada

Background

Aboriginal students face numerous barriers upon leaving their communities and attending post-secondary institutions. Many Aboriginal students are ill-prepared to succeed at university, resulting in graduation rates at post-secondary schools well below those of non-Aboriginals. Accessibility and affordability present difficulties, and throughout university the students often face racism and discrimination from peers, professors and administration. Altogether too frequently, these and other factors prove to be too great a barrier to overcome and result in students dropping out.

To increase retention of Aboriginal students, post-secondary institutions must listen and respond to needs articulated by Aboriginal students. This research project focuses on obtaining knowledge for Atlantic Canadian post-secondary institutions about how they can provide the necessary resources to enable Aboriginal students to succeed.

Methodology

Coordinated by the AAU working Committee on Aboriginal Issues, this research project has conducted 59 interviews with students from nine Atlantic Canadian post-secondary institutions. The data produced from the interviews was analyzed using a qualitative method informed by grounded theory design. This design focuses on new data that leads to themes and concepts, which in turn develops theories. Respondents expressed their views of available supports, what services are needed, their motivations for pursuing post-secondary education, and overall what has helped or hindered their success at post-secondary institutions. From this data and the accompanying analysis, recommendations on how to increase Aboriginal retention at post-secondary institutions in Atlantic Canada were developed.

Key Findings

The information was grouped into six areas, which highlighted the following points:

1. 68% of students reported **awareness of services/supports** available at their post-secondary institution. Generally students reported either high or low awareness at an institution, with one institution reporting mixed awareness.

2. Corresponding with awareness, 63% of students reported **usage of services/supports**. Post-secondary institutions with more visible, accessible resources directed specifically towards Aboriginal students reported higher usage rates. Students were also more likely to praise the **quality** of resources at these institutions.

3. Aboriginal Resource Centres and Aboriginal student counsellors were crucial **enablers of success.** Additional positives were Aboriginal Studies/Language courses, helpful professors, and financial supports.
4. Aboriginal students identified racism and discrimination as a significant **barrier to success**. Students reported feeling isolated because of their ethnicity and entrance into a new and different environment. Financial difficulties were also a considerable barrier students encountered.

5. Echoing enablers of success, **Aboriginal needs** included Aboriginal Resource Centres and Aboriginal/liaisons student counsellors which provide academic and social assistance, as well as peer support and a sense of community.

6. Regarding **motivations for pursuing post-secondary education**, respondents believed attaining higher levels of education would help them finding employment in competitive job markets. Students also strived to be positive role models for their family and community by obtaining post-secondary education.

Recommendations

From this analysis of data, recommendations to improve the situation were developed. The following areas outline necessary steps to take:

1. **Expand Aboriginal Studies/Language courses; raise awareness of Aboriginal issues for students and faculty and administration members:** These measures aim to promote knowledge concerning Aboriginal history/issues and eliminate racism and discrimination that Aboriginal students encounter as they pursue post-secondary education.

2. **Increase Aboriginal representation and input concerning University affairs:** Improving the connection between the Aboriginal community and institutions will provide valuable insight and knowledge concerning Aboriginal educational success.

3. **Increase Aboriginal enrolment and retention:** Institutions must implement an Aboriginal retention and recruitment strategy specific to their own institution. This may include establishing Aboriginal Resource Centres, increasing awareness of supports for incoming/enrolled Aboriginal Students, and increasing Aboriginal scholarships and bursaries.

Comments

Planned workshops and seminars between the institutions, investigators, and other interested parties including Aboriginal students will help generate realistic means for post-secondary institutions to enact change.

Due to the semi-structured nature of the interviews, different data sets were produced from the participating institutions. Certain highlights resulting from this information were emphasized,

though an effort to categorize these results was not undertaken due to these variances in the semi-structured interviews.

Introduction

Health status, employment income, satisfaction and other quality of life factors are positively related to one's level of education (Chacaby *et al.*, 2008). For Aboriginal people in Canada, rates of high school graduation and attendance at post-secondary schools are well below those of non-Aboriginals. Lack of educational attainment contributes to poverty rates more than double the rate for non-Aboriginal peoples (Canadian Policy Research Networks, 2004). However, when higher levels of schooling have been attained, Aboriginal people have been able to reach employment rates comparable with non-Aboriginals. For the healthy development of Aboriginal communities, the number of Aboriginal students graduating from post-secondary institutions must be dramatically increased (Aboriginal Roundtable, 2007; Wotherspoon & Schissel, 1998).

To increase retention of Aboriginal students, post-secondary institutions must listen and respond to needs articulated by First Nations, Inuit, Innu and Métis communities and their governing and educational institutions. The *Retention of Aboriginal Students in Post-Secondary Institutions in Atlantic Canada* study, co-ordinated and conducted by members of the Atlantic Association of Universities (AAU) Working Committee on Aboriginal issues, has two main objectives:

- to identify Aboriginal students' perceptions of the social and academic supports, and lack of these supports, available to them in universities in Atlantic Canada. The study focuses on how students view access to supports/services, what they perceive to be enablers and barriers to their success at university, and what their ideas are about other possible systems of support that would help them and future students overcome identified barriers to university education.

- to develop recommendations which will be made available to AAU, its member institutions, participating Aboriginal communities and decision-

makers in order to encourage post-secondary institutions to offer supports

where they are lacking in order to encourage retention of Aboriginal

students. Dissemination will occur through vehicles such as fact sheets,

brochures, executive summaries, community symposiums, websites and

report presentations.

Increasing educational attainment will create the foundation necessary for the economic prosperity of Aboriginal communities across Canada. Providing appropriate supports will also promote the preservation and use of Aboriginal languages, traditional knowledge and cultures (Thomason and Thurber, 1999). Encouraging further education and retention of Aboriginal peoples with the aim of decreasing, if not eliminating, their marginalized status will also benefit Canada as a whole on cultural, economic, and social levels.

Prior to this research, the AAU Working Committee on Aboriginal Issues conducted an environmental scan of initiatives corresponding to Aboriginal issues at Atlantic Canada universities, with representatives from each university in the Atlantic Region. This scan, which highlights areas of support and success, but also the needs and limits of available resources, can be found on a national website – Roundtable University Strategy (http://www.uwinnipeg.ca/ index/release-071109). The committee will use the scan, along with the student findings, to assess the availability and helpfulness of supports in the post-secondary institutions. The *Retention of Aboriginal Students in Post-Secondary Institutions in Atlantic Canada* study determines where the gaps exist in support for Aboriginal students and provides recommendations to fill these gaps.

This research project provides invaluable information about what is working, what is failing, and what is needed to advance the success of Aboriginal students within Canadian universities. Lavis *et al.* (2003) judge the effectiveness of Knowledge Translation by the "impact that research findings have on decision making processes" (Schryer-Roy, 2005, p.5). The results from this research project show that post-secondary institutions need to offer more in the way of support to promote retention of Aboriginal students in undergraduate, graduate and post-graduate degrees. These findings need to be transferred to administrations in post-secondary institutions to effect

meaningful change. The desired outcome will be the implementation of increased and more effective supports. A future study can evaluate if that indeed has occurred and how successful it proves to be.

This study uses the term "Aboriginal" as a representation of all Indigenous groups within Canada. Indian and Northern Affairs Canada defines Aboriginal peoples as:

> The descendants of the original inhabitants of North America. The Canadian Constitution recognizes three groups of Aboriginal people – Indians (commonly referred to as First Nations), Métis people, and Inuit. These are three separate peoples with unique heritages, languages, cultural practices and spiritual beliefs.

Recognizing the distinctiveness of each group, for the purposes of this paper the term Aboriginal will be used to represent First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and Innu peoples within Canada.

Literature Review

Aboriginal students, within Canada and also in countries such as the United States and New Zealand, face significant challenges upon leaving their communities and pursuing post-secondary education. Post-secondary institutions refer to universities, colleges, vocational/technical institutions, private vocational schools, apprenticeship, and on-the-job training. This study acknowledges the value of these forms of education and training, but due to project limitations focuses upon universities and colleges.

Many Aboriginal students arrive at university ill-prepared to succeed, lacking proper academic preparation or knowledge of how to excel at university. Accessibility and affordability present difficulties, largely due to the capping of educational funding from the federal government at 1989 rates. The isolation of Aboriginal communities often means students must leave their home communities and live on their own, without the support of their community and extended family. Altogether too frequently, this separation proves to be too great a barrier to overcome and results in students dropping out (Brade, Duncan & Sokal, 2003; Ryan, 1995). Throughout their studies, students often face racism and discrimination from peers, and professors and administration. These and other factors prevent Aboriginal students from achieving success or reaching their full potential in university.

Summary of factors resulting in low retention rates:

- accessibility/geographic barriers
- different skill sets/knowledge
- personal/family issues
- financial difficulties/inadequate funding
- effects of assimilation leading to devaluation of Aboriginal identity and heritage
- racism and discrimination from teachers, fellow students and general public

- inadequate academic preparation/lack of knowledge regarding university
- lack of role models in their communities

A 1995 study conducted by James Ryan of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education found that the majority of Aboriginal students experienced significant difficulties in the first year of their degree programs, with all but a few failing one or more courses, if not years. More recently, table 1 (below) represents the success and failure rates of Aboriginal students from the Atlantic region supported by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada funds. This information, supplied by the Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nation Chiefs (APCFNC), displays results of Aboriginal students studying both within and outside the region.

Table 1. Enrolment and Graduation Statistics

Post-Secondary Education Enrolment	Post-Secondary Education Graduates	Graduate % Based on 4 yr Undergraduate degree of students who began their Post-Secondary education in 02/03
NB year enrolled 06/07 = 419 year enrolled 05/06 = 432 year enrolled 04/05 = 401 year enrolled 03/04 = 382 year enrolled 02/03 = 371	NB year graduated 06/07 = 66 year graduated 05/06 = 42 year graduated 04/05 = 39 year graduated 03/04 = 40 year graduated 02/03 = 41	NB 17.7%
NS year enrolled 06/07 = 112 year enrolled 05/06 = 114 year enrolled 04/05 = 117 year enrolled 03/04 = 106 year enrolled 02/03 = 511	NS year graduated 06/07 = 31 year graduated 05/06 = 22 year graduated 04/05 = 23 year graduated 03/04 = 26 year graduated 02/03 = 58	NS 6.1%
PE year enrolled 06/07 = 35 year enrolled 05/06 = 29 year enrolled 04/05 = 26 year enrolled 03/04 = 32 year enrolled 02/03 = 27	PE year graduated 06/07 = 4 year graduated 05/06 = 2 year graduated 04/05 = 10 year graduated 03/04 = 5 year graduated 02/03 = 3	PE 14.8%
NL year enrolled 06/07 = 175 year enrolled 05/06 = 178	NL year graduated 06/07 = 33 year graduated 05/06 = 31	NL 16.1%

year enrolled 04/05 = 206	year graduated 04/05 = 65	
year enrolled 03/04 = 199	year graduated 03/04 = 26	
year enrolled 02/03 = 204	year graduated 02/03 = 31	

(NOTE: Many Aboriginal students take more than three years to complete a general degree. The University of Toronto's review of the Transitional Year Programme indicates that the average time to complete a four-year degree is 4-6 years).

Clearly, the number enrolled in post-secondary studies compared to the number of graduates illustrates the importance of identifying supports that will enable Aboriginal students to be successful – particularly since there are clear links in today's world between educational attainment, income, and health (Declaration of Alma-Alta, 1978; Epp, 1996; Lalonde, 1974; World Health Organization, Health and Welfare Canada, Canadian Public Health Association, 1986; PHAC, 1994; Raphael, 1999; Raphael, 2003; Statistics Canada, 2007). For the prosperity of Aboriginal communities, post-secondary institutions must hear the voice of the Aboriginal students regarding this issue. Canada must increase the educational attainment level of all its members, so every person within its borders can actively participate in the growth of the larger community.

Caution must be used in making assumptions about at-risk students, as Syracuse University Sociology Professor Vincent Tinto warns: "Do not assume that categorical attributes or experiences are perfect predictors of future behaviors. Early warning systems, at best, are signals of the likelihood of potential problems, not absolute predictors of their occurrence." Aboriginal students must not be stereotyped in their pursuit of post-secondary education. Dr. Tinto expands on this warning by stating that those"who have been historically excluded from higher education are affected by the campus expectational climate and by their perceptions of the expectations of faculty and staff hold for their individual performance." Students must be pushed to succeed with flying colours, not get by with passing grades, as "no one rises to low expectations."

The literature identifies some supports for providing assistance to Aboriginal students in scholastic settings (Cummins, 1986; Seidman, 2005; NWT Dept of Education, 1998, Farrimond and Doyle-Bedwell, 2005). A strong identification with one's own minority heritage may have

positive effects, provided, of course, that this identification is a positive one, a situation that happens all too rarely with minorities (Cummins, 1986). Cummins also notes that those who identify strongly and positively with their heritage, even in the face of the dominant society's devaluation, are likely to do better in their studies than those minority people who identify less positively with their heritage.

Dr. Alan Seidman, Executive Director of the Center for the Study of College Student Retention (www.cscsr.org) and Editor of the *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory, and Practice*, has developed a formula which he advocates that post-secondary institutions adopt in order to promote retention of minority students:

Retention = Early Identification + (Early + Intensive + Continuous) Intervention

According to this formula, successful retention of Aboriginal students results from early identification of support coupled with early and continuous intervention (availability of support) throughout the university experience. Seidman puts the onus on the universities, saying institutions "cannot assume that students will take the first step and seek help. The university must be proactive in its approach to students" (Seidman, 2005). Universities need to look at their programs and services and ask the following:

1. Do they help bond students to students?
2. Do they help bond students to the university?
3. Do they identify areas in need of assistance (academic or social)?
4. Do they remediate areas in need of assistance?
5. Do they continue throughout the post-secondary experience?

(http://www.cscsr.org/docs/MinorityStudentRetentionResourcesforPractitioners2006.pdf**.** Retrieved Nov 13, 2007).

Dr. Tinto, a respected authority on student retention, provides a simpler message in helping provide success: retention is the result of effective education, which means that the focus is student education rather than retention itself. "Retention will follow as a by-product," he states. Post-secondary institutions must still undoubtedly provide necessary resources to at-risk students

such as Aboriginal students, as Tinto recommends strategies including providing adequate financial aid, emphasizing academic support services, and focusing on advising, counselling and mentoring students.   However, focus on the overall quality of education provided to students must not be lost, as he believes that is what ultimately will promote student interest, participation and success in school.

Participants

The members of the AAU Working Committee on Aboriginal Issues coordinated the study *Retention of Aboriginal Students in Post-Secondary Institutions in Atlantic Canada*. The AAU Working Committee on Aboriginal Issues has representatives from each university to look specifically at Aboriginal issues. The committee has two co-chairs, one whom must be Aboriginal. At the time the study was undertaken, this committee was co-chaired by Dr. Vianne Timmons, then Vice-President of Academic Development at the University of Prince Edward Island, and Lindsay Marshall, Associate Dean of Mi'kmaq College Institute of Cape Breton University. Dr. Timmons is of Mi'kmaq descent and Lindsay Marshall is Mi'kmaq.

The study recruited interviewees from the 17 universities throughout the Atlantic provinces, in order to ensure that each province was represented in the research; however interviews were only conducted at nine post-secondary institutions despite efforts of the project team. Interviewees were from Cape Breton University, Dalhousie University, the University of King's College, Memorial University, the University of Prince Edward Island, Saint Mary's University, Saint Thomas University and several other institutions which prefer to remain unidentified.

The project coordinator and co-investigators contacted Aboriginal student counsellors, Aboriginal student organizations, coordinators of Aboriginal programs and student services offices at the different institutions. E-mail notifications were sent out to professors regarding the research that was taking place. Recruitment posters (See Appendix C) and electronic billboards at some institutions informed students across campus of the research. These measures were enacted in an effort to ensure that all Aboriginal students attending the participating institutions had the opportunity to participate.

The Research Ethics Boards at the participating institutions approved the research study prior to recruitment and interviewing of students. Approval of the Mi'kmaq Ethics Watch was also

obtained in order to ensure their knowledge and support of the research project. The respondents signed consent forms (See Appendix B), and were permitted to abstain from answering specific questions or withdraw from the interview at any time if desired without penalty.

Methodology

This project utilized a qualitative method, informed by grounded theory design, which focuses on Aboriginal student perceptions of available supports at university. Interviews were conducted with Aboriginal students enrolled in identified universities in the four Atlantic provinces. The project co-ordinator, Dr. Timmons, was at the UPEI site originally. In September, 2008, she moved to the University of Regina, where she continued to oversee the project. At each site co-investigators oversaw the research: Patti Doyle-Bedwell and Frederic Wien of Dalhousie University, Laurel Lewey of Saint Thomas University, Lindsay Marshall of Cape Breton University, Bernadette Power of Memorial University, and Trudy Sable of Saint Mary's. Three research assistants – one each from Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Newfoundland – conducted the interviews in these provinces.

The central questions followed an exploratory and descriptive semi-structured account of the students' perspectives on available support services.

The central questions were:
- As an Aboriginal student, are there supports at your university that helped you?
- What supports would have helped you?

Subsequent queries included:
- Tell us about your experiences accessing these supports.
- Tell us about your experiences using these supports.
- Describe an experience or event that positively contributed to your overall perspective on the available supports.
- Describe an experience or event that negatively contributed to your overall perspective on the available supports.
- What kinds of supports would you like to see available?

- What are the supports in your home community?

- What kinds of barriers have you encountered?

From September 2008 to January 2009, fifty-nine interviews were conducted with Aboriginal students at the participating institutions. The interviews were then transcribed, and the results were compiled, coded, and analyzed.

This qualitative research employs a grounded theory approach, which emphasizes generation of theory from data. This differs from quantitative methods which work in the reverse, using data to test theories. The stages of analysis within grounded theory design are displayed below:

Grounded Theory Design

Stage	Purpose
Codes	Identifying anchors that allow the key points of the data to be gathered
Concepts	Collections of **codes** of similar content that allows the data to be grouped
Categories	Broad groups of similar **concepts** that are used to generate a **theory**
Theory	A collection of explanations that explain the subject of the research

The data produced from the questionnaires are gathered together. Concepts and themes emerge from this collection during analysis, and the similar content is grouped together. Through categories that describe a situation – in this case Aboriginal student services and needs – the content points toward theories about the subject matter researched. To sum up, theories are created by the data rather than by the researchers or analysts. This, debatably, can help avoid

bias or misuse of data in order to display an accurate, truthful description of the situation being researched.

Analyzing Aboriginal education requires this absence of bias, as such a serious and important issue necessitates solid information and proper analysis that will help improve the situations of Aboriginal peoples within Canada. The literature regarding this issue provides its own theories and evidence about what services Aboriginal students need, and what services are lacking. However, it was crucial that the research for this project be conducted apart from the preceding literature, serving as a separate source of data that could be utilized to further the expansion of knowledge concerning Aboriginal education. Theories concerning Aboriginal success in post-secondary institutions produced after the collection of data and analysis in this study were ultimately compared to existing theories, but it must be emphasized that the data initially produced was not informed or influenced by existing theories pertaining to Aboriginal education.

Results

The following is a breakdown of students interviewed from eight Atlantic Canada universities and one community college. Several institutions preferred to remain unidentified. It should be noted there were a number of "no-show" interviewees, which diminished the representation of individual institutions.

A – University of Prince Edward Island: 5
B – Saint Mary's University: 1
C – Memorial University of Newfoundland: 15
D – Saint Thomas University: 7
H – Cape Breton University: 22
I – Dalhousie University: 4
J – Other: 2
K – University of King's College: 1
L – Other: 2

For the purposes of this research paper, the data have been grouped together to emphasize areas for the post-secondary institutions and policy-makers as a collective. One of the central purposes of this study is to identify areas of concern, positives and negatives, and what Aboriginal students believe is needed for them to succeed at university or colleges. The second purpose is to formulate recommendations for institutions to improve the supports and services to Aboriginal students in order to improve retention and academic performances of Aboriginal students. From the data collected, consistent themes emerged that provide valuable information regarding the opinions and needs of Aboriginal students. Participating institutions can collectively utilize this information to improve their supports and services and other areas that require attention. Additionally, as a secondary resource each participating institution will be provided with an individual brief summarizing the data produced from their institution.

Coding of the data collected from the fifty-nine interviews identified six key areas of concern: awareness of services/supports; quality/usage of services/supports; enablers of success; barriers to success; Aboriginal needs; and motivations for pursuing post-secondary education.

Awareness of Services/Supports

Data compiled from the question, "Are you aware of places to go or services and supports specifically for Aboriginal students at your university?" illustrated the knowledge of Aboriginal students regarding support services at their university. Results from this area, and preceding areas, took subsequent questions into consideration, as at times upon further consideration individuals elaborated upon or modified their responses.

Quality/Usage of Services/Supports

Information regarding Aboriginal student usage of the available supports was obtained primarily from the results collected from the questions asking, "Tell us if you have used these supports," "Describe an experience or event that positively contributed to how you view the available supports," and "Describe an experience or event that negatively contributed to how you view the available supports."

Enablers of Success

This information was obtained primarily from the results collected from the questions asking "What has been helpful in university?", "Describe an experience or event that positively contributed to how you view the available supports," "What would be helpful to further your studies?", and "What supports do you have in your home community? Do you think that any similar supports should be implemented in university?" (Note: the wording in questions varied slightly between institutions, but these are summaries of how the questions were consistently conveyed).

Barriers to Success

Determining the barriers to students success came from the following questions: "What has been a barrier at your post-secondary institution?", "What would be a barrier to you furthering your

studies?", and "Can you describe an experience or event that negatively contributed to how you view available supports?"

Aboriginal Needs

Determining the needs of the students and what they desire to see at their university arose from the following question: "If you had a wish list of services or supports at university, what would be on it? For example: scholarships, emergency funding, emergency housing, daycare or childcare."

Motivations for Pursuing Post-Secondary Education

This information was obtained primarily from various responses throughout the questionnaire, as well as specific questions posed that arose as a result of the semi-structured nature of the questionnaire that asked students' motivations for attending post-secondary institutions, or what they intend to do following their graduation.

The collected responses provided invaluable information regarding Aboriginal needs and opinions on supports and services, and this data will be analyzed in the following section.

Analysis

In this research project the principal investigators did not wish to single out individual universities, either positively or negatively, but rather to obtain information about general Aboriginal student perceptions of the services and supports provided to them. In addition to the report, each institution will be presented an individualized summary of student comments pertaining to the services and supports it offers for Aboriginal students. This combination of information gives each institution a well-informed, helpful base of data to aid in decisions regarding alterations or improvements to these services and supports. As such, the information in this report will be analyzed in terms of a collective overview as much as possible. The six areas pointed out in the Results section will form the central units of analysis.

Awareness of Services/Supports

For Aboriginal students to access services and supports, they must first be aware of the resources. There are variances throughout the institutions studied in terms of supports provided, but overall there are services and assistance available to Aboriginal students at each institution. However, institutions on the higher range of supports available predictably scored higher, while institutions on the lower range of supports reported lower awareness.

> "There is nothing that I know of that's in place at my University (specifically for Aboriginal students)."

Overall, 40/59 respondents – or 68% – stated they were aware of supports or services specifically geared toward Aboriginal students at their post-secondary institution. While many students were knowledgeable about the existing supports and services, it is troubling that 32% of Aboriginal students were not even aware of the resources available to them. At some institutions, respondents were aware of

> "I'm aware of a few. Like the native student lounge."

general resources, but not Aboriginal specific supports, as one student commented: "There is no place specifically for Aboriginal students to go."

Post-secondary institutions that have highly visible, accessible resources directed specifically toward Aboriginal students recorded almost unanimous results in which all students reported awareness of the available supports. Conversely, institutions which have less visible, generalized student services that are less visibly directed towards Aboriginal students received poor results. They recorded minimal awareness scores, or at best, mixed results. Several quotations depicted resources that were present but seemingly unavailable, noting: "I heard there was an Aboriginal resource centre upstairs, but I looked for it but it's not there," and "The door was always closed."

> "Yes…the Native Counselling Unit has been a great source of support for me at this university."

Quality/Usage of Services/Supports

Having available resources is important, but the actual quality, accessibility, and usefulness weigh heavily on the effectiveness of the services and supports. Again, the variance between resources of institutions should be noted, as well as the differences in student enrolment, budget, and location. However, it would greatly benefit both students and the institutions to maximize the effectiveness of resources. One student represented some of the responses towards the utilization of supports, commenting, "There's a First Nations student advisor, but I never really used him before."

> "Used services… Yeah, everyday. It is the first place that you come to."

Overall, 37/59 respondents – or 63% – stated they had utilized supports or services specifically geared toward Aboriginal students at their post-secondary institution. This number corresponds closely to the number of students aware of available resources, though 5% were aware of but still did not utilize the supports.

Post-secondary institutions with more visible, accessible resources directed specifically towards Aboriginal students reported higher usage rates. Almost all students within these institutions reported using the

> "There are student services here for, like, all students but it is very intimidating to go in there and ask for something."

services and being pleased with their helpfulness, as a common refrain towards these helpful resources was "Whatever problems you have they'll help you with." In contrast, institutions with less visible and more general services scored lower. Many students were not aware of the supports, and if aware often believed the available resources were inadequate and would not meet their needs.

In addition, several students commented that they were less apt to use supports funded by specific Aboriginal groups, as they feel the resources were not directed towards them, rather just the specific group. In situations where funding and services are provided by Aboriginal groups, institutions and Aboriginal groups must work together with students in welcoming and supporting them, making them aware that the supports are directed towards all Aboriginal students, not just specific Aboriginal groups.

"I found that the people in charge were specifically concerned with the Inuit people and there was no support at all for First Nation people."

Enablers of Success

Students report many sources of assistance from the institutions as well as informal assistance (peer and family support, for example) which contribute to their development and success at post-secondary institutions. Focusing specifically on the resources provided by institutions for Aboriginal students, as well as the overall university/college setting, Aboriginal students clearly believe there are many positives which have helped their progress.

"Funding enabled me because I probably could not afford it myself… there has been a lot of help."

The existence of Aboriginal student lounges (or also referred to as Aboriginal resource centres) is crucial, as this area provided students educational assistance and resources such as the Internet and printers. Perhaps most importantly, these centres imparted a feeling of community, as one respondent summarized: "I find we're kind of like a big family you know, and if you have a problem or a question you can go to pretty much anyone and ask them, they'd be more than happy to help you."

"If it weren't for other native students and that native student lounge I don't think I would've survived."

"Most of the professors are extremely accommodating, encourage you to call them at home…it's a

Small class sizes and accessible, concerned professors were common enablers of success. Aboriginal students also praised some university websites and general services for their provision of useful information. Financial supports such as scholarships, bursaries and available housing and transportation eased the financial burdens and stress felt by students.

When available, Aboriginal Studies programs helped students, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, become aware of the history of the Aboriginal people, as well as current issues confronting them. Aboriginal Studies provide information, community and coping mechanisms for Aboriginal students. Further, Aboriginal Studies ensure all students learn of sensitive and timely issues while imparting positive self identity to Aboriginal students. Aboriginal Studies also create positive space for Aboriginal students to study issues relevant to their academic and personal development.

> "They need an Aboriginal history class or something to address some of those issues, some sort of background and kind of give them an understanding."

Barriers to Success

Aboriginal students face the same stresses and difficulties encountered by all post-secondary students, as a respondent commented: "Sometimes people may be having family problems and they're having a hard time studying, and they're having issues with work, and all of these things." However, Aboriginal students also face additional problems and obstacles. These additional concerns arise from issues discussed in the literature review, such as moving from small, isolated communities to larger areas and the racism and prejudice they may encounter.

> "There's not a lot of Aboriginal activities or clubs or organizations, like to me that's what support is."

Discussing these issues in the context of supports and services directed toward Aboriginal students in an effort to smooth the transition and provide assistance, it is apparent that many barriers still exist and must be focused on.

> "There's a lack of knowledge in students here about cultural sensitivity… courses geared towards Aboriginal Studies would help them become more aware."

Aboriginal students identified racism and discrimination as a prevalent issue across all institutions, leading to alienation within the post-secondary institutional setting. Discrimination was less apparent in larger institutions which provided substantial resources geared toward Aboriginal students. Students reported encountering racial prejudice from fellow students, administration, professors and even a government official at a conference. One response regarding what they thought was a barrier was short but poignant – "The color of my skin." This is an unacceptable situation that must be addressed, as this hurtful discrimination adds significantly to the feelings of isolation and "otherness" Aboriginal students may already face upon arriving at unfamiliar settings:

> People even drop out of classes and that's because of the negative attention they're getting for being Aboriginal, and not wanting to stay in this place where people don't think you deserve to be there… major stigma, I've already been approached after saying that I'm First Nations and people have asked me, "Well do you sniff gas, too?"

Aboriginal students faced financial difficulties that negatively impacted their studies. Students' funding often did not adequately provide properly for tuition, housing, living expenses, daycare, and transportation. A common theme throughout the study clearly illustrated that financial barriers led to hardship and stress. Funding often eventually came through, but not until the student had suffered significant hardship. Additional barriers included outdated and insufficient resources at Aboriginal services, poor counselling advice, limited Aboriginal Studies, and lack of information about available resources.

"[Funding] has been the same amount for the past ten years and it's not keeping up with the inflation at all… supposed to include our rent, our bills, our transportation, our everything, and I find it's very hard to work with."

Inadequate resources directed towards Aboriginal students were also a concern. Knowledgeable of the additional difficulties they face, many students believed the general resources did not fully address their situation, and the allotted Aboriginal resources were insufficient. This displeasure was lessened at institutions with substantial Aboriginal supports, though barriers and difficulties still existed.

Aboriginal Needs

Many students reported that, removed from their communities, they felt like they did not belong at their post-secondary institution. Students from larger centres with strong peer/family support, and some Aboriginal students who were not perceived as being Aboriginal because of their "non-Aboriginal" physical appearance, did not have this same sense of displacement or otherness, but still felt apart from the student body and faculty. Institutions which offered substantial accessible resources directed toward Aboriginal students lessened these negative impacts as well, though students expressed the desire for improvements and alterations in their services/supports.

> "Feeling isolated and different from the rest of the student body, not having a community and sense of belonging … people don't feel welcome."

Across the board, students expressed positive comments about current Aboriginal student lounges. At universities without space dedicated to Aboriginal students, they desired lounges/resource centres designated for them. These centres offer emotional support, a sense of community, peer support, administrative assistance, and educational resources. While recognizing budget constraints, students will benefit from lounges dedicated to them and the larger in size and services, and the more equipped with supports such as computers, the better. Students will be more likely to use such centres as they believe these resources are truly helpful and decrease the isolation and lack of belonging they may encounter. (Budget constraints often do not limit other student services. At Dalhousie, for example, the Native Education Counselling Centre is not funded by Dalhousie but by the Confederacy of Mainland Mi'kmaq. While Dalhousie provides space, and computer access to the network, it has no impact upon the university's larger budget.)

> "Coming in from a community which is like 10,000 and then coming into a university which is double the population of my community, it's been a really big transition."

> "A safe place basically…they just want to walk in, have other people around who they can relate to and be able to have a conversation."

Aboriginal liaisons or counsellors were also much appreciated, as they offer a more accessible alternative to the general services. These

> "The Native counsellor that works in the building has been wonderful at really giving me guidance."

counsellors, as well as Aboriginal elders or mentors, ease the difficulties

of the transition from students' communities to the post-secondary setting.

In addition to these supports, several students called for changes to education at the elementary

and high school levels in order to produce more educated and university-ready Aboriginal

students. A powerful response elaborated on this:

> If you really want a greater number of Aboriginal students in the post-secondary
> system you have to make changes in the elementary system in order to foster a
> real desire to learn. [Promote] real curiosity about reading and a focus on literacy
> and making it a fun enjoyable experience that prepares people to do their own
> studying all of their lives. Because if you don't have that, that spark, it's hard to
> get through high school. It's harder to get through university.

Motivations for Pursuing Post-Secondary Education

The study also sought additional information about why Aboriginal students

believe it is important to receive post-secondary education. Many students

offered this in the course of their discussion, while several interviewers

asked more directly about their motivations for pursuing post-secondary

education.

"If I want to get out there and do something I got to go get my education."

Many respondents believed in the necessity of attaining the highest level of

education possible. This would enable them to compete for higher-level jobs

in today's competitive job market. Aboriginal students also had other

motivations besides simply gaining employment. Students, knowledgeable of

 the poor economic and social conditions of their communities, wanted to

ensure they would not end up in the same dire situations of many of their

peers. Avoiding poverty meant either becoming employed elsewhere, or

"In this day and age we need education and the community I grew up in most people didn't even complete high school."

returning home equipped with skills and abilities to aid the situation. The desire to attain

knowledge through post-secondary education in order to apply these skills back home was a

repeated goal. Many believed that by obtaining their degree they could help fill needed positions

in their communities: "I feel it's very important because there's such a shortage of nurses in the community. So this is a main reason why I'm doing it, just to help our community."

Instances of racism and prejudice before and during their time at post-secondary institutions, which can be damaging and a deterrent, also served as a motivation for some respondents. Hardships in the transition from their community also made some respondents feel empowered as they have fought through the struggle. At the same time, positive interactions with Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals also motivated respondents in seeking post-secondary institutions. Family assistance and support provided a positive impetus to their studies for many respondents. The recognition of the efforts of their community providing assistance and resources for post-secondary education also served as significant motivation, as many desired to "give something back."

> "Due to the difficulties I've had in transitioning I think that overall it's made me more independent and more stronger then if I were to just stay home."

Aboriginal students also expressed the importance and value to themselves and others of achieving a post-secondary education. Respondents hoped to become positive role models for their family, peers and communities. The realization that achieving a post-secondary education would start a positive trend motivated some students, as their achievement of post-secondary education would serve as a standard for their children and extended family members to aspire to. A sense of pride in their Aboriginal heritage was also a significant motivator, epitomized in this statement:

> "I had cousins tell me that they looked up at me for my successes… we need positive role models in our communities."

> [The] satisfaction I get when I get to help native people is way above and beyond anything else, because I am proud of who I am. And I am proud of where I came from, I am proud of our people, I am proud of our traditional people and that's, I think, a big thing to say… let's try to get as educated as we can ourselves so we can pass it on to our kids and our kids in our communities.

Summary

The success of Aboriginal students in post-secondary education will have a positive correlation for the progress of Aboriginal communities and Canada as a whole. The significance and importance of ensuring success cannot be emphasized enough.   Recognizing the essential and fundamental need for Aboriginal students to succeed in post-secondary education must lead to constructive, real changes to Aboriginal student supports. As displayed in the reactions and emotions by the respondents, institutions are not meeting their needs. This leads to difficulties for Aboriginal students in achieving success in their studies, contributing to low retention rates.

Aboriginal students still face significant barriers and obstacles to success at post-secondary education. Institutions which provided accessible, substantial supports directed to Aboriginal students – examples including Aboriginal resource centres, Aboriginal counsellors/mentors, and expanded financial and housing resources – serve as a model for other institutions to follow, though they still must seek to maintain and improve their supports. Due to their importance, the Aboriginal resource centres, and other key supports, must provide the assistance students need. Otherwise, they will become barriers, not enablers, as shown in one respondent's negative experience:

> I actually put my name in to volunteer there [at the Aboriginal resource centre] but the people in charge two years ago, the Aboriginal Representative on [the institution's] student union, neglected that place and did not operate it and I never even got back my volunteer sheet. Actually after she was done being the Aboriginal Representative I went up to the resource centre and opened the door and there was my volunteer form on the floor from a month before.

On the other hand, many positive experiences were expressed. Responses such as this serve as a model for these resources:

> Used services…courses such as writing cover letters, resumes… I haven't had any problems accessing them, I just simply had to go right directly to the person and ask them right up front if I had any specific questions…[name of liaison officer] there for example, it was no more then a few minutes that she invited me and offered me books that I needed for my courses, additional books outside from what I was already doing. I could do additional research. She offered me a place that I could come and meet other Native people and sit down, or even just to be by myself too, and kind of work on my own work.

Atlantic post-secondary institutions that make serious commitments to providing, sustaining, and expanding necessary resources will better their chances of increasing retention of Aboriginal students, providing exponential benefits throughout the region.

Recommendations

1. Expand Aboriginal Studies/Language courses; raise awareness of Aboriginal issues for students and faculty and administration members

Strategy: This study displayed the need for post-secondary institutions to eliminate instances of racism and prejudice towards Aboriginal students. In order to achieve this, institutions are encouraged to offer more Aboriginal Studies and Aboriginal Language courses. Increased Aboriginal content will educate and inform students, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, regarding Aboriginal history within Canada and current issues within the Aboriginal community. In addition, these courses are desired to be taught, or consulted on, by Aboriginal professors/Aboriginal elders. Aboriginal awareness campaigns, including information sessions, activities that reflect and honour Aboriginal culture and communities, and expanded and updated websites would help achieve this goal of increased cultural sensitivity.

Upgraded training for professors and administrators regarding racism and discrimination issues is a key component of this strategy. Faculty and administration members are integral to the overall post-secondary experience of students. They provide support and assistance, control the atmosphere within their classes and other university settings, and overall create and maintain the environment which students exist in at their post-secondary studies. It is crucial that faculty and administrators are presented with the necessary education and training concerning Aboriginal student issues and needs in post-secondary institutions.

2. Increase Aboriginal representation and input concerning University affairs

Strategy: In order for post-secondary institutions to consistently receive vital input from the Aboriginal community, institutions are urged to enact a selection of, if not all of, the following measures:

- implement an Aboriginal student policy, as an official Senate-approved document, ensuring that Aboriginal students are considered in all facets of the university experience;
- create an Aboriginal Council to include representatives from provincial Aboriginal groups as well as institutional officials;
- establish an Aboriginal Advisor to the President to ensure that Aboriginal matters are addressed at a high level and not lost in a heavily layered bureaucratic system;
- develop a support network between the Aboriginal community and student through an education counsellor on reserve;
- have psychologists/counsellors available from the communities for support; and,
- allow more research to be done in the community as per academic guidelines.

3. Increase Aboriginal enrolment and retention

Strategy: A workshop between the institutions involved in this study will generate realistic means for post-secondary institutions to enact change. Using the results from this project and the workshop, institutions can develop and implement an Aboriginal retention and recruitment strategy specific to their own institution. These strategies may include the following:

- establishing, if they do not already exist, appropriate institution-funded Aboriginal Student Centres that incorporate a student lounge, personal and academic advising/mentoring programs, cultural programs, community liaisons, recruitment and retention initiatives, and student advocacy;
- increasing awareness of supports for incoming Aboriginal Students through brochures, newcomers' workshops, and recruitment packages; and,
- ensuring that a self-identification option is on all application forms for admission and that students are aware that this information will serve as a contact list for Aboriginal student activities and initiatives.

Additionally, the following measures are also recommended:

- supporting housing for Aboriginal students with children;

- increasing undergraduate, graduate, and post-graduate scholarships, and bursaries for Aboriginal students;

- implementing increased distance courses and courses in the community; and,

- allowing more flexibility in time requirements for completing a degree.

This project identifies supports that institutions in Atlantic Canada must work towards establishing or improving in order to increase Aboriginal retention. However, similar studies have been undertaken within Canada in recent history, notably Baydock (1992), Christensen (1994), Pidgeon (2001), and Walton (1996). These studies, utilizing surveys, interviews, and environmental scanning primarily throughout Western Canadian universities, produced comparable results to this research project. These analyses depicted deficient Aboriginal resources at post-secondary institutions, and offered similar recommendations: campuses should establish Aboriginal support centres, Aboriginal student organizations need to be established, an Aboriginal counsellor should be available for personal and academic counselling, and other solutions proposed by this study.

These reports on Aboriginal resources in Western Canadian post-secondary institutions display a timeline from 1992 to 2001 where the proper supports and services were not present. Aware of low retention rates of Aboriginal students, institutions provided with possible solutions and approaches to increasing retention were not as successful as desired, despite this information. These institutions have not overcome Dr. Tinto's "Gap Problem," which he states is "the failure to translate voluminous research findings on student retention into models that can guide institutional actions to enhance student retention." Atlantic Canadian post-secondary institutions must learn from the limited success of their Western counterparts.

The recommendations offered from this research project and from further workshops and seminars with invested parties must be implemented properly in order to have the best opportunity for success. Cognizant of the obstacles and challenges Aboriginal students face in pursuing post-secondary education, institutions must respond with appropriate resources. These will enable significant student success, not merely passing grades, keeping in mind Dr. Tinto's objectives of supportive retention. Each institution has particular strengths and weaknesses in

their supports directed towards Aboriginal students. As such, informed institutions that make a serious, consistent commitment to introducing new and improved resources specific to their needs will be strongly positioned to advance the educational success of their Aboriginal student population.

Researcher Note

Due to the semi-structured nature of the interviews, different data sets were produced from the participating institutions. Data was collected on Aboriginal group, status, gender, year and area of study, on- or off-reserve, and on- or off-campus, but because of the variance resulting from the semi-structured questionnaires, this data was not uniform across all involved institutions. Certain highlights resulting from this information were emphasized, though an effort to categorize these results (e.g. "75% of males responded…") was not undertaken due to these variances in the semi-structured interviews. A demographic table of the respondents can be found in Appendix E.

The flags on the cover page of this report represent Aboriginal groups from Atlantic Canada. These groups represented are, clockwise from top right: Métis, Inuit of Nunasiavut Innu Nation and Mi'kmaq Aboriginal peoples.

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Appendix A

Consent Form

After reading the Information Letter and having this research project explained I,..., agree to voluntarily participate in the research project: Retention of Aboriginal Students in Atlantic Canada's Post-secondary Institutions: An analysis of the supports available to Aboriginal students

I understand that I may stop participating at any time. I understand the risks involved in participating in this research, if any, are slight. I understand the researchers will do their best to maintain confidentiality and anonymity. And that despite their attempts, it is possible that others outside the researchers may be able to identify me as being part of a study on university supports.

The interview may take about one hour. The interviews will be recorded so that the researcher can refer to them later. My name and the information in my interview will be kept confidential. No one but the researcher will know what I say. I do not have to answer any questions if I don't want to. I may also withdraw an answer to an already asked question if I want to. I may stop the interview at any time I want.

I will be given a copy of this consent form. If I have any questions or concerns, I can ask the researcher by emailing Bobby at trcameron@upei.ca or calling collect 902-566-6485.

Participant:

Signature:_____Date: _____

Name:_____Address:_____

Researcher:

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix B

Interview Recruitment Posters

Are you an Aboriginal student?

Would you like your voice heard?

If so, we would like to speak with you!

STU and UNB are doing research on how Aboriginal students can best be supported

We are interested in your thoughts and opinions about what kinds of supports are available to you at your University

If you are interested in taking part of our study, please call:

Dina (506) 363-4663 or hbplp@stu.ca

☰ University of Prince Edward Island

Project: "Retention of Aboriginal Students in Atlantic Canada's Post-secondary Institutions: An analysis of the supports available to Aboriginal students"

Are You an Aboriginal Student at UPEI?

UPEI is doing research on how you can be supported as an Aboriginal student.

We are interested in your thoughts and opinions about what kinds of support services UPEI is making available to you.

Office:
5th Floor
Dalton Hall

For more information, or if you would like to participate in this project, please contact:

| **Julie Puiras**
Research Co-ordinator
japuiras@upei.ca
628-4356 | **Bobby Cameron**
Research Co-ordinator
trcameron@upei.ca
566-6485 |

45

Appendix C

Sample Interview Transcript

Note: Permission was granted from the respondent to include her full interview in this report. The following transcript exemplifies the many thoughts, emotions, and beliefs displayed by Aboriginal students towards post-secondary education in Canada collected through the study.

Dalhousie I-4 (Female)

INTERVIEWER: Can you tell me what year of university you are in?

RESPONDENT: I am in my third year.

INTERVIEWER: Do you have status?

RESPONDENT: What do you mean?

INTERVIEWER: Umm do you like have Indian Status, or any other type of…

RESPONDENT: I am Inuit.

INTERVIEWER: Oh okay. Umm have you been living on or off reserve?

RESPONDENT: I don't live on reserve. I live in ah Happy Valley Goose Bay it, it has its own local government so it's almost like an equivalent to a reserve, it's not very different but it just has like that sort of a self government. Which aren't reserves but it is representative of who I am. And my status is Inuit.

INTERVIEWER: Can you tell me about your experience at university so far?

RESPONDENT: It has been a rough transition. My coming in from a community which is like 10,000 and then coming into a university which is double the population of my community it's been a really big transition. Um I think it's interesting that we have we have like support here for people like me like natives, native people and I think it is really helpful to be able to come into a place and to have resources available to us like printing, faxing, and the telephone its really helping the transitions. Umm its, its very tough but I guess that's all a part of the experience.

INTERVIEWER: Are you aware of places to go um, or services and support specifically for Aboriginal students at your university?

RESPONDENT: Yes I am.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

RESPONDENT: The Native house. It's a nice place to come and just get support. I realize that they have like different committees who are like from Africa or like ah the Black students here at university. But I, I am not familiar with anything that they have for like people who are Aboriginal and who want to create their own committee so their own like groups of people so they can come in as a collective and put through like things like to be represented through out Dalhousie. Like if you go up to the DSU and you look at the pictures there, you have like the presidents, you have a Black representative, you have different representatives representing minority groups but I don't see anybody that's there for Native people. I'm not aware of it, it's probably there but I'm not aware of it, so I think that would be something that is ah important to, important to try and bring forward to try and make it more represented.

INTERVIEWER: Um for sure.

RESPONDENT: want me hold it? (the recorder)

INTERVIEWER: no I'm good. Can you tell me how you learned about these supports?

RESPONDENT: Umm I guess that it was sort of something that my friend (name) helped me out with like when I first came here, she, she introduced me to the Native Centre. I didn't know it was here and thankfully for her she showed me, it was through another friend. So I guess a when I was back in college there wasn't anything that was that was established for Native people, specifically even though the majority of people who were there were native, but now that I come to university and I, I see this place I realize that its important to the Native people who, who go to school at Dal.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. So are you speaking of the Native Education Counselling Unit?

RESPONDENT: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. Umm I know you spoke to a bit but could you speak a little bit more about how you have used the services?

RESPONDENT: Umm I've realized that when I, when I need to print something then I'll come here and I'll just come and use the computer and print off my essay, print off lecture notes. Umm my friend used to use the phone and the phone is there. (name) even cut my hair once, so if I needed to get my hair cut then she was here. Umm I used the fax machine a few times, the photocopier. I come in to just get general ideas about what's happening, (name) helps to inform me about like applications, bursaries, different types of things. Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: And (name) she's the Native Education Counsellor?

RESPONDENT: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. Umm if you had a wish list of services or supports at your university what would be on it? For example like scholarships, emergency funding, different things like that.

RESPONDENT: The first thing that I think would be important for me, to not call it Aboriginal.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

RESPONDENT: Being Native.

INTERVIEWER: Native.

RESPONDENT: (laughter) It would be Native. Umm I also think that it would be important to umm probably try and establish something umm which is representative of the different Native groups here at Dalhousie, like perhaps if we could either come up with a different committee or like a group of people who are interested in representing native people at Dalhousie just like there's people who are Black are represented. But they have their own committee, they've created their own collective group of people who have similar interests, and now they even have their own group of people that they come together and like they have a president its sort of like a hierarchy where they, they, if they are interested in something then they just bring it to this group and they a just follow through with whatever decision are made I guess, I'm not sure exactly. But I guess a representative group of native people. Umm I also think that it would be important for DSU to implement a native, a native representative into their ah, their group and let me think. Um, I don't know anything else umm right now.

INTERVIEWER: Um, what about scholarships, are you aware of any scholarships specifically for Aboriginal students or bursaries or…

RESPONDENT: Ah, I, I know that there are some scholarships, I am not really familiar with all of them, but I do know that there are some Native scholarships.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. Um how is your education funded?

RESPONDENT: Um, my education is funded through the Nunasiavut Government through the Post- Secondary Student Support Program. Um…yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Do you have problems with funding?

RESPONDENT: No.

INTERVIEWER: Um, can you tell me about your experience getting housing?

RESPONDENT: Oh, it's been really interesting. For the first two years of university I decided to come and a go and to live in Gerard Hall, which is a residence at Dalhousie. It was really, it

was a good transition, like a good place for me to meet people and help me with the transition. Umm but it was expensive. The funding that I was provided helped me some of the rent cost, but I had to come up with extra money on my own, which wasn't too bad of an issue in the first two years, but I thought it was too expensive so I, I wanted to come and look for umm different housing that was more affordable for me. And so what I decided to do was to a just come and look up this place that was close to campus and I ended up moving in with four guys and these four were very dirty. They didn't clean up after themselves and they were like really loud and did you know guy things. So I just moved out and into another place and its more comfortable there now than it was at the other place. So I guess it wasn't an issue to find a place but I guess on my own behalf I had to look, be a little more considerate to what I was looking at. Umm but I didn't see it as an issue, too much of an issue.

INTERVIEWER: What are the supports in your home community?

RESPONDENT: Umm in, in Happy Valley Goose Bay we have the Labrador Friendship Centre which is a really good place for anyone who, who is familiar with Labrador or who is from Labrador. Umm we also have the (pause) umm have like the Inuit Nation Band Council, which is like a reserve which helps represent the ah Inuit population. And then you have the Nunasiavut Government, which has the self government for Inuit people and it has different departments like health and education and umm it has its there's different departments which, which help the Inuit people like the economic development and stuff. But directly, I don't really umm, they're there to represent us. But like on a day to day level like I wouldn't go to them if I needed some help with something because I think where I come from they also have like umm provincial initiatives that they have like umm, what is it called, HRSCC, which is really helpful if its not that specific for native people but it, it is there, which I think is really helpful. And umm, there's not too much, too much like umm resources which are specifically for native people and my community.

INTERVIEWER: Can you describe an experience or event that positively contributed to how you view available supports? Umm you could speak to either ah here at university or you could speak to in your community. Umm sorry can you describe an experience or event that positively contributed to how you view available supports?

RESPONDENT: Hum, okay, once I came to university and um I come to the, I came to the Native Centre frequently like to print off stuff and like to, to talk to other people who were native and then I began to realize that my friends who weren't native, they didn't have the same support. Like when I realized to when I was over at the library and they had to print something then they had to pay lots of money for it and if they needed a fax then they had to pay a lot of money for that too, like I didn't start to realize umm how, how good it is to have a resource which is specifically for native people until I began to realize my friends who aren't native don't have the same resources as I do. So when I, I guess when I began to realize that difference I began to, to respect it more and to recognize how good it is to have something like the Native Centre.

INTERVIEWER: Can you describe an experience or event that negatively contributed to how you view umm available support?

RESPONDENT: I guess the general consensus from the population who are non-native have to sort of idea of like native people getting everything for free. Umm I don't really understand why they come up with like this sort of idea that like everything is free and we sort of… we… we don't have to, nothing is, nothing, everything is given to us and we don't have to work for anything, they sort of have this idea that umm they have to work really hard while we just give get everything for free and we really don't take advantage of that and I think that seeing that more than one time in a lot of my classes I didn't know how to respond. I, cause I usually am the only Inuit woman in the class and when somebody says something like that and its only me I don't know how I'm supposed to respond because I feel like as if I'm out numbered. Umm so that negatively ah impacted how I look at the resources which are provided to me. But it also made me realize that its not free… it's not free.

INTERVIEWER: What has been a barrier at university for you?

RESPONDENT: Um, good question (laughter). Um, a barrier? I guess the transition. The transition from being home and like if there was a university back home then I would be home and then I'd be home. I guess the, the whole like being away from being away from home and family and friends and travelling to Halifax where things are so different and adjusting to that transition while trying to maintain a high education or just try to maintain a high GPA or stay in tune with my studies, I realize that the, the thing the biggest burden for me is transitioning, yep.

INTERVIEWER: What has been helpful at university?

RESPONDENT: Umm.

INTERVIEWER: If it's different from above.

RESPONDENT: I just realize that I didn't understand how much cultural diversity there was, how much difference there was, or I didn't… when I first came to university I was just a lot of things were so new to me. I didn't understand a lot of it but I realize since I've been here I've learned so much. Like stuff that I wouldn't have if I just stayed back home. Because things are so, so normal so status quo back home. But when I came here things were so different that I had no choice but to learn, to, to learn new ways to look at things differently and to challenge myself. I also realized that coming and getting an education has most definitely allowed me to change my perspectives on things. And I probably could've gained that at home but I realized to that I can't learn everything from a book. That I can't I can't sit down and learn everything from a book or I ah just have to get out there and experience it sometimes, so I think a lot of what I've learned is due to the difficulties I've had in transitioning and I think that over all its made me more independent and more stronger then if I were to just stay home.

INTERVIEWER: Wow, umm what are your plans for future studies?

RESPONDENT: Ah good question (laughter). Ah I'm actually thinking about like doing ah changing my whole degree. To doing like um I am doing Political Science and International Development Studies now. And like I wanted to get into law when I was finished that was like my whole like first plan or second plan and then I realized that I'm interested in Law but I am

also interested Psychology. So I am thinking that when, when I am thinking now that what I am going to do is ah change my degree into a major in Psychology with a minor in Political Science. And then I'm hoping that once I finish my degree that I can come up with something that I can do a masters in an maybe Psychology or maybe Political Science but I'm not quite there yet. But I just plan on doing a Masters in something you know.

INTERVIEWER: What would be a barrier umm to you furthering your studies?

RESPONDENT: Ah a barrier would probably be having to move again, I am always moving like I move everywhere. And I, I begin to miss home sometimes. And I began to realize that every time I move I have to establish new friendships and new relationships and then I have to leave old ones and it gets difficult sometimes. So I guess one of the difficulties that actually looked at is the funding to, if I can get funding and also umm possibly having to end relationships and friendships and moving again. I think that that would be one of the biggest barriers for me.

INTERVIEWER: What would be helpful to further your studies?

RESPONDENT: Yeah, that's a good question. Umm I think what I want to do when if I am like if I go and do a masters in Psychology or like a Masters in Political Science the one thing that I am, my long term my long term vision that when I am ready to have a family that I have a good education that I understand and that I understand I am educated to have a strong family. I think that my main like when I look at psychology I almost think that umm if I, I am able to raise a good family and to have a strong family then I can build umm build a stronger foundation then what I've come from. I guess that's my long term vision. I don't want to get rich or like travel the world anymore but I just want to be educated so when I am ready to have a family that I am that I can.

INTERVIEWER: Is there anything else you would like to share, would you like to add anything?

RESPONDENT: I think that this is really good that what you are doing. Its going, I think it's a good start to be able to gather information from Native people and get their perspective and see what you can do with it.

INTERVIEWER: Um, well thank you for sharing your thoughts.

RESPONDENT: And thank you too.

Appendix D

Respondent Demographic Table

Student	Gender	Year of Study	Major	Status or Non-Status	Lived on Reserve	Funding Type	On/Off Campus	First Nations, Innu, Inuit or Métis
1	Male	Third	Biology	Status	On	Miawpukek Human Resources	On campus	First Nations
2	Male	Four	Bachelor of Arts		On	First Nation Education Band	Off campus	First Nations
3	Male	Third	Bachelor or Arts	Status	On	Miawpukek Human Resources		First Nations
4	Female	Third	Bachelor of Arts	Status	On	Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, community	Off campus	First Nations
5	Female	Fourth	Bachelor of Arts, Education	Status	On	Community resource centre	Off campus	First Nations
6	Female	Third	Biology	Status	On	Miawpukek Human Resources	Off campus	First Nations
7	Female	Fourth	Bachelor of Arts	Status	On	Band office	Off campus	First Nations
8	Male	First	Bachelor of Science	Status	On	Band council	Off campus	Innu
9	Female	Fourth	Bachelor of Science	Non-Status	Off	None	Off campus	First Nations
10	Female	Fourth	Socio-cultural Studies	Status	Off	None		First Nations
11	Female	Third	Bachelor of Nursing	Status	On	Post Secondary Student Support Program	Off campus	Inuit
12	Male	Second	Bachelor of Nursing	Status	On	Miapukek Human Resources	Off campus	First Nations
13	Female	Third	Biology	Status	Off	Miawpukek Human Resources	On/Off campus	First Nations
14	Male	Third	Political Science	Status	Off	Post - Secondary Student Support Program	On/Off campus	Inuit

Student	Gender	Year of Study	Major	Status or Non-Status	Lived on Reserve	Funding Type	On/Off Campus	First Nations, Innu, Inuit or Métis
15	Female	Third	Bachelor of Science	Status	On	Miawpukek Human Resources	Off campus	First Nations
16	Female		Bachelor of Arts		On		Off campus	
17	Female	Fifth	Masters		On		Off campus	
18	Female	Third	Bachelor of Arts		On	Band	Off campus	
19	Female	Fifth	Veterinary Medicine			Limited		Métis
20	Female	Second	Bachelor of Arts		Off		On campus	
21	Female	Eighth	Dentistry	Status	On	Band	Off campus	Inuit
22	Female	Fourth	Bachelor of Social Work	Status	Off	Post Secondary Student Support Program	Off campus	Inuit
23	Female	Third	Two degrees, goal of Masters in Health Promotion	Status	Off	North Shore Mi' kmaq District Council	Off campus	
24	Female	Third	Political Science and International Development Studies	Status	Off	Post Secondary Student Support Program	On/Off campus	Inuit
25	Male	Sixth	Anthropology	Status			Off campus	
26	Female	Third	Bachelor of Arts	Non-Status	Off	None	Off campus	First Nations
27	Male	First		Status	On	Band	Tawaak housing	
28	Male	First		Status	Off	Native Council	Tawaak housing	
29	Female	Fourth	Bachelor of Arts	Non-Status	Off	Post Secondary Student Support Program	Off campus	Inuit
30	Female	Fifth		Status	On	Post Secondary Student Support Program	Off campus	First Nations
31	Female	First	Bachelor of Arts	Status	On	Reserve	Off campus	

Student	Gender	Year of Study	Major	Status or Non-Status	Lived on Reserve	Funding Type	On/Off Campus	First Nations, Innu, Inuit or Métis
32	Female	Second	Bachelor of Education	Non-Status	Off	None	Off campus	Métis
33	Female	Fifth	First Nation's Teacher's Education	Status	On	Indian Affairs	Off campus	First Nations
34	Female	Third	Law School goal	Status	On	Reserve	Off campus	First Nations
35	Female	Fifth	Bachelor of Arts, Post Degrees of Social Work or Bachelor of Education	Status	Off	Band	Off campus	
36	Female	Third	Business Administration		On		Off campus	First Nations
37	Female	Third	Bachelor of Arts		On		Off campus	First Nations
38	Male		Business Administration		On		Off campus	
39			Business Administration		On	Home community		First Nations
40		Third	Bachelor of Science		On	Home community		
41		First	Bachelor of Science		On	Home School Board	Off campus	
42			Business Administration		On	Home School Board	Off campus	First Nations
43	Male		Bachelor of Arts, Communications		On		Off campus	
44	Female		Bachelor of Arts, Communications		On		Off campus	
45	Male		Biology		On	Home School Board	Off campus	
46	Female							
47	Male		Bachelor of Arts		On		Off campus	
48	Female		Medical school goal		On		Off campus	
49	Female		Bachelor of Nursing		On		Off campus	
50	Male		Bachelor of Science		On	Home School Board	Off campus	
51	Female		Bachelor of Arts		On	Home School Board	Off campus	

Student	Gender	Year of Study	Major	Status or Non-Status	Lived on Reserve	Funding Type	On/Off Campus	First Nations, Innu, Inuit or Métis
52	Female		Bachelor of Nursing		On		Off campus	
53	Female	Second	Bachelor of Arts		On		Off campus	
54	Female	Second	Fine Arts		On		Off campus	
55	Male	First	Pharmacy goal		On		Off campus	
56	Female	Third	Bachelor of Arts		On	Home School Board	Off campus	
57	Female		Bachelor of Arts		On	Home School Board	Off campus	
58	Female	Second	Bachelor of Nursing		On		Off campus	
59	Male	Third	Business Administration		On	Scholarship	Off campus	