



“We all became like a family”

Background

Thompson Rivers University’s aim is to be the University of Choice for Aboriginal students.

- 10% of the current student body has aboriginal ancestry; but
- about half (46%) do not complete first-year studies successfully;

Possible explanations include:

- The lack of a supportive community including family members and Elders
- A curriculum that may lack relevance
- Inadequate academic preparation

Assessment

By several measures the program achieved its goals:

- Students completed 105/108 attempted credits for a 97% success rate;
- 10/12 students will be taking university courses in the Fall 2012;

“When I am successful ...I am always going to thank this program...It got me started.”



“When I got here there were people to help...It really wasn’t scary like I thought it would be.”

Support & Mentoring

A supportive environment grew from developing an on-campus community. Key to its success was:

- A preparatory camp that brought together students, elders, faculty, peer mentors and counsellors;
- Frequent opportunities for students to express their fears and challenges;
- Administrative recognition of the unique challenges the students faced.

An Aboriginal Cohort Program: Processes, Results, & Application

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The Cohort

Working with the Local School District (#73), several First Nations support workers identified qualifying students to take part in a program that would:

- Allow students to simultaneously receive 12 secondary school credits and 9 university credits;
- receive academic support from trained Aboriginal peer support mentors and Elders in residence;
- deliver core university courses (Biology, Statistics, English,)

“Without this doorway it would have been so much more intimidating.”



Curriculum

In developing the curriculum for the courses, the following Guiding Principles* were followed:

- Knowledge and skills in one course should be integrated with those from the others;
- experiential, opportunities for learning were highlighted in each course;
- holistic and high impact methods were used-- respecting traditional Aboriginal ways of knowing.

* 2011 TRU Handbook for Educators of Aboriginal Students