

# Community Forum

## Final Report

Thursday, May 15<sup>th</sup>, 2008



RED RIVER COLLEGE  
OF APPLIED ARTS, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

School of Indigenous Education





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OF APPLIED ARTS, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

# *Community Forum*

## **FORUM REPORT**

School of Indigenous Education

September 2008

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## **Acknowledgements**

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April Krahn, Manager, Aboriginal Student Support & Community Relations, and Jaime Richard, Aboriginal Recruitment Officer, were the key leaders planning, organizing and managing the logistics of all aspects of the Community Forum. Marti Ford, Dean of the School of Indigenous Education encouraged the development of the Forum and Dr. Jeff Zabudsky, President of the College, enthusiastically supported the efforts to bring the forum to fruition.

Thank you to Dr. Don Robertson who graciously agreed to be the Master of Ceremonies for the event. Dr. Robertson eloquently introduced the purpose and goals of the Forum, managed the feedback sessions and summarized the day's events and outcomes.

The Forum included guest speakers, a student panel, and small group discussions. The overview and comments from the speakers and students helped establish a common framework for the forum discussions. A special thank you to all of our speakers: Dr. Jeff Zabudsky, Marti Ford, April Krahn and Jaime Richard.

To all members of the Student Panel: Shirley Haynes (moderator) – RRC Aboriginal Alumnus, Chantell Quill (ACCESS Business Administration), Theodore Letandre (Biindigen College Studies/ Introduction to Trades), Lori Flynn (Biindigen College Studies graduate, currently enrolled in Aboriginal Self-Government Administration), Ken Parenteau (Community Centered Therapy Program) and Sharon Mallett (Culinary Arts); our deepest gratitude goes to all of you for sharing with our audience your trials and inspirational triumphs throughout your personal and educational journeys.

Approximately 200 individuals participated in the Forum and we thank them for committing their time and for providing their insights to improve the delivery of educational services to Aboriginal people. Many of these individuals also agreed to facilitate group discussions. Appendix 2 lists these individuals without whom the Forum could not have occurred, thank you for your leadership. Appendix 3 provides the questions addressed by participants. Appendix 4 lists all of the registered organizations.

A special thank you to Elders-in-Residence Mae Louise Campbell and Jules Lavallee for their prayers and thoughts throughout the day as well as their insightful wisdom to the Forum discussions. An additional thank you to Mae Louise for her contribution in assembling the table centrepieces.

During the lunch break, participants were engaged with "Celebrating Aboriginal Cultures." Performances included: Tamara and Lisa Muswagon - First Nation drumming; Lori Flynn & Maureen Tapatai - Inuit Throat singing; and Ryan Richard - Master of the Jig. We thank them all for their exciting and uplifting performances.

Thank you to the Fisher River and Peguis transition year program students for participating in the Forum and giving valuable input from a student's prospective.

Appreciation is extended to everyone at the College who helped make the day a success, including the technical crew, food services, and the faculty and staff who graciously worked the information booths.



## ***Executive Summary***

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### **Background**

On May 15, 2008, Red River College hosted a Community Forum at its Notre Dame Campus in Winnipeg. The Forum brought together 200 representatives from the Aboriginal community, College faculty and staff, former and current students, employers and government. The purpose of the forum was to help identify strategies to enhance the role of the College in supporting Aboriginal people as they strive to achieve their post-secondary educational goals. The event featured several presentations, a student panel discussion and participant group discussions and feedback.

This is a summary of the discussion and highlights the key points that emerged in response to a series of questions.

### **Community Forum Participants' Overall Advice**

Many of the participants praised RRC for its efforts in providing post-secondary education for First Nations, Inuit and Métis people and in its efforts to provide support programs to help with accessibility, retention, graduation and the transition to the workplace or further education. Some comments were: "Continue with current activities at RRC;" "continue to support students [e.g. Aboriginal Student Support Centre];" and "continue the good work." Many participants believed that even more investments were required to build and sustain the solid foundation at the college.

Participants also liked the concept of the Community Forum. Some comments: "Communicate the findings of the Forum to all participants and to government and other key stakeholders;" "employ report as a tool to increase awareness and consciousness;" "build on the success of the Forum." According to participants, the key next step for RRC was to "act upon the wisdom of Forum participants and develop strategies for action."

Participants offered advice to the College on a variety of fronts. Some overall comments were: "need to provide the capacity for spaces and supports for future Aboriginal students in PSE;" "big number of students wanting to attend and striving to attend, how will the system cope;" and "Lack of equity in access to post-secondary education (PSE) for Aboriginal people." Participants provided a wealth of ideas for solutions to overcome the barriers that Aboriginal people experience in post-secondary education. One participant wrote: "Barriers are clear [financial, academic, cultural, interpersonal, and personal] but we must get serious about removing them; the time for action is now, lots of ideas but what is needed is action." The purpose of the Red River College Community Forum Report is to spur action.

### **Barriers to Post-Secondary Education**

During the morning group discussions, participants explored and identified the barriers Aboriginal people experience in their quest for post-secondary education. Some of these include but are not limited to;

obstacles in choosing, gaining entrance, transitioning into, staying in, and graduating, as well as transitioning to employment or to further education.

In many cases the barriers are interconnected. It is widely acknowledged that First Nations, Inuit and Métis people confront persistent barriers that hamper their learning opportunities. These barriers are far more difficult to overcome than those facing non-Aboriginal Canadians.

Community Forum participants felt that Aboriginal participation and success in post-secondary education were hindered the most by:

- The financial obligations of post-secondary education which are difficult to meet by Aboriginal people due to poverty, unemployment and the limitations and underfunding of post-secondary education financial support programs for Aboriginal students.
- The lack of safe, affordable, family-friendly and culturally appropriate housing in proximity to campus.
- Social discrimination, isolation, and loneliness at post-secondary institutions compounded by culture shock for many Aboriginal students.
- The lack of comprehensive, accessible and accurate information on post-secondary education opportunities, options, and requirements.
- Inadequate academic preparation for college or university at the secondary education level.
- Often confusing and rigid entry, admission and registration processes.
- The shortage of supportive academic and social transition programs to post-secondary education.
- Significant family demands for many Aboriginal students that need to be understood and addressed by post-secondary education institutions.
- A lack of understanding and respect for Aboriginal culture and history in the overall educational system.
- Too rigid program structures resulting in heavy course loads in College.
- A failure to recognize Aboriginal languages and the need to address literacy issues.
- A legacy of doubt in Aboriginal communities about imposed education systems due to residential schools and other historic practices which have had a negative and assimilative effect.

- A deficiency of Aboriginal perspectives and worldview in much of the curriculum, classroom practices and testing methods.
- Too few Aboriginal people in faculty and staffing to allow Aboriginal people to feel equally represented at the post-secondary level.
- Limited networks of academic, social and personal support services with an Aboriginal worldview.
- Need for more research on barriers and solutions to guide strategies.

### **Key Strategies to Overcome the Barriers**

There were two group discussion sessions in the afternoon portion of the Community Forum. In the first group discussion session Forum participants explored ideas to overcome the previously identified barriers. During the second afternoon session, participants articulated the key solutions, strategies and models to overcome the barriers identified during the morning session.

Many participants noted that Red River College is advancing many of the strategies and actions needed to overcome the barriers; they would like to see even more resources devoted to expand those services and programs.

Overall, participants expressed that post-secondary education for Aboriginal people must reflect Aboriginal realities, visions, and aspirations; and not be planned, controlled or monitored solely by non-Aboriginal people.

A relevant post-secondary education system must ensure Aboriginal students have the necessary culturally appropriate supports to realize post-secondary education as a viable option for their future and generations to come.

Participants believed that an integrated set of strategies and a wide range of initiatives were needed to overcome the identified barriers.

In brief, post-secondary education direct and indirect costs must be affordable for Aboriginal students and governments and institutions must ensure funding support for all eligible applicants; there must be active outreach recruitment of Aboriginal people across all parts of the province; information must be available on program opportunities; there must be family support programs; transition courses are needed; entrance criteria should be widened to include non-academic factors; and there must be ongoing academic, social and personal support throughout the students' programs of study.

In just looking at the challenges of enrolling, there should be assistance in navigating the post-secondary bureaucracy and there should be available supports for access to child care, student housing, computer hardware and software, text books, and transportation.



While in school, Aboriginal students should have access to academic and social support services with an Aboriginal worldview, the classrooms need to have flexibility in teaching and testing methodologies and post-secondary institutions must reflect Aboriginal culture in architecture, art, staffing and the curriculum.

In addition, there must be transition to work and further education initiatives coordinated across the post-secondary education system.

### **Key Advice to the College Arising from the Community Forum:**

- ✓ Red River College accepts this report as a framework for action and states its commitment to use the voices of the community expressed in this report to set strategic directions for the future of Aboriginal education at the college.
- ✓ Red River College commits to continue to build and sustain a post-secondary education experience for Aboriginal People that is founded on the Aboriginal worldview; arises from Aboriginal realities, visions, and aspirations; and is designed and managed in concert with Aboriginal people.
- ✓ Red River College continues and expands investments in the advancement of Aboriginal education, programs, services and supports by ensuring such investments are of the highest priority in the annual budgeting preparation process.
- ✓ Red River College confirms as a strategic goal that it becomes a national leader in First Nations, Métis and Inuit post-secondary education and commit the resources necessary for the college to be recognized as such a national leader.
- ✓ Red River College commits to incorporate the recommended strategies (listed below) into its strategic and operational plans.

### **Recommended Strategies** (elaborations on these are found in the body of this report):

- Increase financial support for Aboriginal students through awards, scholarships, bursaries, and emergency funds, provided quickly and without red tape; with the goal of ensuring that every accepted, qualified Aboriginal student has the funding required to complete his or her academic program.
- Initiate a comprehensive Aboriginal student housing initiative.
- Lead an inclusive and comprehensive college opportunities in post-secondary education informational and orientation initiative across the province directed at parents, community leaders, elementary and secondary schools and potential students.
- Focus on increasing the academic preparation of Aboriginal students in high schools through joint planning and reciprocal courses between Red River College and elementary and secondary education institutions.

- Expand recruitment initiatives across the province and beyond to help the ease-of-entrance to programs for Aboriginal students coming to the college.
- Establish an Aboriginal student transition to an urban college academic, social and cultural life program.
- Expand the use of community program delivery and other innovative program delivery modes to allow more college programs to be delivered in Aboriginal communities.
- Build partnerships and linkages between the college and Aboriginal communities, organizations, educational institutions and agencies.
- Create more programs geared specifically to Aboriginal people, along side of active recruitment of Aboriginal students into mainstream college academic programs.
- Continue and expand the provision of support services focusing on the unique needs of Aboriginal people at the post-secondary education level.
  - ❖ Expanded support services for students should foster connections with other students in similar situations and offer activities promoting student involvement and skill development to promote academic success.
  - ❖ Comprehensive student services to support the recruitment, retention, and success of Aboriginal students in post-secondary programs and healing initiatives. Funding is required for preparatory programs, tutoring and mentoring, counseling services, sharing circles, Elders and other areas.
- Support development and use of Aboriginal curriculum and culturally sensitive materials and pedagogies throughout the academic programming at the college.
- Provide flexible programming in recognition of strained budgets, the need to work to support families for many Aboriginal people and to expand the range of study.
  - ❖ Allow more part-time studies with reduced tuition and fees.
  - ❖ Allow for more electives and choices for students.
- Encourage the development of and implement the use of alternative course and program assessment methodologies for Aboriginal students.
- Design and deliver programs that develop sensitivity on the part of students, faculty and staff to the issues faced by Aboriginal students. This is especially true for front-line staff, who should be culturally sensitive, understanding and eager to help; and instructors, who perhaps have the greatest impact on students.
- Institute more mentor programs including links with graduates for coaching and support.

- Implement policies, procedures and processes to encourage the hiring of more Aboriginal faculty and staff at all levels and in all positions throughout the college.
- Design and deliver programs and services to strengthen Aboriginal literacy and language skills, both in traditional Aboriginal languages and in the official languages.
- Increase the dedicated space for Aboriginal students reflective of Aboriginal values, architecture, art, and culture, along with the design and phased implementation of an institution wide inclusive learning environment reflective of Manitoba's and Canada's First Nation, Métis and Inuit heritage.
- Work with the employing community to develop and deliver a comprehensive school to work transition program for Aboriginal students.
- Engage other post-secondary education institutions and the Departments of Advanced Education, Literacy and Education, and Citizenship and Youth in a process to work towards full credit transfer across the Manitoba post-secondary education system to facilitate the further education of Aboriginal students.
- Increase the representation and visibility of Aboriginal students on various official bodies at Red River College (for example, advisory committees, student association).
- Establish a research initiative to understand the factors affecting the barriers and solutions to entrance and success of Aboriginal people in Manitoba and at various post-secondary institutions, led by Aboriginal communities and involving Aboriginal students to develop research skills.

*This Executive Summary is just that – a summary. The voices of Community Forum participants and the full richness and wisdom of their ideas, thoughts and words are found in the following pages of this report.*

# ***Introduction***

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## **Background to the Forum**

Red River College is committed to becoming the post-secondary education institution of choice for Aboriginal people. The College will strengthen its higher education program offerings and its supports and services to increase accessibility, support retention, and ensure graduation and successful transition to further pursuits.

One of the fundamental goals of RRC's *Academic Plan 2006-2020* is Aboriginal Outreach.

That plan states that Manitoba's Aboriginal communities are expected to grow at a rate of more than 30 per cent over the next decade and Aboriginal youth will contribute greatly to the evolving workforce in Manitoba.

The plan states that RRC will meet the needs of the Aboriginal community, not only through academic programs, but by offering education to staff and administration on Aboriginal culture and tradition. Moreover, in addition to existing initiatives, the college will develop bold, new projects to meet the expanding needs of the community. The Aboriginal population is changing and in the coming years the college will be educating second and third generations of educated Aboriginal people. The plan commits the college to transforming and updating programs and services to respond to changing socio-economic trends and demographics.

One of the key Strategic Initiatives of RRC's *2008-2011 Strategic Plan* is to Advance Aboriginal Education.

The College recognizes the need to provide more opportunities for Aboriginal students to enter post-secondary education and to ensure they are successful. The Strategic Plan states that "Red River College will ensure its programs and services are designed to attract Aboriginal learners and assist them in their success." There is a commitment to develop a comprehensive plan to provide guidance on how to increase participation and success of Aboriginal students across programs. The plan will take into account marketing/communications, as well as organization requirements and this report should help inform that development.

## **Forum Purpose**

The intent of the Forum was to help provide a more seamless path for Aboriginal students into RRC, support their experiences at the college and lead to successful outcomes from their RRC studies.

The Forum's purpose was to engage the community in a discussion of how RRC can help improve access, retention, graduation and subsequent success of Aboriginal people. The college wanted to hear the voices of the community to help chart a course for the future and to encourage an awareness that everyone needs to work together to ensure a successful future.

The Goal of the Forum was to help identify strategies to enhance the role of the College in improving post-secondary education access, retention, graduation and overall educational outcome success for Aboriginal people.

The specific objectives were:

1. Identify and broadly explore the challenges and issues for Aboriginal people as they strive to achieve their post-secondary educational goals.
2. Explore the resources, strategies and models that Red River College could pursue to enhance access to post-secondary learning opportunities for Aboriginal people.
3. Determine how best to encourage, support and improve the educational success of Aboriginal students.
4. Explore ideas for supporting the successful transition of Aboriginal people from college to further pursuits.

This report documents the issues, ideas and discussion at the Forum. The report will be used to help inform and guide strategic planning in the School of Indigenous Education Aboriginal Student Support & Community Relations department and the college over the next five years.

### **Forum Format and Participants**

The Forum was designed to provide an opportunity for participants to express their views on ways and means to support Aboriginal people in their quest for post-secondary education opportunities.

The morning session of the Forum included a presentation on College Initiatives from Dr. Jeff Zabudsky, President of Red River College, a presentation on the School of Indigenous Education Initiatives from Marti Ford, Dean - School of Indigenous Education, and a presentation on RRC Programs, Supports and Services for Aboriginal Students by Jaime Richard, Aboriginal Recruitment Officer.

After these presentations, participants met in small groups to discuss the barriers that Aboriginal people experience in post-secondary education, led by a facilitator. Individuals in the group noted their responses and then the group worked towards a consensus. Each group reported their key points to the overall forum participants.

After the student panel in the afternoon session, participants again met in groups to discuss solutions to the barriers and what should be of the highest priority moving forward for RRC. Individuals recorded responses and then the group discussed ideas. These were reported to the entire Forum. Copies of individual and group reports were collected and compiled. This report summarizes the key points and recommendations expressed by participants.

## **Barriers and Challenges**

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Community Forum participants, individually and as part of a group, devoted considerable time to considering and discussing the challenges and issues facing Aboriginal people as they strive to achieve their educational goals. Most individuals recorded their own thoughts and groups prepared summary reports and provided feedback to the Forum.

This section provides a summary of the barriers identified by participants.

- **Affordability of Post-Secondary Education**

Many participants said there was a lack of adequate funding/financial supports. Most Aboriginal students have significant financial challenges in going on to post-secondary education. Unemployment and poverty in Aboriginal communities often make the financial obligations of post-secondary education difficult to meet. This is a barrier in choosing to pursue post-secondary education and in affording to continue. Some representative comments: “Financial supports do not always provide for all costs of PSE;” “funding not always available;” “many waiting for funding support;” “income challenge while attending PSE;” “living allowance does not match living expenses;” “financial support needed for Métis students.”

Participants noted the maze of funding sources and that sponsoring programs need to be communicated to Aboriginal students, as well as help with student loans, scholarships etc. Limited and underfunding from Indian and Northern Affairs Canada [INAC] creates significant problems for First Nations communities. This causes limitations in band funding. There is also a lack of support from the federal government for Aboriginal people with little or no connection to bands. Band funding timing is sometimes an issue and should be recognized by PSEIs. Many said that increased financial support is necessary for all students to reduce work hours and increase study hours. “There is inadequate funding overall for PSE.” A need was expressed to expand financial aid for students and have it easily accessible, timely and to provide more funding for accessibility and for all supports. There is also a need for special emergency fund or a contingency fund to support Aboriginal students.

- **Lack of Safe, Secure and Affordable Housing**

Participants saw the lack of safe, accessible and affordable housing as a major barrier. Sometimes students have to live in less desirable areas of the city, putting students at risk or it may lead to dropping out. One comment was that there are “dangers of living in a big city with many negative influences and with racism.” Often Aboriginal people experience problems with heavy requirements, for example, a co-signer and renting history, damage deposit, reference letters. There are many single parents who need secure shelter in an unknown environment. A lack of on-campus housing at RRC was seen as a barrier. Some groups expressed the need for an “on-site Notre Dame residence.” Housing also needed to be of a residential type. The distance to PSE from home communities makes shelter a critical accessibility and success factor. Overall participants expressed a lack of culturally friendly housing that is away from negative influences. “RRC needs to invest in a residence for Aboriginal students,” as part of a comprehensive strategy for Aboriginal students access and success in post-secondary education.

- **Student Isolation**

Often Aboriginal students express feelings of being discriminated against, isolation, and loneliness at post-secondary institutions, especially large, urban institutions. Many participants expressed a sense of isolation, alienation and non-integration into the Canadian and College environment. This is especially true during the first days of attending post-secondary education; it is difficult in transitioning to a new community.

There is extreme loneliness; some reported there is no one to connect with, they felt lost in the city; for some it is the first time living on their own and this is compounded with a fear of leaving their home community. In some cases Aboriginal students feel un-welcomed and do not experience a supportive environment as they are seemingly segregated by non-Aboriginal students. Aboriginal students must be part of the overall college through social involvement. There is a need to connect with other Aboriginal students in similar situations.

- **Culture Shock**

Forum participants said that Aboriginal students experience culture shock when they leave their home communities to attend post-secondary education. It is a new and sometimes hostile environment and there is a great distance from home for many. Students feel family and community pressure to succeed. They feel the stress of living up to high expectations from community, family, peers and sponsors.

“For young people it is a time in their lives of doubt and hope trying to find themselves in their culture in a strange environment with little connections to their heritage.” Some are deeply affected by colonialism and the inter-generational effects of the residential school system.

There is a disconnection from family when they arrive in the city and there is less guidance; it is a big adjustment in relocating. Aboriginal culture, history and spirituality are disrupted and many students directly experience racism. In addition, many students are overcoming poverty and personal and interpersonal issues while trying to attend PSE. Attending post secondary education away from home is a major life defining time. Many students are overcoming a history of abuse and loss of culture and dealing with a cluster of personal, social and family issues, while trying to adjust to a new environment and trying to study to achieve success and trying to overcome value conflicts and develop trust with a system that has failed Aboriginal people for generations.

- **Lack of Comprehensive, Accessible and Accurate Information on Post-Secondary Education Opportunities and Requirements for Aboriginal Students**

Many participants indicated that there was a lack of information and awareness of post-secondary education and career options for Aboriginal people. There is a need for academic advisors and a need for information and role models in communities. This applies to academic programs, support services, housing, counseling and all college services. There is a lack of information about RRC and PSE in general in communities and for parents about options for potential Aboriginal students. More community visits are needed. There is a need for high school awareness programs to increase career knowledge, knowledge of academic standards, admission hurdles and financial support. Earlier



career guidance and planning assistance is needed for students. Participants believed there was a general unavailability of PSE program information for all students; a lack of knowledge on where to get the right information; lack of knowledge of necessary prerequisites and criteria for entrance; and a lack of information on career planning.

- **Lack of Academic Preparation for Post-Secondary Education**

Many participants were concerned about elementary and secondary schools not adequately preparing students for higher education. High schools are not always providing a proper base for students to pursue higher education; some students need upgrading/basic courses. The lack of preparation includes academic courses and study skills, note taking, writing, research skills. Many are ill-prepared for PSE. There is a need for proper academic preparation and better preparation in high schools. The overall education system needs to work together to ensure the solid preparation of all students for post secondary education. Colleges and universities need to work with elementary and secondary schools to develop programs of academic preparation and dual credits.

- **Confusing and Rigid Admission Processes**

Participants said that post-secondary education institutions' admission criteria and processes may dissuade Aboriginal applicants. The lack of flexibility in admissions means that certain programs may be unavailable to Aboriginal students. More information is needed on PLAR and it is needed in more program areas. The admission process needs to be streamlined and clarified for potential students. Navigating the admission process and academic policies of PSEIs are very difficult. Dealing with educational bureaucracy can be intimidating to students and their families. There should be "less red tape in application and registration" processes. There should be "more flexibility in the entrance process."

- **Inadequate Transition Programming to the College**

Many participants identified difficulties in which Aboriginal students face when transitioning to higher education. In addition, moving to a large, unfamiliar city makes this transition even more challenging. Navigating through the institution and through the city is difficult. Perhaps a comprehensive PSE transition year program would help strengthen the transition process for new students to college life. There is a need for a "welcoming strategy or program." Student advocates would be helpful and small group sessions for Aboriginal students in transitioning to PSE could be held. "Higher education is a big bureaucracy with hosts of forms and rules and penalties;" these aspects need to be explained and communicated in a fair and open manner that helps not hinders students. Overall the critical importance of the transition is not well attended to and there is inadequate support. This transition encompasses academic, personal, family, geographical, social, shelter and cultural adjustments. Other needs for adjusting to college life include time management, financial planning, transportation, accessing city resources and family relations.

- **Lack of Child Care Along with Significant Family Demands**

Students experience financial, personal, and time challenges while in post-secondary education as a result of high family demands and the lack of child care. Housing is part of the issue and is even more

challenging for families; “more daycare services are needed for students;” there are transportation challenges to campuses and there is a lack of home resources (computers, internet, etc.). Family obligations require time and reduce the ability to focus on studies.

- **Language/Communication/Literacy Barriers**

Forum participants indicated that there is a failure to recognize Aboriginal languages and the communication challenges for Aboriginal people. Students confront communication issues and challenges due to language barriers; there is a lack of comprehensive language supports; and this is not understood by instructors or staff.

- **Lack of Respect for Aboriginal Worldviews, History and the Need for Cultural Sensitivity**

Some participants expressed a concern that there may be a lack of respect for Aboriginal cultural differences at the post-secondary level. Additional resources are needed to promote an understanding of the Aboriginal worldview and of the history of First Nations, Inuit and Métis people. “At times there is still discrimination and racism.” There is a deficiency of Aboriginal role models in all areas of the College. There are elements of distrust in the Aboriginal community about the education system due to the impact of residential schools and other historic, colonial practices that have had a negative and assimilative effect on Aboriginal communities. A greater depth of awareness of Aboriginal history and culture is needed in some PSEIs. A more welcoming and culturally aware environment would be beneficial. Overall there seems to be a paucity of indigenous perspective in PSEIs.

- **Lack of Aboriginal Culturally Appropriate Curriculum**

The School of Indigenous Education has a solid curriculum but this may not be true across the system and in the programs offered by other Schools at RRC. The curriculum of all programs should establish relevance and connection with Aboriginal students.

- **Course Load Challenges**

Aboriginal students, as well as other students, face a number of challenges with the full program course loads of traditional college programming. This included financial challenges if students want to pursue studies part-time. There is little flexibility in program timetables and the heavy course loads. The in-class sessions and out-of-class assignments are time consuming and with family and work requirements this places a large, extra burden on students. Full program loads may not be the best option for all students. The inflexibility of course selection impacts on the overall challenges of adjusting to post-secondary education and the multiple other challenges facing Aboriginal students. There is a need to consider individual course selection rather than program selection. Moreover, health and physical education courses and creative and arts based courses and other electives should be available to enrich the learning experience of Aboriginal students.

- **More College to Work Transition Programming**

Difficulties are encountered by Aboriginal students in the transition to the labour market. All students need assistance in learning how the world of work functions, how to market one's self after graduation, how to network, and how to prepare for work. There is a need for more connections with employers and matching students with employers early during their post-secondary studies. Participants believed there are issues with work readiness, employment expectations, and job leads. And this starts with solid career counseling and course selection. More practical experience is needed by students. Some thought there was no transition support after graduating to employment. Ongoing career development and planning could be embedded in programs. More internships, co-ops and job placements would be beneficial and job shadowing could be a part of some programs.

- **More College to Further Education Linkages**

Some Aboriginal students wish to pursue education beyond college. A system of dual credits and dual registrations may facilitate this process. Credits should be fully transferable to other Manitoba PSEIs.

- **Classroom-Based Impediments**

There is a need for complete support for Aboriginal students in the classroom (i.e. notes available for students with communication barriers; course deadline flexibility, explanations of unfamiliar testing and evaluation methods, recognition of Aboriginal assessment processes). All classes should be student centered. More of the in-class instruction should be attuned to and be "responsive to Aboriginal values and worldview." In some situations, there seems to be little knowledge of learning differences and little ability to adapt programming. There is a need to help instructors adjust to meet the different learning patterns of all students. "Instructors must believe in the future and embrace change and be holistic minded and accepting of people with different backgrounds and learning styles." Instructors should recognize when tutoring is beneficial and ensure that it is provided.

- **Need for More Academic Supports and Workshops to Help Successful Studies**

All students must be able to obtain the necessary academic supports they need whether for general academic skills or for specific course based skills and knowledge. In some cases this may be a lack of information on the availability of services. Instructors in the classrooms need to be sensitive to and respond to the academic struggles of all students; it is their responsibility to ensure student success. More tutors and alternative delivery methods for academic supports are needed.

- **Need for Ongoing Social Support**

Post-secondary education institutions must initiate proactive interventions to assist students with low self-esteem, shyness, communication needs, and other personal and interpersonal issues, as well as financial assistance and family supports. More culturally aware social supports are required for adjustments and managing personal and interpersonal issues and managing psychological issues. "There are personal barriers with lack of confidence, low self esteem, deficient time management and life skills that must be addressed." Life skills mean communication, problem-solving, self-awareness,

goal setting, time management, budgeting, etc. There is a need for crisis management help. Access to counsellors could be enhanced through new media. A mentor program would be helpful. There is a need to provide more information about specific social supports available for Aboriginal students. Communication and information sessions would be helpful. All staff should be aware of the complete range of support services and make referrals for students with needs.

- **Need for More Research**

Understanding, on a provincial and an institutional basis, the barriers for Aboriginal students is essential. As well, research is needed to discover the significant factors that lead to failure or success. Current academic and other support programs aimed at increasing access, retention and graduation also need to be evaluated.

## ***Strategies and Solutions to Overcome Barriers***

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After identifying barriers, Forum participants explored ideas to overcome the challenges confronting Aboriginal students in their quest for post-secondary education. The focus was to generate ideas for strategies or solutions to surmount the issues and challenges and barriers identified. Participants were asked to think of what the college, the community and others can do to provide supports, programs or services.

This section is a summary of the ideas suggested by participants.

- **Initiate a Coordinated, Comprehensive Housing Program**

A housing initiative was recommended for Aboriginal students and their families. This could take many forms, perhaps, starting with a housing resource centre at RRC. This would be a one-stop-shop for providing shelter for Aboriginal people, including a variety of initiatives, such as recruiting local Aboriginal families, having a portfolio of safe affordable accommodations, a liaison worker; and leading up to creating residences. A key initiative would be an on-campus [Notre Dame mentioned] residence [for families and individuals] “with an Aboriginal design perspective incorporating a full range of family and social supports.”

- **Increase Financial Supports**

Initiatives are needed to ease the financial burden for Aboriginal students, including more, and more flexible direct support for post-secondary studies, less costly student loans, more bursaries and scholarships, flexible tuition fees (with sliding scales) and flexible programming to enable students to take courses on a part-time basis (i.e. fee structure per course, not by program year/semester). Overall, participants believed that access to post-secondary school was inhibited by the lack of adequate, secure and timely funding.

Every Aboriginal student who qualifies for post-secondary should be able to attend regardless of his/her financial circumstances. Funding should be extended over the full year. There should be more innovative funding strategies, more flexibility in deferring tuition and other payments. A fund to assist in short-term financial crisis circumstances for tuition, housing, food and other needs would be helpful. Perhaps the college could establish a dedicated Aboriginal Financial counselor, who helps navigate through the labyrinths of various funding sources, including help with scholarship and bursary applications. A small loan programs, a quick start scholarship and bursary process would ease anxiety and increase success. “Employers must invest more in PSE.”

- **Knowledge of PSE Campaign to Overcome the Information Barrier**

The intent is to get information out and raise awareness of the benefits, educational options, course requirements, admission standards, and funding options for PSE directed at communities, high schools, parents and potential students. This needs to start early in students’ encounters with the educational system. A variety of methods could be considered, such as parent education/career fairs,

bringing elementary and secondary students to RRC, traveling multi-media shows to communities, and partnering with communities to talk about the value and the requirements.

A participant said, "Plant the seed of value of PSE early." This should include informing students of their rights and of the services available to them. Moreover this information and orientation campaign should be an ongoing process, not just at the onset of enrollment. A part of this is informing other groups and organizations about RRC programs and services. RRC could institute a "how to fund your education" information campaign to help students identify costs and possible sources of funding and how to manage a budget throughout their PSE [perhaps specialized office to help]. RRC could also have traveling on-site career/academic advising trailers to stay for a period of time in individual communities. The process should engage Aboriginal young people more in recruitment, communication and outreach and use modern electronic techniques to connect with potential students and to connect alumni with potential students.

- **Institute Transitional Programming**

Many participants suggested transitional programming to ease the path into post-secondary education. Several forms were suggested. There could be a pre-entrance program with orientation, mentorship, housing, funding, information on where academic and social supports are, etc. This could be supplemented by a welcoming committee, maps of 'you are here' and 'here's where you are going.' Another suggestion was a full transition year program, including academic writing, note taking, study skills, student responsibilities, creativity coaching, computer skills, counseling program to overcome culture shock, mentors, time management skills, budgeting, skills, awareness of transportation, accommodation planning, goal setting, etc. Such a program would help overcome student isolation and culture shock.

A first year exploration program was another suggestion; this could include self-assessment and career planning, linking with employers, exploring a variety of college programs, research on interests, and academic preparation courses. The overall idea is have "an introduction to the reality of PSE within an urban context." It would be a "how to survive in PSE initiative with funding, social supports and alternative planning." Part of this could be an Aboriginal student handbook, tool kit, survival guide.

- **Build Academic Preparedness for Aboriginal Students**

Post-secondary education institutions must work with high schools to ensure a smooth path for students into higher education. RRC could work to "have dual registration and dual credit systems with high schools across the province." RRC could work with high schools to develop and deliver needed prerequisites in alternative formats to potential students. A student exchange program with high schools could introduce students to the college environment. "RRC programming could be offered in high schools." An area of special need is to work with guidance counselors to ensure students are aware of the admission criteria and aware of the programs and supports available at RRC. Overall, the goal is to have better "linkages between RRC and high schools to help ensure proper academic preparation."

- **Expand Accessibility Initiatives to the Full Range of RRC Programming**

Participants said that the programs offered by the School of Indigenous Education were extremely valuable for Aboriginal students and the academic programming offered by other Schools was also valuable. The link between Indigenous education and mainstream programs could be enhanced. Perhaps there could be more of a focus on apprenticeships. Overall ACCESS type initiatives should be expanded to all programs.

Part of this is to ensure that Aboriginal values are embedded in the curriculum. And programs need to have more flexibility in course content and have more electives, and provide opportunities for creative courses like art, music and drama. This would help with healing and cultural awareness. Involving elders in curriculum development is essential.

- **Celebrate Aboriginal Heritage, History and Worldview**

RRC has implemented a large number of initiatives and events to celebrate Aboriginal heritage. Participants acknowledged that fact and felt that more should be done to enhance cultural, spiritual and learning supports. Some representative suggestions include: “more elders, more embedding of the medicine wheel, more sharing circles;” “proactive support with Aboriginal worldview;” “teach to four needs; emotional, physical, intellectual and spiritual;” “medicine wheel in curriculum;” “recognize the differences in Aboriginal students and have this reflected in classroom instruction and in the hall ways of the college;” “traditional Aboriginal values embed in curriculum.”

Overall it was recommended that all College faculty and staff should be culturally aware and sensitive to issues faced by the First Nations, Inuit and Métis people. Aboriginal values and worldview should be reflected throughout the college and they should be enshrined in a welcoming area dedicated for Aboriginal students as they progress on their educational journey. Aboriginal art, architecture, sports, medicine and music should be part of the healing fabric that Aboriginal students find at RRC.

One participant wrote: “establish RRC as the place for Aboriginal studies and for Aboriginal students.” This refers to courses on Aboriginal identity issues, colonization issues, and the importance of spirituality. RRC could develop innovative new programming designed and geared to meet the needs of Aboriginal people. Perhaps the college should initiate a celebration of Aboriginal Achievements and Honors awards program.

- **Institute an Aboriginal History Awareness Program for Staff and Faculty**

To ensure cultural competency in instructional and administrative staffing, an aboriginal heritage and history program should be part of the professional development of faculty and staff. Elders should be involved in developing and delivering such a program. RRC should also offer cultural awareness for agencies and employers RRC works with.

- **Establish an Aboriginal PSE Access and Success Research Initiative**

RRC should undertake a comprehensive research initiative to identify barriers and solutions. It must work with all stakeholders to ensure the right supports are in place at the right time and to evaluate



continuously the effectiveness of all programs. Part of this is to identify best practices that have been instituted elsewhere and “test out” on a pilot basis at RRC. Aboriginal people should lead this initiative.

- **Improve Day Care Access**

Child care is needed by many Aboriginal students and such care needs to be accessible and flexible and culturally appropriate.

- **Expand PLAR for Aboriginal Students**

PLAR should play a lead role in the assessment and recognition of the prior learning of Aboriginal students, especially mature students, and the process should be sensitive to language and cultural barriers.

- **Expand Co-op Programs**

Participants recommended that co-operative education be expanded to offer more work experience and offer more paid work placements. They called for an increase in or the establishment of new partnerships with business and industry (i.e. employers) in order to connect Aboriginal students with employment through bridge to work programs.

- **Academic Supports**

RRC should continue to enhance its academic support efforts for Aboriginal students, including generic academic skills and specific course based knowledge requirements through tutoring, special workshops, etc. The College should identify students who are at risk academically and provide the necessary interventions early. This means a proactive search and help for students at risk. Part of this is reviewing diagnostic testing.

- **Ensure Comprehensive Aboriginal Student Support Programs**

RRC should continue to improve and expand support services and systems for young students and for mature students. Such services are best delivered within an Aboriginal worldview. A wide variety of services were suggested:

- Develop, design and distribute RRC information in ways that are appropriate for Aboriginal communities.
- Offer ease of application and registration processes.
- Provide initial support and relocation assistance services for students in need.
- Provide emergency funding and loans.
- Provide quick bursaries and scholarships.
- Have an emergency child care number.
- Initiate a family crisis call centre.
- Establish an on campus social system coordinator as a point of contact.
- Offer interpersonal skills and life skills development workshops.
- Program welcome and sharing circle events for new and continuing students.

- Institute a Crisis team available 24/7.
- Establish a student advocate or ombudsman to manage issues of conflict and issues of racism.
- Investigate a case management system for individual students to follow up and to provide a key point of contact throughout a student's time at the college.
- Ensure there are Aboriginal counselors in mainstream Student Services.
- Have virtual counseling.
- Plan with a holistic program in mind to deal with social, financial and academic issues.
- Provide a visible emergency help desk with access to food, shelter, social services, money.
- Establish a student services traveling support trailer that would go to communities for one week to provide information on available supports for potential applicants.
- Review the viability of an Aboriginal Student's Association to focus on Aboriginal needs and issues.
- Expand the Aboriginal Student Support Centre. This is a comprehensive service offering: educational and personal advising/counseling on cultural and personal issues, career planning, employment counseling, and job search assistance. The centre should include an advocacy/ombudsman function to assist students in resolving problems and offer orientations regarding urban culture.

- **Expand Mentorship**

It was recommended that the College develop and resource mentor/buddy programs to pair Aboriginal students with current Aboriginal students in their first semester. It would also be helpful to pair Aboriginal students with non-Aboriginal students to aid in cultural awareness. The mentor/buddy system could be realized through peer support systems, study groups, and on-line virtual groups.

- **Enhance College Hiring Practices**

To promote staff diversity in all academic, administrative and leadership positions, "more Aboriginal people need to be hired." Participants thought that the reasons for this should be self-evident, for example, counselors need to be familiar with the life experiences of Aboriginal people, and Aboriginal students need role models across PSEIs. A faculty recruitment focus should be on hiring Aboriginal people in all program areas. Overall human resources practices should ensure Aboriginal cultural competency in instructional and administrative staffing.

- **Encourage Academic Success**

RRC should ensure that all instructors are assisted in adapting to meet the needs of students (i.e. language level of instruction; cultural sensitivity etc.). More flexible entrance requirements would help Aboriginal students gain access. Other academic support ideas included: refresher courses for the trades areas, computer awareness workshops for students unfamiliar with computers, extended ACCESS initiatives to other program areas, especially for areas where there is a high demand for skilled people due to labour shortage. Entrance requirements should be reviewed for flexibility in providing learning options for all people.

- **Expand Geographic Access**

To overcome geographic barriers, participants urged RRC to improve access through the development and offering of more programming through rural and northern outreach campuses and through new media techniques in students' home communities.

- **Establish a Transition to the Workplace Initiative**

The College should resource programs that build employability skills and job search skills, as well as provide funding for entrepreneurial initiatives of Aboriginal graduates.

- **Establish a Transition to Further Education Initiative**

The College should provide direct links and articulation with other Manitoba and beyond PSEIs to support the efforts of Aboriginal students who wish to advance their learning.

- **Build Partnerships Between Aboriginal Communities and the College**

Community forums on reserves, rural areas, in the cities and across the province could help solidify the relationship between the College and the Aboriginal community. Such community based forums could elicit more ideas, expand the knowledge base on the issues and solutions and acquire supports. As well, RRC should continue to expand networks with other Aboriginal agencies and organizations. Aboriginal people need to be engaged fully in determining the future direction of their education.

A variety of methods for engagement should be used to identify issues, concerns and outcomes. It is "essential that Aboriginal people have control over their educational destinies." There is a legacy of "distrust with enforced educational models, such as residential schools." The trust and confidence of Aboriginal people has to be earned by post-secondary educational institutions; Aboriginal people must be in positions of authority across all areas of the college.

- **Advocate for Increased Financial Support to Governments**

It was suggested that RRC lobby governments for more financial support, perhaps by taking a plan to COPSE to increase Aboriginal access and success.

- **Become the National Leader for Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education**

Participants saw an opportunity for RRC to become a leader in Aboriginal higher education, especially for colleges. A number of suggestions were reported. The College could be the leader in innovative programming aimed at Aboriginal people based on Aboriginal teachings. Establish a lessons learned data base, hold conferences, provide grants for research, establish scholarships, ensure all eligible Aboriginal applicants are guaranteed a spot and provide the necessary financial support. RRC could decide to be the leader in integrating Aboriginal history into its curriculum. The College could develop pre-school, elementary and high school materials with an Aboriginal worldview. Perhaps an Aboriginal advisory council could work with the President and academic leaders on new initiatives and foster greater connections with Aboriginal groups and communities.

## ***Priorities to Enhance the Educational Success of Aboriginal People***

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Forum participants concluded the group discussions by identifying the key solutions, strategies and models to overcome the barriers. They addressed the question: What initiatives or strategies should be given the highest priority to encourage and support the post-secondary educational success of Aboriginal people? Think of: Accessibility to education, Transitioning into and staying in college, Graduating, and Successful outcomes from college studies.

This section notes the key strategies suggested by Community Forum participants.

- **Expand Financial Support**

In general, participants urged action on easing the financial burden of higher education. Several ideas were expressed: more flexible student loans, more bursaries and scholarships, early financing options/credits/accounts for potential students for PSE, fast approval bursaries and scholarships – special sources of funding and more flexible tuition fees. The private sector should also provide more financial supports for Aboriginal students. The College should lobby government for increased student funding and support (and the government should respond). The college should advocate to INAC and to the Province of Manitoba for focused funding for students and for additional funding to colleges for academic and social supports for students.

- **Establish a Comprehensive Housing Initiative**

RRC should provide more housing support. There is a “critical need for safe and affordable housing”; this could be through a housing coordinator who is responsible for accessing shelter. A dedicated on-campus residence [Notre Dame mentioned] was suggested by many participants, perhaps using a lodge design and including a full range of services and supports, including day care, and spaces for families, along with space for Elders.

- **Initiate a Province-Wide PSE Information and Orientation Program**

A comprehensive program should be implemented to inform potential students and their families of the value, the requirements for entry, program and career options, and the supports available to facilitate entry and success. This should be delivered in a variety of media, including face-to-face in plain-language. This must be an aggressive campaign, which is well funded and is long lasting. Career and PSE exploration should begin in elementary and early high school. One strategy is to have a student services trailer to move from community to community with information and advisors. “Students need information and counselling to navigate the system.”

RRC needs to expand efforts to provide accurate and timely information and opportunities early and often on PSE to potential students, their families and their schools. These efforts should involve Aboriginal people and could use student testimonials and involve the local community and students and graduates. As well, there should be outreach to First Nations, Inuit and Métis leaders to enlist their involvement and support for encouraging young people to focus on education.

- **Build Academic Preparedness**

It is critical to “build motivation with individuals, families and communities.” Parental support for academic studies is important and the College should engage in discussions with them. To encourage PSE thinking use role models and success stories in working with high school students. This needs to start in elementary and secondary where more career planning must occur. RRC should develop strong communication links with high schools to ensure appropriate academic preparation and good information to potential students.

- **Advance Aboriginal Access to College**

Initiate special accessibility programs and special outreach programs to encourage Aboriginal people to attend RRC. Expand recruitment efforts across the province including Winnipeg, rural areas, northern Manitoba and beyond.

- **Integrate Aboriginal Culture/History Into the Overall Fabric of RRC**

Many participants acknowledged the efforts of RRC in providing a welcoming atmosphere for Aboriginal students and they also recommended that the College initiate even more practices and processes to further enhance a welcoming environment.

- **Establish a Transition to College Program**

The College should dedicate resources to provide a service to meet students’ transition to college needs (for example, Intro. to College 101, mentoring, academic preparation courses, housing service guides, subsidized bus transportation, expand day care services; health plans covering family members, prescription coverage, and other family support services). Such a transition programs will augment academic skills and increase success and help lost and lonely students.

A transition to PSE course will explain the structure and expectations of post-secondary education, develop study habits, acclimatize to larger institutions, provide information on how and where to find help, and may include a transitional resources centre.

- **Increase Aboriginal Culture Awareness**

An enhancement of Aboriginal cultural awareness should include a comprehensive set of workshops and seminars offered throughout the year on all campuses. The College should call for all staff to be culturally aware and sensitive to issues faced by the Aboriginal population. An Aboriginal heritage program on cultural identity issues, history, and colonization should be available.

Cultural awareness training should be conducted for faculty and staff and the college should aggressively address instances of racism.

- **Expand Community Based Programming**

More post-secondary education opportunities should be provided in home communities using a variety of means, such as satellite learning centers, use of existing community facilities, use of new media and technology to extend learning opportunities, perhaps a RRC North. These initiatives need to be planned and delivered in partnership with Aboriginal communities. Community delivery can help overcome the problems with relocation to urban or distant schools and it can also promote Aboriginal community awareness on the part of faculty and staff.

- **Expand Aboriginal Student Support Services that Address Aboriginal Needs**

Although many Forum participants praised the work of RRC in providing services and supports, many also felt that more needed to be done. They recommended an inclusive and integrated student services and support network for Aboriginal students. A holistic model of support including family supports, academic supports, social service help, financial help, counselling, housing, day care, life skills, employment, etc. A participant said, the “academic, funding and social barriers faced by Aboriginal people are well known.” Supports are needed to break down the barriers.

Participants suggested using diverse means of delivering services such as a Virtual counsellor to help potential students. A student advocate office would be helpful as would a clearly identified first point of contact for all services. Other suggestions included an on campus social system coordinator to manage employment, income assistance, WCB, transportation, housing, day care, and liaise with bands for funding. Partnering with other agencies to provide needed social support would be an effective strategy. A 24 hour crisis team would be a key element in social supports. A case management system should be investigated for its utility. Expansion of the Elders-in-Residence program was also suggested.

- **Enhance the Dedicated Space for Aboriginal Students**

Participants noted the space and amenities devoted to Aboriginal students at the College. However, some felt more facilities were needed. Something like a lodge of learning and healing to offer students a “home away from home” could help to alleviate the feelings of isolation and loneliness that many Aboriginal people feel, especially at a large urban college.

- **Establish an Aboriginal Transition to the Workplace Program**

A transition to the workplace program should offer support to students in finding meaningful employment upon graduation (for example, employer connections, job applications skills, resume writing, interview skills, dressing for success, etc.). Increasing co-op, internship and practicum experiences would also enhance outcomes, and more partnerships with the private and public sectors would expand the range of experience for students.

In addition, the college should explore a support program for graduates to develop their own businesses in home communities and overall support for entrepreneurial activities of Aboriginal people. Other suggestions included offering training to provide information about the workplace culture and

clarify employer expectations, and using Aboriginal employment role models or mentors to motivate young people to pursue an education or a particular career.

- **Establish an Aboriginal Transition to Further Post-Secondary Education Program**

The college should expand its relationships with other PSEIs to ensure a smooth pathway to further education for those Aboriginal students who wish to do so. This may include dual credits and dual registrations and fast track application and registration processes.

- **Introduce More Flexible Programming**

Consideration should be given to allow access to individual courses, to allow for lower fees and greater flexibility to balance family demands and part-time and full-time work requirements. More curriculum flexibility would allow for more electives for students, providing opportunities for creative courses like art, music and drama.

- **Adjust Classroom Methods**

In individual classrooms, there should be an appropriate language level of instruction and Aboriginal cultural awareness in the delivery of content. Instructors have an immense influence on the success of students. The Medicine Wheel view of learning and curriculum should be realized in all classrooms. Instructors should deploy instructional methods, curriculum engagement and testing methods that are appropriate for a diverse group of students in order to increase academic success.

- **Expand Mentor Programs**

Pair up Aboriginal students to aid in adjustment to post-secondary education and to aid in overcoming isolation and culture shock.

- **Solidify Partnerships with Aboriginal Communities and Organizations**

Expand partnerships with Aboriginal communities and organizations for funding, access and success initiatives. Establish formal and informal linkages to share resources, promote College programs and services.

- **Ensure Aboriginal Representation in All Areas of the College**

Initiate a process to ensure that the percent of Aboriginal people in the College and at all levels, including leadership positions of the College, reflect the percentage of Aboriginal people in the population.

- **Establish a Research Program**

Research should be funded and conducted on Aboriginal post-secondary education access, transition, retention, graduation and outcomes. The college should listen to and involve students, community leaders and elders in leading, planning and implementing such a program. The program needs to be



guided by Aboriginal people. Part of this is to identify best practices through a pilot program; the notion is to learn from others across the Globe. RRC should also measure and report on the progress of Aboriginal people at RRC. This could include exit interviews/surveys with a random sample of graduates and early leavers. As well, follow-up with recent graduates to ensure sustainability in careers would be beneficial.

- **Expand Academic Support Systems**

The college should review its current system of academic supports and ascertain if it meets the needs of Aboriginal students. Many participants felt that more assistance in difficult subject areas, such as math and academic writing, were required for solid academic achievement.

- **Address Language Issues**

Participants suggested the College address language and literacy matters of Aboriginal students. Aboriginal languages need to be acknowledged and recognized across the college; English as a second language program may be helpful in some situations, and interpretation and translation in some programs and in the development of curriculum and curriculum resources.

## ***Forum Evaluation***

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### **Community Forum Evaluation**

An Evaluation Sheet was distributed to Forum participants asking for a qualitative assessment of the Community Forum. The Evaluation asked:

- What are the key next steps for RRC?
- What were the key lessons learned at the forum to increase accessibility and success for aboriginal students?
- What did you like best about the community forum?
- What could be improved?

Overwhelming, participants expressed positive comments about their experience at the Community Forum.

The top five things participants liked most about the Forum were:

- Group Discussions
- Student Panel
- Networking Opportunity Provided by the Forum
- The Entertainment
- Overall Forum Management and Organization

Thinking about improvements for the Forum, by far the most frequent response was that the Forum was well done and not much could be improved.

All other suggestions had small number of responses. The other comments suggested content, technical or participation changes, such as; allow more time for group discussions; involve more young people; and improve time management.

## **Next Steps**

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The key next step mentioned most often by respondents was for Red River College to act upon the input, strategies and recommendations provided by Forum participants.

Participants wanted the college to implement the key recommended strategies arising from the Community Forum and from the wisdom of Forum participants.

Some suggested an inclusive steering/action committee to guide and monitor progress. Clearly, they enjoyed participating but they also want to see action.

Many also wanted to see more community forums in more locations across Manitoba. Some also saw the Forum as the beginning of a continuing community consultation and discussion process. Such a process could include networking with Forum participants, bringing strategic plan recommendations to another forum, and engaging Forum participants and others in focus groups and sharing circles.

Accordingly, the immediate steps are:

- ✓ Forward this Community Forum Report in the College as a framework for action, and;
- ✓ Recommend that this report be approved as setting strategic directions for the future of Aboriginal Education at Red River College.

## **Conclusion**

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The Community Forum was a step on a journey towards the full and equal participation of Aboriginal people in post-secondary education in Manitoba. The Forum brought together many representatives from the Aboriginal community, college faculty and staff, former and current students, employers and government.

The purpose of the Forum: to help identify strategies to enhance the role of the College in supporting Aboriginal people as they strive to achieve their post-secondary educational goals, was realized as evidenced by the voices of participants articulated in this report.

Many of the participants praised RRC for its current efforts in providing post-secondary education for First Nations, Inuit and Métis people and in its efforts to provide support programs to help with accessibility, retention, and graduation. However many said much more needs to be done and more investments are needed.

Participants offered advice to the College on a variety of fronts. They identified the barriers Aboriginal people experience in their quest for post-secondary education. Aboriginal people face obstacles in choosing, entering, transitioning into, staying in, and graduating from post-secondary educational institutions, as well as transitioning to employment or to further education.

Community Forum participants suggested a number of initiatives to overcome the barriers.

Participants noted that post-secondary education for Aboriginal people must reflect Aboriginal realities, visions, and aspirations and not be planned, controlled or monitored by non-Aboriginal people.

Participants believed that an integrated set of strategies and a wide range of initiatives were needed to overcome the barriers.

Of importance was that post-secondary education direct and indirect costs must be affordable for Aboriginal students. Governments and institutions must ensure funding support for all eligible applicants and develop appropriate mechanisms to deliver the funding.

Post-secondary education institutions must have active recruitment programs for Aboriginal people across all parts of the province and beyond.

To overcome the information barrier, outreach communication and orientation programs must be developed and delivered in conjunction with Aboriginal communities.

Family support initiatives are essential for the success of many Aboriginal students.

To manage culture shock, post-secondary education transition courses are needed.

Entrance criteria should be widened to include non-academic factors. Moreover there must be ongoing academic, social and personal support throughout students' programs of study.

Aboriginal students would benefit from help in navigating the post-secondary bureaucracy and there should be available supports for access to child care, student housing, computer hardware and software, text books, and transportation.

While in school, Aboriginal students should have access to culturally sensitive academic and social support services.

Classroom teaching and testing methodologies should be flexible and reflective of Aboriginal values and perspectives.

Institutions should model Aboriginal culture in architecture, art, staffing and curriculum.

There must be transition to work and further education initiatives coordinated across the post-secondary education system.

Collectively, the participants of the Forum expressed that Red River College is doing a wonderful job through innovative initiatives to support Aboriginal students. In addition, RRC is setting the standard for educating the community about their programs, supports and services while celebrating culture, role models and the future path for young people. If the suggestions identified throughout this report are implemented, RRC will be recognized as leaders across the nation and an excellent example of collaboration and partnerships for community capacity building.

## **Appendix 1 - Community Forum Agenda**

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### **Agenda**

8:45 a.m. – 9:00 a.m. - Continental Breakfast & Refreshments

Opening Comments & Overview of the Forum  
Master of Ceremonies, Dr. Don Robertson

9:10 a.m. - Opening Prayer, Elders in Residence Mae Louise Campbell & Jules Lavallee

Greetings & Mini Presentation on College Initiatives  
Dr. Jeff Zabudsky, President of Red River College

Welcoming Remarks & Mini Presentation on School Initiatives  
Marti Ford, Dean - School of Indigenous Education

Working Cooperatively - Communication Exercise  
April Krahn, Manager, Aboriginal Student Support & Community Relations

RRC Program Overview & Supports and Services for Aboriginal Students  
Jaime Richard, Aboriginal Recruitment Officer

10:30 a.m. – 10:45 a.m. - Break - Visit Exhibitors

Facilitated Discussion Question #1 & Group Report

11:45 a.m. - Lunch Prayer, Elders in Residence Mae Louise Campbell & Jules Lavallee

Lunch & Entertainment - “Celebrating Aboriginal Cultures”  
Tamara & Lisa Muswagon - First Nation Drumming  
Lori Flynn & Maureen Tapatai - Inuit Throat Singing  
Ryan Richard - Master of the Jig

12:45 p.m. – 1:20 p.m. - Student Panel & Questions  
Facilitated by RRC Aboriginal Alumni Shirley Haynes

Facilitated Discussion Question #2

2:15 p.m. – 2:30 p.m. - Break - Visit Exhibitors

Facilitated Discussion Question #3, Group Report & Evaluation Forms

Summation - M.C.: Dr. Don Robertson  
Closing Prayer & Thoughts

## ***Appendix 2 - Community Forum Facilitators***

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<b><u>Name</u></b>	<b><u>Organization</u></b>
Leona Daniels	Apprenticeship Branch of Manitoba
Brent Maslow	Apprenticeship Branch of Manitoba
Jerry Woods	Canadian Human Rights Commission
Shirley Haynes	Louis Riel Institute
Cathy Woods	Manitoba Government Employees Union
Diane Carriere	Manitoba Public Insurance
Cheryl Lavallee	Province of Manitoba - Competitiveness, Training & Trade
Cheyenne Chartrand	Red River College
Jay-Lynne Desilets-Makinak	Red River College
Charlotte Kisilowsky	Red River College
Dawne MacKay-Chiddenton	Red River College
Dave Rogalsky	Red River College
Joanna Simmons-Swinden	Red River College
Leslie Walsh	Red River College
Carole Shankaruk	River East Transcona School Division
Randy Herrmann	University of Manitoba
Jennifer Wood	University of Manitoba
Jeff Booth	University of Winnipeg
Wendy McNab	University of Winnipeg
Angela Bye	Winnipeg Regional Health Authority
Denise Cook	Winnipeg Regional Health Authority
Holly Leost	Winnipeg Regional Health Authority

## ***Appendix 3 - Forum Questions for Participants***

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1. What are some key issues and challenges facing Aboriginal people as they strive to achieve their educational goals? Think of:
  - Barriers to accessibility to post-secondary education
  - Barriers to staying in post-secondary
  - Barriers to graduating
  
2. What are some ideas for strategies or solutions to overcome the issues and challenges and barriers you have identified? Think of what the college, the community and others can do to provide:
  - Supports
  - Programs
  - Services
  
3. What initiatives or strategies should be given the highest priority to encourage and support the post-secondary educational success of Aboriginal people? Think of:
  - Accessibility to education
  - Transitioning into and staying in college
  - Graduating
  - Successful outcomes from college studies



## ***Appendix 4 - Organizations Registered for the Community Forum***

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### **Registered Organizations**

Aboriginal Child Support Helper Program - Wahbung Abinoonjiiag Inc.  
Aboriginal Languages of Manitoba  
Aboriginal Literacy Foundation & Turtle Island Adult Learning Program  
Aboriginal Visioning for the North End  
Apprenticeship Branch of Manitoba  
Assiniboine Community College - Adult Learning Division  
Big Island First Nation, Ontario  
Boys and Girls Clubs of Winnipeg  
Canadian Mental Health Association - Rehabilitation & Recovery Service  
Canadian Wheat Board  
Canadian Broadcasting Corporation  
Centre for Aboriginal Human Resource Development - Disabilities Program  
Centre for Aboriginal Human Resource Development - Staffing Solutions  
Chemawawin Cree Nation  
Chief Peguis Junior High  
Child & Family All Nations Coordinated  
City of Winnipeg  
Ecole Selkirk Jr. High  
EDS Canada Limited  
Employment Manitoba  
Erickson Collegiate  
Fieldstone Ventures Education & Training Centre  
FireSpirit  
Fisher River Transition Year Program Students  
Health Sciences Centre  
Indian & Métis Friendship Centre  
John Arnalukjuak High School, Arviat Nunavut

Ka Ni Kanichihk  
Keewatin Tribal Council  
Link-up Employment Services for Persons with Disabilities  
Long Plain Post-Secondary  
Lord Selkirk Regional Comprehensive Secondary School  
Louis Riel Institute  
Louis Riel Institute - Adult Learning Centre  
Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre  
Macdonald Youth Services - Positive Alternatives for Youth  
Making Education Work Project - Province of Manitoba  
Manitoba Family Services and Housing  
Manitoba Food Processors Association  
Manitoba Health  
Manitoba Hydro  
Manitoba Indian Education Association  
Manitoba Lotteries Corporation  
Manitoba Public Insurance  
Manitoba Student Aid  
Medox Health Services  
MLCC  
Native Women's Transition Centre  
Northeast Employment Centre  
Osborne House  
Partners for Careers - Riverton & District Friendship Centre  
Partners for Careers - Selkirk Friendship Centre  
PATH Resource Centre  
Peguis First Nation  
Peguis School Board  
Peguis Transition Year Program Students & Staff  
PPL Legal Care of Canada Corp.  
Province of Manitoba

Province of Manitoba - Aboriginal Education Directorate  
Province of Manitoba - Competitiveness, Training & Trade  
Province of Manitoba - Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth  
Public Service Commission - Government of Canada  
Red River College of Applied Arts, Science and Technology  
River East Collegiate  
River East Transcona School Division  
Rolling River Post-Secondary Education  
Sagkeeng Government Services  
Sandy Bay Post-Secondary Program  
Sargent Tommy Prince School - Brokenhead Ojibwe Nation  
Skills Canada Manitoba  
Southeast Child & Family Services  
St. Norbert Adult Educational Centre  
St. Theresa Point First Nation Education Authority  
Swan Lake First Nation  
University of Manitoba  
University of Manitoba - Engineering ACCESS Program  
University of Manitoba - Enrolment Services  
University of Winnipeg  
University of Winnipeg – Aboriginal Governance Program  
Urban Circle Training Centre  
Winnipeg Regional Health Authority  
Workers Compensation Board  
YouCanDoThat.com  
Youth Addiction Stabilization Unit - Manitoba Health  
Youth Services - Positive Alternatives for Youth Program



**Questions or comments, please contact:**

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**<http://www.rrc.mb.ca/communityforumreport>**