Final Report

Maximizing the Potential of Urban Aboriginal Students: A Study of Facilitators and Inhibitors within Postsecondary Learning Environments

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ABSTRACT

Educational success is a contested concept, especially as it relates to Indigenous youth. Tensions in the discourses about student success reflect the nature of priority setting of postsecondary institutions and their reliance on statistical data that have privileged narrow, assimilative criteria of Western or Eurocentric education, pedagogies, and perspectives. Indeed, the discussion of, as well as policy and program responses to, urban Aboriginal postsecondary student success have been long dominated by analyses of quantitative studies documenting significantly lower rates of educational success among Aboriginal youth than their non-Aboriginal counterparts. These statistical comparisons have yielded research questions and policy studies entrenching a "deficit" narrative or paradigm applied to Aboriginal peoples. That is, these analyses often focus on some perceived deficiencies and dependencies based on the inequities found as Aboriginal youth journey through the conventional educational systems rather than on the systemic challenges facing Aboriginal students, staff, and faculty navigating a system that has privileged Western knowledge as guarantor of systematic, rational thought and source of progress while actively excluding Indigenous knowledge and sensibilities.

Though measures of educational success indicate positive changes in innovative models of delivery, particularly among Aboriginal youth in urban and rural settings, the Office of the Auditor General 2011 status report found that the gap in educational outcomes defined as high school completion rates among First Nations youth was continuing to widen because of the federal government's failures to adjust funding and delivery models to ensure equitable access for eligible students. While there has been greater justice to the diversity of educational attainment within the Aboriginal population, and across geographic contexts, success often remains ill-defined beyond conventional standards such as graduation and employment rates.

While some researchers are reviewing statistics and the federal deficiencies in the delivery of education, Aboriginal researchers and leaders have instead centred their critique and solutions on Indigenous epistemes and perspectives to promote alternative narratives that shed light on the systemic barriers facing Aboriginal students and faculty, their origins in colonial history,

Eurocentric hegemony, and intergenerational trauma and to underline Indigenous strengths and assets drawn from the multiplicity of Indigenous knowledges and socialization. Underlining the costs of continuing colonial research paradigms, they have led a research discourse invested in respect, reciprocity, justice, and decolonization, taking education out of cognitive prisons to "cognitive justice." They are also advancing a reconciliation model where students are raising their voices and postsecondary institutions are listening and learning to become more welcoming and proactive in delivering Aboriginal programming. Postsecondary institutions have demonstrated proactive measures to improving programming and supports for Aboriginal students and are poised to rethink what it means to reconcile their institutions with the Truth and Reconciliation (TRC) Calls to Action of 2015.

This research study has been developed in the context of these on-going efforts in postsecondary institutions across Canada to decolonize and Indigenize in order to advance Aboriginal student successes in the academy and to act specifically on the TRC calls to action. In responding to the TRC calls to action related to education, this study aligns with the social, cultural, and economic imperatives associated with the persistent underinvestment in educational policy and programming for Aboriginal students, while recognizing the deep connections that education has had with the history of colonization, Indian Residential Schools, and the consequent "gap" in attainment noted in the literature and felt powerfully in the life experiences of students. While closing this education gap (even if this notion remains firmly within colonial norms and standards) is recognized as vital both for Aboriginal postsecondary students and for Saskatchewan's economic and social success, those metrics are not the only ways success might be measured. This is especially the case when First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples continue to seek reconstruction, self-determination, and sovereignty, recovery from Indian Residential schools, and rebalancing social and cognitive justice from the inequities of the past. Institutions will need to develop new metrics or measures to account for Aboriginal peoples' aspirations, directions, and goals for reconciliation and their own success metrics based on their own intellectual traditions that have long nurtured their sense of identity and understanding of what it means "to be human, and "to live a good life." Aboriginal scholars and communities are advocating for educational settings where both Indigenous and Western knowledge systems thrive and nurture all.

This study positions Indigenous identities, cultures, languages, values, ways of knowing, and knowledge systems as assets to be considered for postsecondary institutions. Then individuals and institutions might displace old ignorances masquerading as discourses of knowledge production, civilization, and progress while producing and sustaining racial oppression. To displace such ignorance and Aboriginal discomfort with mainstream education, Aboriginal researchers promote mutual learning, reciprocity and respect, new Indigenized languages and concepts that can expand horizons and offer sustainable futures for all. Equitable access to and outcomes from education, employment, and health require both acknowledging and addressing ongoing institutional racism and marginalization and investing in meaningful engagement of Aboriginal people in developing educational policy and programming.

Against this background and current context, the purpose of this qualitative research study is to understand the lived experience and meaning making of currently registered urban Aboriginal postsecondary students in four institutions in Saskatoon (at Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies [SIIT], Saskatchewan Polytechnic, First Nations University of Canada, and University of Saskatchewan), and to identify facilitators and inhibitors of good learning environments that impact the extent to which the learning potential of those students can be maximized. Based on focus groups and interviews of Aboriginal students and their advisors (some of whom also have teaching and research responsibilities), the study found the following factors impacting student success:

- Socio-Political Factors
- Socio-Cultural Factors
- Academic Programming Factors
- Academic Support Services Factors
- Educational Infrastructure Factors
- Financial Factors
- Family Support Factors
- Community Support Factors

INTRODUCTION

Educational success is a contested concept, especially as it relates to Indigenous youth. Tensions in the discourses (national, provincial, and local) about student success reflect statistical data that have privileged narrow, assimilative criteria of Western or Eurocentric education, pedagogies, and perspectives. Indeed, the discussion of as well as policy and program responses to urban Aboriginal postsecondary student success have been long dominated by quantitative studies documenting comparisons of Aboriginal students with non-Aboriginal Canadians. Study after study reported significantly lower rates of educational success among Aboriginal youth than their non-Aboriginal counterparts (Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, 2010; Hull, 1996; Mendelson, 2006; RCAP, 1996). These statistical comparisons have yielded research questions and policy studies entrenching a "deficit" narrative or paradigm applied to Aboriginal peoples. These perceived deficiencies and dependencies have been based on the inequities found as Aboriginal youth journey through the conventional educational systems (Battiste, 2013; Ponting & Voyageur, 2005). These "deficiencies" have diverted attention from the systemic challenges facing Aboriginal students, staff, and faculty navigating a system that has privileged Western knowledge as guarantor of systematic, rational thought and source of progress while, save in a few instances and only in a very limited manner, actively excluding Indigenous knowledge (Battiste, 2002).

Though measures of educational success indicate positive change more recently, particularly among Aboriginal youth in urban and northern settings (Bazylak, 2002; Morrison, 2017), the progress remains limited and incomplete. The Office of the Auditor General's (2011) June status report found that the gap in educational outcomes defined as high school completion among First Nations and other youth was continuing to widen because of the federal government's failures to adjust both the "funding mechanism and delivery model" to ensure equitable access for eligible students. While there has been greater justice to the diversity of educational attainment within the Aboriginal population, and across geographic contexts, success often remains ill-defined beyond mainstream standards such as graduation and employment rates (Bouvier, Battiste, &

Laughlin, 2016; CCL, 2007; Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, 2010).[1] Given the disparities in funding mechanisms and lack of services provided students, as well as the government's compromised ability to provide adequate education, the Office of the Auditor General (2004) predicted that it would take 28 years before Aboriginal children would be able to catch up to other Canadians.

While some researchers are reviewing statistics and the federal deficiencies in the delivery of education, Aboriginal researchers and leaders have instead centred their critique and solutions on Indigenous epistemes and perspectives to promote alternative solutions and narratives that shed light on the systemic barriers facing Aboriginal students and faculty, their origins in colonial history, Eurocentric hegemony, and intergenerational trauma and to underline Indigenous strengths and assets drawn from Indigenous knowledges and socialization (Battiste, 2000, 2002, 2013; Deer & Falkenberg, 2016; Stonechild, 2006). Like Smith (1999) in the Maori context, they underline the costs of continuing research paradigms "inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism," making research itself "probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world's vocabulary" (p. 1). In the process, they have led a research discourse invested in respect, reciprocity, justice, and decolonization (Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008), taking education out of cognitive prisons "from its cognitive imperialistic roots to an enlightened and decolonized process that embraces and accepts diversity as normative" (Battiste, 2000, p. xxix) and mobilizing a restoration of "cognitive justice" (Odora-Hoppers & Richards, 2012). They are also advancing a reconciliation model where students are finding and raising their voices and postsecondary institutions are listening and learning to become more welcoming and proactive in delivering Aboriginal programming. Postsecondary institutions have demonstrated they are taking proactive measures (Universities Canada, 2015a, 2015b, 2017 a, 2017b) and are rethinking what it means to reconcile their institutions with the Truth and Reconciliation (TRC) Calls to Action (2015b).

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[1] . We use the term "Aboriginal" to refer to people from First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (FNMI) communities recognized under Sections 25 and 35 of The Constitution Act of Canada, 1982, and the term "First Nations" to refer to Canada's original peoples, regardless of status in relation to the Indian Act, who are neither Métis nor Inuit. However, we acknowledge that these terms are, to some, problematic. We use the term "urban" in recognition of the location of student studies while acknowledging the diversity of students, including those from northern, rural, and remote communities who face particular challenges in this urban setting (Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, 2010).

This research study has been developed in the context of these ongoing efforts in postsecondary institutions across Canada to decolonize and Indigenize in order to advance Aboriginal student successes in the academy and to act specifically on the TRC calls to action (Battiste, 2013; Kilkenny, 2015). In responding to the TRC calls to action related to education, this study aims to address social, cultural, and economic imperatives associated with the persistent underinvestment in educational policy and programming for Aboriginal students, while recognizing the deep connections that education has had with the history of colonization, Indian Residential Schools, and the consequent "gap" in attainment noted in the literature and felt powerfully in the life experiences of students. When 55% of the job market requires a level of post-secondary education (Spence, Wingert, & White, 2011), closing the education gap is vital both for Aboriginal postsecondary students and for Saskatchewan's economic and social success. Earlier in this decade, the social benefit of closing the gap to Saskatchewan alone was estimated to be $90 billion (Howe, 2011).

Yet, beyond the critique and the 'closing the gap' discourses that remain too clearly framed within largely economic norms and colonial standards, the study positions Indigenous identities, cultures, languages, values, ways of knowing, and knowledge systems as assets to be considered for postsecondary institutions and "how they can flourish in all Canadian settings" (ACDE, 2010, pp. 2-4) and where the benefits to all of "a path to reconciliation" become clear (Bouvier, Battiste, & Laughlin, 2016, p. 37). Institutional transformative change will need to build from within these aspirations, especially when First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples are seeking reconstruction of their societies, recovery of their lands and from Indian Residential Schools, and cognitive and social justice. Although they have their own aspirations, directions, and goals for reconciliation and their own success metrics based on their own intellectual traditions that have long nurtured their sense of identity and understanding of what it means "to be human," or "to live a good life," Aboriginal scholars and communities welcome educational settings where both Indigenous and Western knowledge systems thrive and nurture all.

In their "act[s] of intellectual self-determination," Indigenous scholars are leading "new analyses and methodologies to decolonize themselves, their communities, and their institutions," exposing the myth of Indigenous knowledge as "the binary opposite of western knowledge," while

"restoring control over Indigenous development and capacity building." The "rich treasure" of Indigenous knowledge "benchmarks the limitations of Eurocentric theory—its methodology, evidence, and conclusions—reconceptualizes the resilience and self-reliance of Indigenous peoples. . . . [and] fills the ethical and knowledge gaps in Eurocentric education, research, and scholarship" (Battiste, 2002, pp. 4-5). In light of these teachings, individuals and institutions might displace old ignorances masquerading as knowledge, civilization, and progress while producing and sustaining racial oppression. As Sullivan and Tuana (2007) argue, such ignorance is not "a mere gap in knowledge, the accidental result of an epistemological oversight. Especially in the case of racial oppression, a lack of knowledge or an unlearning of something previously known often is actively produced for purposes of domination and exploitation" (p. 1). To displace such ignorance and the "assimilative and punitive practices . . . framing [First Nations, Inuit, and Métis] unease with education and learning," Aboriginal researchers promote mutual learning, reciprocity and respect, new Indigenized languages and concepts, "Indigenous intellectual traditions and knowledge" that can expand horizons and offer sustainable futures for all (Bouvier, Battiste, & Laughlin, 2016, p. 22).

An important policy issue for all levels of government, quality of life is associated with equitable access to and outcomes from education, employment, and health (Findlay et al. 2014). Such equitable outcomes, as Roland (2009) has demonstrated, require both acknowledging and addressing ongoing institutional racism and marginalization and investing in meaningful engagement of Aboriginal people in developing educational policy and programming. As Henry et al. (2017) argue, "the denial of racism is also the denial of equity" (p. 3); and the denial of Indigenous knowledge is the denial of Indigenous humanity (Battiste, 2016).

Study Purpose
Against this background and current context, the purpose of this study is to understand the lived experience of urban Aboriginal postsecondary students navigating postsecondary institutions in Saskatoon, and to identify facilitators and inhibitors of postsecondary learning environments that promote maximum potential of those students. Building on literature in Saskatchewan (University of Saskatchewan, 2014) and in other jurisdictions (Brown, Knol, & Fraehlich, 2008; Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, 2010; Embleton, 2011; Helme & Lamb, 2011;

Silver, Klyne, & Simard, 2003), the study aims to establish baseline data on factors that either facilitate or hinder educational success at four of the Saskatoon postsecondary institutions: Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies (SIIT), Saskatchewan Polytechnic, First Nations University of Canada, and University of Saskatchewan. The study was designed not to evaluate programming and policies or to compare experiences at specific institutions but to learn from study participants important lessons that could apply to diverse postsecondary institutions.

Research Questions

In keeping with the purpose of the study, the principal research questions are:

- How do urban Aboriginal postsecondary students rate their postsecondary educational experience?
- What do urban Aboriginal postsecondary students consider major barriers to their educational success?
- What do urban Aboriginal postsecondary students consider key factors that contribute to their educational success?
- How do postsecondary Aboriginal student advisors understand the experiences, and the expressed and consequential needs of these students in the delivery of postsecondary education?
- What do postsecondary Aboriginal student advisors consider to be the facilitators as well as the barriers and limitations of their institutions in improving the successes of Aboriginal students?

Research Data

As discussed in greater detail in the Methods section of this report, the data for this study were collected from a set of interviews and focus group discussions with Aboriginal students, student advisors, and administrators (some of whom are also instructors and/or have research responsibilities) from the four listed major postsecondary institutions in Saskatoon. The data collected from those interviews and focus groups were compiled into various thematic categories corresponding to the central research questions of this study regarding the barriers and facilitators of Aboriginal student success in the four post-secondary institutions.

As the study progressed, a discursive dilemma related to our research questions emerged: how to separate the categories of barriers and facilitators when they appeared to be integrally related. The absence of something (financial resources, for example) acting as a barrier might be seen as a facilitator when it is present. We navigate this dilemma while aiming to avoid excessive repetition and reduce undue separation of issues.

The major categories of factors important to the success of urban Aboriginal postsecondary students were these:

- Socio-Political Factors
- Socio-Cultural Factors
- Academic Programming Factors
- Academic Support Services Factors
- Educational Infrastructure Factors
- Financial Factors
- Family Support Factors
- Community Support Factors

Organization of Report

The remainder of this report is organized into major sections elaborating the literature that has shaped understanding of relevant issues, discussing rationale for and details of the chosen methods, before presenting and discussing findings, summarizing major factors, and presenting conclusions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

- If the Aboriginal population could reach the same level of education and social well-being as their non-Aboriginal counterparts, Canada's GDP could rise by $401 billion by 2026 (Kar-Fai & Sharpe, 2012; Sharpe & Arsenault, 2010).
- Continuing the over-representation of Aboriginal people in the justice system instead of investing in education and alternative measures will cost Saskatchewan as much as $13 billion over 20 years (Findlay & Weir, 2004).
- Closing the education gaps in 2017 equals $137.3 billion in benefits to Saskatchewan –or "half again more than the total market value of everything we do in Saskatchewan" (Howe, 2017, p. 2).

These statistics tell a story of the costs and benefits of change, of inequalities where education has often been another name for injustice and exclusion from economic and other opportunities. Aboriginal people, for instance, experience higher rates of unemployment, lower earnings, and lower labor participation rates when compared with the non-Aboriginal population in Canada (Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, 2010; ESDC, 2014; Kar-Fai & Sharpe, 2012; NAEDB, 2015; Statistics Canada, 2011). Although much progress has been made and Aboriginal people contribute importantly to Canadian society and economy, the 2015 progress report documents persistent disparities in education, employment, and housing. The income gap was 2.5 % higher in 2010 than in 2000 and the unemployment rate at 15% remains double the rate (7.5%) for non-Aboriginal people (NAEDB, 2015). As Howe (2017) points out, there is also an income gap among Aboriginal people marked by differences in education; "the path which avoids a future of poverty for our province is, in two words, Indigenous education" (p. 1).

That the Aboriginal population is increasingly urban—increasing by 59.7% between 2006 and 2016 in metropolitan areas of over 30,000; growing four times faster (42.5% between 2006 and 2016 to 4.9% of the Canadian population and could reach 2.5 million within twenty years)—is diverse (more than 600 First Nations bands and more than seventy languages); and is younger (average of 32.1 years as opposed to 40.9 years) than the rest of the population (Statistics Canada, 2017a) adds to the urgency of change.

Saskatchewan is home to the largest postsecondary education attainment gap in the country (Spence, Wingert, & White, 2011). An even greater disparity exists in the education level of

urban Aboriginal males in Saskatchewan (Parriag & Chaulk, 2011; Richards, 2008) who are less likely to be represented in the job market. The attainment gap has been associated with limited funding for postsecondary education, educational preparation, and lower high school graduation (Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, 2010; Parriag & Chaulk, 2011; Sloane-Seale, Wallace, & Levin, 2001), while racism in postsecondary institutions has been associated with high drop-out rates (Council of Ministers of Education, 2002; Preston, 2008; UAKN, 2012).

Ten years ago, the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development (2007) addressed underfunding in First Nations schools, concluding that "future costs to Canada of failing now to fully address the admittedly complex resource issues raised by growing backlogs of potential Aboriginal learners are likely to be unacceptably high and can only compound existing gaps" (p. 29). Roberta Jamieson, President and Chief Executive Officer, National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation (now Indspire) reframed two problems as two solutions:

> Why should Canada be interested in providing more resources? On the one hand, Canada's economy is facing frightening labour shortages in almost every field, and we know that. ... On the other hand, we know First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people nationally are Canada's fastest-growing sector of the population, facing themselves frightening unemployment, under-employment, poverty, and unrealized productivity and potential ... each set of problems provides a solution to the other problem. Instead of two problems, I believe we have two solutions. (Standing Committee, 2007, p.30)

Given the level of knowledge, the variability of and scattered data (across diverse reports, websites, and documents) on Aboriginal postsecondary education programs, the Standing Committee recommended "a national database website for the purpose of making information on successful programs and initiatives in Aboriginal postsecondary education be made available widely available to Aboriginal organizations, communities, learners and Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal institutions" (p. xi). The Council of Ministers of Education (2010) likewise called for greater investment in data collection to address uneven practices and fill knowledge gaps.

Confronting Systemic Discrimination and Ignorance in the Academy

In their study of the quality of life of urban Aboriginal peoples in Saskatoon, Findlay et al. (2014) found that discrimination, residential school legacies, and social problems "marginalized

urban Aboriginal people, decreased social inclusion, and even alienated them from their own culture and traditional teachings" (p. 2). The findings emphasized the need to address cultural and spiritual needs through education (extremely or very important for 90%) adding to a sense of community and belonging.

In the interests of justice, Aboriginal researchers and their allies have reinforced the costs of the status quo, of a colonial history and geography that continues to impact Aboriginal peoples, its entrenchment through pathologizing studies and blame games that locate blame within individuals rather than within systems and institutions. Faced with injustices that challenge self-images of just people, such people experience "injustice dissonance" that causes them to create "an illusion of justice through assumptions, arguments or stereotypes about the blameworthiness of the victim" (Hanson & Hanson, 2006, p. 417). In its diverse forms (divine intervention, nature, or choice, for instance), the "*blame frame* shields us from ugly truths and, in part for that reason, perpetuates them" (Hanson & Hanson, 2006, p. 425). Thus individuals and institutions maintain ignorance or distorting lenses that include "both false belief and the absence of true belief … supporting a delusion of white racial superiority that can afflict white and non-white people alike. White ignorance also impacts social and individual memory, erasing both the achievements of people of color and the atrocities of white people" (Sullivan & Tuana, 2007, p. 3).

Such ignorance is well documented on Canadian campuses (Henry & Tator, 2009; Henry et al., 2017, for example), including among "administrative decision-makers" that have been "profoundly conservative and defensive of the status quo," confirming education's role as "a tool of colonialism and racism . . . . creating and perpetuating unawareness of Aboriginal peoples" (Godlewska, Massey, Adjei & Moore, 2013, pp. 67-68). In their 2013 study, for instance, Godlewska, et al. found "pervasive unawareness [of Indigenous issues], with rare exceptions" among 3,000 first-year students (926 or 29% response rate) at Queen's (p. 74). The study tested students on "information Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal educators who are paying close attention to Aboriginal issues in Canada today consider critical knowledge" including history, geography and culture (p.75). Participants averaged just 27.7% and over 50% scored below the median 26.5% (Godlewska, et al., 2013, p. 74). Perhaps even more disturbingly, numerous students showed an inability to connect Canada's history of colonialism to present day problems,

and others responded with blatant racism, as this comment illustrates:

> I don't give that much of a damn about which-impossible-to-pronounce Native peoples [*sic*] tribe lives closest to me, no matter how diverse or varied each type of aboriginal group is from one another. It's irrelevant. No culture in Canada has been preserved completely, and we should stop trying to artificially prolong theirs. . . . The idea that somehow, by having greater knowledge of totem animals or "sacred plants," we will be better equipped to bring the aboriginals into the 21st century is about as coherent as the idea that we could have better dealt with the cold war if only we had had a better grasp on Russian dancing [*sic*] (Study participant as quoted in Godlewska, et al., 2013, p. 85).

As Roland (2009) also argues, such discrimination continues within postsecondary institutions and "will require the decolonization of all members of the educational community" (p. 146). Drawing on Dua (2008), Roland cautions that "without acknowledging the differentiation of racialization and oppression, anti-racist projects may create a false sense of commonality amongst those marginalized and 'othered' in Canadian society." The "differential experience of Aboriginal peoples involves the collective denial of their citizenship, and the continued efforts to weaken Indigenous self-government rights in Canada" (Roland, 2009, p. 146). When a sense of belonging is critical to "inclusive" educational spaces, the "epistemic divide" between "Western and Aboriginal epistemologies" needs acknowledging and addressing (Roland, 2009, p. 20) for change that will benefit Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal institutions, faculty, and students alike (Battiste, 2002).

Henry et al. (2017) underline the extent to which the Canadian university remains "a racialized site that still excludes and marginalizes non-White people in subtle, complex, sophisticated, and ironic ways" (p. 3). They demonstrate the costs of a professoriate and senior administration that significantly underrepresents diversity in general and Indigenous people in particular and when leadership is key to driving change. University curricula, "disciplinary silences and exclusions" and "canons and pedagogical and methodological paradigms of most disciplines" further entrench an institutional culture that oppresses those perceived as different, especially in the context of neoliberal corporatizing universities (p. 7). The result is a significant gap between rhetoric about diversity and equity and the experience of racialized faculty when "Whiteness serves to maintain the conditions of systemic inequality where the world views and interests of the dominant group are entrenched and normalized" (p. 15).

McGregor, McIvor, & Rosborough, early career Indigenous scholars and their ally, reflect on

the persistent tensions in "the lived spaces" within "the boundaries of institutional tenure and promotion policies" as well as the potential for "reciprocal, respectful and meaningful relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples" (2016, p. 1). The priorities and privileges given to blind peer-reviewed publications contributing to disciplinary fields continue to marginalize Indigenous knowledges and scholars, especially when there are no peers, "no Indigenous representation on the editorial board" (McGregor, McIvor, & Rosborough, 2016, p. 9). Those priorities also ignore community interest in control over histories and languages while burdening Indigenous academics with responsibilities to act as "authorities" on all matters Indigenous (McGregor, McIvor, & Rosborough, 2016, p. 5). The related underrepresentation of Aboriginal faculty/staff typically means that many things that help to attract and retain Aboriginal students (Aboriginal expertise in academic areas; role models, mentors, and advisors for Aboriginal students; Indigenous faculty opportunities to embrace Indigenous knowledges for instruction, or for tenure and promotion; and general equity) are also absent. Whatever barriers or challenges this may create for Aboriginal students are compounded by the fact that some postsecondary institutions do not acknowledge, to students at least, that this is a problem (or a problem they have any responsibility to fix). In this way, even while institutions are not giving Aboriginal students what they need and (many would argue) deserve, the students may also be left feeling that the problem is theirs (Bear Spirit Consulting, 2007; Wilson & Battiste, 2011).

The underrepresentation of Aboriginal people in the development of Aboriginal education policy is widely considered a major barrier (Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, 2010). First Nations leadership refuse to allow their children to be "revictimized in the name of education. . . . we have been fighting back ever since to take back this responsibility" (Shawn Atleo; cited in Kennedy, 2013). The TRC (2015b) *Calls to Action* similarly underline the need to engage Aboriginal people in developing educational strategies to "eliminate educational and employment gaps" and in drafting new education legislation that is culturally appropriate and sufficiently funded (pp. 1-2). Indigenous knowledge, as well as Aboriginal content and pedagogy, is at the heart of recommended changes to better serve all students and communities.

Residential Schools and Intergenerational Trauma

Perhaps the most significant literature on Aboriginal peoples' educational experiences has

focused on issues arising from the traumatizing and debilitating effects of colonization and Canada's policies of removal, displacement, appropriation, assimilation, and racism through Eurocentrism. From 1876 until after World War II, First Nations people who pursued postsecondary education were stripped of their 'Indian' status and disallowed from living in their reserve communities. The residential school system, in place through most of the 20th century, attempted to force assimilation on Aboriginal peoples and erase their cultures and languages, knowledges and identities. On another front, especially in public schools, the racialization of youth by way of their 'identity' and the lack of its connection to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities and relationships have left a burden on the individuals to sort out and recover from the traumatic events of Indian residential schools. These identities are now in flux and youth are challenged, diminished, racialized, and subjected to layers of misrepresentation and abuse for being who they are or appear to be, or challenged for not being more or less what one considers to be First Nations, Métis, or Inuit. It is vital for contemporary Aboriginal youth "to understand [their] identity as a construction, a product, and an effect of social and historical relations" (St. Denis, 2007, p. 1070).

The negative experiences that many Aboriginal people had in residential schools have left a legacy of intergenerational trauma and, for many, deep distrust of educational and social institutions in general (Bear Spirit Consulting, 2007; Malatest, 2004). The traumatic consequences begin well before birth in the food insecurity women have faced to the violence and trauma experienced in the aftermath of Indian Residential Schools, the imposed poverty of First Nations communities, and racialized marginalization and stereotyping, especially in urban areas. Key to the reconciliation process is "public truth sharing" as part of a "sustained public education and dialogue . . . about the history and legacy of residential schools" (TRC, 2015b, Principles 3 and 10). In a study of adult learners in Toronto, for example, Ningwakwe George (2008) reports that most of the adults entering adult literacy programming have suffered several layers of issues that affect them at all levels, spiritually, mentally, physically, and emotionally. Their adult literacy programming requires first "changing learning attitudes toward themselves" (George, 2008, p. 18). This is significant because, as George further points out, "violence and trauma and how they affect people's feelings about themselves have created blocks to learning" (p. 3).

Understanding the effects of colonization is like an onion being removed of its layers, each having a character like the last and each having an effect on its whole. So once there is some understanding of the depths of colonialism, patriarchy, losses and resulting traumas, the disintegration of some families, their rising numbers in urban areas, and the rise of single-parent families, it is equally important to understand not only the struggles but also the resilience of the persons and families who come from these experiences—their hopes and determination to enter into university or other postsecondary institution. Each has come from a community where a worldview has evolved based on tenets of their ancient ancestors—generosity of spirit, love and caring for self and others, relationships with all things, sharing—to navigating the often impersonal transitions to urban communities and the institutional structures, norms, rules, and processes. In this context, the words of Roberta Jamieson resonate: "The bold mandate that we have is to encourage, empower, inspire, and provide assistance so that First Nations, Métis, and Inuit youths can convert their tremendous potential, their aspirations, and their dreams into solid achievement and brighter futures. We make it possible for them to contribute their gifts to their communities, to Canada, and to the world" (Standing Committee, 2007, p. 41).

Aboriginal Student Educational Expectations and Experience

Despite the legacy of residential schools, Aboriginal students make their way with some high hopes to improve their life prospects, as Schissel and Wotherspoon (2003) note:

> Aboriginal people's expectations are high that education carries with it the means to improve their life prospects, and they are clearly aware that schooling as they know it must be retooled to enhance the chances that their aspirations can be achieved. (p. vii)

The improvement of life prospects, reaffirmation of identity and heritage, and the transcendence from a state of marginalization are a few of the goals stated in the literature on Indigenous education; the general implication is that there is a gap between such goals and the current state of affairs. This gap may be closed through the acquisition of education, but such an assertion should be made with one important caveat: education is, and should be, a means to prepare children to be effective contributors to society (Au, 2012). In addition to the prospective improvements that a civically active Indigenous population may bring to Canadian society, such developments should reflect those identities that are prevalent amongst Canada's Indigenous

peoples (Grammond, 2009). Developments in the area of Indigenous cultural revitalization can also enrich Canada's social mosaic (Christensen & Poupart, 2012) while simultaneously strengthening the identities of Canada's Indigenous peoples (Battiste & Semeganis, 2002; Deer & Faulkenberg, 2016). As Longboat (n.d.) argues, "the strength-based perspective is essential to showing the balanced healthy Indigenous person, family, clan and community" (p. 171).

Multiple studies (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008; Pavel & Padilla, 1993; Wright, 1985) have demonstrated that family and peer support networks, community, cultural programs, cultural centres, and mentorship greatly impact Indigenous student success in higher education. As important to success is financial aid (Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, 2010; Wilson & Battiste, 2011), though studies underline how inadequate (covering as little as 48% of costs) that support remains for students who are also likely to be older and single parents removed from their communities (Bear Spirit Consulting, 2007; Malatest, 2004).

Cultural factors are critical for Aboriginal learners (McCann, 1995). Decolonization often starts in postsecondary education as learners begin to recognize "colonized knowledge" (Smith, 1999, 2012). This cultural knowledge is critical as it helps youth and Aboriginal peoples to learn what has created the barriers to their well-being and how their attitudes and beliefs about themselves have been socially constructed from dominance and superiority of groups who have held the power to remove them, alienate them from their families and cultures and languages, by policies, discourses, media, education, and official curriculum (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012, 2017) and hold continuing powers over them, largely through education. All previous education needs to be viewed as part of this process of colonization and decolonization, and the problematization of this knowledge leads to a new cultural synthesis and reconstruction (Smith, 1999, 2012).

Education in an international context has begun to recognize Indigenous cultures and histories as significant knowledges about the past and present. As students are increasingly exposed to Indigenous Studies and Aboriginal student organizations, they gain a clearer understanding of the cultural context of their education (Orr & Friesen, 1999). Dissonance is an indicator of this

transformative process; Aboriginal learners may counter the hegemony of university Eurocentrism by understanding, challenging, and modifying it. The process is also a basis for resolving dissonance and elevating self-confidence and self-esteem and ultimately self-empowerment (Battiste, 1998). Decolonization and dissonance/congruency are grounded in identity and cultural retention in the aftermath of hegemonic control over Indigenous peoples' socialization, languages, education, identities, removals, and access to resources. The effect is that many of today's youth are struggling with the violence of racialized markers of identity and the misrepresentation of Aboriginal identities in the context of persistent racism, racialization, and oppression, and diminishment of their languages, histories and ontological formations stemming from their Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing. They hold the psychological scars of their colonial history, the confusion created by the ideological foundation of racism and Eurocentrism, and an unquenchable desire to re-right the past. Part of the re-righting involves the understanding and balancing Indigenous peoples' knowledges and identities, histories and perspectives in the reconstruction of education along with a deep acceptance of the continuing structures of racism and power in schools, curriculum, teacher training, and university education. Identity in an increasingly multicultural society is a problem (Hebert, 2001), but cultural retention is a fluid process—the individual's identity is never complete, but rather historical, contextual, relational, and always in the making (Bruno-Joffre & Henley, 2001; Sloane-Seale, n.d., p.3).

In sum, the literature makes clear the institutional and individual obligations and opportunities to support critical anti-racist and anti-oppressive education and to engage with and learn from Indigenous knowledge systems that are fully integrated into postsecondary institutions, its policies and practices, methods and standards, creating "a blended educational context that respects and builds on both Indigenous and Eurocentric knowledge systems" (Battiste, 2002, p. 3). Such an exploration of what Indigenous knowledges entail for discovery, innovation, expansion, and cultural change in universities can significantly affect belonging for Indigenous students and intercultural relations for all.

METHODS

The study used mixed methods and a collaborative, decolonizing community-based action research approach (Findlay, Ray, & Basualdo, 2011, 2014).

Furthermore, consistent with UAKN commitment to community-driven research, and the principle that research which focuses on Aboriginal people should be undertaken by, with, and for Aboriginal peoples, the methods, including data collection instruments were developed with the guidance of an Advisory Committee consisting primarily of persons of Aboriginal ancestry, including Métis educator, researcher, and writer Rita Bouvier, and representatives from the Office of the Treaty Commissioner; the Indigenous Voices Program, the Gwenna Moss Centre for Teaching Effectiveness; the Indigenous Graduate Students' Council, the University of Saskatchewan; the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies; the Saskatchewan Polytechnic; and the First Nations University of Canada. Advisory Committee members also helped facilitate the purposive study participant recruitment supplemented by snowballing techniques.

The data were collected using the following two major types of methods:
- *IN PERSON INTERVIEWS*: with a select group of (a) Aboriginal students and (b) student counsellors and officials from four major postsecondary institutions in Saskatoon
- *FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS:* with select groups of (a) Aboriginal students and (b) student counsellors and officials from those four postsecondary institutions in Saskatoon.

The study received ethics approval from the University of Saskatchewan Research Ethics Board (BEH #16-202) on 25 August 2016 and was renewed on July 31, 2017. Consistent with that approval, the study was conducted with due concern for ethical issues of consent, respect, equity, confidentiality, and privacy.

Study Participants

This study engaged two types of participants to meet its objectives of establishing baseline data on factors that either facilitate or hinder educational success for urban Aboriginal postsecondary students. Both types of participants took part in the study concurrently. The first type consisted of

self-identifying Indigenous students (Métis, First Nations, and others) at the four postsecondary institutions (PSE) in Saskatoon. For this study, the definition of PSE follows Preston (2008, p. 2): "any institution that provides education to students beyond high school and incorporates the acquisition of credentials from two major types of educational institutes: university and non-university. Universities predominantly offer certificates, diplomas, and degrees, which are more academic in nature when compared to non-university credentials." The non-university institutes such as community colleges, vocational and technical institutes, colleges of applied arts and technology, commonly offer trade certificates and various diplomas. Both SIIT and Saskatchewan Polytechnic offer degree programs. The second set of participants consisted of individuals tasked with advising or providing support services to the students of their institutions (several of whom have teaching and/or research duties). Figure 1 summarizes the distribution of the student participants in the study, while Table 1 provides their program information. Figure 2 and Table 2 provide descriptive insights into the responsibilities of the advising participants and their institutional distribution respectively.
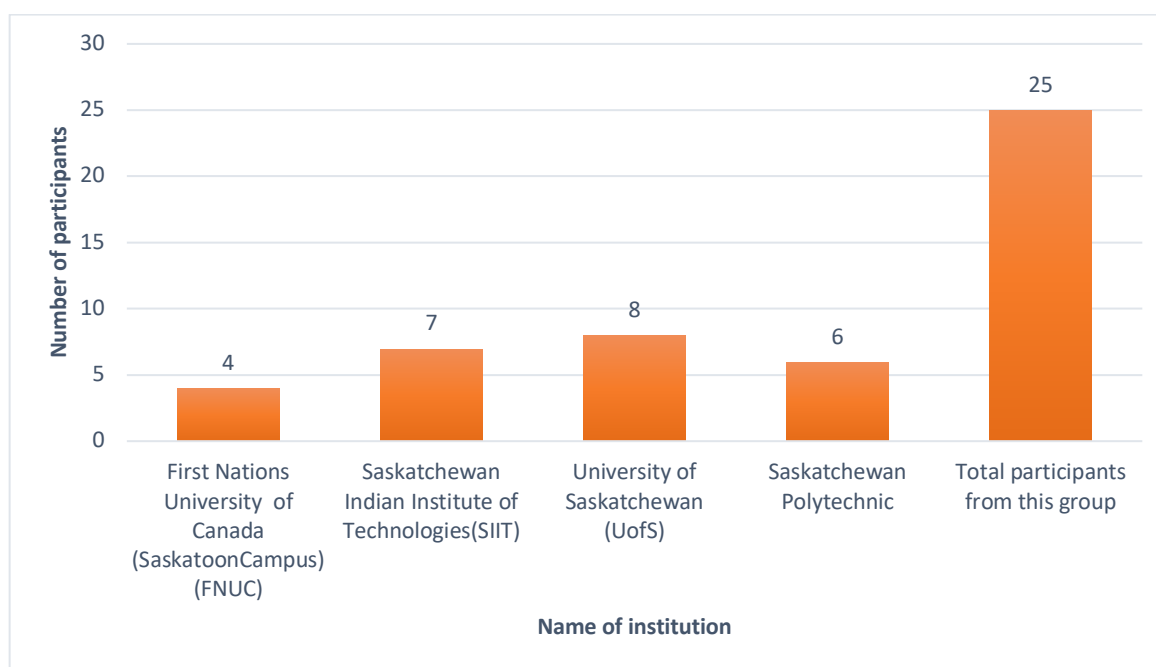

Figure 1. Number of student participants and their institutional affiliation.

Table 1. Distribution of student participants.

| Institution	Distribution of the students by programs taken
Uof S	• 4 Graduate students (Social Psychology, Public Policy, Environment and Sustainability, Economics) • 4 Undergraduate students (SUNTEP, ITEP and Arts and Science)
SIIT	• 1 Business Administration program • 6 Mental Health and Wellness program
FNUC	• 3 Indigenous Social Work undergraduate program • 1 Indigenous Social Work master's program
SK Poly	• 1 Power Engineering program • 1 Business Administration program • 1 Pipe Fitting Apprenticeship program • 3 Hospitality Management program
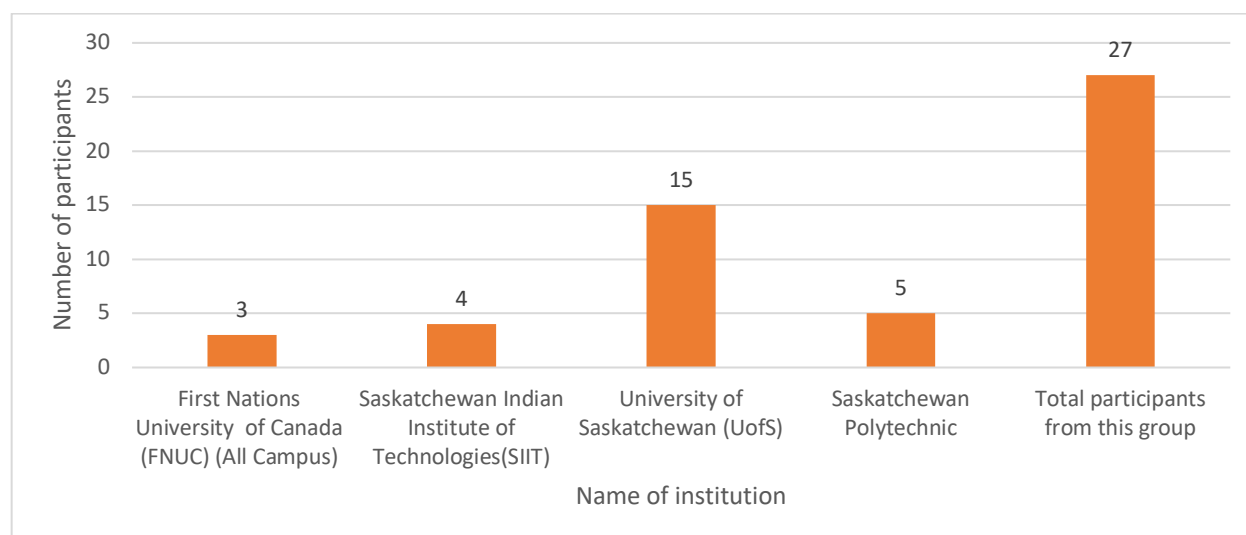
Figure 2. Institutional affiliation and number of advisor participants.

Table 2. Description of duties and responsibilities of the Advising participants

Description of position (to protect anonymity)	Responsibilities/duties
Aboriginal student advisor at college level	Focuses on special programs geared specifically to Aboriginal Students' success in their first year of PSE. Also participates in recruitment drives and education fairs.
Community Advisor	Focuses on access to services/admission at the start of student journey into PSE. Also participates in recruitment drives and education fairs.

Coordinator of Science programs for Aboriginal students	Coordinates a science outreach program designed to provide science expertise to FN and Métis schools that lack science expertise within their teaching staff.
Researcher on Aboriginal academic programs within the institutional unit	Researches programming to increase access and success for Aboriginal students in the sciences in PSE.
Sessional instructor in specific Aboriginal academic programs	Teaches skill-based courses to compensate for lack of preparatory PSE skills and to enhance opportunity to succeed at PSE
PSE Student financial support	Helps students navigate the financial aspects of PSE and advises on the relevant institutional processes.
Coordinator for specific undergraduate direct entry and professional programs	Supports Métis student-teachers to get their BEd in a culturally fulfilling environment; providing programmatic and counselling services as well as ensuring that the faculty and instructors can provide appropriate classes/courses for student-teachers. Another position supports professional programs which are highly competitive and have equity-based reserved entry (seats in the programs) for FN, Métis and Inuit students.
Resource coordinator for cultural programming and partnerships building.	Builds awareness of culturally relevant resources available for students within the institutions and promotes university experiences to high schools to drive FN, Métis, and other Aboriginal student recruitment and ensure their success.
FN and Metis student success support personnel from an Aboriginal support unit	Works with colleagues within the campus both within centralized student services and colleges so as to improve Aboriginal student experiences (social, cultural, and academic) and student services, with the goal of recruiting, transitioning and graduating more Aboriginal students.
Academic advising (at one institution)	Works with faculty and vice presidents on statistics of students, advising students on class options especially for applications to professional programs; helps with transfer credits from other institutions to add to students records; helps with issues arising due to assignment disputes, attendance, and other faculty and student disputes; and manages the graduation files so as to monitor the requirements to graduate for students.
Academic advising and student supporting - professional programs	Provides diverse support to ensure success in the program, ranging from personal support in dealing with departmental requirements such as attendance and class responsibilities to helping with writing scholarship and bursary letters. Also responsible for implementing the equity action for applicants in the reserved FN, Métis, and Inuit slots within their departments, this includes following up and building relationships with chiefs, local communities where prospective students come from, and regional Indigenous organization to ensure authenticity of the applicants.

Indigenous student advisor	Liaises between students and instructors in the health and science programs. Other Indigenous student advisors also help with academic counselling, tutoring, in all the programs. Helps with student transitions, getting them to the school, summer student transition programs, student retention, housing issues, navigating community resources.
Aboriginal educational counsellor	Assists students with life and academic balance: "letting them know that just because they are students, life doesn't stop and I'm here to listen, guide them."
Aboriginal nursing advisor	Supports the transition of new nursing students, connecting to tutors, counselling; maintains relationships with students and helps them navigate the nursing program.
Learning specialist	Completes educational/psychological assessments, advocates for student accommodations with instructors, deans, post-sec workers; provides mini-lessons for students on note taking and also studying tips.
High level executives from Aboriginal specific program	Supports academic orientation for incoming students, manages activities that help build academic confidence for students, and offers all-round academic and life counselling when students seek input.

Data Collection

In the winter of 2016 and January to October 2017, data were collected through 9 focus groups and 13 one-on-one semi-structured interviews. Focus groups were used because they facilitate unique ideas to be discussed by a range of participants, often with divergent perspectives, and for thought-comparison to occur among knowledgeable participants (Bryman, Teevan, & Bell, 2009; Dobson, 2004). Participants can speak and hear different opinions and views on a given topic, and they can raise any issue they feel is important or significant as well as learn from each other (Bryman et al, 2009). A semi-structured interview is a useful and frequently used qualitative research tool for collecting information in an area where little in-depth information about the topic is known (Kvale, 1996; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). It facilitates options for asking clarifying questions, which augment participants' responses and result in more extensive and substantial knowledge. Key lines of inquiry were the same in both the focus groups and the semi-structured interviews for each of the participant types.

A second phase involving an online survey was planned but abandoned after ongoing challenges in scheduling focus groups and interviews across four institutions even with the support of

Advisory Committee members. The research team made the decision to focus on a strong qualitative study. The focus group consent form is included in Appendix A, the recruitment poster in Appendix B, the recruitment letter in Appendix C, the focus group guide for Postsecondary Student Counsellors and Support Service Officials in Appendix D, the focus group guide for Postsecondary Students in Appendix E, the interview consent form in Appendix F, and the Transcript release Form in Appendix G.

Researchers introduced themselves as researchers from CUISR based at the University of Saskatchewan, and explained the study purpose. Focus group and interview participants were informed that to protect confidentiality, the data would be presented in aggregate form so that it would not be possible to identify individuals. Direct quotes, opinions, or expressions would be presented without revealing names unless participants agreed to be acknowledged in the report. The researchers would safeguard the confidentiality of responses to the best of their ability; however, that ability was limited by the small sample size of participants and the specific locations or experiences that might provide identification. Participants were asked to keep these limitations in mind when answering any questions they felt sensitive in nature.

Participants could agree or not to have interviews recorded for transcription purposes only and were advised that they could request that the recorder be turned off at any time. After the focus groups and interviews and prior to the data being included in the final report, they had the opportunity to review the transcript if they chose and to add, alter, or delete information from the transcript as they saw fit (recordings destroyed once transcripts were approved).

Participation was voluntary and participants could answer only those questions with which they felt comfortable. They could withdraw from the research at any time; however, the data provided could only be removed from the research prior to the analysis stage where all data collected would be combined. Before the interview began, participants were asked if they gave consent and whether they wished to receive a summary of the final research report (the full report to be publicly available on the CUISR website).

Data Analysis

The CUISR researchers were responsible for transcribing, inputting, analyzing, and assimilating data with the supervision of the principal investigators and guidance of the Advisory Committee. The analysis followed a dual process of grounded theory (GT) and narrative research (NR). Grounded theory, a rigorous and systematic procedure, guided the segmentation of interview or focus group (text) data to find themes that can help researchers infer meaning and build theory (Birks & Mills, 2012). The text data were queried in regular research team debriefs for a concept-indicator via a constant comparison among terms to find the meaning in the data (Birks & Mills, 2012; Draucker, Martsolf, Ross, & Rusk, 2007). This method also allows for data reduction to show some association among terms expressed by different participants, as well as to signify saturation of data (Birks & Mills, 2012).

Polkinghorne (1988, p. 1) calls narrative "the primary form by which human experience is made meaningful." Narrative research's focus on stories as data sources is one feature of research developments acknowledging a changed understanding of research-researched relations, recognizing alternative epistemologies or ways of knowing, and highlighting the local and specific rather than the general and universal (Clandinin, 2006). In a qualitative research study exploring the lived experience and perspectives of urban Aboriginal PSE students, NR proved an appropriate way of making sense of how study participants were ordering experiences and phenomena, making connections and relationships within their specific contexts. Furthermore, this pairing of GT and NR was also necessary so as to reveal meanings that thematic analysis alone could not capture (constructive narratives).

The following section consists of both findings and discussion, outlining first inhibitors and then facilitators of PSE success for urban Aboriginal students.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Research on factors and indicators of educational success for Aboriginal students in Canada is not new (CCL, 2006a; Cherubini, 2014; Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, 2010; Parriag & Chaulk, 2011; Sharpe & Arsenault, 2010). Some studies have taken a comparative approach to attainment gaps between non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal students (Parriag & Chaulk, 2011; Sloane-Seale, Wallace, & Levin, 2001). Others have studied the representation of urban Aboriginal youth in the PSE system in relation to economic opportunities and job/labour market success (AUCC, 2010; CCL, 2006b; Cherubini, 2014; Howe, 2011). This particular study on the inhibitors and facilitators of success for Aboriginal students enrolled in PSE institutions in urban areas in Saskatchewan is based on information gleaned from the lived experience and meaning making of Aboriginal students (First Nations and Métis) and their student advisors at the PSE they are attending.

Those two sets of study participants (students and student advisors) facilitated the comparison of narratives surrounding PSE facilitators and inhibitors of Aboriginal student success profiled in the literature, with a special focus on students attending PSE institutions in an urban area (i.e., Saskatoon, Saskatchewan). The focus on this particular urban area was important for several reasons. First, because the urban Aboriginal community is mentioned in the literature on Aboriginal education as a whole, but the majority of this type of research focuses either on a few pilot projects taking place in urban places or it is targeted to on-reserve experiences (UAKN, 2012). The second reason is that, according to population projections, by 2020, Aboriginal students within Saskatchewan will represent 40% of all school-aged youth in the province (Preston, 2008; Tymchak, 2001). The third reason is that statistics show a lag in successful completion of university degrees by Aboriginal students, at the rate of 9.8% compared to non-Aboriginal students, which stands at 28%, nationally (Universities Canada, 2015a). The 2016 Canadian national census, however, showed an increase from 7.7% in 2006 to 10.9% of Aboriginal people (25 to 64 years) with a bachelor's degree or higher, while those with a college diploma rose from 18.7% in 2006 to 23.0% in 2016, although those living on-reserve face persistent barriers (Statistics Canada, 2017b). Similar data are scarce or not compiled for non-university PSE institutions nationally and for Saskatchewan respectively. The fourth reason is that, as part of the current reconciliation efforts (TRC, 2015a, 2015b), PSE institutions in

Saskatoon have undertaken some interesting and important initiatives designed to indigenize postsecondary institutions.

This study helps to shed some light on whether such efforts have moved the yard stick away from the pathologizing lens (see Battiste, 2002; Findlay et al., 2014; Findlay et al., 2016; Newhouse. FirtzMaurice, McGuire-Adams, & Jette, 2012; Patrick, 2014; Roland, 2009; UAKN, 2012) that plagues the landscape within which urban Aboriginal issues, including those in the educational sector, are studied and understood. With this context and background, the next section documents inhibitors and facilitators of PSE success as identified by Aboriginal students and the advisors and/or administrators mandated to provide them with some services and supports.

Inhibitors of PSE Success Identified by Aboriginal Students

Racism: A Multi-dimensional Obstacle

Aboriginal students identified racism as a significant inhibitor of success in the PSE system. The researchers raise this issue first because it was an issue that was consistently raised both by the students and by the student advisors for all institutions. Racism towards Aboriginal people, including Aboriginal students, is experienced as both psychological and verbal abuse (St Denis & Hampton, 2002) and as historic exclusion, systemic barriers, institutional ignorance or omissions, lack of safe places for Aboriginal students, and recruitment and retention of too few and overtaxed Aboriginal faculty who can support a holistic, culturally-relevant, student-centred education. In any of its forms, racism, personal or institutional, limits Aboriginal students regardless of their academic success and social competencies (Bazylak, 2002; Deyhle, 1995; Morrison, 2017; Restoule, Gruner, & Metatawabin, 2013; Restoule et al., 2013; St Denis & Hampton, 2002). The PSE experience of students in Saskatoon shows that racism within the institutions they attend is a multi-dimensional obstacle.

Aboriginal students experienced two major types of racism. The first kind of racism faced by some students can be described as manifest overt racism, discrimination, and marginalization facing Aboriginal urban populations in other spheres of life in Canada (Findlay et al., 2014,

2016; UAKN, 2012). That is to say, the students' experiences in PSE institution are generally negative, marked by discriminatory actions towards them, and belittling of their personalities and characters. Such was the finding of the University of Saskatchewan (2014) campus climate survey. While over 70% of students reported positive experiences, "minority group" students, including Aboriginal students, reported negative experiences and behaviours based on race, ethnicity, and English language proficiency. Almost half were unclear on where to get help with the result that reporting rates were between 2% and 8%.

Such racializing views are faced by students from both ends—from non-Aboriginal instructors and fellow students, as demonstrated by this quotation:

> I just heard in the back behind me a class mate make some comments around native people being treated differently. Like he felt native people were getting special treatment and others weren't.

As Battiste (1998) has noted, such negative experiences lead students to imagine the worst of themselves, and feel undeserving of the PSE opportunities. One student talked about her own history of "being internally colonized" but finding pride in learning about Indigenous culture and coming to understand "lateral violence, why we hate ourselves; we are hurt" and "why [she] was so ashamed." In learning from the Elders, she was learning pride in her culture that could "disrupt the power imbalance that society has." Another student commented on similar experiences while also demonstrating his learning and resilience:

> As a First Nations student, it was a struggle for me at first, where I felt belittled and sometimes discriminated because of my background. My advice would be not to give up and work hard and always be confident in who you are as an individual.

A second kind of racism towards urban Aboriginal students is latent covert racism. This type of racism tends to occur in some programs where Aboriginal students constitute a minority of the total number of students, particularly in those offered in institutions open to all, rather than just Aboriginal students. As a result, they felt resentment and a lack of support, which is a phenomenon Richard (2011) revealed has developed out of a culture of silence and cognitive dissonance. According to Young et al. (2010), this feeling by some Aboriginal students is a consequence of the dominant narrative of colonization that still reverberates in the broader

Canadian social context and delimits the space that Aboriginal peoples should occupy socially. It also shows that there is a need for critical anti-racist education, which St Denis (2007) sees as a necessary foundation for shaping alliances between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities in a common search for social justice in education. The story below demonstrates such latent covert racism and explains how one student felt in one PSE program dominated by men who possessed a worldview that "clashed" with hers. That clash eventually led to her withdrawal from the program and the PSE institution altogether:

> I never really had a choice of deciding when to go to university. My parents always said you will go to university and so I went. That's the original idea. After going to university with different education streams, first I was in Engineering and I didn't like it. I feel like I got pushed out and I went to Arts and Science and I found out my passion was in the environmental sciences, so I went and did that and I got a diploma in Land Management for Indigenous People at College of Agriculture. Being in university for so long and having the experience of being pushed out of Engineering and just being in an institution that is, because I was in sciences, primarily Eurocentric, it didn't feel comfortable for me to continue in that institution, because every class that I had to be in, pretty much most classes, except for social sciences like sociology that I did 100 level or 200 level, I had to fight to be represented or I had to be the student who fought for representation.

Another student reported his frustration at feeling "like people are thinking I'm making excuses. But I just need them to understand that they need to teach me differently."

Insufficient Connections to Aboriginal Elders

Students also identified insufficient connections to Aboriginal elders as another inhibitor of their success in the PSE system. Students spoke of their needs to connect to cultural teachings through speaking to the elders. The elders were viewed as culture navigators that provided cultural perspectives which gave students grounding, as this one participant said, "The [Elders] come to different activities and that for me is really important as it reminds me to not let this other side, the academic side, take over. So they help me maintain my connection to my culture and my people, so they really help." Two other students also emphasized a similar importance of elders: "They keep us anchored in the relationships that are vital to our Aboriginal identity. We

can do the hard work needed to succeed academically; they help us through and ensure we are able to remain connected to community"—a key factor in educational success (Cajete, 2000; Hansen & Antsanen, 2017; Tinto, 2006). The other affirmed that: "Coming here and speaking to elders, I learn more about my culture [and ways of knowing] and integrating these [ways of knowing] with western knowledge [systems]" Another student noted that elders provide clarity when students are struggling with their identity: "I like having] elders, I go down there [to their office] every now and then and talk to them."

The experiences of Aboriginal students in all four PSE institutions in Saskatoon show they would like to access the elders more frequently than is currently possible. Unfortunately, there are very few elders compared to students' need for elders at various times during the week. The few elders at institutions are stretched and overworked. Shortage of elders' services was particularly pronounced when it came to graduate students' experience. One student pinpointed this misalignment: "We need access to supportive Aboriginal cultural leaders that can help us make sense of our higher academic training." This indication of how elders support students' success may help redirect data tracking on Aboriginal student success. This particular task remains a challenge at PSEs where most data focus on completion rates as the most important indicator of student success (AUCC, 2013; Human Capital Strategists, 2005).

Indigenization in the Era of Reconciliation: A Perplexing Situation

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) has called on Canadian institutions of higher education to indigenize the curricula (TRC, 2015b, Call 10 - iv) and in their 94 Calls to Action, they pinpoint where that education is especially needed, e.g. law, medicine, social work, education, and intercultural relations. These calls awaken the older adage pinpointed in the Indian Control of Indian Education (1973) that mobilized Aboriginal teacher education several decades ago (RCAP, 1996; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991; St Denis, Bouvier, & Battiste, 1998). Some institutions have launched indigenization campaigns that span both academic and non-academic units in policy responses to the TRC calls to action (Universities Canada, 2017a, 2017b; University of Saskatchewan, 2015), while others have launched reviews of all their academic programs in order to determine where there are gaps and successes in achieving the goal of incorporating Indigenous content into program curricula (Foster, 2016). Despite such

responses, indigenization policy, its definition and delimitations, and its implementation continue to be discussed, sometimes contested, and ultimately remain underdeveloped. In the words of one student, her institution "still needs to work on the policy piece in order to achieve the goal of Indigenization. The institution is continuing to use policy that will prevent it from reaching the scope of Indigenization [required to meet].… students' needs." Another commented on "the significant challenges of how textbooks don't begin to tell half of the story. They perpetuate this mentality of 'get over it'. And that's frustrating when you see younger students who discount those real experiences." To show the failure of implementation of this Indigenization policy, another student made the following observation:

> We just need our instructors to be open to our Indigenous knowledge and experiences and honour that. For example, in [a class] about cultural foods, the instructor did not even mention our First Nations culture and she didn't even acknowledge me when I brought that up in class. The newcomers also need to learn that too, and they need opportunities to learn about us from us [during the class]. So our instructors need to take the time to make an effort at teaching about indigenous food in the course.

In many ways, students still feel that 'true indigenization' is absent in their day-to-day academic life—the system marginalizes these students because they do not recognize themselves within it (UAKN, 2012). For example, there is still limited space to represent and recognize the journeys of Aboriginal PSE students within their full spectrum of identity, multiple nations, languages, races, and histories within the offered curricula (Kovach, Carriere, Montgomery, Barrett, & Gilles, 2014; Restoule et al., 2013; Richard, 2011; Young et al., 2010). In the case of food, they do not learn about what has been called a process to "de-Indianize" and thus de-skill, cutting people off from the holistic knowledge and work of food sourcing, preparing, and sharing (Hansen & Antsanen, 2017, p. 12). One student reported struggling to find support for "[her] anti-oppressive lens," her "questioning of hetero-normative values," and her "harm reductionist lens."

Further, knowledge of natural sciences from Indigenous ways of knowing is not always appreciated (Aikenhead, 2001; Aikenhead & Michell, 2011; Baker, 2016; Malreddy, 2008). Many students are still not able to reconcile set curricula with Indigenous knowledge systems that they possess. Students explained how they felt a sense of loss due to a move from Indigenous worldviews and philosophies into the academic training, which is largely devoid of

such views despite the call to indigenize the curricula by the TRC. One student painstakingly stated, "Two-eyed seeing is important [to me] but it is tough to practice here. I get to use it in my schoolwork sometimes, but to do that I need to use my knowledge to level the playing field first and that's a challenge." Another student explained:

> When you eliminate the culture and philosophy, developing the skills becomes more isolated and detached from your identity. So, in the end, you have skills but have lost the associated development of yourself as an Aboriginal adult during those years. We are writing and researching with our communities but I have found that I have had to detach from participating in ceremonies, learning lodges, etc., because they can often take several days [which is out of scope of the expected time for research and learning]. Wouldn't it be something if our graduate schools could help us to have access to these as part of our studies?   I hate to think we are emerging as bureaucrats without culture, Aboriginal languages, knowledge of ceremonies, and our place as leaders who uphold traditional philosophies. When you think about all the things that are not present to support our growth as cultural beings, then it becomes hard to really say that you are self-actualized as an Aboriginal scholar.

As the PSE institutions continue to implement the TRC's calls for indigenization of education, it will be important to heed the students' observations and suggestions based on their experiences, in order to ensure initiatives by PSE institutions are student-centred and learner-focused. While the focus of many institutions, as noted earlier, is on access and retention and numbers in and out, at least one researcher Pidgeon (2008) urges universities to move off their hegemonic discourses relating to retention and Aboriginal persistence in mainstream institutions to embrace a more balanced understanding of Indigenous understandings and worldviews. Some institutions may find it useful to consider existing initiatives as potential models for indigenizing the curricula. One existing model is the Bimaadiziwin/Atonhetseri:io Native Studies Ph.D. program at Trent University, Ontario, Canada, which provides students at an advanced level of study with an opportunity to apprentice with Elders and Indigenous Knowledge Holders (Bell et al., 2005).

Compressed Programming: Stolen Opportunity to Learn

Students also noted that compressed programming is an inhibitor to their success at PSE institutions. At some institutions, some programs are compressed to provide students with a quick way of becoming professionals who are in demand within the labour market. These programs are designed to attract Aboriginal students with a promise that they can quickly enter

the job market (Lunney Borden & Wiseman, 2016). Given this particular objective, the compressed programs do not apply comprehensive pedagogical understanding that is both cognizant of adult education/learning and of appropriate instructional designs (Wilson & Battiste, 2011). As a result, they do more to harm than to help students enrolled in them. They fall short of the learning aspirations urban Aboriginal people have for themselves and other members of their communities. Such students aim to live a rewarding and healthy life and to better position themselves in light of the changing needs of a changing world, rather than meeting a fixed needs assessment for a job market in a designated locale. One student elaborated on this issue as follows: "For example, the course subjects are compacted in the program and the content is a lot in little time. So expectations of instructors are challenging and we students need more time to do this work; sometimes you want to give up. We need more time to learn things in quality not quantity. We just need more time." This same student added: "We have this as a 3-year program in 2 years and it feels like I'm being cheated in my learning." Another student simply stated: "I just want to make sure I'm getting what I need." In sum, the prevailing sentiment among PSE students is that rather than focusing on expediting the completion of programs, the central objective should be ensuring that programs are sufficiently long for them to absorb and appreciate what is being taught.

Students suggested that compressed programs are not only not meeting their desire to learn, but they also cause undue stress for them as a result of unrealistic expectations placed on the students: As one student pointed out: "I don't feel valued and respected when they are pressuring us to finish courses in such a short time and not making the content relatable and they aren't open to our needs." Another student also added, "If we fail one subject, we don't have opportunity to take another class; we have to wait another year." One student noted that this back-to-back offering of classes without building contingencies for the challenges faced by adult learners into the programs is one of the limiting components of compressed program format. Again, these quotes show that the data for urban Aboriginal students is narrowly focused on satisfying the completion rates (AUCC, 2013; Human Capital Strategists, 2005) as an indicator of success while avoiding or disregarding other possible indicators of success, including their own self-empowering, Elders' teachings and knowledges that could expand or enrich or transform current conventional knowledges.

Insufficient and Inappropriate Support Services: Orientation to 'City Life'

Students pointed to insufficient and inappropriate support services as another inhibitor of success. Students identified a wide range of support services that should be provided or improved, including orientation to living in a city, orientation to succeeding in PSE institutions, academic assignments, and financial management strategies. The students' views on a need to add or improve such support services are profiled in other sub-sections of this overview of student responses. Here it is useful to profile their views on support services for orientation to city life. The reason for this is that such orientation is very important for Aboriginal students, especially given the widely recognized disparity that exists between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations in terms of service delivery in the cities (Findlay et al., 2016). One Aboriginal student who focused on this issue reflected on the experience s/he had when starting his/her PSE in Saskatoon:

> It would be nice to have a 'City Bootcamp' so the students can be shown how to live in a city, I came from Little Pine where I lived my whole my life. Coming to Saskatoon, I didn't know what to do, where to go. There is so much noise and traffic, I didn't know about bus routes. So a bootcamp will let students integrate better into the city, and that would really help a lot of students.

Another student added how much time s/he had wasted in the beginning of the term just to be able to navigate city life: "When I came here I didn't even know where to get buses and get around; everything was different. I wish I had people to pick me up and show me around." Yet another student mentioned how isolating the move to the city was for her/him: "Moving to a bigger City was kind of a cultural shock for me. I lived here alone. I got really depressed and that took a lot out of me. I was thinking a lot of just retreating and going back home." Two other students discussed integration not only in terms of accessible transportation and locating school-related services, but also the need for housing fit for incoming students:

> Another service needed is getting off-reserve students some affordable housing where they can all live. Do you know how many students in my class don't like where they live or don't know where to live? So to have something set up or an agreement with SaskHousing or Crest Housing to save a certain amount of Bachelor apartments for students since we don't have our own student residences. Especially since you are only here for 9 months and going back home for the summer, so have the spaces on rotation. I think it will also help with student retention.

Another reinforced the point:

> It is important for Indigenous students to have supports with affordable
> housing, daycare etc., when they don't have family in the city that can help
> with these things.

Some students also indicated that as part of such programs, a focus on housing options should be paramount for PSE institutions especially since, as has been noted in literature, safe and secure housing is a key issue of concern for a large proportion of urban Aboriginal people (Silver, et al., 2003; UAKN, 2012). In sum, the consensus among Aboriginal students who participated in this study was that a 'bootcamp' program for incoming students could easily be part of students' orientation programs in Saskatoon PSEs when they begin their PSE away from their local communities.

Insufficient and Inappropriate Support Services: Guidance/Counselling

Several students also suggested that some guidance or counselling services within the academic institutions were either non-existent, insufficient, or inappropriate. The implicit criticism was that the provision of such services, as well as other services, for students admitted to the institutions is not valued as much as enrolment targets. Furthermore, they echoed the views expressed by others in various cities that in many cases meeting enrollment targets tends to be valued more than retention rates and success in graduating students with a strong knowledge base and skills that will contribute to their careers and quality of life (University of British Columbia, 2014). Students noted that devoting greater attention to retention rates as well as graduation and learning outcomes should be the priority for institutions (Berger, 1992; Bynum and Thompson, 1983; UAKN, 2012).

Students indicated that inadequate guidance or counselling services exist in many parts and programs of the PSE institutions, including within the units that house guidance counsellors. Many factors have contributed to such services being inadequate. First, in some institutions there are very few counsellors and they have an overloaded schedule. Consequently, students do not have opportunity to meet them. Second, in some cases where PSE institutions operate multiple sites, these guidance counsellors are found only at the 'main' site and not at the 'satellite' sites; hence, students cannot meet them face-to-face. A student from a southern

institution revealed this discrepancy: "We don't have guidance counsellors here in Saskatoon. We need that support and those people. I feel like sometime I'm independent doing this. I have no one really to go to for personal issues other than instructors for academic support." This same student added: "This structure and [its sustainability and] stability is questionable right now based on our current set up." Another student at an institution with both main and satellite campuses also identified this model to be deficient for their needs: "I think our institution can do better. We only *Skype* with our counsellors or wait until they come see us here, which could take up to four weeks."

A substantive reason that guidance counselling is limited despite being in high demand relates to the ongoing nature of problems such as mental health (see Bennett & Big Foot-Sipes, 1991). For example, one student said, "I still have emotional work to do, like a lot of other Indigenous people. I think it would be helpful for everybody and make it mandatory. Even if we are seemingly fine, there are things which trigger us and there are skills we need to learn to cope with that." On the same topic of mental health, another student also disclosed a condition that needs ongoing monitoring and support: "I also have depression [which affects me] when I am really tired or going through a lot of assignments and deadlines. I am learning to be resilient through it. There is a counsellor on site that I have been to a couple of times. She does help a little, but personal improvement work is a long-term thing, so we need more of them." Consequently, students experience prolonged suffering in the absence of adequate services throughout their student life.

Finally, mature students returning to school need guidance as well. This was one of the revelations from the student participants. One said, "I didn't know I was a very passive aggressive person and I just kind of realized it and come to terms with it now that I am here [names the institution]". Another type of help mature students need is to develop their academic skills:

> The challenging thing about coming back to PSE after a long time is how to learn how to write proper critical essays—these are not like the high school essay when I took my English 100. I have taken English twice now and started seeing a writing tutor.

"More supports to connect with community" in, for example, internships in the city or province were on the wish list of another student who reported that few organizations were willing to take on Indigenous graduate students.

The diverse nature of students' needs for both academic and non-academic problems underlines that counsellors' availability and areas of expertise are factors that need further input by PSE administrators. Meeting the demand in counselling services will ensure students are supported appropriately towards achieving their academic goals (Bennett & Big Foot-Sipes, 1991; LaFromboise, Trimble, & Mohatt, 1990).

Insufficient and Inappropriate Support Services: Facilities

The Aboriginal students interviewed also pointed to the lack of adequate and appropriate facilities or spaces for them as inhibitors to their academic success. This includes a range of both dedicated and common spaces or facilities needed for studying, socializing, recreation, and special services.

The importance of dedicated spaces or facilities for the success of Aboriginal students has also been recognized by Universities Canada, an organization representing 96 universities in Canada, in a report that outlined 13 principles on Indigenous Education. One of these principles is to "continue to build welcoming and respectful learning environments on campuses through the implementation of academic programs, services, support mechanisms, and spaces dedicated to Indigenous students" (Universities Canada, 2015b, p. 2). Despite the fact that there is an understanding of the importance of that principle among administrators and educators in PSE circles, more efforts and resources are needed to ensure that the principle is reflected in practice.

In addition to space dedicated to Aboriginal students in mainstream institutions, some students enrolled in Aboriginal PSE institutions in Saskatoon also identified many common spaces that must be built or could be improved to ensure they are adequate in meeting the needs of students. Some students attending such institutions compared their current spaces with those of University of Saskatchewan, which is the largest of the PSE institutions in the city. As one of the students

said, "If we had our own library, that would be great as we got a little one to work out of but it's not enough." Another student also added, "I wish my university was like the U of S where we had our own gym to go and workout."

In addition to the library and gym a host of students also identified childcare facilities as being essential for PSE institutions. One student underlined the need of this necessary facility: "Childcare on campus would be awesome. It takes a long time to get into daycare and for those who don't come from Saskatoon you don't know how hard it is. We need specific services for students and the children would be closer to us."

Also stressed was access to safe spaces such as Women's Centre which one student identified as a safe and useful place. The student noted that in addition to being a safe place, it is also a useful place because "….they have tampons, condoms and I could have tea there, or take a nap on the couch." The student added that unfortunately accessibility to that space is limited: "The Women's Centre is open, I think, two days a week, and it's not open 24/7. The fact that the Women's Centre is not open all the time is a bit problematic, I think, because women may need a safe space on campus anytime of the day, not just 2:30-4:30 when it's open." it's a safe space."

At least one student also noted that accessibility to various facilities and services for a longer time-frame each day would contribute to academic success. This was deemed particularly important for registering and completing evening classes. One student mentioned that computer use was limited in the evenings when students need them outside of class time. Two students made the following observations regarding this particular aspect of the timeframes when facilities are available and when courses are offered:

> To have campus evening hours more than a couple of days per week. I
> know not everyone comes all the time. When we want to access the
> campus, it's not available for us and because it's not every day you can't
> get childcare, and it's not allowed to bring your kid here on campus, I
> can't come here in the evening but maybe having campus open from 8:00
> a.m. - 8:00 p.m. would make our lives a little bit easier.

And

> We can't have evening classes or summer class because this place gets closed. If you fail one class you can't pick it up, you have to wait and do the program all over again.

Efforts have to be put in understanding that students' success depends on facilities that enable them to feel welcomed in dedication to their educational pursuit.

Insufficient Indigenization and Aboriginal Cultural Events

A prevalent theme in the observations made by Aboriginal students regarding inhibitors of success was an insufficient degree of Indigenization and Aboriginal cultural events. This was particularly true in reference to the mainstream PSE institutions in the city.

In terms of Indigenization, students pointed to the importance of faculty members and program curricula. Some respondents emphasized the importance of having Aboriginal faculty members who are engaged in teaching and researching Aboriginal phenomena. One student committed to being a role model in her home community found motivation in "seeing Indigenous scholars." Some students indicated that the existence of such faculty members is one of the reasons they choose where to study and what to study. Two Aboriginal students at two different PSE institutions addressed this issue. One student sated: ""I think we feel closer to Aboriginal professors because we know that they know how we have grown up and experienced life. This creates a feeling that they will understand how you think and why you think the way you do." The students stated: "The big part I chose [names an institution] is for sure the focus on Indigenous students. The work I did on my year off was with Indigenous organizations which led me to connect back to my Indigenous background because my dad is not super connected and he is the Indigenous one in our family." This student went on to add, "With this Indigenous focus at [names an institution], I am able to do research with someone who has had previous experience doing research with Indigenous persons, which believe it or not, it's pretty hard to find [in my field]."

Students' seeking to enhance their own skills and knowledges looked for areas that would enhance their communities and the prospects of their working in Aboriginal communities. Though students were aware that they were receiving an education in a largely Eurocentric context, they believed

that Indigenization of their institutions had to be more than preparing them with Eurocentric skills and knowledges and had to be for their own goals in decolonizing and enriching their own Indigenous knowledges and heritages. One student, for example, talked of the importance of learning from their Aboriginal peers: "We quite often learned as much from our fellow students as from course content and instructors." A graduate student reported her experience of no Aboriginal faculty in her program and "no Aboriginal content in any of the courses I took." The student had to lead the work of decolonization ("I tried to bring up Indigenous knowledges as much as possible"), while seeking "supervision from outside my school." Yet another attested to the fact that "decolonizing ourselves is a lot of work" but also "gives choices to people . . . . In society and the TRC, this is important. We need to see our people take back the power and have choices, and have their voices heard." Yet another student commented on using "all the resources at the Indigenous centre and learning services" and found it "hard to talk to instructors and let them know how I feel about some of these issues. I feel like people are thinking I'm making excuses. But I just need them to understand that they need to teach me differently."

One student advisor highlighted the concern in this way:

> Many academic institutions talk about reconciliation and Indigenization but have zero clue how this relates to day to day for the Indigenous student. Faculty and student services have to wake up to the reality of Indigenous communities and issues therein, and learn to accommodate such issues. Residential schools, foster care, incarceration, justice system, housing, funding shortfalls in communities, etc., all this needs to be more well known as to how it still affects Indigenous communities. These organizations need to start studying statistics and the reality Indigenous people are facing which includes lowered mortality rates, social service issues, police issues, education issues, racism in society that is systemic, health care issues, justice system issues, etc. Until the complexity of this is more well known Indigenous students will never stay in these schools as their experience is brushed aside. I see it almost daily and our students just want to have their experiences respected and understood. Education institutions still do a horrible job with this.

Although some progress is being made on Indigenization and Aboriginal cultural events, students indicated that more must be done in all facets of the institutions. This includes the on-campus divisions responsible for providing support services. In this regard, one student in one of the larger institutions stated: "More cultural events, maybe monthly cultural events, would have made my first year less scary and also could build more community for first years. It would have helped build relationships for people who are attending university for the first time." This is in keeping with the prevailing view that limited opportunities for community on campuses for Aboriginal students is one of the factors that accounts for the fact that they do not feel welcomed at many Canadian university campuses (Restoule et al., 2013; Timmons, 2013).

Also highlighted by students in discussions about cultural support was the imbalance in the attention devoted to Aboriginal students and issues related to different Aboriginal nations or peoples. They seemed to suggest that in some instances there was undue emphasis on some particular Aboriginal nations or peoples or on some particular issues based on what was most familiar or comprehensible for the few in divisions mandated to provide guidance and support to students. One Métis student said: "I see that there are areas that require development with respect to cultural competency and Indigenous peoples, but I feel that the University is working to address this. I feel that there needs to be more attention paid to Métis students; it feels very First Nations focused." Furthermore, some students pointed to different emphases on service provision by full- time staff and elders for different types of students even within a particular nation. One student, for example, stressed the need for more support for two-spirit students: "We need more supports for two-spirit students; elders need to be open to those students."

Collectively, the foregoing observations suggest that Aboriginal students see various types of PSE institutions as potential sites of decolonizing processes through sharing of knowledge and culture, especially via the Aboriginal faculty members, guidance counsellors, and elders who can accord authentic and accurate cultural interpretation to students as well as other faculty members and staff (University of Saskatchewan, 2015; Kovach et al., 2014; AUCC, 2010).

Facilitators of PSE Success Expressed by Urban Aboriginal Students

The previous section revealed that many factors inhibit the urban Aboriginal students' success in PSE institutions in Saskatoon, However, there are also factors that facilitate their success. The facilitators can be grouped into family and social support, institutional support, and band financial support.

Family and Social Support

Students interviewed indicated that the essential support needed by many urban Aboriginal students in PSE institutions in Saskatoon is provided largely through their own family as well as their social networks of peers developed while in their programs. This confirms Embleton's (2011) findings on the important ability "to form authentic, respectful and reciprocal relationships with instructors and other students," while also gaining "opportunities to connect with cultural activities, pedagogies and place" (p. 1).

Several students acknowledged that family members and spouses are important support for anyone undertaking PSE regardless of their nationality or ethnic identity. For the most part, almost all the participants mentioned that the motivation to begin their PSE journey was related to their role models or their 'cheer leaders' who are normally their family members and spouses. A student returning to PSE after life-changing experiences expressed the importance of this kind of support as follows:

> What got me to [gives name of institution] – 6 years ago I was in a healing lodge at this point in my life I already put in 11 years of prison. I decided things needed to change and put into action what the elders have been saying to me. I received my day parole and my spouse asked me if I could see myself as a social worker. At that time, I could not see it but I gave it a try anyways, and just learning to believe in myself that I could do this. I had a spouse who had knowledge to help me pursue this career.

The same student spoke powerfully of the experience of being "rejected growing up," which made receiving "an acceptance letter" for postsecondary education "huge." School not only brought the student back to Saskatchewan but, very importantly "brought me home. I found out who I was." Yet another student simply stated, "My older brother is my inspiration [and support].… He has finished his Arts and Science degree and majored in Sociology at U of S."

Several students also indicated their social networks of peers are very important for them. One student explained this type of social network as follows: "Most of our supports are here. We have each other. We are in the same program and we support each other when we are struggling because our families are so far way. I have people to talk to here; it makes coming to school much easier." Tinto (1987) called this type of support a 'critical mass' phenomenon whereby there are enough numbers of individuals from similar groups who can then form a viable community. Another student emphasized the importance of having a supportive community in the context of the cohort sustained through the program:

> Since all our student population from years one to four of the degree were Aboriginal students, we quite often learned as much from our fellow students as from course content and instructors. Northern students helped those of us more urbanized students learn about traditional activities, languages, and philosophies. It greatly enriched our experiences and filled them with love, laughter, and mutual support. Since we did all four years together with the same cohort, we became very close and, I think, we became very attuned to individuals' state of mind, stress levels, and need to reach out to each other at times when we needed help or needed to give help.

The importance of social support was a significant factor not only for individual success but also for success of entire communities. According to another student: "Also a part of it is I want to see our people in more management positions and leadership positions. We are just as capable to do this type of work." Similarly, another student added, "I will be a change agent in my community; I'm a big picture thinker and when it comes to the TRC [calls], I see myself being a part of that change." These statements show the students' desire to succeed together and build strength in numbers so as to be able to make transformational changes for their communities and Canada. Students were not merely aiming for jobs, a conventional narrative for most postsecondary education students; they were thinking about the decolonizing nature of the work they would do and how they might include Indigenous knowledges, and thus enrich their communities when they returned to their communities. One student, for example, admitted to having been "addicted to money" which he could make in the mining sector before learning what "pipelines were doing to our people's land." So he has been smudging and "learning that part of who I am" after experiencing the church's rejection of the sweat lodge as "the devil's work"

Now he is working on learning from "both ways: the Indigenous and Catholic ways" and taking pride in his ability to use his language and make a difference. Another student explained the motivation to make "my daughter proud" and "to change society's perceptions of single mothers." Another acknowledged that "my band . . . is investing in me so I need to bring good things to them with my education." Yet another attested to the fact that community benefits kept "me striving forward in my goals. I also have a responsibility to remember my roots and the work I'm doing."

Institutional Support

Student interviewees emphasized the importance of institutional supports in facilitating their success. Their views are in keeping with the prevailing views in the extant research and literature. It has been shown by both Berger (1992) and Bynum and Thompson (1983) that for students who differ from the majority in any cohort, namely students who are either older, members of minority groups, from low-income or working-class backgrounds, or who have been associated with personal life circumstances (e.g., single parent status, nuclear or extended family responsibilities, employment while attending school), their retention and eventual graduation in PSE programs is associated with institutional resources dedicated to their special needs and lifestyles. Some of these resources consist of specific developmental courses, tutoring programs, and counselling services. Students at the Saskatoon PSEs who have similar profiles mentioned the institutional supports which they feel facilitates their success include access to writing help/tutors especially tutors for mathematics.

Other facilitators identified by Aboriginal students were those all participants, regardless of their circumstances and lifestyle, appreciated and felt were important in their PSE journey at their respective institutions. For instance, students mentioned that the reasons for attending specific PSE institutions was that there was a common impression and ambiance of wanting students to succeed; that is, the faculty and the staff were very student-centred. One student put it this way: "I am so grateful that an Aboriginal professor has given me work space because it provides me with a sense of relief, especially when other Aboriginal students come by to visit or do their work." Other faculty members substitute as family members. As another student said, "My biological family members are deceased, so I have Dr. (female faculty member) who adopted

me." Another student commented on being an introvert before enrolling in the institution, but that during the years in the program that has changed. The student stated that it "has helped me to talk and form relationship with other people and now I have a relationship with this institution. I would say it's really good." Now the student feels that it "is basically a second home." The student was particularly appreciative of one faculty member who taught anti-oppression and anti-racist education and taught him to be proud of his two-spirit identity: "I am more proud of who I am, and I am not feeling ashamed of being a Two-Spirited First Nation male, and it helped me build up my confidence as well."

Students also pointed to a few innovative student services geared to enhance the PSE experience and success of the students. One of these was a special breakfast program at one of the PSE institutions. Students had proposed such a program to their senior administration and it was initiated with the help of local suppliers and food bank. Two students commented on the program as follows:

> The other day we found out that we need a breakfast program and we put in a proposal and right away it was accepted and right away we had a pilot breakfast program. So we don't have to fight for things here and they want to bring the best from the students and they want us to succeed here.

And

> The breakfast program, since I don't have time for … breakfasts really saves my life. I can grab a piece of toast or fruit; it really helps with the focus.

Finally, students underlined the importance of extra-curricular activities, including ceremonial activities. In the institutions connected directly to Aboriginal communities, there were far more activities directed to ceremony. One student put it this way in the context of decolonizing work and taking back community power: "You know as a learning researcher myself I believe in the ceremony and I will always offer smudge and I hope you will too." Another student concluded that "we just need our instructors to be open to our indigenous knowledge and experiences and honour that."

Students also mentioned professional development activities related to various programs that helped them learn about governance, employment opportunities, and volunteering, among others. A student elaborated the exciting offerings geared towards achieving future career success:

> Going through the Business program, our program coordinator really supported us learning with other off-campus events. They will sponsor "breakfast bites" with the Saskatoon Aboriginal Professional Association or for example we went to the Brett Wilson Pitch Party, [where I was able] to meet him, [and we also went] … to the ABEX awards. These are extra curculular but they really helped me grow as a business person.

Students in the student associations also mentioned the support received by the institutional units responsible for Aboriginal programs and advancement make them grow and reach their own student-centred mandates:

> I do think the Indigenous Graduate Student Council (IGSC) has been able to make good space for me to connect with other Indigenous students. I think the student centre (Gordon Oakes Red Bear Student Centre) is a big reason why that rift can be filled because you have students together in the same space. The Gordon Oakes Red Bear is very much interested in supporting with funds towards the IGCS to do our events. It seems there is more funding because [gives name of a person] always asks us if we need food—they will pay for it; if we need to book space, they will do it and they are interested in collaboration and supporting us.

Financial Support

Financial support is the most significant and persistent concern for many PSE students in Canada generally (CCL, 2009a; Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, 2010; George, 2008; Malatest & Associates & Stonechild, 2008). While the students in this study had a variety of sources of funds, those with band funding explained that this is an important facilitating factor for their PSE journey. As one student explained:

> My band sponsors my tuition cost. They always [do], as long as you apply. We [the band] are in a good shape, so I have always been supported. For undergrad, you get some extra money for living expense, while for grad it's just tuition….. There is no cap but there is a budget. They pretty much accept everyone who apply I would imagine. I think there is me and maybe one other graduate student right now. My band is not that big; there are 1700 people.

Another student also shared details regarding what they received and the sense of security the funding provides: "I receive funding from my band [which has a population of about 1100]. It's about $1150 a month for a living allowance and they pay for my tuition and books. They do have emergency funding if I need to go back home they would help me out for transport." Even though this is the case, the student added: "It was easy for me to get funding. At the time I was looking for funding there weren't many people looking for funding. Now, I have noticed, this year, there are students struggling to get funding because there is a lot….." As more First Nations students are recruited to attend universities, especially at graduate levels, the dollars at the band administration levels get thinned (Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, 2010), leading to the need for PSE institutions to provide more bursaries and scholarships. In addition, the financial sustainability of this source of funding for students and the variability of funds must be studied more closely over time.

Many Métis students have a different challenge as they do not receive any financial resources from community governments (AUCC, 2010; Bear Spirit Consulting, 2007; CCL, 2009b; Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, 2010; Environics Institute, 2010; Mendelson, 2006; R.A. Malatest & Associates, 2004). In a scan of postsecondary factors affecting Aboriginal students in Canada, Wilson and Battiste (2011) noted,

> While First Nation students with status and band membership and Inuit may be able to access some funding from AANDC, Métis students and other Aboriginal students without status must rely entirely on their own resources, Canada Student Loans, or other bursaries, scholarships, loans and other types of funding. Aboriginal students are less likely to be able to access employment income, personal savings or family funds to support their education than non-Aboriginal students, Aboriginal students are also more likely than non-Aboriginal students to find it difficult to apply or qualify for loans and other funding, in part because of lack of information, but also because they are more likely to come from low income families or to have little experience with loans and other forms of credit (p. 36).

One student elaborated on these issues as follows:

> I think major barriers to success could be imagined like a Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. That is, first you need to have the resources to take care of your physiological needs. You need to be able to pay the bills and cost of education, have good nutritional food, transportation, and such things to live every day. Most of us live dollar to dollar and have to rely on family if there is an emergency cost. I think a lot of Aboriginal students are older than a typical student and have children and family to look after. In my case, I am a part-time parent and barely have enough

money to live on myself. My family members often need help and I don't have any money to travel to help them. I don't want to trouble them by telling them I don't have much money.

Inhibitors of PSE Success Identified by Advisors in Urban PSE Institutions

PSE advisors also identified the inhibitors or impediments that urban Aboriginal students face in their respective postsecondary educational institutions. The factors they identified are gleaned from their respective experiences interacting with such students in their day-to-day work in four PSE institutions in Saskatoon (see Table 2). One advisor commented on the extent to which the services they offer are themselves part of "a paradigm shift. Part of that is the outside impression of the value of education—the value from getting those certificates and diplomas. . . . it is an opportunity for change in lifestyles and history because it hasn't been too long that Indigenous people have even been allowed to attend postsecondary [institutions].... So the full value of education hasn't even been fully realized yet. That's what we are part of changing."

Racism

Advisors reported that racism creates the most impediments to students and explained why it is difficult to overcome the observed racism in PSE institutions. First and foremost, the participants explained how the separation of programs for Aboriginal students away from the other largely non-Aboriginal students in larger PSE institutions can create unintended consequences, and that despite good intentions they do not necessarily insulate students from the adverse effects of racism. The programs referred to were of three kinds: advancement, equity-based, and transition. Both the advancement and transition programs are targeted for Aboriginal students and geared towards bridging the differences in academic preparation facing some of the Aboriginal students on entry to university (AUCC, 2010; Walton, 1996).

An achievement program acts as a stepping stone into university level courses. For example, at University of Saskatchewan, an Aboriginal Student Achievement Program (ASAP) is specifically designed for those Aboriginal students who have been identified as exceptional upon entering university but require more time to acclimatize to the university's conventional academic demands and styles of learning. In the ASAP program, students take course offerings

under a framework of a learning community in their first year whereby, in addition to the selected courses, they also meet weekly with upper-year peer mentors and connect with Aboriginal role models (College of Arts and Science—University of Saskatchewan, 2017). Equity-based programs are those professional programs whereby a set number of seats are reserved for Aboriginal applicants. A transition program is offered for students under 21 years of age who are interested in joining university, but whose marks fall short of the established University entrance requirements. Such transition programs generally offer a mixture of high school courses and university courses through a special admission channel into University (See University of Saskatchewan, n.d). At the University of Saskatchewan, such programs also utilize the learning community model for some few selected applicants. Although the three named programs were all intended to close the education gap for Aboriginal PSE students (Assembly of First Nations, 2010; Kumashiro, 2000), advisors have acknowledged that varying facets and degrees of racism exist in these programs. One participant stated:

> Our students face racism. And I don't know how to deal with that in this institution that will help the student. The onus is always on the student to prove it. It's so hard to pin down. They feel it and they say I know it is there. How do we in our areas deal with it? I don't' think we have a process that is meaningful to deal with it.

Another advisor said: "Among the departments we are seeing that there is some disdain in having Aboriginal and Achievement in the same sentence. There are institutional walls around what Aboriginal programs are." Such thinking is targeted by Universities Canada's (2017a) Inclusive Excellence program. On a similar note another adviser explained how the students are seen "as problems" for being in programs aimed at upgrading their credentials to becoming fully admitted to university programs or participating in achievement programs because some persons within the institution do not want to acknowledge that they have genuine needs as well as abilities. In underscoring the point, that advisor cited the following example:

> We have had a forum on campus with upper-year students and they said they haven't experienced racism on campus, which is great. But we don't know where their bar is set up in terms of implicit versus explicit racism, so we don't know for sure. We have also had a talk with upper-year science students and some of them felt that they had been discriminated against by instructors and teaching assistants because they were classified as 'problem students' and not students with their own independent [and genuine] needs.

A feeling of undue surveillance was reported by one advisor who had helped a student file an appeal resulting from feeling "that the instructors were watching her more closely because she was Aboriginal. She felt she needed to go above and beyond to prove herself, and it's more pressure." Another advisor reported "the culture of school sometimes doesn't align with [students'] own Indigenous culture," giving the example of "an assertiveness class" that clashed with an upbringing "that taught to be humble."

Cultural safety programming or separation of targeted groups in programming, while vitally important to Aboriginal students, has had the unintended effect of increasing the distance between other faculty and students, and students from each other which increases stereotyping and racism. Association of Universities and Colleges Canada (AUCC) offered in 2010 an understated recommendation for a cross-cultural awareness approach to deal with these relational issues and changing institutional climate as well as reviewing ethical practice. Later in 2015, the organization now called Universities Canada agreed to advance and change the climate of postsecondary institutions through more elaborated measures. Among the principles on Indigenous education were these: to "provid[e] greater exposure and knowledge for non-Indigenous students on the realities, histories, cultures and beliefs of Indigenous people in Canada" and to "recognize the importance of fostering intercultural engagement among Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, faculty and staff" (Universities Canada, 2015a).

In the same year, TRC specifically referenced over 80 educational directives in their Calls to Action, yet two specific calls to higher education implicate teacher education within universities:

> 62. We call upon the federal, provincial, and territorial governments, in consultation and collaboration with Survivors, Aboriginal peoples, and educators, to: i. Make age-appropriate curriculum on residential schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal peoples' historical and contemporary contributions to Canada a mandatory education requirement for Kindergarten to Grade Twelve students. ii. Provide the necessary funding to post-secondary institutions to educate teachers on how to integrate Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods into classrooms.

> 63. We call upon the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada to maintain an annual commitment to Aboriginal education issues, including:

> ii. Sharing information and best practices on teaching curriculum related to residential schools and Aboriginal history.

iii. Building student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect.

iv. Identifying teacher-training needs relating to the above." (p. 8)

Though useful and important are the initiatives, neither the Universities Canada nor TRC address sufficiently the depth of embedded systemic factors related to constructions of race that underpin colonial constructions so damaging to Indigenous students and communities. TRC's calls to action called for universities to enact intercultural understanding and to that end, one of the academic advisors urged the university to "have faculty development that ensures they receive cultural competency training with Indigenous students and contexts, understand the safety needs of students of diverse cultural backgrounds, humility to their own cultural knowledge and privileges, and job responsibilities that expect respecting the students." Other researchers in Aboriginal education have advocated for instructors with necessary skills in decolonization concepts and understanding of the complexity Aboriginal students face to be the ones leading these programs for them to be effective (Battiste, 2013, 2016; Friesen & Friesen, 2002; Kanu, 2005; Lipka, 2002; Longboat, n.d.; McAlpine, 2001; St Denis, 2007; Young, 1996).

Equity-based programming remains clearly an important feature of balancing access to PSE for Aboriginal students. Specifically, to qualify for the equity-based programs, students need to self-declare their Aboriginal status to gain the reserved seats. To reiterate, self-declaration in such situations is also a point of contention that can lead to racism in the classes. One caution noted is that this route may single out students for being accepted through a channel that is viewed by mainstream students or some instructors as an inferior or entitled process for acceptance into competitive or highly acclaimed programs. Such a concern was stated by one advisor: "Our students need to feel like they belong in all parts of the institution [even the equity-based programs]. Right now the students are feeling the effects of racism. I probably have someone every other week in my office talking about what they are experiencing." Another participant concurred with this statement:

> For regular Arts and Science students, it really doesn't have a lot of
> consequences to it. It's when you get into the Medicine, Law and Nursing,
> which are very competitive and conservative programs whereby both
> inside and outside the program, self-identification can have negative
> consequences. Like, I heard that medical students, if they are in a hospital

and a medical doctor hears they are FN all of a sudden there is a look of what are you doing here? You got in through affirmative action and all that.

Institutions must develop the needed leadership and education for those students. Toward that end, they must ensure that faculty and students understand equity as a necessary program for equity-seeking groups of students to mitigate the effects of systemic racism. To be effective, this matter needs to be addressed proactively to ensure students who are members of these equity-seeking groups do not feel any shame and burden for being in these programs.

Deficiency in Understanding Complexity Faced by Indigenous Youth

In the assessments and views of advisors, it is exceptionally important to ensure the faculty responsible for educating Aboriginal students and all other divisions of the institution rendering services to them are cognizant and possess expertise in navigating the complexity entailed in the residential schools legacy, intergenerational trauma, the ongoing cycles of trauma, and the multiple discourses that have pathologized Indigenous students and peoples over time (Orlowski, 2011; Paquette & Fallon, 2010). This is important because it is well established that trauma which affects feelings of people about themselves caused by the process of oppression and repression in schools has indeed created blocks to learning (Battiste, 2002; George, 2008). One advisor reinforced the point in this way: "A lot of Aboriginal students have a lot of challenges and they are much intermixed as a lot of my colleagues here have stated. They are complex and inter-related challenges, which are both personal and systemic in nature." As George (2008) demonstrated, because of such traumatic experiences, both personal and systemic, and because they compound one another, when Aboriginal students enter PSE, their first goals become about changing their learning attitudes from the oppressed view they have constantly experienced.

Two advisors gave exemplary narrations of what they see as an ultimate barrier for Aboriginal PSE students towards achieving their maximum potential:

A big issue I see is personal issues they are having while at home or in their community. Our students experience a lot of traumatic events and things that shake their academic experience. These are all one-on-one cases and I offer a listening ear to find out where they are at and what can be done going forward. Much of these issues revolve around issues of death in their community or family, violence, or life instability (even

diseases). One only need to check statistics on issues in Indigenous communities to see these are common occurrences and have to be factored into dealing with their educational experiences.

And

A lot of our people come from significant barriers in life. It's very difficult to see what success will look like. I think university staff need to take decolonizing courses; they need to go and visit [gives a name of a professor teaching this at University of Saskatchewan]. They will learn to recognize that our people are human and that this place is filled with too much racism and we use way too many dehumanizing tactics to make people feel uncomfortable.

By the same token, the failure to understand the on-going effects of traumatic experiences have on Aboriginal students, which stem from the overarching consequences of colonialism (Cote-Meek, 2014; George, 2008; Goulet & Goulet, 2014; TRC, 2015b), is a revelation of how far from reconciliation PSE institutions are, as explained by one other advisor: "Many academic institutions talk about reconciliation and Indigenization, but have zero clue how these [concepts] relate to day-to-day life for the Indigenous student." This advisor went on to elaborate:

Faculty and student services have to wake up to the reality of Indigenous communities and issues therein, and learn to accommodate issues such as residential schools, foster care, lowered mortality rates, social service issues, police issues, education issues, racism in society that is systemic, health care issues, justice system and incarceration issues, housing, funding shortfalls in communities, etc., all this needs to be more well-known as to how it still affects Indigenous communities [including the PSE students].

Therefore, PSE institutional machinery needs to understand these underlying issues with a critical view and recognize how they are impacting the aspirations and motivations of their Aboriginal students. Other specific inhibitors as discussed below stem from these overarching discourses of colonialism and traumatic experiences (Battiste, 2013; 2016; Cote-Meek, 2014; Longboat, n.d.).

Insufficient Understanding of the Differences and Similarities between Métis and First Nations Students

Some advisors also noted that insufficient understanding of differences and similarities between Métis and First Nations students also inhibits the PSE success of Aboriginal students. While the realities of limited educational support cut across many Aboriginal communities, there has been

a recognition that not enough is being done to understand the similarities and differences between Métis population and their First Nations counterparts when it comes to specific inequalities in PSE. Part of the problem is that the lumping of all Aboriginal students' issues together may sometimes obfuscate specific issues and options. In this study, the advisors acknowledged the additional challenges or hurdles Métis students face, compared to their First Nations counterparts, because of their precarious nature with no connections to community governments that are available to the latter. One of these challenges or hurdles is the limited opportunities to learn historical materials relevant to Métis heritage in the general space created for Aboriginal students as a whole. One advisor commented on this issue: "The support we need for our young people is to provide the [historical] context. They need to have the history and learn what their people [i.e., ancestors, elders, and other members of their communities] fought for and struggled for."

Another advisor added that the cultural student identity challenges that some Aboriginal students face constitute significant obstacles to their success. That advisor noted that this is particularly true of Métis students living in large urban centres who, unlike both some of their Métis counterparts living in smaller remote communities along with some of their First Nations counterparts living in remote reserve communities, do not have either a strong sense of their cultural identities or a strong connection to their respective communities and their relatives who live there. Furthermore, some noted that such problems are compounded for Métis students because the provincial government does not believe it has any jurisdictional responsibilities towards supporting the Métis students beyond the Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program (SUNTEP).

One of the advisors who pointed to these jurisdictional issues noted that it creates a counterproductive division or segregation of Métis and First Nations students. In the words of that advisor, such divisions are counterproductive: "We have a need to see more interaction between First Nations and the Métis Nation. Friendships are formed naturally, but there is a gap in knowledge with respect to the historical background of each community and a lack of guidance/direction from the leadership of the respectful colleges etc. to create environments for meaningful interaction between the groups." The educational institutions could play an important

role in facilitating the important linkages about the diverse cultural and historical aspects of the First Nations and Métis people to benefit the students. Two advisors made notable observations on this matter. One stated:

> There is a different dynamic being played out with the Métis students than the First Nations. They come from a band, but Métis are coming from all over and finding their identity through SUNTEP. They have their own great relationships as you know, but we have to be great role models, uncles and cultural carriers.

The other advisor made these points about the need for more knowledge and understanding of Métis identity:
> We could have a program for Métis students to get them through but it is their identity as Métis that is important. The students have Métis lineage and sometimes that is quite removed from their lives. So we become like their Métis uncles or aunties who offer them an idea of what it means to be Métis. They need to know more about First Nations too. But there is not as much connection there. It is the way the world of the Métis is. There is some…ignorance…they don't know about each other.

The consensus among them was that in the absence of more information and more understanding about such matters, both Métis and First Nations students will not be sufficiently enlightened or united.

Cultural Identity, Cultural Ambiguity, and Cultural Confusion

A particularly significant inhibitor for Aboriginal students is what can be termed "cultural ambiguity" or "cultural confusion" because they do not have sufficient clarity on their cultural roots and cultural identity. Several advisors suggested that some Aboriginal students were living in what might be termed either a "hybridized cultural space" that consisted of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal dimensions or a "cultural limbo" that was neither mainstream nor Aboriginal, and they were unclear about their cultural identity and where they fit. In the words of one advisor:
> What we are seeing …is that they are coming with the academic credentials and really high marks, but they don't have the culture. They are asking us in the interviews, could you please teach me about who I am. I know a little bit about it but I need to know more and this is why I have applied here.

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal researchers and educators have long noted the effect of assimilation and cognitive imperialism in education on Aboriginal student mental and emotional health (Battiste, 1986; Graveline, 1998; Haig-Brown, 1988; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991), but it is the effect of cultural ambiguity that is the most distinguishing characteristic of contemporary assimilation throughout schools and universities. While some programs such as SUNTEP and ITEP can offer students a critical mass of Aboriginal students with self-declared Aboriginal heritage, the diversity of experiences they bring with them from home, communities, provincial schools, colonization, Christianization, and urbanization make it now difficult to find a critical mass of students with deeply embedded Aboriginal identities connected to ancestral languages, Indigenous knowledges from the land, and understanding of the rich histories, oral and cultural traditions surrounding the First Nations and Métis peoples of Saskatchewan. This dilemma creates a challenge to reconciliation efforts, given the role of education in forcing assimilation on Aboriginal peoples and in embedding racialized discourses, narratives, and stereotypes among all other citizens of Saskatchewan and beyond. What roles should educational institutions take on under the TRC calls to action to reverse, repair, or transition Indigeneity into more authentic and transformative ways that support cultural understanding, learning, and engagements with Indigenous peoples and elders as well as self-determination and rebuilding efforts?

Authenticating Indigenous Lineage and Self-identification for Equity-based Programs: A Sensitive and Difficult Job

PSE administrators and advisors also noted that authenticating Indigenous lineage and self-identification as Aboriginal persons to qualify for equity-based programs is another inhibitor of student success. There are several potential reasons for this. First, authenticating lineage is problematical for some students who lack the necessary documentation from being adopted, or from having no established ancestral Indigenous community to authenticate their identities. Second, self-identification may contribute to fostering racist discourses among non-Aboriginal faculty or students who do not understand or are opposed to equity-based programs. Third, offering seats in equity-programs to deserving students tends to be a contentious issue for various reasons, not the least of which is some of the complexity surrounding Aboriginal identity. As one

advisor explained, at times it is a difficult and sensitive job to determine who is 'Indigenous.'
One advisor explained some of this complexity:

> The reality is some students have been adopted, and others have had their
> identities hidden by the family, and others have grown up in the urban
> context. They need to be able to explore that [identity] in safe and
> respectful ways; but we have had four students in the last few years who
> had no Indigenous blood and we have had to turn them away because we
> have only 10 seats in our college for Indigenous students and we have to
> be sure they are held by Indigenous students. It makes it difficult, even
> though I do have to get to know them and ask difficult questions about
> their relations, and communities, it is still challenging.

Since the equity-based programming policy at the University of Saskatchewan was approved by
Elders, communities, leaders, lawyers, and Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission (personal
communications), it is seen as a policy that has passed at minimum the expected barriers to its
implementation, as well as one that does not impinge on human rights. Regardless of this legal
qualification and social license to apply it, one advisor underscored the sensitivity surrounding
authentication of lineage and self-declaration of identity and the difficulty for some advisors and
administrators to apply and enforce it: "It is still not an easy process and I don't like going to
someone and saying how are you authentically Indigenous when I know you aren't." Another
advisor also reported how common it is to get into a difficult situation even if the policy has been
vetted because it is only through implementation that it becomes evident how difficult it can be
to prove authenticity:

> Normally we receive a status card or a Métis card or a letter from an
> organization saying they have community affiliation. Say an Anishinaabe
> goes out and falls in love with a Newfoundlander, has a child, and the
> child has a mixed blood and does not have an organization to go to for
> verification. We will look at genealogy and letters from chiefs, but then
> some chiefs have their biases, in that case for such reason the person is not
> Indigenous.

More must be done to eliminate racism that is at the root of opposition to specific programs
geared towards increasing Aboriginal students' access to PSE, and more must also be done to
protect the students from unintended consequences of the application of a policy which is
designed to operationalize the treaty right to education in the 21st century and courts

interpretation of who is Métis. Institutions need to keep a keen eye on such important matters to attain their stated goals and projected success for Aboriginal students.

One additional maxim that has been frequently reiterated to universities regarding choices or decisions about who is or is not Aboriginal is that Aboriginal peoples need to be defining who is a member of their collective nations, whether it is First Nations, Métis, or Inuit. As noted by Boyer and McCaslin (2009) in their study of Métis and postsecondary education note, Métis "need to define their own terminology which captures their *sui generis* cultural perspectives and understandings; Initiatives must be consistent and supportive toward Métis inherent right to self-determination" (p.25). Identities can be individual and thus selective of many diverse determinants of those identities, but when Aboriginal peoples have suffered collectively with discrimination, harassment, and subjugation for those identities, it is necessary to remedy those collectively through progressive and institutionalized policies and practices that support the self-determination of these peoples.

Insufficient Support for Indigenous Languages

PSE advisors also identified the insufficient valuing and resourcing of Aboriginal languages as a factor that hinders the educational success of Aboriginal students. Despite the growing interest in Aboriginal languages by Aboriginal students, the limited resources devoted to teaching such courses has become an obstacle for them in learning their mother tongues.

This factor was identified by many advisors whose position includes responsibilities for cultural awareness, advancement, and revitalization. Their perceptions demonstrate a failure to meet the TRC's call on education restructuring for Aboriginal people (Call to Action 10). According to the TRC, there is a recognized right for the protection and preservation of Aboriginal languages, including the teaching of such language as credit courses at PSE.

Specifically, it was noted that limited resources dedicated by PSE institutions to this venture causes slow progress towards revitalization of the Michif language. As a result, students who opt to learn their language are not able to reach a proficiency level that they could have if sufficient resources were available. One advisor within the unity that supports Métis students explained

this inhibiting factor: "I noted that the academic level of students is really high, but there is no interest in learning Michif; I mean the classes are dynamic and good, but the students are not learning it because it is like Greek to them. There are too few speakers and opportunities are limited." Another advisor also noted similar limitations: "SUNTEP students are learning Michif for the first time and then are expected to teach fundamental Michif in the classroom with elementary students." This participant went on to explain, "We have one fluent Michif speaker [names person], who is always encouraging the students to continue to learn the language but he is only available for limited periods of time."

There were plenty of calls for supporting Michif as well as support offered to other Indigenous languages. In the words of one participant: "We have no support for other Michif dialects, Dene, Nehiyawewin (Cree), Nakawe (Saulteaux), and other Indigenous languages. There are [possibly] speakers of many Indigenous languages on campus but knowledge and interaction among them is rare." To emphasize the observed need in supporting Indigenous languages, another advisor said: "There should be a push for Indigenous languages of Saskatchewan. Need changes to get the capacity, like it might mean running small classes of 10 people. Languages should be alive here. No reason why they shouldn't have the same footing as French and English." Pushing for Indigenous language courses is necessary not only for generating more ideal teacher candidates who will be bicultural and bilingual (Indigenous language and English/French), but also, as argued by Taylor, Crago, & McAlpine (2001), for adding impetus to incorporate heritage culture into mainstream education so as to avoid making it exclusive to some programs. By offering lndigenous language courses broadly, such languages will be transmitted rapidly and be part of curricula. Additionally, it is important to incorporate formal language classes because most Indigenous languages are becoming vulnerable to loss. It is also particularly significant that the TRC (2015b) (Education, Call to action #16) called on universities "to create university and college degree and diploma programs in Aboriginal languages" (p.2) as part of their reconciliation efforts.

Insufficient Services for Learning Disabilities

Learning disabilities constitute another major inhibitor of the educational success of Aboriginal students. During the research process for this study, this particular factor only became obvious after those who provided the related support services were queried on this specific matter by the researchers. This shows that some important issues do not receive sufficient thought or attention even by those who are at the forefront of advising and assisting students. It also shows that more knowledge is gathered on various types of services when sub-categories of support services are treated separately, rather than being lumped together into a single general type of service.

Very little literature is available on the supports or accommodations for Aboriginal PSE students with learning disabilities (Batsford-Mermans, 2015). This is especially true of the barriers they face due to lack of special instructional accommodations. These instructional accommodations are supposed to be provided to PSE students upon proof of assessments of their exceptionalities while in elementary or secondary school, prior to entry to PSE. However, not all band schools manage to secure the *Special Education Program* funding, which is generally used to cover the costs associated with student assessments, salaries and benefits of special education staff, and purchase of assistive technology to be used by the students (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2013; Batsford-Mermans, 2015). Because of this inadequacy in the availability of funds, Batsford-Mermans (2015, p. 50) states that "Aboriginal students attending on-reserve schools may not be receiving all of the special education services that they would receive if they were attending an off-reserve school." Such discrepancies leave some students unaware of what they need in terms of help and their learning disabilities remain unattended and continue to have an adverse effect during their PSE studies. One advisor commented on this current reality:

> My experience working with people with disabilities is 15 years or more.
> Through my experiences, I know there is a big gap for those students as
> far as something being identified early. More than 10% of the population
> has a learning disability, so if you have a class of 30 students you are
> looking at least 6 to 8 that are struggling with anxiety or ADHD. My
> thought is most of the students that come here have had some past
> experience at some point with education that was not good and it continues
> [that way] because of learning disabilities.

Some advisors have started to suspect there may be many students suffering from learning disabilities who have not received the attention they needed at the right time. One of the advisors emphasized this point: "They may have a learning disability that they have not known before. They do not have funding to get the assessment—they need a pot of money to get the assessment they need. Disability Services does not provide this without a cost. I run into this quite a bit actually." Two advisors gave examples of when they have noted the consequences of such learning disabilities:

> The kind of need that comes at this level with students who have functioned well with an issue and then the high stress and multiple projects activate an issue that they have up to this point not recognized or had not needed to fix because they have been able to cope up with until this time.

And

> For example, if the assigned reading is not going to make sense, they will get frustrated. They try as they finally make sense of the reading; then it's time to go to the next reading or concept or the next test. So the student doesn't really have time to grasp and process what they are supposed to have learned. Those are the effects they face.

The lack of funding to cover the assessment charges seems to be the leading cause behind the unknown prevalence of the situation. According to another advisor, "I would like to see more help for students with these needs. It could be a student may need a learning assessment and they can't get it paid." Another advisor mentioned the steps they take to help students:

> Students are coming from high school and they have never been tested and we know there is some kind of learning disability and they haven't gotten the help they need. The Indigenous staff on campus see the exact same thing. In order for students to be tested, it costs $800. Just recently, because of being proactive we are able to go to the Vice Provost and say these are some of the challenges; is it possible to have a loan for the students until they have their student loans?"

Insufficient and Inappropriate Support Services for Housing

Lack of adequate and affordable housing was also identified as an inhibitor of success for PSE Aboriginal students. They also noted that it is a source of ongoing stress for many Saskatoon-based PSE students who are also "navigating that internal struggle of leaving home and loved

ones" in order "to educate themselves so they can return home . . .; they have to sacrifice for a year or two," as one advisor put it. Within this theme, two topics were discussed: the needs of students with children and the fact that many of the students do not know where to look for safe housing options. One advisor noted, "Some Aboriginal first-year students do have family with kids and need housing options for families. Few institutions provide undergraduate students with accommodation" that is adequate and affordable to meet the housing needs of their nuclear family unit. This lack of housing was also mentioned as a confirmation of a well-known fact that urban Aboriginal communities face issues of discrimination and communication of housing availability (Boyer & McCaslin, 2009; Carter & Polevychok, 2004; UAKN, 2012). In the words of one advisor: "I think possibly what I find in this environment is that the students aren't … well informed about housing when they relocate here." The advisor added that all students, including those with children, should be provided with guidance and support in finding adequate and appropriate housing.

The foregoing observations lead one to question whether the institutions have exhausted all the channels of communicating to the students, and especially in-coming new students, about the support services offered. Not knowing where to turn to for help has been noted as one of the barriers of successful experience at PSE (Timmons, 2013). Not informing students of the supports available to them leaves them unsure of the type of support offered, makes them feel that they are not supported, and leads them to conclude that they are not worthy of institutional support (Wilson & Battiste, 2011).

Band Funding: A Quagmire

Advisors also pointed to the challenges that funding poses for Aboriginal students, and particularly those who depend on funding from Aboriginal government funding programs. Major sources of funding for Aboriginal students come from band funding/ postsecondary student support program (PSSSP), student loans, scholarships, awards, and bursaries, underscoring the dependence of students on public funds (Sloane-Seale, Wallace, & Levin, 2000, p. 361). This is because poverty within the Aboriginal communities has limited the finances that students can direct towards their PSE (Battiste, 2013; Wilson & Battiste, 2010). However, according to Williams (2000), making a case for funding is usually about underscoring and amplifying the

negative aspects of First Nations students thus further entrenching the negative stereotypes (p. 144). This amplification is the extension of what has been labeled the 'study of lack' (Findlay et al., 2016; Newhouse, et al., 2012; Patrick, 2014), which seeks to highlight the deficiencies and dependencies of First Nation students even though it is well established that there are inequities in funding for Aboriginal youth for PSE. These inequalities result from the fact that most financial aid or support that is available to Aboriginal students is not adequate for their real-life financial needs (Bear Spirit Consulting, 2007; Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, 2010; Malatest, 2004).

For instance, the Assembly of First Nation (2010, p.16) showed that, "The PSSSP program provided $292 million to approximately 22,000 students to fund the costs of tuition, books, fees, transportation, and living expenses in 2008-09 as per federal official reports. When averaged out this amounts to about $13,273 per student per year. In reality, however, the annual cost of an undergraduate degree in 2008-2009 was about $19,588. Based on that cost assumption, a four-year degree would cost about $80,498 for a student living away from home." The AFN (n.d.) also indicated that the number of First Nations students funded through what was the Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (now Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada - INAC) PSE program, which includes the PSSSP, has steadily declined from 22,938 in 1997 to 18,729 in 2009. Currently, the capped PSE program at 2% does not meet the real needs of First Nations students (Assembly of First Nations, 2010; AFN, n.d; CCL, 2009a, 2009b). This financing deficiency has been a root cause of a quagmire that bands face in establishing funding amounts and application quotas. This well-known fact has led to bureaucratic and unclear funding disbursement for PSE qualifying students as practiced by their bands. As one advisor said, "I have been here for 20 years and I see it hasn't changed, and students are still dealing with it." This advisor went on to explain as follows:

> When you look at any First Nation who comes from reserves, funding is
> sometimes very difficult to get and has nothing to do with the person but
> the FN band. They have stipulations and different point of view within
> different First Nations on deciding who has funding, and that's something
> I have tried to… deal with [in helping] First Nations [students] regarding
> their PSE funding. When I get the copies of their funding applications and
> scrutinize them, and sometimes I find they have idiotic stipulation which
> are unbearable for any student.

Advisors in PSE have been placed in difficult positions of trying to navigate the highly demanding and ever confusing applications that do more harm than helping the students seeking band financial aid. Additionally, some students are asked by their bands to first seek outside financial sources beyond the band funding so as to decrease applicants within the PSSSP allotted funding, making students endure additional hardships. One advisor went on to give an example of these unfair and bureaucratic practices: "I had one student who applied for funding from her band and she was told she needed to apply to other places before they would help. That means student loans, and how many times do you hear student loans rejecting anyone? I don't want to be very condescending or ignorant, I find that is just a wall existing for students."

Métis students are unique in being racialized and stigmatized but not considered for the government-funded education afforded to First Nations. This fact creates burdens on Métis students that are different from First Nations students. Boyer and McCaslin wrote:

> The fact that the Métis student must incur large debts has debilitating effects on access to education at a postsecondary institute and many are prevented from going on to longer programs such as engineering, medicine, or postgraduate because of the prohibitive costs. (2009, p. 22)

Since Métis students do not have access to sufficient financial resources, they often turn to loans, like the Canada Student Loan Program, but the layers of complicated processes and rules make postsecondary education highly prohibitive for many if not most Métis students. Boyer and McCaslin reported:

> In today's society, Métis university students that obtain university degrees can exit the system with extreme debt loads and financial repayment burdens of $750 or more per month for 10 years. This has a chilling effect on other members of their community from following the same educational pathway. (2009, p. 23)

Challenges Faced by First Generation Students

Advisors also noted that being a first generation Aboriginal student can be an inhibitor for success within the PSE system. In the words of one advisor:

> Generally, when we have conversation about student success, it centres on challenges that many Aboriginal students face, and many that are discussed are within the cultural misalignment between Aboriginal communities and university as an institution and those are very true. We see a lot of students who are struggling with the transition or first-time university students/first generation students. Even though the parents may be very supportive in wanting them to come here, a large institution like this can be very challenging.

While having a parent with a university degree is said to be a factor in student success (Zhao 2012), the experience of having a university-educated parent or one with any type of postsecondary education is not a common experience among Aboriginal students. Some studies in Aboriginal education have looked at how navigating the university services is an impediment for first generation Aboriginal students to attend PSE, especially for those whose families are located on reserves or in Métis communities in remote areas (Boyer & McCaslin, 2009).

Low educational attainment among Aboriginal students has been identified with the residential schools and colonial experiences in education:

> The families where educational attainment norms are low tend to reproduce the low attainment in their children…This may account in part for the situation in First Nations communities where residential schools had the effect of reducing educational attainment and creating a negative attitude to schooling. (White, et. al., 2009, p. 6)

While the past has definitely affected the present in terms of structures, policies, attitudes, and practices, Battiste (2013) has also noted that the current renaissance of Indigenous peoples as evidenced by Idle No More, successful court cases advancing Aboriginal and treaty rights, and a small but growing cohort of Aboriginal scholars, teachers, and leaders is not only advancing a change in attitudes about education, about self-determination and sovereignty, but is also fueling the expansion of Aboriginal teachings and inspiring theses and dissertations drawing on Indigenous knowledges and languages. The advancement and policy changes related to Indigenous knowledges and languages at the PSE level is having an impact on the determination of men, women, and youth, so much so as to have

increased Aboriginal populations at every level of PSE education. These have created and expanded opportunities for academic and support staff to learn about Aboriginal issues, perspectives, and cultures.

The Aboriginal staff we interviewed shared aspirations of hope for and admiration of the resilience of their students, and above all the importance of relationships that build on both. When programs are small, students have opportunities to build strong relationships with each other and the faculty and staff that promote their feelings of belonging, safety, community, and a continuing desire to succeed. It also helps the faculty and staff to learn about and support the student who is going through difficult situations, whether from home communities or in their daily lives. Having many opportunities to develop the intimate relationships and meaningful interaction is essential (whether these are academic, cultural, spiritual, or social events) to the encouragement and growth of students. And student stories confirmed their resilience when, for instance, one student recalled early struggles with feeling "belittled and sometimes discriminated because of my background" but had learned to advise others "to work hard and always be confident of who you are as an individual." Then they might experience the institution as "a second home," as he had.

Facilitators of PSE Success Identified by Advisors

The PSE advisors identified several facilitators of success for Aboriginal students attending PSE institutions in Saskatoon—many of which are already implicit as the corollary of inhibitors listed. The most notable facilitators are listed and explained below.

Early Warning & Strategic Withdrawal

One advisor pointed to the importance of an early warning and strategic withdrawal approach for students experiencing academic challenges in any course. The advisor explained that this approach was beneficial in helping students maintain a positive record that would not lead to

being required to withdraw: "We have an advisory model, with an early warning and withdrawal policy to try and save student records." The advisor noted that if this strategy is not used, students would not only fail the course(s), but they would find it very difficult to get the funding required to continue in a subsequent year. If they were required to withdraw more than once, they would not even be able to get permission to resume their studies at that particular institution.

Financial Support for Students

Many advisors pointed to the importance of providing financial support for students to help them cover some of their costs/expenses (e.g., housing, food, child care*).* One advisor commented on the value of funding programs established for subsidizing living costs. In pointing to one such program, the advisor noted providing a housing subsidy of $200 per month for students who do not live in one of the student residences on campus. Another advisor explained how the cost of books can be prohibitive to some students and added that there are some programs for book vouchers. For example, "The [College of Arts and Science at UofS] gives out bookcards for our bookstore for $ 300 per term for ASAP enrolled students." This program is part of emergency loans and grants initiatives to lighten the burden of ever-increasing PSE expenses.

Financial Planning

Another advisor underscored the importance of helping students with financial planning. That advisor noted that one of the institutions has incorporated financial planning as one of the programming initiatives to help Aboriginal students to use their limited financial resource more effectively in covering various costs, and particularly the costs related to essential services.

Peer Mentorship Programs

One advisor raised the importance of mentorship programs in assisting Aboriginal students succeed. In doing so the advisor noted the benefits of peer mentorship programs comparable to the one that requires students enrolled in their first year to meet with mentors twice per week to provide them with information, orientation, and guidance on living in the city and studying in a PSE institution:

They often need someone to advocate for them as they are not comfortable
asking those difficult questions. So I would spend time with them to
explain these are your options and if you need help—and I would imagine
trying to navigate that in a bigger institution is probably a challenge—
communicating the support and resources that are available.

Designated Space and Events for Aboriginal Students to Build Community on Campus

Another important factor identified by many advisors was having designated space and

designated events on campus for Aboriginal students to build community. Having positive and

safe space where they can support each other in their studies, socialize, and participate in cultural

events has also been identified as important in other PSEs in Canada (Timmons, 2013; Wilson &

Battiste, 2011; Young, et. al, 2012). An advisor noted that this is the reason it was important to

develop such a place or space at the University of Saskatchewan: "We send our students to the

Gordon Oakes Red Bear Centre to [participate in] their activities there; they make them feel

comfortable." Another advisor underlined how specific bridging classes offer a similar option to

participant events for building community: "We have instructors teaching our classes. Even if

they have a general class, we have our own sessions to build more community through classes."

The education for the 'other' has been a significant feature of Aboriginal education in the

universities since the 1970s when government policy approved Indian Control of Indian

Education. Since then, over 350 programs in universities across Canada have been introduced

for Aboriginal students (Battiste, 2016).

Guidance Counselling and Guidance

Another major factor identified by several advisors is offering counselling and guidance to assist

Aboriginal students in dealing with anxiety, stress, self-confidence, time management, and the

academic requirements of their programs and courses. One of the advisors succinctly explained

how offering the guidance and counselling improves the lives of students:

Personal counselling is an important part of my job. Just because school
has started, life doesn't stop. There are personal matters that need to be
dealt with and it impacts students academically. For example, I had a
student who came to me overwhelmed; the student implied that she wasn't
confident in her language. So I helped her explore [what can be done about
it] and connected her with learning services that have a learning strategist

who specializes in English as a second language. Being able to pass her along in the gentlest way to access services [needed] not only personally but [also] academically is important [in my job].

The advisors explained how the need to keep in touch and follow up is important when offering such support, as another advisor commented: "I keep in contact with them as much as I can. I try [to] maintain a relationship with them." Therefore, a holistic support in counselling is a way forward in achieving better outcomes for Aboriginal PSE. This is because this sub-population of PSE students do have other unique challenging situations resulting from a multitude of difficulties that need overcoming as pointed out in the calls for action by the TRC (2015b).

Familiar Faces within the Programs/Department/Institution Who Identify with the Students Ethnically/Culturally

Several advisors also noted the importance of ensuring that the ethno-cultural background of many faculty and staff members is either the same or very similar to those of the Aboriginal students. They must also be persons who can establish a personal connection grounded in trust and legitimacy. More specifically, it is important that students have access to people within various academic and non-academic units who students deem to be approachable, empathetic, non-judgmental and fair, and who make them feel comfortable, welcomed, understood, and supported. One advisor put it in this way:

> I feel and what I have seen and know from students who will continue coming here is that there is a breakdown of the family system within our people. A lot of us are very familiar with this. If you don't have that support at home, …we have [to perform] a role as caring for these young people that come in and we have these role not just as administrators. People don't realize that is a place of privilege if you have a place you call home and you can fall onto for support. A lot of our students don't have that."

More Tailored Academic Models

Numerous advisors also pointed to the importance of adopting academic models and pedagogical approaches that are more tailored to Aboriginal students. More specifically, they pointed to tailoring that takes into account the learning styles, the academic needs, and the social and

psychological needs of Aboriginal students. To this effect, one advisor commented: "For example, many students in the Medicine Wheel in Nursing are wanting to go to second year, we want to create a program for them to go throughout their university life--Community of Learners—within the four-year program". The prevailing view was that without such tailoring, the academic success of Aboriginal students would be compromised to the point that they would experience not only academic failure, but also a devastating blow not only to their confidence, self-esteem, and sense of well being, but also to their hopes and dreams for a better life for themselves and their families. Such devastating blows would compound the pressures and problems they may have experienced prior to enrolling in a PSE institution.

SUMMARY OF MAJOR FACTORS

Whereas the objective in the previous section of this report was to provide a detailed overview of each relatively discrete factor that PSE students and advisors in four of Saskatoon's institutions identified as facilitators or inhibitors of Aboriginal student success, the objective this section is to highlight the major clusters of factors (i.e., facilitators & inhibitors) that impinge on their success. Succinctly stated, this section provides a synoptic summary of the major clusters of factors that function as inhibitors or facilitators of student success.

Before presenting the synoptic summary, however, an important caveat and two important observations are warranted. First, the caveat issued in other parts of this report warrants repeating here: invariably, the inhibitors and the facilitators of Aboriginal student success are essentially 'two sides of the same coin". In other words, the absence, insufficiency, or inappropriateness of something constitutes an inhibitor; but the addition, sufficiency or appropriateness of that very same thing constitutes a facilitator. Thus, for example, while insufficient funding is an inhibitor, sufficient funding is a facilitator.

Second, given the similarities in the lists of inhibitors and facilitators identified by PSE students and advisors/administrators, the objective in this summary is to cluster their responses and deal with them as a single group, rather than two separate groups. We believe this commonality in their responses occurred largely because the advisors adopted a 'student-centric' perspective in

making their observations and thinking about what students need, rather than an 'advisor-centric' perspective and thinking about what advisors need to deal with inhibitors and facilitators of students' success.

Third, the findings of this study are consonant with those of other comparable studies in other jurisdictions, but particularly Tinto's (2006) findings from a review of the literature and longitudinal studies over four decades of student retention at PSE institutions in the United States. In that study Tinto (2006) identified shifts in thinking from individual students to institutional and broader social roles and responsibilities as well as the following factors related to institutional action, program implementation, and student income (p. 6) that inhibit or facilitate student success:

- Adequate financial support for programs and students
- Advising and mentoring of students
- Providing greater support in all academic student support services.

Tinto identifies further areas for research, including institutional investments in faculty development and reward systems to ensure quality student education for retention, especially in the critical first-year experience, and to address the deeper roots of both student attrition and resilience.

The remainder of this section identifies and briefly explains eight major categories of factors the participants identified as important for the success of Aboriginal students in the PSE system.

[A] Socio-Political Factors

The first major category of factors consists of what might be termed socio-political factors. The most significant factor within this particular category was racism both in PSE institution and in the broader urban communities. The vast majority of respondents pointed both to manifested and un-manifested racism. Respondents noted that racism created not only a cold unwelcoming climate but also relative uncaring and unresponsive systems both within and beyond the PSE institutions. It is noteworthy, that although racism within the broader community was profiled as a factor by respondents both from mainstream and Aboriginal PSE institutions, not surprisingly

perhaps, racism within those institutions was identified much more often by respondents from former than the latter types of institutions. Support staff in the institutions similarly noted that their students come to them with concerns about expressed racism among faculty and students that are often difficult to manage as there are few mechanisms in institutions to address situations of harassment related to racism due to the sensitive nature of the events and people involved. Their point is confirmed by the Dua and Bhanji (2017) study of mechanisms to address inequities in Canadian universities.

[B] Socio-Cultural Factors

The second major category of factors consists of socio-cultural factors. A particularly important factor was the focus and scope of Indigenization and Aboriginal acculturation within the institutions. In discussing this category of factors, participants tended to identify a cluster of specific, and in many cases interrelated, factors in the following facets of the curricular and extra-curricular elements of the PSE institutions:

- More Aboriginal content in various programs and courses
- More Aboriginal faculty and staff
- Support services for Aboriginal students dealing with their holistic development and growth
- Aboriginal content and perspectives in a wider range of courses
- Aboriginal language courses and sufficient teaching and tutoring supports for those courses
- Aboriginal cultural events inclusive of both First Nations and Métis peoples
- Connections and interaction with Aboriginal elders
- Linkages between Métis and First Nations students and the various programming and support services for them
- Number and quality of physical spaces dedicated to Aboriginal students and Aboriginal programming.
- Cultural safety programming

Although steps are being taken in the aftermath of the testimonies and report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to foster a greater degree of Indigenization and Aboriginal acculturation in the PSE institutions, particularly within the mainstream institutions, the prevailing view is that much more must be done in this facet of all those institutions, but again particularly in the mainstream institutions, to achieve the level of Indigenization and Aboriginal acculturation that participants deemed valuable and essential to enhance the success of Aboriginal students in the PSE institutions. Normalizing Aboriginal content in and through disciplinary knowledges and programming for all students to appreciate will take time and not without some further consultation and elaboration within and beyond the postsecondary institutions. But at the moment the introduction of these into the postsecondary institutions is welcomed though primarily directed to support services for Aboriginal students. What else is needed is to broaden the approaches to include non-Aboriginal students as well. At this point in time, however, Indigenization and Aboriginal acculturation is directed primarily to the support services for Aboriginal students. Perhaps most significant in the findings is a need to advance Indigenization within some other parameters, such as cultural safety programming that can assess the conditions that PSE institutions advance through Indigenous people themselves. Cultural competency training and cultural safety programming are similar in that they are both about understanding the context and historical factors that can impede success of Indigenous programming by examining the power relations in assumptions, discourses, and actions of the systems and providers, whether in health, education, law or other professions. Cultural safety goes beyond cultural knowledge and understanding and shifts the power authority and relation in an interaction to the Indigenous person(s) to determine if the event/place/environment is culturally safe. Summarizing Brascoupé and Waters (2009), Yeung, 2016) points out: "Cultural safety lies on the continuum of cultural competence in that it will not be realized in practice all at once, but will likely be built out of cultural competency practices, as stronger and more trusting mutual relationships develop between the patient and the provider" (p. 3).

[C] Academic Programming Factors

The third major category of factors identified by participants consists of academic programming factors that impinge on the success of PSE students. Respondents identified a wide range of factors related to academic programs and courses. This includes their requirements, their content, their duration, their timetabling, their delivery, and their pedagogy.

In conjunction with academic programming factors, some participants also underscored the importance of improving the educational grounding (i.e., skills and knowledge bases) of Aboriginal students prior to admission into PSE institutions. Toward that end, they emphasized the importance of improving the preparation of Aboriginal students for PSE by improving the communication and coordination between high schools attended by Aboriginal students and the PSE institutions. The related goal of such an initiative is to close the PSE preparation and transition gap that exists between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students.

[D] Academic Support Services Factors

The fourth major category of factors that impinge on the academic success of Aboriginal students consists of academic support services. In particular, they pointed to the importance of the following in the academic lifecycle of Aboriginal students: academic orientation to the academic life in general; orientation, advising and guidance related to academic programs, courses, and regulations; orientation, guidance and advising related to specific courses and specific assignments; tutoring for specific courses in various disciplines, but particularly in math and science courses; counselling services for students experiencing challenges related to, or contributing to, psychological conditions such as insufficient self-confidence, anxiety, stress, and depression; providing adequate and appropriate assessments and accommodations for students with learning disabilities. Some participants also underscored the importance of ensuring that any services provided are targeted to and/or tailored for Aboriginal students.

Relatedly, some participants also indicated that it was not enough to simply provide those support services. They indicated that in providing such support services, it was imperative that individuals responsible for doing so understand and empathize with the complexities faced by Indigenous youth in their personal and academic lives. A notable example of such complexities and the need to understand them and supporting students in dealing with them is found in authenticating Aboriginal lineage and self-identification for purposes of accessing equity-based programs and benefits targeted or tailored for them. Participants noted that this is a significant challenge for some Aboriginal students and also a sensitive and difficult job for counsellors and elders who attempt to assist students with this particular matter. This is particularly true of many Metis students and First Nation students who live in urban areas away from the home communities of their ancestors or current families.

[E] Educational Infrastructure Factors

The fifth major category of factors identified by participants as important for the success of Aboriginal students in PSE institutions consists at least four major components of educational infrastructure. Whereas the first two components are particularly important for Aboriginal PSE institutions, the third component is particularly important for mainstream institutions. The first consists of facilities, or at least some parts of a particular facility, that are designated primarily for use by Aboriginal students and for accommodating Aboriginal activities. The second component is academic infrastructure, namely more library space and library resources needed by students. The third component is athletic and recreational infrastructure such as large gymnasiums and exercise rooms with the requisite training equipment, and various types of outdoor spaces (e.g.. parks, expansive lawns, trees, flower beds, benches, and parking lots) consisting of variety of facilities and outdoor spaces, rather than a single building that in some instances does not even have a parking lot for students. The fourth component is adequate, appropriate, and affordable housing and childcare spaces that are located either on campus or in a location that is close to the campus, especially for students coming from rural or northern communities.

[F] Financial Factors

A sixth category of factors identified by participants was financial factors. This included several interrelated factors related to student funding and financial management. Participants indicated that adequate, predictable funding from Aboriginal funding authorities is essential for students to ensure they could cover the cost of tuition, books, housing, food, child care, transportation and other essential needs. Another prevailing view was that responsibility for ensuring the affordability of some essential needs (e.g., housing, food, child care) was the shared responsibility of Aboriginal governments and PSE institutions. In the case of PSE institutions, the focuses was on their shared responsibility in ensuring that housing, food and child care services are adequate, affordable and accessible.

Another notable financial factor identified by some participants is financial management. Some participants felt that Aboriginal students like many of their non-Aboriginal counterparts with limited resources would benefit from some training in financial management.

Somewhat distinct from but related to financial management because it has such a significant bearing on their finances, as well as on their safety and quality of life, identified by some participants is an orientation to living in relatively large urban areas. This was deemed to be a very important factor in increasing their chances for success within the PSE system.

[G] Family Support Factors

The seventh category of factors consists of family support factors. Many respondents noted the importance of family support for students both in choosing to enroll in a PSE institution, and in their ability to cope and succeed when faced with challenges within those institutions. They noted the absence of close family members within the city and also the lack of family guidance on educational matters as major challenges faced by students from communities far from Saskatoon. The existence of relatives within the Aboriginal family circles who have attended and succeed in PSE institutions are important not only for providing students with inspiration, but

also in serving as positive roles models who can provide students with advice on strategies for precluding challenges, or strategies for any challenges that they might encounter.

[H] Community Support Factors

The eighth category of factors consists of community support factors. In speaking of the importance of community support factors, the participants emphasized the importance of such support in three interrelated communities for Aboriginal students: their home communities, their communities in the urban areas in which students live; and the community within the PSE institutions. Although participants pointed to the importance of all groups of members within those three types of communities, the shared view was that the support of Aboriginal members of those communities was very important. In the case of the communities within PSE institutions, for example, they pointed to the importance of faculty and staff members with Indigenous identities and cultural backgrounds that reflect those of the students, within various units, programs and courses, and extra-curricular activities. The prevailing view was that it is imperative to have individuals in such positions who not only identify with and understand the students, and with whom students can identify and understand, but there is also a high degree of trust, and respect in the interactions between them and the students. To reiterate something noted before in this respect they also pointed to the importance of having individuals in such positions that understand and empathize with the complexities faced by Indigenous youth in their personal and academic lives. Given the importance Aboriginal students put on relationships for ensuring their success, beyond counselling and in-house support staff, mentorships (peer or faculty) may be another informal process that could help students navigate their early success in the urban area.

UPSHOT OF ALL FACTORS (Aboriginal student-centric PSE system)

Collectively, most if not all, of the foregoing factors are embodied in the general theme articulated explicitly by some participants, namely that academic programs, courses, and support

services should all be tailored to meet the needs of the entire Aboriginal student population and of various sub-groups of that population based on their needs. Succinctly stated, the prevailing view is that the colonial and assimilative experiences of Aboriginal peoples that students bring with them have created high levels of ethnostress, trauma, poverty, and anxiety about living and being educated in the urban areas that affect their successful transitions to university life and academic expectations. The racist climate within both the urban area and the urban post-secondary institutions further exacerbates their tensions, stress, and efficacy in the institutions. While a high need for supports, services, and programming still exists for Aboriginal students to navigate these terrains, educating as many people as possible on and naturalizing Indigenous knowledges, ways of knowing, and fostering appreciation of Indigenization in the academy for all students, it is also necessary to continue to decolonize the systems, unpacking the violence, strategies and effects of systemic and individual racism on Indigenous individuals and peoples, and increase intercultural understanding, as has been affirmed by the TRC's calls to action.

CONCLUSIONS

To reiterate, the central objective in this report has been to identify and explain the perceptions of Aboriginal students and the advisors of such students at PSE institutions regarding the factors that impinge on the success of Aboriginal students with the PSE system.

The findings reveal that despite ongoing improvements in postsecondary institutions to build programs and supports for Indigenous students, and the increase in Aboriginal faculty and staff, together with a change in discourses about Indigenous peoples in Indigenization initiatives, there is still much to be done in all these areas, and beyond. More improvements are needed to enhance the success of Aboriginal PSE students. Explicitly and implicitly the participants identified an array of general categories of factors and an even larger array of specific factors.

Collectively, most if not all, of those factors are embodied in the general theme articulated explicitly by some participants and implicitly by others, namely that academic programs, courses, and support services should all be better tailored to meet the needs of the entire

Aboriginal student population and of various sub-groups of that population based on their respective needs. Succinctly stated, the overarching goal of such tailoring is to continue Indigenizing PSE institutions and to make them more Aboriginal student-centric.

This theme is rooted in the prevailing view that such tailoring and improvements are necessary and overdue adjustments or antidotes to the negative effects of two interrelated legacies: (a) the colonial and assimilative experiences of Aboriginal peoples that continue to have an adverse effect on Aboriginal PSE students; and (b) the racist climate within the urban postsecondary institutions and the communities in which they are located. Among the negative effects that have been created by those legacies for those living and being educated in urban areas include high levels of ethnostress, trauma, poverty and anxiety. Collectively these factors have had major adverse effects on their successful transition to PSE institutions and the expectations on academic performance therein.

In addition to the prevailing view among participants that there is still a high need for financial assistance, supports, services, and programming targeted at or tailored for Aboriginal students to deal with the challenges facing them, there is a shared belief other special efforts should also be made in postsecondary education to reduce the incidence and magnitude of racism, inequities and their consequential challenges. The systemic change should engage and normalize Indigenous perspectives and responses and responsibilities to the land, to life, and to social relations as well as respond to the colonial history of systemic inequities and outcomes. Systemic changes that recognize diverse knowledges and diverse human responses would offer multiple points of entry and supports for diverse student needs and aspirations. Anti-racist and anti-oppressive courses in institutional settings for all students can ameliorate the discourses of difference and othering creating racialization, and fostering stereotypes, discrimination, and racism. It would address knowledge beyond Eurocentric production, where Indigenous knowledge systems would have normative force and a strong foundation for a renewed postsecondary community where Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal persons feel they belong, find a shared history of interdependence, and flourish. Three particularly important objectives and initiatives are suggested:

(a) Doing more to improve collective understanding and appreciation about the legacies, the current realities, and especially regarding the challenges faced by Aboriginal students

(b) Doing more to help the postsecondary community understand the prospective benefits that will be derived by everyone by fostering and sustaining a more positive and successful PSE experience for Aboriginal students

(c) Doing more in naturalizing Indigenous knowledges, ways of knowing and appreciation of Indigenization in the academy for all students as well faculty and staff members.

Such strong visions for the future move well beyond the fostering of intercultural understanding, and intercultural bridging and bonding but require actions that will ensure that institutions of higher learning can be places that help eliminate racism, renew reconciled relationships, and secure justice for all, as envisioned by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action that demand justice through change in these ways:

- How we govern ourselves
- How we redesign the justice system
- How we educate our children and ourselves
- How we do business
- How we think
- How we tell our stories in media, sports, and cultural institutions

We could make many recommendations on specific initiatives that might be pursued and the implementation strategies that could be undertaken in increasing the success of Aboriginal students within the PSE system. However, we will not both because it is somewhat beyond the original purpose of this report, and also because we want to remain as true as possible to our belief that this report should echo the views of the participants on such matters. In that spirit we believe that although more information could have been collected from participants on the

implementation of the initiatives, this report contains extensive information on the key factors that impinge on the success of Aboriginal students, and the types of initiatives that should be implemented in relation to those factors. Finally, we also believe that both in moving toward the implementation of any initiatives and identifying the best implementation strategies, it is imperative to consult Aboriginal students and their advisors, as well as other progressive and proactive individuals within the PSE system who want to make a positive contribution to achieving the desired goals. Our hope is that this report will provide all of them with a useful source in identifying the key factors, in framing the goals and objectives, in setting priorities, and in choosing good implementation strategies.

Acknowledgements

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Participant Consent Form

Project Title: **Urban Aboriginal Postsecondary Student Experience: Facilitators and Inhibitors of Learning Environments for Maximum Potential**

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Ms. Jania Chilima, Graduate Research Assistant, School of Environment and Sustainability, University of Saskatchewan, (306)-262-6920, Jania.chilima@usask.ca

Purpose and Objectives of the Research:
The purpose of this study is to understand the lived experience of urban Aboriginal postsecondary students in Saskatoon, so as to identify facilitators and inhibitors of learning environments for the maximum potential of those students. This will facilitate and shape the development of educational policy and programming relevant for Urban Aboriginal People. Building on literature in other jurisdictions, the proposed study will establish baseline data on factors that either facilitate or hinder educational success at Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies, Saskatchewan Polytechnic, First Nations University of Canada, and University of Saskatchewan. Improved understanding of lived experience of urban Aboriginal post-secondary students is directly linked to improvements of social and economic imperatives, given that 55% of the job market requires a level of post-secondary education. Thus, closing the education gap is vital for Saskatchewan's economic and social success, which as a consequences, improves the quality of life that is associated with equitable access to education, employment, and health. This study will also enlighten the indigenizing and decolonizing initiatives undertaken across Canadian postsecondary institutions as part of the current efforts to act on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) calls to action at educational institutions.

Procedures:
Focus groups will be used to collect data for this study. A focus group guide has been developed by the CUISR research team. Data collection will occur in Saskatoon. The focus group will consist of approximately 10 to 15 people and will take roughly 45 - 60 minutes. If participants agree, the focus group will be audio recorded for transcription purposes.

Please feel free to ask any questions regarding the procedures and goals of the study or your role.

Funded by:
This study is funded by the Prairie Research Centre of the Urban Aboriginal Knowledge Network (UAKN).

Potential Risks:
There are no known or anticipated risks to you by participating in this research. Some of the questions may feel too personal and cause discomfort in that way. This minimal risk is addressed by your ability to choose not to answer any questions you feel uncomfortable answering.

Potential Benefits:
The project aims to provide often marginalized voices with outlets to affect policy development relevant to their own lives. This research will help to empower postsecondary Aboriginal students by developing clear and usable knowledge about factors that facilitate or inhibit their learning environment so they can reach full potential similar to those non-Aboriginal postsecondary students. It will also help inform indigenizing and decolonizing initiatives that are undertaken across Canadian postsecondary institutions as part of the current efforts to act on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) calls to action at educational institutions.

Confidentiality:
Although the data from this research project will be published as a final report submitted to UAKN and may also be presented at conferences, the data will be presented in aggregate form, so that it will not be possible to identify individuals. All personal data will be removed before the responses and interventions are analyzed and reported. This means that any direct quotes, opinions, or expressions will be presented without revealing names. Confidentiality will be further protected by allowing only the research team access to the recordings of the focus groups and by storing the signed consent forms separately from transcriptions. Recordings will be destroyed once transcripts have been approved. The only case where confidentiality will be waived is when the participant has agreed to have their contributions acknowledged.

Your data will be deleted if you request it. Identifying factors (such as names, specific locations) will be removed and individuals will be given pseudonyms where necessary. The researcher will undertake to safeguard the confidentiality of the discussion in the focus group, but cannot guarantee that other members of the group will do so. Please respect the confidentiality of the other members of the group by not disclosing the contents of this discussion outside the group, and be aware that others may not respect your confidentiality.

If you agree, the focus group will be audio recorded for transcription purposes. You may request that the recording be turned off at any time.

- **Storage of Data:** Data will be securely stored at CUISR for a period of seven years after publication at which time it will be destroyed. Electronic files will be kept in password protected computer files. Hardcopy data will be stored in locked filing cabinets and, as mentioned above, transcripts will be stored separately from signed consent forms.

Right to Withdraw:
Your participation is voluntary and you can participate in only those discussions that you are comfortable with. You may withdraw from the research project for any reason, without explanation or penalty of any sort. Should you wish to withdraw, you may leave the focus group meeting at any time; however, data that has already been collected cannot be withdrawn as it forms part of the context for information provided by other participants.

Whether you choose to participate or not will have no effect on how you will be treated.

Follow up:
To obtain results from the study, please contact CUISR by phone (306-966-2120) or by email (cuisr.research@usask.ca) or visit our website www.usask.ca/cuisr.

Questions or Concerns:
Contact the researchers using the information at the top of page 1.

This research project has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Research Ethics Board. Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to that committee through the Research Ethics Office ethics.office@usask.ca (306) 966-2975. Out of town participants may call toll free (888) 966-2975.

Consent

SIGNED CONSENT
Your signature below indicates that you have read and understand the description provided; I have had an opportunity to ask questions and my/our questions have been answered. I consent to participate in the research project. A copy of this Consent Form has been given to me for my records.

_____   _____   _____
  Name of Participant   *Signature*   *Date*

_____   _____
Researcher's Signature   *Date*

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.

_____ Check the right to remain confidential in contributing to this research (name will not appear in the publications)

_____ Check the right to being acknowledged for your knowledge (meaning your name will appear in the publications)

CALLING FOR FOCUS GROUP VOLUNTEERS
FOR A STUDY

Urban Aboriginal Postsecondary Student Experience: Facilitators and Inhibitors of Learning Environments for Maximum Potential

We are looking for volunteers to take part in a research study funded by the Urban Aboriginal Knowledge Network (Prairie Research Centre) that will ask self-identifying Aboriginal students in Saskatoon about their postsecondary experiences, so as to identify factors that support or impede student success.

This is an opportunity to share your experience and knowledge about how your postsecondary institution can be a supportive place.

As a study participant, you would be asked to take part in a 60-9**0-minute** focus group discussion at a time and location on campus convenient to you.

In appreciation of your time, refreshments and snacks will be provided.

For more information, or to volunteer for this study,
please contact:
DR. ISOBEL FINDLAY
306-966-2120; Email: findlay@edwards.usask.ca

Or CUISR at cuisr.oncampus@usask.ca; 306-966-2121

This study has been reviewed by, and received approval through, the Research Ethics Office, University of Saskatchewan.

Letter of Initial Contact

Project Title: Urban Aboriginal Postsecondary Student Experience: Facilitators and Inhibitors of Learning Environments for Maximum Potential

Research Team and Advisory Committee:
Co-Principal Investigator: Dr. Isobel M. Findlay, Professor Emerita, Edwards School of Business & CUISR University Co-Director, University of Saskatchewan, (306) – 966 – 2120, findlay@edwards.usask.ca
Co-Principal Investigator: Dr. Joseph Garcea, Professor, Political Studies, University of Saskatchewan, (306) – 966 – 5222, joe.garcea@usask.ca
Co-Principal Investigator: Dr. Marie Battiste, Professor, Department of Educational Foundations, College of Education, University of Saskatchewan, (306) – 966 – 7576, marie.battiste@usask.ca
Ms. Jania Chilima, Graduate Research Assistant, School of Environment and Sustainability, University of Saskatchewan, (306) – 262 – 6920, Jania.chilima@usask.ca
Mr. Ryan Jimmy, Graduate Research Assistant, College of Education, University of Saskatchewan, (306) –261–3706, ryan.jimmy@usask.ca
Mr. Gordon Graham, Advisory Committee, Vice President of Student Services and Academics, Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies, (306) – 244 – 4460,
Ms. Danielle Jeancart, Coordinator, ê-sihtoskâtoyahk Indigenous Students' Centre, Saskatchewan Polytechnic, Saskatoon Campus, (306) – 667– 5655, danielle.jeancart@saskpolytech.ca
Ms. Rita Bouvier, Métis educator, researcher, writer, and former director of Saskatchewan Urban Native Teachers Education Program (SUNTEP)
Mr. Rhett Sangster, Director, Reconciliation and Community Partnerships, Office of the Treaty Commissioner, 306 – 667 – 5655, rsangster@otc.ca
Dr. Sharon Acoose, Associate Professor, School of Indigenous Social Work, First Nations University of Canada—Saskatoon Campus; sacoose@fnuniv.ca
Dr. Stryker Calvez, Research Team/Advisory Committee, Educational Development Specialist: Aboriginal Engagement and Education – Indigenous Voice, University of Saskatchewan, (306)-966-6280, stryker.calvez@usask.ca
Ms. Dana Carriere, Research Team/Advisory Committee, Indigenous Graduate Students' Council Chair, University of Saskatchewan, (306)-966-5790, dana.carriere@usask.ca

We are writing to request your participation in the research project "**Urban Aboriginal Postsecondary Student Experience: Facilitators and Inhibitors of Learning Environments for Maximum Potential.**" This study, to be carried out by the Community-University Institute for Social Research (CUISR), is funded by the Urban Aboriginal Knowledge Network (Prairie Research Centre). It has been approved by the Research Ethics Board at the University of Saskatchewan (Beh Certificate # 16-202).

The purpose of this study is to understand the lived experience of urban Aboriginal postsecondary students in Saskatoon, so as to identify facilitators and inhibitors of learning environments for the

maximum potential of those students at Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies, First Nations University of Canada, Saskatchewan Polytechnic, and University of Saskatchewan. Improved understanding of lived experience of urban Aboriginal post-secondary students is linked to improved educational, social and economic outcomes. The research questions are:

- How do urban Aboriginal postsecondary students rate their postsecondary educational experience?
- What do urban Aboriginal postsecondary students consider major barriers to their educational success?
- What do urban Aboriginal postsecondary students consider key factors that contribute to their educational success?

Our study will rely on your participation as someone who meets the study criteria of self-identifying postsecondary Aboriginal student and/or officials/counsellors at Saskatchewan Polytechnic, Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies, First Nations University of Canada, and University of Saskatchewan. We apply mixed-methods which have been identified as appropriate for the study by the Advisory Committee. The first phase will consist of focus groups with postsecondary Aboriginal student and with officials/counsellors (key informants). The focus groups will take approximately 60-90 minutes at a time and location agreeable to you.

The second phase will be an online survey utilizing Fluid Survey platform in order to gather baseline data from self-identifying post-secondary urban Aboriginal students. The survey will ask questions on specific facilitators and inhibitors of educational success as well as experiences you have had as an Aboriginal post-secondary student at your institution. These will be specific questions related to emerging themes of experiences collected from the initial focus groups and literature review. Upon receiving your express interest, a user-specific survey link will be sent to you.

The survey tool is Fluid Survey for which University of Saskatchewan has an education license, which means that we will follow most stringent University research ethics rules. The servers of this survey platform are located in Canada. With your permission, the focus groups and interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed.

Your participation is voluntary and will remain confidential, unless you choose to be acknowledged in the publication. You may withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty. The results of the study, in the form of a formal report, will be given to the funders mentioned above and published by CUISR. Your confidentiality and anonymity will be fully protected in reported findings unless otherwise specified by you.

Study participants are welcome to contact the research team for more information. If you have questions about this study or would like to participate, please contact Dr. Isobel M. Findlay at 306-966-2120 or findlay@edwards.usask.ca or cuisr.oncampus@usask.ca or 306-966-2121.

Your time and interest in this study are very much appreciated.

Focus Group Guide: Postsecondary Student Counsellors and Support Service Officials

Project Title: **Urban Aboriginal Postsecondary Student Experience: Facilitators and Inhibitors of Learning Environments for Maximum Potential**

Researchers:

Co-Principal Investigator: Dr. Isobel M. Findlay, Professor Emerita, Management and Marketing, Edwards School of Business, University of Saskatchewan, (306) 966-2120, findlay@edwards.usask.ca

Co-Principal Investigator: Dr. Joseph Garcea, Professor, Political Studies, University of Saskatchewan, (306) 966-5222, joe.garcea@usask.ca

Co-Principal Investigator: Dr. Marie Battiste, Professor, Department of Educational Foundations, College of Education, University of Saskatchewan, (306) 966-7576, marie.battiste@usask.ca

Jania Chilima, Graduate Research Assistant, School of Environment and Sustainability, University of Saskatchewan, (306)-262-6920, Jania.chilima@usask.ca

Ryan Jimmy, Graduate Research Assistant, College of Education, University of Saskatchewan, (306) 261-3706, ryan.jimmy@usask.ca

1. Could you describe your main duties in your position as a support service provider to students (for example, financial, academic, social, cultural, or personal needs)?

2. Thinking of the services within your institution, what aspects of these services do you feel help students in remaining motivated and feeling supported in pursuing their education to graduation?

3. What are the challenges most identified by students who come to seek your assistance? And how did you help them address those challenges?

4. Could you describe any supports or services that are not available in your institution and you feel would help students achieve their goals?

5. Could you describe the extent to which you feel your institution recognizes the unique position/qualities in the educational experiences of those students who identify as Aboriginal/Indigenous/ First Nations/Métis?

6. Is there anything else that you would like to add or share about your experiences with urban Aboriginal postsecondary students?

Focus Group Guide: Urban Aboriginal Postsecondary Students

Project Title: **Urban Aboriginal Postsecondary Student Experience: Facilitators and Inhibitors of Learning Environments for Maximum Potential**

Researchers:

Co-Principal Investigator: Dr. Isobel M. Findlay, Professor Emerita, Management and Marketing, Edwards School of Business, University of Saskatchewan, (306) 966-2120, findlay@edwards.usask.ca

Co-Principal Investigator: Dr. Joseph Garcea, Professor, Political Studies, University of Saskatchewan, (306) 966-5222, joe.garcea@usask.ca

Co-Principal Investigator: Dr. Marie Battiste, Professor, Department of Educational Foundations, College of Education, University of Saskatchewan, (306)966-7576, marie.battiste@usask.ca

Jania Chilima, Graduate Research Assistant, School of Environment and Sustainability, University of Saskatchewan, (306)-262-6920, Jania.chilima@usask.ca

Ryan Jimmy, Graduate Research Assistant, College of Education, University of Saskatchewan, (306) 261-3706, ryan.jimmy@usask.ca

Strength-based questions:

1. When did you decide to start your post-secondary education? Can you share with me how you chose to attend this institution?

2. Could you describe your motivations and goals (career, non-career, academic) for pursuing post-secondary education?

3. Do you have support (outside the institution) for attending school? Where do you go when you need support? Describe the most significant people for support and what you expect to get from them.

4. Thinking of the most significant challenges you have experienced in attending school, why were they challenging? And how did you overcome them?

5. Thinking of all the reasons for attending school that you talked about, how have these affected your education while at school? Describe the good impacts and the challenging ones. Have your goals changed, strengthened, or weakened?

6. Can you please describe any supports or services at your school that you have used to help you to achieve your goals? Please describe the different types of support you have looked for; for example, financial, academic, social, cultural, or personal needs?

7. Thinking about the last question, could you describe any supports or services that were not available that you feel would help you to achieve your goals?

8. How would you describe your relationship with your institution?

9. Could you describe the extent to which you feel your institution recognizes your unique qualities in the educational experiences you have had? Do you feel valued and respected when you participate?

10. Is there anything else that you would like to add or share about your experiences as a student?

INTERVIEW   *Participant Consent Form*

Project Title: **Urban Aboriginal Postsecondary Student Experience: Facilitators and Inhibitors of Learning Environments for Maximum Potential**

Researchers:

Co-Principal Investigator: Dr. Isobel M. Findlay, Professor Emerita, Management and Marketing, Edwards School of Business, University of Saskatchewan, (306) 966-2120, findlay@edwards.usask.ca

Co-Principal Investigator: Dr. Joseph Garcea, Professor, Political Studies, University of Saskatchewan, (306) 966-5222, joe.garcea@usask.ca

Co-Principal Investigator: Dr. Marie Battiste, Professor, Department of Educational Foundations, College of Education, University of Saskatchewan, (306) 966- 7576, marie.battiste@usask.ca

Ms. Jania Chilima, Graduate Research Assistant, School of Environment and Sustainability, University of Saskatchewan, (306)-262-6920, Jania.chilima@usask.ca

Ryan Jimmy, Graduate Research Assistant, College of Education, University of Saskatchewan, (306) 261 3706, ryan.jimmy@usask.ca

Purpose and Objectives of the Research:

The purpose of this study is to understand the lived experience of urban Aboriginal postsecondary students in Saskatoon, so as to identify facilitators and inhibitors of learning environments for the maximum potential of those students. This will facilitate and shape the development of educational policy and programming relevant for Urban Aboriginal People. Building on literature in other jurisdictions, the proposed study will establish baseline data on factors that either facilitate or hinder educational success at Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies, Gabriel Dumont Institute, First Nations University of Canada, and University of Saskatchewan. Improved understanding of lived experience of urban Aboriginal post-secondary students is directly linked to improvements of social and economic imperatives, given that 55% of the job market requires a level of post-secondary education. Thus, closing the education gap is vital for Saskatchewan's economic and social success, which as a consequences, improves the quality of life that is associated with equitable access to education, employment, and health. This study will also enlighten the indigenizing and decolonizing initiatives undertaken across Canadian postsecondary institutions as part of the current efforts to act on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) calls to action at educational institutions.

Procedures:

Interviews will be used to collect data for this study. An interview guide has been developed by the CUISR research team. Data collection will occur in Saskatoon. The interviews will include approximately 15 people and will take roughly 30 – 45 minutes. If participants agree, each will be audio recorded for transcription purposes.

Please feel free to ask any questions regarding the procedures and goals of the study or your role.

Funded by:

This study is funded by the Prairie Research Centre of the Urban Aboriginal Knowledge Network (UAKN).

Potential Risks:
There are no known or anticipated risks to you by participating in this research. Some of the questions may feel too personal and cause discomfort in that way. This minimal risk is addressed by your ability to choose not to answer any questions you feel uncomfortable answering.

Potential Benefits:
The project aims to provide often marginalized voices with outlets to affect policy development relevant to their own lives. This research will help to empower post-secondary Aboriginal students by developing clear and usable knowledge about factors that facilitate or inhibit their learning environment so they can reach full potential similar to those non-Aboriginal post-secondary students. It will also help inform indigenizing and decolonizing initiatives that are undertaken across Canadian postsecondary institutions as part of the current efforts to act on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) calls to action at educational institutions.

Confidentiality:
Although the data from this research project will be published as a final report submitted to UAKN and may also be presented at conferences, the data will be presented in aggregate form, so that it will not be possible to identify individuals. All personal data will be removed before the responses and interventions are analyzed and reported. This means that any direct quotes, opinions, or expressions will be presented without revealing names. Confidentiality will be further protected by allowing only the research team access to the recordings of the interviews and by storing the signed consent forms separately from transcriptions. Recordings will be destroyed once transcripts have been approved. The only case where confidentiality will be waived is when the participant has agreed to have their contributions acknowledged.

You have the right to withdraw from the study. Your data will be deleted if you request it. Identifying factors (such as names, specific locations) will be removed and individuals will be given pseudonyms where necessary. The researcher will undertake all necessary steps to safeguard the confidentiality of the interviewee by following anonymity protocols expressed above.

If you agree, the interview will be audio recorded for transcription purposes. You may request that the recording be turned off at any time.

After the interview and prior to the data being included in the final report, you will have the opportunity to review the transcript if you choose to and to add, alter, or delete information you contributed from the transcript as you see fit.

- **Storage of Data:** Data will be securely stored at CUISR for a period of seven years after publication at which time it will be destroyed. Electronic files will be kept in password protected computer files. Hardcopy data will be stored in locked filing cabinets and, as mentioned above, transcripts will be stored separately from signed consent forms.

Right to Withdraw:
Your participation is voluntary and you can answer only those questions that you are comfortable with. You may withdraw from the research project for any reason, at any time without explanation or penalty of any sort. Whether you choose to participate or not will have no effect on how you will be treated.

Should you wish to withdraw, you may do so at any point. It will not be possible to remove data gathered at a focus group prior to withdrawal since individual interventions will be difficult to identify and may affect the ability to understand the remaining contributions.

Follow up:
To obtain results from the study, please contact CUISR by phone (306-966-2120) or by email (cuisr.research@usask.ca) or visit our website www.usask.ca/cuisr.

Questions or Concerns:
Contact the researchers using the information at the top of page 1.

This research project has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Research Ethics Board. Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to that committee through the Research Ethics Office ethics.office@usask.ca (306) 966-2975. Out of town participants may call toll free (888) 966-2975.

Consent
SIGNED CONSENT
Your signature below indicates that you have read and understand the description provided; I have had an opportunity to ask questions and my/our questions have been answered. I consent to participate in the research project. A copy of this Consent Form has been given to me for my records.

_____   _____   _____
 Name of Participant   *Signature*   *Date*

_____   _____
Researcher's Signature   *Date*
A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.

_____ Check the right to remain confidential in contributing to this research (name will not appear in the publications)

_____ Check the right to being acknowledged for your knowledge (meaning your name will appear in the publications)

I would like to have the opportunity to review the transcript.

_____   _____
_____
 Name of Participant   *Signature*   *Date*