

Improving access to university education in the Canadian Arctic:

learning from past experiences and listening to Inuit student experiences

Pan-Canadian Workshop

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NORTHERN
SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT
CHAIR

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Summary: This paper provides information about the workshop held in Ottawa on March 1, 2011 on improving access to post-secondary education in the Canadian Arctic. The discussion was based on the experiences of Southern universities and college administrators, Northern actors and college administrators, and instructors involved in Arctic post-secondary education and training.

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Introduction

This workshop and discussion about improving access to university education in the Canadian North was funded by ArcticNet Centre of Excellence (<http://www.arcticnet.ulaval.ca/>). It was part of an ArcticNet research project entitled: Improving access to university education in the Canadian Arctic: Learning from past experiences and listening to the Inuit students experiences. This project involves researchers from Université Laval (Thierry Rodon and Frédéric Laugrand), Carleton University (Frances Abele), and the University of Prince Edward Island (Fiona Walton), in partnership with Nunavut Arctic College and Nunavut Sivuniksavut.

This meeting offered an opportunity to discuss, based on the experience of each participant, how to improve post-secondary access for Inuit; and ways to work together to increase the percentage of Inuit students who attend and complete post-secondary programs. The participants were individuals and agencies involved in programs that offer access to post-secondary education in Inuit nunangat. The workshop allowed the participants to discuss a useable model for Northern delivery of university programs.

The meeting was a discussion-based workshop run by a facilitator. Participants were asked to share their experiences and their ideas about the strengths and weaknesses of current programs and curricula. Discussion focused on such issues as curriculum, course development, program delivery and continuity, student counselling, support, and funding.

These discussions are summarized herein. We hope that this document will help everyone better understand how Southern colleges and universities might improve access for Inuit students in the respective institutions and communities, as well as in Inuit nunangat.

If you need more information about the workshop, or the project, please contact Thierry Rodon (project supervisor) by e-mail: thierry.rodon@pol.ulaval.ca, or Marise Lachapelle marise.lachapelle@gmail.com.

About this document

This document is the report of the discussions and suggestions that came out of this workshop. It is designed to make available to the participants and to those who were unable to come the results of that “all together” working day. It is not being made available to be public but might be given to individuals, agencies, and institutions that could benefit.

Topics covered are:

- Sharing experiences: successes and challenges
- What are the needs of Inuit students?
- What kind of programs can be designed and delivered to meet those needs?
- How can we ensure that the programs will continue if successful?

This report presents the outcomes of an emerging rethinking of access to post-secondary education. The reader should not take it as the last word but rather as a stepping-stone toward better access to post-secondary education in the Canadian Arctic.

Context

Inuit students and institutions are facing a lot of challenges: the gap between post-secondary studies and high schools (readiness); program length and intensity; support and assistance, dealing with social memory of education; and so forth. Despite these challenges, Inuit post-secondary education has had successes in the areas of student services, teaching in Inuktitut, Inuit content, field-based courses, and self-fulfillment. Nevertheless, many needs still need to be met with initiatives. Such initiatives will involve looking at gender issues, helping students to go home after their studies, and building confidence in this foreign system. Improving access to university education will involve developing not only interest among students but also a sense of belonging among all Inuit in all four of their regions in Canada.

Needless to say, these four regions with these different institutions and organizations are already meeting some of the challenges and having successes, admittedly to varying degrees and varying extents. As Wayne McElroy explains for the Kativik School Board, funding is not as important than in the other regions because of the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement. As Morley Hanson shows, Nunavut Sivuniksavut has more leeway in meeting student needs because of its status as an NGO. As Ann Crawford explains for the Akitisiraq Law School Society, a society has more trouble getting recognized and acknowledged for funding than does a formal institution. It is also difficult to maintain interest in liberal arts, as Susan Sammons explained for the Inuit culture program at Nunavut Arctic College. These participants each have their own experiences to tell. Yet all of them have to deal with hard realities, such as combining family life and studies, personal challenges and difficulties, funding and housing, and so on. All participants have something to share about such successes as the “Inuitization” of course materials for the Certificate in Nunavut Public Services Studies, elder involvement at Athabasca University, or employer partnering in programs at Nunavut Arctic College for example. The workshop has clearly demonstrated the need for joint effort through coordinated actions.

We must meet these challenges of Inuit society, if we are to continue building Northern post-secondary education. We must also incorporate programs that are relevant and meaningful to the Inuit and, especially, give thought to establishing a Canadian Northern university.

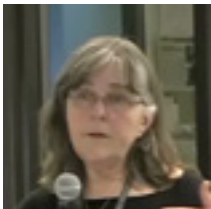
Academic, personal (family, work), financial (tuition, scholarship), and housing supports have been recognized as valuable. Yet more guidance counseling for individuals seems to be required. Inuit people need to relate schools to their life choices, and courses have to be as relevant up North as they are down South. As often as possible, a face-to-face approach is needed to develop mentorship, role models, and small groups of individuals. Peer support appears to be critical but reaching the parents and the communities is even more necessary, such as by holding parent workshops, by bringing the Inuktitut language into programs, and by inviting elders into the education system.

The next section will present passages from the speeches so as to share the participants’ visions.

Sharing experiences¹



All of the workshop participants had experiences with post-secondary education, and the first part of the meeting involved sharing these experiences in order to learn from each other, from one personal background to another. Each participant was asked to present the programs/institutions he/she knew and discuss its successes, failures, and challenges.



Frances Abele: Certificate in Nunavut Public Service Studies

The program was designed for Government of Nunavut employees, and the courses were delivered individually throughout Nunavut. The students could enrol only in one course at a time, and they were not expected to complete the whole certificate. The students were thus able to continue working while completing their degrees.



It was intended to help people who already work by teaching them general knowledge and skills about public administration.

This was a non-profit program for Carleton. The Government of Nunavut paid the extra costs of delivering the course in Nunavut. Student tuition and materials were paid for, but Carleton did not make any money on it at all. It just covered the cost of the instructors and administration. That kind of program is probably not replicable today in the climate of Ontario's universities, but it was something we were able to do in that period.

We called it a hybrid system. A professor, like an instructor, taught the course, being the equivalent of a teacher assistant who was in the communities where people were and who could support their learning. There were visits with the professor as well as various distance learning techniques.

The program seems already successful because about half the registered students have completed it. Two things account for this success:

- 1) One reason was the work by Chris Turnbull. We had a person working at Carleton who kept in touch with all the students and all the courses. She advised people about registration until the problems got solved. She helped orient the instructors we were able to hire and maintain the network of onsite leaning support people in Nunavut. Chris kept it all together. She was in touch with the instructors, the students, and the administration. Her work enabled us to solve a lot of problems.
- 2) We had a commitment to *Nunavutize* every course and we succeeded to varying degrees but the instructors were required to follow that policy. We developed curriculum that were based on existing Carleton University courses but rooted in Nunavut reality. For example, the economics courses were taught with references to the economy of Nunavut. We referred to Nunavut to build the concepts students had to learn. The public administration courses in Nunavut covered public administration concepts and principles but were given reality by the example of the Government of Nunavut as the public administration that we were teaching about. *Nunavutization* was the rooting of the curriculum in Nunavut realities.

¹This section is close to participant speeches but this is not a verbatim of these.

The biggest challenges were the ones the students faced. Most of them were incredibly tenacious and dedicated. They were full-time public servants. They each had a job and a half most of the time. They had to face enormous and sudden demands and yet half of them successfully completed the courses anyways.

- 1) The biggest challenge was to make sure that they had enough time in the day to learn and to focus on the course material. We only partly succeeded in that respect, and it will probably still be a problem if the certificate program is continued in any way.

Program website: <http://www1.carleton.ca/sppa/prospective-students/certificate-in-nunavut-public-service-studies/>

Martha MacDonald: Labrador Institute, Memorial University- Social work program for Nunatsiavut

At Memorial University there are students from Nunatsiavut who come to Goose Bay to their first year in a university program which is offered by the College of the North Atlantic. We work with that institution to offer courses. There are courses offer with intersession courses leading to a second year for the students wanting to go on. The students generally go from Goose Bay to St-Johns University afterwards, which is a pretty big university and it represents a big change for them.

We found out that the students doing a year in Goose Bay have more chance of achieving with success when they go to the city later on.

Memorial University offer a bachelor degree in social work program and we offering the full bachelor program in Goose Bay and it is for Nunatsiavut beneficiaries. We have 19 students. We started with about 31 in a pre-social work program of two semesters and after that time some chose not to carry on with the bachelor program. We hope for 20 so that is a pretty good number and they are just finishing their first year in the social work program.

The instructors are flying from St-Johns for the semester. The people who teach the courses that are not specifically social work courses (English, sociology, geography, etc.) are people with graduate degrees who live in Goose Bay, Labrador. The students have a lot of support. They have cultural a consultant who is a social worker from Labrador and she works full time with them. There is a coordinator of the program and there is a person who is hired to teach the non social work courses and he stays with the programs to help the students with the writing and he is a constant resource to assist them with that kind of things. Actually, one of the main supports we have is a person whose only job it is to help the students learn to write better. Their difficulty with writing essays is one of the greatest challenges they face academically. So they have access to counseling all the time. That is working pretty well, but we only are in the first year of it. All the students have to return a service agreement so they will work as social worker for Nunatsiavut when they were done.

All those things are contributing to success so far. I think a challenge is that it is so extremely expensive that it will probably be offer only one time.

Another thing with our students in Nunatsiavut, they are still thinking of education in the way of becoming a nurse, or becoming a social worker and we would like to see people interested in other things and going on to graduate studies so they can come back and do research of other kinds such as social sciences or whatever it might be.

We have a number of challenges but we hope that this program will have its success.

Program website: <http://www.mun.ca/socwrk/home/>

Fiona Walton: University of Prince-Edward-Island- Nunavut Master in Education

This program is very well documented. There is a documentary video and also full reports available on the University of Prince Edward Island (UPEI) website.

The program started as a result of a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada grant. I was a long-term Nunavut educator who went back to school. I had gone to UPEI saying I would start working with *Qallunaat* teachers to help them go North. When SSHRC brought in their Northern Development grant program I applied. Nunavut wanted an ongoing program that would go beyond the undergraduate program that McGill University had been providing for many years. A lot of teachers were out in the schools, but the government wanted more. We went North, we did the research, and we were asked to come back with a master's degree and we earned it.

The program was based on the existing program. It was one course at a time and part-time over three years. There was no rush. The pace was slow and it was blended or hybrid. Almost every course had a distance learning component and a face-to-face one except for the winter course, which was offered primarily by distance but preceded by a face-to-face portion. There were 27 people in that part-time master in education program. Only 21 graduated of the 27 who enrolled because of personal issues that came up throughout the program.

The graduates are all Inuit women. There are Inuit women with bachelor in education degrees and now master degrees. They are role models in their communities and they are grandmothers. In fact, we had two great-grandmothers in the program.

The program also demonstrated that graduate work is perfectly within the capacity of any Inuit who wants to come and do it. The question is much more about access. Create the program and we shall come.

We are now into our second round program and have 23 people enrolled. The biggest problem we continue to face is follow-up. Students can graduate but they still require support from that cohort. When they go back to their communities, they are not necessarily ready to become leaders. From the research that we have done, in order to step forward into a position of leadership, they have to be guided by an elder. There is a need to have the community around them for help. It is a big challenge for a student who goes back to a community that may not sustain him or her.

Program website: <http://education.upei.ca/nunavutmed>



Susan Sammons: Nunavut Arctic College

In memory of Susan Sammons

We would like to underline the important contribution of Susan Sammons to Inuit knowledge, culture, and language through her devotion and passionate work at Nunavut Arctic College throughout her life. We are extremely grateful for her participation in our research project. She will be missed dearly.

The language and culture program at Nunavut Arctic College is actually two programs. The interpreter/translator program has been running for some 25 years now, and the Inuit studies program is 15 years old.

The greatest challenge with the interpreter/translator program is not lack of choices. It is a problem for us because there are so many more choices out there now than there were 25 years ago. To get into these programs you need a pretty high level in English and other academic subjects, and people are choosing law programs or nursing programs. The number of qualified students we can accept is thus dwindling.

The Inuit culture program is a liberal arts program. A lot of the students have not been in school for a long time and do not really know what they want to do. After going through Inuit studies, the students often go into law or education, or some just go back to their home communities. They just want to learn more about their language and culture to pass it on to their students, or their children.



An interesting thing about the Inuit culture program is that it is delivered 90% in Inuktitut. There are not many programs of that kind.

For both programs, the challenge is the number of personal problems the students are going through. This year I had one student who committed suicide, two students who were really badly beaten—one so much that she needed cosmetic surgery—or students are dropping out

because of daycare problems. These are big obstacles to success.

Program website: http://www.arcticcollege.ca/programs/programview_eng.aspx?programid=037

Naullaq Arnaquq: Culture, language, elders and youth, Nunavut Government

I will talk about my experience when I taught for the teacher education program from 1985 to 1990. Previously I was a Nunavut Teacher Education Program (NTEP) student. After 1990 I worked for the board of education with Inuit teachers who had completed their teacher's certificate but did not have their degree yet. I was involved with NTEP during that period and acquired different experiences and perspectives.

I was part of the NTEP program when it was established in 1979. At the time it was a pilot project, and we graduated in 1981. It was adjusted afterwards to let more students enrol. A field-based portion was then established. The schools had many Inuit teacher assistants who were teaching without a teacher's certificate. Suddenly they could enrol in the program by taking field-based courses during the winter or two courses throughout the year and two courses during the summer. There were different program options. Practitioners were teaching in the schools and then taking courses and going back to their communities to

teach. They were practising what they were learning. It really helped students not just to take theory but also to practise what they were learning.

NTEP programs over those years had ups and downs for various reasons: financial issues, housing, etc.

After the field-based portion of the program had been established, the Baffin Division Board of Education, working with NTEP, was able to free up the teacher assistants to take courses during the year. The schools were given substitute teacher funding, which greatly helped people who were able to take courses. Students did not have to stay away for a long time from their homes and families. In that respect, the field-based program was very effective.

In the 1990s, the Department of Education of the Northwest Territories established a community-based NTEP program that took the field-based program further. NTEP started to be offered in the community, and students no longer had to leave their communities. Pond Inlet graduated more teachers, as did Pangnirtung, Clyde River, Rankin Inlet, and all regions. That aspect was very effective because the program went out to the communities and students did not have to leave.

Those pilot projects were effective, as shown by a lot of documentation available, reports upon reports. The studies validated what was working, and what was not. They brought about some adjustments to the program.

Challenges include family and personal issues. Financial support has worked. When you put money in, it is bound to work. It helps to retain students.

In the master's program, those teachers who were already NTEP graduated. Being encouraged to take the master's program was another big step. Marketing is very important, and not just in the print media or on television. People must go out in the communities to promote the programs, and graduates should talk about the programs. The 21 graduates are role-models, not just for their families but also for the rest of the community where they live.

Many are now lawyers, doctors, scientists, engineers, and teachers, and many of their kids are entering those professions or something similar. In Nunavut, higher education was very limited and almost nonexistent when the college was established in 1985. Suddenly people thought they could take courses. "My cousin took it, my friend, I can do it too." That does make a big difference. If we do not establish a university in the North, there will always be fewer Inuit taking that opportunity.

When I went to McGill to complete my courses, it was a very isolating experience for me. I had never lived in a city, and my husband stayed at home in Iqaluit with my daughter. There was some system of support at the time because four other Inuit were taking courses at McGill, but the experience was very overwhelming for me. I had not traveled very much, and living in a city in an urban setting was very different. How can we expect students to function in urban settings if they have never lived in a city before and let alone on a budget? Now we have enough experience to know what kind of support is needed.



Donna Lee-Smith: McGill First Nation and Inuit Education Program

McGill has been working with the Inuit for over 30 years. I first want to talk about what the Kativik School Board has been doing so well through their Teacher Training Program. The courses are all taught in Inuktitut, which is absolutely amazing. These courses are developed over a series of planning sessions in the North with two *Inuk* co-teachers. We develop the course together and listen to them to find out how we can make it suit the audience. They own the course and co-teach it. Everything I have to say in the classroom is translated, and the majority of the essays are written in Inuktitut. Those students who want to write in English may do so, and the co-instructors do the evaluations as well. This approach has been very successful, and the program has been a model for a very long time.

Pedagogically there are problems. The courses are taught over seven to eight days. Imagine a course that is taught over 13 weeks and that now has to be taught over seven or eight days. The coursework is very difficult for the instructors and is extremely difficult for the students.

The students are all part-time students, and they are full-time teachers. They are in the classroom and are getting tremendous teaching experience that they then bring into their courses, but it takes a long time to get the certificate. The certificate program that they are enrolled in right now leads to being allowed to teach in First Nation or Inuit schools. It does not lead to a general certification. Afterwards they can do a bachelor's degree and become a fully certified teacher, but I have never had a student from the Kativik School Board wanting to come down South and teach. So general certification is not a huge issue at this point.

Program website: <http://www.mcgill.ca/edu-dise/fnie/>

Ann Crawford: Akitisiraq Law School Society Program



Akitisiraq has been affiliated with Nunavut Arctic College, the University of Victoria, and the University of Ottawa. It has been developed and delivered through a society of legal professionals in the North who saw people working as co-workers, with legal capacities both inside and outside the legal system, who had the abilities and the skills but not the training to be lawyers. They felt that a professional program could be delivered in the North and that the students were capable of being successful lawyers. The profession had a duty to ensure that those people were given the access that they needed.

The first cohort of Akitisiraq students was admitted in the year 2000. It was designed as a 4-year program rather than as the 3-year program of law schools in the South. The Akitisiraq students tended not to be university graduates. Some had university experience, but admission was based on work and life experience. Most of them had families to support, so we had a very large extended group of families and kids who were involved in the program.

Most of the students were women. There were occasional exceptions. Some of them were RCMP-sponsored, but most came straight as students. The facilities were all Nunavut Arctic College facilities. We had no permanent faculty. Our faculty came from Southern universities and colleges to teach at Akitisiraq.

There were 15 places in the original cohort. Of those, we had 11 graduates and 9 calls to the bar. Everybody is working in his or her profession. One is working outside the territory but with Nunavut cases.

The program has been widely accepted as very successful. At the time it was a fairly inspirational program for people in Nunavut to see young Nunaviamut who had earned professional qualifications. It had the benefit of an external test, the British Columbia bar admission of the University of Victoria. If you had passed the bar admission course, you passed the course (to see the report, visit the website: <http://www.akitsiraq.ca/documents>).

Akitsiraq serves all Inuit regions, but most of the students are Nunavut-based. This program cannot run every year with, for example, the same program delivery. We made a proposal to the Government of Nunavut in 2009, and in 2010 they answered that they would not fund the program. Our federal funding went away because the federal government was not going to sponsor something that was not going to happen. We still exist as a society, and we are working to get funds and engage another cohort. It might be private funding. We are looking at different opportunities and just being persistent.

One area of satisfaction was to see our students demonstrating in front of everybody their ability to take up the challenge of the course. It took a lot of time and a lot of energy. There is a lot in a 4-year program. It is a big investment in your future and your choices. We were immensely proud of the capacity we saw in the students, which was effectively realized when they did graduate.

Our greatest disappointment was criticism based on credentialism, on admission qualifications rather than on the end product. People depreciated the program for its class size, or whatever it was that they wanted. The criticism continues today. Notwithstanding our grads and their careers, we continue to have people say: "Is that any good as a program?"

The question is one of priority. Do institutions, and people with money or making money-based decisions think it is what needs to be done?

Priscilla Campeau: World indigenous knowledge and research centre, Athabasca University

The centre itself is located in Edmonton and is 100% Aboriginal from our course writers and instructors to the people that we work with, such as First Nation colleges in Alberta. We are also involved with the University of the Arctic on the program development team. The centre itself handles the administration and academic arms of the university. We were created in 2001 to address the needs of Aboriginal learners. Alberta was our primary focus. At the moment we are working on a preliminary degree proposal and on indigenous degree studies that will be delivered by distance and online. The proposals involve 3 and 4 year degrees. The courses focus on Canada. We are trying to bring in some international content too, such as modern international models of indigenous governance.

We are a very small centre composed primarily of women. In 2003 we were lucky that the university believed in us enough to give us a position—our virtual elder in residence. That is how we got Maria Campbell. She really is the boss and we really have to watch out for her. She is constantly travelling and we are constantly catching up with her.

On the indigenous education side, we focus on public relations with community partners. In the Edmonton area, we do a bannock and a movie event once a month and a four-season speaker's series that features Aboriginal speakers who discuss what we think is relevant. We invite people into the centre to give a talk.

Those are all the external people who come to the university. It is the same thing for the bannock, the movie event, and the chat with the public on the movie.

Maria told us that we should be even more present in the community. That will be our next adventure out in the Edmonton area.

We also have a project on communities: how to address their learning needs and giving them access to post-secondary education. We are working with community members on how to achieve that goal and how technologies would work for them. Rather than us going there and telling them what we think they need, we are asking them what they need, what they want us to do for them, and how we can facilitate learning in the community.

On the indigenous study side we work with Cree people, but we are also in preliminary talks with Nunavut Arctic College on what to offer in the North. That issue is our next focus.

Our greatest achievement is that we have just completed a grad course in indigenous knowledge and education. We were very lucky to find external stakeholders who had a vision of what they wanted for our Alberta teachers working in First Nation communities. In the space of 6 months, we created a grad course that involved traditional teaching from strategies. We had writers from each nation working with academics to develop an online course. Our online instructors are all indigenous too.

The typical student at Athabasca is 29 years old and is a female working outside her home. She is also the first person in her family who will ever get a university degree.

Our biggest challenge is funding. It is a challenge across the board for all universities and colleges.

Finally the centre works by consensus. We all have to agree on something if we are going to do it.

Website: <http://www2.athabascau.ca/indigenous/>

Maria Campbell: World indigenous knowledge and research centre, Athabasca University

Two things we do are really important. One is the elder's role in making sure that within the centre we constantly look at our work and constantly remind ourselves that we have to be grounded in the place we come from. The other is the grounding of the curriculum in our own language. We need to have discussions about our language. The elders and I really believe that speaking the language is not enough. We must think about where that language is grounded and be able to have a lot of discussion about the work we are doing and how we are interpreting it from our own perspective and worldview.

I work with elders in the communities. One of the real concerns is writing. Our students have a lot of difficulties.

Something that happens with our students in the South is that they just pass from one grade to another. By the time they hit university they have no real skills, they cannot write very well, they do not have good analytical skills, and they have to compete with everybody else in the classroom. Usually, they are passed on to the next level even though they are not prepared.



When we talk about supporting our students, we must make sure that they are prepared before they leave. They have enough problems when they go to university without taking any more problems with them.

Website: <http://www2.athabascau.ca/indigenous/>

Wayne McElroy: Kativik School Board

Our programs seem to be very different from the others that I have heard about. The financial concerns are not our biggest concerns because of the James Bay Agreement. We have programs that have evolved since a long time ago and we provide a lot of services of different kinds.

First of all, our school system is really different. There is only secondary 5, which means Grade 11, and then there is CEGEP. CEGEP is a place where students are supposed to figure out what they want to do before they actually go to university. In itself it is supposed to be a preparation stage for university. But the way things are going and what the government has done over the years is really structured. People must know what they want to do and make choices very quickly.

The first step we do is to go to secondary 5 schools in the North and recruit students who are ready to pass to see what their aspirations are and what will be offered them before they go down South, if they want to continue their education. We tell them which programs are available.

In the schools in Northern Quebec, students are usually very strong in Inuktitut because they continue after their first three years of school, which are totally in Inuktitut, to have Inuktitut classes. After the first three years, they choose between English and French. The objective is that they will learn Inuktitut throughout their education and the second language of their choice, and they graduate from there. We give a language test at secondary 5 to see whether they are proficient enough in English or French to go on to post-secondary education. They do not write the same kind of exams as the Southern students, so we do not really know whether they are at the same academic level as the students in the South. We have a norm. Over the years we have known what level of proficiency they need to benefit from further education. If they are below that norm, we recommend further upgrading if they are still interested in post-secondary studies.

Then they come down South, where we have an orientation program during the first two weeks. We have agreements with John Abbott College and CEGEP Marie-Victorin to ensure that our students have the first choice of courses that they want and are never restricted because the courses have been filled with too many students.

The last three or four years, there has been a program called “pathways” where students can take any programs they want, even in sciences and technology. Right from the beginning, they will get the prerequisites for the course. We have a very good relationship with the institutions.

As soon as the students arrive, we have dormitories available for them. If they continue their studies, we have apartments provided for them, they are given allowances, and we provide continual financial support and/or personal support and guidance all along the way. Gradually with assistance they get used to it and stay there. They get more independent and go on to university.

We had Inuktitut once and we are looking for it now at the CEGEP level. It is mandatory at the CEGEP level to have a second-language course.

Student activities are organized for our students down there, so that they can get together.

We lose about 50% of our students after the first year, and sometimes more. But we do have graduates. We have a graduation ceremony every year. I think it is because of the support system we have for them. When I was a teacher up North, a long time ago, they did not have that sort of system and there were no graduates from university. I have to admit that the system is not perfect. We evolve as much as we can to



get more students interested in mathematics, sciences, and technology. Those subjects are required by so many careers that are available to students in Northern Quebec now. The difficulty is that it just seems too overwhelming to get into those areas.

The biggest challenge is academic readiness. Our students come from very small communities that sometimes have only one or two students in secondary 5. It is a lot to ask someone to come down South and adapt to the many things they have to when they come here.

Our English students are immersed in the regular classrooms at CEGEP during the first semester but not our French students. French is very weak when they get to secondary 5 and they cannot go straight into regular CEGEP classes. A year of sheltered course is provided just to our Inuit students together before they go into the regular classes.

French is a big challenge, bigger than English. English is widespread in all of Nunavik, and even our French students speak English. Some students come to Marie-Victorin and switch to John Abbott after a while because they learn three languages rather than two and they become very good students that way.

So the biggest challenge is academic readiness. It begins before post-secondary education and the challenge is for the regular sector. By the time our students come, we try to support them but some areas really need improvement.

Program website: <http://www.kativik.qc.ca/fr/frontpage>

Maria Wilson: Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami

ITK is the national Inuit organization that represents Inuit across Canada. We work on many national issues with education being one of ITK's key priorities. We have many success stories one of which being our partnership with the Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre (ABLK) of the Canadian Council on Learning (CCL). Unfortunately, the funding for CCL was not renewed and the ABLK closed its operation in 2009. CCL currently operates as a private organization. One of key achievements when working with ABLK was the creation by Aboriginal educators from across the country of lifelong learning models for the Inuit, Métis and First Nations. The models are available on the CCL website www.ccl-cca.ca. They show a holistic approach to learning from the Aboriginal perspective: our life is a learning path from life to death. The Inuit model, for example, uses a throwing blanket as a background. It is also interactive and can be used as a means to measuring performance which can be applied to any level at any stage of learning.

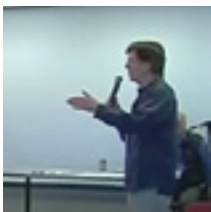
Another success is the National Inuit Education Strategy which will be released in the near future. The Strategy aims to improve the learning outcomes from ECD to K-12 and post-secondary education. Inuit education is spread across two territories and two provinces. The National Committee on Inuit Education



is made up of the territorial and provincial governments as well as the federal government and regional Inuit land claim organizations, also including the Kativik School Board, Pauktutiit and the National Inuit Youth Council. We hope once the Strategy is launched key stakeholders will remain committed and work with us on its implementation.



Education and learning outcomes are closely related to the overall well-being of Inuit communities. For example, to develop the Inuit workforce organizations working in the communities have to deal with the shortfalls of the education systems. In order to be job ready, most people need upgrading such basic skills as math, reading and writing in English. Ideally, any high school graduate in the north should be able to pursue a specific professional training or go to a college or university without requiring any further academic upgrading but currently, the system is failing us.



Overall, a general shift seems to be occurring as more and more attention is paid to Aboriginal education and there is a growing interest to the issues and challenges we face. More educational institutions are becoming interested in attracting Aboriginal students, for example, there is an Aboriginal Education Council at the University of Ottawa that aims to create an attractive and friendly environment not only for Inuit, First Nations and Métis students but for the Aboriginal academics, as well. The Council of Ministers of Education of Canada (CMEC) just had a meeting last week in Toronto

during which there was a special session with the leaders of the National Aboriginal Organizations. Also, there is the provincial and territorial Aboriginal Affairs Ministers Working Group on Education that is working on regional and national priorities in Aboriginal education.

It is hoped that all the work that has been done to date and the ongoing efforts and activities will bring positive practical results in the near future.

CCA website: <http://www.ccl-cca.ca/ccl/Reports/RedefiningSuccessInAboriginalLearning.html>

Morley Hanson: Nunavut Sivuniksavut

The Nunavut Sivuniksavut is not an institution; it is a non-profit organization governed by its own board of director and by a small handful of staff operates per year by year funds are raised from a variety of sources. We bring that about 22 students each year from communities across Nunavut that we hope to increase to 26 next year. That will be a big step for us. We are very small and we grow very slowly but we change very quickly. There are a lot of pieces that make the program work and if you take out one of these pieces it would not work. One of the key ones it is a program of academic studies accredited by the Algonquin College, but the courses there are not designed by a top-down institution saying that this the courses that people should learn. The courses are developed by the ground-up through an interactive process with the students. It is almost like a continuous research and action program for years and years. We reinvent the wheel every year, we learn from experiences, but the program does change from year to year and now it is far away from the beginning.

Most of the study focuses on Inuit history from an Inuit perspective. Not individual history but a larger picture with the relationship of Inuit with the rest of Canada and the world. We organically develop program and I think the key is to respond to the needs of Inuit students. Nobody decides what they are needed it's been a concern with the students what is in the courses and what the students implicitly or sometimes explicitly are after. That is one of the keys that make it works.

Because we are not an institution we have the freedom to change and adapt and design as we see fit at any point in time. So that is the overall view of study for the first year that is operating for a number of years. The focus is Inuit history, focusing on details like land claims agreement, the political relationship between Inuit and the rest of Canada and the courses are delivered in English and Inuktitut as well and students learn a lot of cultural performing skills. They can become cultural ambassadors.

In terms of the relevance of building something coming from a ground-up, the students can respond to, that is where we see people's commitment to it. The students don't come to NS to get a piece of paper at the end. The certificate at the end has little relevance. They don't come to pass certain courses. They simply come to learn because somebody told them that it is a good experience. Even while they are there this is the learning that counts not what mark they get in one course. That is almost an attraction sometimes in the actual learning that is going on.

On the 22 students there are 2 or 3 or 4 that will leave in any given year because of the course contents or they don't know what they are doing there. That speaks to the relevance of their post-secondary studies. We may handle topics, subjects, material, information, and concepts that are close to the post-secondary level, but the students' ability to work at that level with their own academic skills is very limited, for the most part. Our biggest challenge is to design pedagogy that will as quickly as possible bring them up to a more acceptable level.

NS also offer a second-year program, which is a combination of our own courses and university courses. Instructors come here from outside and deliver a university-credited course. Other people come in and we have students go to the university to take courses and we offer some on our own. We seem to work best when we have outside instructors and we play a supporting role because often the three hours they might spend in class will take us six hours. It is still work in progress even though we have tried it several times. A lot of great learning went on but as a structured program it did not work all that well. We are still trying to fine-tune and to find the pieces that will work. We will find them by listening to the students and watching them.

In terms of readiness, we had somebody from Trent University phone us to find out what they could do to support students at the university. We have had different students go there and try out some programs from time to time. Unless you are sure they have the ability to take on the academic content, you should not accept them. You are setting them up for failure, and failure does not do anybody any good. So that is one of the challenges.

Program website: <http://www.nstraining.ca/index.php>



Sandra Inutiq: Office of the Language Commission, Nunavut Government

I have four post-secondary experiences. I attended Carleton for a year and a half, until I found out I owed Revenue Canada money because of how our student funding system is set up. It is seen as a salary. I was a single parent attending Carleton. The support system that was here was excellent, as stated by the students. The support for development of writing skills was so helpful, not only the skills, but also the confidence building, the fact that you can succeed in a university environment. Also, the Aboriginal lounge was really safe, even in this university, especially when you finally found it after going through the maze of tunnels in Carleton. It provided a sense of your own space and other Aboriginal students to talk with. There was a Cree from Great Whale. We used to tease each other because we were enemies way back.

You need to have *nallinirq*, a sense of compassion and empathy for the students and the institution—maybe institution is not the right word—to be successful. The Nunavut Sivuniksavut and Akitisiraq Law School are both community-driven projects. There is a sense of ownership by Inuit in those programs, not just by Inuit but also by the community. Those two programs had that support system in common. People really did care and that does not happen a lot for our students. The fact that many graduated from NS and the Akitisiraq Law Program shows the *nallinirq* of those programs.

Akitisiraq was set up with more assignments and essays and fewer exams. It allowed your writing skills to develop. It was spaced out a bit, by an extra year, so that you could phase into it slowly and then it sped up very quickly. For the Akitisiraq program, we had a salary; many of the students were working already. Six of my group had mortgages. Almost all, except two students, had families. For post-secondary programs, you are going to have families, children, and working people. The salary base was one less thing to worry about.

The biggest thing that made it successful was having an elder. We had an elder who taught us Inuit Law and Inuktitut, and he was also there to listen to us if we needed an ear and guidance. We would have discussions about Inuit Law after class. One time, one of the students and I would walk home after class. We were discussing as usual, after the Inuit Law course. What did this mean, how did this translate into the current legal system, could it work? We thought, “Wouldn’t it be awesome if all the students from here would have the opportunity to experience what we are experiencing, not only to instill confidence in who we are in the systems that are ours. “So,” we thought, “why don’t we create a university?” So we created a society that we are looking into. We are just about to raise funds. We wish to create a university from scratch that is inspired by Inuit knowledge and by the Arctic, whose programs are relevant to where we are and that acknowledges who we are and how the courses are developed, and the vision that it has. The society that we created is Illirtarvik.

I wanted to mention as well what Fiona Walton mentioned about the master’s program: how they do not take it into the community. We also have to recognize the systemic barriers. Once we graduate students, there is a real sense that, for a lot of Akitisiraq programs, we are not really welcomed into the legal profession. When people criticize about how many people are actually practicing law, you also need to discuss why that is. When I passed the bar exam, I went into a division in the government that had 7 lawyers. They were all male—no offence to the men here. All except one were over 50. They were, for the most part, stuck in time in terms of how



they viewed the law and how they viewed women in society. That was tough. I am not telling you this for you to feel sorry for me. I survived, but that was the reality. Once we graduate our students, that is what they are entering. A friend from Greenland told me that if you are going to have a plan to further educate Inuit you also need to make sure that the system is in place for them to go back.

Lindsay Sowdluapik: Studies Coordinator, University of the Arctic

I am the University Studies Coordinator at Nunavut Arctic College. This is a new job that was created last September. The summer before, I had finished my Master's in Indigenous Governance at the University of Victoria and before that I had done an undergraduate degree at Queen's University in Sociology.

The main point of my job is to expand university options for Inuit in Nunavut in their communities and across the territory. That means a couple of different things. One is building university partnerships, so we met with Athabasca to talk about making a Bachelor's of Arts, a general studies degree, because we do need more options in Inuit studies and having it online. In Nunavut, we can offer a land-based course taught by elders in Inuktitut. We were thinking about how we could do university in our way, because that is one way to build partnerships.

Another way is to take existing courses and teach them at the college and give more options. I am teaching a University of the Arctic course right now, online across Nunavut. We have 27 students in 5 communities, and they are taking a first-year introductory course on the circumpolar world. It has been going very well. It is very busy because there are a lot of challenges in terms of Internet access and everybody is working full-time or is a full-time student. There have been a lot of time management challenges that way. Overall, it is a good way to give people university credits or to give them an idea of what level the reading and writing is at. Another way is taking a developmental approach: having more essays than exams, and giving people options for re-writes and having tutors.

The most successful part of the job, even though it is very new, is that we are making a time and a place to talk about university and to talk about what we want and how we can do it, at home on our own.

The biggest challenge is that bits and pieces are happening but they are not cohesive. A lot of people are working in different areas that are not working together as much as they could be.

We need to think about radically changing, or understanding, education in Nunavut right from public schools to home schools and to land-based education and thinking what can we do, rather than bringing systems in. What can we make for ourselves? Do we have to go with what we have right now or can we do something else?.

Students experiences

As participants at the workshop, the students shared their own experiences in different post-secondary programs. They brought their point of view about the programs they took and got involved with, but they also presented their vision of where they succeeded and their personal challenges and failures.

Joseph Flowers: McGill University

I am a student at McGill University. I have been a student several times in post-secondary education. I went to John Abbott College in Montreal in 1998. I started in CEGEP in 1998 in an English college. For those of you who do not know what the CEGEP system is, it is somewhere between high school and university, it is two years of pre-university education that you get before you go off to university. After I did CEGEP, I went to cooking school. I applied to McGill, Concordia, and a culinary institute and I got accepted into all three. I chose to go to cooking school.

I should also mention that I recently had the opportunity to participate in the Jane Glasscow Arctic Fellowship Program, which is a program for Arctic people from all across Canada from Labrador to the Yukon. Every fellow looks at a policy issue that affects the Arctic.

(http://www.gordonfn.org/CdnNorth_ArcticVoicesFellowship.cfm)

After graduating from culinary school, I went back home to Kuujjuaq, where I am from. I am from Kuujjuaq and I am from Goose Bay, Labrador. I went back to Kuujjuaq but I realized the restaurant industry in Montreal was much more enticing. I decided to go back there.

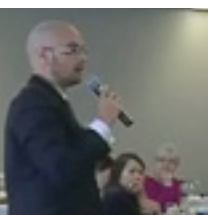
After some time cooking in Montreal, I decided that I wanted to do something else. I got a Bachelor's degree in Linguistics from McGill and now I am in my third year of Law School at McGill.

The two questions were what really worked well and what challenges still exist. I am speaking from a student's perspective. My proposal is to look at these sponsorship programs that the Kativik School Board provides to post-secondary students, such as myself and lots of students that I know. So I am also working on that project right now. I have just finished developing my interview plan that I will be bringing to students to ask them about their experience and their concerns about the support they receive from the school board. My perspective comes directly from the user end of the support that we get as students here.

One success is that KSB has a program for bringing students from Nunavik to adapt to Montreal. It is an ongoing thing for the first year of CEGEP. There is a college preparatory program, which is a couple of weeks before the actual time that school starts, and people come down and actually participate in a sort of mock college class where you do college-level reading and oral presentations. It is like

a CEGEP class and you get familiar with the level of study that is expected of you. That was very helpful for me when I first came down. Montreal was a new place, and the school had five thousand students. That was really intimidating to me. When I first came down, that was very challenging. The school board is doing a very good job in terms of developing that program and helping students to adapt.

One of the challenges that needs to be addressed, and this is my experience, is that it is hard to be treated as an individual who has individual goals and aspirations.



Teevi McKay: Carleton University

I graduated from Nunavut Sivuniksavut and that was the best experience I have ever had. Learning about my culture and heritage, just knowing where I am from and my identity, really helped me to succeed and know where I fit into society and that helped me with university. I tried university five years ago and I did not do well. I was not mature enough. But I think that experience is helping me because I can see where the gaps were when I did not do well during that time. One ingredient for success is academic readiness. Nunavut Sivuniksavut is doing a great job with orientation because that is one of the biggest challenges that students face, just being orientated to the city. Just being thrown into the city when you are from the North is really difficult. That is one of the main things, just orientation to the university, just learning how to do research and so on, just knowing the services that are available for students to be successful.

Pam Gross: Carleton University

I have had a long journey to where I am right now. It started off at Red Deer College upgrading and coming from the North and moving around a lot. My education was all over the place. One of my biggest struggles was with English. Now, I really enjoy English, and I actually like essay writing. It is kind of one of those things. I have grown from going to school for a number of years.

My biggest challenge during the upgrading program was my being far from home. I was in Red Deer, getting into city life even though it has only a hundred thousand people, but it was still pretty big coming from a town of three thousand people. I grew to get used to that and I got accepted to the Nunavut Sivuniksavut program for the first year. I wanted to learn more about my culture and where I come from. I grew up in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut but I spent high school, like junior high, in the Northwest Territories.

I gained a lot from the experience because of Murray and Morley (instructors). It was kind of just them for the first year and then Jackie Price came on board. Having them there and having our other classmates with us was a big thing because we all became like family.

It was challenging because there were seven of us to begin with and there were three of us in the end. We had a lot of growing together. We were in different programs because there was only one course where we could take our own thing together. It was hard to manage the night time, going to school from seven to ten. Having school during the day and time management was the biggest thing that year.

After that year, I came here and got accepted to the Aboriginal Enriched Support Program. The program that Carleton offers for Aboriginal students and other students who want to get into post-secondary helped me immensely. There were eleven of us in my AESP program. We became very close. It was much like NS. I was the only *Inuk* in the program that year.

The biggest challenges would be funding. Living off seven hundred dollars a month is kind of hard and so is being away from family.



<http://fedcan.ca/content/fr/10/Carleton.html>

Ceporah Mearns: Carleton University, AESP mentor

I am just going to speak from my own experience. I have taken a long time to get to where I am today. I graduated in 2003 from high school in Pangnirtung. I went to Arctic College and I went to Nunavut Sivuniksavut for two years. I also volunteered for a year. Now, I am in my third year at Carleton University.

I want to talk about the AESP program. That is what got me into Carleton because I did not do very well in NS, although it was a fabulous experience and I did grow as an individual. Academically, I was not ready. I needed to develop those skills to write essays and to improve my marks to get into university. AESP was really instrumental, and it was my program with the centre for initiatives and education.

As an Aboriginal mentor, I support Aboriginal students who are in their first year. As a peer, I can help them with academics and with resources on campus that will help them make that transition into university studies. While working with that program, I have watched students from Aboriginal communities. There are a lot of Cree students from up North, from James Bay, who have come, and you can really see the development, the growth in each student and the confidence they gain through learning Aboriginal history. They have additional support with the workshops, facilitators, and mentors. For myself, I had an Aboriginal mentor in my first year, and that mentor provided me with support because I was able to relate to that individual. With my own experience, I have tried really hard in the past few years as a mentor to provide that support, as well as from my experience, coming from where I come from, an isolated community, and coming to the city. Being able to provide that support is crucial for success at university, as is having a peer to relate to.



Table 1: Summary of participants key points

FRANCES ABELE

Carleton University
Certificate in Nunavut Public Services Studies

Challenge
Finding time for studies (between work and family)

Success
The work of Chris Turnbull: linking the students to the instructors and to the administration.

NAULLUQ ARNAQUQ

Culture, Language, Elders and youth
Nunavut Teacher Education Program

Challenge
Funding and Housing

Success
Field-based courses

MARIA CAMPPELL

Athabasca University
World Indigenous Knowledge and Research

Challenge
Getting ready for university

Success
Elder involvement

PRISCILLA CAMPEAU

Athabasca University
World Indigenous Knowledge and Research

Challenge
Funding

Success
Courses 100% Aboriginal

ANNE CRAWFORD

Akitisiraq Law School Society
Affiliated with Nunavut Arctic College, the University of Victoria, and the University of Ottawa

Challenge
Fighting credentialism

Success
Recognition for British Columbia bar admission at the University of Victoria

MORLEY HANSON

Nunavut Sivuniksavut

Challenge
Getting ready to enter programs from high school to post-secondary

Success
Program organically developed, not as an institution, freedom to change and adapt

SANDRA INUTIQ

Office of the Nunavut Language Commissioner
Carleton University student experience

Challenge
Coping with family, work, and studies

Success
Creation of a sense of belonging (Elder participation, Aboriginal lounge)

MARTHA McDONALD

Labrador Institute, Memorial University
Social work program for Nunatsiavut

Challenge
Coping with the cost of running the program

Success
Counseling and support

WAYNE McELROY

Kativik School Board
John Abbott College

Challenge
Getting ready for postsecondary studies

Success
Services (counseling, housing, and living allowance)

DONNA LEE SMITH

McGill University
First Nation and Inuit Education program

Challenge
Developing an intensive program (13 weeks in 8 days)

Success
100% in Inuktitut

LINDSAY SOWDLUAPIK

Nunavut Arctic College
Nunavut Research Institute
Master in Indigenous Governance, Victoria University

Challenge
Extending university options for Inuit from Nunavut (access)

Success
Development of writing skills

Table 2. Challenges/Successes

| CHALLENGES/CONSIDERATIONS | SUCCESSSES |
|--|---|
| <p>Academics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time management • Academic readiness • Intensive program (13 weeks in 8 days) • Expand university options for Inuit from Nunavut (access) • Success rates – students are not staying in the North • Follow-up after completed the course • Each of the four regions (Inuvialuit, Nunavut, Nunavik, Nunatsiavut) has its own standards in education • Trying to incorporate what you know into the academic sense • Writing essays | <p>Academics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Linking the students to the instructors and to the administration • Having “Inuitization” of the contents • Field-base courses • Courses 100% aboriginal (100% Inuktitut) • Recognition of the British Columbia Bar Admission of University of Victoria • Program organically developed, not an institution – having the freedom to change and adapt • The development of writing skills • Space to understand different ways of thinking coming from an aboriginal perspective • Relying to who you are • Peer support |
| <p>Personal and Social:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coping with family, work and studies • Personal problems • Living in a city • Money management | <p>Personal and Social:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elder involvement • Creation of sense of belonging (elder participation and aboriginal lounge) • Counseling and support • The support of employers to partner on programs • Graduates becoming role models in their communities |
| <p>Institution and other:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing • Funding • Credentialism | <p>Institution and other:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Services like housing and living allocation • Their work with the Aboriginal Learning knowledge center (online interactive tools and models) • Inuit residence or dorms |

Conclusion

This workshop allowed an open discussion about the experiences of Southern universities, college administrators, and Northern stakeholders and instructors who are involved in Arctic post-secondary education and training.

Participants shared experiences, successes, and challenges and presented their knowledge of the students' needs and the strengths and weaknesses of current programs for Inuit students.

Students do not necessarily know what to expect or what they want to do and they need to be accompanied on their journey. We have more and more experience in identifying what kind of support is needed, but we often encounter difficulties in being able to afford what is required. Access and choices have improved over time but are still important issues. Readiness was quite problematic in every speech, but CEGEP and Nunavut Sivuniksavut College have proved to be important steps in the transition to university education. There are different delivery methods (online, onsite, or hybrid), and all of them have their strengths and weaknesses. Even though Aboriginal ways of education are slowly getting recognized, undertaking initiatives to build Aboriginal education remains a challenge to be met. Partnership is the key to many programs. Working on more cohesion and teamwork is an objective to keep in mind and reinforce.

One question remains unanswered, despite discussion: How can we ensure that the programs will continue if successful?

When support fades, programs will disappear. Participants all agreed that Northern post-secondary education is costly. When the money comes from governments, donors, and funding agencies, the program may not fully address the needs of the students or of Inuit society as a whole. We are dealing here with the tension between vocational, and liberal education. There is a need not only for Northern workers and practitioners, but also for Inuit thinkers.

What can be done to preserve successful programs that are discontinued because of insufficient funding? This question still needs to be examined, especially when we think about creating a Canadian Northern university. The next workshop in Kuujjuaq will focus on such issues.

Appendix A: participants list and contact

| | | |
|-------------------------|---|---|
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Thanks to Udloriak Hanson (Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami) for her presentation and being with us.