

information

Post-Secondary Education for Status Indians and Inuit

December 2000

In the mid-1960s, there were about 200 Status Indian students enrolled at Canadian colleges and universities. By 1999, the number had soared to more than 27,000.

Several factors motivated this remarkable success story. One was First Nations' increasing control over their own education.

First Nations Control of First Nations Education

In the 1960s, the courses taught in on-reserve schools largely ignored First Nations history, culture and values. Few First Nations communities had their own high schools. To further their education, many First Nations teenagers had to relocate to towns and cities, sometimes hundreds of kilometres from their homes. This upheaval often interfered with their academic performance. It did little to inspire them to stay in school and go on to university or college.

In 1972, the National Indian Brotherhood (now the Assembly of First Nations) presented the government with a paper entitled *Indian Control of Indian Education*. The paper said that First Nations



wanted their children's identity to be shaped by their own traditions and values. Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) adopted this policy of First Nations local control of education in 1973.

Today, 98 percent of the schools on reserves are administered by First Nations themselves. Many First Nations communities have their own high schools and children are staying in school longer. First Nations education systems prepare children for modern-day life, while preserving their traditions. As a result, more First Nations students are graduating from high school and enrolling in college and university programs.

The Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP)

A second factor behind the increase in post-secondary education of Status Indians and Inuit is increased federal funding.

In the 1950s, there was no federal government program specifically supporting post-secondary education for Status Indians and Inuit. Instead, INAC provided some financial assistance to these students on a case-by-case basis.

In 1968, INAC introduced a financial assistance program for technical, vocational, college and university training for Status Indians and Inuit. (See "A Brief History of Post-Secondary Education Funding" below.) In the 1970s, more and more First Nations and Inuit students began to pursue post-secondary education. As a result, in 1977 INAC established the Post-Secondary Education Assistance Program. This was revised in 1989 to become the Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP). The program applies to all levels of post-secondary education, including community college diploma and certification programs, undergraduate programs



and professional degree programs, such as medical and engineering degrees.

Between 1988 and 1999, the number of Status Indian and Inuit students pursuing a college or university education increased from 15,572 to more than 27,000. Today, almost 100 percent of all post-secondary funding is administered by First Nations and Inuit organizations who establish their own priorities for this funding.

The PSSSP has removed many of the financial barriers to post-secondary education that Status Indian and Inuit students encountered in the past. The program offers students three types of support:

Tuition support is provided to part-time and full-time students. It may include fees for registration, tuition and the cost of books and supplies required for courses.

Travel support is available to students who must leave their permanent place of residence to attend college or university. Students may qualify for a grant to return home once every semester. This grant also covers any dependants who live with the student.

Support for living expenses is provided to full-time students to help cover the costs of food, shelter, transportation and day care.

INAC also provides financial support to Status Indian and Inuit

students enrolled in **University and College Entrance Preparation (UCEP)** programs. UCEPs enable students to attain the academic level required to enter degree and diploma programs.

Aboriginal Studies Programs in Canadian Universities

The expansion of Aboriginal studies programs in Canadian universities has also played a part in attracting more Status Indian and Inuit students to university and college studies. Through its **Indian Studies Support Program (ISSP)**, INAC provides funding for research and the development of post-secondary level programs designed for Aboriginal peoples. In 1969, Trent University in Peterborough, Ontario, became the first university in Canada to establish a Native Studies department.

Several colleges and universities now offer Aboriginal studies programs and actively recruit Aboriginal high-school graduates and mature students who may not meet regular entrance requirements. They also provide support programs, including counselling and pre-entrance preparation courses to ease students' transition to campus life.

The Saskatchewan Indian Federated College (SIFC) was founded in 1976 by the Chiefs of the Federation of Saskatchewan Indians (now the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations). It was founded as a university college affiliated with the University of Regina. SIFC continues to develop as a centre of excellence in First Nations education and is a member of the

A Brief History of Post-Secondary Education Funding

1950s — No specific funding program existed. The federal government provided support on a case-by-case basis.

1968-1969 — 250 post-secondary students were assisted through an INAC program for Status Indians and Inuit who were experiencing difficulties in getting support under the 1976 *Adult Occupational Training Act*.

1977 — The rapid increase in the number of Status Indian and Inuit students enrolling in colleges and universities in the 1970s resulted in INAC's creation of the Post-Secondary Education Assistance Program.

1983 — Status Indian and Inuit students enrolled in University and College Entrance Preparation programs began to receive support from INAC.

1988 — Under its Indian Studies Support Program, INAC formalized its support to First Nations and other post-secondary institutions for developing and delivering special post-secondary programs for Aboriginal peoples.

1989 — The Post-Secondary Education Assistance Program was revised to become the Post-Secondary Student Support Program.

1991 — The federal government announced an increase of \$320 million for Status Indian and Inuit post-secondary education over the five-year period of 1991-92 to 1995-96.

1994 — The federal government announced the addition of \$20 million to the PSE budget.

2000-2001 — The current PSE budget of \$293 million enables more than 27,000 Status Indian and Inuit students to attend college and university.

Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada. SIFC's mission is to improve the quality of First Nations life, and to preserve, protect and interpret First Nations history, languages, culture and artistic heritage. Among the many courses the college

offers are a Health Studies Program and a Dental Therapy Program, designed for First Nations peoples who want to provide dental services in remote communities.

The 2000-2001 budget for post-secondary education is over \$293 million.

For more information on post-secondary education programs, contact your band office, administering organization or regional office of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada.

DEFINITIONS

First Nation: A term that came into common usage in the 1970s to replace the word "Indian," which many people found offensive. Although the term First Nation is widely used, no legal definition of it exists. Among its uses, the term "First Nations peoples" refers to the Indian people in Canada, both Status and Non-Status. Many Indian people have also adopted the term "First Nation" to replace the word "band" in the name of their community.

Indian Act: This is the Canadian federal legislation, first passed in 1876, that sets out certain federal government obligations, and regulates the

management of Indian reserve lands. The act has been amended several times, most recently in 1985. Among its many provisions, the act requires the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development to manage certain moneys belonging to First Nations and Indian lands, and to approve or disallow First Nations by-laws.

Inuit: An Aboriginal people in northern Canada, who live above the tree line in Nunavut, the Northwest Territories, Northern Quebec and Labrador. The word means "people" in the Inuit language — Inuktitut. The singular of Inuit is Inuk.

Reserve: Land set aside by the federal government for the use and occupancy of an Indian group or band.

Status Indian: An Indian person who is registered under the *Indian Act*. The act sets out the requirements for determining who is a Status Indian.

Publications and Public Enquiries

Indian and Northern Affairs Canada
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0H4

(819) 997-0380

www.inac.gc.ca

QS-6119-010-EE-A2