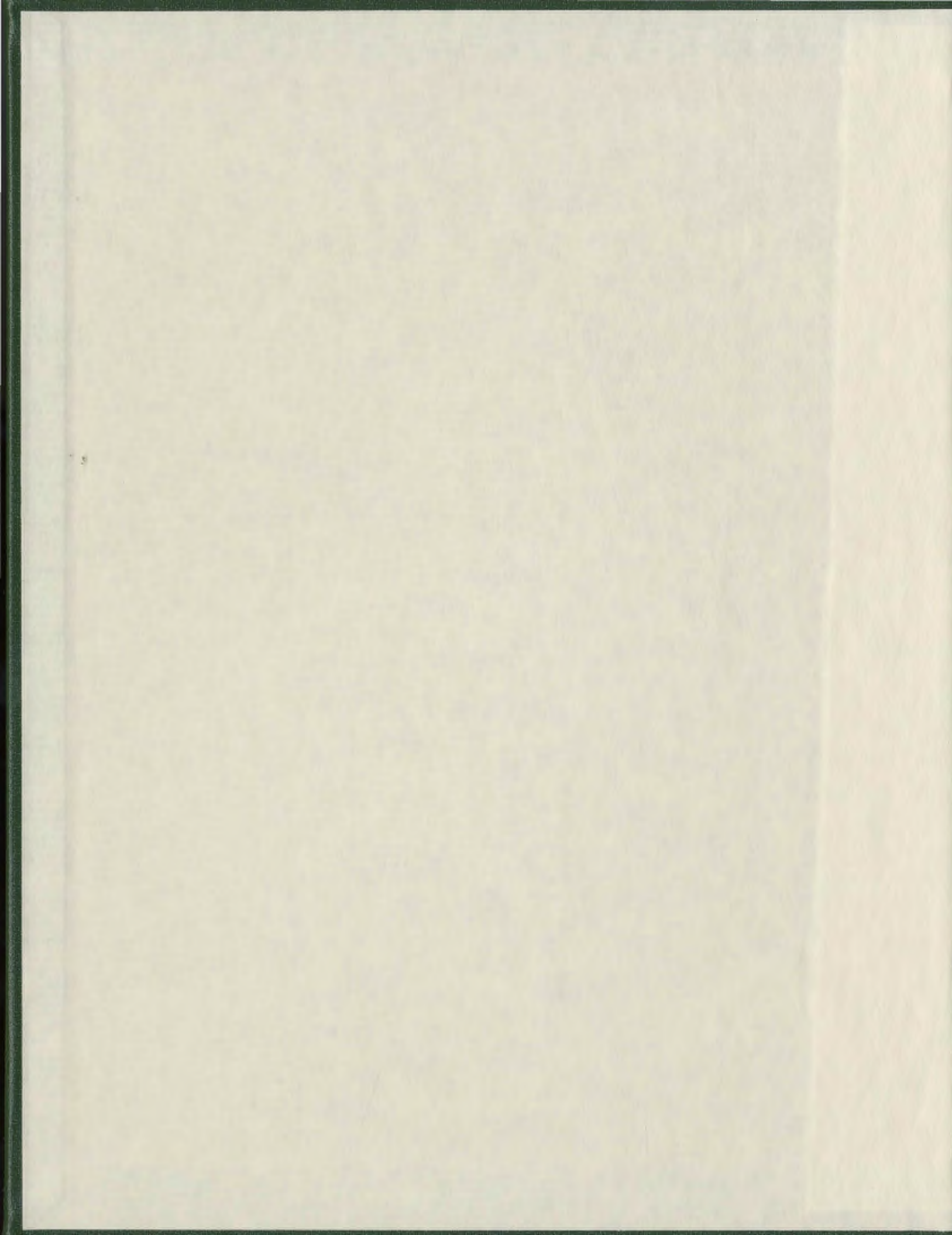


AN EVALUATION OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF A
POSTSECONDARY TRANSITION PROGRAM FOR
ABORIGINAL STUDENTS

ALISON PICKRELL



AN EVALUATION OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF A POSTSECONDARY
TRANSITION PROGRAM FOR ABORIGINAL STUDENTS

by

© Alison Pickrell

A thesis submitted to the School of Graduate Studies
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Education

Faculty of Education

Memorial University of Newfoundland

September 14, 2008

St. John's

Newfoundland

Abstract

The focus of this evaluation research study was to examine how a program of early intensive intervention impacted the persistence rate of a cohort of Aboriginal students in trades and technology programs at a postsecondary institution in Saskatchewan. A pre-experimental static group comparison study design was used to compare participant persistence with non-participant persistence. Multiple data collection methods were used to maximize the breadth and depth of the study and to accumulate rich stakeholder feedback. Student, program staff and faculty perceptions were explored and the achievement of the four-week transition program goals were evaluated using a combined objectives-oriented and participant-oriented approach. Program strengths were summarized and recommendations for program improvement were provided. A number of major themes emerged in this study that provide valuable insight into Aboriginal student postsecondary transition issues and program completion barriers.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my husband, children and close friends for supporting me in my lifelong learning endeavors. You have been amazingly patient and understanding over the last few months as I immersed myself in this study. I look forward to spending more time with you soon. I owe a special thank you to the following individuals:

- My thesis supervisor, Dr. Vernon Curran for his insight, feedback, guidance and support;
- Dr. Barb Bremner, David Frances, Kelly McInnes and Lisa Halstead for their personal and professional support, advice and encouragement. They truly understood what it meant to juggle full-time work, family responsibilities and graduate-level studies;
- The ASITT students, ASITT program staff, and SIAST program heads that participated so enthusiastically in this study. Their perceptions were full of insight and their experiences added depth to this study;
- The SIAST Aboriginal Council and the SIAST Aboriginal community for opening their hearts to me, sharing their experiences, and providing me this chance to learn and grow;
- My student affairs colleagues at SIAST and across Canada for providing such a supportive community of practice;
- My mom and dad, who are no longer with us, for their high expectations and unconditional support.

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CHAPTER ONE: NATURE OF THE RESEARCH

Introduction

The Council of the Federation (COF, 2006, p. 1) has indicated that “Canada has reached a critical juncture¹. We have an aging workforce. We are not fully capitalizing on the skills and education of new immigrants, Aboriginal people and young people and others”. The Canadian economy faces increased competition from around the world and rapidly evolving technologies are changing how we work. Within Canada we are facing regional and local challenges in meeting the demand for skilled labor. To keep pace with the global economy and to adequately address labor shortages, Canadians require high quality, accessible postsecondary education and skills training and access to lifelong learning opportunities. Education, training and skills are widely considered to be essential links to social well-being, economic prosperity, and quality of life (Brunnen, 2003; Malatest, 2004; Mendelson, 2006).

The COF has outlined five key priorities for education and skills training in Canada: improved access, enhanced quality, increased participation of underrepresented groups in the labour force, enhanced workplace-based skills training, and expanded research and innovation (COF, 2006). To increase participation in postsecondary education and skills training, postsecondary institutions, employers and governments must work together to develop strategies to encourage participation and improve access for the many Canadians who have been traditionally disadvantaged and underrepresented.

¹ Created in December 2003, The Council of the Federation (COF) is a federal institution that promotes interprovincial-territorial cooperation. Postsecondary education and skills training is one of the Council's priority initiatives.

The young Aboriginal population is growing and that offers an unparalleled opportunity for Canada to replace its ageing and shrinking labour force (Statistics Canada, 2004). However, this demographic also brings with them a legacy of historical disadvantage and exclusion that presents challenges and barriers to full participation (National Council of Welfare, 2007). Although the number of Aboriginal peoples in Canada participating in post-secondary education has increased over the last two decades, their enrolment and completion rates are still significantly lower than those of the general Canadian population (Malatest, 2004). There are also a disproportionate number of unemployed Aboriginal people across the country (Poehnell, Amundson and McCormick, 2006). Ensuring that Aboriginal peoples have the education, training and skills necessary to fully participate in the Canadian economy is one of society's most important challenges.

This issue is of particular relevance to post-secondary education administrators in Saskatchewan. Saskatchewan's population has been at or near one million people for the past 20 years (Elliott, 2003). In 2001, Saskatchewan's Aboriginal population was 13.5%, up 17% from the 1996 census (Statistics Canada, 2004). It is estimated that by 2025, 20% of Saskatchewan's population will be of Aboriginal descent and nearly 30% of school-aged children will be Aboriginal (Elliott, 2004). As the baby boom generation ages and retires within the next ten to fifteen years, a shortage of skilled workers is projected. The province will need to rely on the young, Aboriginal, working-age population to alleviate some of the pressures that are anticipated in Saskatchewan's future labor market. To realize this potential it will be important that these young Aboriginal people attain higher levels of education and higher employment rates than their parents

and grandparents (Elliott, 2003). It is, therefore, essential that the province's postsecondary institutions pay attention to these demographic trends to help ensure that Aboriginal postsecondary participation and success rates are adequate to address labor market demands. Human capital development theory predicts that investment in human capital such as higher education and technical training will benefit not only the province and its employers through increased levels of participation and productivity, but also the individual through increased employability and higher wages (Gray & Herr, 1998).

The focus of this evaluation research study was to evaluate the effectiveness of a postsecondary transition program for Aboriginal students at a postsecondary institution in the province of Saskatchewan. Postsecondary transition programs are a series of strategies or a collection of planned activities that help transition students into a postsecondary educational environment. The purpose of the research was to gain insight into how transition programs can be effectively designed and delivered to increase Aboriginal student participation and success rates at postsecondary institutions in Canada. An additional goal was to contribute to the growing body of knowledge in the area of Aboriginal student success.

The remainder of this chapter describes the study in more detail. The chapter continues with a description of Aboriginal student participation and Aboriginal student success at the Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology (SIAST). A description of the program evaluated in this study, the Aboriginal Success in Trades and Technology (ASITT) program, is provided. The study purpose is described and the evaluation research objectives are outlined. The chapter concludes with an overview of the study chapters and a summary of Chapter One.

Aboriginal Student Success at SIAST

SIAST is the province of Saskatchewan's primary public institution for the development and delivery of post-secondary technical education and skills training. Training is offered throughout the province at four urban campuses and through the virtual campus with additional training being brokered through partnerships with regional colleges and other post-secondary partners. SIAST has an enrolment of approximately 12,000 full-time students in certificate, diploma, apprenticeship and basic education programming; and an additional 29,000 individual course registrations (SIAST website).

In academic year 2004-05, approximately 18.9% of the total SIAST enrolment was of Aboriginal ancestry, and 15.4% of certificate and diploma program enrolment was Aboriginal (SIAST, 2006b). The majority of Aboriginal students (over 40%) are located at SIAST Woodland Campus in Prince Albert, the most northern of the urban centers however there are significant Aboriginal enrolments at all four campuses. A comprehensive education equity plan was introduced at SIAST in the early 1990's, and today SIAST offers enhanced access through reserved equity seats, and a comprehensive array of services and resources to assist Aboriginal students in attaining academic success.

Although SIAST has met its targets for a representative Aboriginal student population of 12.2% in most programs, adjusted to 16.6% beginning 2006-07, the success rate of Aboriginal students is considerably less than the general student population (SIAST, 2006b). Aboriginal student graduation rates vary by program and by campus location. For example, in 2004-05, 78.4% of non-Aboriginal students at SIAST Kelsey Campus graduated from certificate and diploma programs in the trades and technology

divisions, while only 43.5% of the Aboriginal students graduated. At SIAST Woodland Campus, which is located farther north, 60% of non-Aboriginal students graduated, while only 47.9% of the Aboriginal students completed their programs with a credential (SIAST, 2007).

In 2005, a comprehensive study was undertaken to determine the main reasons students leave SIAST programs before completion (SIAST, 2005a). In 2003-04, 13.2% of SIAST students enrolled in certificate or diploma programs, at one of SIAST's four campuses, exited the institution before completing their program. Aboriginal students presented 29.3% of early leavers. The majority of Aboriginal early leavers (57.8%) were discontinued from their studies by SIAST for not meeting program expectations such as academic performance and attendance; 16.6% left for personal reasons such as family demands, transportation challenges, and childcare issues; 7.6% exited because of personal or family health reasons; 6.2% left early as they had obtained employment; and only a small number left for financial reasons (2.8%). 9% of Aboriginal students left for unknown reasons as they did not complete withdrawal forms upon exiting.

In 2003-04 Dynamic Aboriginal Management Solutions undertook a review of SIAST Aboriginal initiatives (SIAST, 2004). Information was gathered through surveys and focus groups of SIAST employees and students. Student responses, particularly within the focus groups indicated some feelings of discrimination, insensitivity and misunderstanding from different levels of the organization. Aboriginal students felt that participation in social activities was generally done within the comfort of other Aboriginal peoples which although culturally inclusive they felt segregated from the main student body. Students were appreciative of Aboriginal programming, Elder support

services, Aboriginal student groups, and supportive staff members. They indicated that building a sense of trust and pride was a key to being successful within their program, and they talked about the need to ensure they had a clear voice within the organization rather than feeling they were on the periphery. Many comments referred to the need for a transition program between secondary and postsecondary studies. Both employees and students expressed an interest in accessing more information about Aboriginal culture and values as an enhancement to their skill base, thus contributing to a validation of Aboriginal ways of knowing and acknowledgement of Aboriginal cultures.

Ensuring conditions that foster Aboriginal student success at Saskatchewan post-secondary institutions has never been more important. Aboriginal students face a complicated array of social, economic, cultural, educational and psychological factors that affect their participation and graduation rates. Given SIAST's role within the province's postsecondary education sector, it has a responsibility to encourage and support Aboriginal people to pursue occupations in the skilled trades and technologies; both to address the issue of economic marginalization of Aboriginal people, and also to ensure economic growth in Saskatchewan through an adequate supply of an appropriate trained workforce. To accomplish this, SIAST must maintain or realign current Aboriginal services and resources to support Aboriginal students to attain graduation rates similar to those of the general student body.

Aboriginal Success in Trades and Technology Program (ASITT)

One of the initiatives launched to support Aboriginal students at SIAST is the ASITT Program. The program, which was initially funded by the Saskatchewan Crown

Investments Corporation (CIC), was piloted at SIAST Kelsey Campus in 2006-07 (SIAST, 2006a), and in 2007-08 ran at both SIAST Kelsey Campus in Saskatoon and SIAST Woodland Campus in Prince Albert (SIAST, 2007). The ASITT program focuses on enhancing the success of Aboriginal students pursuing studies in the trades and technologies.

The ASITT framework is based on the following principles: (a) sustained and visible support; (b) successful transitions (academic, personal and career); and (c) validation of Aboriginal culture (SIAST, 2006a). It includes the following components: (a) early identification, pre-entry contact and communication; (b) a four-week postsecondary transition program including initial financial and practical support; (c) ongoing personal, academic, and cultural support throughout the academic program; and (d) transition to program-related employment. The intent of the ASITT program is to increase participation rates of Aboriginal students, decrease program attrition of Aboriginal students, and increase the persistence of Aboriginal students through to program graduation and successful employment. The approach provides, as CMEC (2002) suggests, a strong visible support network that is proactively provided to Aboriginal students and the elements of the program are offered in a sustained and progressive manner.

The ASITT program, from an Aboriginal perspective is modeled on the concept of the medicine wheel, an ancient symbol used by many Aboriginal peoples throughout the world. There are many different ways the concept of the medicine wheel is expressed: the four grandfathers, the four winds, the four races, the four cardinal directions, the four aspects of nature, and many other relationships that can be expressed in sets of four (Bopp

et al., 1984; Regnier, 1995). The medicine wheel as it applies to the ASITT program addresses the four aspects of humanness (emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual). Successful transitions from this perspective are holistic in nature, inseparable, and best achieved by recognizing and supporting all four aspects of the human being.

Theoretically the ASITT framework is modeled on Seidman's (2005a) retention formula for student success: Retention = Early Identification + (Early + Intensive + Continuous) Intervention. Early identification of Aboriginal students in the trades and technology programs includes identification of Aboriginal students through declaration on their application for admission, pre-entry contact and an invitation to join the program. Early and intensive intervention is provided to ASITT participants during the four-week transition program prior to enrolment. Continuous intervention is provided by sustained support throughout the students' program of study.

There are elements of the Swail et al. (2003) geometric model in the ASITT program, which take into consideration Aboriginal student differences and the cognitive, social and institutional forces that effect Aboriginal student outcomes. To address this, the ASITT program provides ongoing personal, academic, and cultural supports throughout the students' academic program and transition to employment. The ASITT program also implements aspects of the campus ecology perspective, creating a constructed environment for new Aboriginal students where there is an opportunity to experience a sense of inclusion, involvement and community membership (Braxton, 2003; Strange, 2003).

The focus of the four-week program is to effectively transition students to a post-secondary training environment. Many Aboriginal students struggle from the outset due

to a combined lack of academic and personal preparedness. The transition program provides an opportunity for students to orientate themselves to a new environment before the stress and rigor of their academic studies begin. The program also provides for academic assessment, academic preparation and review of prerequisite skills. The participants are taught both lifestyle skills and study skills and are connected to on-campus and off-campus supports they may need early in their academic endeavours. Emphasis is placed on ensuring that students experience a culturally affirming and accepting environment.

The program (SIAST, 2006a) is intended to orient students to their new environment both on- and off-campus by:

- having participants set personal and academic goals,
- providing an understanding of the challenges of their program of studies,
- providing an understanding of their level of academic and personal preparedness,
- providing basic skills development/review (e.g. study skills, exam writing),
- providing program-related academic skills review (e.g. mathematics, reading comprehension),
- providing information on how and where to access required on-campus resources, and services (e.g. learning assistance, registration services, library, cafeteria),
- providing information on how and where to access required off-campus resources, and services (e.g. banking, shopping, doctor, dentist),
- establishing connections with and introductions to key individuals at SIAST (e.g. program head, instructors, Aboriginal Activity Centre staff),
- assisting with obtaining secure sponsorship or student loans,

- assisting with securing suitable housing, childcare and transportation.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this study was to gain insight, through the evaluation of an existing postsecondary transition program, into how transition programs can be effectively designed and delivered to increase Aboriginal student participation and success rates at postsecondary institutions in Canada. An additional goal was to contribute to the growing body of knowledge in the area of Aboriginal student success.

This evaluation research study examined the effectiveness of one aspect of the ASITT program, the four-week transition program. Specific objectives of this study were to:

1. Examine how a program of early intensive intervention impacted the persistence rate of a cohort of Aboriginal students in trades and technology programs SIAST during their first semester of study.
2. Examine ASITT students' satisfaction with participation in the four-week transition program.
3. Explore the perceptions and experiences of student participants regarding the effectiveness of the four-week transition program in helping them transition to their postsecondary studies.
4. Explore the perceptions of the ASITT program staff regarding the effectiveness of the ASITT program in helping students transition to postsecondary studies.
5. Explore the perceptions of SIAST program heads regarding the effectiveness of the four-week transition program in helping Aboriginal students transition to postsecondary studies.

6. Evaluate the achievement of the four-week transition program goals.

Overview of Methodology

This evaluation research study focused specifically on one component of the ASITT program, the four-week transition program. A combined objectives-oriented and participant-oriented evaluation approach (Fitzpatrick, Sanders & Worthen, 2004) was used to evaluate the effectiveness of the four-week transition program in enhancing the success of Aboriginal student participants at SIAST.

A cohort of 24 students accepted to the ASITT program for the 2007-08 academic year at SIAST Kelsey Campus in Saskatoon and SIAST Woodland Campus in Prince Albert was tracked. A pre-experimental static group comparison study design was utilized (Heffner, 2004). Mixed-methods (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000; Fitzpatrick et al., 2004) were employed to increase validity and ensure both breadth and depth of information.

Persistence rates for the ASITT program participants were compared to Aboriginal non-ASITT program participants using statistical data from SIAST's Banner Student Information System. Survey questionnaires with ASITT students, a focus group with academic program heads and interviews with ASITT program staff were used to inform the evaluation. Full details of the research design and methodology are described in Chapter Three.

Definitions

For the purpose of this research, the following working definitions were used:

1. *Cohort* is a group of students who have enrolled in a specific program at the same time. Students in this study are from the 2007-08 cohort, which means they began their studies during the 2007-08 academic year. The 2007-08 academic year is defined as July 1, 2007 through June 30, 2008.
2. *Attrition* is a decline in the number of students in a program cohort from the beginning to the end of the learning event.
3. *Continuing* refers to a student who continues to be enrolled in the program.
4. *Persistence* is the result of a student's decision to continue their participation in the learning event under analysis.
5. *Retention* is continued student participation in a learning event which in postsecondary education could be a course, a program, an institution, or postsecondary system. This study is looking primarily at program retention.
6. *Graduated* refers to a student who has attained a completion credential (e.g. certificate, diploma).
7. *Student success* is the extent to which individual students or institutions achieve their enrolment goals.
8. *Transition* is the act of passing from one state or place to the next or an event that results in a transformation. In a postsecondary context, students transition from a familiar environment and familiar role to a new environment which is the postsecondary institution and the role of postsecondary student.
9. *Withdrawal* refers to the act of withdrawing from the learning event and is often used instead of the term attrition. Students may withdraw from a learning event voluntarily or they may be required to discontinue their studies by the institution.

Overview of the Study

Chapter One provided an introduction to the study, the purposes and objectives of the research, an overview of the methodology, and working definitions for terms used in the study. Chapter Two presents an overview of the literature and theory in the areas of student success, minority student retention, and Aboriginal student success. A brief history of Aboriginal peoples in Canada and more specifically the province of Saskatchewan is also presented to provide context for the systemic barriers Aboriginal learners face. Chapter Three presents a detailed overview of the research design, selection of participants, data collection and data analysis. Ethical considerations and validity and reliability are also discussed. Chapter Four presents the study's findings including an analysis of the student persistence and student attrition data. Descriptions of the perceptions and experiences of ASITT students, ASITT program staff, and SIAST program head participants regarding the effectiveness of the four-week transition program are summarized. Finally, Chapter Five presents a discussion and analysis of the study's findings, study limitations, implications for practice, and recommendations for future research.

Summary

Ensuring that Aboriginal peoples have the education, training and skills necessary to fully participate in the Canadian economy is one of society's most important challenges. This issue is of particular relevance to postsecondary education administrators in Saskatchewan. As the province becomes increasingly dependent on the young, Aboriginal, working-age population to address a shortage of skilled workers, it

will be increasingly important for postsecondary institutions to improve access and address barriers to completion for the many Aboriginal students who have been traditionally disadvantaged and underrepresented. The postsecondary education sector has a responsibility to encourage and support Aboriginal people to pursue occupations in the skilled trades and technologies; both to address the issue of economic marginalization of Aboriginal people, and also to ensure economic growth in Saskatchewan through an adequate supply of an appropriate trained workforce. To accomplish this, postsecondary institutions, including SIAST must maintain or realign current Aboriginal services and resources to support Aboriginal students to attain graduation rates similar to those of the general student body.

The focus of this evaluation research study was to evaluate the effectiveness of a postsecondary transition program for Aboriginal students at a postsecondary institution in the province of Saskatchewan, SIAST's Aboriginal Success in Trades and Technology program. The purpose of the research was to gain insight into how transition programs can be effectively designed and delivered to increase Aboriginal student participation and success rates at postsecondary institutions in Canada. An additional objective was to contribute to the growing body of knowledge in the area of Aboriginal student success.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF SELECTED LITERATURE

Introduction

There are a number of theoretical perspectives on post-secondary student departure. Much of the literature on student retention, attrition, and persistence assumes that students enroll in post-secondary institutions with graduation as their main goal. More recent theories and research, however, take into consideration student goals, different types of institutions, differences between female and male persistence, students studying in non-traditional areas, and minority student persistence. (Berger & Lyon, 2005; Braxton, 2003; Braxton & Hirschy, 2005; Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges & Hayek, 2007; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt & Associates, 2005; Swail et al., 2003).

This chapter presents an overview of the literature and theory in the field of student and minority student retention, attrition and persistence. In order to examine the effectiveness of post-secondary initiatives and programs designed to increase Aboriginal post-secondary participation and persistence rates, it is also necessary to understand how history has contributed to the barriers Saskatchewan Aboriginal learners face. A brief history of Aboriginal peoples in Canada is presented. The chapter concludes with a discussion of literature specific to Aboriginal student success and Aboriginal ways of knowing and learning.

Student Success

Retention research for the most part concentrates on analyses of graduation rates, examination of persistence patterns, the investigation of student attrition behaviors, analyses of historical trends and facts, and explanations of the psychosocial dynamics

associated with retention (Berge & Huang, 2004). Researchers and practitioners have also developed models and instruments to assess, predict, and enhance student retention.

Students enter post-secondary institutions with varied backgrounds and intentions and individual student goals differ. Not all students enter a post-secondary institution with the intent to complete a program. Braxton (2003) identifies three general types of student goals: enrolment goals, academic achievement goals, and social experience goals. Similarly, institutional goals for student success vary depending on their mission and student populations. This makes the concept of student success challenging to define and study. Post-secondary institutions need to understand what their students' intentions are so they can evaluate how the institution supports or hinders students' goal achievements.

One of the most widely studied theories in the area of student retention is authored by Vincent Tinto. His model of institutional departure takes into consideration a student's pre-entry attributes, their goals and commitments, their institutional experiences, the academic systems they interact with, and the student's academic and social integration (Tinto, 1993). Tinto's interactionalist theory considers an individual student's interaction with the post-secondary institution as an organization (Braxton, 2003).

Tinto identifies four theoretical perspectives on post-secondary student departure: economic, organizational, psychological, and sociological. (Braxton, 2003), and most research can be categorized into one or more of these perspectives. The economic perspective suggests that students will depart a post-secondary institution if they perceive that the cost of continued attendance outweighs the benefits of continued attendance. The organizational perspective focuses attention on the influence of organizational structure

and organizational behavior on students' decisions to leave an institution. The psychological perspective emphasizes the importance of students' psychological characteristics in their decision to persist. The influence of social forces on student persistence is the last perspective and it takes factors such as social interactions, culture of student peer group, student's culture of origin, and ability to acclimate themselves into dominant culture into consideration.

Another prominent researcher in the field is Alexander Astin. Astin's theory of involvement suggests that the more involved a student is with the post-secondary institution, the higher likelihood of student retention (Astin, 1993). He proposes that the amount of time and effort students put into their studies and other campus activities leads to the experiences and outcomes that affect their success. Kuh et al. (2005) suggest that student engagement has two components. What students do during college contributes toward persistence but so does the way the institution allocates its human and other resources and organizes learning opportunities and services. The better faculty and administrators are at engaging students the more effort students put forth.

Bean (2005) discussed nine themes that affect retention: intentions, institutional fit and commitment, psychological processes and key attitudes, academics, social factors, bureaucratic factors, the external environment, the student's background, and money and finance. His approach to studying student retention varies from others primarily in relation to his perspective that students' intentions to stay enrolled are shaped by attitudes. He proposes that retention programs need to take into consideration anyone and everyone on campus, such as faculty, staff, and service providers because they help shape

students' attitudes toward the institution and their subsequent decision whether to stay or leave (Bean, 2005, p. 240).

Campus environments and campus climates may also impact student departure decisions (Braxton, 2003; Strange, 2003, Baird 2000). Effective educational settings are those that are perceived as safe, inclusive and support and challenge students to learn and grow. Strange (2003) suggests a framework that focuses on four dimensions of campus environments: (a) physical components; (b) organizational structures and designs; (c) the collective characteristics of groups of people; and (d) constructed environments such as social climate and campus culture. He postulates that the effectiveness of an educational environment is a "function of its design (planned or not), what it encourages and expects students to do, and what ends it services" (Strange, 2003, p. 314).

Seidman (2005a) proposes a retention formula for student success which is $\text{Retention} = \text{Early Identification} + (\text{Early} + \text{Intensive} + \text{Continuous}) \text{ Intervention}$ (p. 314). He argues that as early as possible in the admissions process, an institution needs to identify students who may need intervention to succeed. Past institutional data on unsuccessful students can be to develop profiles of at risk students. Some students in need of assistance will not meet the profile criteria; therefore, institutions need to develop a way to identify students who are at risk early in the first term. He proposes that once an at-risk student is identified the student requires an academic and personal assessment and a mandatory intervention plan. He suggests that faculty are key to successful retention programs and that for programs to be successful, they must be powerful enough to effect change.

Minority Student Retention

Seidman (2005b) states that for all types of institutions, minority students are entering college at rates higher than in previous years, but they continue to leave at a higher rate than non-minorities. Research suggests that although minority and non-traditional students face many of the same issues as non-minorities there are different factors to consider.

Swail et al. (2003) suggest that non-traditional students live in multiple realities and that student retention must therefore take into consideration factors such as learning how to step in and out of multiple contexts, engaging in double readings of social reality and moving back and forth between their native world and the new world of college. They also suggest that minority students are often systemically inadequately academically prepared, particularly in mathematics and sciences. Those who are also inadequately prepared for non-academic challenges can experience culture shock. Lack of diversity in the student population, faculty, staff, and curriculum often restricts the nature and quality of minority students' interactions inside and outside the classroom, threatening their academic performance and social experiences.

Brief History of Aboriginal Peoples in Saskatchewan

In order to understand and evaluate the effectiveness of post-secondary initiatives and programs designed to increase Aboriginal post-secondary participation and persistence rates, it is necessary to know a little bit about the history of Canada's Aboriginal people and how it has contributed to the barriers Saskatchewan Aboriginal learners face. Excavated archeological sites provide evidence that approximately 8,000-

11,000 years ago plains-dwelling First Nations peoples established residence in Saskatchewan (http://www.royalsaskmuseum.ca/research/aboriginal_history_unit.shtml). The broad terms of First Nations, Aboriginal and Native refer to all of the people descended from these original habitants; Indian, Inuit, and Métis are societies within (Brizinski, 1989). Each of these groups, in turn, is large and diverse, and may not always share common languages, religions or beliefs. For example, today there are 74 First Nations in Saskatchewan represented by the Federation of Saskatchewan Indians (<http://fsin.com/aboutfsin>). The Métis people have a mixed biological and cultural heritage, usually French-Indian or British/Scottish-Indian with distinct cultural groups and unique blends of Indian and European-derived customs, cultures and languages (<http://www.metisnation.ca/who/index.html>).

In 1876 the Canadian government consolidated all legislation pertaining to Indians into the Indian Act (Brizinski, 1989). Aboriginal people present when registration lists were drawn up became status Indians under the Act, and those who did not register became non-status. Initially, status descended through the male line and until Bill C-31 was passed in 1985, women and their children lost status if they married a non-Native or non-status male (Brizinski, 1989). The Indian Act only applies to status Indians.

In Saskatchewan numbered treaties were signed which exchanged land for money and benefits such as hunting and fishing rights, education, health, and annuities. Treaty lists were drawn up of members of the various bands that signed treaties, and these individuals were considered registered under the Indian Act. Therefore, in Saskatchewan, the terms status Indian and treaty Indian are used interchangeably.

The Indian Act does not apply to Inuit people, but the federal government has evolved separate policies toward the Inuit. The Inuit were included in the Constitution as Native people in 1982, thus acquiring legal recognition and a solid claim to rights from the government as Aboriginal people (Brizinski, 1989). The Métis were recognized by the Constitution Act of 1982 as well, however, a final definition of Métis people is still a matter of debate (Brizinski, 1989). The Métis National Council defines Métis as a person who self-identifies as Métis, is of historic Métis Nation ancestry, is distinct from other Aboriginal peoples and is accepted by the Métis Nation (<http://www.metisnation.ca>).

The role of Aboriginal post-secondary education in Canada has evolved from a “tool of assimilation”, to a tool of integration, and most recently the recognition of Aboriginal rights and the struggle for self-government (Stonechild, 2006, p. 2). Historically, government policies used schooling to assimilate Aboriginal peoples into mainstream society. The residential school system was a prime example of assimilationist policy (Malatest, 2004, Stonechild, 2006). Indian children were removed from their home and communities and sent to schools administered primarily by religious denominations. Schools were under funded, many of the teachers had no professional training, students presented serious language and cultural barriers, and the curriculum was not relevant to the students’ past experiences or future prospects (Stonechild, 2006). The schools were relatively successful in destroying the cultural identity of the students, leaving a legacy that continues to damage First Nations communities today.

Until 1951, the Indian Act of Canada forbade Aboriginal persons from attending university unless they voluntarily relinquished their status as an Indian under a process called enfranchisement (Aboriginal Institutes’ Consortium, 2005). In addition, since

Indians were legally wards of the government and did not have the right to own property or enter into contracts it was almost impossible for them to pursue education on their own accord (Stonechild, 2006).

A fundamental policy disagreement exists between Aboriginal people and the federal government over whether higher education is a treaty right. Aboriginal people believe the spirit of the treaties is such that First Nations were to receive something of significant value, such as education that would enable future generations to “share in the bounty of Canada” (Stonechild, 2006, p. 137). This includes access to any level of training for which they qualify, and the right to establish and control their own postsecondary institutions.

Haig-Brown (1995) categorizes Canada’s current approach to post-secondary education for Aboriginal peoples into three categories: (a) the add-on approach; (b) the partnership approach; and (c) the First Nations control approach. Each category approaches the intent and nature of education for Aboriginal peoples differently and approaches can often co-exist. Haig-Brown emphasizes that real change requires less government control of Aboriginal education as well as changes in the larger Canadian society including non-Aboriginal people learning about Aboriginal cultures, addressing the issue of racism and including more Aboriginal content into mainstream curriculum.

The Assembly of First Nations (2005) recognizes that First Nation peoples live and work in a knowledge-based society and an economy that requires them to be adaptable lifelong learners. They argue that:

To prepare First Nations for the realities of the 21st century, fundamental changes to First Nations education must become a priority. This includes the recognition of

First Nations jurisdiction over education at all levels: from early childhood development through to postsecondary education, including skills development and adult education. (AFN, 2005, p. 2)

They support education that strengthens First Nation's identity through an emphasis on language, cultural and traditional knowledge, and the incorporation of elders and women.

Aboriginal Student Success

Despite the barriers they face, Aboriginal students are more successful in postsecondary education today than in the past (CMEC, 2002). However, the difficulties encountered by Aboriginal students in making a successful adjustment to student life on campus and the transition from living in a remote community or a reserve to an urban centre have been well documented. Enrolment and persistence barriers for Aboriginal students are often difficult to isolate because they are components of a complex pattern of inter-related conditions between the Aboriginal community and Canadian society (CMEC, 2002). Often Aboriginal students experience multiple barriers.

The main barriers faced by Aboriginal learners can be derived from a review of recent studies and publications (Association of Canadian Community Colleges, 2005; Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, 2002; CMEC, 2002; Holmes, 2005; Holmes, 2006; Malatest, 2004; McCue, 2006; Mendelson, 2006). These barriers can be categorized as: historical, social, cultural, lack of academic preparation and prerequisites, financial, geographic, and individual/personal. There are commonalities between Canadian Aboriginal and other minority groups in the United States such as American Indian, African American, Hispanic students; and with Australian indigenous students in

terms of becoming successfully integrated into postsecondary academic and social life (Malatest, 2004). Seidman (2005b) lists inadequate academic preparation, financial considerations, first in family to attend college, lack of information, being away from family and community, and lack of role models as some of the common issues minority students face. Malatest (2004, p. 17) cites a Western Australian study (Walker, 2000) that identifies family and personal issues and worrying about failing their courses as the two major factors impeding Aboriginal postsecondary student success.

Gender and age in Aboriginal postsecondary education participation are also factors. CMEC (2002) has identified that female Aboriginal students, especially single mothers, often face higher costs than other students and because of the increased burden of raising a family while undertaking studies they often require different social supports to persist and succeed. Aboriginal students are also, on average, older than non-Aboriginal students (CMEC, 2002) and this affects the resources they require and how they study.

A key social issue in western Canada is encouraging Aboriginal students to stay in school. High school attainment is linked to postsecondary education attainment (CMEC, 2002). In 2001, 49.8% of the Aboriginal population in the west who were over 15 and not attending school possessed less than a high school diploma compared to 31.3% of the general population (Brunnen, 2003, p. 4). Aboriginal students are most likely to withdraw from education between grades 9 and 10, and educational attainments for on-reserve students are consistently lower than those for off-reserve residents. More than twice as many Aboriginals living on-reserve have left school before grade nine compared to Aboriginals living off-reserve (Brunnen, 2003, p. 8).

The intervention strategies that are most widely used and show the most promise for positively affecting Aboriginal student participation and completion rates at mainstream institutions include: (a) reserved seats to increase access and participation; (b) preparatory, bridging and access programs; (c) transition programs that address initial issues related to transitioning to a new environment; (d) Aboriginal-specific student services; (e) enhanced level of tutoring and postsecondary skills support; (f) culturally appropriate counselling (i.e. elders); and (g) mentoring programs (CMEC, 2002; ACCC, 2005). Emphasis is placed on creating a safe and welcoming learning environment that respects diversity of learners, an approach supported by campus ecology literature (Braxton, 2003; Strange, 2003). Suggestions for creating a welcoming learning environment for Aboriginal students include: (a) increasing the number of Aboriginal faculty and staff; (b) integrating culturally relevant content in order that students have an opportunity to see themselves and their communities in the mainstream curriculum; (c) increasing the cross-cultural awareness of non-Aboriginal faculty, staff and students; and (d) ensuring Aboriginal participation in institutional planning and program development (ACCC, 2005).

Since different students may require different approaches (i.e. Aboriginal students), colleges are beginning to take a more holistic approach toward persistence by implementing multiple intervention strategies throughout the student life-cycle. Swail et al. (2003) suggest a geometric model that takes into consideration minority student differences, and encourages institutions to take into consideration cognitive, social and institutional forces that effect student outcomes. The cognitive factors form the academic ability of the student, such as the level of proficiency in reading, writing, mathematics,

and science. Social factors, such as the ability to interact effectively with other persons, personal attitudes, and cultural history, form a second set of external factors that influence the student. The third set of factors, institutional, refers to the practices, strategies, and culture of the postsecondary institution that impact student persistence and achievement. Examples include academic support programming, financial aid, student services, recruitment, admissions, curriculum and instruction.

CMEC (2002) have also identified that one of the issues that may affect Aboriginal students in the postsecondary system is the transition in support levels from secondary to postsecondary levels. While financial issues play a role in full representative participation of Aboriginals at the post-secondary education level, stronger and more visible support networks for students in post-secondary institutions are the key to fostering higher rates of success. "These supports must be proactively offered since Aboriginals who are feeling socially isolated may not seek the support that is available unless that support is offered in a progressive and accessible manner." (CMEC, 2002, p. 55). Supports must also take into consideration basic needs such as day-care, housing, relocation costs, and transportation. "The Aboriginal student is still in the world of survival and not able to give full energy to learning." (CMEC, 2002, p. 50).

Aboriginal Ways of Knowing and Learning

Not all learners come from a Western perspective of learning and knowing, although this perspective tends to dominate the study of adult learning (Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner, 2007). Non-western perspectives are important to consider because they make us aware that there are different ways of thinking about how learning

takes place. Indigenous peoples throughout the world, including those in Canada, have sustained their unique world views and ways of knowing for thousands of years, despite major social upheavals and attempts at assimilation or marginalization (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005).

Barnhardt and Kawagley (2005) discuss the tendency in earlier literature on indigenous education to focus on how to get Native people to acquire a better understanding of the Western world view. Only recently has literature started to address how to get Western educators to understand native ways of knowing as knowledge systems in their own right (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005; Cajete, 1994; Canadian Council on Learning, 2007; Hughes & More, 1997; Warner, 2006). Indigenous or native ways of knowing, in contrast to Western educational practices, are “acquired and represented through the context of place, revolving around the needs of a community and the best efforts to actualize a holistic understanding of the community’s environment” (Warner, 2006, p. 149). The Aboriginal Human Resource Development Council of Canada (2006, p. 11) has summarized some of the major differences between traditional Aboriginal culture and mainstream Western culture (see Table 1). Understanding that multiple worldviews and knowledge systems co-exist is important if we want to fully engage the Aboriginal population and better understand and address the postsecondary success barriers they face.

Table 1

Differences Between Traditional Aboriginal and Mainstream Western Cultures

Aboriginal Culture	Mainstream Western Culture
Community	Individualism
Oral tradition	Tradition of print and history
Present tense dominant	Future tense dominant
World understood mythically	World understood scientifically
Goals are met with patience	Goals are met with aggressive effort
Ownership is communal	Ownership is the reward for hard work
Work is motivated by group need	Work is motivated by ambition
Aging is a source of wisdom	Aging is decay and loss
Silences are acceptable	Silences are a waste of time
Assertiveness is non-communal	Assertiveness is a basic social skill
Listening skills are prized	Communication skills are prized
Soft spoken words carry farthest	Emphasis carries the day
Family is extended family	Family is nuclear family

Note: Differences are not all-inclusive and represent only portions of the highly diverse Aboriginal population in varying degrees.

Pidgeon (2008) indicates that student success is generally discussed from the dominant Western cultural viewpoint which focuses on intellectual capital such as graduation rates and success strategies to address perceived deficits in the individual. She provides an alternate framework, grounded in Indigenous epistemology, from which a more holistic understanding of success can be examined. The framework takes into consideration physical, emotional and spiritual realms, as well as intellectual aspects. It also emphasizes that the structures of the institution and the attitudes of those within the institution may impact Aboriginal students and their understandings of success.

The Contribution of This Study

Canadian postsecondary institutions have a depth of experience in delivering services and programs for Aboriginal students (ACCC, 2005; AUCC, 2006; CMEC,

2002; Holmes, 2006); however, Canadian institutions have only recently started to track Aboriginal student enrolment, and even more recently measure the effectiveness of Aboriginal support programming and services (Holmes, 2006; Mendelson, 2006). This evaluation research study will contribute to the growing body of literature in the area of Aboriginal postsecondary student success in Canada by taking an in depth look at a Canadian postsecondary transition program designed specifically for Aboriginal students. The study incorporates both quantitative and qualitative data sources, and multiple stakeholder perspectives to explore the effectiveness of the program. The researcher hopes to provide some insight into how Aboriginal student transition programs can be designed to maximally increase Aboriginal student completion rates.

Summary

This chapter presented an overview of the research and literature in the field of postsecondary student retention discussing primarily the contributions of Astin (1993), Bean (2005), Braxton (2003, 2005), Kuh et. al (2005, 2007), Seidman (2005a, 2005b), Strange (2003), Swail et al. (2003) and Tinto (1993). Literature takes into consideration student goals, different types of institutions, different types of students, and the various economic, organizational, psychological, and sociological factors that influence their persistence. Research suggests that although minority and non-traditional students face many of the same issues as non-minorities there are different factors to consider such as multiple realities and systemic issues and barriers.

Like other minority groups, Aboriginal students in Canada face multiple systemic barriers that negatively affect their postsecondary education participation and completion

rates. These barriers are categorized in the literature as historical, social, cultural, lack of academic preparation and prerequisites, financial, geographic, and individual/personal (ACCC, 2005; AUCC, 2002; CMEC, 2002; Holmes, 2005; Holmes 2006; Malatest, 2004; McCue, 2006; Mendelson, 2006). This chapter presented a brief history of Aboriginal peoples in the province and discussed the lingering effect of Canada's assimilation policies and the residential school system.

Postsecondary institutions are beginning to recognize the diversity of their student bodies, and are taking a more proactive, holistic approach toward increasing student persistence by implementing multiple intervention strategies throughout the student life-cycle. Intervention strategies that are widely used to affect Aboriginal student participation and completion rates include enhanced recruitment, access programming, transition programming, mentoring, and ongoing cultural support and services (ACCC, 2005; AUCC, 2006; CMEC, 2002). A safe and welcoming learning environment that respects the diversity of learners is emphasized. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the literature related to multiple worldviews and knowledge systems, and the importance of understanding how Aboriginal ways of knowing and learning may affect postsecondary success.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter presents an overview of the study's research design and methodology. The chapter begins with an overview of the evaluation research study design, a description of the participant recruitment process, and a summary of the data collection process. This is followed by an explanation of how the data was coded and analyzed. The chapter concludes with a discussion of ethical considerations, and information on how the researcher addressed research validity and reliability.

Research Design

This evaluation research study focused specifically on one component of the ASITT program, the four-week transition program. Specific objectives of this study were to:

1. Examine how a program of early intensive intervention impacted the persistence rate of a cohort of Aboriginal students in trades and technology program at SIAST
2. Examine ASITT students' satisfaction with participation in the four-week transition program
3. Explore the perceptions and experiences of student participants regarding the effectiveness of the four-week transition program in helping them transition to their postsecondary studies
4. Explore the perceptions of the ASITT program staff regarding the effectiveness of the ASITT program in helping students transition to postsecondary studies

5. Explore the perceptions of SIAST program heads regarding the effectiveness of the four-week transition program in helping Aboriginal students transition to postsecondary studies
6. Evaluate the achievement of the four-week transition program goals

A pre-experimental, static group comparison study design was used to compare ASITT program participant persistence with non-ASITT student persistence (Heffner, 2004). Pre-experimental studies follow basic experimental steps but do not include a control group. In static group comparison study designs, the lack of a control group is mitigated somewhat with the use of two groups, one of which receives the treatment and the other does not. A post-test score is then determined to measure the difference, after treatment, between the two groups. If no pre-test is used, any differences between the groups prior to the study are unknown. No pre-test was administered in this study.

Students who completed the four-week ASITT transition program were compared to Aboriginal students in the same programs of study who did not participate in the four-week ASITT transition program. The post-test measurement was student persistence. Student persistence was measured for the two groups, using student enrolment and withdrawal rates at the end of the first semester. Student persistence was also measured at the end of the first year looking at program completion rates and withdrawal rates.

Achievement of program goals and stakeholder perceptions were explored using a combined objectives-oriented and participant oriented approach. Fitzpatrick et al. (2004) state that the distinguishing feature of an objectives-oriented evaluation approach is that the “purposes of the activity are specified” and the “evaluation focuses on the extent to

which those purposes are achieved” (p. 71). Information can be used to evaluate the activity, reformulate the purpose of the activity, or reformulate the assessment used to determine the achievement of program goals. A participant-oriented approach takes into consideration “the needs, values and perspectives of the program stakeholders” (Fitzpatrick et al., 2004, p. 149). This evaluation research model favours the use of a combination of both approaches to evaluate the effectiveness of the program in meeting the needs of the program stakeholders and achieving the program goals.

Multiple data collection methods were used to maximize the breadth and depth of the study and to gather stakeholder feedback (Fitzpatrick et al., 2004). Stakeholder perceptions of the effectiveness of the program and stakeholder program satisfaction levels were examined through the quantitative and qualitative methods described under the data collection section in this chapter.

Selection of Participants

This research used purposeful sampling. “Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (Merriam, 1998, p. 61). Purposeful sampling was most appropriate for gaining insight into stakeholder perceptions of the effectiveness of the four-week transition program. A description of the population selection of the three stakeholder groups follows: ASITT students, ASITT program staff, and SIAST program heads.

ASITT Student Population

All self-identified Aboriginal applicants accepted to SIAST Kelsey Campus and SIAST Woodland Campus certificate and diploma trades and technology programs for fall 2007 received information about the ASITT program from SIAST and were invited to participate. Out of 143 invited students, a total of 24 students, 11 at SIAST Kelsey Campus and 13 at SIAST Woodland Campus, registered for the ASITT program. All 24 of the students were included in the static group comparison study, and all 24 were invited to complete the student questionnaire that measured their perceptions of the effectiveness of the program at the end of the first semester of study.

ASITT Program Staff Participants

Eight SIAST Student Development Department staff members were identified through the Academic Director of Student Development as having responsibility for a significant portion of the planning, delivery or evaluation of the August 2007 ASITT four-week transition program; or the ongoing support of ASITT students throughout the 2007-08 academic year. Staff roles for the eight identified individuals included program head, counsellor, life skills coach, and instructor. All were invited by email to participate in an interview that explored the effectiveness of the program from their point of view.

A number of additional instructors and special guests were involved in administering testing, facilitating activities or delivering specialized content during the four-week transition program. Aboriginal Elders provided cultural teachings and personal support. This secondary group was not invited to become part of the study interview because of their more limited and narrow involvement with the program.

SIAST Program Head Participants

SIAST academic program heads are responsible, under the direction of their division dean, for the development and delivery of one or more credentialed programs of study at SIAST. A total of 12 SIAST program heads at SIAST Kelsey Campus and SIAST Woodland campus had ASITT students enrolled in their academic programs of study. All were invited by email to participate in a focus group that examined the effectiveness of the four-week ASITT transition program.

Data Collection

Methodological triangulation or multiple data collection methods were used in this study to maximize the breadth and depth of the study and to gather richer stakeholder feedback (Cohen et al., 2000; Fitzpatrick et al., 2004). Cohen et al. (2000) define triangulation as the “use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of human behaviour” (p. 112). Triangulation is used in the social sciences to explain something more fully by studying it from more than one standpoint, at the same time strengthening validity and reliability. Table 2 summarizes the research objectives and the data collection methods used in this study.

Table 2

Summary of Research Objectives and Data Collection Methods

Research Objective	Data Collection Method
Examine how a program of early intensive intervention impacts the persistence rate of a cohort of Aboriginal students in trades and technology programs at SIAST	Pre-experimental, static group comparison using enrolment data from SIAST Banner Student Information System. ASITT student persistence compared to non-ASITT student persistence at end of first semester and at end of academic year
Examine ASITT student satisfaction with participation in the 4-week program	Analysis of program-administered student satisfaction survey completed by students immediately following completion of 4-week program
Explore perceptions and experiences of student participants regarding the effectiveness of the 4-week transition program in helping them transition to their postsecondary studies	Researcher-administered questionnaire completed by ASITT students after the end of the first semester.
Explore perceptions of ASITT program staff regarding the effectiveness of the ASITT program in helping students transition to their postsecondary studies	Researcher-led one-on-one ASITT staff interviews at the end of the first semester using semi-structured interview format.
Explore perceptions of SIAST program heads regarding the effectiveness of the ASITT program in helping students transition to their postsecondary studies	Researcher-led focus group with SIAST program heads at end of first semester.
Explore the achievement of ASITT program goals	Using a combined objectives-oriented and participant-oriented approach, compare program goals to stakeholder perceptions and experiences. Data collected as above through enrolment data, ASITT student questionnaires, ASITT program staff interviews, and SIAST program head focus group

ASITT Student Persistence Data

The program enrolment information for the full cohort of 24 ASITT students was tracked using information from the SIAST Banner Student Information System.

Enrolment, withdrawal and completion statistics were provided to the researcher by SIAST's Institutional Research and Analysis Office and SIAST Registration Services through the official information request process.

ASITT Student Satisfaction Data

ASITT program staff administered a student satisfaction survey immediately at the end of the August 2007 four-week transition program. Copies of the surveys with the names removed were provided to the researcher by SIAST. The survey contained 16 questions that rated the students' satisfaction with various components of the program using a 1-5 Likert rating scale, 1=low and 5=high. Cohen et al. (2000) suggest that "rating scales are particularly useful for tapping attitudes, perceptions and opinions of respondents" (p. 255). Ten additional open-ended questions were also included allowing for the respondents to reply using their own words. The researcher was informed that although the survey was not formally piloted, the same questionnaire was used with the 2006-07 ASITT students at SIAST Kelsey Campus. The student satisfaction survey is provided in Appendix A.

ASITT Student Program Effectiveness Questionnaire Data

Surveys or questionnaires are often used in evaluation to measure opinions, attitudes, behaviour or other circumstances. Fitzpatrick et al. (2004) indicate that the term survey most appropriately refers to the general method, while the term questionnaire

refers to the instrument used to collect the data (p. 341). Cohen et al. (2000) suggest that questionnaires are useful instruments for collecting information, they offer flexibility in administration and they provide structured data that is fairly straightforward to analyze. The drawbacks are that questionnaires are time-consuming to develop, limited in scope and flexibility, reliant on good question and survey design and often there is a low percentage of returns (Cohen et al., 2000; Gorard, 2001).

A student questionnaire was developed to obtain data from the ASITT students about their perceptions of the effectiveness of the four-week transition program. Various resources were consulted to inform construction of the survey tool (Fitzpatrick et al., 2004; Cohen et al., 2000; Gorard, 2001). A design plan for the questionnaire was developed keeping in mind the primary evaluation research question and additional evaluation research objectives.

The questionnaire consisted of 46 questions. Both structured and open-ended questions were included in the questionnaire. Structured, closed questions were used to enable the generation of frequencies of response and comparison across stakeholder groups (Cohen et al., 2000). Open-ended questions were included to provide an opportunity for respondents to expand upon their structured responses or to provide recommendations and suggestions for improving the program content or structure. Gorard (2001) suggests that open-ended questions are useful where they will be used to help explain a statistical pattern.

Structured questions relating to life circumstances were measured using multiple-choice items that presented a list of response alternatives or a yes-no response choice. For example, "Did you have to move to Saskatoon to begin your studies at SIAST?"

Attitudes were measured using a Likert scale, which rated responses on a continuum. A Likert scale is an ordered, one-dimensional scale, where respondents select a response that best represents their view (Cohen et al., 2000; Fitzpatrick et al., 2004). Likert scales are often used to measure attitudes because “they build in a degree of sensitivity and differentiation of response whilst still generating numbers (Cohen, 2000, p. 253). For example, the questionnaire asked the students to rate the effectiveness of various components of the four-week program in relation to helping them with their comfort level and readiness for transitioning into their postsecondary program of study. A rating scale of “not helpful”, “helpful” and “very helpful” was used to determine the perceived helpfulness of each of these components, and a scale of “not important”, “important” and “very important” was used to determine the perceived importance of each of these components.

Program components included in the evaluation were taken from the program goals outlined in the ASITT proposal document (SIAST, 2006a). Components included securing suitable living accommodations, ensuring banking and finances were in place, orientation to off-campus services, orientation to on-campus services, providing an understanding of the challenges of their selected program of studies, providing basic skills development, providing program-related academic skills review, having participants set personal and academic goals, providing and understanding of their level of academic and personal preparedness, and establishing connections with and introductions to key individuals

The face validity, practicality and usability of the survey was evaluated by having one Aboriginal student, one non-Aboriginal student, the Academic Director of Student

Development, the ASITT program staff at each campus, the Okimaw of SIAST's Aboriginal Council, and SIAST's institutional Research & Analysis Office provide feedback on the questionnaire's legibility, time to complete, content and layout. Feedback was incorporated into the final version of the questionnaire. The questionnaire is provided in Appendix B.

The researcher chose to introduce and explain the survey to the participants face-to-face to help ensure that students understood the purpose of the study and the voluntary nature of their participation. The method of survey delivery was a self-administered survey approach to ensure student anonymity was preserved and honest answers encouraged (Gorard, 2001). A date was set at each campus, through the ASITT program staff, for the researcher to meet with the ASITT students at one of their events. Students were informed in advance by the program staff that the researcher would be present. ASITT program staff emphasized to the students that participation was voluntary.

An information sheet was developed which introduced the researcher, the nature of the research, what to expect, the voluntary nature of their participation and the confidentiality of their responses. The information sheet provided a standardized guide for the verbal introduction of the information at each campus, and a copy was given to each student participant for their records. Completion of the questionnaire was considered the students' consent to participate in the study. The information sheet is provided in Appendix C.

To maximize the response rate, remaining information sheets and questionnaires were left with the ASITT program staff. They followed up with the ASITT students still at SIAST who did not attend the January survey sessions. Students who left the transition

program or their SIAST program before the questionnaire was administered were mailed an information sheet, a questionnaire and a stamped addressed return envelope.

ASITT Program Staff Interview Data

Interviewing is a common means for collecting data and qualitative interviews are often used for learning perspectives, attitudes, behaviours and experiences of others (Cohen et al., 2000, Fitzpatrick et al., 2004; Merriam, 1998). Because of the relatively small number of ASITT program staff, and the desire of the researcher to maximize both information and understanding, an interview was chosen as the method of collecting data from ASITT program staff on their perceptions of the effectiveness of the four-week transition program.

A semi-structured interview format was selected with a mix of more-and less-structured questions (Merriam, 1998). This type of interview was chosen to increase comparability of responses, help to reduce the interviewer effect, and facilitate the organization and analysis of the data (Cohen et al., 2000; Merriam, 2001). Interview format and interview questions were designed with the primary research question and additional research objectives in mind. The general wording and the order of the set questions was pre-determined to maximize reliability (Cohen et al. 2000). Structured questions and answers were used to obtain specific information from all respondents on the relative importance and effectiveness of various elements of the ASITT program. Open-ended questions were used to explore specific predetermined areas of interest such as perceptions of common challenges Aboriginal students face in transitioning into postsecondary studies at SIAST and perceptions of barriers to Aboriginal student program

completion at SIAST. The structure allowed for themes and ideas to be explored with respondents as they arose during the interviews, and for the researcher to clarify the meanings of relevant aspects of the answers.

Concerns of validity and reliability were addressed as much as possible through the careful construction of the interview questions, attention to the researcher's interviewing skills and approach, and attention to respondents' non-verbal cues (Fitzpatrick et al., 2004; Cohen et al., 2000). The interview questions were piloted with the Okimaw of the SIAST Aboriginal Council, the Academic Director of Student Development, and the SIAST Institutional Research & Analysis office. Recommendations were incorporated and a final interview guide produced. The interview guide is provided in Appendix D.

A total of eight ASITT program staff at both campuses were invited by email to participate in the interview for the study. The ASITT program staff members who agreed to be interviewed were sent a copy of the interview in advance along with a copy of the interview consent form. The consent form explained the purpose of the study, the interviewee's role and what to expect, risks and benefits of their participation, the voluntary nature of their participation and the confidentiality of information. The consent form asked for permission from the interviewee to audio tape the interview and permission to use a general position descriptor such as "ASITT program staff member from SIAST Woodland Campus" to describe their involvement. The interview consent form is provided in Appendix E.

Interviews were in-person at the staff member's campus and dates were arranged by telephone and email. Interviews took approximately one hour to complete and were

recorded using an Olympus digital voice recorder. This small and unobtrusive recording device helped minimize nervousness of respondents, and allowed for electronic storing of the interviews. The researcher reviewed the interview consent form with each interviewee, answered any questions, and had the interviewee sign the consent form prior to beginning the interview and turning on the tape recorder. Interviews were held in small meeting rooms behind closed doors to maximize privacy and minimize interruptions. The researcher did not take notes during the interview and used a semi-directive, non-confrontational interview style using verbal encouragement, reflecting on remarks made by the respondent, verifying interpretations of the interviewee's answers, and asking probing and clarifying questions where appropriate (Cohen et al., 2000).

Each interview was fully transcribed by the researcher and then forwarded to the appropriate interviewee for review and approval. Final, approved versions of the interviews were used for data analysis.

SIAST Program Head Focus Group Data

The researcher chose a focus group as the method for obtaining data from SIAST Program Heads about their knowledge of the ASITT program and their perceptions of the effectiveness of the four-week transition program. Cohen et al. (2000) indicate that focus groups are useful to triangulate with more traditional forms of interviewing such as the one-on-one interviews used with the ASITT program staff and the ASITT student questionnaire. They describe focus groups as a form of group interview; however, the information is primarily gained through the interaction within the group who discuss a topic or topics supplied by the researcher. Fitzpatrick et al. (2004) describe focus groups

as a group process because often dialogue emerges between focus group participants themselves. The interviewer acts more like a facilitator in the process “making use of ideas and issues raised by participants to obtain reactions from others in the group” (p. 351).

The goal of the focus group was to develop a better understanding of the program heads’ perspectives of the academic and personal preparedness of the Aboriginal students who had gone through the four-week transition program versus Aboriginal students in their programs who had not. Recognizing that program head familiarity with the ASITT program and the ASITT students within their program would vary, a secondary goal was to better understand program head perceptions of the common challenges Aboriginal students in their program face when transitioning into their program of study and a better understanding of the common barriers to completion these same students face.

The focus group guide was developed with the primary research question and additional research objectives in mind. The student questionnaire and ASITT program interview questions were reviewed to maximize comparability during the analysis stage. Four main areas of interest were outlined: ASITT program familiarity, transition challenges, completion barriers, and components of successful postsecondary transition programs. The guide contained 12 potential questions to direct the discussion. The guide was reviewed by SIAST’s Institutional Research and Analysis office and changes were incorporated. The focus group guide is provided in Appendix F.

All program heads from the programs where ASITT students were enrolled (n=12), were sent an e-mail invitation to participate in a focus group session to share their perceptions of the ASITT students’ level of academic and personal preparedness to

undertake postsecondary studies. The email introduced the researcher and nature and purpose of the research. To maximize participation in the focus group a second email invitation was sent a few weeks later. E-mail is a common form of communication in the SIAST academic community, and the researcher received responses from eleven program heads.

Program heads who confirmed participation were sent an additional email with the details of the focus group date, time and place and a copy of the informed consent form to review prior to the focus group. They were informed the focus group would take approximately one and a half hours. The consent form introduced the researcher and the nature and purpose of the research. It reviewed their involvement, the risks and benefits of participation, emphasized the voluntary nature of their participation and reinforced the confidentiality of information. The form also advised program heads that the focus group would be audio taped and major points recorded on a flip chart. The informed consent form is provided in Appendix G.

A meeting room was selected to suit the size of the group and to ensure privacy. Refreshments were arranged. The researcher moderated the focus group and began the session with a review of the informed consent form. Signed consent forms were collected from the program heads. The session was recorded using an Olympus digital voice recorder and major points were recorded on a flip chart by the researcher.

Data Analysis

Merriam (1998) describes data analysis as the process of making sense out of the data (p. 178). The researcher began the data analysis process by reviewing the selected

literature related to postsecondary student retention, attrition, and persistence and the main barriers faced by Aboriginal learners. ASITT program documents, the ASITT student satisfaction questionnaire administered by the program, the ASITT student questionnaire, the ASITT program staff interviews, the SIAST program head focus group and the ASITT student data rounded out the data collection process. All of these data resources were used to provide a framework for the analysis process.

ASITT Student Persistence Data Analysis

Students who completed the four-week ASITT transition program were compared to Aboriginal students in the same programs of study who did not participate in the four-week ASITT transition program. The post-test measurement was student persistence. Student persistence was measured for the two groups, comparing percentage of students still enrolled at the end of the first semester. Student persistence was also measured at the end of the first year comparing percentage of students who graduated or completed their year successfully. An analysis of student withdrawals was also conducted, examining frequency of withdrawal reasons for each group.

Additional 2007-08 academic year student data was compiled for the purpose of analysis and comparison including: (a) overall and self-reported Aboriginal enrolment by gender and age distribution by campus in all SIAST programs; and (b) overall and self-reported Aboriginal enrolment at SIAST Kelsey Campus and SIAST Woodland Campus by program, gender, and age distribution in trades and technology programs. A demographic profile of the ASITT students was compiled including geographic location, age distribution, gender, program, previous level of education.

ASITT Student Satisfaction Data Analysis

Answers to each of the 16 rated questions were coded and entered into SPSS Version 14.0 software. Frequencies and percentages were generated for each structured question. Open-ended question responses were tracked in a spreadsheet and analyzed. Frequency and percentage of like-responses were generated.

ASITT Student Program Effectiveness Questionnaire Data Analysis

The structured responses in the student questionnaires were coded and entered into SPSS Version 14.0 software. Data analysis included frequencies and percentages for each structured question. Open-ended question responses were tracked in a spreadsheet and analyzed. Frequency and percentage of like-responses were generated.

Development of Themes and Codes

Data analysis began during the data collection process for the qualitative data. To organize and manage data related to the ASITT program staff interviews and the SIAST program head focus group, categories and themes were systematically constructed using the constant comparative method. The constant comparative method of data analysis is described by Merriam (1998) as a method that “involves comparing one segment of data with another to determine similarities and differences” (p. 18). Fitzpatrick et al. (2004) describe a similar process called content analysis where “patterns and themes are identified; coding schemes are established; and then, selected ‘chunks’ of the textual information are coded, counted, and analyzed” (p. 362).

The researcher began analyzing and coding the data immediately after the first interview, noting possible themes and related categories. Themes represented recurrent

concepts noted in the interview responses while theme categories emerged as separate concepts that were related to the larger themes. These themes were then related back to the literature on student retention, attrition, and persistence.

The researcher chose to manage the qualitative data using simple word processing and spreadsheet applications. Merriam (1998) discusses a number of issues in the use of qualitative software indicating that it may shape a researcher's choice of methods, distance the user from the data, introduce inappropriate application of tools, and unintentionally shape tasks. Because of these concerns, the small number of interviews and the researcher's preference to be hands on with the data, qualitative software was not utilized.

ASITT Program Staff Interview Data Analysis

The six interview recordings were transcribed from the digital voice recordings using Microsoft Word. Each transcribed interview was reviewed line by line, and analyzed using the constant comparative method described above. Text was coded within each word document using the theme and category framework in Table 3. The search and replace function was used to update codes as new or more finely tuned themes and codes emerged. After all interview coding was complete, coded text was copied and pasted into themed spreadsheets for analysis. A spreadsheet was created for each qualitative question, and also one for each theme.

Data related to program staff roles was summarized in chart format. Data for the structured answers to the questions related to the importance of the program goals and the effectiveness of the four-week program in meeting the program goals was entered into

SPSS Version 14.0 for analysis. Data related to student participation as well as suggestions for program recruitment, program structure and program content was also coded and copied into separate themed word documents. Comments were reviewed and summarized. Frequency of like-responses was noted.

SIAST Program Head Focus Group Data Analysis

A total of six program heads participated in the focus group. The program head focus group discussion was recorded on an Olympus digital voice recorder and themes were noted during the focus group on flip charts. The researcher reviewed the audio recording to ensure all themes were captured correctly and minor adjustments were made to the flip chart notes. The themes were then compared to the theme and category framework that was developed for the program staff interviews. Where similarities existed, the same themes and categories and codes were used. Where new themes and categories emerged, these were added to the framework (see Table 3).

Ethical Considerations

Approval from SIAST's Office of Applied Research and Innovation, through the Associate Vice President, Educational Services, was obtained to conduct research on-site including: (a) permission to conduct a survey, focus groups and interviews; (b) permission to examine SIAST official documents; and (c) access to student data following freedom of information and protection of privacy requirements. Permission to use the organization's name was also secured. The researcher also received ethics approval from Memorial University of Newfoundland's Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR No. 2007/08-030-ED).

The participants in this research study assumed no unusual risks. The research was not an evaluation of participant performance or effectiveness. Participant confidentiality was assured and the use of generic descriptors was used to protect the identity of participants. Survey, interview and focus group participants were fully informed prior to participation verbally and in writing, and informed consent was obtained. Subjects had the option to refuse to take part in the research and to terminate their involvement at anytime.

Researcher bias and undertaking research within one's own institution were recognized as potential ethical issues. Fitzpatrick et. al (2004) discuss a number of sources of bias in evaluation research including personal beliefs, interpersonal relationships, financial relationships, and organizational relationships factors. Merriam (1998) suggests researchers be aware of potential bias in all phases of research including planning, conducting, analyzing and reporting. The researcher's position as Associate Vice President, Student Affairs at the institution must therefore be acknowledged. The researcher recognizes she may have unconscious biases to the research given her responsibility for the division that is responsible for student retention and student success initiatives. Fitzpatrick et al. (2004) indicate that becoming aware represents the first step in preventing bias.

The researcher acknowledges that she is in a perceived position of power. It is important to note that the researcher does not directly supervise the staff members that participated in the study. Responsibility for the ASITT program and the ASITT program staff is that of the Academic Director of Student Development. This position reports to the researcher. The Academic Director was not a participant in the study, however, she

was asked to provide assistance in the review of the data collection tools. The researcher has no preconceived notions regarding the outcome of the evaluation research study, and care was taken to ensure there was no pressure on potential subjects to participate or respond in a particular manner.

This research did involve Aboriginal peoples therefore additional care was taken in the design of the informed consent form, the survey instrument and the interview questions to be aware of potential language barriers and cultural differences. Issues of Aboriginal ownership of information provided by and relevant to Aboriginal students and staff have been considered and the SIAST Aboriginal communities have been engaged and consulted throughout the research study. Formal communication has occurred through SIAST Aboriginal Council, an 18-member advisory committee that provides the SIAST president with an Aboriginal perspective on institutional issues and initiatives.

Validity and Reliability

Care was taken at the design stage to maximize internal and external validity in each phase of the research process such as the research plan, data collection, data management and data analysis. Merriam (1998, p. 218) defines internal validity as the extent to which research findings are congruent with reality. Internal validity was addressed in this research through the use of multiple data sources, peer examination in the development of the tools, and clarification of this researcher's biases. External validity, or the generalization of findings to other situations (Merriam, 1998), in this research will be limited because it is an evaluation research study. The experiences and findings of this case, however, can serve to expand the knowledge and inform practice in

other organizations as they plan and deliver programs to enhance the success of Aboriginal postsecondary students.

Cohen et. al (2000) define reliability as “a synonym for consistency and replicability over time, over instruments, and over groups of respondents” (p. 117). They refer to three principle types of reliability: stability, equivalence and internal consistency. Merriam (1998) suggests that in qualitative research reliability is related to consistency. “The question then is not whether findings will be found again but whether the results are consistent with the data collected” (Merriam, 1998, p. 206). This researcher has maximized reliability by clearly explaining the assumptions and theory behind the research and by describing in detail how participants were selected, how the data was collected, how the data was analyzed, how themes and categories were determined, and how conclusions were derived.

Summary

This chapter described the research design and methodology used in this evaluation research study. A pre-experimental, static group comparison study design was used to compare ASITT program participant persistence with non-ASITT student persistence. An objectives-oriented and participant-oriented evaluation approach was used to evaluate the achievement of the four-week transition program goals. Perceptions of ASITT students, ASITT program staff and SIAST program heads regarding the effectiveness of the program were explored.

Multiple data collection methods were used to maximize the breadth and depth of the study. Data collection methods included student statistics, the review of a previously

conducted student survey, a new student survey conducted at the end of the first semester, a semi-structured interview with ASITT program staff, and a focus group with SIAST program heads. Themes and codes were established using the constant comparative method and provided a framework for an analysis of the quantitative data.

The chapter concluded with a discussion of ethical considerations and an overview of how the researcher maximized research validity and reliability.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter summarizes the study's results beginning with a presentation of the ASITT student persistence data. Enrolment, graduation and withdrawal rates of ASITT students are compared to rates of Aboriginal students and non-Aboriginal students in the same programs of study that were not part of the ASITT program. A summary and analysis of reasons for withdrawal for the three groups is also presented.

Perceptions of the ASITT students immediately following the completion of the August 2007 four-week transition program, as measured through a program-administered questionnaire, are summarized in the ASITT Student Satisfaction Survey Results section. Student perceptions and experiences of the program after the end of the first semester of postsecondary study are summarized in the ASITT Student Program Effectiveness Questionnaire Results section. Lastly, ASITT program staff interview results are presented, followed by SIAST program head focus group results.

ASITT Student Persistence Results

ASITT Student Cohort Description

A total of 24 students were registered in the ASITT program during academic year 2007-08, 11 at SIAST Kelsey Campus and 13 at SIAST Woodland Campus. All ASITT students were of Aboriginal ancestry with 19 First Nations and five Métis students, and all students were male with the exception of one female student. All ASITT students met the minimum admissions requirements for their program of study. Ages range from 18 through 54 with a mean age of 27. Twenty students were from outside the campus cities.

Measure of Persistence at End of First Semester

ASITT student persistence was measured at the end of the first semester as one measure of the effectiveness of the four-week transition program in assisting students with transitioning to their postsecondary studies. Table 3 shows a distribution of initial program enrolments across campuses along with the number of withdrawals. It compares the number of ASITT students withdrawn at December 31, 2007 with the number of non-ASITT Aboriginal students and non-Aboriginal students who have withdrawn in the same programs of study.

As of December 31, 2007 non-Aboriginal persistence rates were higher than Aboriginal student persistence rates. Only 75% of the ASITT students were still enrolled, while 81.36% of non-ASITT Aboriginal students and 91.16% of non-Aboriginal students remained. Overall, students from the ASITT cohort did not demonstrate a higher persistence than their counterparts. However, an analysis of persistence by campus yields slightly different results. This analysis shows that SIAST Woodland Campus had a much higher ASITT student persistence rate at 84.62% than SIAST Kelsey Campus at 63.64%. In addition, SIAST Woodland Campus ASITT students had a higher persistence rate (84.62%) than their non-ASITT Aboriginal counterparts at Woodland Campus (75.75%).

At the program level, of interest is the large Aboriginal student withdrawal rate (88.89%) in Carpentry at Woodland Campus. Eight Aboriginal students withdrew in the first term. The lone persister was an ASITT student. Also of note is the 100% retention of all students in the Electrician Applied Certificate and the Resource and Environmental Law diploma.

Table 3

Student Enrolment and Withdrawals at December 31, 2007 (2007-08 cohort)

Program	Total Enrol	Non- Aboriginal Enrol	Non-ASITT Aboriginal Enrol	ASITT Aboriginal Enrol
Kelsey Campus				
Auto Body	14(-1)	10	1	3(-1)
Automotive Service	47(-7)	35(-4)	8(-1)	4(-2)
Computer Systems (2 yr)	40(-5)	36(-4)	3(-1)	1
Heavy Equipment	60(-6)	56(-5)	3	1(-1)
Power Engineering (2 yr)	37(-3)	31(-3)	5	1
Welding	36(-7)	29(-6)	6(-1)	1
Subtotal Kelsey	234(-29)	197(-22)	26(-3)	11(-4)
% Withdrawn	-12.39%	-11.16%	-11.53%	-36.36%
Woodland Campus				
Carpentry	21(-8)	12	6(-6)	3(-2)
Electrician	32	23	7	2
Industrial Mechanics	14(-1)	9	4(-1)	1
Outdoor Power Equipment	12(-1)	8	3(-1)	1
Resource/Env Law (2 yr)	22	13	8	1
Welding	34(-1)	24(-1)	5	5
Subtotal Woodland	135(-11)	89(-1)	33(-8)	13(-2)
% Withdrawn	-8.15%	-1.12%	-24.24%	-15.38%
Total Enrolment	369 (-40)	286 (-23)	59(-11)	24(-6)
% Withdrawn	-10.84%	-8.04%	-18.64%	-25.00%

Note: Numbers outside brackets represent total enrolment. Numbers inside brackets represent number of students that have withdrawn. Percentages represent percent of student withdrawn. Source: SIAST Institutional Research and Analysis operational data store reports generated June 18, 2008.

Measure of Persistence/Completion at Year-End

A second measure of persistence was taken at the end of the academic year in June 2008 (see Table 4). ASITT student persistence was compared to non-ASITT Aboriginal student persistence in the same programs of study. At year end, 50% of the

ASITT students had withdrawn while only 30.51% of the non-ASITT Aboriginal students had withdrawn and 12.24% of non-Aboriginal students had withdrawn. ASITT student withdrawal rates were slightly lower at SIAST Woodland Campus (46.15%) than SIAST Kelsey Campus (54.55%). At the program level, Power Engineering and Resource and Environmental Law had exceptionally low withdrawal rates.

Table 4

Student Enrolment and Withdrawals at June 30, 2008 (2007-08 cohort)

Program	Total Enrol	Non-Aborig Enrol	Non-ASITT Aborig Enrol	ASITT Aborig Enrol
Kelsey Campus				
Auto Body	14(-2)	10(-1)	1	3(-1)
Automotive Service	47(-13)	35(-5)	8(-5)	4(-3)
Computer Systems (2 yr)	40(-9)	36(-7)	3(-1)	1(-1)
Heavy Equipment	60(-6)	56(-5)	3	1(-1)
Power Engineering (2 yr)	37(-3)	31(-3)	5	1
Welding	36(-8)	29(-7)	6(-1)	1
Subtotal Kelsey	234(-41)	197(-28)	26(-7)	11(-6)
% Withdrawn	-17.52%	-14.21%	-26.92%	-54.55%
Woodland Campus				
Carpentry	21(-8)	12	6(-6)	3(-2)
Electrician	32 (-4)	23(-3)	7(-1)	2
Industrial Mechanics	14(-2)	9(-1)	4(-1)	1
Outdoor Power Equipment	12(-2)	8	3(-1)	1(-1)
Resource/Env Law (2 yr)	22(-1)	13	8	1(-1)
Welding	34(-7)	24(-3)	5(-2)	5(-2)
Subtotal Woodland	135(-24)	89(-7)	33(-11)	13(-6)
% Withdrawn	-17.78%	-7.87%	-33.33%	-46.15%
Total Enrolment	369 (-65)	286 (-35)	59(-18)	24(-12)
% Withdrawn	-17.62%	-12.24%	-30.51%	-50.00%

Note: Numbers outside brackets represent total enrolment. Numbers inside brackets represent number of students that have withdrawn. Percentages represent percent of student withdrawn. Source: SIAST Institutional Research and Analysis operational data store reports generated June 18, 2008.

Table 5 provides a summary of student persistence by campus and student group at year end, including details on number of students graduating, continuing and withdrawing. Although withdrawal rates for ASITT students are higher than non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal non-ASITT students at both campuses, on-time graduation rates² at both campuses are higher for ASITT students than Aboriginal students not enrolled in the ASITT program. Approximately forty-five percent of ASITT students graduated from their one-year program on time, where only 33.9% of Aboriginal non-ASITT students graduated on time.

Table 5

Student Persistence at Year End by Campus and Student Group (Cohort 2007-08)

Campus/Student Group	% Graduating	% Continuing	% Withdrawn
ASITT Students			
Kelsey Campus	36.36%	9.09%	54.55%
Woodland Campus	53.85%	0.0%	46.15%
Total ASITT	45.83%	4.17%	50.00%
Aboriginal Non-ASITT			
Kelsey Campus	34.62%	38.46%	26.92%
Woodland Campus	33.33%	33.33%	33.33%
Total Aboriginal Non-ASITT	33.90%	35.59%	30.51%
Non-Aboriginal Students			
Kelsey Campus	48.22%	37.56%	14.21%
Woodland Campus	75.28%	16.85%	7.87%
Total Non-Aboriginal	56.64%	31.12%	12.24%
Total All Student Groups	52.30%	30.08%	17.62%

Note. The continuing category includes students who are in two-year programs and have one additional year to complete and students who successfully completed only part of their one-year program requirements and must return to complete. In the Aboriginal non-ASITT category, 15 of the persisting students are in two-year diploma programs and six students did not complete their full one-year program requirements. Source: SIAST Institutional Research and Analysis operational data store reports generated June 18, 2008.

² On-time graduation is defined as students who complete their credential within the regularly allocated timeframe. Generally this is one year for certificate programs and two years for diploma programs.

Analysis of Withdrawals

An analysis of student withdrawal reasons is represented in Table 6. The most common reason students withdrew in all student categories and across both campuses, was failure to meet academic performance requirements. Approximately 35% of all students and 67% of ASITT students were required to withdraw from the institution for this reason. For Aboriginal students, both ASITT and non-ASITT students, the next most common reason for withdrawal at both campuses was absenteeism. For non-Aboriginal students, withdrawals due to program unsuitability and withdrawals because of personal reasons occurred slightly more frequently than withdrawals for too many absences. Kelsey Campus had a higher rate of students leaving because of program unsuitability and for employment reasons.

Table 6

Analysis of Withdrawal Reasons (Cohort 2007-08)

Withdrawal reason	ASITT Withdrawals	Aboriginal Non-ASITT Withdrawals	Non-Aboriginal Withdrawals	Total withdrawals by reason
Exited by institute, Failed req'ts	8 (66.67%)	6 (33.33%)	9 (25.71%)	23 (35.38%)
Absenteeism	2 (16.67%)	5 (27.78%)	4 (11.43%)	11 (16.92%)
Personal Reasons	1 (8.33%)	1 (5.56%)	5 (14.29%)	7 (10.77%)
Program unsuitable	0	1 (5.56%)	5 (14.29%)	6 (9.23%)
Personal Illness	0	2 (11.11%)	2 (5.71%)	4 (6.15%)
Program difficulty	0	0	3 (8.57%)	3 (4.62%)
Employment	0	1 (5.56%)	2 (5.71%)	3 (4.62%)
Family reasons, Family illness	0	1 (5.56%)	1 (2.86%)	2 (3.08%)
Other, No show, Reason not given	1 (8.33%)	1 (5.56%)	4 (11.43%)	6 (9.23%)
Total Withdrawals	12	18	35	65

Source: SIAST Institutional Research and Analysis operational data store reports generated June 18, 2008.

ASITT Student Satisfaction Survey Results

All 24 students participating in the August four-week transition program were surveyed by the ASITT program staff immediately following completion of the program. A total of 19 of 24 surveys were returned to the ASITT program staff for a response rate of 79.2%. Table 7 summarizes the students' perceptions of the usefulness of program content, how easy the content was to understand and adequacy of time spent on various program components immediately after completion of the four-week transition program.

Table 7

Frequency and Percentage of Respondents Rating Component Above Average/Highest

Component	Content Usefulness	Easy to Understand	Adequate Time
Math Skills	12 (63.1%)	13 (68.4%)	10 (52.6%)
Life Skills	17 (89.5%)	17 (89.5%)	15 (78.9%)
Reading Skills	11 (57.9%)	17 (89.5%)	12 (63.1%)
Computer Skills	11 (57.9%)	14 (73.7%)	9 (47.4%)
Circle Check	14 (73.7%)	16 (84.3%)	12 (63.2%)
Elder Teachings	14 (73.8%)	17 (89.5%)	11 (57.9%)
Wellness	9 (47.4%)	13 (68.4%)	9 (47.4%)

Source: ASITT Student Satisfaction Survey data collected in August 2007 by ASITT program staff, and summarized by researcher in SPSS Version 14.0

Life skills, circle check, elder teachings and mathematics were ranked the highest in terms of usefulness. Wellness ranked the lowest in terms of perceived usefulness, followed by reading skills and computer skills. Wellness, computers and mathematics ranked lowest in terms of adequate time allocated and ease of understanding the content.

When asked the question what part of the program was of most benefit, the most frequent responses were circle check (31.6%) and mathematics skills (31.6%). One student indicated that circle checks were very useful because "they allowed me to get to know my classmates and to get over my nervousness and shyness" while another

mentioned they “learned a lot from other people.” Students commented that the math skills review was very helpful however a number of students commented that they wanted to spend more time on math skills review. When asked the open-ended question about what they liked least about the program, difficulty finding accommodation was the most frequent response (22.2%).

Table 8 summarizes the ASITT student perceptions of the most useful aspects of the program in terms of transitioning to the city. Students found the orientation to the city and the orientation to the campus the most useful, followed by connection to community resources. Finding suitable housing before the program began was ranked lowest.

Table 8

Frequency and Percentage of Aspects of Program Most Useful to Transitioning to City

Component	Most useful/ Above Average
Orientation to city	17 (89.5%)
Orientation to campus	17 (89.5%)
Connection to community resources	15 (78.9%)
Weekly allowance	14 (73.7%)
Temporary accommodations	14 (73.7%)
Temporary meal provision	13 (68.4%)
Arranging/finalizing finances	13 (68.4%)
Utility hook-ups	13 (68.4%)
Finding housing	8 (42.1%)

Source: ASITT Student Satisfaction Survey data summarized in SPSS Version 14.0

All of the students would recommend the program to other students. One student explained, “It helped me meet new people. It would have been a little difficult to get started because I wouldn’t have known anyone. I felt comfortable in class because I was sitting with a few guys I went to this program with.” Another indicated, “It’s free and gives you a chance to settle into the city and campus.” All of the students felt that the

amount of time allocated for each day of the program was sufficient; however, 26.3% of the students would increase the total length of the program to allow more time to find suitable housing and more time for math skills review.

ASITT Student Program Effectiveness Questionnaire Results

A total of 14 of 24 surveys were returned, six from SIAST Kelsey Campus and eight from SIAST Woodland Campus, for a response rate of 58.3%. Survey respondents were fairly representative demographically of the ASITT cohort, ranging in age from 18 through 54; all were male except for one female; and 11 were First Nations and three were Métis. Fifty percent of the respondents were single, never married, and half of the respondents had one or more children. Fifty percent of respondents reported a first language that was not English and of these 57.2% did not start learning English until they entered the school system at age six. Approximately 43% of respondents had less than Grade 12 or equivalent education, while 35.7% had completed grade 12 and 21.4% had previous postsecondary studies.

The majority of students found out about the program through a letter of invitation from SIAST. Students were asked the open-ended question, "Why did you choose to participate in the ASITT program?" The majority of students initially chose the program to help them find accommodations, prepare or refresh their academic skills, or to assist with their transition from the reserve to the city. Only one student mentioned enrolling in the program to meet people.

The majority of survey respondents (85.7%) indicated they had to move to Saskatoon or Prince Albert to undertake their postsecondary studies at SIAST. Fifty

percent of respondents moved from a reserve setting and 71.5% were required to move more than 50 kilometres. When asked who assisted them with finding living accommodations, ASITT students responded they were assisted primarily by ASITT staff (64.3%) and/or family/friends (57.1%). Only 14.3% found accommodations without assistance. The majority of students were able to secure accommodations before their postsecondary program started (85.7%).

As of the January 2008 survey date, only 64.3% of the students were living in the same accommodations, while 35.7% of the students had relocated. One student commented, "I didn't feel comfortable," while another indicated, "I was living with a relative, and wanted to live alone." Other students suggested that their initial accommodations were intended to be temporary while they found something more suitable.

All respondents received funding to attend their postsecondary studies with 64.3% of students band funded, 28.6% sponsor funded, and 7.1% student loan funded. The majority of students were assisted by their band and sponsors to arrange funding. Only 17.6% used ASITT staff to assist them with funding-related issues. All but one student had their finances in place before their postsecondary program started.

Perceptions of the Effectiveness of On- and Off-campus Orientation Activities

The majority of students (92.9%) found the orientation to on-campus services somewhat to very helpful. Because students were not able to fully access services during the summer months, familiarity with these services varied (see Table 9). Students were asked if there were any on-campus services they would like to see added to the program.

The only suggestion that was not already part of the program was to provide information on SIAST high school upgrading courses.

Table 9

ASITT Student Ratings of Helpfulness of Orientation to On-Campus Services

On-campus services	% of Students
Aboriginal Centre	92.9%
Learning Assistance	71.4%
Library	64.3%
Gym/Recreation	64.3%
General campus tour	57.1%
Bookstore	50.0%
Registration Services	50.0%
Cafeterias	50.0%
Student Associations	42.9%
Student Counselling	35.7%
Disability Services	7.1%
None (previously familiar)	7.1%
Campus clubs	0.0%

Note: This table summarizes on-campus services that were part of the orientation and students' perceptions of their familiarity with that service after orientation.

The majority of respondents (92.9%) found the orientation to off-campus services somewhat to very helpful in their transition to the city (see Table 10).

Table 10

ASITT Student Ratings of Helpfulness of Orientation to Off-Campus Services

Off-campus services	% of Students
Bus service/transportation	57.1%
Community recreation	57.1%
Groceries/shopping	50.0%
Banking	42.9%
Utility hook-up	35.7%
Medical services	21.4%
Daycare/childcare	14.3%
None (previously familiar)	28.6%

Note: This table summarizes off-campus services that were part of the orientation, and the percent of students that indicated they benefited from an orientation to that service.

Students had varying degrees of familiarity with an urban environment and therefore benefited differently from city orientation activities.

Perceptions of the Effectiveness of Program Orientation Activities

The majority of students received a tour of their program area (84.6%), however only 69.2% were able to meet their program head and/or some of their program instructors. Approximately two-thirds of the students reported that they were introduced to program specific challenges and what would be required to be successful in their specific program of study. When asked if there were any program-related activities that should be added, comments were focused on ensuring existing components of the program-orientation could be delivered consistently. For example, one student indicated, “my program head was unable to meet with me” and another stated they would “like a tour of the shop and to meet instructors.”

Perceptions of the Effectiveness of Student Success Activities

Students were asked how helpful the ASITT program student-success activities were in preparing them for their postsecondary studies. Table 11 summarizes activities by perceived helpfulness. Students perceived that team building skill activities were most helpful in preparing them for postsecondary studies with 78.6% of students ranking these activities very helpful. Students also considered the assessment of their math skills quite helpful with 100% rating this activity somewhat to very helpful. The activity that ranked the lowest was program specific preparation with 28.6% of students rating this activity not helpful.

Table 11

ASITT Student Perceptions of Perceived Helpfulness of Student Success Activities

Activities	Very Helpful	Somewhat Helpful	Not Helpful	Did not Participate
Team building	11 (78.6%)	2 (14.3%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (7.1%)
Math assessment	9 (64.3%)	5 (35.7%)	0 (0.0%)	0(0.0%)
Essential computer skills	9 (64.3%)	3 (21.4%)	2 (14.3%)	0(0.0%)
Academic goal setting	8 (57.1%)	5 (35.7%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (7.1%)
Cultural	8 (57.1%)	5 (35.7%)	1 (7.1%)	0 (0.0%)
Math skills	8 (57.1%)	4 (38.6%)	1 (7.1%)	0 (0.0%)
Lifestyle coaching	7 (50.0%)	6 (42.9%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (0.0%)
Student success strategies	7 (50.0%)	6 (42.9%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (7.1%)
Personal goal setting	7 (50.0%)	6 (42.9%)	1 (7.1%)	0 (0.0%)
Study skills	6 (42.9%)	8 (57.1%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Reading/Writing assessment	6 (42.9%)	7 (50.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (7.1%)
Sports and Recreation	4 (28.6%)	9 (64.3%)	1 (7.1%)	0 (0.0%)
Reading/Writing skills	4 (28.6%)	8 (57.1%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (14.3%)
Journaling	4 (28.6%)	8 (57.1%)	2 (14.3%)	0 (0.0%)
Exam writing skills	4 (28.6%)	5 (35.7%)	2 (14.3%)	3 (31.4%)
Program specific prep	1 (7.1%)	8 (57.1%)	4 (28.6%)	1 (7.1%)

Perceptions of Support

All of the ASITT students felt supported by the other ASITT students at their campus with 35.7% citing they felt supported all of the time, and 64.3% indicating they felt supported at least some of the time. Approximately 93% of the students indicated that the support of other ASITT students was somewhat to very important to their success.

All but one ASITT student felt supported by the ASITT program staff at their campus, 71.4% all of the time and 21.4% at least part of the time. Approximately 93% of the students indicated that the support of ASITT program staff was somewhat to very important to their success, and of those that indicated support was somewhat to very

important, 85.7% indicated that they continue to access the support of the ASITT staff at their campus.

Approximately three-quarters of the students indicated they felt culturally supported at the campus at least some of the time. Only 21.4% of the students rated on-campus cultural support as very important to their success, 50.0% indicated it was somewhat important and 28.6% indicated it was not at all important.

Overall Perceptions of ASITT Program Helpfulness

Approximately 71% of students found the four-week transition program very helpful in assisting them to be successful in their postsecondary studies at SIAST, while 28.6% found the program somewhat helpful. When asked if they could change anything about the four-week transition program, the majority of comments centered around more time to find accommodations and review math skills. Other comments included more specific activities with their program of study and one individual suggested that there should be an effort to recruit more women to the program. When asked the open-ended question what was the most valuable part of the four-week transition program, the three most common responses were mathematics, accommodations, and getting to know people.

Students were asked what piece of advice they would give SIAST about helping Aboriginal students. Comments were about helping Aboriginal students believe in themselves, motivating them, and understanding that Aboriginal students may learn differently. One student indicated “Help them believe in themselves. If I didn’t hear my program head and what he thought about me, I wouldn’t think I could. So I would have

been defeated already”. Another student suggested SIAST should “learn how they learn, and be patient” and another that Aboriginal students “can’t let the stereotypes get the best of them”.

Students were asked what one piece of advice they would give other Aboriginal students entering postsecondary studies at SIAST for the first time. Comments are summarized by theme in Table 12.

Table 12

ASITT Student Advice for Other Aboriginal Students Entering SIAST

Theme	Student Quote
Utilize services	<i>Take advantage of the things that the Aboriginal Centre offers</i> <i>Enter the ASITT program</i> <i>Apply to the ASITT program</i> <i>Nice instructors</i>
Accommodations	<i>Look hard for a place to stay</i> <i>Spend more time on finding a place</i>
Commitment	<i>Never give up on school. Treat it like a job.</i> <i>Concentrate on your studies and attend all your classes.</i> <i>Get used to sharing circles and attend every day.</i> <i>Avoid any distractions that make you lose focus.</i> <i>Do not skip!</i>
Preparedness	<i>Attendance is key to success, also a very thick skin</i> <i>Go into something they can actually do and enjoy doing</i> <i>Be prepared and stay focused on what you want in life</i> <i>Don't be afraid to try new things, you might get something out of it</i>

ASITT Program Staff Interview Results

A total of six of the eight invited staff members were available for interviews with equal representation from each campus. Two staff members declined to participate, one due to availability and another because of circumstances that limited their participation in the planning and/or delivery of the program in 2007-08.

Participant Roles

The initial interview questions clarified the participants' perceived role in the 2007-08 ASITT program and ensured that perspectives in program planning, program delivery and ongoing student support were represented. Table 13 represents the responsibilities of the six participants from their own perspectives.

Table 13

ASITT Program Staff Interview Participant Roles with 2007-08 ASITT Program (N=6)

Interviewee	Program Planning	Program Delivery	Ongoing Student Support
#1	X		X
#2			X
#3	X	X	X
#4	X	X	X
#5	X	X	X
#6	X	X	X

Perceptions of Transition Challenges

Interviewees were asked what they perceived were some of the most common challenges faced by Aboriginal students transitioning into postsecondary studies at SIAST. A definition of transitioning was provided to maximize a common understanding of the concept. Transition was first defined as "moving from one state, stage, subject, or place to another [a passage]; or a change, movement, development, or evolution from one form, stage, or style to another [a transformation]" (Merriam-Webster's online dictionary). The definition was then linked to a postsecondary environment using Schlossberg's (1984) concept of marginality. After a transition from a familiar environment (such as the reserve, the community, friends and family) to a new environment (such as the city or SIAST) students experience a shift from a sense of

belonging to a feeling of marginality. Roles and expectations are no longer clear and the new environment brings uncertainty. Unresolved uncertainty can lead to departure from the postsecondary institution. Categories and themes are summarized in Table 14, along with identification of interviewees who discussed these topics.

Table 14

ASITT Program Staff Perceptions of Aboriginal Student Postsecondary Transition Issues

Theme	Category	Interviewee #
Biculturalism	Geographic isolation	1,4,6
	English language learners	1,4
	Cross cultural stress	1,2,3,4,5,6
	Cultural context of language	1,4,6
	Communication styles	1,4
	World view	4
Systemic issues	Access/opportunity	1,4
	Racism	1,2
	Residential schools	1,3
	Intergenerational change	3
	Government policy	3
Urban integration	Accommodations	1,2,4,5,6
	Banking	1,3,4
	Community supports	1,2
	Transportation	3,4,5,6
	Urban survival skills	3,6
Preparedness	Academic	1,6
	Familiarity/belonging	1,2,4,5,6
	Self-esteem	5
Support Systems	Family/Community	2,4,5,6
	Friends/Peers	5
	Role models	3

ASITT program staff pointed out very quickly that not all Aboriginal students face the same transition issues. Interviewee number one stated, "Aboriginal is not painted with one brush and that makes a difference of how you plan your program and its reason to exist." All interviewees touched on the concept of cross-cultural stresses. Northern Aboriginal students and Aboriginal students who are from reserves distant from urban

centers often face unique challenges related to their geographic isolation from urban areas and their unique cultures and world views. These students experience a transition from being part of the dominant culture in their own small community to living in large urban environment with a predominately white culture. They do not necessarily relate to urban Aboriginal communities either. Interviewee number six explained, “When they come here it’s like being dropped in the middle of another country.” Another interviewee expanded on this concept:

Our students from the north may have been on trap lines, they may have never been in the city to see the street lights, they have no idea about banking, where to live and what to do. They fall into traps, and it’s a very strange and frightening scene to them, where our Aboriginal people in the southern part, they have a very different context. (Interviewee 1)

Interviewees discussed the magnitude of change that many northern Aboriginal students face. Several mentioned unfamiliarity with transportation, banking, shopping or how to find suitable accommodations. They indicated northern Aboriginal students may not know how to access community resources and they likely have not developed urban survival skills. One of the interviewees explained:

In the native communities if you run out of groceries or you run out of milk, and if you don’t have any money, you can go to your neighbour or family and ask “Can I get some milk until I get you back?” Here I don’t think they have resources like that. Once you are out of money, you are out of money. Their support systems are no longer in place. (Interviewee 2)

Interviewee number five suggested that students feel lonely and isolated because they are away from their families and friends and familiar surroundings. Interviewee number six described it as “not fitting”.

One of the ASITT staff members introduced the idea of intergenerational transitions. “The students we are dealing with, this is not just a personal change for them, it’s an intergenerational change. It’s a change for them in terms of their family and their home communities and everybody around them” (Interviewee 3). This interviewee also discussed the relationship of residential schools and federal policies to these transition issues and emphasized that they are systemic in nature, pointing out that many of these students are the first people in their family and in their communities to enter postsecondary education. These students may not have any role models to show them what is expected in terms of employability skills or postsecondary success skills.

One individual raised the theme of racism and explained that students often experience discrimination right after arriving in the city while trying to secure suitable accommodation:

They come down here and they are now the minority so they experience – whether covert or overt – they experience racism. Students need to think about how this is going to impact them and how they are going to deal with it. (Interviewee 1)

Another interviewee agreed that stereotyping and discrimination definitely affect students, often in negative ways as they hold these feelings inside and they have nobody to talk to, to help legitimize these feelings:

I think there is some reluctance to put yourself out there to meet folks. Coming from an Aboriginal community myself I know that there are things that go on that

are not real pleasant and it is hard to trust people where they are coming from.

(Interviewee 2)

The English language barrier was introduced. One ASITT program staff member described the concept of Aboriginal English language learners:

Some of our Aboriginal students have taken their Grade 10, 11 and 12 and it has been offered in English so we automatically assume they know the English language well. But in reality some of those students have taken their English classes and their training in Cree or some other language. They don't have a good basis of English. Or they might get some of their school and it is in English but the rest of their life is not in English. (Interviewee 1)

Interviewee number four explained, "They haven't got the command of the English language that a lot of our students know, and so they are scared they are going to be teased or they are not going to say things in the proper way." Even when students have a command of the English language they may not have had exposure to the technical vocabulary or a cultural context for the technical terms they are learning.

A number of interviewees discussed differences in communication styles such as lack of eye contact, valuing humility rather than spotlighting, hesitating to ask for clarification, and feeling comfortable with silences in the conversation. One interviewee stated:

A lot of people aren't used to how our Aboriginal students do communicate and so we might be saying things, and you think that you understand it or you have said it clearly, but with the Aboriginal student or Aboriginal learner, it's not there. And

vice versa, what they say, they think they are being clear. To them it's clear, but to the instructor it may not be. (Interviewee 4)

Perceptions of Program Effectiveness in Addressing Transition Challenges

ASITT staff felt that the four-week program was very instrumental in helping students address initial transition challenges such as becoming familiar with the environment, connecting to services and resources, getting practical affairs settled before school started, and equipping them with some initial life skills. Staff indicated that the program also provided students with a supportive and safe environment to try new things and get to know others.

I think it created a sense of belonging right off the bat, because you are putting them in a group of their peers. Quite often they at least understood if nothing else, they've seen somebody that looked like them, and who was feeling like them, and who may at least be going into a trades program. So they had some common stuff right away. (Interviewee 6)

Interviewee number three indicated that ASITT students end up being "better equipped" than their non-ASITT counterparts in terms of "urban survival skills". Examples such as knowing which days of the month to shop, how to buy groceries, how to take public transportation instead of cabs, and how to use the bank instead of money lending places were described in detail by a number of the interviewees.

Interviewee number one felt the program was not as effective in providing remediation for larger gaps such as English language, while interviewee number six

discussed that even though the program was effective in transitioning students into their programs, the students still had many barriers to overcome during their program of study.

Perceptions of Program Goal Importance and Effectiveness

ASITT program staff were asked to rate the importance of the program goals in helping students transition to their postsecondary studies, and also the effectiveness of the four-week program in meeting each of these goals. All responses were in the very important/effective to somewhat important/effective range. There were no responses indicating that the goals were not important and the program not effective. Table 15 summarizes the frequency of interviewee responses citing the goal very important and the program very effective in goal attainment.

Table 15

ASITT Program Staff Perceptions of Goal Importance and Program Effectiveness

Program Goal	% Staff Rating Goal Very Important	% Staff Rating Program Very Effective*
Establishing connections	100.0%	83.3%
Familiarity with off-campus services and resources	100.0%	67.7%
Understanding of academic and personal preparedness	100.0%	50.0%
Basic skills review and development	100.0%	33.3%
Securing suitable housing	100.0%	33.3%
Understanding challenges of their program of study	100.0%	16.7%
Securing finances	83.3%	50.0%
Setting personal and academic goals	83.3%	33.3%
Familiarity with on-campus services and resources	66.7%	50.0%
Cultural support	66.7%	33.3%
Program-related academic skills review	66.7%	16.7%

*One staff member declined to rate program effectiveness because of limited involvement in delivery.

Perceptions of Completion Barriers

Interviewees identified the barriers or issues that they perceived to be most common in preventing Aboriginal students at SIAST from completing their postsecondary programs. These issues and barriers are summarized in Table 16.

Interviewees most frequently identified English language deficiencies, systemic/historical issues and Aboriginal students' different world view as the most common barriers to Aboriginal students completing their postsecondary programs at SIAST.

Table 16

ASITT Program Staff Perceptions of Barriers to Postsecondary Program Completion

Barrier	Interviewee #
English language deficiencies	1,4,5,6
Systemic/historical issues	1,2,3,6
Different world view / different values	1,2,4,5
Family/community expectations	4,5,6
Low self-esteem	3,4,5
Practical issues (transportation, daycare, accommodations)	4,5,6
Right program at the right time	1,2,4
Fear of success/self-sabotage	3,6
Lack of role models/ lack of support	2,6
Academic preparedness	1,6

A number of ASITT staff perceived that some Aboriginal students are unsuccessful in their SIAST programs because their English language deficiencies are too large to overcome in such a short period of time. Interviewee number five discussed language barriers in terms of understanding and vocabulary, indicating Aboriginal students are just not familiar with a number of the of words and concepts used in their program. Interviewee number six supported this, indicating "the technical words they couldn't translate because Aboriginal learners are hand-on experiential learners and learn

by doing, so this is really a different mode of learning for them in the classroom and this type of classroom.” Another staff member tied English language deficiencies to difficulties in achieving success in exams:

Language is a barrier and exam writing is a barrier. You need that extra time for interpretation. So, even having exam readers, you still need to interpret what they said into your own language and then change it back over to the English language.

(Interviewee 4)

Historical and systemic issues were discussed in terms of the multiple barriers they have created for some of the Aboriginal students. Interviewee number two explained:

Well like I said, we all are an affect of colonization and it's been very damaging. Lots of our Aboriginal families are immersed in all kinds of dysfunction – physical, mental, sexual, alcohol, drugs – and if there is that in one household, everybody feels it.

Interviewees also linked historical and systemic issues to some of the other barriers such as low self-esteem, fear of success or self sabotage and lack of role models. One staff member discussed the concept of self-sabotage describing the phenomenon of students who are successful in their programs, but do not show up for or perform poorly in their final examinations or unexpectedly leave their program just prior to completion:

Let's say you are going through life and you are living in a marginalized society on assistance, or whatever. You have never really been required to be successful at something, yet you are able to survive day to day. All of a sudden there is an opportunity here for you to be successful and change your lifestyle in many ways

because this is one of the things that education can do for you. As you get closer towards your goal you start to realize, “Oh, I’m going to be successful. I’m going to have to change a bunch of things in my life.” Self-sabotage – that’s the word. A lot of students we have realized over the years self-sabotage themselves as they get close to their goal. A lot of them come back a year or two later, or in three or four years. We see them return three or four times because they return to their lifestyle, analyze their lifestyle, make changes and then come back and complete. So it’s not the same sequence of being successful that is typical for the non-Aboriginal student. (Interviewee 3)

Interviewees identified conflicting world views as a major barrier, indicating Aboriginal students are often faced with two different value systems. This can create a conflict between postsecondary institution expectations and family/community expectations. ASITT staff members gave a number of specific examples where Aboriginal students were looking after other family members needs causing them to be frequently late or to miss school. Interviewee number five explained, “I find with a lot of the Aboriginal students they look after everybody else before themselves”. Another staff member elaborated that because family often doesn’t understand the commitment that school requires, the family still expects the student to be there for them, and the student’s priority is to support their family:

For example, everybody has heard of “Indian time”. Most people think of that as a really negative thing and being late. When you talk to an Aboriginal person about “Indian time”, you do what is important at the time. So if you have a sick child, if you have a parent or grandparent or somebody who is sick in your family,

and they need to go to the doctor and you have an exam ... you take them to the doctor because that is what is important and that is what needs to be done at that time. And so, people don't understand that. Those are values. (Interviewee 4)

ASITT staff members linked different world views to low self-esteem, explaining that students are hesitant to ask questions when they don't understand things not only because they do not want to appear stupid but because culturally they do not feel comfortable speaking up or challenging people.

Quite often another big one is that they just didn't understand our system. They were kind of feeling threatened sometimes. And, so if they missed, they thought well is that 1% or 10% or whatever [absences]? So then instead of asking they would just leave. (Interviewee 6)

Perceptions of Program Effectiveness in Addressing Completion Barriers

In general ASITT program staff felt the four-week program was somewhat effective in helping students address completion barriers. Staff emphasized that the biggest benefit was awareness, making students aware of some of the issues they were going to face. Other program components that were considered particularly effective were the self-esteem building exercises and helping students understand that there were institutional supports in place to help them through some of the challenges they were going to face.

Staff emphasized that program effectiveness is somewhat limited because success depends somewhat on whether the student is ready or not.

As much as I would like to support people and try to empower them with information, you know, about society and how things have evolved, its ultimately the student's decision to make to be able to finish or not. I don't know, it depends on whether they are ready or not. (Interviewee 2)

Interviewee number six explained that effectiveness is limited by time, emphasizing that it often takes time for students to become self-aware enough to apply the skills they have learned in the four-week program.

Perceptions of Reasons for Aboriginal Student Participation in ASITT

When asked why they thought Aboriginal students chose to enrol in the program, ASITT staff gave three main reasons: (a) to brush up on their skills and increase their chances of academic success, (b) to orient themselves to the city and the campus, and/or to find accommodations and get settled before classes began; and (c) to take advantage of the monetary support. They felt that female interest in the program was lacking primarily because Aboriginal female participation in the trades and technology programs is relatively limited. With very few role models in these careers, Aboriginal females are not considering them seriously as options.

Recommendations for Increasing ASITT Program Enrolment

All ASITT staff agreed that SIAST needed to market the ASITT program beyond just making newly admitted students aware of the opportunity. Staff suggested that a strategy for communicating to funding agencies, band councils, and postsecondary counsellors was necessary, not only to inform them about the transition program but to

promote SIAST as a first choice postsecondary institution, and trades and technology programs as routes to viable career options. Making personal contact with Aboriginal communities was suggested as a way to better establish and sustain long-term relationships. Staff suggested that another important message to relay to funding agencies is that the ASITT program can help them protect their investment, by enhancing students' chances of program completion. Finally staff suggested that strategic partnerships should be investigated and long term funding secured to enable the program to run proactively with permanent staff.

Recommendations for Changes to ASITT Program Content

ASITT staff differed in their recommendations for changes to ASITT program content. Interviewees four and five recommended more time for reviewing and developing mathematics and communications skills, while interviewees one, three and four suggested more emphasis on the life skills component of the program. Interviewee three explained, "I know students get stressed about academics, and they would like to have an easier time of it. I see different. I see life skills as the biggest impactor." Interviewee number one agreed, "If we can work with them on developing confidence in themselves as an individual and an understanding of what their life is going to be like, and how to get information, how to make decisions, how to creatively problem solve, then I think it makes the academic part easier as well."

Interviewee number two suggested that consciousness-raising activities should be incorporated that foster students' thinking critically about themselves and their role in society, arguing that activities like this would empower students to take action and take

responsibility for their own success. Interviewee number six recommended that we find out more about the students before they get here. That way program content could be pre-structured before their arrival, and students could be grouped based on areas they need to develop.

Recommendations for Changes to ASITT Program Structure

Staff recommended changes in program structure. Interviewee numbers three, five and six suggested adding additional time to the program. An additional week at the front end would allow more time for securing accommodations before August 1st and more time for life skills and mathematics review. Interviewee number five suggested it would also allow more time for students to have their academic skills assessed and in cases where deficiencies exist time to get extra tutoring in place for the year.

The majority of ASITT program staff recommended incorporating a stronger connection to employment and career awareness. Some staff members suggested bringing students on to campus in June for a few days to experience their programs in action and to meet their program heads and instructors. Others suggested incorporating a job shadowing opportunity or a paid work experience. Interviewee number five suggested tying the student's weekly allowance to employability skills such as attendance.

Interviewee number one talked about permanent infrastructure and the need for full-time employees and permanent budget. Interviewee number three emphasized the importance of strategic partnerships for long-term program sustainability and success.

SIAST Program Head Focus Group Results

Six out of twelve invited program heads attended the March focus group session in Saskatoon, five from SIAST Kelsey Campus and one from SIAST Woodland Campus. To ensure an adequate representation from both campuses, two additional telephone interviews were held with program heads from Woodland Campus. The same focus group guide was used. No additional themes emerged.

ASITT Program Familiarity

Program head awareness of the ASITT program was very low. Although the majority of program heads remembered receiving a request to show some Aboriginal students around their program areas, they did not connect this request to the existence of a formal transition program. Those who were aware of the program did not know the details of the program structure or program content. Only one program head was aware of whom the ASITT students were in their program. Two program heads indicated that were consulted about what mathematics and reading comprehension content should be part of an academic skills review.

Program heads were familiar with the Aboriginal Centre staff and other student support areas, but very few were able to clearly identify who the ASITT program contacts were. Those few who were more familiar with the program and program staff expressed concerns that the frequent staff turn-over at SIAST Kelsey campus was detrimental to the program this year. They perceived that new staff members were not adequately oriented to their roles and to the details of the support program, and that students were not able to develop close bonds with the staff because of the staffing changes.

Those program heads that were familiar with the ASITT program saw great potential in this type of transition programming, indicating that it was most helpful in helping students settle into their new environment prior to school beginning. They also perceived that it helped students make decisions about whether they are in the right program at the right time of their life. Concerns were expressed about the ad hoc nature of the program and its impact on program effectiveness. Preference would be for this type of programming to have sustained funding and permanent staff.

Program heads felt strongly that program involvement is absolutely essential to maximize student success. They recommended constructive involvement with the ASITT program including input into academic review content. They wanted to be part of the ongoing intensive support network for these students and suggested meeting the students one-on-one prior to the program beginning, and having ongoing contact with the ASITT program staff about student progress. They sought better communication about what is happening, suggesting that personal contact is better than e-mail, and recommended adequate notice to be able to participate in activities.

Perceptions of Transition Challenges

Program heads were asked to identify and discuss their perceptions of the most common transition challenges Aboriginal students in their programs face. A number of transition themes emerged and are summarized in Table 17.

Table 17

SLAST Program Head Perceptions of Common Aboriginal Student Transition Issues

Theme	Category
Biculturalism	English language learners Communication styles World view
Systemic issues	Inadequate academic preparation Lacking workplace/essential skills Lack of exposure to technology
Urban integration	Affordable and suitable accommodations Familiarity with community supports Timing of funding support
Preparedness	Skills Assessment Life Skills Study Skills Self-sufficiency/independence Commitment/Motivation
Support Systems	Family/Community Friends/Peers

Program heads perceived that integrating into the city environment was one common transition issue for all students, with finding suitable and affordable accommodations noted as one of the biggest challenges. They noted that it was important for students to know where community services and supports were located, and they noted that northern Aboriginal students face additional challenges in this area.

Program heads mentioned that Aboriginal students, like other students, often had difficulty being on their own for the first time and were not necessarily self-sufficient. They suggested students struggled without their usual support systems. They noted that Aboriginal students in particular often find out that their support systems do not

understand the challenges they are facing with postsecondary studies. Family and community obligations may conflict with postsecondary obligations.

Initial financial challenges were also noted as a transition issue. Although Aboriginal students almost always have their tuition in place, funding to cover books and required equipment is often not in place on time resulting in students not being able to keep up with program expectations.

Preparedness was one of the primary transition issues discussed. Program heads perceived that Aboriginal students are often lacking the necessary life skills and study skills, and that challenge can lead to early departure. Initial primary academic concerns were in the areas of mathematics and English reading comprehension. Another theme that emerged was students' lack of exposure to technology, and the disadvantage this presents to students entering technology-heavy programs.

Differences in communication styles were discussed at length. Program heads perceived that Aboriginal students tend not to speak up in the classroom and are hesitant to ask for help or clarification. They often have little understanding of the postsecondary system and program expectations. Program heads found they were often unaware students were struggling until it was too late. Program heads indicated that learning disabilities were often undiagnosed.

Perceptions of Program Completion Barriers

Program heads were asked to identify and discuss their perceptions of the most common program completion challenges Aboriginal students face. A number of completion themes emerged and are summarized in Table 18.

Table 18

SIAST Program Head Perceptions of Barriers to Aboriginal Student Program Completion

Theme	Category
Biculturalism	English language learners Communication styles World view
Systemic issues	Multiple barriers Intensity, type and range of issues Family/community dysfunction
Preparedness	Program expectations Postsecondary environment Academic skills Commitment/motivation
Urban integration	Unsuitable accommodations Unfavourable social influences

Program heads discussed the issue of program expectations at length. Poor attendance, late arrival to class, late assignment submissions, and the lack of ability to write tests that are based on assessing skills and abilities rather than memorization were noted as common reasons for students to fail academically. Program heads suggested that because SIAST programs are short and intensive, students need to be committed to the program quickly or they will be left behind. Program heads noted that many student absences are due to family and community expectations. Student priorities are aligned with these expectations rather than with the program expectations.

They perceived that Aboriginal students are often systemically unprepared academically and even though they may have graduated from high school their reading comprehension and mathematics skills are not adequate for program success. They indicated that Aboriginal students for whom English is a second language struggled even more.

Program heads perceived that many of the Aboriginal students in their programs faced multiple personal issues that were systemic in nature such as family dysfunction and unhealthy peer influences (e.g. alcohol, drugs, violence), and that the intensity and severity of these issues was higher than the general student population. Securing and retaining suitable housing arrangements was noted as a significant challenge. Students in unsuitable housing arrangements have difficulty keeping up with program demands.

Differences in communication styles were noted, with program heads suggesting that Aboriginal students are reluctant to ask for assistance. Program heads discussed the importance of developing relationships based on trust. Institutional barriers to program completion were noted such as the academic progress policy, admission requirements, and program structure.

Essential Components of Aboriginal Student Transition Programming

Program heads discussed their perceptions of the essential components of a transition program for Aboriginal students. Table 19 summarizes their recommendations including transition program content and wider institutional responsibilities. Program heads fully supported the concept of transition programming and emphasized it should be a collaborative effort and an institutional priority.

Table 19

Program Head Recommendations for Effective Aboriginal Transition Programming

Transition program content	Academic and skills pre-testing
	Early identification of learning disabilities
	Arrangement of additional personal and academic supports
	Jointly-developed academic skills content
	Orientation to program expectations
	Orientation to physical program spaces
	On-campus services orientation
	Suitable, affordable housing
	Off-campus (city) orientation
	Life skills
	Study skills
	Team building
	Funding and financial issues
Institutional responsibility	Identify and track students
	Cooperative effort between student, staff, program
	Proactive intervention
	Ongoing communication between staff and program
	Establish communication with bands/sponsors
	Educate staff/programs about student persistence
	Educate staff/programs about biculturalism
	Examine institutional barriers to program completion
	Secure permanent funding for transition programming

Summary

This chapter summarized the study's results beginning with a presentation of the ASITT student persistence data. Enrolment, graduation and withdrawal rates of ASITT students were compared to rates of Aboriginal students and non-Aboriginal students in the same programs of study that were not part of the ASITT program. Overall ASITT students did not show a higher level of persistence than non-ASITT Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in the same programs of study. ASITT students did have a higher level of on-time program completion than their non-ASITT Aboriginal counterparts. An analysis of withdrawal reasons showed that the most common reasons for ASITT and

non-ASITT Aboriginal students to withdraw were failure to meet academic performance expectations and absenteeism.

ASITT student satisfaction was measured by the ASITT program staff immediately following the completion of the August 2007 four-week transition program. ASITT students ranked life skills, circle check, elder teachings, and mathematics the highest in terms of perceived usefulness in terms of transitioning into their postsecondary studies. Students found the orientation to the city, orientation to the campus, and connection to community resources the most satisfactory aspects in terms of transitioning to the city. All of the students would recommend the program to other Aboriginal students. Students suggested that additional time be allocated to finding suitable housing and mathematics skills review.

Student perceptions of the effectiveness of the four-week transition program after the end of the first semester of postsecondary study were summarized in the ASITT Student Program Effectiveness Questionnaire Results section. Approximately 71% of the students found the four-week transition very helpful in assisting them to be successful in their postsecondary studies, while 28.6% found the program somewhat helpful. Approximately 93% of the students found the orientation to off-campus and on-campus services and resources somewhat to very helpful in their transition. An analysis of perceived helpfulness of student success activities showed team building was most frequently rated very helpful, followed by assessment of math skills and introduction to essential computer skills. All students found study skills and assessment of their reading/writing skills somewhat to very helpful, and 93% of the students indicated that

the support of other ASITT students was somewhat to very important to their postsecondary success.

ASITT program staff perceptions of the importance of the four-week transition program goals were discussed along with their perceptions of the program's effectiveness in meeting these goals. Program staff suggestions for changes to the ASITT program content and structure were summarized. SIAST program head perceptions of the effectiveness of the ASITT program were discussed, and their recommendations for essential components to consider in Aboriginal student transition programming were introduced.

An analysis of the SIAST program staff interviews and the SIAST program head focus group discussion yielded a number of themes related to Aboriginal student postsecondary transitions and Aboriginal student barriers to program completion. These themes were summarized and will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

This evaluation research study examined how a program of early intensive intervention impacted the persistence rate of a cohort of Aboriginal students in trades and technology programs at SIAST in their first semester of study. The achievement of program goals; and the perceptions and experiences of students, staff and SIAST program heads were explored using a combined objectives-oriented and participant-oriented approach. Multiple data collection methods were used to maximize the breadth and depth of stakeholder feedback.

This chapter will discuss the study's findings in relation to the primary research objectives. An examination of the program strengths and limitations will be presented along with recommendations for strengthening the program. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of the contribution of this study to the field of Aboriginal student success, limitations of the research, suggestions for future research and concluding comments.

Discussion

One of the primary objectives of this research was to examine how the four-week ASITT transition program impacted the persistence rate of a cohort of Aboriginal students in trades and technology programs at SIAST during their first semester of study. The findings presented in Chapter Four suggest that the majority of ASITT students and ASITT program staff perceived the four-week program was effective in helping with the transition to postsecondary studies. The quantitative student persistence data, however,

does not fully support that students who completed the ASITT program have higher levels of postsecondary persistence than their non-ASITT counterparts. A further analysis of the data and the student persistence literature suggest a number of possible explanations.

It is important to preface the following discussion with a note that the numbers of students in the ASITT- and non-ASITT Aboriginal cohorts are significantly smaller than the number of students in the non-Aboriginal cohort; therefore, the data has to be interpreted with some caution because of the low numbers.

Student Persistence at End of First Semester

The measure of student persistence at the end of the first semester showed that ASITT students at SIAST Woodland Campus had a higher level of persistence (84.62%) than their non-ASITT Aboriginal counterparts (75.76%), and a higher level of persistence than SIAST Kelsey Campus ASITT students (63.64%). This suggests that the four-week transition program may have had some positive impact on their persistence in the first semester.

ASITT students at SIAST Kelsey Campus, however, did not demonstrate a higher level of persistence than the non-ASITT Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal students at that campus. ASITT student cohorts at both campuses were very similar both demographically in terms of age range, gender distribution and educational background; therefore, other explanations for campus differences were explored.

One of the major differences between the two campuses was in the area of providing a strong, consistent, visible support network for the ASITT students. SIAST

Kelsey Campus had a significant number of staffing changes in their service areas; therefore, some of the initial connections students established during the four-week program with ASITT staff and other support areas were not sustained. Of particular note was the departure of the original ASITT life skills coach at the end of the four-week transition program and the arrival of a new coach. Because Aboriginal students who are feeling socially isolated may not seek out support, consistency in this position is instrumental in providing proactive support to students at that campus. Kelsey Campus also had the additional challenge of providing support services to programs located away from the main campus (i.e. Heavy Equipment Truck and Transport). Interviewee number one discussed a concern with the expansion of off-campus facilities and maintaining connections. "My concern for the future is that SIAST is embarking on other off-campus facilities as well and that is going to hinder the work that we can do in a summer group like that because people just become isolated again when they leave." This concern is supported by the withdrawal of the ASITT student in the HETT program during the first two weeks of the program.

One possible explanation for campus persistence differences could be environment. As campus ecology literature suggests (Braxton, 2003; Strange, 2003), campus size, number of Aboriginal students at the campus, city size, city location and city demographics may have had an impact on persistence. SIAST Woodland Campus is smaller, has a higher percentage of Aboriginal students, and it is located in the more northern city of Prince Albert; therefore, it may have been easier for Aboriginal students at this campus to integrate into their new environment. Swail et al. (2003) suggest that the level of diversity in the students' environment can affect the nature and quality of

minority students' interactions inside and outside the classroom, threatening their academic performance and their social experiences. SIAST Kelsey Campus is a large campus with a very diverse student population.

Other explanations for campus persistence differences could be institutional. Swail et al. (2003) suggest that the practices, strategies, and culture of a postsecondary institution impact minority student persistence and achievement. Although both campuses have the same institutional policies and similar student services they may have developed different campus cultures because of their geographic location, program offerings, student demographics, and institutional history. For example, SIAST Woodland Campus has integrated more Aboriginal cultural education for students into their classroom environment and there is access to more Aboriginal cultural events and ceremonies.

Another difference is at the program level. Each SIAST program has a slightly different program-delivery timeframe therefore decisions regarding student continuation are made at different times of the academic year. Differences in the percentage of withdrawals at each campus could be a result of timing. It is therefore important to take a look at year end withdrawals as well.

Student Persistence at Year End

Measuring persistence at year-end has some value for measuring the effectiveness of the four-week transition program. Although, the four-week transition program was designed to help students with their initial transition into postsecondary studies and help prevent early program withdrawals, the impact of the four-week program should carry

across the first year of the student experience. The second phase of the ASITT program which was ongoing, intensive support was designed more specifically to help support students throughout their postsecondary studies (SIAST, 2006a). The effectiveness of the second phase was not examined in this study. Year-end persistence is still of interest in evaluating the 4-week program because it provides a full picture of first-year cohort completion and withdrawal data.

The measure of persistence taken at year end showed that overall withdrawal rates were similar at both campuses with about 17% of the students withdrawing. The overall withdrawal rate for ASITT students (50%) was higher than non-ASITT Aboriginal (30.51%) and non-Aboriginal (12.24%) withdrawal rates. SIAST Woodland Campus ASITT students continued to have a slightly higher level of persistence than the Kelsey Campus cohort. An analysis of on-time graduate rates also showed ASITT students were more likely to successfully complete their programs on time than Aboriginal non-ASITT students.

One explanation for the higher withdrawal rates and higher on-time graduation rates for the ASITT students might be that the four-week transition program helped Aboriginal students to make up their minds about whether they were academically and personally prepared, and whether they were in the right program at the right time. The three early September ASITT withdrawals could possibly be attributed to students recognizing that this was not the right program or the right time for them to pursue postsecondary studies, and understanding that withdrawing from the program was an acceptable option. For example, the female Aboriginal student in carpentry withdrew from the program because it was not what she expected and she transferred into Basic

Education to pursue academic upgrading and prepare for another program choice that better suited her interests. Students who elected to remain in the program were those who were better prepared to complete, and therefore more likely to graduate on time. Further research could explore this rationale with ASITT program leavers.

An analysis of withdrawal reasons, however, shows that the majority of ASITT students were withdrawn by the institution because of failure to meet academic performance expectations and because of absenteeism. A closer examination of ASITT student withdrawals shows that despite meeting minimum entrance requirements, the majority of them may have been inadequately academically prepared. Four of the unsuccessful students had less than Grade 12. Six of the unsuccessful students that did have complete grade 12 had very low high school grades, particularly in high school English (below 60%). This suggests that English language proficiency, reading comprehension and communication skills may also have been issues for some of these students. This has implications for transition programming design, suggesting that sometimes more intensive academic upgrading may be required than what can be delivered in a four-week transition program. It also challenges traditional higher education systems which provide time-limited semesters and sequenced courses.

Two of the withdrawn ASITT students had excellent performances until close to the end of the program. This may be attributed to unexpected circumstances in their personal lives or perhaps they were examples of the 'fear of success' phenomenon that was discussed by ASITT program staff.

Perceptions and Experiences of Students, Staff and Program Heads

ASITT student perceptions of the effectiveness of the program were generally positive with students finding the program somewhat to very useful. Their perceptions of what parts of the program were most helpful in assisting them with transitioning to their postsecondary studies changed between August and January. Although different tools were used to measure their perceptions, hands-on experience in the postsecondary environment was a probable contributor to perception changes.

Initially the majority of students found life skills, circle check, elder teachings and mathematics skills the most useful in terms of transitioning to postsecondary studies; and the orientation to the city and the campus the most useful in terms of transitioning to the city. At this point in their transition students were most concerned with knowing how to find their way around and how to fit in. Many were worried about their academic ability, particularly in the area of mathematics. After some experience in the postsecondary environment, students began to appreciate the value of goal setting, skills assessments, team building and the support of the other ASITT students.

ASITT program staff perceptions of the effectiveness of the four-week program suggested that it was instrumental in helping students address initial transition challenges, and that it was somewhat effective in making students aware of the challenges they were going to face in completing their programs. ASITT staff emphasized that there were some large gaps such as English language proficiency and inadequate academic preparedness that were difficult to address during such a short period of time. Similar to the student persistence results, these perceptions suggest that four-week transition programming cannot adequately address these larger gaps.

Although SIAST program head awareness of the four-week ASITT transition program was very low, program heads demonstrated a strong knowledge of Aboriginal transition issues and completion barriers. This knowledge-base was developed through their direct experiences with Aboriginal students in their classrooms, and many discussed strategies they used in their own programs. Program heads stressed the importance of program involvement in the development of transition program content. They also emphasized that Aboriginal student support would be most effective if it was a collaborative effort between the student, the ASITT staff, and the program faculty. ASITT students and ASITT program staff agreed that more program involvement was required. ASITT students expressed a desire to meet with program faculty before their programs began and were not fully satisfied with the level of program-specific information and preparation they received. ASITT program staff expressed a frustration with accessing program staff during the month of August; however, attempts to contact the programs at other times of the year were not observed by the researcher.

Finding suitable and affordable accommodations was an issue raised by all three stakeholder groups. The large majority of ASITT students had to move to the city to undertake their postsecondary studies. Although most students found housing before classes began, a large number of them ended up moving to other accommodations during the academic year. The researcher was unable to analyse the impact of inadequate housing on program completion, however, moving during academic studies might potentially have some impact on student success.

English proficiency emerged as a major theme. Fifty percent of the ASITT students who completed the questionnaire indicated they had a first language that was not

English, and half of the ASITT students who withdrew from their postsecondary studies had low grades in high school English. ASITT program staff discussed in detail the impact that language proficiency had on the students' abilities to succeed. Program heads agreed and emphasized that since SIAST programs are so short there is not time to adequately address language gaps.

Issues related to cross-cultural stress, the cultural context of language and different world views were raised frequently by all three groups. These issues are connected to Braxton's (2003) discussion about the concept of biculturalism. Biculturalism pertains to the ability of minority students to learn and function in two cultures at the same time. Minority students enter postsecondary studies with varying degrees of biculturalism, and the greater the degree of biculturalism presented, the greater the adjustment is for the student. Since the majority of the ASITT students were from northern communities or non-urban reserves their degree of adjustment was much larger than for Aboriginal students raised in the city. Conflicts between school and family/community obligations and lack of family/community understanding of the challenges students face were discussed. Understanding that multiple worldviews and knowledge systems co-exist is an important for institutions if they want to fully engage the Aboriginal population and better understand and address the postsecondary success barriers they face.

Systemic barriers were discussed by SIAST program heads and ASITT program staff. Access and opportunity, racism, lack family/community support, lack of role models, and the impact of the residential school system were major themes. These historical and systemic were linked to some of the other barriers such as low self-esteem,

fear of success and self-sabotage. As CMEC (2002) suggests, ASITT students faced multiple barriers and it was often difficult to isolate the factors that influenced a specific student's decision to withdraw or complete.

Achievement of Program Goals

One of the research objectives was to examine the achievement of the four-week transition program goals. Student, staff and program head experiences and perceptions were reviewed and a discussion of stakeholder perceptions of goal achievement follows.

Establishing connections. All ASITT program staff mentioned that establishing connections was one of the most important goals of the program and one of the goals the program was most effective in achieving. Interviewee number six stated, "I think it is critical to the students wanting to stay here because if they are on the outside looking in, they are not going to stay." Interviewees discussed that the program was very effective in meeting this goal because students had the opportunity to meet other Aboriginal students, particularly through the team building exercises, and they established key support connections within the institution and the community. SIAST program heads recognized the importance of establishing connections, and mentioned that Aboriginal students, especially those from the north, struggle without their usual support systems. ASITT students appreciated being introduced to key individuals and support services, and valued the support of the other ASITT students.

Familiarity with off-campus services and resources. ASITT staff unanimously agreed that establishing familiarity with off-campus services and resources was a very important program goal because so many of the students were not familiar with an urban

environment. SIAST program heads agreed that integrating students into the city environment was one of the most common transition issues. This was also one of the primary reasons students enrolled in the ASITT program. Program effectiveness was somewhat limited for the northern Aboriginal students because there was so much for students to learn about their new environments. The program was most effective in teaching the students how to ask questions to find out what supports are available. Interviewee number two stated, "If you can help them out in letting them know what kind of resources are out in the community, I think it better prepares them to keep going." Another ASITT staff compared ASITT student familiarity with off-campus services and resources to non-ASITT student familiarity, indicating that they had better urban survival skills and had become role models to other new Aboriginal students.

Understanding of academic and personal preparedness. All ASITT staff indicated this goal was very important and that the program components of life skills coaching, journaling, goal setting and academic testing were helpful in providing students with this information about themselves. Interviewee number six explained that these activities created awareness in the individuals about how these things can impact their studies. SIAST program heads agreed that students need to have an understanding of whether they are academically and personally prepared and that it would be helpful if this information could be shared with programs to develop a success strategy for the students. ASITT students developed an appreciation for an understanding of their own preparedness once they had embarked on postsecondary studies. Staff discussed that although the program was effective in helping students understand their strengths and weaknesses that this can be discouraging for students. One staff member explained:

You know, there are constantly fingers being pointed as an Aboriginal person that something is wrong, and to come out and say that, I think it's hard. It's absolutely necessary that we need to be able to talk about them, but I'm not surprised when they don't come out and talk about it because the messages in society are "there is something wrong with you". That's a tough thing. (Interviewee 2)

Basic skills review and development. ASITT program staff and SIAST program heads agreed that basic skills such as study skills, exam writing skills, and computer skills were very important, and they perceived that effectiveness of delivering on this goal was limited. This was attributed to the amount of new things students were exposed to during that timeframe, the limited amount of time in the four-week program, and the vastly different basic skill levels students had when entering the program. Students were mixed in their views of the effectiveness of this goal, perhaps confirming that perceived effectiveness of the program component was related to the students' basic skills levels upon entry. This has potential implications for transition programming content and delivery. Ideally students' basic skill levels upon entry could be assessed and programming individualized to focus on those skill areas that needed most development. For example, if a student came into the program with an adequate proficiency in computer skills, more time could be spent on developing other basic skills rather than completing the computer skills component of the program.

Securing suitable housing. Assisting students with finding suitable housing was seen as very significant by all three stakeholder groups. This goal was difficult for the program to achieve due to decreased availability of suitable housing and increased rental rates. Staff and students both mentioned this aspect of the program took up a

considerable amount of time. Program heads expressed a concern that lack of suitable housing impacts students' ability to perform well in their studies. One staff member stated effectiveness goes beyond finding housing and emphasized the importance of educating students how to look after their accommodations. Many ASITT staff members, at both campuses, mentioned that Aboriginal students experience racism when trying to secure accommodations.

We ran into racism, people not wanting to rent to Aboriginal students, quite often. You know if I had been driving around and I talked to the people, they'd say "Oh come and look". I would go with them because I could present well [in person] and on the phone. But if our students would phone they get "we are rented out". So we had huge heart breaking barriers to trying to find housing this past year.

(Interviewee 6)

Understanding challenges of their program of study. Staff, students and program heads agreed that having students understand the challenges of their program of study is somewhat to very important, and that the program was only somewhat effective in achieving this goal. Interviewee number three talks about introducing students to the challenges of postsecondary studies, "We wanted to get them into that routine of being here for that 8 hours a day or 7 ½ hours a day or whatever." Program heads discussed the issues of attendance, late arrival to class, and late assignment submission. Students expressed a desire to know more about their program of study and wanted to be introduced to program faculty ahead of time. This suggestion was supported by ASITT staff and program faculty. Others spoke about the limitations of what can be explored in

the four-week time frame, and a few expressed a wish to do some of this work with students ahead of their arrival.

Securing finances. ASITT program staff indicated that while it was important to have finances in place, their role in helping students secure finances was limited as most of the students already had their funding in place. An analysis of student survey results confirmed only a portion of the ASITT students accessed ASITT program staff for assistance in this area. Where staff felt they were most effective was helping students who were experiencing difficulties with securing damage deposits from their funding agencies, assisting students with setting up bank accounts, providing them with information on budgeting their limited resources, and helping them work through solutions when they run into financial trouble during the year. Program heads discussed initial financial challenges as an important transition issue stating that although tuition is most often in place, funding for books and equipment is often not in place, which puts students behind in their studies. They felt that they were often able to assist students with these issues by contacting their sponsors for them.

Setting personal and academic goals. The majority of ASITT program staff agreed that giving students experience with how to set personal and academic goals was very important.

It is very important because that talks about “why am I here, what am I doing, and how is this fitting with my future”. So many of them have never done that. They are just here because their band council has said, “Go. You need to get some training.” So they need to know if they are in the right place at the right time of their life.” (Interviewee 1)

Interviewee number six discussed the benefits of setting short term goals around attendance, writing in their journals at the end of each day, and beginning to identify goals for changing ineffective behaviour like alcohol usage. Students appreciated this aspect of the program as they progressed with their postsecondary studies. Program heads did not specifically discuss goal setting but discussed the importance of preparedness. A major challenge identified by ASITT program staff for being truly effective in this area is that learning how to set your own realistic goals can be a long term process. One of the staff members discussed the benefits of having students set short term goals and breaking up longer term goals into smaller achievable ones, and provided the example of the paper airplane class:

We do a little exercise. We make paper airplanes and put a big bullseye on the thing. When they come in I said "OK we are going to make paper airplanes" and they start from over there and they try to hit the bullseye. I keep moving them up until finally they do. It's an exercise for them to see that when you try to hit something from far away it's harder than a bunch of short term goals.

(Interviewee 5)

Familiarity with on-campus services and resources. While ASITT program staff were split on the relative importance of this program goal compared to other program goals, both SIAST program heads and ASITT students suggested it was somewhat to very important. All groups expressed a frustration that effectiveness was somewhat limited because everything was not open during the summer months. There was agreement, however, that the on-campus orientation built up comfort levels with the campus

environment and helped students understand that these types of resources were there for them to access.

Cultural support. There were mixed responses in the area of cultural support with the majority of ASITT program staff responding that the relative importance of cultural support was a very individual thing, and that the program was somewhat to very effective in delivering these supports. Student responses confirmed this. ASITT program staff distinguished between the comfort of being with other Aboriginal people versus taking part in cultural ceremonies and accessing cultural supports like Elders.

I believe that peer support is really important and when you are with other students of similar background you understand that you both sort of come from the same background. There is a comradery. My thoughts on cultural events and stuff like that, I am reserved. (Interviewee 2)

Interviewee five clarified this idea, "As you know even though we are all Aboriginal, everybody practices different customs. So, as long as there is the familiarity of having other people who are Aboriginal around, it makes it very effective." Interviewee number six explained, "It depended on the student. For some it was a big thing. For some they were never introduced to it. Some had already practiced their culture and didn't want to be part of their culture anymore."

Some ASITT staff emphasized that cultural support was very important for all Aboriginal students.

One of the things that we've been taught as Aboriginal people is that our culture isn't important, that the traditional ways of learning, a lot of the traditional beliefs are not important. So, when students are exposed to that, and they are allowed to

see that it is an important thing, and that the self-belief in your self is critical, it affects their day to day life. It affects the choices they make every day. When you feel better about yourself, you know, you do better in just about everything in your life. (Interviewee 3)

Interviewee number four discussed the importance of their in-house Elder and the comfort his presence brought to the students. "They knew he was there and they could work with him and come back to him any time they wanted." SIAST program heads discussed cultural support in terms of educating faculty and staff about Aboriginal student success issues and ensuring new staff is adequately oriented suggesting that more work needs to be done in this area.

Program related academic skills review. In general ASITT program staff found the program only somewhat effective in achieving this goal given time restraints. Interviewee number four stated, "Vocabulary and math, those are the two things I think that really needed more time." ASITT students agreed, indicating they would have liked more time to review math skills. Interviewee one explained that although the program can review required skills within the four weeks, it is difficult to bring some of the students are far as they need to go, however, "if you can show them where the resources are, and they keep coming for help afterwards, they can continue on with their learning process." SIAST program heads suggested academic skills review could be more effective if programs were involved in developing the ASITT program academic review curriculum.

Aboriginal Student Transition and Program Completion Issues

Perceptions of the most common Aboriginal student transition issues and Aboriginal student program completion barriers were examined and compared for each of the three stakeholder groups. For Aboriginal student success programming to be most effective, it is important to ensure that it addresses the transition needs and completion barriers observed and identified by students, staff and faculty. These transition and completion issues are summarized in Table 20.

Table 20

Summary of Aboriginal Student Transition and Completion Issues Identified by ASITT students, ASITT Program Staff and SIAST Program Heads

Biculturalism	Geographic isolation English language learners Cultural context of language Differences in communication styles Cross cultural stress Non-western world view Different value systems Family/community expectations
Systemic/historic issues	Multiple-barriers/intensity and type of issues Racism Lack of access/opportunity Inadequate academic preparation Lacking workplace/essential skills Lack of exposure to technology Effects of residential school system/government policy Family/community dysfunction Intergenerational change Lack of role models Fear of success/self-sabotage
Urban integration	Lack of affordable/suitable accommodations Banking/funding/financial issues Transportation issues Medical care/illness Urban survival skills Childcare responsibilities Unfamiliarity with community services

	Unfavourable social influences
Preparedness	Inadequate academic preparation Level of personal preparedness Poor understanding of chosen program/career Lack of understanding program expectations Non-identification of learning disabilities Low self-esteem Inadequate life skills Inadequate study skills Lack of self-sufficiency/independence Lack of commitment/motivation
Support Systems	Lack of family/community support Inadequate friend/peer support Lack of Aboriginal role models Lack of cultural support Lack of program support Reluctance to ask for assistance Reluctance to access services Unfamiliarity with campus support services Unfamiliarity with community support services
Institutional	Policies and procedures Institutional culture Level of bicultural awareness Availability of required supports

Recommendations

The ASITT program has a strong theoretical foundation based on western theory (Bean, 2005; Kuh et al., 2005; Seidman, 2005a, 2005b, 2006; Swail et al., 2003; and Tinto, 1993) and it has incorporated many of the Aboriginal student success strategies recommended by Canadian postsecondary institutions in recent literature. An Aboriginal perspective has been incorporated into the support approach based on the four aspects of humanness (emotional, physical, mental and spiritual) and SIAST Aboriginal staff members are involved in the development and delivery of the program and in the support of the students. The program has strategically tapped into the expertise of other student

service areas such as learning assistance, disability services, and the Aboriginal Activity Centres.

The four-week transition program has many strengths as evidenced by the student and program staff feedback. Some of these strengths include familiarizing students with their on-campus and off-campus environments and empowering them to know how to access the required resources. The program is particularly strong in the area of urban survival skills. ASITT students know how to shop for groceries, navigate public transportation, open bank accounts, access medical services, and participate in community recreation opportunities. The program also appears to be effective in enhancing students' awareness of the challenges they may face during their postsecondary studies, and increasing students' understanding of their personal and academic preparedness. The program has provided the students with a strong peer support network. At the end of the four-weeks they knew other Aboriginal students on their campus and the majority of students continued to access this peer support network throughout their studies.

There are some recommendations that have arisen from an analysis of the evaluation research data. These recommendations could be used to strengthen the existing four-week transition program, or they could be incorporated into future Aboriginal transition programming at SIAST.

1. *Increase the level of SIAST program involvement.* SIAST program heads and instructors should be involved in the development of ASITT program content and consulted regarding transition and completion issues they are witnessing within the classroom and program environment. In addition, program heads and faculty

should be a visible part of the support network for Aboriginal students. From an Aboriginal perspective programs are part of the circle of emotional, physical, spiritual and mental support for the student. From a western theoretical perspective, strong academic communities are important particularly for non-residential commuter colleges because “they serve as the intersection of both social and academic dimensions of the student experience” leading to a greater degree of student integration and commitment (Braxton & Hirschy, 2005, p. 78). Support of faculty also increases student persistence by showing students that the institution is committed to their success.

2. *Formalize academic and personal assessment of all ASITT students.* Seidman (2005) discusses the importance of early identification of students at risk and this concept was strongly supported by SIAST faculty and staff. SIAST should explore the possibility of conducting a comprehensive battery of academic and personal tests with all ASITT students prior to the transition program starting, or within first few days of transition program structure. This will enable the institution to get proper supports in place to support at risk students, and it will help to determine which program components students need to focus on during the transition program. Students whose scores suggest that they will not be successful in postsecondary studies could be provided with counselling to determine whether they should remain in their postsecondary program, or be redirected into other options such as upgrading, language training, or other programs. SIAST should consider whether transition models of a longer more intensive nature can be provided for students with significant academic preparation gaps. The researcher

recognizes that standardized testing has some limitations and biases particularly when used with minority populations, however, these tests do provide a starting point for assessing student preparedness, especially if they are administered by those who are knowledgeable about the tools' limitations.

3. *Formalize an early warning system for all ASITT students.* A formal early warning system should be implemented to identify ASITT students who are struggling during the academic year. Once identified, a proactive circle of support can be put into place utilizing faculty, staff and other required resources. SIAST has an academic progress policy that helps to identify at risk students, however, as evidenced by the withdrawal data this can occur too late to identify or remediate any barriers the student is experiencing. ASITT staff are a key point of contact as they may already be a part of the students' support system. Faculty too play a central role in identifying students who are struggling at an early point in their academic career. They will likely be the first to become aware of at risk behaviours such as poor attendance, student misconduct, and poor academic performance. SIAST program heads need to know who the ASITT students are in their programs and become active players in the referral and remediation process.
4. *Address the English language proficiency barrier.* This study suggests that many Aboriginal students at SIAST are struggling with English language proficiency issues. Both comprehension and the cultural context of language were identified as barriers. Aboriginal students with smaller proficiency gaps can benefit from program-specific vocabulary and terminology being integrated into the four-week transition program. These students should also receive ongoing formal English

language support throughout year, perhaps through weekly workshops that are integrated into their academic schedule. SIAST will need to determine how to address larger gaps in English language proficiency. Consideration should be given to establishing intensive language programming for Aboriginal students who require longer-term remediation. Ensuring students can access funding during this stage is a key factor.

5. *Formalize an ongoing proactive support network for ASITT students.* Seidman (2005) emphasizes the importance of proactive, ongoing and intensive support. This concept was supported by ASITT program staff and SIAST program heads who emphasized that Aboriginal students, especially those from the north, are away from their families and communities. Often their support systems do not understand the challenges they face in the postsecondary environment and they experience competing priorities. Because SIAST is a commuter institution, it is important that SIAST leverage the relationships built during the four-week transition program. A strong positive social community and an institutional support network can be built around the ASITT program structure. The students' ongoing circle of support should be formal and proactive, and it should include at minimum ASITT staff, other ASITT students, program heads and instructors.
6. *Provide ASITT students with ongoing personal preparedness training.* ASITT staff and SIAST program heads identified the importance of building self-awareness, self-esteem, life skills and essential skills. Consideration should be given to integrating activities that enhance the development of these skills into the ongoing intensive phase of the ASITT program. As students approach the end of

their studies, activities should cover 'fear of success' and transition to work topics.

7. *Increase stakeholder awareness of ASITT program.* Increasing external stakeholder awareness of the program would assist SIAST with recruiting students to the program. It could also increase the effectiveness of the program through valuable stakeholder feedback. Increasing internal stakeholder awareness of the program is important particularly with SIAST Program Heads and instructors so that they become full participants in the support of the ASITT students. It is also extremely important that Student Development Program Heads and ASITT staff have a strong understanding of the theoretical basis of the program, the program goals, and the program deliverables. Consideration should be given to developing staff orientation and training materials to ensure comprehensive training is provided.

8. *Introduce ASITT students to successful role models in their fields of study.* Students weigh the costs and benefits of investing their time in postsecondary education. Aboriginal students are often the first ones in their families or communities pursuing postsecondary studies; therefore, they need to understand the benefits of completing their program. They also need to see that success is possible and that they are capable of earning a credential. This can be achieved by introducing ASITT students to Aboriginal mentors in their fields of study and by providing opportunities to meet employers. Site visits to potential employers or guaranteed work placements could provide ASITT students an opportunity to see what it would be like to work in their chosen careers.

9. *Secure institutional commitment and permanent funding.* To run effectively and

efficiently the program requires secure funding and a longer term employment commitment for staff running the program. Term positions lead to frequent staff turnover and decreased program effectiveness. Dedicated staffing would allow for proactive program planning and a chance for the program staff to learn from experience. Students would benefit because there would be a stronger likelihood of developing relationships of trust with program staff. SIAST program heads would also have a better opportunity to develop effective relationships with ASITT staff.

10. *Measure program and student success outcomes.* SIAST should implement a formal assessment strategy to inform the ongoing evaluation of the effectiveness of the ASITT program. As recent literature suggests (Komives et al., 2003; Kuh et al., 2005; Seidman, 2005), assessment is one of the emerging issues in higher education and the student affairs profession. ASITT student completion rates should be tracked yearly but also over the longer term. ASITT program staff comments suggest that ASITT students may return to their SIAST programs at a future date when they are better prepared. Withdrawal reasons should be tracked and analyzed. SIAST should consider surveying or interviewing leavers to obtain richer information from students who withdraw. Student, staff and program perceptions of the effectiveness of the program should be part of the formal feedback process. Another useful measure would be to consider ASITT students' pre-entry attributes (e.g. age, gender, education history, geographic origin, academic and personal pre-test results) to gain a better understanding of how pre-entry attributes are related to postsecondary program completion. Consideration

should be given to including external stakeholders in the assessment process, such as band counsellors and funding agencies. These groups may have a valuable perspective to offer.

There are some additional recommendations that are not specific to the four-week transition program that SIAST should consider. These recommendations address student retention by ensuring the internal campus environment and organizational influences support Aboriginal student success.

1. *Identify institutional barriers to Aboriginal student success.* SIAST should examine institutional policies and practices that may contribute to Aboriginal students leaving the institution unnecessarily. Seidman (2005) indicates that “a failure to negotiate the formal requirements can be disastrous” (p. 230). ASITT staff and SIAST program heads agree that Aboriginal students may leave the institution because they do not understand our system. SIAST needs to ensure that Aboriginal students do not feel “powerless in the face of a bureaucratic maze” by determining if there are any processes that may be linked to early departure (p. 230). Retention statistics should be used to inform SIAST which programs have high Aboriginal withdrawal rates. Further analysis can determine if program admission requirements or course pre-requisites may be a factor. Student satisfaction surveys can be used to determine if there are concerns with student support services or program content, delivery, facilities, equipment, or instruction. The Academic Progress policy and attendance practices should be examined to determine if they are creating unintended barriers to completion.
2. *Create a welcoming and inclusive learning environment.* Creating and

maintaining a safe and inclusive learning environment is essential to Aboriginal student success. Training for faculty and support staff in the areas of biculturalism, diversity, student transitions, Aboriginal ways of knowing and learning, and systemic barriers to success is important and should be required or at minimum proactively offered. SIAST's Instructional and Leadership Development Centre (ILDC) could integrate this training into their new instructor orientation, their faculty certificate program, and their program head workshops. SIAST's Human Resources Division could offer this training to staff as part of their ongoing professional development. The real experiences of Aboriginal staff and students should be incorporated as much as possible to help illustrate the issues. SIAST should continue with its efforts to create a representative workforce (SIAST website) as it is important that Aboriginal students see Aboriginal faces at all levels of the organization.

3. *Build campus housing for Aboriginal students.* Aboriginal students are spending a significant amount of time securing suitable housing and many are being negatively impacted during the school year by housing-related issues. Ensuring Aboriginal students have suitable, affordable, convenient housing in Saskatoon and Prince Albert would remove a major barrier. It may also provide SIAST with an opportunity to build a stronger supportive on-campus community for them.

Limitations

One of the intents of this evaluation research study was to inform and improve the delivery of the ASITT program, and to provide useful information to other institutions

planning and implementing postsecondary transition programming. Care must be taken when generalizing the results of this study to other postsecondary institutions. Aboriginal populations across Canada vary widely as do the types of postsecondary institutions. The in-depth nature of this study should still yield useful information for other postsecondary institutions particularly because it illustrates the multiple transition and completion barriers Aboriginal students face.

Another limitation of the study was the small number of students in the ASITT program, and the fact that only one female student was represented. A different student population could reveal different or additional perspectives. The small number of ASITT program staff interviewed presented a similar limitation. The researcher attempted to minimize these limitations by maximizing participation of ASITT students and ASITT program staff, and by incorporating mixed-methods. The commonality of responses on many of the issues, and the correlation of responses to student success literature helped to minimize this concern.

The ASITT program-administered student satisfaction survey had some limitations. The design of the questions made it difficult to interpret some of the data. Finally, the researcher's position in the institution is a potential limitation. The researcher did not know any of the students, but she had met some of the ASITT program staff and SIAST program head participants previously. All participants were aware of the researcher's position prior to participation as this was disclosed as part of the consent to participate process. It is possible that responses were influenced. Every step was taken to minimize researcher bias as much as possible within the parameters of the study described in Chapter Three.

Suggestions for Future Research

Several areas for future research have been identified throughout this chapter and in the findings of this study. Future research at SIAST could include a more in depth analysis of reasons why Aboriginal students withdraw from their programs. Exit interviews or follow-up with withdrawn students could potentially yield some very helpful information. Aboriginal student persistence and completion statistics should be monitored over the long term, by cohort, to gain a more thorough understanding of Aboriginal student participation patterns. SIAST may want to investigate whether the implementation of any of the recommended strategies in the study have a positive impact on Aboriginal student persistence.

Aboriginal student retention research outside of SIAST could examine the researcher's comprehensive list of Aboriginal student retention issues and completion barriers to determine if they are relevant for Aboriginal students in other provinces or other postsecondary institutions. Additional comprehensive studies of other postsecondary transition programming for Aboriginal students in Canada would be informative, especially those that incorporate persistence statistics and multiple stakeholder perspectives. The impact of transition program components such as goal setting and journaling could also be pursued.

Studies focused on the pre-entry attributes of Aboriginal students would be valuable, particularly in the areas of geographic location, gender, and academic preparedness. Aboriginal English language proficiency and its impact on postsecondary success is another potential area of research. Studies on the reliability of various academic and personal risk assessment tools on the Aboriginal student population would

be extremely helpful for institutions trying to identify at-risk students. Finally, two concepts that arose from the study that may be of potential interest to researchers are Aboriginal student self-sabotage and Aboriginal intergenerational transitions and their effects on Aboriginal student success.

Further research on how Aboriginal ways of knowing and learning impact student success is required. Addressing barriers to Aboriginal student success and creating a welcoming and inclusive learning environment requires an understanding and perhaps an integration of indigenous knowledge systems. In addition, further research could be pursued in the area of defining student success from an Aboriginal perspective. For example, Pidgeon's (2008) research is one of the first comprehensive reviews that examine Aboriginal student success from an Indigenous understanding of success and institutional and public responsibility and accountability.

Summary

Chapter 5 discussed the study's findings in relation to the primary research objectives. Student persistence measures taken at the end of the first semester showed that ASITT students at SIAST Woodland Campus had a higher level of persistence than their non-ASITT counterparts. ASITT students at SIAST Kelsey Campus did not demonstrate a higher level of persistence. Explanations for campus differences were explored. A measure of persistence was also taken at the end of the academic year. This data showed that the overall withdrawal rate of ASITT students at both campuses were similar. ASITT student withdrawal rates were higher than for non-ASITT Aboriginal students. An analysis of on-time graduation rates, however, showed that ASITT students

were more likely to complete their programs on time than Aboriginal non-ASITT students. ASITT student withdrawal reasons were analysed and implications for transition programming discussed.

The perceptions and experiences of ASITT students, ASITT program staff and SIAST program heads were discussed in detail. In general students and program staff perceived the program was somewhat to very effective. Achievement of the four-week transition program goals was discussed from the various stakeholder perspectives. SIAST program head awareness of the ASITT program was low, however, they demonstrated a strong knowledge of Aboriginal transition and completion barriers.

Perceptions of Aboriginal student transition and program completion issues were examined and compared. A number of major themes emerged such as biculturalism, systemic/historic barriers, urban integration, student preparedness, lack of support systems, and institutional barriers.

Program strengths were summarized and recommendations for program improvement were provided. Recommendations for ensuring the internal campus environment supports Aboriginal student success were also provided. Limitations of the study were discussed and suggestions for future research were provided.

Conclusion

This evaluation research study contributed to the understanding of the multiple barriers Aboriginal students at a postsecondary institution in Saskatchewan faced in their pursuit of postsecondary education. Understanding that multiple world views and knowledge systems co-exist was an important theme in this research and it showed that

Aboriginal learners in Saskatchewan often experience an overlap in lifestyles between cultures. It illustrated that postsecondary transition program approaches need to be holistic in nature, and suggested that postsecondary institution staff, faculty and administration have a responsibility to be informed about the unique challenges this demographic faces.

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Appendix A: Program-Administered Student Satisfaction Survey

Aboriginal Success in Trades & Technologies

Summer Transition Program 2007

Feedback from students:

What part of the program did you benefit the most from? _____

Please rate each of the following components using a 1-5 scale with 1 being low/least useful and 5 being high/most useful:

	Content/Topic	Adequate Time	Easy to understand
Math			
Rating			
Comment			

	Content/Topic	Time	Easy to understand
Life Skills			
Rating			
Comment			

	Content/Topic	Time	Easy to understand
Reading			
Rating			
Comment			

	Content/Topic	Time	Easy to understand
Computers			
Rating			
Comment			

	Content/Topic	Time	Easy to understand
Circle Checks			
Rating			
Comment			

	Content/Topic	Time	Easy to understand
Elder Teachings			
Rating			
Comment			

	Content/Topic	Time	Easy to understand
Wellness			
Rating			
Comment			

Please rate the following aspects of the program relating to transitioning to city life?
Use a 1-5 scale (1 is low, 5 is high)

Finding housing _____

Finances _____

Orientation to the city _____

Orientation to the campus _____

Utility hook-ups _____

Amount of weekly allowance _____

Community resources (maps,
phonebooks, intranet, housing list) _____

Hotel accommodations _____

Meals _____

What did you least like? _____

Please explain: _____

Should there have been more time/emphasis on any certain component of the program? _____

Was four weeks the right amount of time to do this program? Yes ____ No ____
If no, what would you recommend? _____

Was the schedule for each day: long enough? ____ too short? ____ too long? ____

Is there anything that we can change to make this program better next year? What did we miss?

Are there things that we should not do, or leave out for next year's program?

Was the advance information you got about the program accurate and complete? Are any changes needed?

Are there any things you want to tell us about the program that we did not ask about?

Would you recommend this summer program to other students? Why or why not?

Appendix B: ASITT Student Program Effectiveness Questionnaire

Please read each question carefully and respond by checking the one box that best answers the question. You may check more than one box if a question states "check all that apply".

Living Accommodations

1. Did you have to move to Saskatoon/Prince Albert to begin your studies at SIAST?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

2. If you had to move to Saskatoon/Prince Albert, where did you move from?

- ☐ I did not have to move
- ☐ City/Town less than 50K from Saskatoon or Prince Albert
- ☐ City/Town 50K or more from Saskatoon or Prince Albert
- ☐ Rural less than 50K from Saskatoon or Prince Albert
- ☐ Rural 50K or more from Saskatoon or Prince Albert
- ☐ Reserve less than 50K from Saskatoon or Prince Albert
- ☐ Reserve 50K or more from Saskatoon or Prince Albert
- ☐ Other (Please describe _____)

3. Who assisted you with finding living accommodations? (Check all that apply)

- ☐ Family/friends
- ☐ ASITT program staff
- ☐ Real estate agent
- ☐ Nobody, I already had a place to live
- ☐ Nobody, I found my own accommodation without help
- ☐ Other (Please describe _____)

4. If ASITT program staff assisted you with finding a place to live, was their assistance helpful?

- ☐ Not helpful
- ☐ Somewhat helpful
- ☐ Very helpful
- ☐ ASITT staff did not assist me

5. Did you have a place to live by the time your program started?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If not, why? _____

6. Are you still living in the same accommodations?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If not, why? _____

Finances

7. Did you receive funding to attend your postsecondary program at SIAST?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If yes, from where? (Check **all** that apply)

- ☐ Band
- ☐ Sponsor
- ☐ Student Loan
- ☐ Scholarship
- ☐ Bursary
- ☐ Bank Loan
- ☐ Other (please describe _____)

8. Did anyone assist you with arranging funding or financial assistance? (Check **all** that apply)

- ☐ Family/friends
- ☐ ASITT program staff
- ☐ Band
- ☐ Sponsor
- ☐ Employer
- ☐ Bank or other financial institution
- ☐ Government student loan staff
- ☐ Nobody, I had finances in place already
- ☐ Nobody, I handled this without any assistance
- ☐ Other (Please describe _____)

9. Were your finances in place by the time your postsecondary program started?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

10. If ASITT program staff assisted you with your funding or financial arrangements, was their assistance helpful?

- ☐ Not helpful
- ☐ Somewhat helpful
- ☐ Very helpful
- ☐ ASITT staff did not assist me

Off-Campus Services

11. Which of these *off campus* services did the 4-week transition program help you become familiar with? (Check **all** that apply)

- ☐ Banking services
- ☐ Daycare/childcare
- ☐ Bus service/transportation
- ☐ Groceries and shopping
- ☐ Medical services (i.e. dentist, doctor, optometrist)
- ☐ Community recreation facilities
- ☐ Utility hook-ups
- ☐ None
- ☐ Other (Please describe _____)

12. How helpful was the introduction to *off-campus* services in preparing you to start your postsecondary studies at SIAST?

- ☐ Not helpful
- ☐ Somewhat helpful
- ☐ Very helpful
- ☐ ASITT program did not assist me

13. Were there any *off-campus* services that were not introduced to you as part of the 4-week transition program that should be part of the program in the future? _____

On-Campus Services

14. Which of these *on-campus* services did the 4-week transition program help you become familiar with (Check **all** that apply)

- ☐ Registration Services
- ☐ Student Counselling
- ☐ Learning Assistance

- ☐ Aboriginal Centre
- ☐ Disability Services
- ☐ Library
- ☐ Cafeteria(s)
- ☐ Gym/Recreation opportunities
- ☐ Campus tour
- ☐ Bookstore
- ☐ Student Association
- ☐ Campus clubs
- ☐ None
- ☐ Other (Please describe _____)

15. How helpful was the orientation to on-campus services in preparing you to start your postsecondary studies at SIAST?

- ☐ Not helpful
- ☐ Somewhat helpful
- ☐ Very helpful
- ☐ ASITT program did not assist me

16. Were there any *on-campus* services that were not introduced to you as part of the 4-week transition program that should be part of the program in the future? _____

Program-Related Information

17. Which of these *program-related* activities did you participate in? (Check **all** that apply):

- ☐ Introduction to your program head and/or program instructors
- ☐ Tour of your program location (i.e. classrooms, labs, program offices)
- ☐ Introduction to what is required to be successful in your specific program
- ☐ Introduction to challenges that you might face in your specific program

18. Were these program-related activities helpful in preparing you to start your postsecondary studies at SIAST?

- ☐ Not helpful
- ☐ Somewhat helpful
- ☐ Very helpful
- ☐ I did not receive an orientation to my program as part of transition program

19. Were there any *program-related* activities that were not part of the 4-week transition program that you think should be added in the future? _____

Student Success Activities

20. How helpful were the following student-success activities in preparing you for your postsecondary studies?

Setting personal goals	<input type="checkbox"/> Not helpful	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat helpful	<input type="checkbox"/> Very helpful	<input type="checkbox"/> Did not do
Setting academic goals	<input type="checkbox"/> Not helpful	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat helpful	<input type="checkbox"/> Very helpful	<input type="checkbox"/> Did not do
Journaling activities	<input type="checkbox"/> Not helpful	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat helpful	<input type="checkbox"/> Very helpful	<input type="checkbox"/> Did not do
Study skills	<input type="checkbox"/> Not helpful	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat helpful	<input type="checkbox"/> Very helpful	<input type="checkbox"/> Did not do
Exam writing skills	<input type="checkbox"/> Not helpful	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat helpful	<input type="checkbox"/> Very helpful	<input type="checkbox"/> Did not do
Computer skills	<input type="checkbox"/> Not helpful	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat helpful	<input type="checkbox"/> Very helpful	<input type="checkbox"/> Did not do
Assessment of math skills	<input type="checkbox"/> Not helpful	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat helpful	<input type="checkbox"/> Very helpful	<input type="checkbox"/> Did not do
Math review	<input type="checkbox"/> Not helpful	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat helpful	<input type="checkbox"/> Very helpful	<input type="checkbox"/> Did not do
Assessment of reading and writing skills	<input type="checkbox"/> Not helpful	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat helpful	<input type="checkbox"/> Very helpful	<input type="checkbox"/> Did not do
Reading and writing review	<input type="checkbox"/> Not helpful	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat helpful	<input type="checkbox"/> Very helpful	<input type="checkbox"/> Did not do
Program specific academic preparation and review	<input type="checkbox"/> Not helpful	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat helpful	<input type="checkbox"/> Very helpful	<input type="checkbox"/> Did not do
Lifestyle coaching (i.e. addictions, social skills, peer pressure, conflict resolution)	<input type="checkbox"/> Not helpful	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat helpful	<input type="checkbox"/> Very helpful	<input type="checkbox"/> Did not do
Cultural activities and support (i.e. sweats, elders, talking-circle)	<input type="checkbox"/> Not helpful	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat helpful	<input type="checkbox"/> Very helpful	<input type="checkbox"/> Did not do
Sports and/or recreational activities	<input type="checkbox"/> Not helpful	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat helpful	<input type="checkbox"/> Very helpful	<input type="checkbox"/> Did not do
How to be a successful student	<input type="checkbox"/> Not helpful	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat helpful	<input type="checkbox"/> Very helpful	<input type="checkbox"/> Did not do

Team building activities (i.e. icebreakers, trip to Rosthern, games)	<input type="checkbox"/> Not helpful	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat helpful	<input type="checkbox"/> Very helpful	<input type="checkbox"/> Did not do
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The 4-week ASITT Transition Program

21. How did you first hear about the ASITT program?

- ☐ SIAST letter of invitation
- ☐ SIAST staff member
- ☐ Friends
- ☐ Family
- ☐ School or band counsellor
- ☐ I do not remember
- ☐ Other _____

22. Why did you choose to participate in the ASITT program? _____

23. How helpful was the 4-week transition program in assisting you to be successful in your SIAST postsecondary program?

- ☐ Not helpful
- ☐ Somewhat helpful
- ☐ Very helpful
- ☐ ASITT program did not assist me

24. If you could change anything about the 4-week transition program to make it more helpful to students in the future, what would you change? _____

25. What was the most valuable part of the 4-week transition program to your success in the first semester of your program? _____

26. If you could give Aboriginal students entering SIAST for the first time one piece of advice, what would you tell them? _____

27. If you could give SIAST one piece of advice about helping Aboriginal students to succeed, what would you tell them? _____

Support

28. Do you feel supported by the other ASITT students at your campus?

- ☐ Not at all
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ All of the time

29. How important is the support of the other ASITT students at your campus to your success in your postsecondary studies?

- ☐ Not important
- ☐ Somewhat important
- ☐ Very important

30. Do you feel supported by the ASITT program staff at your campus?

- ☐ Not at all
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ All of the time

31. How important is the support of the ASITT staff at your campus to your success in your postsecondary studies?

- ☐ Not important
- ☐ Somewhat important
- ☐ Very important

32. Do you continue to access the support of the ASITT staff at your campus?

- ☐ Yes, frequently
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Not at all

33. Do you feel culturally supported at your campus? (i.e. Elders, Aboriginal Activity Centre, cultural events)

- ☐ Not at all
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ All of the time

34. How important is *on-campus* cultural support to your success in your postsecondary studies?

- ☐ Not important
- ☐ Somewhat important
- ☐ Very important

Postsecondary Program Completion

35. Program completion:

- ☐ I am still enrolled in my SIAST program (proceed to Question #34)
- ☐ I have withdrawn from my SIAST program (skip to Question #36)

36. If you are still enrolled in your program, do you think you will complete the program?

- ☐ I am confident I will complete this postsecondary program on time
- ☐ I am confident I will complete this postsecondary program with some delay
- ☐ I am not sure if I will complete this postsecondary program but am still enrolled
- ☐ I will not complete this postsecondary program but am still enrolled
- ☐ I have already withdrawn (skip to Question #36)

37. If you are still enrolled in your program, what are the biggest challenges you are facing to complete your program? (Check **all** that apply)

- ☐ I am not prepared academically for this program
- ☐ I am not sure if I am suited to this program
- ☐ Language difficulties
- ☐ Personal health-related issues
- ☐ Financial difficulties
- ☐ Personal issues (family, relationships, etc)
- ☐ Lack of support from my instructors and program head
- ☐ Lack of support from student services at SIAST
- ☐ Lack of support from my family, friends, and/or community
- ☐ Disability (physical, mental, learning)
- ☐ None, there are no challenges to completing my program
- ☐ I have already withdrawn from the program
- ☐ Other _____

38. If you have already withdrawn from your program, please indicate why you have withdrawn. Check **all** that apply. (If you are still enrolled, skip to question #37).

- ☐ I am not suited to this program
- ☐ I am not prepared academically for this program
- ☐ Language difficulties
- ☐ Personal health-related reasons
- ☐ Financial difficulties
- ☐ Personal issues (family, relationships, etc)
- ☐ Lack of support from my instructors and program head
- ☐ Lack of support from student services at SIAST
- ☐ Lack of support from my family, friends, and/or community
- ☐ Disability (physical, mental, learning)
- ☐ I had an offer of employment
- ☐ Other _____

Personal Information

39. Gender

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female

40. Age

- ☐ Less than 20
- ☐ 21-25
- ☐ 26-30
- ☐ More than 30

41. Marital Status

- ☐ Single
- ☐ Married
- ☐ Divorced
- ☐ Other _____

42. Number of dependent children (under age 18 or over age 18 with a disability)

- ☐ None
- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5 or more

43. Aboriginal Ancestry

- ☐ First Nation
- ☐ Metis
- ☐ Inuit
- ☐ I don't know
- ☐ Other _____

44. First Language

- ☐ English
- ☐ Other (Please indicate which language _____)

45. If English is not your first language, at what age did you start learning English?

- ☐ 0-5
- ☐ 6-10
- ☐ 11-15
- ☐ 16-18
- ☐ Don't know
- ☐ Other _____

46. The highest level of education I **completed** before attending this SIAST program is (Check only one):

- ☐ Less than Grade 10
- ☐ Adult Basic Education 10
- ☐ Regular Grade 10
- ☐ Regular Grade 11
- ☐ GED
- ☐ Adult Basic Education 12 or Adult 12
- ☐ Regular Grade 12
- ☐ Postsecondary certificate
- ☐ Postsecondary diploma
- ☐ Postsecondary degree

YOU ARE FINISHED! THANK YOU FOR COMPLETING THIS SURVEY!

**Appendix C: Aboriginal Success in Trades & Technology (ASITT) Program
Student Questionnaire
Information Form**

Title of Project:

An evaluation of the effectiveness of a postsecondary transition program for Aboriginal students

This information form, a copy of which has been given to you along with the survey, is only part of the informed consent process. Although I will go through this information with you before you begin the survey, please take the time to read this carefully. If you want more details about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. My contact information and the contact information of my thesis supervisor are listed below should you have any questions after today.

The proposal for this research has been approved by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research Memorial University of Newfoundland. If you have ethical concerns about the research (such as the way you have been treated or your rights as a participant), you may contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at icehr@mun.ca or by telephone at 709-737-8368.

Purpose of the Study:

My name is Alison Pickrell, and I am a graduate student undertaking research for my masters thesis in postsecondary education at the Memorial University of Newfoundland, and I am also a SIAST employee. This research is being supervised by Dr. Vernon Curran, Director of Academic Research and Development, Faculty of Medicine, Memorial University of Newfoundland.

This evaluation research study will examine the effectiveness of *one phase* of the SIAST Aboriginal Success in Trades and Technology program; the 4-week transition program you completed in August 2007. All 24 of the ASITT students who completed the transition program at SIAST Kelsey Campus and SIAST Woodland Campus are being asked to participate. Your participation in this questionnaire will help the researcher gather your perceptions of the effectiveness of the program in helping you transition into your postsecondary program of study.

What will I be asked to do?

Your participation is voluntary and confidential. You will be asked to complete an anonymous survey. The survey will take you about 20-30 minutes to complete. I will be available to answer any questions you might have about the survey. Upon completion of the survey, all copies will be collected and sealed in a confidential envelope.

Are there risks or benefits if I participate?

There are no known or anticipated harms to your participation in this research beyond those in an everyday school environment. This is not an evaluation of the ASITT program participants or the ASITT program staff.

As a benefit, it is the hope of this researcher, that this evaluation research study will assist with making the ASITT program as effective as possible, and that it will inform the development of permanent on-going transition and support programming for Aboriginal students across SIAST. As well, it should contribute to the growing literature and research in the field of Aboriginal student success.

There will be no payment offered for participation, however, refreshments will be provided as a thank you for your time.

What happens to the information I provide?

Your participation is entirely voluntary and your information will be anonymous. Completion and submission of the survey will be taken as your informed consent to participate.

Your name will not be used in the study. Some general personal information is part of the survey so that the information can be analyzed demographically. You should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation. You may decline to answer any of the individual questions.

No one except the researcher and her thesis supervisor will have access to the raw data. Raw data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet at the researchers' home and/or password protected computer. Data will be destroyed after the required five year retention period.

The findings of this study will be published in a thesis. Public information cited in the thesis may be used for articles or conference presentations.

Researcher:

Alison Pickrell, masters of postsecondary education student, Memorial University of Newfoundland
Telephone: 933-5589
Email: Pickrell@siastr.sk.ca

Thesis Supervisor:

Dr. Vernon Curran, Director of Academic Research and Development, Faculty of Medicine, Memorial University of Newfoundland
Telephone: 709-777-7542
E-mail: vcurran@mun.ca

Thank you very much for your consideration!

Appendix D: ASITT Staff Interview Questions

Involvement

1. I understand you were involved with the Aboriginal Success in Trades & Technology (ASITT) 4-week summer transition program for August 2007. I'd like to understand your official role with the 4-week transition program, your level of involvement in planning and delivery of the 4-week transition program, and your ongoing involvement with the ASITT program or ASITT students.

- (a) Official role with ASITT 4-week transition?
- (b) Involvement in planning of 4-week transition?
- (c) Involvement with delivery of 4-week transition?
- (d) Any ongoing role with ASITT program or ASITT students?

Transitions

2. What do you perceive are some of the most common challenges Aboriginal students face in transitioning into post-secondary studies at SIAST?

3. How effective do you think the ASITT 4-week program is in helping students overcome these transition challenges you have identified, and why?

4. I am going to list some of the goals of the 2007 4-week transition program, and I want you to discuss briefly how important you think each of these goals is, and how effective you think the 4-week transition program was in meeting each goal.

- (a) Having participants set personal and academic goals?

Important

Very important

Somewhat important

Not important

Effective

Very effective

Somewhat effective

Not effective

Comments: _____

- (b) Providing an understanding of the challenges of their program of studies? (i.e. program related orientation activities, assessments, academic reviews)

Important

Very important

Somewhat important

Not important

Effective

Very effective

Somewhat effective

Not effective

Comments: _____

(c) Providing an understanding of their level of academic and personal preparedness (assessments, lifestyle coaching, journaling, academic review)

Important

Very important

Somewhat important

Not important

Effective

Very effective

Somewhat effective

Not effective

Comments: _____

(d) Providing basic skills review and development (study skills, exam skills, computers)

Important

Very important

Somewhat important

Not important

Effective

Very effective

Somewhat effective

Not effective

Comments: _____

(e) Providing program-related academic skills review (i.e. math, reading and writing)

Important

Very important

Somewhat important

Not important

Effective

Very effective

Somewhat effective

Not effective

Comments: _____

(f) Providing information on how and where to access required on-campus resources and services? (i.e. student services, library, cafeteria)

Important

Very important

Somewhat important

Not important

Effective

Very effective

Somewhat effective

Not effective

Comments: _____

(g) Providing information on how and where to access required off-campus resources and services (i.e. banking, childcare, transportation, medical, shopping)

Important

Very important

Somewhat important

Not important

Effective

Very effective

Somewhat effective

Not effective

Comments: _____

(h) Securing finances

Important

Very important

Somewhat important

Not important

Effective

Very effective

Somewhat effective

Not effective

Comments: _____

(i) Securing suitable housing

Important

Very important

Somewhat important

Not important

Effective

Very effective

Somewhat effective

Not effective

Comments: _____

(j) Establishing connections (i.e. other ASITT students, ASITT staff, intro to key individuals)

Important

Very important

Somewhat important

Not important

Effective

Very effective

Somewhat effective

Not effective

Comments: _____

(k) Cultural support (i.e. elder, talking circle, sweats, aboriginal centre)

Important

Very important

Somewhat important

Not important

Effective

Very effective

Somewhat effective

Not effective

Comments: _____

Student Completion

5. What do you perceive are the biggest barriers to Aboriginal students completing their SIAST programs, and why?
6. Do you think that the 4-week transition program is effective in helping Aboriginal students identify and address some of these barriers, and why?

Student Participation

7. Why do you think Aboriginal students choose to enroll in the ASITT program?
8. Why do you think participation of female students is so low?
9. What recommendations do you have for increasing program enrolment?

ASITT Program Structure and Content

10. If you could change or add any program content to make the 4-week transition program more effective, what would you recommend?
11. If you could change anything in the 4-week program related to structure, what would you recommend?
12. Anything else you would like to mention?

Appendix E: ASITT Program Staff Interview Consent Form

Researcher:

Alison Pickrell, Masters of Postsecondary Education student, Memorial University of Newfoundland, Telephone: 933-5589, Email: Pickrell@siastr.sk.ca

Thesis Supervisor:

Dr. Vernon Curran, Director of Academic Research and Development, Faculty of Medicine, Memorial University of Newfoundland, Telephone: 709-777-7542, E-mail: vcurran@mun.ca

Title of Research:

An evaluation of the effectiveness of a postsecondary transition program for Aboriginal students

This consent form, a copy of which has been given to you, is only part of the informed consent process. Please take the time to read this carefully. If you want more details about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. My contact information and the contact information of my thesis supervisor are listed above should you have any questions after today's interview.

The proposal for this research has been approved by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research Memorial University of Newfoundland. If you have ethical concerns about the research (such as the way you have been treated or your rights as a participant), you may contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at icehr@mun.ca or by telephone at 709-737-8368.

Purpose of the Study:

I am a graduate student undertaking research for my masters thesis in postsecondary education at the Memorial University of Newfoundland, and I am also a SIAST employee. This research is being supervised by Dr. Vernon Curran, Director of Academic Research and Development, Faculty of Medicine, Memorial University of Newfoundland.

This evaluation research study will examine the effectiveness of *one phase* of the SIAST Aboriginal Success in Trades and Technology program; the 4-week transition program. The following evaluation research question will be examined:

1. How will a program of early intensive intervention impact the persistence rate of a cohort of Aboriginal students in trades and technology programs at SIAST Kelsey Campus and SIAST Woodland Campus in the first semester of study in their programs?

Additional objectives of this evaluation research study are to evaluate the achievement of the 4-week transition program goals using a combined objectives-oriented and participant-oriented approach. This evaluation research study will seek to:

1. Summarize ASITT students' satisfaction with participation in the 4-week transition program.
2. Describe the perceptions of student participants of the effectiveness of the 4-week transition program in helping them transition to their postsecondary studies.
3. Describe the perceptions of the program heads that had ASITT program participants in their programs about the effectiveness of the 4-week transition program in helping these students transition to postsecondary studies.
4. Describe the perceptions of the ASITT program staff of the effectiveness of the 4-week transition program in helping students transition to postsecondary studies.

This interview is to gather perceptions of the ASITT program staff on the effectiveness of the 4-week transition program in helping students transition to postsecondary studies. You have been selected based on your involvement with the delivery of the ASITT program in the 2007-08 academic year.

What will I be asked to do?

You will be interviewed using a semi-structured interview guide developed by the researcher. All interviews will be tape recorded. The interview will take approximately 1 hour. Once the interview has been transcribed, the data will be sent to you. You will have the opportunity to confirm and/or amend your responses. You will be required to respond to the data within 14 days of receipt. A lack of response within 14 days will be deemed as your approval. A follow up interview may be requested for clarification purposes. This follow up will be approximately 30 minutes in length if required and will be conducted by telephone or in person.

What type of personal information will be collected?

Should you agree to participate you will be asked to provide your name, your position in the organization, and your campus. All information gathered in this study is strictly confidential, will be used only by the researcher, and at no time will individuals be identified in the study.

I grant permission to the researcher to tape record the interview:

Yes: _____ No: _____

I grant permission to the researcher to use a position descriptor such as "ASITT program staff member at SIAST Kelsey Campus" or "ASITT program staff member at SIAST Woodland Campus"

Yes: _____ No: _____

Are there risks or benefits if I participate?

There are no known or anticipated harms to your participation in this research beyond those in an everyday work environment. This is not an evaluation of the ASITT program participants or ASITT program staff.

Although you will not be identified by name in the research, I will utilize the general position descriptors above. There is a possibility that your identity may be deduced through the types of comments you make. If direct quotes are used, permission will be obtained from you.

As a benefit, it is the hope of this researcher, that this evaluation research study will help to inform the development of on-going transition and support programming for Aboriginal students at SIAST as well as contribute to the growing literature and research in the field of Aboriginal and minority student retention and student success. There will be no remuneration offered for participation and permission has been obtained for these interviews to be conducted during your normal work hours without any financial implications for your participation.

What happens to the information I provide?

Your participation is entirely voluntary and you have the option to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. You should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation. You may decline to answer any of the individual questions or stop the interview at any time. If you chose to withdraw, you retain the right to determine if the data provided to the date of the withdrawal can be used or will be stricken. Stricken data will be destroyed.

No one except the researcher and her thesis supervisor will be allowed to see or hear any of the answers to the interview. The interview data will be kept in a locked cabinet only accessible by the researcher or on a password protected computer. The original recorded data will be kept for the required five years and then permanently destroyed. Public information cited in the thesis may be used for articles or conference presentations.

Signature (written consent)

Your signature on this form indicates that you (a) understand to your satisfaction the information provided to you about your participation in this research project, and (b) agree to participate as a research subject. Your signature does not release the researcher from her legal, professional and ethical responsibilities.

Participant's Name: (please print) _____

Participant's Position: _____ Participant's Campus: _____

Participant's Signature _____ Date: _____

Researcher's Name: (please print) _____

Researcher's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix F: SIAST Program Head Focus Group Guide

Focus Group with SIAST Program Heads

March 27, 2008

SIAST Kelsey Campus

ASITT program familiarity

1. How many of you are familiar with the Aboriginal Success in Trades and Technology (ASITT) Program? (Provide an overview of program)
2. Did your program participate in the 4-week transition program this August, by helping to orient ASITT students to your program? If yes, how?
3. Do you know which students in your program(s) are ASITT students? If not, is it important that you know?
4. Do you have ongoing contact with ASITT students and/or ASITT program staff throughout the year?

Transitions

5. What are the most common challenges students face in transitioning into your programs?
6. In your experience do Aboriginal students face different transition issues than other students in your programs?
7. Are the ASITT students in your programs better prepared to handle the transition to postsecondary study than other Aboriginal students in your programs?

Program Completion

8. What are the most common barriers to students completing their program of study?
9. Do you feel Aboriginal students face any different or additional barriers to successfully completing their program(s)?
10. Are the ASITT students in your programs more aware and able to address completion barriers than other Aboriginal students in your programs?

4-week Transition program

11. Do you feel any changes should be made to the 4-week transition program to make it more effective?

If program heads have minimal familiarity with program, ask the following:

12. From a program head point of view, what are some of the essential components of a transition program that would help Aboriginal students transition successfully in your program(s)?

Appendix G: SIAST Program Head Focus Group Consent Form

SIAST Program Head Focus Group Consent Form

“An evaluation of the effectiveness of a postsecondary transition program for Aboriginal students”

Introduction

My name is Alison Pickrell. I am a graduate student undertaking research for my masters thesis in postsecondary education at the Memorial University of Newfoundland, and I am also a SIAST employee. This research is being supervised by Dr. Vernon Curran, Director of Academic Research and Development, Faculty of Medicine, Memorial University of Newfoundland.

Purpose of the Study

This evaluation research study will examine the effectiveness of *one phase* of the SIAST Aboriginal Success in Trades and Technology program; the 4-week transition program. The following evaluation research question will be examined:

1. How will a program of early intensive intervention impact the persistence rate of a cohort of Aboriginal students in trades and technology programs at SIAST Kelsey Campus and SIAST Woodland Campus in the first semester of study in their programs?

Additional objectives of this evaluation research study are to evaluate the achievement of the 4-week transition program goals using a combined objectives-oriented and participant-oriented approach. This evaluation research study will seek to:

1. Summarize ASITT students' satisfaction with participation in the 4-week transition program.
2. Describe the perceptions of student participants of the effectiveness of the 4-week transition program in helping them transition to their postsecondary studies.
3. Describe the perceptions of the program heads that had ASITT program participants in their programs about the effectiveness of the 4-week transition program in helping these students transition to postsecondary studies.
4. Describe the perceptions of the ASITT program staff of the effectiveness of the 4-week transition program in helping students transition to postsecondary studies.

The purpose of this focus group is to gather perceptions of the program heads at SIAST Kelsey Campus and SIAST Woodland Campus on the effectiveness of the 4-week transition program in helping students transition to their postsecondary program at SIAST. The goal is to develop a better understanding of the academic and personal preparedness of the Aboriginal students who have gone through the 4-week transition program versus Aboriginal students in your programs who are not part of the ASITT program. You have been invited to participate because you are the program head of one of the trades and technology programs that have ASITT students in the 2007-08 academic year.

What Will I Be Asked To Do?

Focus group participants will be presented with a set of interview questions, within a small group of approximately 5-6 program heads, which will be held at SIAST Woodland Campus and SIAST Kelsey Campus in March 2008. The researcher will facilitate the session. Participant feedback will be recorded by the researcher on audiotape and a flip chart. The focus groups will be completed within one hour from the start time.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Your decision to withdraw from a focus group will be accepted and respected at any point in time that you wish. If you decide to withdraw from a focus group; however, you may not re-enter a group after making this choice, as integrity in group process must be preserved. If you decide to withdraw part-way through a focus group, due to the interactive nature of the process, any data you may have contributed will be retained and/or included in the study.

What Type of Personal Information Will Be Collected?

All participants shall remain anonymous in the research reporting processes and documents. Data collected during the focus group will be attributed to “participating SIAST Woodland Campus Program Heads” and “participating SIAST Kelsey Campus Program Heads”. Participants will not be asked any specific questions about individual students, or be asked to make reference to specific students by name.

Are There Risks or Benefits If I Participate?

There are no known or anticipated harms to your participation in this research beyond those in an everyday work/study environment. This is not an evaluation of the ASITT program participants, the ASITT program staff, or the participating SIAST program heads.

Although you will not be identified by name in the research, I will utilize the general position descriptors above and if you agree the self-chosen pseudonym above. There is a possibility that your identity may be deduced through the types of comments you make. If direct quotes are used, permission will be obtained from you.

As a benefit, it is the hope of this researcher, that this evaluation research study will help to inform the development of on-going transition and support programming for Aboriginal students at SIAST as well as contribute to the growing literature and research in the field of Aboriginal and minority student retention and student success. There will be no remuneration offered for participation and permission has been obtained for these interviews to be conducted during your normal work hours without any financial implications for your participation. Refreshments will be provided at the focus group session to thank you for your participation.

What Happens To The Information I Provide?

Focus group participants are guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity by the researcher. Due to the interactive nature of focus groups, participants will be aware of each other's identities. The researcher will ask participants to agree to respect the confidentiality of other participants and emphasize the importance of doing so; however, cannot guarantee absolutely that participants will maintain each others' anonymity and confidentiality. Only the researcher and her supervisor will be allowed to see or hear any of the answers to the interview guideline and/or tape. Focus group responses will be analyzed and reported only in terms of themes, trends and percentages of participants who report similar perceptions.

The focus group data, including the original recorded data will be kept in a locked cabinet only accessible by the researcher or on a password protected computer. The original recorded data will be kept for the required five years and then permanently destroyed. Public information cited in the thesis may be used for articles or conference presentations.

Signatures (written consent)

Your signature on this form indicates that you 1) understand to your satisfaction the information provided to you about your participation in this research project, and 2) agree to participate as a research subject.

In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the investigators, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from this research project at any time. You should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

Participant's Name: (please print) _____

Participant's Signature _____

Date: _____

Researcher's Name: (please print) _____

Researcher's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Questions/ Concerns

The proposal for this research has been approved by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research Memorial University of Newfoundland. If you have ethical concerns about the research (such as the way you have been treated or your rights as a participant), you may contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at icehr@mun.ca or by telephone at 709-737-8368.

Permission has also been obtained from SIAST Applied Research Office to undertake research on site.

If you have further questions or want further clarification regarding this research and/or your participation, please contact:

Researcher:

Alison Pickrell, Masters of Postsecondary Education student, Memorial University of Newfoundland, telephone: 306- 933-5589 or email: pickrell@siast.sk.ca

Thesis Supervisor:

Dr. Vernon Curran, Director of Academic Research and Development, Faculty of Medicine, Memorial University of Newfoundland, telephone: 709-777-7542 or e-mail: vcurran@mun.ca

