

LE,NONET Research Project

INFORMATION SHEET

Between 2005 and 2009, a series of programs were offered to Indigenous undergraduate students at the University of Victoria (UVic) as part of the LE,NONET Research Project, a partnership between UVic and the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation. These programs were aimed at improving the retention and success of student participants, as well as making the university a more welcoming environment for Indigenous learners. Research was undertaken to measure the impact of the programs on the success and retention of participants, as well as to identify best practices in supporting Indigenous post-secondary students. A final report will be released in 2010; this information sheet provides an overview of the preliminary research results.



OVERVIEW OF STUDENT PROGRAMS

A total of two hundred undergraduate students participated in LE,NONET Programs during the four-year pilot project. Most students (62%) participated in more than one program. The programs were coordinated through a central project office, providing Indigenous students with a place to hold events, study, connect with staff and find support.

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH PARTICIPATION

Of the 200 participants, 144 (72%) participated in interviews, surveys or focus groups in which they shared their reflections on the programs. Interviews were also conducted with University stakeholders, project partners and staff to identify project outcomes and best practices.

PROGRAM	DESCRIPTION	# OF PARTICIPANTS
Bursary	Up to \$5,000 per year; maximum of \$15,000 over four years	140
Emergency Relief Fund	Up to \$750 per year	54
Preparation Seminar	Pre-requisite for RA and CI programs; unique course only for Indigenous students; students received academic credit in Indigenous Studies	90
Research Apprenticeships (RA)	200 hours of research work with a UVic faculty member; students received academic credit in Indigenous Studies and a \$3500 stipend	62
Community Internships (CI)	200 hours of work in a community setting; students received academic credit in Indigenous Studies and a \$3500 stipend	64
Peer Mentors	More experienced students were hired part-time to mentor new students; included one-on-one mentoring and group activities	24 mentors 50 mentored students

“ Success to me means that I can complete my program and while doing that acknowledge my Aboriginal background and be supported in that. And really be able to explore it, and not compromise that background for any achievements in academia. ”

— LE,NONET Student

IMPACT OF LE,NONET PROGRAMS ON RETENTION AND ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Preliminary quantitative analysis of the impact of LE,NONET Programs on student retention is overwhelmingly positive. Data from the 200 student participants was compared with that of 819 non-participating Indigenous students, as well as a cohort of 997 Indigenous students who attended UVic in the 5 years prior to the start of the project. The results indicate that, compared to non-participants, LE,NONET students experienced:

- ➔ 100% increase in term-to-term continuation
- ➔ 20% increase in graduation rates
- ➔ 67% reduction in withdrawal rates
- ➔ one extra year of persistence

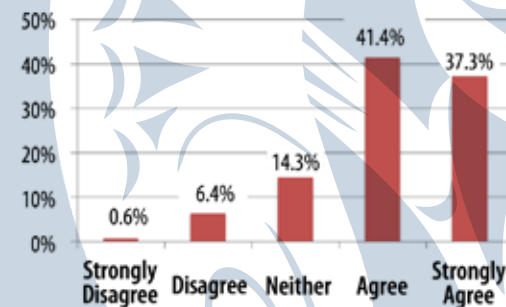
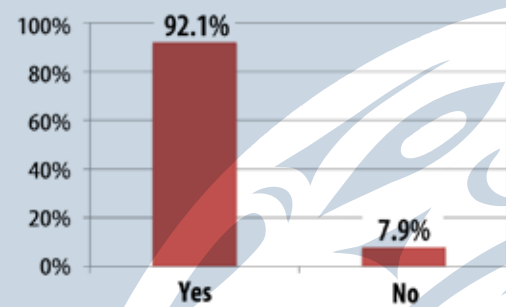
STUDENT EXPERIENCES IN LE,NONET PROGRAMS

DID THE LE,NONET PROGRAM CONTRIBUTE TO YOUR SUCCESS?

One of the key research questions was an in-depth exploration of the meaning of “success” for Indigenous students. The vast majority of students (92.1%) agreed that the programs contributed to their success, but the definition of that success was impacted by individual, cultural and community factors. Many students linked their success to the relevance of their education to creating change in their community and the ability to integrate cultural teachings into their coursework. Participants also talked about the significance of becoming role models for younger generations through academic, personal and family achievement.

“THE LE,NONET PROGRAM HELPED ME TO FEEL PART OF THE ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY ON CAMPUS.”

One of the major outcomes of the project was that students developed a strong sense of community, resulting in a strengthened connection to the campus. This was facilitated through both formal program activities and informal drop-in events at the LE,NONET office. Indigenous students, faculty, staff, elders and other community members nurtured relationships with one another, creating a community within the broader academic setting.



RAISING AWARENESS OF UVIC STAFF AND FACULTY

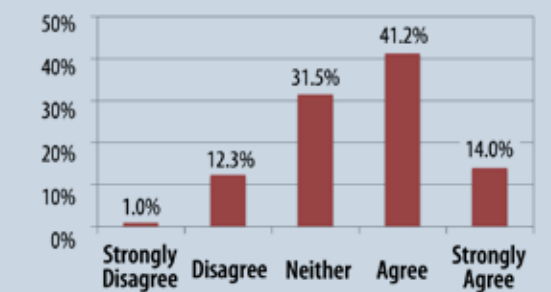
To complement the student-focused programs, the Staff and Faculty Aboriginal Cultural Training (SFACT) Program was developed to improve the Indigenous cultural awareness of UVic staff and faculty. Online and workshop curriculum modules were developed and piloted. The curriculum included content on Indigenous cultural practices and history, as well as issues that may emerge in a classroom or other educational environment with Indigenous students. A needs assessment was conducted with more than 240 participants from across the university campus, to inform the creation of the SFACT workshops. The full needs assessment report is available on the LE,NONET website (web.uvic.ca/lenonet).

“ I think one of the best things about that was that I guess it showed me, it gave me a role model, that it was possible for Aboriginal people to succeed in university. So, I think that it gave me hope and helped me believe that I could be one of them.”

— LE,NONET Student

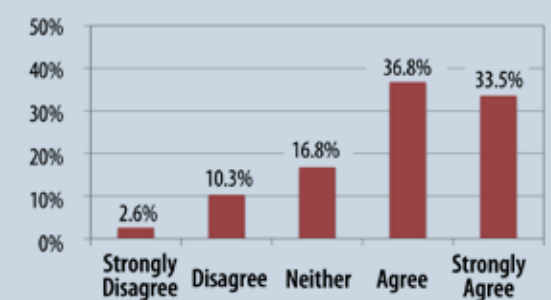
“THE LE,NONET PROGRAM HELPED ME TO FEEL PART OF THE GENERAL UVIC COMMUNITY.”

While some programs were held off campus (such as the Community Internship Program), a large percentage of student participants felt an increased connection to the University community. Through the various programs, students participated in academic conferences, published papers, and engaged in academic research. Students also developed an appreciation of the significant and valued place that Indigenous scholars hold at the University.



“THE LE,NONET PROGRAM HELPED ME TO DEVELOP A SENSE OF WHO I AM AS AN ABORIGINAL PERSON.”

The programs were highly successful in strengthening students’ sense of cultural identity. Program staff supported students to connect with their cultural teachings, learn about other Indigenous people’s experiences, and develop a sense of pride in their heritage and ancestry.



“ Well, in order for you to be successful, you need a support system. Especially in the academic community, I feel that especially with Aboriginal students, you need to have some kind of a support system, especially if you’re new on campus.”

— LE,NONET Student

BEST PRACTICES IN SUPPORTING THE SUCCESS OF INDIGENOUS STUDENTS

Key principles of best practices in supporting Indigenous post-secondary students were identified through the qualitative research. Students, UVic staff, faculty and community members identified six common elements running through the LE,NONET programs. This summary includes examples of the ways these principles can be put into practice in program development and delivery.

RECIPROCAL LEARNING	Opportunities for students to share their strengths, knowledge and experiences, as well as to learn from the skills and knowledge of professors, staff, mentors and other students. Students have as much to offer as they have to gain, and know that their perspective is valued.
SUPPORTING INDIGENOUS IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT	Students feel seen and respected as Indigenous people. Students from diverse backgrounds and identity perspectives (rural, urban, culturally grounded, displaced, Métis, First Nations, Inuit, etc.) are valued and supported. Indigenous identity is multifaceted and complex, and this diversity is given room to grow.
CULTURALLY RELEVANT PROGRAMMING	Cultural activities and knowledge are integrated into programs for students. This includes the use of local traditional practices, involvement of local elders, and the incorporation of students' own cultural teachings into the program activities.
COMMUNITY-BUILDING	Indigenous students are provided with a space in which a sense of community is facilitated, encouraged and supported. Students have opportunities to build ongoing connections with Indigenous faculty, staff and other students on campus, as well as with the broader Indigenous communities off-campus. Community is developed out of a sense of being cared for, nurtured, valued and embraced as a whole person; extended family is also welcome, including children and partners.
RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING	Students develop lasting relationships with Indigenous faculty, UVic staff, community members and other students. Relationship-building is seen as a central part of program delivery, including continuation of staff in key positions. Staff and faculty develop meaningful connections with students that are nurtured from year to year.
INDIVIDUALIZED PROGRAMMING	An intersectional understanding of individual students' lives includes taking cultural practices, community needs, academic area of study, personal learning needs, and other factors into account. Programs include opportunities for students to develop their own strengths and interests, and allow enough flexibility in order for students to succeed on their own terms.

“ I used to think I would never amount to anything, but I feel I can do almost anything now.”

— LE,NONET Student



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