

Aboriginal Teacher Education Programs

Jurisdiction: Alberta

Contact: Robert Rock

Level: Post-Secondary

Theme: Teacher Training Programs

Description of Practice:

The Ministry of Alberta Advanced Education and Technology supports a number of Aboriginal Teacher Training Programs in the province: The Aboriginal Teacher Education Program at the University of Alberta, the Niitsitapi Aboriginal Teacher Education Program at the University of Lethbridge and the Master of Teaching Program at the University of Calgary. These programs, delivered in collaboration with First Nation colleges, have led to an increased number of First Nations, Metis and Inuit teachers in Alberta classrooms.

Background:

In the spring of 1999, a review of the 1987 Native Education Policy in Alberta was initiated. An extensive public consultation process involving over 5,000 participants laid the foundation for the development of the First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education (FNMI) Policy Framework, released by Alberta Learning in February 2002. The lack of teacher and instructor awareness of the culture and life-styles of First Nations and Métis peoples was one of the major issues identified by people attending the community meetings. Recommendations made by participants included provision of an Aboriginal teacher education program, pre-service and in servicing of teachers.

The Aboriginal Teacher Education Program

The Aboriginal Teacher Education Program (ATEP) began at the University of Alberta in 2001. The intent of the program is to allow students to complete their Bachelor of Education degree (BEd) in Elementary Education while maintaining community, family and cultural connections. The U of A offers a community based model and work closely with partner colleges in all phases of program development and delivery. Elders are involved in many capacities but their primary involvement is in the classroom and in the student teacher learning process. The program minor is selected based on community need, e.g. Cree Language, cross-cultural language arts.

The program began in 2002 with one cohort of students at Blue Quills First Nation College. A full four year community-based program in collaboration with Northern Lakes College in Grouard, Slave Lake, Wabasca, Peace River, and Ft. Vermilion began in September 2003. This cohort consisted of 22 students. In September, 2005, a three year degree completion program was launched at Maskwachees Cultural College in Hobbema. This cohort consists of 16 students.

Niitsitapi Aboriginal Teacher Education Program

In August 2003, the University of Lethbridge, in collaboration with Red Crow Community College, launched the Niitsitapi Aboriginal Teacher Education Program. The program was designed to offer local First Nations students a teacher education program that incorporates Blackfoot culture, traditions and knowledge as foundational components. Students graduate with a bachelor of education (as a second degree) or a combined degree.

A first cohort of 12 students was admitted to the regular on-campus degree program in the fall 2003. A second cohort of 24 students was admitted in the fall of 2004 to a specialized, culturally sensitive Blackfoot teacher education program.

Siksika Teacher Training Program

The University of Calgary offers a two-year after degree Bachelor of Education (Master of Teaching), to prepare professional teachers for the K-12 school system. The Siksika option is a joint collaboration between the University of Calgary, Old Sun Community College and the Siksika First Nation. The first cohort of the program started classes in September 2004 with 11 members (10 women and one man). All students in the program were Siksika First Nations members who had previously earned Bachelor's degrees with most holding Bachelors of General Studies (many in Canadian Studies).

Development:

Under the Aboriginal Teacher Education Program, a new cohort of students at Blue Quills First Nations College is scheduled to begin in September 2007. The University of Alberta is currently involved in discussions with Yellowhead Tribal College concerning a new cohort (based in Edmonton) that would serve Treaty Six Nations. To date, the University of Lethbridge has not proposed any future cohorts. The University of Calgary intends to run a second cohort of the Siksika MT Program starting in September 2007.

Evidence:

To date, two cohorts of students who began in 2002 at the University of Alberta have completed and graduated from the program (the last two years of the Bachelor of Education were offered); one cohort from Blue Quills First Nations College and one from Northern Lakes College. Of the 33 of graduates who have completed their Bachelor of Education degrees 94% are teaching.

In May 2006, 9 students from the first cohort of 12 students graduated from Niitsitapi Aboriginal Teacher Education Program with either a Bachelor of Education or a Combined Bachelor of Education degree. It is anticipated that the majority of the 24 students admitted in the fall of 2004 will graduate in the spring 2007.

The retention rate for the University of Calgary's Master of Teaching program - Skisika option was 100 percent with all 11 graduates of the program received job offers in their community upon their graduation in May 2006. A celebration of this achievement, attended by the Governor General was held January 27, 2007 at the university.

Adaptability:

While the program delivery model (e.g. community based, use of elders, etc.) and aspects of curriculum is adaptable, Aboriginal Teacher Education Programs are somewhat unique in every region of the country because of demographic and cultural differences.

Further information:

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