

Afterword

A Graduate Program in First Nations Education

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On January 19, 1996 the Council of the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research at the University of Alberta, Edmonton approved the proposal for a Graduate Program in First Nations Education at both the master's and doctoral levels. A news release from the university stated:

This new initiative in graduate education in Canada will be process driven while articulating an Aboriginal world view. It will combine existing parameters and standards of university education with the collective efforts of Aboriginal students, scholars and Elders to develop Indigenous scholars who will maintain and respect the values, integrity and knowledge of Indigenous peoples worldwide. Core courses will be taught by Indigenous faculty already on permanent staff at the University of Alberta and by adjunct faculty from throughout North America. Culturally eminent Elders will address specific topic areas of cultural sensitivity and understanding within core course areas.

Recruitment of students to the new program began at the same time as approval of the program was announced.

Establishing the New Program

Integrating all the suggestions, wishes, and insights brought forward at the Indigenous Scholars' Conference into a Graduate Program in First Nations Education has not been an easy task. Attempting to infuse the wishes of such a diverse group of Indigenous cultures as was represented at the conference while upholding the norms of the university has been a challenge and will continue to be the base of the program as it grows.

The Use of Elders

As coordinators of the new program, we continue to define the meaning of *Elder*. We do not want to say simply that we will involve Elders in the program because we know that not all Elders would know what the program was about. Elders are human. Some have experience and knowledge in specific areas; others have different experiences and different skill areas. So we do not want token use of elderly Native people. Collectively, between the first doctoral students and ourselves, we have decided that when we need assistance in culturally specific areas we will call on Elders who we know are versed in that specific area. And because we do not want the program to reflect only local, or Alberta, First Nations we will



The first doctoral students in the First Nations Graduate Education Program at the University of Alberta. Seated: Cora Weber-Pillwax, Ralph Makokis, Jane Martin, and Walter Lightning. Standing: Peggy Wilson and Stan Wilson.

need to draw on an international pool of Elders. We will call on the assistance of Beatrice Medicine, our own academic Elder, who has been able to work within recognized university systems while maintaining both the respect of scholars within the system and the respect of her own community. She has not compromised her own cultural norms, but has given back to her community whatever research she has conducted. We will ask also for the prayers and guidance of Tom Porter and Lionel Kinunwa; their guidance will be powerful because they understand our desires for the program and the trials of infusing new issues into well-established systems. As time goes on, our own pool of academic supports will grow. Meanwhile, we will attempt to see that students who are accepted into the program have their own spiritual guides.

Because this is an international Indigenous program, we know that cultural groups and specific areas have specific protocols that must be followed when addressing and calling on Elders for assistance. This knowledge will become a specific responsibility of every student in the program. We want students to learn about the protocol for addressing the

Elders in their own cultures. And together, over time, we will need to develop a specific protocol for working with Elders within the program.

Reviving Languages

If any one issue appeared as frequently as Elder protocol, it was the need to address loss of language in Native communities. The program must include a language revitalization component. We hope we can make Language Revitalization a core course in the program. If we are to look to communities for research bases and if we are to respond to expressed needs, then this whole area of language revitalization must become a major concern for all our students. Beginning in the Spring Session (May 1996) we will begin to offer a course on a biannual basis called Reviving Indigenous Languages. This course will be compulsory in the First Nations Graduate program, but will also be open to other students interested in this area.

The First Intake

Following the announcement of acceptance of the First Nations Graduate Program in Education, a selection committee was formed to interview those students who had already applied. Four students were chosen from a diverse group of applicants. It is our intent to involve this initial group of students, as well as those who follow, in the content and process of the program. We are concerned with commitment and know how difficult it will be to get continuing input from students if they are also working full- or part-time while attending classes. Juggling work, family, and school is never easy, and we are particularly thankful for those students who have decided to take leaves from their positions in order to concentrate wholeheartedly on their doctoral studies. For those who are funded, this is not as difficult a decision to make, but for Metis students or those who do not have full funding, it is a difficult and challenging choice. Learning to write grant proposals will be a necessary part of their acquired knowledge.

In both the master's and the doctoral program students will be required to take the following four core courses.

Foundation Theories in First Nations Education. This will be a field-based course. Students will be required to spend time both in their own home community and in two additional First Nations or Metis communities. At this time students will begin to understand important community concerns. We hope future research will be grounded in these community issues.

Reviving Indigenous Languages. To be offered every other year in Spring or Summer Session, this course will address the need for revitalizing Indigenous languages and will attempt to build models that students can follow and learn how to implement in communities.

From Oral Tradition to Written Text. This course explores the transition from an oral consciousness base to a literacy base that uses written text. Stu-

dents will examine literature by Native authors and poets who ground their writings in an oral tradition. They will learn to analyze their own writings and to appreciate differences and similarities in writing styles.

Indigenous Research Methodologies. Learning how to listen to community and how to conduct research that is meaningful and helpful to the growth and well-being of community will form the basis of this course. As it is taught in a narrative format, students will again learn to listen and abstract research designs, including literature reviews, from descriptions of research already conducted and from possible new initiatives. Reciprocity is major focus here.

Adjunct Faculty

All core courses in the program will be taught by Indigenous scholars. Currently approved adjunct faculty include Howard Adams, Paula Gunn Allen, Lionel Kinunwa, Beatrice Medicine, Terry Tafoya, and George Sioui. All have extensive university training and have maintained their traditional teachings and roots.

Each doctoral student's program will be designed specifically to prepare her or him to complete original research and will usually involve either additional coursework in theory, method, or specialization to be determined by the student's background and preparation at entry. In addition to the four core courses, elective courses to a total of 36 credit weights are required. Doctoral students will be required as well to take part in the planning and implementation of a biannual Indigenous scholars' conference, to make presentations at scholarly conferences, and to assume some editorial responsibility for a refereed journal on Indigenous education and research. The doctoral program will take a minimum of three years to complete.

The Master of Education program will have as its core the same four courses as those required in the doctoral program. The master's program can be completed by either the thesis or the project route. The thesis route will require a minimum of 10 three-weight courses and a thesis. The project route requires 14 courses and a project. Students will usually take a minimum of two years to complete the master's degree.

Application Process

The deadline for completed application to the First Nations Graduate Education Program is *December 20* of each year. There will be one intake per year, with students entering and progressing through their studies in cohort groups. In early January of each year applications will be short-listed and an interview schedule set up. Interviews will usually take place in February.

The interview committee will comprise two participating faculty members, a university faculty member from outside the Faculty of Education, a

culturally eminent Elder, and an Aboriginal student from the University of Alberta.

Students will be informed of their acceptance into the program by April and will begin their studies in September after a short orientation session.

For information brochures and application forms contact:

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