

Executive Summary

The disappearance and murder of Saint Mary's University student Loretta Saunders in February 2014 captured national media attention. Ms. Saunders' murder highlighted the tragedy of missing and murdered Aboriginal women in Canada. As a student, Ms. Saunders' experience also highlighted significant gaps in the programs and services available to Aboriginal students at Saint Mary's University. The murder of Loretta Saunders served as a catalyst for students, staff, faculty and administration to begin the process of building a better university experience for Aboriginal students.

At the Loretta Saunders Memorial Service, the President of Saint Mary's, Dr. J. Colin Dodds, committed to establishing a Task Force to provide guidance on how the Saint Mary's university community could enhance learning opportunities and the education experience for Aboriginal students. The Task Force completed its work during the Spring and Summer of 2014. The Task Force report has been organized around three major, and interconnected questions:

1. What are the structural/foundational elements upon which Saint Mary's University can start to build institutional transformation?
2. How does Saint Mary's University engage and support success among aboriginal learners, including those in university and those who aspire to attend?
3. How do we indigenize the academy?

Enhancing the learning opportunities and education experience of Aboriginal students will space, staff, resources and a sustained commitment to cultural change. The seventeen

Once appointed, the Aboriginal Student Advisor will have a key role to play in fostering a culture of change, in collaboration with the Aboriginal Advisory Council and the university community. Specifically, we point toward our remaining recommendations as some of the ways to enhance the experience of Aboriginal students at Saint Mary's, while strengthening our connections with Aboriginal communities. The remaining recommendations are:

2. Outreach activities

2.1. That the university develop a single, coordinated, university-wide outreach strategy that builds upon the university's existing strengths for younger Aboriginal students.

3. Pathway mobility

3.1. That Saint Mary's develop a mechanism for voluntary self-identification in the university's application procedures and for sharing information, when permitted, with other relevant units.

3.2. That the University create opportunities for including as many Aboriginal

classrooms and in special public lectures across the university and that such a fund be continued in subsequent years.

4.4. *That the University facilitate the creation, development, growth and delivery of curriculum that would be relevant to Aboriginal communities throughout the Atlantic Region in all of the undergraduate faculties.*

4.5. *That the University explore the creation, development and delivery of credit and non-credit programs that can be co-designed by Continuing Education, the Business Development Centre, relevant departments and programs, and the aboriginal community.*

4.6. *That the university support and expand the Office of Northern and Aboriginal Research through full funding the director and further support the mandate for the office that includes research, community liaison and other activities.*

5. Student Success

5.1. *That Center for Academic Instructional Development (CAID) be charged with developing a sus 0 34(ai) 0.2 naublpermntoring programor(0 34(he) 0.2 (-de)0.2 (*

We hope that the Task Force Report will provide the framework that will enhance the experience of current Aboriginal students and for future generations.

PRESIDENT'S TASK FORCE REPORT

FINAL REPORT

15 SEPTEMBER 2014

INTRODUCTION

The murder of Loretta Saunders deeply affected the Saint Mary's University community. When Ms. Saunders went missing on 13 February 2014, her family flew to Halifax to initiate a search. They appealed for help and volunteers responded, putting up posters around Halifax and effectively using social media. When her body was discovered in the late afternoon of 26 February, a collective grief was experienced by many in the community who knew Ms. Saunders as well as those who knew that since 1980, almost 1200 Aboriginal women have gone missing or have been murdered across Canada.

To put this in context, Aboriginal women made up about 4.3 percent of the female population in 2013 but they are disproportionately represented among murdered and missing women, accounting for 16% and 11.3% respectively. Ms. Saunders had decided in September 2013 that she would study the topic of missing and murdered Aboriginal women as her thesis project, under the supervision of Dr. Darryl Leroux. She likely would have graduated in May 2014 and was considering law school.

At the Loretta Saunders Memorial Service, the President of Saint Mary's, Dr. J. Colin Dodds, committed to establishing a Task Force to provide guidance on how the Saint Mary's university community can enhance learning opportunities and the education

experience for Aboriginal students. In the spring, he appointed a task force consisting of students, Aboriginal people, faculty and staff from Saint Mary's University. The Task Force is comprised of Dr. Paul Dixon (Associate VP, Enrolment Services), Mr. Roger Lewis (Board Member, Mi'kmaq Native Friendship Centre) Ms. Salina Kemp (Student), Ms. Amanda Kolwich (Student), Dr. Trudy Sable (Office of Northern and Aboriginal Research), and Dr. Peter L. Twohig (Atlantic Canada Studies and History, who served as chair).

Dr. Daniel Woolf, stated unequivocally in 2011 that improving Aboriginal education is “critical to the fabric of Canadian society today.”³

Education has been viewed as a key site of agency by Aboriginal peoples in Canada. The apogee of the paternalistic federal approach was, perhaps, the *Statement of the Government of Canada on Indian Policy* (the “White Paper”) presented in 1969. Among the recommendations put forward was that First Nations children be fully integrated into provincial and territorial education systems. Aboriginal people across Canada successfully resisted this approach. The National Indian Brotherhood (the forerunner of the Assembly of First Nations) issued a position paper entitled *Indian Control of Indian Education* (1972). This document signaled an important change in the colonial relationship and First Nation communities began to insist on a larger voice in shaping the educational experience of their children. In a general sense, Aboriginal education in the 1970s was concerned with the preservation of culture.⁴ The 1980s were a period when Aboriginal people became involved in postsecondary education through partnerships. Educational interventions targeting potential Aboriginal students became common, as did the delivery of distance courses.⁵ Efforts to reform First Nation education have continued in different ways in settings such as Northern Quebec (1975), Nova Scotia (1998) and British Columbia (2006). In each of these examples, authority for education has been transferred to First Nations as an essential building block in the

In the case of Nova Scotia, Canada's Parliament passed the *Mi'kmaq Education Act* (1998) that provided a statutory basis for the implementation of the *Final Agreement with respect to Mi'kmaq Education in Nova Scotia*. This was the first tripartite agreement to be concluded. It essentially replaced the education provisions outlined in the *Indian Act* in participating communities and granted First Nations full authority over education.

people.¹¹ To put it bluntly, nationally we have a *university* problem, not a postsecondary education problem.

It must be acknowledged that the university is steeped in the epistemologies and the world-views of the dominant, non-Aboriginal society.¹² Many of the findings and recommendations that have been outlined in reports highlight strategies, initiatives and practices to better prepare Aboriginal students for their university experience.

privilege are you willing to give up to improve the quality of education for Aboriginal learners here at Saint Mary's University?¹⁴

The Saint Mary's University community needs to start with asking some of the right questions and entering into an ongoing dialogue with Aboriginal communities, students and other stakeholders to create the best path forward. Real change necessitates

Today, Canadian universities are more likely to see potential in changing the relationship between Aboriginal peoples and universities. In part, this potential has been framed by an understanding that it is necessary to address the legacy of colonialism, to recognize and affirm the importance of Aboriginal ways of knowing, and to meet the needs of Aboriginal communities. It is routinely pointed out that Aboriginal youth are the

student success. The supports available at the University of Manitoba include a tailored orientation experience, individualized academic advising, an “Introduction to University” course that is a degree credit, and tutorials. These students also have access to academic advisors and counseling support staff.²¹

Saint Mary’s University may be well positioned to implement these best practices and to develop a robust engagement strategy for Aboriginal students that will help them realize their aspirations and ensure academic success. Saint Mary’s University has had a rich tradition of engagement with the Aboriginal community through curricular offerings, research relationships, extension teaching and graduate courses. This tradition dates back to the 1970s, and it must be renewed and strengthened.

The key to any strategy is that it be consultative, inclusive and comprehensive. From the perspective of Saint Mary’s University, there are structures that can be enhanced and developed to support Aboriginal students and new ones that will have to be created if the university is to succeed in enhancing learning opportunities for Aboriginal students. Eber Hampton (1988, p. 19) listed a number of qualities that he considered to be important to support Aboriginal education, including spirituality, service, diversity,

Student Centre.” The AUCC also found that, despite a proliferating number of studies and analyses, there had been no significant change nationally in the number of universities that provided dedicated space for Aboriginal students between 2005 and 2010.²⁵ Space is fundamental to institutional change. The creation of such a centre can provide study space but also a sense of connection for Aboriginal students. When other universities have established such centres, they have quickly become a focal point of student activity. Importantly, spaces can serve a variety of purposes. In some cases, university librarians, writing centre staff, financial aid officers, advisors and others routinely go to the student space to enhance their availability and to further break down any barriers. In this way, the Aboriginal student centre becomes a “one-stop-shop” for the students. If possible, the Aboriginal student advisor should be located in or near the space, to further enhance a sense of community.

While the Task Force is sensitive to space planning processes within Facilities Management in consultation with other processes, there is a dire need to have such a space immediately. It is, furthermore, critical that such a space be located in a highly visible location. The Task Force recommends that the current “Faculty of Arts Graduate Study Commons” (MM206) be repurposed for the use of Aboriginal students immediately. The Task Force further recommends that some budgetary consideration be given to redesigning this space, following consultation with Aboriginal student users, staff, and Aboriginal communities. The Task Force recognizes that displacing graduate students from this existing space may be problematic but there are a number of common areas throughout the university available to them. Nevertheless, every effort should be

made to relocate Arts graduate students to another space on campus and to repurpose the existing space as an Aboriginal Student Centre.



Space is fundamental to institutional change. But the provision of space cannot be the only response. Other important areas include inclusion and governance, the delivery of courses off-campus, the creation of relevant curriculum and programs, access to the full spectrum of university offerings, and financial support and flexibility. However, in the view of the Task Force, the appointment of an Aboriginal student advisor is absolutely critical.

Aboriginal Student Advisor

Aboriginal students at Saint Mary's University have been served for the past number of years by an Aboriginal student advisor who was also a student. Moreover, the position of Aboriginal student advisor was soft-funded and part-time, leading to significant gaps in access throughout the year. Consultations with students, advisors at other universities and others all raised serious questions about this service model. Student informants noted the lack of service, the lack of continuity and the lack of confidentiality embodied in a part-time position filled by another student. Saint Mary's University simply must do better.

The Native Post Secondary Education Counselling Unit is operated on the campus of Dalhousie University by the Confederacy of Mainland Mi'kmaq Education Department. The Unit is open to all Aboriginal students in the Metro area and is an important resource to students who make use of it. Despite the presence of this service, there remains a need for additional student services on the Saint Mary's.

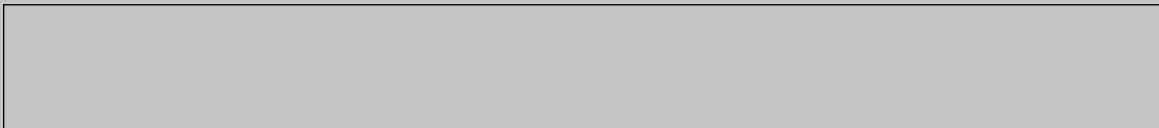
Universities throughout Canada have appointed Aboriginal student advisors as full-time members of staff. Larger institutions have full-time staff meeting the needs of Aboriginal students. In the Maritimes, there are different models. Mount Saint Vincent University and three metro campuses of the Nova Scotia Community College, for example, share a single Aboriginal student advisor on a 40/60 basis. Other universities have contract employees in the role. As documented in this report, Saint Mary's has a good deal of work to do with respect to improving the learning environment for Aboriginal students. A skilled Aboriginal student advisor could play a significant role in the implementation of many of the recommendations contained herein.

While a precise job description will need to be developed, the appointment of a full-time member of staff will enhance the quality of the Aboriginal student experience at

initiatives outlined in this report, in collaboration with the Aboriginal Advisory Council and other relevant committees at the university.

Aboriginal Advisory Council

Many universities across Canada have a committee that provides guidance on campus strategy with respect to Aboriginal people. The composition and role of these bodies vary widely. In October 2013, Carleton University established its Aboriginal Education Council. The Council reports directly to the President and, through the President, to the Board of Governors and Senate. The Council was charged with implementing Carleton University's Aboriginal Co-Ordinated Strategy.



The Aboriginal Advisory Council would provide advice to the highest level of the university (President's Office, Board of Governors and Senate) and serve as a resource to the entire university community. Saint Mary's University does not have a corpus of Aboriginal staff and faculty from which to draw upon. It is therefore recommended that the Aboriginal Advisory Council be comprised of a combination of internal and external appointments. There are precedents that could usefully be followed in creating such a committee. There are joint committees that include representation from the Board of Governors and the Senate, such as the Honorary Degree Committee. The Finance Committee of the Board of Governors has representation from outside of the university.

The Governance Committee of the Board of Governors could develop “Terms of Reference” for the Aboriginal Advisory Council and appointments made by the President.

Saint Mary’s University has a good deal of work to do in terms of enhancing the learning opportunities for Aboriginal students and only some of these can be achieved in the short-term. It is essential that the university develop a vehicle for listening to, and understanding, the perspectives of Aboriginal people in all their diversity and to respect the full range of their aspirations. The Aboriginal Advisory Council at Saint Mary’s would play a critical role in developing a strategy that would lead to the implementation of the recommendations contained in this report and develop new strategic priorities for the future.

Elders

As part of the transformation of Saint Mary’s, the Task Force recommends that a titular “University Elder” be appointed, in consultation with Aboriginal communities in 2014-15. Elders have a deep knowledge of tradition, culture and spirituality that can provide students with unique and culturally appropriate support. The presence of university elders would provide an alternative to the Aboriginal Student Advisor or to existing counselling services. Most importantly, the appointment of a university elder will be a tangible sign of Saint Mary’s University’s respect for, and understanding of, the important role that elders in the well-being of Aboriginal people. The “University Elder” could also play a role in important events throughout the academic year, such as convocation. Upon the advice of the Aboriginal Advisory Council, the roles and functions

Community-based programs

Community-based programs have been developed in different settings. First

build awareness of the range of programs available and, more importantly, build a relationship with students, their families and their communities. These encounters need to be regular, on-going, and sustainable and they are a critical component of any successful community engagement strategy.

PATHWAY MOBILITY

Admission Experience

Universities elsewhere have created a variety of admission policies to encourage and facilitate the enrolment of Aboriginal students. Queen's University, for example, offers students an "additional and alternative pathway for admission." Students who opt for this admission pathway are directed toward the usual academic and personal support services available to all students, as well as to additional resources such as the Four Directions Aboriginal Student Centre. In addition to meeting the general admission conditions of the university and of programs, students admitted under this pathway must "provide evidence of Aboriginal ancestry", a personal statement of experience, and other materials.²⁹

Creating such admission procedures, regardless of their particularities (and it is too early to consider these in details), is an important sign to Aboriginal communities and learners. It also provides an opportunity for greater continuity, insofar as Aboriginal Community Liaisons or Admission Coordinators can be identified and serve as a point-of-contact for potential students. An essential first step in this must be to develop a mechanism for voluntary self-disclosure with respect to Aboriginal identity. Universities in other jurisdictions routinely collect and share such information to facilitate communication, resource planning and appropriate budgeting. Information collection would have to conform to Nova Scotia's *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy* legislation and best practices within the university. The Task Force recommends a two-step process for paper and on-line applications that would (a) ask students to self-identify as Aboriginal and (b) seek their permission to share their name and contact

information with other units including Student Services, Financial Services, the anticipated Aboriginal Student Advisor, and other relevant units.

A study of best practices for postsecondary institutions in British Columbia noted that effective student intake practices must move beyond traditional recruitment techniques. Recommended strategies include direct community visits, word of mouth and targeting specific groups of learners through regular and ongoing contact with knowledgeable people in the band to target specific audiences.³⁰ Conversations with Aboriginal student advisors throughout Nova Scotia and at institutions elsewhere confirmed the importance of establishing ongoing relationships. This requires both the identification of staff and faculty contacts within the university, to provide cthettre

or life experiences beyond the classroom and who have been outside of school for some time.

Transition

Evidence suggests that thirty percent of Aboriginal students leave postsecondary education after their first or second year of study, compared to thirteen percent of non-

was replaced in 1989 with the Post-Secondary Student Support Program. In 2004-05, about 23,000 learners were assisted through federal funding, a tenfold increase since the late 1970s. But the imposition of a funding cap (2% of annual growth) has meant that funding has not kept up with demand.³³ In 2004, the Auditor General of Canada noted that at least 9500 eligible individuals were not able to pursue postsecondary education because of a shortfall in federal funding.³⁴ In the decade since that report, things have become worse.

In evidence given before the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, Darren Googoo, then Director of Education for Membertou First Nation, described how funding had increased from \$11,726 to only \$12,200 a decade later. Membertou was able to fund each student who wanted to go to postsecondary education. In nearby Eskasoni, approximately eighty students were being funded but there were another forty to seventy students each year who applied for support.³⁵

One of the ironies of the demography of reserve communities is that there will be increasing demand on band resources. In their recent assessment, the Six Nations of the Grand River, one of Canada's largest First Nation communities, found that rising postsecondary education costs "has meant fewer students" have been able to attend and are left "unable to realize their educational goals." First Nations individuals, therefore, are required to self-fund a portion of their education or the full cost, a significant barrier when upwards of 38% of First Nation families live below the poverty line.³⁶

Two different scholarships were organized in direct response to the murder of

university. There is little doubt in the view of the Task Force that such changes are both significant and meaningful. There must also be a strategy for indigenizing the faculty and the curriculum. Incorporating Aboriginal knowledge-holders into the university, as well as research methods, worldviews and philosophies, can be both “transformative and transforming”⁴⁰ for the entire university community. Universities have, in the assessment of Anishinaabe researcher Kathleen Absolon, “fences and gatekeepers” that effectively enforce a “conformity of approach” that reproduces the value systems of the privileged, while closing off paths that could foster “new learning and create new knowledge.”⁴¹ Saint Mary’s University must embrace a strategy for indigenization.

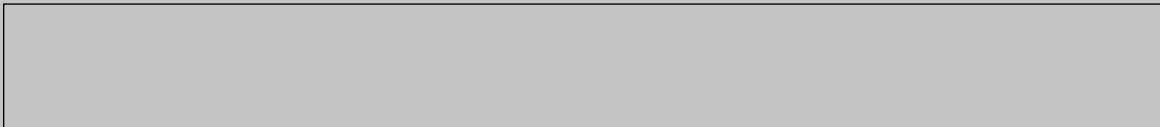
The Task Force recognizes that these are not objectives that will be easily achieved. Any effort to increase the number of full-time faculty who identify as Aboriginal will necessarily be a slow and long-term process. The Task Force agrees that continuing to work on the equity portfolio to increase the number of Aboriginal faculty (as well as women, persons with disabilities and visible and linguistic minorities) is an important goal. However, the Task Force recommends a more immediate strategy for indigenization.

There are well-established mechanisms at the university that can be used to pursue the goal of indigenizing the faculty, while conforming to the Collective Agreement. The Task Force recommends several actions that, taken together, will yield immediate results.

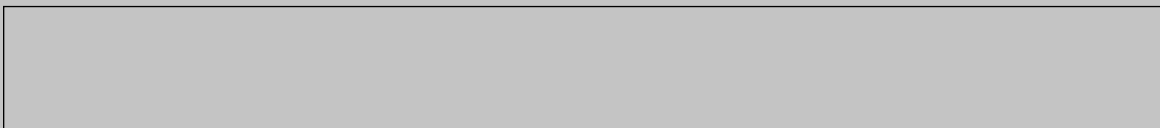
Indigenizing Faculty

The Task Force recommends the creation of externally-funded chairs that would be in addition to existing faculty complements. Two possibilities exist and the Task Force recommends that both be pursued.

A “University Chair in Indigenous Studies” could move among the three undergraduate faculties, departments and programs. Appointments could be made for one year and could be nationally advertised. A “University Chair” in contrast to one situated in a specific department or program offers a degree of flexibility and the ability to be responsive to the changing needs of the Aboriginal community. A campaign to endow the chair and a search for a major donor would have to be pursued but this nevertheless should be a goal of Saint Mary’s.



The Task Force further recommends that one of the existing Canada Research Chairs be dedicated to an individual with expertise in an Aboriginal content area. This could either be achieved by keeping the chair in its current “home department” or, through consultation with stakeholders within and outside the university, reallocating the chair to a new department or program.



Aboriginal learners. These include a variety of “native studies” programs at universities across Canada usually situated in the humanities and social sciences, professional programs such as social work or education that have identifiable streams that lead to careers in Aboriginal communities or working among Aboriginal populations, a variety of “access” programs that increase the number of Aboriginal students in specific programs (such as engineering or nursing, to name two examples). First Nations University of Canada has a stated mandate to meet the needs of Aboriginal peoples across Canada. Other institutions have special relationships with Aboriginal communities, such as the Northern Ontario School of Medicine that has, since its founding, cultivated strong linkages to Aboriginal communities in Ontario and Manitoba.

At Saint Mary’s University, several programs and departments, including Atlantic Canada Studies, English, History, Religious Studies, and Sociology and Criminology, regularly offer courses that can become the basis for an “indigenous studies” stream. Indeed, a working group of faculty has begun to develop new courses that focus on aspects of indigeneity and to think about ways to bring new courses into a relationship with existing courses. While this is an organic development from faculty, the administration nevertheless has a role to play in encouraging a commitment to developing curriculum and course offerings that would be relevant to Aboriginal communities. While adapting developing new courses and identifying existing courses is an important step in establishing a new relationship with the Aboriginal community in the region and beyond, it cannot be the only response. Robust curricular development will depend upon “integrating language and cultural components, having experiential aspects (whether on

the land or in the institution), encouraging elder participation, [and] strengthening community relations ...”⁴³ There is, then, a specific need for the university to support the creation, development, growth and delivery of such courses through dedicating a portion of FCEs to courses with significant Aboriginal content or courses that are a priority for the Aboriginal community.

Continuing Education at Saint Mary’s has a critical role to play in transforming the university in the view of the Task Force. Continuing Education has a track record of working with mature students (over the age of 25), delivering extension courses, offering university-preparation courses, and offering professional and executive courses. All of these are relevant to enhancing Saint Mary’s engagement with the Aboriginal community. Continuing Education has expressed an ongoing interest in supporting the development of credit and non-credit courses that would meet the needs identified by the Aboriginal community itself. Other units of the university, such as the Business Development Center, have cultivated strong relationships that could be linked to course offerings and program

Saint Mary's is to satisfy demand for business courses, professional and executive courses, and the development of lifelong learning opportunities for Aboriginal people.



Many of these trends are also evident in universities in the Maritimes. Saint Mary's University is, frankly, rather late in cultivating curricular linkages with the Aboriginal community, despite the efforts of many dedicated faculty, staff and administrators over the years. Other universities in the region have ably developed many of the recommendations described herein. For example, The University of Prince Edward Island Faculty of Nursing launched a program to "increase the number of "Academic Ready" Aboriginal students into the UPEI Nursing Program and other health related programs." The UPEI Faculty of Nursing allocates two seats each year to Aboriginal students who "have been identified in their high schools as having the potential interest to becoming nurses." Efforts within nursing were part of an overall university strategy that sought to increase the number of Aboriginal students admitted to UPEI and to transform the university into a school that is "supportive of Aboriginal students." The university also opened an Aboriginal student centre in January 2009.⁴⁴ St. Thomas University has a well-established native studies program, while Cape Breton University has established both a Mi'kmaq Studies program and the larger Unamaki College within the institution. Indeed,

Cape Breton University has established itself as a leader in creating partnerships with the Mi'kmaq community, with a suite of tailored program offerings. Following the recommendations of the Marshall Inquiry, Dalhousie University created the Indigenous Black and Micmac program within the Faculty of Law. This is not an exhaustive list but, rather, serves to illustrate the range of programs that have been implemented to meet the educational aspirations of Aboriginal learners.

With such a diversity of programs do opportunities still exist for Saint Mary's University? The short answer is yes and that any special undertakings should be responsive to community needs, mindful of existing programs and linked to the existing strengths of the university. The range of course offerings at universities across the region and beyond have been hard won over a long period of time. What has changed in the 21st century is the level of engagement, in many settings, between universities and the Aboriginal community.⁴⁵ There are certainly opportunities to develop, in collaboration with bands and organizations around the region, ongoing lifelong learning courses through Continuing Education. There may be opportunities within the Sobey School (through linkages with the BDC) and the Faculty of Science to meet the needs of Aboriginal entrepreneurs, administrators, business owners, managers, and others. There may be opportunities in the other faculties as well.

Such a collaborative approach will enhance educational opportunities and outcomes for Aboriginal students. It will also ensure that employment and career opportunities exist for those Aboriginal students who wish to stay and work in their local community. In this region, there have been compelling analyses of the role of universities in helping students

portion of the Director's salary, while the remaining portion is generated through contract research. This puts the Director in a highly stressful situation. The OARN has supported a large number of Aboriginal student interns (twenty in the last four years) through its grant funding and through accessing other funding streams such as the Student Employment and Experience Program (SEEP) funding and funding through Canada Youth programs. Similarly, many First Nations researchers have been hired within communities to work on a variety of funded projects over the years. The OARN could be a key setting for the further development of student research experiences, mentoring opportunities and community engagement activities.



STUDENT SUCCESS

The Task Force sees the LEAP learning community model as a useful component of student success. However, LEAP is focused only on first-year university students and there is no provision within the program for on-going peer mentoring or support. Many Aboriginal students are older than non-Aboriginal students. Some may have familial relationships that include living off-campus, providing child-care, or caring for other relatives. There are other issues, including the transition to a larger urban environment, housing instability or uncertainty about funding. A university that is sensitive and

outreach activities, academic innovation and other initiatives. It is equally true that the creation of learning communities or peer mentoring programs beyond the first year will

TOWARDS IMPLEMENTATION

Recent communications from the senior administration have signaled that Saint Mary's University is entering a difficult fiscal environment. The changing demographics of Nova Scotia, declining enrolments, increased competition to recruit students domestically and internationally, dependency on the differential fees paid by international students, increasing contractual obligations, and cuts in provincial contributions all contribute to a difficult fiscal climate. The Task Force recognizes that there are financial implications to many of the recommendations contained herein, especially with respect to the appointment of a full-time Aboriginal student advisor, the creation of an "Aboriginal Advisory Council" and efforts to create new research chairs. The financial implications, however, are not insurmountable barriers. In the case of an endowed University Research Chair and rededicating a Canada Research Chair, external funding would help to off-set the expenditures, though not fully. The appointment of a full-time Aboriginal student

1. The creation of a proper “Aboriginal Student Centre”
2. The search for, and appointment of, a full-time “Aboriginal Student Advisor”
3. The appointment of an “Aboriginal Advisory Council”

Each of these initiatives will have an immediate impact on the university community. The student advisor and the Aboriginal advisory council would also have a critical role to play, in consultation with other university committees, in developing a strategic implementation plan for the remaining recommendations in this report. The

Aboriginal involvement in institutional governance. In 2006, 13 Ontario universities participating in the Ontario Government's Aboriginal Education and Training Strategy (AETS) reported 3400 Aboriginal students. This ranged from 945 at Lakehead University to just over 100 students at universities like Brock, McMaster and Nipissing. To 2006, expenditures under AETS were \$87 million. Until 1996, funds were allocated on a competitive basis and thereafter, monies were allocated on a fixed share basis with 53% for colleges, 37% for universities and 10% for Aboriginal institutes.⁵⁰

What is significant in this model is that postsecondary institutions have been able to access funding from the government to support Aboriginal students, programs and programming. Nipissing University, a primarily undergraduate institution with about 6500 students in 2012, received \$485,000 in provincial government funding to support its commitment to Aboriginal students.⁵¹ In Nova Scotia, the Office of Aboriginal Affairs "is supporting several actions that help more Mi'kmaq youth reach their potential, find meaningful employment and contribute to the business activity of the province."⁵² This has meant working with other government departments to ensure that Mi'kmaq youth are well-positioned for jobs. To that end, a coordinated "Aboriginal skills and employment team" has been created by the Office of Aboriginal Affairs, Labour and Advanced Education and Economic and Rural Development and Tourism.

opportunities for Mi'kmaq students interested in working with Nova Scotia Corrections Services. There is interest in developing collaborative initiatives that help to facilitate employment of Mi'kmaq youth.⁵³

In some provinces, such as Saskatchewan, partnerships have been created among postsecondary institutions, the provincial government, and partner Aboriginal organizations to develop programs that are responsive to community needs and that facilitate student achievement. Some universities have ably cultivated relationships with the corporate sector to support specific initiatives. Although corporate involvement may seem attractive for a number of reasons, it also must be done with a view toward community values both within the university and within the Aboriginal community.

CONCLUSION

The Task Force was asked to provide guidance on how the Saint Mary's University community can enhance learning opportunities and the education experience for Aboriginal students. Saint Mary's has a substantial legacy of working with Aboriginal communities. This track record provides a solid foundation on which to build the initiatives described herein. We also conclude, however, that there is a profound need for structural and institutional change. Such change will enhance the learning opportunities for Aboriginal students and will enrich the entire Saint Mary's community.

Enhancing the learning opportunities and education experience of Aboriginal students will require space, staff, resources and a sustained commitment to cultural change. The seventeen recommendations contained in this report describe both concrete

steps that can be taken immediately and longer-term goals that will promote positive cultural change, in collaboration with Aboriginal communities. The report is pragmatic and can lead to immediate action.

The Task Force recognizes that the implementation of the recommendations contained herein will take time but there is a need for immediate and effective action. Saint Mary's is woefully behind other postsecondary institutions in the region and nationally when it comes to meeting the needs of Aboriginal students. The time for action is now to honour the memory of Loretta Saunders and the university's place with Mi'kma'ki.

⁸ Events in early 2014 culminated in the resignation of Assembly of First Nations' Chief Shawn Atleo over differing views on Aboriginal education. Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples. *Reforming First Nations Education*, p. 30.

<http://www.parl.gc.ca/content/sen/committee/411/appa/rep/rep03dec11-e.pdf>

⁹ <http://www.aucc.ca/policy-issues/Aboriginal-education/> Accessed 25 March 2014.

¹⁰ Statistics Canada, National Household Survey Analytical Report "Aboriginal Peoples in Canada: First Nations People, Métis and Inuit." <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/as-sa/99-011-x/99-011-x2011001-eng.cfm>

¹¹ Canada. Parliament. House of Commons. Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. *No Higher Priority: Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education in Canada*. 39th Parliament, 1st Session. February 2007.

<http://www.turtleisland.org/education/abed07.pdf>

Cote-Meek, *Colonized Classrooms*

¹⁶ Howard Adams, *The Politics of Colonization* (Penticton: Theytus Books, 1999); Michael Hart, “Colonization, Social Exclusion and Indigenous Health,” in Lynne Fernandez, Shauna MacKinnon and Jim Silver, eds., *The Social Determinants of Health in Manitoba* (Winnipeg: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives Manitoba Branch, 2010); and Jim Silver, “Aboriginal Adult Education: Combating Poverty and Colonization,” in Jim Silver, ed., *Moving Forward, Giving Back: Transformative Aboriginal Adult Education* (Halifax and Winnipeg: Fernwood, 2013), p. 1-16.

¹⁷ Jim Silver, Claudette Michell and Judith Harris, “To Walk in Both Worlds: Ma Mawi Goes to University,” in Jim Silver, ed., *Moving Forward, Giving Back: Transformative Aboriginal Adult Education* (Halifax and Winnipeg: Fernwood, 2013), p. 81 and Larry Morrisette, “We Are the Agents of Change,” in Jim Silver, ed., *Moving Forward, Giving Back: Transformative Aboriginal Adult Education* (Halifax and Winnipeg: Fernwood, 2013), p. 39.

¹⁸ Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. *No Higher Priority* <http://www.turtleisland.org/education/abed07.pdf>

¹⁹ <http://www.aucc.ca/policy-issues/Aboriginal-education/> Accessed 25 March 2014.

²⁰ Storytellers’ Foundation & Gitxsan Wet’suwet’en Education Society. *Funding and Best Practices Research: BC First Nations Post-Secondary Institutes Indian Studies Support Program Research Project*. December 2005, p. 18.

²⁹ Queen's University Alternative Admission Policy

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⁴⁸ Shauna MacKinnon, "Healing the Spirit First," in Jim Silver, ed., *Moving Forward, Giving Back: Transformative Aboriginal Adult Education* (Halifax and Winnipeg: Fernwood, 2013), pp. 49-60.

⁴⁹ Jochen (2005) cited in Storytellers' Foundation & Gitksan Wet'suwet'en Education Society. *Funding and Best Practices Research*.

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