



PROJECT SNAPSHOT

Indigenous Institute credential recognition

Type: Innovative Transfer

Project Number: 2019-29 or I1929

Project Lead: Six Nations Polytechnic

Collaborators: The project engaged with 20 universities and 24 colleges, giving it a comprehensive breadth/scope. Collaborators were "passive" participants, as their outward-facing data was the focus of the project; a follow-up project is intended to operationalize these findings and mobilize the knowledge arising from this research by engaging directly with all institutional partners, both literal (those with whom SNP has existing articulation agreements) and "passive" (all post-secondary institutions in the province, any of whom may stand as the initiating/outbound or receiving/inbound end of student transfer pathways).

Project Summary

Responding to barriers to educational mobility experienced by Indigenous graduates, Six Nations Polytechnic proposed to assess the recognition of its Bachelor of Arts programming and identify possible parity-catalysing measures both internally and externally. The primary goals of the project were:

- understanding the transfer experiences of BAOL students by exploring and analysing the specific hurdles to mobility they face;
- documenting the lapses and lacunae in existing credit transfer pathways out of the BAOL program;
- enhanced understanding of the Indigenous Institutes sector among Ontario universities and colleges, necessary to facilitate recognition of the credentials these postsecondary bodies are empowered to grant; and
- identification of possible internal supports and external tools that could reduce disparities in the current credit transfer system (including possible changes to BAOL curriculum)

Project Rationale

After five years of accredited undergraduate programming, Six Nations Polytechnic's status as a degreegranting body has not been either identified or built into entrance requirements or

transfer pathways at other, mainstream postsecondary institutions in Ontario. This presents formidable structural barriers to educational mobility. Such barriers have developed due to the historically self-referential environment of the broader educational system; an under-appreciation of the institutional bridging accomplished by Indigenous Institutes for at least the past thirty years; and the related lack of appropriate awareness of the shifting regulatory landscape in the postsecondary sector. The Indigenous Institutes Act (S.O. 2017, c. 34, Sched. 20) recognized Indigenous Institutes (IIs) as unique and complementary pillar of Ontario's postsecondary education system and supported their independence and sustainability. The passing of this legislation quickly catalysed growth in, and significant aspirations for, curricular development across the sector. This project is thus of significant, wider import and potential utility, as Indigenous Institutes across Ontario begin to offer, or further develop their programme offerings; and accordingly, as their roster of graduates grows.

Key Steps

The project deviated somewhat from the intended methodology and goals as it was initially developed based on the assumption that barriers to student mobility were specific (i.e., institutional) and so could be diagnosed and rendered "actionable" through an internal process. It also included planned outreach to specific universities and colleges to "map" those internal processes and so initiate institutional change. However, the project quickly uncovered not specific/institutional but largely systemic, making outreach to specific colleges and universities both premature and inappropriate. Instead, SNP plans to propose and initiate a subsequent ONCAT project, or seek out alternative funding, to implement the high-level and sectorwide shifts called for in the recommendations.

Outcomes

This project sought to: understand the transfer experiences of BAOL students by exploring and analyse the specific hurdles to mobility they face, documenting the lapses and lacunae in existing credit transfer pathways out of the BAOL program; enhance understanding of the Indigenous Institutes sector among Ontario universities and colleges, necessary to facilitate recognition of the credentials these postsecondary bodies are empowered to grant; and identify possible internal supports and external tools that could reduce disparities in the current credit transfer system (including possible changes to BAOL curriculum). The scope of the project shifted during the term of the contract, as the specific recommendation anticipated became higher-order concerns, triggering recommendations for systemic, normative shifts in the postsecondary educational sector. Note that SNP is developing an implementation plan for the widespread mobilization of the many recommendations arising from this final report (pp. 15-17 of the report document).

Challenges

This project needs to continue, as it evolved as properly biphasic. At this point we have the data, analysis, and recommendations necessary to reach out to sectoral actors and initiate focused conversation on next steps.

Student Outcomes

The project places the student transfer experience (and the Indigenous student experience in particular) centrally in its analysis of wide-ranging findings, and from there recommends

significant, multi-level changes to a number of systems impacting student transfer into and out of Indigenous Institutes. Further, it makes recommendations intended to reduce not only structural barriers and biases but the cognitive/emotional effect these have on students.

Student Flexibility

The longer-term effects of the project promises to improve credential recognition for students of Indigenous Institutes.

Institutional Outcomes

The project final report recommends an organizational structural change to SNP's academic governance.

Sector or System Implications

This project was particularly oriented toward system factors/considerations, and yielded important insights, cautions, and observations for a more seamless system. Recommendations include inter- and intrainstitutional shifts, along with inter-organizational and sectoral changes. Please see the attached report for details.

Tips/Advice

The project final report has been distributed to Indigenous Institutes (IIs) through their representative body, the Indigenous Institutes Consortium, in the knowledge that it significantly informs their own work at multiple levels (sectoral, inter-organizational, and intra-institutional).

Tools and Resource

A slideshow of the project (purpose, methodology, findings, and recommendations) is currently under development. Articulation agreements with college and university partners will be updated using the specific findings of this project, including both high-level and institution-specific recommendations.

