



PROJECT SNAPSHOT

Creating Mobility for Students Enrolled in New Programs at FNTI

Type: Innovative Transfer

Project Number: 2019-08 or I1908

Project Lead: First Nations Technical Institute

Collaborators: Confederation College of Applied Arts and Technology, Trent University

Project Summary

FNTI is developing some of the first university level degrees offered by Indigenous Institutes in Ontario.

These programs will have a common first two years, and the delivery method, content, as well as the structure of the degrees are unlike anything that currently exists in public education in the country. This project will enable FNTI to identify and develop pathways for students with full or partial credentials entering and exiting programming at FNTI from/to other Ontario institutions.

Project Rationale

FNTI is in the process of submitting several degrees for accreditation to the Indigenous Advanced Education and Skills Council. Foundational work to ensure maximum transferability and recognition is critical to this work, and was facilitated through this project funding.

Collaborator Contributions

Partners were instrumental in providing curriculum materials such as course outlines and course calendars for their respective and existing programs. Discussions were conducted in order to better understand the mechanics of post-secondary level planning, development, programming, research and development.

Preliminary discussions were conducted to explore possible transfer initiatives for the proposed Bachelor level programming. During these discussions, opportunities for additional collaborative

efforts such as shared curriculum resource's, personnel and expanded field practice possibilities.

Both Trent and Confederation have long been partners with FNTI and have worked diligently to strengthen engagement and collaborative initiatives on many levels. The foundation of many initiatives involved ongoing formal and informal discussions to ensure that any new ideas can be explored or any ongoing transfer possibilities are documented for further development.

All of our new stand alone programs are Bachelor's level degrees, so more emphasis and engagement is ongoing with our University partners and colleagues. For example, Algoma University, while not a formal partner was instrumental in guiding our efforts to obtain relevant course syllabi so we could have some examples of content, credit values and so forth. Algoma was also very familiar with the process for block transfer which will be important to further develop for a core cultural curriculum that is an anomaly across the sector.

Key Steps

The main consideration was to create a common core cultural curriculum that was transferable in as many possible iterations as necessary to afford learners a lot of options. Working with other institutions to raise awareness of this initiative was critical. Initial efforts to engage other Universities were successful but somewhat limited by COVID 19. Time to fully embark on something new when everyone was engaged in regrouping efforts was a challenge that would be mitigated in "normal" times.

Another key step was building capacity internally to address the pressing need for transfer across sectors.

The decision to engage a dedicated Pathways Coordinator was critical as the project was unfolding. This common core cultural curriculum is only one currently being developed across the Indigenous Institutes and serve many functions in the process of access and transfer.

Another key step was the collaborative efforts across the Institute, i.e.. faculty, program coordinators and administrators were all involved in various aspects of the development of either product, policy or process. This was very successful and enabled us to development some lasting and important changes.

Outcomes

We have learned a great deal from this project. Although the timelines and outcomes were not exactly what was initially anticipated, we were able to garner a great deal of knowledge with respect to our path forward in accrediting our degrees through IAESC, and ensuring wider recognition across the sector.

Outcome 1: Greater collaboration across the sector

We have developed some strong connections with new institutions and further enhanced existing partnerships, with our colleague institutions across the sector. This is critical for a number of reasons. One, it will ensure that once our degrees are ready to be delivered, clear entry and exit pathways will be more easily developed and defined. Secondly, relationships on an individual level have also been developed, which will ensure timely dissemination of pathways requests and development. These relationships have already led to a subsequent ONCAT project, and a new E-campus project that was recently approved. Much of the work in

these subsequent projects builds upon this initial ONCAT project.

Outcome 2: Defined Resource Guides/Toolkits

This process has provided an internal resource kit to further develop existing programming and planned future IK based programming. It has given us a greater understanding of the Common Core Cultural Curriculum, and how it can be disseminated across existing curriculum. Additional degrees and diplomas are currently being planned utilizing this resource. It has also been shared with other IIs to assist in their own, separate programming development.

Outcome 3: Recognition of Indigenous Knowledges and Indigenous Ways of Knowing and Understanding the World

To build upon the last outcome, the actual content in the Common Core Cultural Curriculum is fairly unique to the sector in Ontario. Perhaps only Trent University, Laurentian University, Six Nations Polytechnic and Algoma University house programming that is grounded in IK, and in those cases, it is only one or two programs that encompass this. All of our new programs will be grounded in IK, and this further contributes to the validity of the work, and the importance of disseminating IK across the sector. This project has gained a great deal of momentum and we have numerous potential avenues for further development of the programming and potential pathways because of this project.

Challenges

The ability to build and strengthen institutional relationships takes time and extensive travel. The Covid-19 pandemic shelter in place order came in mid-project limiting integral face-to-face meetings however activities were carried out utilizing a virtual resource. Relationship building was further somewhat limited as all work that was required had also migrated to a virtual environment and individuals were functioning in semi-crisis mode.

We also realized that in order for FNTI learners to transfer easily to another PSE in Ontario the other PSE's had to recognize our 4C curriculum as integrate to all of our undergraduate degrees and diploma. Additional time and resource will be required to fully apprise Ontario's PSE's of our innovative Indigenous approaches.

An ongoing theme that surfaced throughout the work was the ability to track the transfers and the pathways with the integration of the 4C elements. Receiver institutions would be required to accept and assess these credits and the recommendation to transfer. Rigorous and detailed tracking mechanisms would need to be created that aligned with existing processes. Again, this would require time and resources to create.

Student Outcomes

Our future stand alone degree offerings have been mapped to allow for extensive transfer credit, specifically the SSW-BISW pathway which allow for a 2+2 or 2+2.5 pathway offering for students. Other similar pathways are being identified as we go through the program review process with IAESC.

A review of available course content from Trent, Ryerson and Laurentian Universities provided a level of comparison and examples of like-minded Indigenous program offerings.

Extensive discussions with a variety of institutional personnel from Registrar's, Vice Presidents and faculty members provided insight into their respective philosophies, values,

beliefs and nuances of Indigenous curricula – content and delivery.

This was useful to ensure that learners were indeed able to transfer and mobility was possible between and among programs and institutions with seamless success.

Ultimately, FNTI sees itself as a hub for Indigenous Knowledge mobilization and dissemination. Part of future pathways discussion will include FNTI playing the part of a hub for LOP students, who are seeking community based, IK courses, outside of their home institution.

Institutional Outcomes

Collaborative community response

A critical element in the project deliberations was the inclusion of comprehensive community involvement and feedback on every aspect of the project. Multiple meetings and conversations were carried out to garner support and seek feedback at various points. A variety of individuals were provided with different components of the curriculum content to review, modify and edit as relevant. Specific content experts were involved to provide “a deeper dive” into Indigenous specific historical context design. The pathway forward will continue to be collaborative and relational between relevant community stakeholders.

Sector or System Implications

In order to ensure rigour and quality assurance the project sought to review existing curriculum materials from other post-secondary institutions. An online search as well as face-to-face enquiries were conducted of both College level and University level programs hoping to access course descriptions and Intended Learning Outcomes for the affinity programs. College level content was widely available and easy to access via institutional websites. University level course content is not available at all unless someone internally to the institution is willing to share their course material. With respect to this project, the alignment of curriculum between exit and entry affinity programs will be critical. Mapping all content from the learners existing institution with our program and vis versa will only assist in ensuring the learner is well prepared and success is built into the program. Without transparency of curriculum content between institutions the learners may be in jeopardy and set up for failure in their transfer efforts. Further work needs to be carried out to create specific alignments between FNTI and other post-secondary institutions.

Tips/Advice

It has been well documented that in order for Indigenous Learners to succeed within the Western education system it is vital that learners are able to develop a sense of belonging. One of the ways to develop a sense of belonging a student needs is to find commonalities with their own lives and living conditions.

Learners will begin to understand the similarities among the diverse Indigenous Nations through their own personal context.

The inclusion of cultural practice within the education curriculum can develop this sense of belonging.

Providing the opportunity for a student to know oneself and one’s heritage will ensure that learners develop a strong sense of identity, leading to greater self-confidence and higher

persistence rates. Including a plethora of consistent common cultural core curriculum options will serve to continuously enhance a student's sense of belonging and the contents and contexts will provide deeper meanings and richer understandings of course content and relationships to lived personal and professional experience. On a micro level, the continuity of Indigenous references made during lectures will serve to continuously enhance a student's sense of belonging and it will provide a deeper meaning and understanding to the topics being discussed.

One of the ways that FNTI has chosen to address the academic cultural responsiveness is through a common core curriculum. Historically a common core curriculum is often viewed as a one size fits all framework. Our definition of common core encompasses common courses that would or could be applied to multiple programs as applicable but also includes what we teach (content) and how we teach it (Andragogy and Indigegogy).

Tools and Resources

Concurrent with the 4C development and the undergraduate program development a comprehensive Table of Contents (Appendix 1) of references and resources was suggested. Each new program will be provided with a guidebook specific to each program area. The R & R Guide is divided into sections with an introductory unit containing information that is common to all programs. Each program will have a separate unit which will be a repository of current processes, practices, content, modules, assessments, assignments, and pedagogical suggestions. As well, all program storyboards, course outlines, lesson plans, schedules and a comprehensive Bibliography will be maintained for each program in their respective units. This will be an invaluable resource to new personnel and will ensure current documents for yearly program reviews.