

Vancouver Island University and Aboriginal Education: The Next Level
A Discussion Paper Prepared by
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Introduction

At the request of the Provost, Dr. Dave Witty, we are launching a planning process to guide VIU's approach to "Aboriginal Education" for the next several years.

VIU/ Malaspina has enjoyed good relationships with our regional First Nations and other Aboriginal groups for a long time. We also, over those years, have developed and offered programming, and contributed to student successes, of which we ought to be rightfully proud.

It is time, however, to reexamine our approaches to Aboriginal education, for several reasons both external and internal. In particular, we need to encourage a broad-based discussion of the topic, and possible approaches and initiatives, that involves as many faculty, students, and staff as possible. We believe this is the way to identify and develop the best ideas, and also to recognize that many strategies will emerge: some at the institutional level, but others specific to departments and programs.

Contexts

A number of social, economic, and government trends and priorities contribute to the current landscape and shape the dialogue about Aboriginal rights and education. A non-exhaustive list follows:

- Demographic trends: the regional population of young Aboriginal people is increasing at a dramatic rate
- First Nations in many regions are negotiating treaties and forming governments of their own, highlighting a need to build capacity in many roles/ functions
- Governments at all levels are increasingly aware of Aboriginal and First Nations groups as stakeholders and partners
- In BC alone, the Aboriginal Service Plan (since 2007) has supported initiatives at many post-secondary institutions, including c.\$400,000/year at VIU
- Also in BC, the Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education and Training Policy Framework and Action Plan (2012) – also known as *2020: Vision for the Future* – lays out bold timelines for improvements and changes to be achieved by (you guessed it) the year 2020

Framework - General

As a starting point, we would like each of you to think about what “Aboriginal education” looks like in your program or service area. To get that primed, reproduced here are six questions that were circulated at the end of an email Steve Lane sent around in September 2012:

- *What more can be done to recruit Aboriginal students?*
- *What more can be done to ensure student success?*
- *What new courses and programs ought to be developed to serve Aboriginal students better?*
- *What supports do faculty and staff need to respond to the above needs?*
- *What institutional learning outcomes should we expect for all graduates of VIU?*
- *How do we recognize and value differing bodies of knowledge, worldviews and ways of being?*

Thinking about and formulating responses to these broad questions may spark some interesting, effective new ideas.

Framework – More Specific (from the Academic Plan)

For the purposes of our discussing, planning, and especially our reporting, we will be organizing along the lines of the Academic Plan: its principles and action items arose from consultation some 4-5 years ago, many of them have been completed or are in process, and therefore there is a sense of continuing dialogue to the Academic Plan.

Also, to the extent that it is possible, we ought to be looking at integrated, wide-ranging approaches and solutions, rather than isolated “one-offs”, or local initiatives that are not supported by broader institutional policy and direction.

Just to refresh your memory, the Plan has 30 “action items” that are organized into five main categories: **1) Student learning, engagement and success; 2) Academic community; 3) Program quality; 4) Community engagement; and 5) Institutional effectiveness.**

What follows is an overview of some of the action items that seem to relate directly to the Aboriginal education enterprise and planning. In each case, we try to situate the item in the Aboriginal education context, and provide thoughts on where some of them may lead. The below is *not meant to restrict the discussion, and is certainly not exhaustive.*

I. Student learning, engagement and success

AP Action Item	Status and Considerations
#2: review of undergrad curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - creating more leadership opportunities (and recognition) for students (co-curricular?) - expanded use of Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) - discussion of Multi-Disciplinary degrees, and even a General Studies option, to better serve students
#4: student services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - as we explore more integrated approaches to student education – educating the “whole student” – we can learn from indigenous perspectives and also better serve <i>all</i> learners
#5: experiential learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - as an institution, we are looking to enhance students’ experiential learning opportunities, which can include field schools, learning on the land, learning in community, and other approaches – and again, this can be for <i>all</i> student groups

II. Academic community

AP Action Item	Status and Considerations
#8: statement of academic values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the work currently underway on a “statement of academic values” adopts a complementary, yet rigorous, approach to knowledge systems
#9: formalize roles of Advisory Committee, Elders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the First Nations Advisory Committee has been re-named the Hwulmuxw Mustimuxw Siiem (HMS) - work continues on these items - should we consider new governance models like connecting HMS to Senate or Admin more clearly (Curriculum Committee? Planning and Priorities?) - do we need to consider writing new policy?

III. Program quality

AP Action Item	Status and Considerations
#18: a viable mix and distribution of programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - this is ongoing work of departments and Faculties - there is discussion of Planning and Priorities, the Senate standing committee, taking a more active role in identifying new program opportunities
#19: institutional learning outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - another dialogue currently underway on campus - the draft outcomes currently being discussed contain some statements about educating all students about some

	elements of Aboriginal history and culture
#20: collaboration across departments, Faculties, and disciplines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Senate is tasked with monitoring this type of activity - collaboration involving regional campuses should be part of the mix - discussions have begun for a degree offering at Cowichan with an indigenous focus

IV. Community engagement

AP Action Item	Status and Considerations
#21: enhance participation of Aboriginal communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - we have good, long-standing partnerships with most First Nations and tribal groups in our region - more partnerships with groups outside our region - enhancing student recruitment and retention activities - we recently held a Canada Research Chair competition in Aboriginal Community Engagement, and have identified our nominee to take forward to CRC - concept of Salish Sea College under consideration by local groups
#22: promote dynamic and contemporary cross-disciplinary themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “Aboriginal Peoples” is identified in the Academic Plan as one of 5 such themes - the degree discussion at Cowichan mentioned above would be one approach
#23: role in the region (more contract activity, delivery in communities)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - VIU faculty have begun new initiatives with partners like SD 68 - recent discussions with Snuneywmxw about partnerships on Newcastle island may create a number of learning, scholarly, and other benefits - Office of Aboriginal Education has increased capacity to seek contracts and grants

V. Institutional effectiveness

AP Action Item	Status and Considerations
#25: Assess university’s organizational structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - nothing currently underway, but this should always be subject to review
#30: Raise the profile of the university	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - we already have quite a reputation for many facets of our Aboriginal education enterprise, whether it be programs, student supports, scholarship, or other; further clarity and institutional commitment may further promote the profile and reputation of VIU