The Atlantic Aboriginal Economic Development Integrated Research Program, AAEDIRP

**The Atlantic Aboriginal Post-Secondary Labour Force**

December 2010

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*With Research Assistance by Pat Sark and Reg Parsons*
**The Atlantic Aboriginal Post-Secondary Labour Force** is one of nine research reports on Aboriginal economic development released by Atlantic Aboriginal Economic Development Integrated Program, (AAEDIRP) in 2010 – 2011.

The AAEDIRP is a unique research program formed through partnerships between the 38 member communities of the Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nations Chiefs (APCFNC), plus the Inuit, 12 Atlantic universities and 4 government funders, both federal and provincial. AAEDIRP funders include Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC), the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA), the Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) and the Office of Aboriginal Affairs, Nova Scotia. The AAEDIRP conducts research on Aboriginal economic development that is relevant to communities, builds Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal research capacity, conducts workshops on Aboriginal economic development and is developing a database on this topic. **The main purpose of the AAEDIRP is to improve the knowledge base concerning Atlantic Aboriginal economic development in order to improve the lives of the Aboriginal people in the region.**

The APCFNC is a policy research organization that analyzes and develops culturally relevant alternatives to federal policies that impact on the Mi’kmaq, Maliseet, Passamaquoddy and Innu Aboriginal communities and peoples.

**Maliseet Artist Arlene Christmas (Dozay) created the AAEDIRP logo**

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Bear River First Nation       Elsipogtog First Nation
Eskasoni First Nation        Lennox Island First Nation
Miawpukek First Nation       Millbrook First Nation
Membertou First Nation       Metepenagiag First Nation
Pictou Landing First Nation  St. Croix - Scoudic First Nation
St. Mary's First Nation
Beneficiaries of the Labrador Inuit Land Claims Agreement
Executive Summary

Introduction

This report affirms that post-secondary education (PSE) holds many benefits for Aboriginal people and their communities in Atlantic Canada and across the country. Education has been shown to improve health and well-being, increase income, and lead to higher rates of employment. It also has the potential to renew culture, traditions, and self-determination.

This study examined the education and employment experiences of a cross-section of Aboriginal people in Atlantic Canada who completed post-secondary studies, as well as those who did not complete their studies, to identify possible barriers and challenges they experienced during their post-secondary studies and while searching for employment.

The four primary objectives of this project were:

- To understand the education and employment experiences of Aboriginal people who had completed post-secondary education (PSE) in the past five years, and to identify any barriers or challenges they experienced in moving into careers of their choice and interest related to their field(s) of study.
- To understand the reasons why some Aboriginal students were unable to complete PSE in the past five years.
- To understand the direct and indirect linkages between PSE completion and the impact on economic and social development outcomes in Aboriginal communities.
- To provide recommendations for action which may lead to more positive Aboriginal PSE completion rates.

The study begins with an examination of the national and Atlantic region Aboriginal PSE and labour force policy literature and sets the policy and socio-economic background context for the study. The report presents a discussion of the labour market outcomes of the Aboriginal people who participated in the research. It then discusses the main barriers and challenges which Aboriginal students face in completing their post-secondary education that are found in the policy literature. A summary of the research methodology and findings from the interviews is then presented. Research findings related to employment search experiences and the linkages between completing post-secondary education and community economic development are also presented. The final section of the report offers the most significant findings from the research, provides recommendations for various stakeholders, and identifies potential research directions to explore in the future.

Challenges and Barriers for PSE and Employment Identified in the Policy Literature

Findings in the current literature stress that the impact of residential schools and colonization has created many social and cultural challenges for Aboriginal children and youth being schooled in Canada. Poverty, discrimination and loss of autonomy have contributed to a greater incidence of substance abuse, alcoholism, and incarceration amongst Aboriginal peoples than the Canadian population as a whole. Aboriginal communities have been seriously impacted by conflicting worldviews and value systems and dependence on the Canadian federal government for economic assistance.
Financial challenges are the number one barrier to Aboriginal people accessing and completing post-secondary education. There has been a funding freeze for post-secondary education since 1996. Aboriginal people who are eligible for funding do not receive it because there are not enough funds for everyone. Other barriers and challenges include a lack of published data on Atlantic region trends; a lack of formal evaluations of Aboriginal educational programs and limited discussion regarding the positive impacts of higher education for Aboriginal people. There are other barriers related to accessibility and a relative lack of Aboriginal content and ‘education processes’ in university course curricula.

Despite all these challenges, Aboriginal enrolment in and completion of post-secondary education is increasing due to the strength and cultural determination of Aboriginal people. What is needed, now, according to the Assembly of First Nations and many others, is the recognition of Aboriginal jurisdiction over education, at all levels, accompanied by sustained funding to allow an education with an emphasis on Aboriginal languages and cultural values.

*The Picture in Atlantic Canada - Post-Secondary and High School Completion Rates*

Aboriginal post-secondary enrolment and completion rates have been steadily rising. More Aboriginal women attend university while more Aboriginal men attend trades and community colleges. While the overall completion rate of Aboriginal peoples in post-secondary programming as a whole tells a story of increasing success, the completion rate for Aboriginal peoples attending university has been much lower. One of the challenges in Aboriginal post-secondary education is the under representation of Aboriginal students enrolled in science and engineering fields.

There are few analyses of the perceptions of Aboriginal students as to how their high school education contributes to their post-secondary success. There is some literature that reports that for students attending Band operated schools in the Atlantic region, barriers related to a lack of educational resources/structure and Band politics/decisions and support were much greater. Students attending provincial schools noted considerably fewer barriers related to these areas, but were much more likely to have mentioned that systemic discrimination and lack of cultural programming were barriers to their success. While 11% of non-Aboriginal students drop out of high school, 22% of Aboriginal students do so.

In Atlantic Canada, Aboriginal high school completion rates are better than elsewhere in the country. In the 10-year period from 1991-2001, there was an increase of almost 10% in the Mi’kmaw Kina’matnewey First Nations communities (where there is a strong Aboriginal appropriate curriculum and language immersion programming) of students who had completed post-secondary education, compared with a less than 8% increase of all First Nations peoples living on-reserve. This is slightly higher than for the Canadian population as a whole, which showed an increase of 9.2%. The Mi’kmaw Kina’matnewey communities include: Acadia First Nation, Annapolis Valley First Nation, Bear River First Nation, Eskasoni First Nation, Glooscap First Nation, Indian Brook First Nation, Membertou First Nation, Millbrook First Nation, Paqtnkek First Nation, Pictou Landing First Nation, Potlotek First Nation, Wagmatcook First Nation and We’koqma’q First Nation.
Rationale for Aboriginal Labour Force Improvement Identified in the Policy Literature

There has been some research that establishes a positive association between achieving higher levels of education and higher levels of incomes and/or employment rates. In terms of improving the numbers of Aboriginal people in the labour force, Canadian economic prosperity and well-being is related to supporting better Aboriginal post-secondary and labour force results. The Aboriginal population, which is growing much faster than the general Canadian population, will be a significant force in filling gaps in the aging Canadian workforce.

A significant indicator of Aboriginal post-secondary success would appear to be successful completion of secondary school. If this is so, then a key focus of improving post-secondary success should be related to providing the most appropriate learning environment in primary and secondary schools to enable more Aboriginal students to graduate from high school. Currently, fewer Aboriginal students complete high school compared to non-Aboriginal students.

In Nova Scotia there has been some positive evidence of the linkages between completing post-secondary education and positive labour market outcomes among First Nations. As mentioned, Mi’kmaw Kina’matnewey First Nations communities had an increase of almost 10% of those who completed post-secondary education in the 1991-2001 period. There was an increase from 36% to 51% in the labour force participation rates among those who reside in Mi’kmaw Kina’matnewey First Nations communities in the same period. This is in contrast to a 5% labour force participation rate increase for all on-reserve Registered Indians and a drop of 1.5% among all Canadians, in the same time period. Clearly, in this Nova Scotia example, improved post-secondary education outcomes seem to be positively related to a corresponding increase in labour market participation.

Across Canada, in comparison to non-Aboriginal workers, Aboriginal people are not as well represented in high-skill jobs in the private sector, in particular, in positions such as managers, occupations in business and finance, engineering, and occupations in computers and medicine. They are also under represented, comparatively speaking, in technical occupations such as engineering, and computer and health technicians. They are better represented than non-Aboriginal workers as public sector managers, skilled workers in government, cultural positions such as paralegals and library technicians, as semi-skilled workers in trades, and as low-skilled sales people and labourers. Roughly 35% of Aboriginals who are working are employed in the public sector, including public administration, education, health, or social services.

Because the growing Aboriginal youth population, in the coming years significantly higher numbers of Aboriginal people will be of working age and seeking jobs. Unless there are more on-reserve and/or off-reserve jobs to meet this increased demand, the demand for work will outstrip the capacity of Aboriginal organizations to provide employment. A variety of post-secondary institutions across the country have recognized the need to enable Aboriginal people to succeed at post-secondary education, and have begun to develop appropriate programs and strategies to meet their needs. These programs include Aboriginal access programs, community-based programs, distance education, Aboriginal controlled institutions, and Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal partnerships and the development of Aboriginal curricula.
Education from an Aboriginal Perspective

There is a relative lack of Aboriginal content and ‘education processes’ in Canadian university course curricula. Historically there has been little attempt to incorporate the Aboriginal perspective or worldview in a systematic way across university courses. This has slowly been changing, with specific courses, especially those as part of Native Studies programs, and ad hoc courses in some disciplines, incorporating Aboriginal values, content, and speakers.

There are a variety of universities and colleges across Canada and in the Atlantic region which are designed with input from Aboriginal people. The most notable in the Atlantic include the Mi’kmaq-Maliseet Institute at the University of New Brunswick (UNB), the Atlantic Provinces Community Colleges, St. Thomas University, the Unama’ki College of Cape Breton University (CBU), (formerly the Mi’kmaq College Institute), St. Francis Xavier University (St. FX), the Transition Year Program (TYP) at Dalhousie University and the Mi’kmaq/Maliseet Bachelor of Social Work Program with St. Thomas and Dalhousie University. There are also several promising practices by post-secondary institutions in the Atlantic region that are serving to reduce the impact of long travel distances between post-secondary institutions and Aboriginal communities.

Policy literature contends that there will be more success for students if the curriculum is culturally appropriate, applied in context, taught by those attuned to Aboriginal cultures and reflective of traditional values. Schools need to create a curriculum that reflects Aboriginal values in which subjects should be derived from these values and taught in accordance with them. A study conducted of Mi’kmaw Kina’matnewey points out the importance of having Mi’kmaq people teaching in the classroom, using their own language and culture as the basis for curriculum content, and having Elders coming to the schools to interact with students on a regular basis. In Nova Scotia there was an 18% reduction (from 60% to 42%) of those without high school completion certificates in the nine Mi’kmaw Kina’matnewey communities, between 1991 and 2001. Furthermore, since cultural identity influences positive conceptions about one’s self and affects learning, formal antiracist sensitivity programs for both students and teachers are often cited as ways to develop student’s cultural awareness.

A policy study conducted for Mi’kmaw Kina’matnewey, related to the Aboriginal post-secondary labour force, recommended the establishment of an interagency committee within individual Aboriginal communities to allow for better planning and coordination across departments who fund Aboriginal post-secondary education learners. Committee members could include representatives from federal government departments such as education and health, Human Resource and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC), Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC), as well as Band Councils, Native Employment Officers, Aboriginal Education Directors, Aboriginal education training experts, provincial training and apprenticeships, and provincial student loan departments. The main goal would be to achieve greater communication among all those involved with post-secondary education and Aboriginal communities to ensure adequate funding is being provided to Aboriginal students. Furthermore, the implementation of a data tracking system that Aboriginal education authorities deem appropriate would help to determine the success rates of the graduates.
Empirical Findings in the Study

Careful research ethics procedures were designed and ethics approval was granted by Mount Allison University’s Research Ethics Board, the Mi’kmaw Ethics Watch, and the Nunatsiavut Government. The researchers engaged in interviews with people who completed and those who started but did not complete post-secondary education in the 2003-2008 period; and completed interviews with key informants who were familiar with post-secondary and labour force participation. The interview participants were self-selected. Two-thirds of those interviewed were Mi’kmaq, while another quarter were Maliseet and the remainder were Inuit.

The interview questionnaires were designed to collect both qualitative and quantitative information. Attempts were made to interview as many people as possible from the eleven First Nations communities who agreed to participate as well the Nunatsiavut region. 96 people volunteered to be interviewed for the project. The experiences of people in some communities are not reflected in the results and the small numbers of participants mean that the results are not from the entire population of Atlantic First Nations and Inuit people. Interviews also took place with key informants who are familiar with post-secondary and labour force participation. The barriers described by interviewees affirm the findings across Canada.

The interview results tell about the strength and determination of Aboriginal women in particular. When women pursue post-secondary education, they complete it and go on to find meaningful employment, despite circumstances such as being a single parent. Family support is mentioned as the greatest contributor to success for all Aboriginal peoples interviewed. The research also highlights that both student and institutional informants perceive that high school experiences are not adequately preparing Aboriginal students for post-secondary education. Lack of support for students once they reach the post-secondary level was also considered a common barrier to completing post-secondary studies.

Seventy-five of the 96 interviewees (81%) reported that they “Completed PSE”. Eighteen of 96, or 19%, “Did Not Complete PSE”. (Three of the 96 interviewees provided insufficient information to categorize their completion status.) A total of 18 of 69 interviewees who completed at least one post-secondary education program also provided details of their job search experience. Almost all of them found a job after completing post-secondary education. 83% found employment in their general field of study in their home community. There were also very positive labour market outcomes for Aboriginal PSE graduates who grew up on Reserve. Almost half of the Aboriginal people interviewed grew up on Reserve and 80% of this sub-group found work in their home communities in a job directly related to their general field of study.

Findings for the 18 Aboriginal people who indicated that they did not complete a post-secondary education program were as follows: first, relatively fewer (80% compared with 94%) found employment. Secondly, relatively more (96% compared with 86%) of those who found a job did so in their home communities. Thirdly, relatively fewer (55% compared with 84%) found employment in their general field of study.
Women rated personal and family-related issues such as struggling to find the balance between family and school, and taking a break, as more of a barrier to completion than did men. Men rated social and employment related issues such as lack of support (from friends, from community) and taking a job, as more of a barrier to completion than did women.

The barriers described by interviewees are related to the broad areas identified in the Aboriginal PSE policy literature related to personal and family barriers. These findings suggest that although there are a range of individual, institutional, and community factors that individuals perceived as contributing to success for these interviewees, family support was seen as the greatest contributor to their success.

This data suggests that four big factors in interviewees’ successes were: wanting to find a good job; support from parents and family; financial help from their Band and the supportive role of post-secondary education teachers and faculty. According to responses from key informant experts as well as these PSE student interviewees, four barriers have a particular impact: lack of preparation at the high school level; lack of career planning; lack of support while at post-secondary school; and funding issues.

The research highlighted that both student and institutional informants perceived that high school experiences were not adequately preparing Aboriginal students for post-secondary education. Students need to have opportunities for support to transition to their new PSE environment when dealing with personal and school related issues such as transportation, language barriers, culture shock, financial stress, schedules, social life/school balance, distance, accommodations, and day care. Students and PSE support personnel interviewed agreed that a lack of career planning has been a barrier to completing post-secondary education. Better support at the post-secondary level for Aboriginal students in Atlantic Canada may also help more students complete their studies, which may then lead to improved employment outcomes. The lack of support for students once they reach the post-secondary level was considered a common barrier to completing post-secondary studies. Lack of adequate funding is a crucial barrier which prevents many Aboriginal students from succeeding at post-secondary education. Success in the labour market is linked to completing a post-secondary program.

Policy Recommendations Arising from this Study

A series of recommendations are offered for each of the four strategies that have been identified. I- Ensure that there is adequate and appropriate preparation of young Aboriginal people in the school system so that they may be ready to attend post-secondary institutions by

1. Working together on shared approaches to Aboriginal-controlled education that use shared second level services such as such as:
   - Aboriginal content and language in curriculum
   - employment of Aboriginal teachers
   - use of Aboriginal language in the classroom through immersion and core language instruction
   - the presence and role of Elders in the classroom
to support educational learning, as does Mi’kmaw Kina’matnewey.
2. Ensuring elementary and secondary schools develop and implement more effective and meaningful career planning programs and activities;
3. Encouraging provincial Departments of Education to:
   - adopt core language instruction and curriculum in consultation with Education Directors of representative Aboriginal communities
   - provide sufficient and appropriate resource support
   - offer cross-cultural training and awareness programs for students and teachers in the public school system

II- Increase the number of Aboriginal people who attend post-secondary institutions by
4. The federal government increasing the total amount of money in the funding envelope for Aboriginal people wishing to attend post-secondary education and work with the Atlantic region Aboriginal education authorities and organizations to determine the number of students who currently wish to attend post-secondary education institutions but who cannot due to a lack of funds;
5. Ensuring the funding program is sufficient to cover the full costs of tuition to attend any recognized post-secondary education institution and expanding the range of eligible expenses that will be covered;
6. Universities expanding their presence in Aboriginal communities by implementing summer programs, distance education and research and development of outreach initiatives and, recruitment of Aboriginal youth.

III- Improve the completion rate of post-secondary education for Aboriginal people by
7. Developing more Aboriginal content in various existing courses and more programs that are specifically responsive to and inclusive of Indigenous Knowledge systems;
8. Developing policies and practices to attract more Aboriginal students to their campuses and creating welcoming and supportive environment and proactive admissions policies to ensure access, and new core resources for Aboriginal students such as tutoring, writing classes, staffed by Aboriginal people; and development of effective retention strategies to give support to supportive elements, like peer mentoring, Elder in residence programs, and continuous career counselling and motivational support groups.
9. Developing and implementing anti-racist policies that have specific strategies that support respectfulness of the culture and knowledge systems of Aboriginal people, and increasing the number of Aboriginal faculty and staff;
10. Developing a single, appropriate data tracking tool that will be used by all institutions, government departments, and communities.

IV- Strengthen the linkages between post-secondary education, labour market opportunities, and the economic development needs and plans of Aboriginal communities by
11. Developing an Atlantic Aboriginal Employment Agency to be responsible for matching inquiries from employers seeking Aboriginal graduates with known available Aboriginal people who match the qualifications and credentials required
12. Carrying out medium (5-year) to long term (10-year) economic development planning exercises which identify new business development opportunities and related employment / labour force development needs, and sharing this with youth so they may begin to plan appropriate career path options.
13. Undertaking a review of current labour market information targeted to Aboriginal youth and sharing it with them. Recommendations should be made to HRSDC so they will respond more effectively to the information needs of Aboriginal youth.

14. Encourage a) the Chief and Council from each Aboriginal community to direct their Economic Development Officers to identify one or more private sector companies with which to develop a relationship for the purpose of creating internships, mentorships, and job placements for their youth, b) Aboriginal communities and their private sector partners identify a post-secondary education institution with which they can work collaboratively to identify and train Aboriginal youth to fill the job opportunities and vacancies they have together identified.
### List of Abbreviations

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<td>AAEDIRP</td>
<td>Atlantic Aboriginal Economic Development Integrated Research Program</td>
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<td>AAU</td>
<td>Atlantic Association of Universities</td>
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<td>AFN</td>
<td>Assembly of First Nations</td>
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<td>AHRDS</td>
<td>Aboriginal Human Resources Development Strategy</td>
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<td>APCFNC</td>
<td>Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nations Chiefs</td>
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<td>Indian and Northern Affairs Canada</td>
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<td>National Aboriginal Health Organization</td>
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1. Introduction

Post-secondary education holds many benefits for Aboriginal people and their communities in Atlantic Canada and across the country. It has been shown to improve health and well-being, increase income, and lead to higher rates of employment. It also has the potential to renew culture, traditions, and self-determination.

The Atlantic Aboriginal Economic Development Integrated Research Program (AAEDIRP) of the Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nations Chiefs (APCFNC) commissioned the Rural and Small Town Programme to study the Aboriginal post-secondary educated labour force in Atlantic Canada. This study examined the education and employment experiences of a cross-section of Aboriginal people in Atlantic Canada who completed post-secondary studies, as well as those who did not complete their studies, to identify possible barriers and challenges they experienced during their post-secondary studies and while searching for employment.

More specifically, the four primary objectives of this project were:

- To understand the education and employment experiences of Aboriginal people who had completed PSE in the past five years, and to identify any barriers or challenges they experienced in moving into careers of choice and interest related to their field(s) of study.
- To understand the reasons why some Aboriginal students were unable to complete PSE in the past five years.
- To understand the direct and indirect linkages between PSE completion and the impact on economic and social development outcomes in Aboriginal communities.
- To provide recommendations for action which may lead to more positive Aboriginal PSE completion rates.

These four primary objectives are linked to the following six longer term goals for improvement in:

1. Decision-making by young Aboriginal people interested in pursuing post-secondary education.
2. Supports and information provided by educational institutions and communities to young Aboriginal students interested in pursuing post-secondary education (including possible changes to policies and programs).
3. Rates of post-secondary education completion among young Aboriginal students attending post-secondary education institutions.
4. Appropriate career attainment by Aboriginal people in their fields of study.
5. Income and employment for Aboriginal communities and individuals.
6. Economic and social development in Aboriginal communities.

The study begins with an examination of the Aboriginal PSE and labour force policy literature and sets the policy and socio-economic background context for the study. The report presents a discussion of the labour market outcomes of those who completed post-secondary education and those who started but did not complete in the 2003-2008 period. It then discusses the important
barriers and challenges which Aboriginal students face in completing their post-secondary education that are found in the national and Atlantic regional policy literature. A summary of the research methodology and the methods and research sample is then presented. Research findings related to employment search experiences and the linkages between completing post-secondary education and community economic development are presented. The final section of the report offers the major conclusions from the research, provides recommendations for various stakeholders, and identifies further research issues.

1.1. Terminology

For the purposes of this report we use the Statistics Canada definition of Aboriginal people, which includes First Nations (or North American Indians), Inuit, and Métis.

Post-secondary education includes formal academic, vocational, and career technical education, as well as adult basic education, upgrading, life skills, and pre-college courses taken to meet post-secondary requirements. This is the definition used in the 1973 Indian Control of Indian Education policy statement (AIC, 2005).
2. Literature Review

2.1 Literature Review and Secondary Sources

The purpose of the literature review was to provide a context for interpreting the results of the study’s primary data, which is interviews with Aboriginal people from Atlantic Canada communities who finished or did not finish post-secondary education in the 2003-2008 period, and from key informants. A variety of sources were consulted and reviewed including:

- Post-secondary program reviews and evaluations;
- Reports and bulletins released by government departments and agencies (such as Statistics Canada and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC);
- Reports from development, research and public policy organizations and institutes (such as the National Aboriginal Health Organization (NAHO), the Caledon Institute of Social Policy, the Canadian Council on Learning, Mi’kmaw Kina’matnewey (MK), the First Nations Education Initiative, Assembly of First Nations (AFN), and other relevant Aboriginal organizations); and
- Peer reviewed journal articles (such as the Canadian Journal of Native Education, The Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology, and the Journal of Canadian Studies).

There is a lack of published quantitative data, statistics, historical information on the subject of Aboriginal post-secondary education in Canada (R.A. Malatest and Associates Ltd., 2004; Richardson and Blanchet-Cohen, 2000). However, there have been a significant number of national policy studies of late that are seeking to understand and improve Aboriginal PSE (Auditor General of Canada, 2004; Battiste, Bell, & Findlay, 2002; Canadian Millennium Scholarship Foundation, 2005; Government of British Columbia, 2006; Holmes, 2006; Mayes, 2007; Mendelson, 2006; McCue, 2006; Orr, 2008a; Malatest and Associates, 2004; Richardson & Blanchet-Cohen, 2000; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). Post-secondary programs for Aboriginal people in Canada are evolving rapidly (Richardson and Blanchet-Cohen, 2000). There is little in the way of formal evaluations of Aboriginal education programs which means information is missing on gaps in post-secondary institution attendance, what has worked well, impacts of different methods, and so on (McCue, 2006).

Some of the literature focuses on the history of Aboriginal PSE with explicit ties between social problems today and the lasting impacts of the residential school system. There is discussion in the literature on the barriers to accessing and completing post-secondary education, and on its positive impacts. Authors also offer strategies, actions, and recommendations to improve education systems that incorporate culture and traditional values back into Aboriginal education.

This literature review begins with a discussion of Indigenous Knowledge and a brief history of the education systems of Aboriginal groups, with a specific focus on the Mi’kmaq, Maliseet, Innu, Inuit, and Métis of the Atlantic region. The review goes on to examine the Aboriginal learning context and the impact of residential schools on the lives of Aboriginal peoples. It then looks at the policy literature related to Aboriginal PSE and the barriers and challenges that
Aboriginal students continue to face in PSE. It continues with a look at the social, community, and labour market impacts of Aboriginal PSE. The review concludes with a comparison of existing strategies as well as a variety of recommendations and policy implications.

2.2 The Importance of Indigenous Knowledge

“Indigenous Peoples of North America have always had education systems as a foundation for the survival and flourishing of their families and communities” (NAHO, 2007, 3). As noted by the Assembly of First Nations in its Education Action Plan (2005), “First Nations education is a lifelong learning process that begins in the cradle and continues through to old age” (1). These two concepts of the importance of Indigenous learning approaches and life-long learning for Indigenous peoples are fundamental to understanding the perspectives that Aboriginal people have on the role and importance of Indigenous approaches to education. Quality education is absolutely important to Aboriginal people; however, mainstream western society has consistently imposed Eurocentric processes and systems which do not respond to the needs and culture of Aboriginal peoples (Aboriginal Institutes’ Consortium, 2005; Battiste, 2004; Nadeau and Young, 2006).

Before first contact with European settlers and the establishment of schools operated by religious missions in the mid-1600s, Aboriginal people, including those in what would become Atlantic Canada, taught their children by having them observe adult role models. The community and the land were their classrooms, and all members of the community were their teachers (Kirkness, 1999). Education was a life-long process and every individual’s learning was a responsibility of the entire community. In general there were four stages in the process: early childhood learning, learning of life skills, learning more advanced skills, and mastery. Aboriginal people have traditionally had a holistic worldview in which spirituality is an integral part of the Aboriginal worldview. Holistic spiritual Indigenous worldviews have consistently been in tension with Western worldviews. Traditional Indigenous worldviews are typically characterized as having deep relationships with the land, as represented by Mother Earth and Indigenous worldviews particularly value experiential learning of Indigenous values and Traditional Knowledge. Elders would pass on their knowledge which dealt with the mental, emotional, and spiritual health of both parents and their children. Children were cherished by all members of the community and not considered a possession of the parents (Richardson and Blanchet-Cohen, 2000; NAHO, 2007).

Newhouse (2007) defines Indigenous Knowledge as “the knowledge that [Aboriginal people] have developed over generations: the theories of the universe and how it works, the nature of human beings and others, the nature of society and political order; the nature of the world and how to live in it; human motivation, among many other aspects of life” (3). Today there is an interest in the values of Traditional Knowledge at the post-secondary level. Traditional or Indigenous Knowledge is now shaping disciplines such as health studies, environmental studies, political science, law, and biology. Curriculum has come to reflect a desire for cultural transmission, identity development, and market skills in order to create self-confident people fully capable of succeeding in today’s world. Newhouse states, “Over the last three decades, Indigenous peoples have stood up and begun to speak for themselves, using the skills and knowledge gained from this curriculum. They speak back to a system that saw and generally
continues to see them only in negative terms, that saw them as marginal and offering little to contemporary life and even less to the broad political, social and cultural debates of the day” (2007, 3).

Battiste, Bell and Findlay (2002) argue that despite decades of work toward educational equity, Aboriginal interests continue to need more attention in higher education. They state, “Aboriginal peoples’ achievements, knowledge, histories, and perspectives remain too often ignored, rejected, suppressed, marginalized, or underutilized in universities across Canada and beyond. Although promising to make post-secondary education accessible to Aboriginal peoples, universities express an Aboriginal agenda in mission statements, priorities, and projects that reaffirm Eurocentric and colonial encounters in the name of excellence integration and modernity” (2002, 82). Holmes (2006) also contends that increased access to post-secondary education has not been accompanied by changes in content to university curricula and disciplinary knowledge.

2.3 Cultural Groups and their Educational Histories

When Europeans arrived in what would become Canada there was a conscious effort to assimilate Aboriginal peoples, which continued well into the twentieth century. For example, policies and legislation banned traditional ceremonies, costumes, and the speaking of Aboriginal languages. Lands and resources were lost and small reserve communities were created (Richardson and Blanchet-Cohen, 2000). This section provides a brief statistical summary of the Aboriginal population in Canada with a specific summary of the Atlantic Aboriginal population. It also provides a brief summary of the educational context and history of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people in Canada.

The more than 600 First Nations communities across Canada have a rich socio-cultural diversity. First Nations represent about 60 different languages across the country. In the 2006 Census, 1,172,790 Canadians self-identified as having First Nations, Métis, or Inuit ancestry. This represents nearly 4% of the total Canadian population. The majority (81%) are Status Indians registered under the Indian Act. First Nations people comprised 60% of those who identified themselves as Aboriginal. This equals 2.2% of the total Canadian population. Sixty percent of First Nations people live off-reserve and most of these people live in urban areas. Most First Nations people (83%) live in Ontario and points farther west. The First Nations population increased 29% between 1996 and 2006 and is growing nearly three times faster than the non-First Nations population. This growth is due to high birth rates and because more people identifying as Aboriginal (Statistics Canada, 2008).

In Atlantic Canada, Aboriginal groups include First Nations (Innu, Mi’kmaq, Maliseet, and Passamaquoddy peoples), Métis, and Inuit. The most recent Census of Canada provides a snapshot of the Aboriginal population (Statistics Canada, 2008). The Mi’kmaq are part of the Algonquian linguistic family and make up many of the First Nations communities in Atlantic Canada. There are 22,295 in the Atlantic Region, of which 16,121 live on-reserve (INAC, 2008). At the time of European contact in the 16th and 17th centuries, Mi’kmaq territory extended from southern Gaspe Peninsula down through New Brunswick’s eastern coast, Prince Edward Island,
Nova Scotia, and southern Newfoundland. The area was and is known as Mi’kma’ki (Nova Scotia Office of Aboriginal Affairs, 2008).

Like the Mi’kmaq, the Maliseet are part of the Algonquin linguistic family. There are 5,269 Maliseet people in the Atlantic Region, of which 3,030 live on-reserves (INAC, 2008). Their traditional territory covers the Saint John River Valley in present day New Brunswick. Living more inland, they have a distinct way of life, culture, and language from the Mi’kmaq (INAC, 2008).

Related to the Maliseet people are the Passamaquoddy who belong to the Abanaki confederacy, and spoke a dialect similar to Maliseet. The Passamaquoddy traditionally occupied the region around Passamaquoddy Bay and the St. Croix River on the boundary between present day Maine and New Brunswick. They had a principal village on the site of current day St. Andrews, New Brunswick (White, 1913).

Inuit live primarily in the Northwest Territories, Nunavut, and northern Québec, but there are five Inuit communities in northern Labrador (National Aboriginal Health Organization, 2003). The communities are Nain, Rigolet, Makkovik, Postville and Hopedale. In total there were 2,634 Inuit living in the Atlantic Region in 2008 (INAC, 2008).

While there are Métis living in Atlantic Canada, nearly 90% live in Ontario or farther west. (Statistics Canada, 2008).

The Innu are also part of the Algonquin linguistic family. There were 1,235 Innu living in the Atlantic Region, mostly on the Labrador Peninsula, in 2008 (INAC, 2008). The Innu Nation is comprised of the Sheshatshui Innu First Nation and the Mushuau Innu Band Council in Natuashish.

Many authors have noted that there has been a history of forced assimilation of First Nations through educational institutions (for example, (R.A. Malatest and Associates Ltd., 2004; Richardson and Blanchet-Cohen, 2000). Shortly after 1911 the Indian Act was changed to make education mandatory for 7 to 15 year old Aboriginal children. Residential schools were operated all over Canada beginning in the 1880s. They peaked at 80 schools in 1931 and the last one closed in 1986. Residential schools took First Nations children away from their families and prevented them from using their Aboriginal languages and cultural practices. More than 90,000 Aboriginal people attended residential schools in Canada (Greenwood et al., 2007). Residential schools created a general sense of distrust amongst the majority of Aboriginal peoples towards educational institutions. Although residential schools began to close in the 1960s, their negative social impact upon Aboriginal peoples in Canada is still being felt today (Greenwood et al., 2007).

In 1973, Indian Control of Indian Education, which was a policy statement made by the National Indian Brotherhood (which would later become the Assembly of First Nations), was accepted in principle by the federal government. This policy has led to a steady increase in the number of
First Nations-operated schools since the 1970s (AIC, 2005). Increasingly, Aboriginal teachers are working at these schools, and language classes and cultural elements have been introduced (Richardson and Blanchet-Cohen, 2000; NAHO, 2007). According to INAC (2005, 49), in 2003-2004 there were 496 First Nations managed schools across Canada, up from 372 in 1993-94.¹ In Atlantic Canada, 848 students were enrolled in First Nations managed schools (grades K-12) and 1,966 students were enrolled in provincial schools in 2003-2004 (INAC, 2005, 39).

McCue (2006) explains that the federal government’s decision to offer education to Aboriginal people through the provincial school system has continued to yield poor results. He argues that the “provincial curriculum in Aboriginal schools has been, by any measure one chooses, a colossal failure” (2006, 4). He claims that reliance on the provincial education system has led to chronically undereducated youth with minimal economic prospects. In the late 1980s and 1990s most of the population with the exception of Aboriginal people was finishing high school. According to Mendelson (2006), by the time of the 2001 census, 31% of the total population in Canada 15 years and older had less than high school, whereas this number was 51% for North American Indians, 42% for Métis, and 58% for Inuit. Fifty-nine percent of Aboriginal students living on reserves had less than a high school education, whereas 40% of Aboriginal peoples living in cities did not have high school diplomas (Mendelson, 2006, 17). In Atlantic Canada in 2001, the total Aboriginal population with less than high school was 44% in Newfoundland, 42 % in Prince Edward Island, 41% in Nova Scotia, and 43% in New Brunswick. For the total population of each of the provinces in Atlantic Canada, the percentage of adults without high school was between 2 and six percent less than for the Aboriginal population of each province (Mendelson, 2006, 18).

For all Aboriginal people, colonization by Europeans is not just a part of their history but it continues to manifest itself in current daily life (Battiste and McLean, 2005). Some of the negative social consequences of the historical relationship between Aboriginal peoples and the wider Canadian society since first contact have been a higher infant mortality, suicide, and dropout rates, lower education achievement, and more poverty, substance abuse, and criminal activity than the general population (Battiste, 2005; Battiste and McLean, 2005). The legacy of residential schools, the reserve systems, and the Indian Act still challenges many First Nations people. “Along with these significant challenges, the ignorance and indifference of Canadian society of the worldview, histories and cultures of First Nations people, their contributions and potentials in Canada, constitutes a travesty that manifests itself in prejudice, racism, and illusions of superiority” (Battiste and McLean, 2005, 2).

On June 11th, 2008, Prime Minister Stephen Harper and the Government of Canada officially apologized for the abuses suffered by Aboriginal people at residential schools (these schools began in 1874 and were government funded). The apology was seen as long overdue for the physical and sexual abuse suffered by thousands of Aboriginal children at schools designed to assimilate Aboriginal people into a Christian society. In his apology, Prime Minister Harper stated, “The government now recognizes that the consequences of the Indian residential schools policy were profoundly negative and that this policy has had a lasting and damaging impact on the Aboriginal culture, heritage and language” (The Canadian Press, 2008). Despite efforts

¹ Please note that the INAC 2004 Basic Departmental Data Report does not provide breakdowns by province or region for the number of First Nations Managed Schools in Canada.
towards reconciliation, there remain many core problems with Aboriginal education today including the lack of Indigenous Knowledge in education programs and funding freezes (Mendelson, 2008; Wotherspoon and Schissel, 1998). High school completion rates for First Nations across Canada have remained unchanged from 1996 to the present with 60% not completing high school (Mendelson, 2008). Mendelson states, “There is all but unanimous agreement on the desperate need for improvement in education for those living on reserves” (2008, 2).

A substantial issue facing Aboriginal education is the lack of adequate funding. In Atlantic Canada there has been a funding freeze for post-secondary education to Bands since 1996. INAC continues to provide $11,725 per unit (per student) per year (personal communication, Eleanor Bernard, January 6, 2008). Typical costs for maintaining a post-secondary education student is approximately double this amount leaving most Aboriginal students living below the poverty line. Furthermore, in Atlantic Canada more than half of First Nations students must attend provincially operated high schools (Mendelson, 2008).

Many First Nations scholars (Battiste, 2004; Greenwood et al., 2007) and Elders believe that solutions to many of the socio-economic challenges faced by Aboriginal peoples will be found in the revitalization of traditional languages, knowledge, and traditions. “The destiny of a people is intricately bound to the way its children are educated, and for this reason, control over the education of their children has been a pressing priority for First Nations people” (Battiste and McLean, 2005, 9).

Inuit History

The Inuit in Labrador’s Nunatsiavut region live in relatively isolated and remote communities. The Inuit language is part of the Inuktitut linguistic family. Before the 1950s Inuit people lived in semi-nomadic groups in a traditional camp lifestyle where the entire community raised the children, Elders were revered, and older children learned parenting skills by looking after younger siblings. In the 1950s Inuit children were assimilated into the Canadian education system. Residential schools located in a small number of communities served to break the bonds between parents and children and prevented and/or hindered the natural acquisition of parenting skills, which made raising children difficult for many. Federal schools were also started by missionaries in major centres in Labrador where students were generally discouraged from using the Inuktitut language. However, it is interesting to note that the Moravians educated Inuit in Inuktitut and Inuit enrolment dropped significantly when the Newfoundland government took over education and began teaching English language only.

By the early 1960s schools were being built in many communities, but many Inuit lived in more remote settlements. In 1969 the federal government took over responsibility for running the schools from the missionaries. Inuit parents felt compelled to move from these more remote locations to larger communities where the schools were located in order to stay close to their children. The curriculum was not adapted to the Inuit and was similar to southern schools. Inuktitut was not allowed to be spoken until the mid-1970s. Parents and Elders could not understand why their older children, who were able bodied workers, had to sit in school learning
nothing relevant to their lifestyles. In addition, there was a shift in authority from parents to teachers (ITK Socio-Economic Department, 2005; Battiste, 2005).

Today the situation is greatly improved. In Natuashish, according to the most current information from the Mushuau Innu Band Council, the Council’s long term plan to assume control of education in the community came to life in 2009. The Mushuau Innu Band Council devolved education, and passed control to Mamu Tshishkutamashutau / Innu Education; a Board of Trustees comprised of Innu leaders from the communities of Natuashish and Sheshatshiu. The Mushuau Innu Natuashish School is now in existence and thriving.

*Métis History*

The Métis are a distinct people within Aboriginal groups in Canada (Hodgson-Smith, 2005). Most Métis of Western Canada are descendants of the historic Métis who lived in Western Canada. They have their unique language, culture, history, and homeland. In recent years many Métis groups in Atlantic Canada and elsewhere in Canada who are descendants of people of Aboriginal ancestry and early European settler groups have begun to self-identify as Métis.

Métis do not have reserve lands. This has presented extra challenges concerning cultural survival and implications for self-government. First Nations have on-reserve and First Nations-operated schools, but the Métis remain without the recognized authority for the creation of their own schools. Thus, Métis children and youth in Atlantic Canada are educated in provincial schools. Like other Aboriginal groups, the Métis have similar principles and values for their education including the preservation of traditional culture, identity, language and Traditional Knowledge, the desire for life-long learning, and self-determination (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996; Hodgson-Smith, 2005; NAHO, 2008)).

*Summary*

The effects of residential schools and other colonizing forces have created many social and cultural challenges for Aboriginal children and youth being schooled in Canada. Aboriginal communities and many individuals and families have experienced severe hardships including poverty, unsafe housing, poor health, polluted water and family breakdowns. Poverty, discrimination and loss of autonomy have contributed to a greater incidence of substance abuse, alcoholism, and incarceration amongst Aboriginal peoples than the Canadian population as a whole. Aboriginal communities have been seriously impacted by conflicting worldviews and value systems and dependence on the government for economic assistance. However, social conditions are slowly starting to change. For instance, Aboriginal enrolment in and completion of post-secondary education is increasing (Richardson and Blanchet-Cohen, 2000). What is needed, now, according to the Assembly of First Nations (2005) and many others, is the recognition of First Nations jurisdiction over education, at all levels, accompanied by sustained funding to allow an education with an emphasis on First Nations languages and cultural values.


2.4 Post-Secondary Education Experiences

There is widespread agreement that Canadian economic prosperity and well-being will be at least partly related to achieving better Aboriginal post-secondary and labour force results (Mendelson, 2006; Canadian Millennium Scholarship Foundation, 2005; Holmes, 2006). This is partly because the Aboriginal youth population which is growing much faster than the general Canadian population will be a significant factor in filling gaps in the aging Canadian workforce (HRSDC, 2007; Brown, 2003).

Table 4 shows the percentage success rate of Aboriginal peoples and the total Canadian population aged 15+ for Canada as a whole and for each of the Atlantic Provinces. For both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students finishing high school across Canada, there is about a 75% probability of them finishing some kind of post-secondary education. These figures are even higher for Aboriginal peoples in each of the Atlantic Provinces except for New Brunswick and for the total population of each of the provinces in the Atlantic except for New Brunswick (Mendelson, 2006). This finding has significant implications for post-secondary education for Aboriginal peoples.

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<tr>
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<td>Total population</td>
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A significant indicator of Aboriginal post-secondary success would appear to be successful completion of secondary school. If this is so, then a key focus of improving post-secondary success should be related to providing the most appropriate learning environment in primary and secondary schools to enable more Aboriginal students to graduate from high school as currently, fewer Aboriginal students complete high school compared to non-Aboriginal students. Currently, the high school completion rates are better in Atlantic Canada than elsewhere in the country. For instance, the on-reserve Aboriginal population aged 20 to 24 with less than high school education is 27% in Newfoundland and Labrador, 40% in Nova Scotia and 44% in New Brunswick. Whereas for the national Aboriginal on-reserve population 58% of 20-24 year olds have less than a high school education (Berger et al., 2007, 60). Richards (2008) also reports the Aboriginal high school completion rates by province for those age 20-24. In Newfoundland and Labrador the completion rate is 70%, while in PEI it is 66%. In Nova Scotia and New Brunswick the rates are 71% and 72% respectively (Richards, 2008, 4).

The Aboriginal post-secondary enrolment and completion rates have been steadily increasing, but not as quickly as the national average (R.A. Malatest and Associates Ltd., 2004; Juby, 2007). However, Orr and Cameron (2004) reviewed a number of INAC reports and found that in the 10-year period of 1991-2001 there was an increase of almost 10% of those in the Mi’kmaw Kina’matnewey First Nations communities (where there is a strong Aboriginal appropriate curriculum and language immersion programming) who had completed post-secondary education, compared with a less than 8% increase of all those on-reserve. This was also slightly higher than for the Canadian population as a whole (9.2%).
According to the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation (2005) most young Aboriginal people in Canada want to go on to post-secondary education and they recognize the value of college and university. The Foundation quotes a recent study that found 70% of Aboriginal people ages 16 to 24 hope to complete post-secondary education and 80% of parents hope that their children will (2005, 2). These students and their parents also believe they will obtain their desired level of education. The reality though is that only 39% of Aboriginal people ages 25 to 64 have actually graduated from a post-secondary institution (Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, 2005). Thus, despite aspirations, not many students are fulfilling their educational goals currently.

The increase in Aboriginal students attending post-secondary education has coincided with and is a result of policy changes at the national level including land claim agreements, treaty negotiations, and fiduciary obligations (Richardson and Blanchet-Cohen, 2000). The remainder of this section examines post-secondary studies in university and non-university programs and examines statistics and experiences in each.

University Education

While the overall completion rate of Aboriginal peoples in post-secondary programming as a whole has been relatively successful, the completion rate for Aboriginal peoples attending university has been much lower. For instance, in his summary of Canadian universities and their programs aimed at Aboriginal people, Holmes noted that “…the record of Aboriginal success at universities has not been good. Not only is university participation low in relation to the overall age cohort in the general population, but Aboriginal students in general also appear to do poorly in terms of progression, retention and graduation rates…” (2006, 14). Only one quarter of Aboriginal students who begin university actually graduate (McCue, 2006, 16). Nationally there are more Aboriginal women (13%) than Aboriginal men (9%) who are 15 years and older with university level education (Mendelson, 2006, 33). Similarly, a recent study of the health of 1189 people from 13 Mi’kmaq communities in Nova Scotia found that women in the province are more than twice as likely as men to complete a university degree. Mi’kmaq men are more likely to pursue trades, technical and vocational education (Mi’kmaq Health Research Group, 2007). According to the First Nations Regional Longitudinal Health Survey, about half (52%) of the adults in the 2002-2003 national survey had graduated from high school. Twenty percent had graduated from high school and 23% had gone on to obtain a diploma from a college, technical or vocational school. A very small minority had obtained a bachelor’s (4.5%), master’s, or doctorate (0.6%) degree (AFN, 2007, 25-26). According to a national study by the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation (2005, 6) 72% of Aboriginal university students feel part of their school community and 91% are satisfied with the quality of their education.

A study of Aboriginal youth in Prince Edward Island (Critchley et al., 2007) found that 90% of 9 to 12 year old students and 100% of 13 to 18 year old students said they planned to complete high school and many thought they would continue with post-secondary studies including university. Interestingly, 26% of 13 to 18 year olds said they wanted to become lawyers. Other top professional aspirations included police officers, athletes, and health care workers.
One of the challenges in Aboriginal post-secondary education is the under representation of Aboriginal students enrolled in science and engineering courses (Canadian Council of Learning (CCL), 2007a). According to the CCL, Aboriginal people are in high demand in science and technology positions because they tend to stay in these occupations a long time, bring stability to the work, and because they have pride in their communities. But the lack of Aboriginal students in sciences may be partially explained by the cultural divide between western science and Aboriginal knowledge and methods. The Aboriginal worldview is more related to seeing the world as part of a spiritual whole while Western science typically breaks things apart to understand them (CCL, 2007a). There is often a failure to validate and incorporate Aboriginal values and knowledge in science education (Battiste et al., 2002) which may lead to lower rates of success among Aboriginal students.

However, there is at least one example where a university in Atlantic Canada has made efforts to address this issue. Cape Breton University has developed the Mi’kmag Integrative Science Program (MSIT). MSIT is a Mi’kmag word meaning ‘everything’ or ‘everything together’, and it is the title of the four pairs of unique core courses for the program (in the Mi’kmag language: Toqwa’tu’kl Kijitaqnm). These are science courses which engage students in a holistic understanding of nature, drawing on the strengths of both western and Aboriginal worldviews and their common ground (CBU, 2009). Improvements in education outcomes and more Aboriginal students choosing science programs in post-secondary institutions has been evident in communities served by Mi’kmaw Kina’ matnewey and most of these students have attended Cape Breton University.

…the number of students enrolled in post-secondary programs that are addressing specific community labour market needs appears to be increasing in areas such as sciences, teacher education, and commerce. For instance, the current enrolment of post-secondary students in science related programs is estimated to be almost 20%. There are also close to 30 students enrolled in commerce programs (Orr and Cameron, 2004, p.43-44).

Non-University Post-Secondary Education

In 2001, 28% of the total Canadian population and 21% of the Aboriginal population completed non-university post-secondary education (such as trade schools or community colleges) (Mendelson, 2006, 10). The Atlantic Provinces have the best results in non-university post-secondary completion. In fact, the Aboriginal population is more likely than the general population to hold a non-university diploma (Mendelson, 2006). One success story is the Nova Scotia Community College system. It has Aboriginal student success advisors at some campuses, and has partnered with Membertou First Nation in the creation of an Aboriginal IT Centre of Excellence in Membertou. The college system also offers access programs and a wide variety of trades and diploma programs such as tourism, culinary arts, aerospace technology, nursing, power engineering, and many more (personal communication, Chastity Meuse, Aboriginal Student Success Advisor, NSCC Truro Campus, July 11, 2008).
Community colleges have an important role in assisting urban Aboriginal youth (McCue, 2006). Roughly half of the Aboriginal population in Canada live in urban areas and their numbers are increasing. While these students tend to do better than rural, on-reserve students, they still fall behind urban non-Aboriginal students.

There has been a general increase in the number of Aboriginal students in post-secondary programs because of targeted Aboriginal programs in education, law, and preparatory classes (Richardson and Blanchet-Cohen (2000). At some colleges and universities there is on-campus support, resident Elders, tutors, and counsellors. In addition, there are community-based education programs, modified admissions qualifications, and increased funding for students. These programs and strategies are discussed later in section 1.8.

2.5 Barriers to Accessing and Completing Post-Secondary Studies

The literature identifies a variety of barriers and challenges which prevent Aboriginal people, including those in Atlantic Canada, from pursuing and completing post-secondary programs. These include historical, social, accessibility, financial, cultural and personal barriers. These are discussed below.

Historical Barriers

As noted earlier, before the late 1960s the government’s post-secondary education policies and practices served to assimilate Aboriginal people into mainstream society. “Many Aboriginal students still see assimilation as a prominent feature of post-secondary education, which has led to an overarching distrust and hostility to education in many parts of the Aboriginal community” (R.A. Malatest and Associates Ltd., 2004, 11). Holmes (2006) noted that Aboriginal student perceptions of the assimilations nature of post-secondary education remains a significant issue to consider when developing an understanding of the barriers to increasing the attendance of Aboriginal peoples at post-secondary institutions. “Over the years, education has been associated with assimilation. For many years the Indian Act “enfranchised” Aboriginal people who had received a post-secondary education forcing them to give up their Indian status and absorbing them into mainstream white society” (9). Further to this, there are relatively few role models for current Aboriginal students since much more widespread participation in post-secondary education is a relatively recent occurrence (Holmes, 2006).

Social and Educational Barriers

Many Aboriginal students living on-reserve do not receive the academic preparation required to succeed in post-secondary education programs (Holmes, 2006). The Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation reports that 46% of on-reserve First Nations peoples identified poor academic preparation as a barrier to achieving success at post-secondary education (Berger et al., 2007, 59). Holmes (2006) noted that Aboriginal students are generally less well prepared than the general Canadian population in the fundamentals of English or French, and math and science. Half of Aboriginal students do not complete high school, compared with one-third of the total Canadian population. The result is that Aboriginal students who choose to go on to the post-
secondary level may need to take further preparatory courses before entering their chosen programs. This can lead to frustration and students dropping out before they even start.

The lack of Aboriginal staff and faculty in post-secondary schools may also make post-secondary education appear less attainable and less welcoming for Aboriginal students (Holmes, 2006). Berger et al. (2007) reported that 26% of Aboriginal peoples living on-reserve did not feel welcome on university and college campuses. In addition, post-secondary institutions are often a considerable distance from Aboriginal communities and therefore, in order to attend post-secondary institutions, many Aboriginal students must make the difficult decision to leave home – with distance, travel, costs, isolation, and other concerns to consider (R.A. Malatest and Associates Ltd.; 2004; McCue, 2006; Mendelson, 2006; ITK Socio-Economic Department, 2005; Holmes, 2006).

There are several promising practices by post-secondary institutions in the Atlantic region that are serving to reduce the impact of long travel distances between post-secondary institutions and First Nations communities. For example, Cape Breton University (CBU), located in Sydney, Nova Scotia is close to the large First Nations communities of Membertou and Eskasoni and has a large Aboriginal student population. CBU is home to the Unama’ki College (formerly the Mi’kmaq College Institute) which provides a variety of Aboriginal services such as the Mi’kmaq Resource Centre and Mi’kmaq Student Support. Cape Breton University has the largest Mi’kmaq student population in Eastern Canada and the highest number of Mi’kmaq graduates each year (CBU, 2009). Cape Breton University, St. Francis Xavier University, and St. Thomas University and the University of New Brunswick, (UNB) all offer targeted programming on reserve which enables First Nations students to remain connected with their home communities, and often to study part-time while working. In certain community colleges that are located near reserve communities there are also large Aboriginal student populations. For example, at the NSCC Truro campus near Millbrook First Nation an estimated 10% of the student body is Aboriginal (Personal communication, Chastity Meuse, Aboriginal Student Success Advisor, NSCC Truro Campus, July 11, 2008). All of the above institutions offer the services of an Aboriginal Student Success Advisor.

Financial Barriers

Holmes (2006) summarizes the challenges concerning the costs of post-secondary education relative to the financial position of many Aboriginal households. Since unemployment rates are high on reserves and many jobs are seasonal, a considerable number of Aboriginal households are forced to rely on social assistance. As many Aboriginal families have relatively low incomes there is insufficient family income to pay for the costs of post-secondary education, especially university. Families are usually not in a position to assist their children with money to pay for the costs of post-secondary education (Holmes, 2006). According to two reports by the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, in 2005 and 2007, financial challenges are the number one barrier to Aboriginal people accessing and completing post-secondary education. Fifty-three percent of on-reserve First Nations people stated inadequate funding as their main reason for not pursuing higher education (Berger et al., 2007, 59). This is not surprising given the low income levels of Aboriginal people. For First Nations on-reserve the average individual income is $14,616, for Aboriginal people living off-reserve it is $20,888. In comparison average individual
incomes for non-Aboriginal people in Canada is $30,062 (all figures 2001 Census, as reported by Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, 2005, 4). Adding to financial burdens for Aboriginal students is the fact that many are older with families, and some are single parents. Specifically over half of Aboriginal university students are 22 years old or older and one-third have children. Thus, these students are juggling family, work, and other responsibilities. Despite these numbers, the Foundation found that 39% of First Nations parents said that someone in their family is saving for post-secondary education (2005, 4).

Despite the fact that completing post-secondary education would provide Aboriginal peoples who are living in poverty with the potential to obtain meaningful employment and improve their financial situation, the reality is that their lack of access to sufficient financial means makes it difficult for many Aboriginal people to climb above their financial hardships (R.A. Malatest and Associates Ltd., 2004). Many studies have identified that there are significant financial costs for Aboriginal people who attend post-secondary education institutions, including housing, daycare, and relocation costs in addition to tuition fees (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996; Auditor General of Canada, 2004; Assembly of First Nations, 2005; Mendelson, 2006; Holmes, 2006; Berger et al., 2007; Mayes, 2007). These studies note that current approaches to providing financial assistance to Aboriginal students are inadequate. The amount of funding per student is not enough because it is usually limited to tuition fees. Many post-secondary education Aboriginal students are also single parents and Aboriginal single mothers have the greatest challenges accessing education and finding employment (White et al., 2003).

Many Aboriginal people who are eligible for funding do not receive it because there are not enough funds for everyone. There is limited financial support for Aboriginal post-secondary education in Canada (R.A. Malatest and Associates Ltd., 2004; McCue, 2006). Reports by the Aboriginal Institutes Consortium (AIC, 2005, 18) and R.A. Malatest and Associates Ltd. (2004) noted the problems created by the federal government’s capping of funding support in 1988 for the Post-Secondary Student Support Program.

Some financial programs exist; for example three of the programs from INAC are the Indian Studies Support Program, the Post-secondary Student Support Program, and the University College Entrance Preparation Program. A brief summary of each is provided below, as reported by INAC (2004) and R.A. Malatest and Associates Ltd. (2004).

- The Indian Studies Support Program gives funding to post-secondary institutions to develop and deliver special programs for Status Indians. It covers all post-secondary levels and programs.
- The Post-secondary Student Support Program offers assistance with tuition, books, travel, and living expenses such as food shelter and day care. It does not cover first year transition programs, academic upgrading, trades, or computer studies.
- The University College Entrance Preparation Program offers financial assistance for students and covers tuition fees, books, travel, and living allowances, when applicable. It offers financial assistance for Status Indian and Inuit students enrolled in university and college entrance preparation programs, to help them achieve the academic level required to enter degree and diploma programs.
Research conducted by the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation (R.A. Malatest and Associates Ltd., 2004; Holmes, 2006) discussed the many challenges and limitations associated with these programs. There are age restrictions on who can receive funds and restrictions on the choice of institution stipulated by the programs. As well, the funding is administered by First Nations communities and they establish policies and control who receives these funds. Thus to receive funds Aboriginal applicants must be associated with a community. Each community has its own rules about the number of courses students must take, hours of class per week, and duration of the funding period. Older, mature students and people living off-reserve and who wish to attend a post-secondary institution often have a difficult time receiving funding (Holmes, 2006). In addition, in most cases, if a student fails or must take a leave of absence, his or her funding is cut. Evaluation research on one of the programs found that funding can be delayed, promised, and then denied, and that the process of applying for and receiving funding is often plagued by nepotism, favouritism, and other unfair practices (R.A. Malatest and Associates Ltd., 2004; Holmes, 2006).

The funds for these programs are for Status Indians only, but there are never enough funds for all who seek assistance. Even those who receive support may need to obtain provincial and federal loans. However, if a student has Student Support Program funding, he or she is not normally eligible for government student loans. Furthermore, student loans are not always adequate because many Aboriginal students have higher travel and living costs compared to non-Aboriginal students (R.A. Malatest and Associates Ltd., 2004; Holmes, 2006). The Assembly of First Nations estimates that 27,500 Aboriginal applicants received funding for post-secondary programs in 2000-2001, but more than 8,475 who applied for financial assistance did not receive it. And those who did receive funding may not be able to cover all their costs (AFN, 2005).

**Cultural Barriers**

“Many Aboriginal students do not see themselves or their culture reflected in the typical Canadian university setting. There are few Aboriginal people employed at universities, even fewer are faculty members and fewer still hold high profile administrative positions” (Holmes, 2006, 10). A related issue is cultural discrimination – which remains a central barrier for Aboriginal people (R.A. Malatest and Associates Ltd., 2004; McCue, 2006). In particular, the university world is usually very different from the Aboriginal world. “To Aboriginal people, the university often represents an impersonal and hostile environment in which their culture, traditions, and values are not recognized” (R.A. Malatest and Associates Ltd., 2004, 13). What they learn is often at odds with the culture they grew up with and for many this is too great a sacrifice and they return home. If they complete their studies, they may feel caught between two worlds: “…universities and colleges are not consistently concerned with the effects of culture on students” (R.A. Malatest and Associates Ltd., 2004, 15). The authors argue that universities do not understand the diversity of cultures, traditions, and core values among Aboriginal communities across Canada. According to a stakeholder interviews they conducted, “Non-Aboriginal people are allowed to be ignorant of Aboriginal people. Thus we exercise racism unconsciously” (R.A. Malatest and Associates Ltd., 2004, 16).

There is also a relative lack of Aboriginal content and ‘education processes’ in university course curricula. Historically there has been little attempt to incorporate the Aboriginal perspective or
worldview in a systematic way across university courses. This has slowly been changing, with specific courses, especially those as part of Native Studies programs, and ad hoc courses in some disciplines, incorporating Aboriginal values, content, and speakers (Holmes 2006).

**Personal and Family Barriers**

Personal circumstances that provide personal challenges for Aboriginal peoples are often the main barrier to attending and completing post-secondary education (R.A. Malatest and Associates Ltd., 2004). These challenges can include poor self-esteem, lack of motivation, feeling powerless, and frustrated. In addition, the lack of visible role models, encouragement, and support from family and friends can be a large barrier. In more severe situations some Aboriginal people are dealing with alcohol and substance abuse, physical and sexual abuse, and Aboriginal peoples have the highest rate of incarceration in Canada. Juby (2007) found that some Aboriginal youth chose to enter the workforce instead of completing high school or continuing their education. This research found that young Aboriginal people who did not complete high school were more likely to have work compared to non-Aboriginal people in the same situation. Some Aboriginal youth may feel the need to work to support a family instead of spending money on post-secondary education (Holmes, 2006). Thus the need to secure a job to make a living at an early age may be leading Aboriginal youth to take on unskilled work, which in turn may serve to keep Aboriginal people from entering or completing post-secondary education (Juby, 2007).

The majority of Aboriginal post-secondary students are women and Aboriginal women are more likely to have young children than are non-Aboriginal students (Holmes, 2006). Therefore, they are more likely to have responsibilities related to child care than are the general Canadian post-secondary population. There is also evidence that more Aboriginal students than others interrupt or stop their academic programs – for a variety of reasons – and often have trouble returning to finish as other priorities take over (Holmes, 2006).

An empirical study of Atlantic First Nations high school student’s perceptions of barriers to and reasons for success in attending post-secondary education was conducted by Augustine (2002). Orr and Cameron (2004) analyzed the raw data included in this study to compare student’s perceptions from First Nations-operated schools with those of students attending provincial schools. They determined that for students attending First Nations-operated schools barriers related to lack of educational resources / structure and Band politics / decisions and support were much greater. Students attending provincial schools noted considerably fewer barriers related to these areas, but were much more likely to have noted that systemic discrimination and lack of cultural programming were barriers to their success. This study is one of the few empirical analyses of the perceptions of Aboriginal students as to the relative contribution of their schooling to post-secondary success and challenges. It serves also as a reminder of the differences across provincial and Band-operated systems.

**2.6 Socio-Economic Benefits of Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education**

Post-secondary education offers many socio-economic benefits for Aboriginal students and their communities across Canada including increased income, better health, and decreased poverty and crime rates. Mendelson states, “[B]etter education outcomes, including post-secondary
graduation, does increase income which implies that improving post-secondary success among Aboriginal peoples will result in improved socio-economic status and in so doing, contribute to the social and economic well-being of Canada” (2006, 9). According to the author, socio-economic status is lowest in the north and west. These regions also have the lowest education levels.

Many authors have noted that Aboriginal students have consistently lower average educational achievement than the total student population in Canada, otherwise referred to as an education gap (Maxim and White, 2006; Wotherspoon and Schissel, 1998). Wotherspoon and Schissel (1998) state that Aboriginal people remain highly disadvantaged relative to the general population due to structural and cultural factors. Maxim and White (2006), who employed the Youth in Transition Survey by Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC) and Statistics Canada, state that 54% of non-Aboriginal youth across Canada participate in post-secondary education, while only 35% of Aboriginal youth do.²

Although only 11% of non-Aboriginal students drop out of high school, 22% of Aboriginal students do so. However, Aboriginal dropouts fare much better than non-Aboriginal dropouts in the labour market. Seventy-five percent of Aboriginal early school leavers are employed within one year of leaving school, while only 48% of non-Aboriginal early school leavers are employed within the same time frame. Maxim and White (2006) argue that even a marginal job can provide a substantial improvement in an Aboriginal family’s standard of living and so this may account for the difference between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal employment after dropping out of high school. More capable non-Aboriginal students may continue to post-secondary education, while their Aboriginal counterparts may go straight into employment. The authors state that 14% of Aboriginal people leave post-secondary education before completion, while the rate is only 9% for non-Aboriginal students. However, according to Maxim and White (2006), the rate of return to complete post-secondary education is much higher for Aboriginal people, than for non-Aboriginal people. Thus, these authors conclude that formal education is a major factor in achieving parity on many issues with non-Aboriginal people.

Aboriginal peoples’ lower attainment of higher levels of education affects them as individuals but it also has an impact on Aboriginal communities and upon Canadian society as a whole. “The low rate of formal education in the Aboriginal population will likely determine the overall state of Aboriginal society’s health, wealth and potential for the future” (R.A. Malatest and Associates Ltd., 2004, 5). In addition education is one of the determining factors of health (Critchley et al., 2007; Mi’kmaq Health Research Group, 2007). The “returns to education are not solely private, but also societal, as increased educational attainment generally reduces crime, improves health, and potentially breaks the cycle of poverty” (Sharpe et al., 2007, 7). Thus education helps Aboriginal peoples to enter the labour market to meet their individual career dreams and helps them provide for their families. Education also addresses a variety of social needs for Aboriginal communities.

² Maxim and White (2006) do not include statistics related to school completion and workforce transition by region or province in Canada. The Youth in Transition Survey also groups all Aboriginal identity groups together, thus comparisons between First Nations, Inuit and Métis are not possible.
2.7 Impacts of Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education on the Labour Force

Increasing the number of post-secondary educated Aboriginal people has the potential to change the face of Canada’s labour force, and positively impact local Aboriginal community economic development – a key step to self-determination and self-government in the 21st century.

In Nova Scotia there has been some positive evidence of the linkages between completing post-secondary education and positive labour market outcomes among First Nations. Mi’kmaw Kina’matnewey First Nations communities had an increase of almost 10% in those who completed post-secondary education in the 1991-2001 period. Citing studies by INAC, Orr and Cameron (2004) report that there was an increase from 36% to 51% in the labour force participation rates among those who reside in Mi’kmaw Kina’matnewey First Nations communities in the same period. This contrasted with a 5% labour force participation rate increase for all on-reserve Registered Indians and a drop of 1.5% among all Canadians, in the same time period. Clearly, in this Nova Scotia example, improved post-secondary education outcomes seem to be positively related to a corresponding increase in labour market participation.

According to Kapasalis (2006) while significant gains have been made in labour market outcomes for Aboriginal people across the country (including Atlantic Canada), Aboriginal people remain among the most vulnerable groups in Canada. Lower education and post-secondary skill levels are key factors in explaining their weaker performance in the labour market. Using the 2001 Census of adults age 18 to 24 years who worked full time in 2000, Kapasalis examined why Aboriginal occupations tend to differ from those of the rest of Canadians. The National Occupational Classification (NOC) was used to compare the distribution of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal workers in Canada. High-skilled occupations include managerial, professional (requiring a university degree), and skilled administrative and technical jobs (requiring college or apprenticeship training). Semi-skilled occupations include clerical work, health support, intermediate sales, or machine operators. Low-skilled occupations include elemental sales, trades helpers, and labourers. Aboriginal workers are more highly represented in the semi-skilled and low-skilled occupations, whereas a larger percentage of non-Aboriginal people are working in managerial and professional occupations (Table 5).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Managerial</th>
<th>Professional</th>
<th>Skilled</th>
<th>Semi-skilled</th>
<th>Low-skilled</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Aboriginal</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Kapasalis (2006, 88).³

Kapasalis (2006) shows that, in comparison to non-Aboriginal workers, workers of Aboriginal ancestry are less well represented in high-skill jobs in the private sector, in particular, in positions such as managers, occupations in business and finance, engineering, and occupations in computers and medicine. They are also less well represented, comparatively speaking, in technical occupations such as engineering, and computer and health technicians. They are better represented than non-Aboriginal workers as public sector managers, skilled workers in

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³ Kapasalis (2006) does not provide Atlantic Canada statistics related to occupational gaps.
government, cultural positions such as paralegals and library technicians, as semi-skilled workers in trades, and as low-skilled sales people and labourers. Roughly 35% of Aboriginals who are working are employed in the public sector, including public administration, education, health, or social services.

There is a difference in the wages made by Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people. On average Aboriginal workers earn 23% less than non-Aboriginal workers and this is true within each broad occupation classification (Kapasalis, 2006, 88-93). Similar to the findings of Mendelson (2006), the AFN (2007), and Holmes (2006), Kapasalis reports that Aboriginal workers are less likely to have a university degree than their non-Aboriginal co-workers (8% versus 21%) and more likely to have less than high school (29% versus 18%) (2006, 93). Thus there are significant economic differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal workers in Canada and Kapasalis argues that education remains the most promising policy option to eliminate the employment gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal workers.

Sharpe et al. (2007) studied the connections between Aboriginal education levels, labour force growth, and growth in labour productivity. They found that increasing Aboriginal education levels increases the personal well-being of Aboriginal people, and also contributes to labour force growth and productivity. Aboriginal people are projected to account for 30% of the annual natural population increase (births minus deaths) in Canada between 2001 and 2017 (Sharpe et al. 2007, 6). The potential contribution of Aboriginal people to the total growth of the Canadian labour force between 2001 and 2017 is estimated to be 7.4%. Furthermore, if Aboriginal people were by 2017 to increase their education levels to that of non-Aboriginal people in 2001, the average annual GDP growth rate in Canada would go up by 0.036 percentage points which would add $71 billion (2001 dollars) to the economy between 2001 and 2017 (Sharpe et al., 2007).

Similarly to Sharpe et al. (2007), Richards (2008) reports that the employment rate of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people increases as education levels increase. For example, Aboriginal people with less than high school have an employment rate of roughly 35%, compared to 39% for non-Aboriginal people. With a university degree, Aboriginal people actually have a higher employment rate (80%) than non-Aboriginal people (77%) (Richards 2008, 2).

The basic requirements for securing many forms of good jobs are changing due to the specific new skill requirements of the knowledge economy (Ciceri and Scott, 2006). Aboriginal people may have some specific labour market disadvantages in the new knowledge economy compared to other Canadians because of relatively lower levels of skills in relation to some of these new skill requirements. This may in turn translate into lower levels of employment in these areas and under-representation in occupations requiring high levels of education and skills, which may increase overall levels of unemployment for Aboriginal peoples. Currently, non-Aboriginal people earn 1.5 times more than Aboriginal people (Ciceri and Scott, 2006, 8). Within all Aboriginal identity groups in Canada, Métis are most likely to have jobs that match their skills, followed by First Nations and then Inuit people (Ciceri and Scott, 2006, 21). The authors go on

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4 The authors do not provide the Atlantic Canada Aboriginal natural population increase.
5 Ciceri and Scott (2006) do not provide statistics for Atlantic Canada specifically.
to claim that there has been little work thus far on the determinants of Aboriginal employment in Canada.

Aboriginal people represent one of the fastest growing populations in Canada but they remain underrepresented in the workforce (Simson, 2003). Brown (2003) states that the Aboriginal population experiences unemployment rate of nearly twice the national average. Currently, most Aboriginal people find work on reserves or with Aboriginal companies. Because the Aboriginal population is so young, in the coming years significantly higher numbers of Aboriginal people will be of working age and seeking jobs. Unless there are more on-reserve and/or off-reserve jobs to meet this increased demand, the demand for work will outstrip the capacity of Aboriginal organizations to fulfill these job demands.

Aboriginal Canadians will be an increasingly important part of the workforce…. If corporate decision-makers aren’t taking steps to recruit more Aboriginal employees, and just as importantly make the workplace attractive to Aboriginal workers, they … are simply overlooking one the best opportunities for a fresh supply of employees (Brown, 2003, 12).

Young Aboriginal people are approaching working age at a perfect time to fill vacancies left by retiring baby boomers (Saskbusiness, 2003; Canada and the World Backgrounder, 2004). These positions include scientists, engineers, health care professionals as well as trades which require post-secondary training. It is estimated that there will be a worker shortage by 2011, especially in healthcare, education, and construction. By 2020, Canada could be short one million skilled workers (Canada and the World Backgrounder, 2004).

According to Sharpe et al., in Atlantic Canada the percentage increase in the Aboriginal workforce from 2001 to 2017 could be as high as 43% and for Canada as a whole, 54% (2007, 70). The authors also predict that the percent change in the employment rate among Aboriginal people in Atlantic Canada may be as high as 72% and for Canada, 76% (2007, 72).

2.8 Institutions, Programs, and Strategies

The Picture across Canada

A variety of post-secondary institutions across Canada have recognized the need to enable Aboriginal people to succeed at post-secondary education, and have begun to develop appropriate programs and strategies to meet their needs. These programs include Aboriginal access programs, community-based programs, distance education, Aboriginal controlled institutions, and Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal partnerships (R.A. Malatest and Associates Ltd., 2004; ITK Socio-Economic Department, 2005; AIC, 2005).

A review of all university initiatives across Canada identified that the following common factors or approaches were being employed to address the challenges of Aboriginal student success in universities (Holmes, 2006, 14-32):

- Increasing the number of Aboriginal faculty and staff
• Proactive recruitment of Aboriginal students
• Early intervention (reaching out to and involving school age children in university-led programs and activities to get them interested in and aware of, universities as an option)
• Pro-active admissions policies
• Transition/bridging programs
• Academic outreach programs (delivering courses at a distance in rural and remote reserve communities, with the intention to attract students to finish their programs on campus)
• Native studies programs
• Other programs with an Aboriginal focus (such as education, nursing, social work, where students learn about specific issues and approaches in Aboriginal communities and societies)
• Student support
• Financial support for students (universities offering specific scholarships and bursaries for Aboriginal students through endowment funds)
• Cross-cultural awareness training
• Aboriginal input into university governance

A variety of post-secondary institutions, including those in Atlantic Canada, offer Aboriginal Access Programs (R.A. Malatest and Associates Ltd., 2004). They sponsor people who would not otherwise be able to attend. Staff actively recruit students and help them to get the qualifications they need. The programs also offer supports such as special orientation, counselling, help finding housing and day care and adjusting to urban living. In Manitoba, recruitment packages, videos and information are sent to First Nation communities, and university representatives visit communities to actively recruit. Individual academic advising, introduction to university, tutors, adjustment assistance, workshops on personal development and career counselling are offered. However, these Access courses are perceived by some as “not real” because they do not have the same standards as regular courses. The programs are often not favoured due to the different standards used to counter cultural differences. And there has been some debate over the lower admission requirements (R.A. Malatest and Associates Ltd., 2004).

Beyond access programs, there are many community-based programs which allow Aboriginal students to complete some or all credits at home in their local community. This helps alleviate financial burdens and social hardships. For example, there are many teacher education distance programs in British Columbia, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan. Distance education is interspersed with classroom experience (R.A. Malatest and Associates Ltd., 2004). Another example is the Gabriel Dumont Institute, affiliated with the University of Saskatchewan, which offers the first two years of a Bachelor of Arts and Science degree (Richardson and Blanchet-Cohen, 2000; Hodgson-Smith, 2005). Courses are available to Métis and non-Métis people, who meet the entrance requirements and are accepted by the college. Programs offered by the Gabriel Dumont Institute and College are both community-based and include the following features: preparatory or upgrading courses run together with regular programming; sensitivity to Métis culture including Métis studies programming; an integrated practicum phase whenever possible; fully accredited and recognized programming. Academic and personal support is also offered as part of the institute’s mandate to serve the Métis population (Richardson and Blanchet-Cohen, 2000).
It has been shown that Aboriginal control over education results in higher success (R.A. Malatest and Associates Ltd., 2004; AIC, 2005). These schools tend to be successful due to the high number of Aboriginal staff and peer support provided by Aboriginal students. First Nations University of Canada was established in 1976 as the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College through a federated partnership with the University of Regina. The First Nations University of Canada offers undergraduate and graduate degrees in an Aboriginal environment that includes traditional and standard areas of study in all programs (First Nations University of Canada, 2008). Some unique operating principles that often distinguish Aboriginal institutions from “mainstream” institutions include:

1) Governance Boards are directed and controlled by Aboriginal communities and there is community involvement/integration of community throughout the educational process through linkages and relationships with various community organizations

2) Efforts are made to target the hiring and development of Aboriginal faculty who serve as role models for students and these faculty and others are valued because they use methods of instruction that address Aboriginal learning styles and ensure a holistic approach to education

3) Aboriginal support staff focus specifically on Aboriginal student services and the creation of culturally appropriate student support networks (AIC, 2005, 33-34)

There are also post-secondary institutions that are not governed by Aboriginal peoples that have developed successful partnerships with Aboriginal organizations and peoples. For example, some Aboriginal groups have developed joint programs with existing institutions to create culturally relevant programs by ensuring Aboriginal people have input into curriculum design and can offer proactive support (R.A. Malatest and Associates Ltd., 2004). For example, the University of British Columbia has a First Nations House of Learning, which was built in the Aboriginal Longhouse design. In the House of Learning there is support, liaison, culture sharing, an Elders’ lounge, a sacred circle, childcare, administration offices, a kitchen, and a computer lab. The house provides more visibility for Aboriginal studies at the university. Other universities offer similar services, such as the University of Alberta with its office of Native Student Services, McGill University and its First People’s House, Concordia University’s Native Centre, and, as described above, CBU has the Unama (R.A. Malatest and Associates Ltd., 2004).

The Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation (2005) has also implemented pilot projects to address barriers faced by Aboriginal post-secondary students. The projects include “Making Education Work” which involves a support program in Manitoba schools to ensure Aboriginal high school students are ready to enter post-secondary school. The Millennium Aboriginal Access Bursary for first-year Aboriginal students in Saskatchewan helps to lower the costs of the first step to post-secondary education. It is a $2000 bursary that does not have to be paid back. “LE, NONET” is a program that offers financial, academic, and cultural support to Aboriginal students at the University of Victoria to ensure that those who do get into the university have the best chances to graduate, including financial assistance (Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, 2005). These are only pilot projects but the Foundation hopes to learn more about what helps Aboriginal people succeed at the post-secondary level.
The Canadian Council of Learning (CCL) and its Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre partnered with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people to develop Holistic Lifelong Learning Models as a result of a series of national workshops and consultations. The aim of the models is to create a new framework to measure success in learning in Aboriginal communities. The CCL believes that new ways of thinking about learning are important to measuring individual and community Aboriginal well-being. The models focus on the Aboriginal way of seeing education— as a lifelong learning process. Thus, new indicators are needed that reflect this holistic approach. It is also argued that lifelong learning is needed to help eradicate poverty and other social problems in Aboriginal communities (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007b).

Some provinces have also developed Aboriginal post-secondary educational strategies and policies. For example, British Columbia has developed the “Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education Strategy and Action Plan” (Government of British Columbia, 2006). It includes nine action items:

- Increase access, retention, and success for Aboriginal learners through implementation of Aboriginal Service Plans;
- Reduce financial barriers through targeted scholarships for Aboriginal learners;
- Increase participation in strategic program areas;
- Support Aboriginal learner transition;
- Enhance opportunities for Aboriginal culture to be reflected within the infrastructure of institutions;
- Increase the number of culturally relevant programs and services;
- Encourage Aboriginal representation on institutional governing bodies;
- Strengthen agreements and partnerships; and
- Effective planning based on system-wide data tracking and performance measures based on student success.

In addition to education support programs for Aboriginal people there is also assistance available to find employment. Across Canada, including the Atlantic Region, the Aboriginal Human Resources Development Strategy (AHRDS), a federal program offered through Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, assists Aboriginal people in finding a job or upgrading their skills. In Canada, 80 AHRDS holders deliver labour market programming in over 400 locations. Each AHRDS holder has programs suited to the community it serves. AHRDS also offers youth programs and childcare to assist Aboriginal people while they work or go back to school (HRSDC, 2007). In addition to AHRDS, Aboriginal employment offices across the country assist in connecting Aboriginal people to appropriate employment.

Over the years there have been many policy studies, commissions, reports conducted for the federal government on Aboriginal post-secondary education. The House of Commons Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development (Mayes, 2007) prepared a comprehensive report on Aboriginal post-secondary education in Canada based on extensive

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6 Since the writing of this report the Aboriginal Human Resources Development Strategy has been replaced by the Aboriginal Skills Employment Training Strategy (ASETS).
consultations and analysis of policy studies, including those completed in and about Aboriginal persons and communities in Nova Scotia. This report identified significant recommendations for creating positive outcomes, improving student funding, better data collection and tracking, allocation and delivery of post-secondary education funding, introducing Indian Studies programs, and improving access to post-secondary education programming. Moreover, this report underscored the importance of addressing these recommendations in a collaborative way that centered on capacity building within First Nations, and by urging various government branches such as INAC and HRSDC to work together as part of a coordinated approach.

In 2008 the province of Nova Scotia and the Canadian government collaborated with the Native Council of Nova Scotia and the Aboriginal Human Resources Council in launching a three-year Nova Scotia Coordinated Aboriginal Apprenticeship and Trades Strategy (Government of Nova Scotia, 2008). The strategy builds on existing programs and provides skills training to prepare Aboriginal people for apprenticeship and job placements in a streamlined Nova Scotia apprenticeship system. The strategy is intended to benefit both Aboriginal communities and industry in the province. It aims to provide more Aboriginal people, both on- and off-reserve, with employment close to their home communities while addressing the shortage of skilled tradespeople. The strategy is funded by Human Resource Development Canada’s Sector Council Program (Government of Nova Scotia, 2008).

Trent University was the first university in North America to establish a department dedicated to the study of Aboriginal peoples. The department, now known as Indigenous Studies, was originally established in 1969 as the Indian-Eskimo Studies Program. The program focuses on the realities of Aboriginal life in Canada and internationally with the goal of creating leaders who will work to create better realities for Aboriginal people. The program at Trent is among the best in Canada and has set the foundation for similar programs across the country (AIC, 2005). Trent also started the first Masters of Arts in Native Studies in 1986 and the first PhD program in 1997. In 2005, the First Peoples House of Learning was officially opened and houses a performance space, lecture hall, gathering space, two outdoor ceremonial areas and an indoor art gallery. Trent also has Elders appointed as tenured professors, which is unique in the country (Trent University, no date; Newhouse, 2007).

Algoma University in Sault Ste. Marie is committed to providing a respectful, inclusive, and innovative educational environment for First Nations, Métis and Inuit students. The Shingwauk Education Trust established Shingwauk Kinoomaage Gamig, which offers courses and programs of particular interest to Anishinaabe students. These courses and programs are fully accredited through Algoma University or other partner institutions. The campus has a long history as it was first created as a direct result of Chief Shingwauk’s efforts to secure educational opportunities for his people in the 19th century (Algoma University, 2009).

Aboriginal Programming at Atlantic Canadian Post-Secondary Institutions

Many of the Atlantic Canadian universities and colleges offer courses on Aboriginal history and issues and many also conduct related research or outreach. Some of these include Cape Breton University (CBU), Dalhousie University, St. Francis Xavier University (StFX), Saint Thomas
University (STU), the University of New Brunswick (UNB), the University of Prince Edward Island (UPEI), and many of the Atlantic region community colleges.

CBU, located in Sydney, Nova Scotia has the largest Mi’kmaq post-secondary student population in Eastern Canada and the highest number of Mi’kmaq graduates each year. Mi’kmaq students have graduated from the Bachelor of Business Administration, Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Science, and Bachelor of Arts Community Studies degree programs. It is home to the Unama’ki College which provides for the needs of the Mi’kmaq communities. The university also houses Mi’kmaq Student Services (a support system for all Mi’kmaq and First Nations students at CBU) and the Mi’kmaq Resource Centre (a repository of documents available for use by students, organizations, and individuals interested in Mi’kmaq issues). The foundation of the Unama’ki College has made it possible for Mi’kmaq students, educators, scholars, and researchers to establish a curriculum and research agenda which contributes to the achievement of the educational and community goals set by Mi’kmaq communities (summarized from CBU, 2009; personal communication with Patrick Johnson, April 16, 2009).

A key factor in the success of CBU in responding to the needs of First Nations students is the relationship with Mi’kmaw Kina’matnewey. A number of partnerships have been established with them, including Elmitik, the Mi’kmaw Science Advantage Program, Mi’kmaq Integrative Science Programming and Mi’kmaq Studies in linguistics and social sciences (Orr and Cameron, 2004).

Dalhousie University offers a Transition Year Program (TYP) for Aboriginal and African-Canadian students. It is a one year program designed to assist adults who are entering university programs. The TYP introduces students to the university through curriculum, tutorials, tours, and workshops. Its curriculum can be adapted to individual needs and objectives. All TYP courses are full-year, university preparatory courses and are not for credit. Classroom instruction is complemented by an orientation week, special lectures, campus tours, workshops and field trips. The program’s staff includes members of the Dalhousie University community as well as the First Nations and Nova Scotian Black communities (summarized from Dalhousie University, no date; personal communication with Isaac Saney, April 17, 2009).

Dalhousie, UNB, CBU, StFX and Memorial University are involved in the Aboriginal Human Health Research Initiative (AHHRI). The AHHRI is a collaborative project, comprised of faculty and staff members from the universities and leaders from Aboriginal communities in Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick. The goal of this initiative is to increase enrolment and retention of Aboriginal people working in health careers across the country (Dalhousie University, 2009).

The Atlantic Aboriginal Health Research Program (AAHRP) is another initiative that Dalhousie is involved with. The purpose of the AAHRP is to increase Aboriginal health research capacity by providing financial support to undergraduate and graduate students to encourage them to pursue careers in Aboriginal health research. The AAHRP also funds small research projects of interest to Aboriginal communities so they can learn how to conduct research and use research results in their work. They also hold community-based workshops that will help communities develop research skills (Atlantic Aboriginal Health Research Program, 2009).
StFX, located in Antigonish, Nova Scotia, formed a partnership with Mi’kmaw Kina’matnewey in which they established a Mi’kmaw teacher education program. Between 1998 and 2004, almost 40 Mi’kmaw teachers received B.Ed. degrees; many are now working in Mi’kmaw Kina’matnewey schools, teaching their language and culture as part of their pedagogy (Orr and Cameron, 2004). By 2009, ninety Mi’kmaw teachers had received their B.Ed degree from St. FX and extensive off-campus, distance, and part-time programming that is culturally sensitive to student’s needs continues to facilitate Aboriginal access to B.Ed. and M.Ed programs.

Saint Thomas University (STU), located in Fredericton, New Brunswick, offers the only Interdisciplinary Native Studies program in Atlantic Canada. The program is designed to provide both Native and non-Native students with an opportunity to explore the cultural, historical and contemporary issues of Native people of North America, with an emphasis placed on the Native cultures in the Atlantic region and the eastern United States. The Native Studies program offers more than 40 courses. One key component of the Native Studies program is the Native Language Immersion Teaching Certificate Programme, the first in the country. Courses offered include introductory, intermediate and full-immersion levels in Maliseet and Mi’kmaw. In 1984, STU became the first university in Canada to establish a chair in Native Studies. An important goal of the Chair is to promote the survival of Native peoples and culture. Since the Chair has been established, STU is committed to undertake research and publication in the areas of Native languages, education, history, treaty and Aboriginal rights (Saint Thomas University, 2005).

The Mi’kmaq/Maliseet Bachelor of Social Work Programme (MMBSW) is an existing programme that allows First Nation individuals to obtain a Bachelor of Social Work degree from either St. Thomas or Dalhousie University within a flexible and culturally relevant framework. The MMBSW is designed for First Nation individuals who are currently working or wish to work in social work or related positions in areas such as child & family services, addictions, health, social development or schools in First Nation communities in the Maritime Provinces. STU also offers the Labrador Bachelor of Social Work Programme which has a focus on Aboriginal content (Saint Thomas University, 2005).

The University of New Brunswick, located in Fredericton, New Brunswick, is home to the Mi’kmaq-Maliseet Institute (MMI) and offers special services and programs for Aboriginal students. It administers UNB academic programs for Aboriginal students, conducts research, and publishes in Aboriginal Studies and Aboriginal Education. The MMI’s goal is to maintain the high quality of UNB programs for First Nations students and to broaden the Aboriginal content and perspectives in these programs. MMI provides services for all Aboriginal students at the university including academic counselling and tutoring, access to the Mi’kmaq-Maliseet Resource Collection in the Harriet Irving Library, an Aboriginal student lounge, and opportunities to participate in social and other group events. Degree credit courses are available in the Mi’kmaq and Maliseet languages and cultures, and in Aboriginal Business and Aboriginal Education. The Faculty of Education at UNB also offers a Bridging Year Program for Aboriginal students who are preparing for admission to a UNB degree program (summarized from UNB, 2007; personal communication with Andrea Belezewski, April 17, 2009). UNB has recently hired an Aboriginal recruitment to recruit and provide support to Aboriginal students. They have
also established an Elder-in-residence to provide support to MMI and Aboriginal students. A bachelor degree in First Nation governance and management as an extension of the existing certificate program is being established through MMI and it will be the first undergraduate degree of its kind in Canada (University of New Brunswick, 2010).

UPEI, located in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island has a Mawio’mi Aboriginal Student Centre which is place for Aboriginal students to share and support one another in the Mi’kmaq language. They offer mentoring and support services to Aboriginal students, such as tutoring and counselling, help with course selection, and assist in finding volunteer or work opportunities (University of Prince Edward Island, 2009). The faculty of education offers a bachelor of education program with a specialization in Indigenous Education. This program focuses on studying about issues facing Indigenous populations in the world and students are required to complete a practice teaching in an Aboriginal setting. Also through the faculty of education, UPEI offers the Nunavut Master of Education in Leadership and Learning program, the first graduate program to be offered in Nunavut. This program is in partnership with the Department of Education of the Government of Nunavut, StFX, and the Nunavut Arctic College (University of Prince Edward Island, 2009).

The Nova Scotia Community College (NSCC) system strives to improve access for Aboriginal students. The college sets aside one seat in each program to be filled by the first qualified applicant of underrepresented groups (Orr, 2008a). As a recruitment tool the NSCC distributes postcards displaying successful Aboriginal graduates as a way of advertising Aboriginal services offered at the various college campuses across the province (personal communication, Chastity Meuse, Aboriginal Student Success Advisor, NSCC Truro Campus, 2008). Many of the community colleges in the Atlantic region offer Aboriginal programming. This includes the New Brunswick Community College, the College of the North Atlantic and the New Brunswick College of Craft and Design, to name a few.

2.9 Funding Strategies

Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) provides funding for post-secondary education to Aboriginal students across the country including Atlantic Canada with the Post-secondary Student Support Program and the University College Entrance Preparation Program. These programs assist with tuition fees, books, travel, and living expenses (INAC, 2004). The department also offers funding for post-secondary institutions through the Indian Studies Support Program. These programs are funded as a matter of social policy by the Government of Canada. Eligibility covers Inuit and Status Indian students living on- or off-reserve who are residents of Canada. The aim of the programs is to increase participant employability. However, according to the Auditor General of Canada (2004) there are significant weaknesses concerning the Post-Secondary Student Support Program’s management and accountability framework. The Auditor General goes on to state, “The Department has not clearly defined its roles and responsibilities. The way it allocates funds to First Nations does not ensure equitable access to as many students as possible and the Department does not know whether the funds allocated have been used for the purpose intended” (Auditor General of Canada, 2004, 1). In addition, the Department does not have information about the performance of the program or if the funds are sufficient to
support all eligible students, or that only eligible students are obtaining funding. According to the Auditor General of Canada (2004) the total budget for the program is $273 million a year.

Not all Aboriginal people receive or qualify for post-secondary funding. Furthermore, those who do obtain funding do not all go through the same process. Some First Nations Bands administer funding themselves; others go through central agencies such as the Confederacy of Mainland Mi’kmaq in Nova Scotia. Aboriginal people living off-reserve access funding through the Native Council.

In Labrador, full resident members of the Labrador Inuit Association can gain access to post-secondary education through the Post-secondary Student Support Program. It encourages students to graduate and contribute to the achievement of Inuit self-government and economic self-sufficiency. The program provides financial assistance to eligible Inuit students. While 59% of Inuit people in their early twenties have not completed high school, Labrador has the highest rate of Inuit graduates of post-secondary education compared to any other Inuit region in Canada (ITK Socio-Economic Department, 2005).

Students have reported time and again, that access to appropriate funding is a major concern that needs to be addressed. Augustine’s survey of university and college students in 2002 revealed the need for more funding for individual students, more funding to reach more students, and the need for more funding to take into account living expenses. Students also noted that mature students are often overlooked or not eligible for funding support, and this needs to be addressed (Augustine, 2002).

2.10 Policy Implications from the Literature

What follows is a summary of the broader literature which outlines a variety of recommendations and implications for policy found in various reports and articles for both the elementary-secondary and post-secondary levels.

Elementary and Secondary Levels

Battiste (2005) identified the following foundational principles that she has determined should be followed to ensure that Aboriginal knowledge is honoured in the learning and education of Aboriginal peoples:

- Teach holistic and lifelong learning
- Instil importance of the land
- Link to Elders and community
- Focus on individuals as part of whole (spiritual, intellectual, emotional, and physical selves)
- Acknowledge and foster gifts and abilities
- Include Aboriginal people as part of policy and curriculum development
- Involve parents
- Address unequal funding for education
- Involve Aboriginal people in all stages of research
• Ensure research is ethical

One example of where these principles have come into effect is in Nova Scotia. The signing of the Mi’kmaw Kina’matnewey agreement by nine Mi’kmaq Chiefs and the Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada on February 14, 1997 was critical to establishing the self-government of education in these Mi’kmaq communities. Although Aboriginal control of Aboriginal education in Canada officially began in the early 1970’s, the Mi’kmaw Kina’matnewey agreement is thought to be to most progressive and effective in Canada by enacting “education laws of the participating communities with respect to jurisdiction…[that] shall have paramountcy over federal and provincial education laws” (Orr and Cameron, 2004, p.2).

ITK Socio-Economic Department (2005) recommends the creation of literacy assistance programs, support for language and culture in an integrated and protected fashion, and curriculum development based on Traditional Knowledge. They recommend capacity building to achieve better education outcomes and increased Aboriginal teachers. They also suggest the creation of a national Inuit Education Resource and Research Centre.

Culturally Appropriate Curriculum

McCue (2006) recommends a curriculum that is culturally appropriate, more applied in context, taught by those attuned to Aboriginal cultures, including traditional arts and crafts, and that reflect traditional values. He contends that schools need to create a curriculum that reflects Aboriginal values in which subjects should be derived from these values and taught in accordance with them. “The greatest mistake educators (and legislators) have made with regards to Aboriginal education is assuming that all Aboriginal youth begin their formal education as an empty vessel bereft of prior learning, core values, and codes of conduct” (McCue, 2006, 6). The importance was noted of having Aboriginal people teaching in the classroom, using their own language and culture as the basis for curriculum content, and having Elders coming to the schools to interact with students on a regular basis (Orr and Cameron, 2004). Critchley et al. (2007) argue that since cultural identity influences positive conceptions about oneself, it affects learning so they suggest a formal antiracist sensitivity program for both students and teachers.

One challenge for the creation of First Nations-operated education systems is that many First Nations communities are too small to operate their own schools for all grade levels. Many First Nations students, therefore, must receive some or all of their education in the broader public school system(s). To address this challenge, the Assembly of First Nations recommends that:

Enhanced relationships are needed between First Nations and provincial / territorial ministries, school boards, and schools to support First Nations participation in governance and to develop culturally appropriate programming, teacher recruitment and retention strategies, and methods of tracking First Nations student progress and rates of success in the provincial / territorial systems. Related to this, there must also be an increase in provincial / territorial accountability at all levels to First Nations on these matters (AFN, 2005, p.8).
Language, Literacy, and Applied Skills

There needs to be a stronger focus on building language and literacy skills at the elementary and secondary levels (McCue, 2006; Critchley et al., 2007). Furthermore, curriculum might be expanded to include various life skills such as parenting, health, budgeting, etc. and a focus on students’ traditional language first before English or French (ITK Socio-Economic Department, 2005). McCue (2006) urges policy makers to include Aboriginal content about Aboriginal communities, unique cultural elements of Aboriginal families such as child rearing, gender differences, roles of Elders, the dynamics of intergenerational relationships, and contemporary political, economic and social developments. He also suggests the inclusion of applied manual skills that are geographically and environmentally relevant to their community or region. He argues that these types of courses and skills will make education more meaningful for many students and also provide benefits back to the community. McCue goes on to support the need to teach reading comprehension, Aboriginal science, and traditional Aboriginal numeracy in mathematics (2006).

Neganegijig and Breuning (2007) also recommend the implementation of more native language programs at the elementary, secondary, and post-secondary levels for the reestablishment and maintenance of native languages. Many operate currently but with limited teaching materials, funding, and instructors.

Immersion of students in their own language has been shown to have a positive impact on education outcomes. In assessing the impact among elementary school students in the Mi’kmaw Kina’matnewey system, it was found that by the end of four years in immersion, 21 of the 24 students were fluent speakers in Mi’kmaq, and were able to have conversations in Mi’kmaq with Elders, and “could follow and remain engaged by the oral language of Elders. These young students were also considered to be more pure speakers of the language than most of the students at the high school level” (Orr and Cameron, 2004, p. 16). In addition, a number of First Nations students attending public schools off-reserve (both K-6 and high school) are now able to take “core Mi’kmaq language” courses; this is expected to contribute to more positive education outcomes (Orr and Cameron, 2004, p. 20-22).

Bridging and Support Programs at the Secondary Level

Critchley et al. (2007) reported that many of the students they talked with in their study explained that they encountered difficulties when they returned to class after being absent even for just a few days. They reported that this sometimes led to dropping out of school. Critchley, et al suggested that developing effective protocols to follow when these students returned to class after missing school would help support their return so that they could be successful. Furthermore, they felt that programs should be put in place to support single teenage mothers who wish to return to school. “Whatever can be done to help a young mother continue her studies and complete high school would have far-reaching positive benefits for her and her family and the entire community” (Critchley et al., 2007).
It is interesting to note that the studies summarized above corroborate the findings and recommendations of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People (1996) Concerning Secondary Education. This important report made strong recommendations that encouraged federal, provincial, and territorial governments to collaborate with Aboriginal governments, organizations, and educators to develop or continue developing innovative curricula that reflect Aboriginal cultures and community realities, for delivery: At all grade levels of elementary and secondary schools; In schools operating under Aboriginal control; and In schools under provincial or territorial jurisdiction.

RCAP also recommended that federal, provincial, and territorial governments act promptly to acknowledge that education is a core area for the exercise of Aboriginal self-government. Furthermore RCAP recommended that the federal, provincial, and territorial governments collaborate with Aboriginal governments, organizations, or education authorities, as appropriate, to support the development of Aboriginal controlled education systems by: Introducing, adapting, or ensuring the flexible application of legislation to facilitate self-starting initiatives by Aboriginal nations and their communities in the field of education; mandating voluntary organizations that are endorsed by substantial numbers of Aboriginal people to act in the field of education in urban and non-reserve areas where numbers warrant until such time as Aboriginal governments are established; and providing funding commensurate with the responsibilities assumed by Aboriginal nations and their communities, or voluntary organizations, given the requirements of institutional and program development, costs of serving small or dispersed communities, and special needs accruing from past failures of education services.

(Sections 3.5, 3.5.1, 3.5.2).

These recommendations made by RCAP in 1995 and by a range of authors in the P-12 education literature are still a long ways from being fully realized across the entire Aboriginal context. However, there are hopeful examples of success within some of the regions within the Atlantic region. For instance, the Mi’kmaq Kina’matnewey recognizes the importance of teaching Mi’kmaq language at all education levels and the importance of jurisdiction over education. Mi’kmaq governance and control over education is more likely to ensure the development of education policies that reflect Mi’kmaq values, beliefs, cultures, and language and incorporate Traditional Knowledge (Mi’kmaw Kina’matnewey, 1999). In the case of the Mi’kmaw Kina’matnewey, the following elements were identified by Orr and Cameron (2004, p. 10) as critical:

- Developing leadership capacity through the establishment of Strategic Goals for the organization;
- Establishing an Education Working Group and an Annual Education Symposium;
- Developing and providing policy templates for communities;
- Providing secondary educational services for communities;
- Creating a capital plan and strategy;
- Liaising with the provincial education system through the Tripartite Forum;
- Providing leadership for national and regional initiatives;
- Leading the rollout of national initiatives for First Nations within Nova Scotia; and
In Nova Scotia there was an 18% reduction (from 60% to 42%) of those without high school completion certificates in the nine Mi’kmaw Kina’matnewey communities, between 1991 and 2001 (Orr and Cameron, 2004, p. 36, citing data prepared by INAC).

**Post-Secondary Level**

It has been suggested in the policy literature that the creation of Aboriginal education governing bodies and national councils will lead to the improvement of post-secondary education for Aboriginal peoples. It is also noted that improved governance will lead to some significant opportunities for increased Aboriginal staff and faculty and culturally relevant curricula and more focus on Aboriginal values. Evaluations of existing programs are also a way to increase accountability and improve outcomes. Increased funding for schools, programs and students was also noted as being important.

**Aboriginal Education Councils, Boards, and Governing Bodies**

While individual institutions have responded to needs by setting up programs or departments to address Aboriginal needs, post-secondary education for Aboriginal students has generally developed without a comprehensive and inclusive vision from Aboriginal communities (McCue, 2006). Aboriginal controlled and designed institutions have been developed over the last three decades, but there is a need for a senior council on Aboriginal post-secondary education that would bring members of the post-secondary and Aboriginal communities together to examine issues and develop actions (McCue, 2006). McCue (2006) urges post-secondary institutions to include representation by Aboriginal people on their college and university Boards of Governors and other governing bodies to help identify and develop culturally appropriate post-secondary policies and programs (AIC, 2005).

**More Aboriginal Staff and Faculty**

At the post-secondary level there needs to be more Aboriginal staff and faculty. This would allow for a more welcoming environment, the inclusion of Aboriginal expertise in academic areas, role models, mentors, advisors, and a general sense of equality (R.A. Malatest and Associates Ltd., 2004, Augustine, 2002). This may also have the effect of reducing racism on campuses.

**Culturally Relevant Curriculum and Support**

Aboriginal student numbers are low in sciences and health and culturally relevant curriculum in these disciplines is needed. In the sciences it would be best to teach both western science and Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge so that all scientists have knowledge of both worldviews (CCL, 2007a; Malatest and Associates, 2004) Programs such as the Cape Breton University Mi’kmaw Integrated Science Program could be replicated elsewhere. There should be support centres where Elders can pass along Traditional Knowledge (Orr, 2008a, AIC, 2005, Augustine, 2002). They can act as counsellors and mentors. Innovative programs such as the University of British Columbia’s First Nations House of Leaning need to be promoted and extended. Furthermore, Orr (2008a) also advocates for increased career development practices such as
career fairs and work co-op programs, which will help attain higher employment among Aboriginal graduates. In universities where there are no Native Studies programs or courses specific to Aboriginal content, these should be introduced (Augustine, 2002).

Further to culturally appropriate curriculum, services and support within post-secondary institutions should also meet the needs of Aboriginal students such as having a physical space on campus for Aboriginal students (Augustine, 2002). A centre could allow Aboriginal students and staff to gather, provide support, hold social events, and create a home away from home. Childcare services are also important for many Aboriginal students, as a large percentage of female students are single mothers (Orr, 2008a).

There is also a need for universities and other post-secondary institutions to develop direct relationships with First Nations communities (Augustine, 2002). This includes, for example, offering open houses in communities as a recruiting and information tool, and having Elders from communities come to campus to offer support to students and to speak in classes.

**Evaluation of Aboriginal Programs and Departments**

Programs and departments focusing on Aboriginal topics and issues have grown steadily since the mid-1970s but there has been little evaluation of them (McCue, 2006). Evaluation would identify gaps and the need for new courses, and determine new academic directions. The development of an Aboriginal Post-secondary Report Card to allow for a measure of accountability and enable the Aboriginal population to track its progress is needed. Data on post-secondary graduates has been gathered only on a voluntary basis, and McCue argues that it should be mandatory in order to have a better picture of how the system is operating and if it is meeting the needs of Aboriginal students.

**Increased Funding**

Funding remains a central challenge to accessing post-secondary studies for many Aboriginal people across Canada. According to McCue, “Federal assistance through the PSE support program… has been unable to match the demands of an expanding PSE student population for several years” (2006, 14). Furthermore, the Aboriginal Institutes Consortium called for “the government of Canada [to] … significantly increase the amount of funding available to First Nations students under the national Post-Secondary Student Support Services Program … Funding levels must reflect the costs of attending post-secondary institutions, as identified by the provinces” (AIC, 2005, 74). McCue (2006) suggests that an Aboriginal group be formed to provide directions and guidelines to Aboriginal communities about the appropriate length of time to support students pursuing different post-secondary programs, and how much support should be provided. Furthermore, the Education Plan outlined by the Assembly of First Nations in 2005 (p. 7) noted that there is a need to address the following funding issues concerning post-secondary education:

- More funding for post-secondary education to address the funding gap created by the 2% INAC funding cap and a 400% increase in tuition from 1988 to 2005;
• More financial support for the development of First Nation Institutions of Higher Learning that are controlled by First Nations peoples; and
• The elimination of taxation on post-secondary education assistance.

The House of Commons Committee dealt with funding issues as well and recommended that the 2% funding cap be eliminated (Mayes, 2007). The committee also recommended that increases in funding for post-secondary education programs be based on actual costs, that every eligible Aboriginal student receive adequate funding (including that for tuition, travel, and living expenses) with increases indexed annually to reflect actual increases in these expenses, and that additional eligible expenses should be considered and allowed (such as child care and special needs) (Mayes, 2007).

These findings in relation to increased funding for post-secondary education are similar to the findings of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People (1996) Concerning Post-Secondary Education Funding. The RCAP recommended that the federal government continue to support the costs of post-secondary education for First Nations and Inuit post-secondary students and make additional resources available: to mitigate the impact of increased costs as post-secondary institutions shift to a new policy environment in post-secondary education; and to meet the anticipated higher level of demand for post-secondary education services (Section 3.5.21)

Local Accountability and Coordination

Orr (2008b) recommends the establishment of an interagency committee within individual Mi’kmaq Kina’matnewey communities in Nova Scotia that would allow for better planning and coordination across departments who fund Aboriginal post-secondary education learners. Committee members, as suggested by Orr, could include representatives from government departments such as education, health, social, Band Council, provincial training, Native Employment Offices, Human Resource Development Canada, the Mi’kmaq Education Training Secretariat (METS), and the Provincial Student Loan Department. The main goal would be to achieve greater communication between post-secondary education departments to ensure adequate funding is being provided to First Nation students.

Furthermore, Orr (2008c) recommends the implementation of a data tracking system. He argues that data collection and tracking are primary barriers to the success of First Nation post-secondary students. Better tracking would enable INAC to determine if post-secondary funding is being used for intended purposes. Orr (2008c) recommends the use of an online electronic data collection system that would track nominal roll requirements (name, Band registry number, age, home address, number of dependents, relationship status, etc.), post-secondary funding and expenses (tuition, books, travel, rent, etc.), and course information (name of institution, degree sought, proof of registration, credits, transcripts, explanation for withdrawal, etc.). Orr positions his recommendations on the basis that they will benefit all involved in Aboriginal post-secondary education issues. For example, tracking financial records would ensure that funding is allocated according to INAC guidelines. In addition, the total financial assistance awarded to individual students would be reported and tracked ensuring that funding is adequate but not in surplus. Students would be required to submit supporting documentation such as receipts, and confirm the costs of tuition, residence fees, and travel expenses, along with associated costs of counselling, tutoring, or childcare. Orr also recommends that department(s) responsible for
funding each student be identified within the tracking system in order to identify departments responsible for funding students and to reveal who has applied for and received funding possibly from more than one department or funding agency.

More Aboriginal Controlled Institutions

Many Aboriginal people, including youth, perceive university education as assimilative. McCue (2006) argues this may continue to be the perception until there are more fully funded, accredited Aboriginal controlled post-secondary institutions. The Aboriginal Institutes Consortium recommended that “the government of Canada and the provinces provide adequate funding to Aboriginal institutions in order to ensure Aboriginal students have the necessary supports to realize post-secondary education as a viable option for their futures” (AIC, 2005, 74), and that this funding be available for more than tuition, and include all of the supports that students require.

Such institutions would offer programs and courses that reflect and integrate Aboriginal values, objectives and content. This would potentially enable Aboriginal people to maintain their values and culture while adapting to and being successful in the 21st century. Focusing values and taking charge of their education is the answer to avoiding assimilation and adapting to an ever changing world.

2.11 Summary and Conclusions

There has been some research on the explicit link between post-secondary education outcomes and labour market outcomes, among the Aboriginal population, and some of this research has been focused on Atlantic Canada. There is a positive association between achieving higher levels of education and higher levels of incomes and/or employment rates.

Aboriginal achievement at the post-secondary level is much lower compared to non-Aboriginal achievement because relatively fewer Aboriginal people attend PSE. The low numbers of Aboriginal students in post-secondary institutions are due to a variety of historical, social, financial, cultural and personal barriers. This is due in part to the perceived irrelevant and assimilationist qualities of post-secondary school. However, Aboriginal enrolment and completion rates have been steadily rising. More Aboriginal women attend university while more Aboriginal men attend trades and community colleges. There are also fewer Aboriginal students in sciences, and professional studies such as health care, law, and engineering.

Post-secondary education offers socio-economic benefits to Aboriginal people and their communities such as better health, decreased social exclusion, crime and poverty. It also offers economic development benefits for Aboriginal communities. Aboriginal people are the fastest growing population in Canada and have the potential to change the face of the labour market.

Recognizing the need to enable Aboriginal people to succeed at post-secondary education, Aboriginal groups and others have developed various programs and strategies across the country. These include Aboriginal access programs, community based programs and distance education, Aboriginal controlled institutions, and Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal partnerships.
The literature provides a wide range of recommendations for specific improvements at all levels of the post-secondary education system.

- Increase the number of Aboriginal staff and faculty;
- Create Aboriginal education governing bodies and national councils;
- Provide bridging and support programs for the transition to post-secondary education;
- Increase funding for students to attend post-secondary education institutions;
- Use culturally appropriate curricula;
- Evaluate existing programs to recommend improvements;
- Increase funding for schools, programs, and students;
- Develop literacy entrance tests; and
- Create more Aboriginal controlled institutions that focus on Aboriginal values in education.

Table 3: Summary of Recommendations from the Literature for Action at the Elementary, Secondary and Post-Secondary Levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elementary and Secondary Levels</th>
<th>Post-Secondary Level</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Follow foundational principles for Aboriginal learning</td>
<td>Create a “Senior Council on Aboriginal Post-secondary Education” that would bring together members of the post-secondary and Aboriginal communities together to examine issues and develop actions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create literacy assistance programs for Aboriginal learners</td>
<td>Increase the number of Aboriginal staff and faculty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase the number of Aboriginal teachers</td>
<td>Design culturally relevant curriculum in science and health studies fields to attract more Aboriginal students to these disciplines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design culturally appropriate curriculum (traditional arts and crafts, etc., that reflect traditional values)</td>
<td>Hold career fairs and implement work co-op terms to achieve higher employment levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Include cross-cultural training and awareness for teachers and students</td>
<td>Have on campus support centres that include Elders acting as mentors, child care services, a gathering place for staff and students, a home away from home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have a stronger focus on basic language and literacy skills</td>
<td>Promote innovative programs for Aboriginal students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teach Aboriginal language before English or French and provide more funding for Aboriginal language instruction (immersion instruction in First Nation schools; core language instruction in public schools)</td>
<td>Evaluate and collect data on existing Aboriginal programs and departments to identify gaps, impacts, and determine new academic directions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Include applied manual skills that are geographically and environmentally relevant to their community or region</td>
<td>Implement literacy entrance tests for Aboriginal students without a high school diploma as a way of communicating the importance of literacy at the elementary and secondary levels</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Teach Aboriginal science and numeracy | Increase the amount of funding for students wishing to attend a post-secondary school:  
- More total money in the system  
- More money per student  
- Include a wide range of living expenses as eligible costs for support  
- Annual increases in the amount of money indexed to cost of living |
<p>| Ensure Aboriginal control over education at the | Open more fully funded, accredited Aboriginal |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elementary and Secondary Levels</th>
<th>Post-Secondary Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>elementary and secondary levels</td>
<td>controlled post-secondary institutions that offer programs and courses that reflect and integrate Aboriginal values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Train teachers on classroom communication, Aboriginal child development, dispute resolution, conflict avoidance, the use of storytelling as a pedagogical tool, cooperative learning techniques, the cultural dimensions of authority, etc.</td>
<td>Better data tracking and collection concerning the number of Aboriginal people in each program; entrance and graduation numbers; by community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create more bridging and support programs at the secondary level, especially for single teen mothers</td>
<td>Where possible and where currently not offered, institutions need to create Native Studies programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universities need to create working relationships with First Nations communities, including: delivery of some courses and programs to remote communities; visits to communities for recruiting; offering programs for youth in summer months to engage them in the possibility of choosing a university program when they are preparing to graduate from high school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Methodology

For the empirical portion of this research study the researchers engaged in interviews with people who completed and those who started but did not complete post-secondary education in the 2003-2008 period; and completed interviews with key informants who were familiar with post-secondary and labour force participation. These are discussed in detail below.

3.1 Primary Research

Once secondary sources were reviewed and analysed, interview questionnaires were designed to collect both qualitative and quantitative information. Careful research ethics procedures were designed and ethics approval was granted by the Mount Allison University Research Ethics Board, the Mi’kmaw Ethics Watch, and the Nunatsiavut Government. The consent form and interview questionnaire for recent students are included in Appendices A and B, while those for key informants are in Appendices C and D.

Following the methodological requirements and protocols of the APCNFC and the AAEDIRP, First Nations Chiefs were first contacted and asked if they would be willing to have their Band members participate in the study. Contact was made through faxes, e-mails, letters and telephone calls. Only one Chief declined the invitation to have their community to participate, feeling that their community was too small. None of the other Chiefs said “no” to the invitation, but the majority did not respond with either a “yes” or a “no”. Eleven Chiefs (or their designated representatives) volunteered to have members of their communities participate including Miawpukek, Lennox Island, Millbrook, Membertou, Pictou Landing, Bear River, Eskasoni, Elsipogtog, Woodstock, Metepenagiag, and St. Mary’s. In addition, representatives of the Nunatsiavut Government wished to include beneficiaries of the Labrador Inuit Land Claims Agreement (Inuit people). Collectively these and individuals communities represent all four Atlantic Provinces, and different geographic and socio-economic characteristics (as summarized in Table 1). A list of local contact people was developed and included Chiefs, Education Directors, Economic Development Directors or Officers, and others as appropriate to each community.

Table 4: Summary Profile of Participating Communities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Cultural Group</th>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Pop’n</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eskasoni</td>
<td>Mi’kmaq</td>
<td>NS</td>
<td>rural</td>
<td>3844</td>
<td>Cape Breton, near Cape Breton University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elsipogtog</td>
<td>Mi’kmaq</td>
<td>NB</td>
<td>rural</td>
<td>2884</td>
<td>south east NB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miawpukek</td>
<td>Mi’kmaq</td>
<td>NL</td>
<td>rural</td>
<td>2642</td>
<td>central NL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Mary’s</td>
<td>Maliseet</td>
<td>NB</td>
<td>adjacent to urban</td>
<td>1394</td>
<td>Fredericton area, near UNB and St Thomas University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Millbrook</td>
<td>Mi’kmaq</td>
<td>NS</td>
<td>adjacent to urban</td>
<td>1366</td>
<td>central NS, near an NSCC campus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Membertou</td>
<td>Mi’kmaq</td>
<td>NS</td>
<td>adjacent to urban</td>
<td>1150</td>
<td>Cape Breton, near Cape Breton University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woodstock</td>
<td>Maliseet</td>
<td>NB</td>
<td>rural</td>
<td>823</td>
<td>western NB, near an NBCC campus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lennox Island</td>
<td>Mi’kmaq</td>
<td>PEI</td>
<td>rural</td>
<td>820</td>
<td>western PEI</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In adherence to appropriate research practices involving Aboriginal people, each participating community identified the process and protocols they required for the engagement of their members in the research. For confidentiality reasons they were not willing or able to provide individual names and contact information directly to the research team. Communities contacted their Band members in a wide variety of ways, including, newspaper ads, mass e-mails to recent students, cable television ads, posters in the participating communities, bulk mailing of flyers explaining the study and the need for participants and by obtaining names of recent graduates from Atlantic universities.

These approaches informed potential research participants about the study and invited the individuals in the community to contact the research team directly to arrange for an interview.

All ideas and approaches for contact were approved by the community through the Chief or designated community contact person. A discussion of methodological challenges encountered is presented in Section 2.5. A total of 96 interviews were conducted with recent graduates as well as those who did not complete their studies. The data was analysed using quantitative techniques and the Statistical Package for Social Sciences program called SPSS.

A total of twelve key informants were selected and interviewed for their expert opinions and insights regarding post-secondary education for Aboriginal people and labour force outcomes in Atlantic Canada. They included representatives from the Aboriginal Human Resources Council, the New Brunswick Department of Post-Secondary Education and Training, First Nations Chiefs, education directors, First Nations economic development experts, an Aboriginal Student Success Advisor at a community college, and Aboriginal student program advisors from the three universities in the region with the largest number of Aboriginal students (Dalhousie University, CBU and UNB). All but three of the key informants were Aboriginal. They were contacted by e-mail, telephone, and/or fax and asked if they would participate in a key informant interview. A mutually agreed upon time was set up for a 45 minute telephone interview.

Questions revolved around their professional experience with Aboriginal post-secondary education, challenges and barriers faced by students, recommendations for improvements to increase graduation rates and success finding employment, as well as connections between post-secondary education and Aboriginal community development. Interviews were transcribed and analysed qualitatively by looking for common themes.
Limitations of the Primary Data from Interviewees with Recent Post-Secondary Education Attendees

Attempts were made to interview as many Aboriginal people as possible who had attended a post-secondary institution in the 2003-2008 period, from the eleven First Nations communities and from the Nunatsiavut Region. However, we were only able to interview 96 Aboriginal post-secondary graduates and school leavers combined, so the results should be interpreted with caution. They do not necessarily reflect the views and experiences of all people who could have participated in an interview. This is for two reasons: the first is that not all communities participated and the experiences of people in some communities are not reflected in the results and the small numbers of participants mean that the results are not from the entire population of Atlantic First Nations and Inuit people; secondly, the participants were not chosen or identified on a random basis – they self-selected their participation. It may be that those people who experienced success in finding employment after they completed post-secondary education were more likely and willing to participate in these interviews. Those who had much less success in finding employment, and those who dropped out or did not finish for whatever reason, may have been less likely to have been interested in sharing their personal experiences, and therefore relatively few of these individuals may have chosen to participate. Thus although the number of interviews completed, and the results they provide, are from of a cross-section of the population, they are not representative of the entire Atlantic Aboriginal population who attended post-secondary institutions in the 2003-2008 period.

Demographic Profile of the Interview Participants

Two-thirds of those interviewed are Mi’kmaq, while another quarter are Maliseet and the remainder are Inuit (Figure 1). In terms of First Nation /Aboriginal affiliation, twelve communities participated in the study and half of the interviewees belong to one of Elsipogtog, Eskasoni, Woodstock, and St. Mary’s. The rest of the interviewees belong to the eight other participating communities (Table 2).
Figure 1: Distribution of Interviewees by Cultural Sub-Group

Source: Authors’ calculations from interviewee data.

Table 5: Distribution of Interviewees by Affiliation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Affiliation</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elsipogtog</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eskasoni</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woodstock</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Mary's</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pictou Landing</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metepenagiag</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miawpukek</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beneficiaries of the Labrador Inuit Land Claims Agreement</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lennox Island</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Membertou</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bear River</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Millbrook</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Authors’ calculations from interviewee data.

In Table 3 we show the community of residence for the interviewees at the time of the interviews. Just over one-third resided in one of Elsipogtog, Pictou Landing, and Eskasoni. Just over 20% resided in a variety of “other” communities across Canada, mostly in urban centres both in the Atlantic region and elsewhere.
Table 6: Distribution of Interviewees by Current Place of Residence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Where interviewees live</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elsipogtog</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pictou Landing</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eskasoni</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woodstock</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Mary's</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nunatsiavut Region</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metepenagiag</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miawpukek</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lennox Island</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Membertou</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Authors’ calculations from interviewee data.

Almost three-quarters (74%) grew up on-reserve. A total of 55 respondents, or 57%, are living on-reserve in the same community in which they grew up, while just under 20% of the interviewees grew up off-reserve and continue to live in that same off-reserve community (Figure 2). The balance of the respondents moved from the communities in which they grew up.

Figure 2: Comparison of Where Interviewees Grew Up and Where they Currently Live

Source: Authors’ calculations from interviewee data.

Among the interviewees, 68% are women and 32% are men. According to Mendelson, across Canada there are more Aboriginal women (13%) than Aboriginal men (9%) who are 15 years and older with university level education (2006, 33). Figure 3 shows the age distribution of the interviewees. Close to half of the interviewees are under the age of 30 years while slightly more than 20% are 40 years of age or older, at the time of the interviews.

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7 The authors do not have statistics that include the typical gender split between current Aboriginal students in all post-secondary programs in Canada. Mendelson (2006) does not include this data, either.
3.2 Capacity Building of Researchers

Aboriginal Researchers

A key component of this research project was to build the capacity of Aboriginal researchers. Three Aboriginal graduate level students were hired and were involved in the following activities:

- Receiving initial orientation to the project, and training concerning research ethics, conducting interviews, records management, and other related activities. Two of the students participated in a day-long session at Mount Allison University, while the third received this training via telephone.
- Providing input into the development of the interview questionnaires – for the recent graduates / leavers, and the key informants.
- Participating in two scheduled formal teleconference check-in meetings in which all three student researchers participated. The purposes of these calls was to discuss issues, concerns, how the interviews were going, what the student researchers were learning, and to obtain input on the emerging themes and issues from the interviews.
- Performing data entry, both qualitative (paragraph form, in WORD) for the open-ended questions, and quantitative (using Excel spreadsheets) for the closed questions. Once the interviews were completed, the students forwarded these to the research team for merging.
- Performing data analysis. Each of the students reviewed all of the data tables and qualitative summaries and provided their interpretation of the results, which was used for the final report. In addition, a conference call was held to discuss their ideas and for them to learn from one another.
- Writing the draft report. Two of the students prepared draft text for sections that they were most interested in reporting on, based on their own experiences and perspectives. The research team provided feedback on and edits to the text.

Source: Authors’ calculations from interviewee data.
• Preparing presentation materials. One student assisted with the preparation of a PowerPoint presentation for use at the national Aboriginal Policy Research Conference in Ottawa, March 9-12, 2009. The slides were developed in consultation with the research team, and subsequently edited based on feedback. A second student provided comments on the final presentation materials.

• Presenting research findings. One student co-presented with the Principal Investigator at the national Aboriginal Policy Research Conference in Ottawa, March 9-12, 2009. A second student co-presented with the Principal Investigator at the Life Long Learning – From Youth to Elder Conference on Aboriginal Education held in Fredericton, New Brunswick, March 23-25, 2009.

In addition, the students were provided with regular and on-going individual e-mail and telephone communication during the field research stage to ensure that their work was moving along as planned and to provide advice and guidance on issues as they arose.

**Capacity Building of Non-Aboriginal Researchers**

A further outcome of the project was an increased capacity of the non-Aboriginal research team members in terms of abilities and experience in working with Aboriginal communities and community members. In addition, there was an increase in knowledge about Aboriginal education issues, particularly in the Atlantic Canada context. More specifically, with respect to working with Aboriginal communities and community members, we understand more about the following items:

Band offices are busy with a wide range of administrative and community responsibilities. It may take many attempts, using a variety of forms of communication (fax, email, numerous phone calls, etc.,) to get a question answered, such as “Do you want to participate in our study?” Patience is critical.

It is important to understand that knowledge about region-wide initiatives such as AAEDIRP may be limited in individual communities.

When there is a death in a First Nation community, it affects the entire community. The entire community mourns (and celebrates the life of the individual) together. This means that for a period of time normal routines in the community and the ability to make contact with community members may be disrupted.

Aboriginal people may be leery of or sceptical about welcoming non-Aboriginal researchers into their communities. In part this is due to poor experiences in prior research projects where Aboriginal people and their cultures were not respected nor were they invited to participate in the design and implementation of the project. In part this is due to the perception, and perhaps reality, that nothing comes out of the research that improves the lives of Aboriginal people.

Working with Aboriginal communities and organizations takes patience and a sense of humour.
Adhering to appropriate research ethics processes is critical. In addition to obtaining approval from an institution, there is a need to obtain approval and consent from communities (through their leadership) and individuals. This process takes time.

More specifically, with respect to Aboriginal education issues, we understand more about the following items:

There are many passionate and dedicated individuals in the Aboriginal community who have been working on education issues for many years. They have worked tirelessly for their people to improve the delivery of education, to secure recognition of Aboriginal approaches to education, and to obtain more resource supports for their people. These individuals are knowledgeable and “have been there”. It is important to tap into their experience and wisdom.

There have been improvements in Aboriginal education at the secondary and post-secondary levels in recent years. However, there is still much to be done in terms of providing appropriate and sufficient supports for Aboriginal students. This includes financial support, academic and career counselling support, and creating a culturally welcoming environment (especially at the post-secondary level).

There is a need for more cross-cultural training and awareness for researchers before research projects are started.

There remains significant sensitivity to the past injustices inflicted upon Aboriginal people through the education system. Any researcher working on education and related issues must understand this legacy and recognize that participation in research is filtered through those individual and collective experiences.

3.3 Methodological Challenges

Research in Aboriginal communities requires a careful adherence to ethical approval processes, such as those developed by the Canadian Institutes for Health Research (Cook and Reading, 2008). In Atlantic Canada, when conducting studies in Mi’kmaq communities, researchers must submit an application to the Mi’kmaq Ethics Watch for approval. For research in Inuit communities in Labrador, researchers must submit an application to the Nunatsiavut Government, in addition to obtaining research ethics approvals from the researchers’ own institutions. These additional mandatory ethics review processes are intended to ensure researchers are aware of and respect the cultural beliefs of the communities in which they work (Mi’kmaq Ethics Watch, 2007; Piquemal, 2000; Cook and Reading, 2008). Furthermore, researchers must also seek approval directly from the community with whom they will be working. This level of participation, also referred to as collaborative research, has become the expectation of Aboriginal communities (Piquemal, 2000). While ethics approval processes themselves are not “methodological challenges”, the length of time to obtain approvals did prove to be a hindrance to launching the contact process with individuals.

Once the study was underway, other challenges were encountered. All Atlantic Aboriginal communities were asked to participate in the study; however, individuals from a community
could not be interviewed unless their Chief and Council had given prior consent. Much time was
dedicated to contacting communities to obtain initial consent using e-mail, faxes, and telephone
calls. There was only one situation where a community chose not to participate because they felt
they were too small, while the others did not participate because they did not respond to the
initial requests.

Education departments tended to be the primary point of contact in various communities. They
were unable to provide contact information for recent students because their personal
information was confidential. Thus we relied on third party contact to reach potential
participants. The timing of the study also posed a problem because the start of the interview
period corresponded with the end of the school year. Education departments were preparing for
the end of the school year, and after that, staffs were on vacation. Many Directors were difficult
to reach or did not have the time or resources available to help contact students. Some local
issues also impeded the project’s development such as Band Council elections, deaths, holidays,
Chiefs that became ill, etc.

It was difficult to identify and contact former students who had dropped out of post-secondary
education programs. Attempts were made to make contact through post-secondary institutions
but this was a challenge for them as well. Incentives to encourage volunteers to participate as
research subjects were not used. In hindsight this may have limited the interest of some potential
interviewees.
4. Labour Market Outcomes of Aboriginal People Who Attended Post-Secondary Education

In this section we explore the labour market outcomes of Aboriginal people interviewed for this study, and compare the results for those who completed their post-secondary education to those who did not. For the purpose of our analysis, interviewees were classified as “Completed PSE” if they completed at least one post-secondary education program or degree, regardless of whether they completed a first program and subsequently completed more, or if they were currently in progress in a subsequent post-secondary program. All others were classified as “Did Not Complete PSE”. Under these criteria, 75 of the 93 interviewees or 81% “Completed PSE” and 18 of 93 or 19% “Did Not Complete PSE”. (Note: 3 of 96 interviewees provided insufficient information to categorize their completion status.)

Figure 4 shows that the labour market outcomes of the two groups are very different. Whereas 75% of those who “Completed PSE” were working full time, less than half of those who “Did Not Complete PSE” were doing so. Furthermore, only 7% of those who complete PSE were unemployed and looking for work, compared with almost 18% of those interviewees who “Did Not Complete PSE”.

Working in the Community – Completers and Non-Completers

A particular focus of the study was to understand whether or not Aboriginal people are able to find employment in their chosen field. Furthermore, another goal was to understand the direct and indirect linkages between PSE completion and the impact on economic and social development outcomes in Aboriginal communities. This was a particular concern because of the potential positive impact that post-secondary educated people could have on local Aboriginal communities.
Some of our interviewees left their post-secondary institution prior to completion of their program and later returned for a second attempt. In these cases, most of these students that returned to PSE were usually successful. Tables 7 and 8 summarize those collective experiences.

Table 7 summarizes the experiences of all interviewees who completed at least one post-secondary education program. It summarizes their immediate experience in finding employment after they completed their post-secondary education. A total of 69 interviewees who completed at least one post-secondary education program also provided details of their job search experience. Almost all of them found a job after completing post-secondary education. 83% found employment in their general field of study in their home community. There were also very positive labour market outcomes for Aboriginal PSE graduates who grew up on reserve. Almost half of the Aboriginal people interviewed grew up on reserve and 80% of this sub-group found work in their home communities in a job directly related to their general field of study.

**Table 7: Labour Market Outcomes of Those Who Completed Post-Secondary Education, Location of Employment and in Field of Study**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Found a job</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In general field of study</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>84.6%</td>
<td>(of the 65 who found a job)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the community</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>86.2%</td>
<td>(of the 65 who found a job)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working in community &amp; in field of study</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>83.6%</td>
<td>(of the 56 working in the community)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| All interviewees who completed post-secondary education, regardless of community they grew up in (69 interviewees) |
| All interviewees who completed post-secondary education, people who grew up on-reserve only (45 interviewees) |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Found a job</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In general field of study</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>81.4%</td>
<td>(of the 43 who found a job)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the community</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>95.3%</td>
<td>(of the 43 who found a job)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working in community &amp; in field of study</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>80.5%</td>
<td>(of the 41 working in the community)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Authors’ calculations from interviewee data.
Table 8 reports findings about the labour market outcomes for the 39 Aboriginal people that indicated that they did not complete a post-secondary education program. First, relatively fewer (80% compared with 94%) found employment. Secondly, relatively more (96% compared with 86%) of those who found a job did so in their home communities. Thirdly, relatively fewer (55% compared with 84%) found employment in their general field of study.

The experiences of finding employment for the 30 interviewees who grew up on-reserve and who reported that at some point they did not complete a post-secondary program generally mirror those experiences of the total Aboriginal population interviewed who reported not completing a program.

### Table 8: Labour Market Outcomes of Those Who Did Not Complete Post-Secondary Education, Location of Employment and in Field of Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>All interviewees who did not complete post-secondary education, regardless of community they grew up in (39 interviewees)</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Found a job</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>79.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In general field of study</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>54.8%</td>
<td>(of the 31 who found a job)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the community</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>96.8%</td>
<td>(of the 31 who found a job)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working in community &amp; in field of study</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>(of the 30 working in the community)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>All interviewees who did not complete post-secondary education, people who grew up on-reserve only (30 interviewees)</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Found a job</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>86.7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In general field of study</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>53.8%</td>
<td>(of the 26 who found a job)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the community</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>96.3%</td>
<td>(of the 26 who found a job)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working in community &amp; in field of study</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>(of the 26 working in the community)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Authors’ calculations from interviewee data.
Figure 5, shows that about one-third of those who completed their post-secondary education were working in social sciences, education, and general government services, while less than one-quarter of those who did not complete, were doing so. This is the standard classifications used by Statistics Canada in census reporting. A larger proportion of those who completed their post-secondary education were working in business, finance, and administration, or in health care occupations, while a larger proportion of those who did not complete were working in natural and applied science fields or in management positions.

Figure 5: Current Occupations, Comparison of Those Who Did and Did Not Complete Post-Secondary Education

Source: Authors’ calculations from interviewee data.
As shown in Figure 6, the two groups trained for similar occupations (in their most recent post-secondary education program). About one-third of the interviewees in each group studied in fields that would lead them to work in social sciences, education, and general government services. Close to one-quarter trained for employment in business, finance, and administration.

Figure 6: Occupations Trained for, Comparison of Those Who Did and Did Not Complete Post-Secondary Education

Source: Authors’ calculations from interviewee data.
Figure 7 shows that close to 60% of the interviewees classified as having completed post-secondary education are in fact currently working in a field directly related to what they studied. However, it also shows that just under half of these were working in a job that they actually desire. Among those who did not complete a post-secondary program, 46% were working in a field related to what they were studied, while just over half reported that they were working in a field that is closely related to what they had desired (even if it was not related to what they had originally planned to do when they started their post-secondary program).

Figure 7: Match Between Current Occupation and What Was Trained for, and What is Desired

Source: Authors’ calculations from interviewee data.
About 60% of the interviewees have attended more than one post-secondary institution (Figure 8); this figure also includes people who started and/or completed more than one degree or program at the same institution (such as completing both a bachelor’s and a master’s degree at the same university). In some cases, individuals switched institutions after completing a program and in other cases they did not complete a program of study at one institution but later went to another to finish their post-secondary education.

**Figure 8: Number of Post-Secondary Education Programs Started / Attended, All Interviewees**

![Figure 8: Number of Post-Secondary Education Programs Started / Attended, All Interviewees](image)

Source: Authors’ calculations from interviewee data.

Table 9 shows the total number and percentage of interviewees who attended each type of post-secondary institution. More of the interviewees have attended UNB and CBU than any other. (These numbers and percentages do not add to 96 or 100% which is the total number of interviewees because people may have attended more than one institution and therefore are counted in each.)

**Table 9: Post-Secondary Education Institutions Attended, All Interviewees, All Programs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PSEs Attended</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent of all interviewees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University of New Brunswick</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>40.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cape Breton University</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dalhousie University</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Brunswick Community College</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nova Scotia Community College</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private colleges</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Thomas University</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other universities</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Francis Xavier University</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other colleges</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College of North Atlantic</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Prince Edward Island</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Authors’ calculations from interviewee data.
5. Challenges and Barriers to Completing PSE Studies

In this section we focus on what prevents Aboriginal students from completing post-secondary education. In particular we focus on understanding the issues and concerns of sub-groups, including those who attended universities compared to other institutions, gender, reserve status, and other factors.

Examining where interviewees were born and their most recent post-secondary education outcomes, we found that 92% of the interviewees who grew up off-reserve and 77% of those who grew up on-reserve completed their most recent post-secondary program(s).

Among Aboriginal women who were interviewed, 86% completed their most recent post-secondary program, while for Aboriginal men it was 69%.

About 26% of interviewees’ mothers, and 23% of interviewees’ fathers, completed some type of post-secondary education. Fully 60% of interviewees came from families where neither parent had completed post-secondary education.

Figure 9 shows the completion outcomes among interviewees based on the most recent type of post-secondary institution they attended. Among those who attended (or were attending at the time of the interview) university, over 40% were in progress (working on a second degree or program) with their degree while over 40% completed their degree and only 8% did not complete their university program. Among those who attended (or were attending at the time of the interview) community college, about one third completed, one third were in progress, and the remaining one third did not complete their program.

When we look at all of the post-secondary education programs that each interviewee started (regardless of whether it was their first, second, or third program), we found that 53% of the programs were successfully completed, another 24% were in various stages of “progress,” and 24% were not completed.
The most common programs for which Aboriginal people registered in post-secondary education are Humanities, Business/Management, and Education (Figure 10). The least common were Math/Computer Science, Visual/Performing Arts, Trades, Personal Services (including protective Services and Transportation), and Secretarial/Office Management. However, within the three most common programs, there were a large proportion of students in the Business programs who were “in progress”; many of these students were continuing on a part-time basis towards their degree. There is a similar situation with those who registered for Education programs; a relatively large proportion of them were “in progress”. Finally, a significant proportion – 26% – of those who registered for Humanities programs did not complete their program.

Although the absolute numbers are small eight of thirteen who registered for Health programs (including parks and recreation programs) completed them, as did eight of nine who registered for Physical and Life Sciences programs.
Aboriginal people who started but did not complete a post-secondary education program were asked to identify the single most important barrier preventing them from doing so. The two main reasons given were changes in their family status (such as a death in the family or an illness in the family) or that they experienced academic problems (Figure 11). It is important to note that each individual’s circumstances are unique and it is therefore not surprising that a variety of “other” reasons were identified as the single most important reason.

Individuals were asked to rate on a scale of 1 to 5 (with 5 being a very important barrier) the relative importance of various factors which prevented them from completing their post-
secondary program. For each of the eight highest rated barriers, the degree to which they were barriers was relatively low, registering less than “3” on a scale of 1 to 5. Taking a break from post-secondary education (and then deciding not to return), struggling to find a balance between school and family, and feeling that they were not adequately prepared for post-secondary education, registered higher than other factors as contributing to non-completion of post-secondary education (Figure 12).

**Figure 12: Relative Importance of Various Factors Serving as Barriers to Completing Post-Secondary Education, by Gender, Institution Type, and Reserve Status**

[Graph showing relative importance of barriers]

Source: Authors’ calculations from interviewee data.

Women rated personal and family-related issues such as struggling to find the balance between family and school, and taking a break, as more of a barrier to completion than did men. Men rated social and employment related issues such as lack of support (from friends, from community) and taking a job, as more of a barrier to completion than did women. The pattern of responses was quite similar between those who attended university and those who attended other post-secondary institutions (and did not complete their studies). However, those who attended other post-secondary institutions rated lack of support from friends and cost issues as more of a barrier to completion than did those who attended universities.

Interviewees who grew up off-reserve and did not complete their studies rated issues such as taking a break, being too far from family, and cost, as more of a barrier to completion than did those who grew up on-reserve.

The barriers described by our interviewees are related to the broad areas identified in the Aboriginal PSE policy literature related to personal and family barriers. Some of our interviewees listed a lack of support from friends and lack of community support as barriers they faced while attempting to complete post-secondary studies. Respondents did not mention the legacy of residential schools or the presence of racism or discrimination as being barriers to
completion, which is similar to the findings related to historical barriers associated with the literature. The lack of support from home communities is both a personal and family barrier but may also be indirectly tied to lasting impacts of residential schools and negative perceptions of education in general.

Aboriginal people who did complete a post-secondary program were asked to identify the single most important factor contributing to their successful completion. The main factors cited were: the support of their parents and family, their personal drive to want to find a good job, and general personal motivation. Other factors cited as being the single most important include friends, financial help from their Band, and having support from their teachers or faculty at their post-secondary institution (Figure 13). These findings suggest that although there are a range of individual, institutional, and community factors that individuals perceived as contributing to success for these interviewees, family support was probably seen as the greatest contributor to their success.

Figure 13: Main Reason Contributing to Completing a Post-Secondary Education Program

Source: Authors’ calculations from interviewee data.
These same individuals were asked to rate, on a scale of 1 to 5 (with 5 being a very important factor) the relative importance or impact of various factors which helped them to complete their post-secondary education program. The degree of impact or extent to which each of the top four factors were viewed as being very important to their success was relatively high, registering more than “4” on a scale of 1 to 5. This data suggests that four big factors in interviewees success were: wanting to find a good job, support from parents and family, financial help from their Band, and the supportive role of post-secondary education teachers and faculty (Figure 14).

Figure 14: Relative Importance of Various Factors Contributing to Completing Post-Secondary Education, by Gender, Institution Type, and Reserve Status

Source: Authors’ calculations from interviewee data.

Women rated their desirability to find a good job and the support of parents and families higher than did men. Men rated financial help from their Band and from other sources higher than did women. There were almost no differences in the relative importance of various supportive factors between university and non-university attendees, although those who successfully completed a university program rated the importance of having a part-time job higher than those who attended a non-university program. As factors contributing to their success, those who grew up on-reserve rated the following higher than those who grew up off-reserve: their desire to find a good job; the support of parents and families; and financial support from elsewhere. Among those who grew up off-reserve, financial help from their Band was a more important factor.

According to responses from key informant experts as well as these PSE student interviewees, four barriers have a particular impact: lack of preparation at the high school level; lack of career planning; lack of support while at post-secondary school; and funding issues. These are discussed in more detail below.
5.1 Lack of Preparation at High School Level

The research highlighted that both student and institutional informants perceived that high school experiences were not adequately preparing Aboriginal students for post-secondary education. Interviewees who successfully completed post-secondary education indicated their high school experience was the least helpful factor influencing their success. Furthermore, of those who failed to complete post-secondary education, inadequate preparation and struggle to balance school and family life were ranked among the top three reasons for their lack of success.

A number of interviewees indicated they felt that as students they were not taught to value education. Key informants stressed the importance of promoting education early, by presenting post-secondary education not as an “If I go” but “when I go” option. The standards at high school were perceived as being inconsistent with low student expectations. Thus not all students felt they were adequately prepared to succeed at post-secondary education. The expectations in post-secondary institutions were noted to be more demanding and students often felt they ended up failing because they were ill-equipped to deal with the transition to higher academic standards and they often experienced institutional culture shock.

Many interviewees and key informants recommended that high schools offer skills development programs. The types of programs suggested revolved around explaining university programs and career paths, helping students develop life skills, and providing emotional support that explain challenges other students have faced. If students do not get the right information soon enough it can have implications for inappropriate course selection and lead to frustration. The programs may involve information sessions, trips to large centres to expose youth to city life, visits from post-secondary institution representatives, or field trips to local post-secondary schools. The emotional stress experienced due to culture shock was especially predominant for those students who transitioned from reserve life to academic life in urban settings. In high school there were often strong community support networks; whereas in post-secondary institutions students often felt they were left to be independent. Students need to have opportunities for support to transition to their new PSE environment when dealing with such personal things as transportation, language barriers, culture shock, financial budgets, schedules, social life balance, distance, accommodations, and day care.

5.2 The Need for Career Planning

Students and PSE support personnel we interviewed agreed that a lack of career planning has been a barrier to completing post-secondary education. They suggested that students be informed early on in their transition towards their PSE education about possible career options through such matters as career fairs or hands on/experiential learning through coop programs. As one Education Director said, “We need to do more promotion around trades. Especially if students have no clue what they want to do” (Key informant interview with an Education Director, 2008). An Education Director provided an example where grade 10-12 students have career planning for three years. This Director found these students tended to take more interest in their studies after learning about career paths and what course were needed. They encouraged students to study different career paths and then do a presentation. They also found summer placements for students in the field where they could see if they wanted to pursue that career or not.
Participants in this study identified the need for career planning at all levels, even in elementary school. For example, a manager with Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour explained,

*Better infrastructure in Band-operated elementary school [is needed]. I met an employment counsellor out west who visits grade one classrooms on First Nations. He takes the students for a tour of their community. He looks at different things such as water at fountain and says, ‘Huh, how do you suppose that got to be there? We’ll need plumbers, that requires grade 12, and more training. We’ll need a plumber on the reserve.’ He continues and looks at how things are built and the need to repair and build new buildings and talks about carpenters, electricians, etc. He goes into the Band Council and talks about managers, business people, and the need for public service backgrounds. They then visit the school, the clinic, etc. He then goes back and visits them in grade 5 and individually in grade 9. He sees light bulbs going on all the time. They are exposed to the job options and the need for them. You can’t expect someone to say they want to be a manager if they have no experience or exposure to it* (Key informant interview with a Program Manager from Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour, 2008).

An Economic Development Advisory noted that career planning assistance should follow in the high school years as well. “Counselling needs to be explored at the high school level to help with areas of study, and to explain university programs and career paths. I think we are lacking in that respect” (Key informant interview with an Economic Development Advisor, 2008). One Aboriginal Human Resources Council representative noted that formal career guidance is necessary because many Aboriginal students may be the first in their family to decide to go on to post-secondary education. Thus, their parents and relatives may not be able to help them plan their career path. She said, “The steps involved in entering a certain position should be spelled out. And these issues aren’t being discussed at the supper table. If parents and aunts and uncles didn’t go to post-secondary education, they don’t have any advice to offer. There is high unemployment on-reserve. Students need career counselling early on” (Key informant interview with Aboriginal Human Resources Council representative, 2008). Furthermore, as one Education Director noted, the high school years are a crucial time for many Aboriginal youth. They need guidance to help them choose a responsible path that leads to higher education since it is easy to get caught up in the negative side of reserve life:

*It’s really frustrating. You need to grab kids right out of high school and have them continue. If not, you could lose them in one year after graduating from high school. They are on the reserve day and night and can get into drinking and drugs. If they break the path, the responsibilities, the focus, then we lose them. They will get caught up in what is going on in the reserve. Keep the*
An Education Director noted that career planning can and should also continue at the post-secondary level. Once Aboriginal students get to college or university they may need assistance in choosing the right courses for their desired or intended career. “A lot of students are not aware of what courses to take. They need advice on what to choose, majors and minors, guidance. It could be the student’s fault for not asking and not seeking out help. But there should be more support from the university” (Key informant interview with an Education Director, 2008).

Recent students we interviewed who were not able to complete their studies said that having access to or making use of academic advisors and career counsellors could have helped them succeed. Furthermore, when recent students were asked to provide suggestions for the future they said that they would like to see their communities communicate requirements for jobs that are available at home and they also would like to have role models come into the community to talk to students about career paths. They also identified that schools should hold job fairs and have resource centres that provide information about different options for programs and prospects for jobs.

The fact that few interviewees expressed a clear career goal or plan as the reason why they applied for post-secondary education supports the need for more attention to career planning counselling. Many said they wanted a “better job” and a “better future” and one recent student said, “I had a desire to be better. I wanted to get an education so I could choose a career and not have my career choose me. I had some discussion with the Director of Education where they gave me some counselling and guidance. I intended to do law, but found out how long it would take to complete. Then I had some friends that were doing education, so I looked into that and decided that was better.” Many other respondents said things such as “I wanted to better myself so I could get employment and earn a living” and “I wanted a better job so I could support my family and create a better life for my kids”. These stories suggests that assistance with career planning may be helpful as it may lead to better awareness of employment options for post-secondary educated Aboriginal people in Atlantic Canada.

5.3 Lack of Support at Post-Secondary Level

Better support at the post-secondary level for Aboriginal students in Atlantic Canada may also help more students complete their studies, which may then lead to improved employment outcomes. The lack of support for students once they reach the post-secondary level was considered a common barrier to completing post-secondary studies. Lack of support was cited as coming in different forms such as a lack of cultural awareness within institutions, and among teachers and other students, and lack of support for dealing with social issues involved in living off-reserve for the first time such as dealing with a landlord, finding childcare, and accessing reliable transportation to get to school.

Some of the post-secondary support people interviewed said that cultural awareness activities are needed in post-secondary institutions. One Director of Education said, “Sometimes First Nations [students] can be picked on in class just for being First Nations. If you aren’t strong willed that
could deter you from continuing the course or staying at the school’’ (Key informant interview with an Education Director, 2008). Similarly, a representative with the Aboriginal Human Resources Council stated that she felt dropout rates were related to feelings of ‘‘alienation’’. One recent student said that while at school in the early 1990s she had rocks thrown at her, was stalked and other students played dorm pranks on her. Furthermore, post-secondary institutions may not always be accommodating to Aboriginal culture on-reserve. For example, a representative from the Aboriginal Human Resources Council explained,

*I believe [the lower completion rate for Aboriginal students] is due to the cultural component. I feel that those who do better have maintained a closer link to their home communities, as she did. But it comes at a cost too. If you want to go home because there was a death in the community, you end up missing three or four days of school and have a hard time getting caught up. Communities are close knit and it is important to be home for those kinds of things. But then you fall behind in school, you can’t get notes, and while it may not be the main reason for dropping out, it may be one of them. You also wonder what you are missing at home while you are away at school* (Key informant interview with a representative from the Aboriginal Human Resources Council, 2008).

By contrast, Aboriginal students who attend post-secondary education institutions which have Aboriginal resource centres, and which have Aboriginal staff and faculty, often have a much more positive experience. One recent student said,

*At CBU, I was surrounded by Mi’kmaq faculty and the familiarity helped. It was inspiring. They showed me my history, showed what needed to be done, what could be done. Then they challenged me to do more and work harder. At DAL, it wasn’t the same because there weren’t the same mentors. It was harder to understand how it all fit together and where I fit into everything. I was glad I started at CBU because learning in that comfortable environment gave me the confidence to succeed and continue.*

Cultural issues and racism directed at Aboriginal post-secondary students are not only present in post-secondary education institutions, but also in First Nations communities. A Program Manager from Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour said, “Aboriginal people are not encouraged to go to school. School is where you are hurt. Across Canada those who do make it to post-secondary are sometimes called ‘Apples’ by some Aboriginal people – red on the outside and white on the inside” (Key informant interview with a Program Manager from Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour, 2008).

Besides dealing with cultural issues, bad attitudes and racism on and off-reserve, students in post-secondary education also have to deal with daily life away from home and sometimes in a big city. One key informant with the Aboriginal Human Resources Council said, “In an urban setting Aboriginal students have to figure out how to get a bus pass, deal with a landlord, etc.
They have left the social safety net of their community in a non-native world.” Childcare is also a big challenge especially if the student is a single parent. A recent student we interviewed said, “I had a hard time finding a sitter for the children. I didn’t feel welcome in class when breastfeeding.” Reliable transportation can be another daily challenge for students. One key informant with the Nova Scotia Community College said, “Transportation is also a problem. Our campus is only a 5 minute drive from Millbrook but people need their own vehicles. They aren’t motivated to walk in the rain or the cold. And carpooling can be tricky, if the driver is late, then everyone ends up being late. Reliable transport is needed.” Likewise, a recent student said, “I missed a lot of classes due to lack of gas money.”

Some of the interviewees suggested that high school programs should provide more emotional support for students who have gone to post-secondary institutions, to help during the transition in that crucial first year. They may help introduce students to role models such as teachers, professionals, guidance councillors, or other students. Guidance counsellors and others who encouraged students in high school could continue to contact them and provide encouragement. Along with this, it is important to communicate at their level so they feel comfortable asking questions, and taking direction. Students do not always feel comfortable asking questions because they do not want to appear ignorant. One respondent explained that they found students were more comfortable communicating online, using MSN or Facebook.

Most Aboriginal post-secondary students are mature students who enter PSE sometime after leaving high school. Community colleges offer adult learner programs where mature students can obtain their high school equivalent without being surrounded by younger students. They also benefit from programs that help them to develop life, career, academic, and emotional skills. Programs that help them become familiar with campus life when they finish upgrading will assist them to transition to other post-secondary education programs. In addition, although many students go into university directly from high school through the traditional progression, upgrading is often needed.

### 5.4 Funding Issues

Lack of adequate funding is a crucial barrier which prevents many Aboriginal students from succeeding at post-secondary education.

The funding situation varies greatly from First Nation to First Nation in Atlantic Canada. The amount of money available, eligibility, length of funding, etc. differs from community to community. For example, one First Nations Chief said, “Everyone who wants to go to post-secondary education can go because we provide funding. We are able to work through the waiting list too” (First Nation Chief interview, 2008). In contrast, an Education Director from another First Nation said, “The amount of money given for living allowances is not comparable at all to [mainstream] New Brunswick student loans.... A lot of courses are also not covered through our Band funding such as some two year programs at NBCC. Vocational and trade programs should be covered through our funding from INAC” (Education Director interview, 2008). This Education Director went on to say that one year programs are funded by HRSDC but many students are turned away because of a lack of funding. Furthermore, she said that INAC does not fund attendance at programs offered at private post-secondary education institutions,
nor do they fund all programs at NBCC. “Most of our students go to university because that is the funding we can approve” (Education Director Interview, 2008).

A representative from the Aboriginal Human Resources Council said that Bands may supply some funding but it generally is not enough and students have to learn to budget carefully, something they are not used to doing. Furthermore, the allotted living allowance may not be enough for single parents with dependent children. Similarly, an Education Director said:

_We don’t refuse anyone who wants funding so the Band has gone into deficits, or we take money from other programs which can create problems. We should be able to allow all to go. We do have rules to make students responsible though. If they fail, they have to take a year off.... They only get $775 for all [monthly] living expenses which may not even cover rent in some places. So many have to get part time jobs and this takes away from their school. Some can’t survive and end up having to work full time_ (Education Director Interview, 2008).

In another First Nation, the Education Director said that if the Band Council pays for four years of education, then the student is required to put in four years working for the community. He said, “That way, the skills come home” (Education Director Interview, 2008).

It seems that while many Bands are short on funding for post-secondary institutions, some government departments and agencies have money that is going unused. A representative from the Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour said her department is constantly discussing how to get more Aboriginal people to apply for their funding. She explained that between 2006 and 2008 they had only 119 Aboriginal clients compared to thousands from the general population.

Student informants supported the views of most PSE support people; confirming that there is inadequate funding available for Aboriginal post-secondary education. One said, “I couldn’t get any funding, and had to support myself. With the transition year program if you passed they would pay your tuition right through the end of your degree.” Students noted that they often experienced racial discrimination from non-Aboriginals regarding their funding situation. One former student said, “Other students discriminated me because of the funding, others thought I didn’t deserve it or didn’t work for it.” Another echoed these sentiments and said “There was only one instance that I can remember ever there being any discrimination. This was when a co-student said to me, ‘My parents are paying for your education by paying taxes’.”

There is a need for increased funding, a re-examination of funding criteria and eligibility (as many program options are not currently funded), and for improved promotion about existing funding programs to increase take-up. Students need to be able to obtain funding to access and complete their post-secondary studies so that they will have access to the appropriate employability skills to participate fully in the labour market.
The Staff Perspective: What’s Working Well, What’s Needed, At Three Atlantic Universities

The following are helpful in assisting Aboriginal students:

- Transition/Bridging Year programs which offer academic upgrading and general support
- Student centres
- Resources: study rooms, phone, Elders, tutors
- Banquets, ceremonies, celebrations
- Guidance on course selection, careers, other information sessions

The following issues still need to be addressed:

- More Aboriginal staff
- More full time staff for counselling and tutoring
- More people teaching the language(s)
- Mature students have special needs and challenges (funding, child care, housing)
- Low self-esteem among many Aboriginal students
- Adaptation to urban life
- More courses and course content that reflect Aboriginal culture

(Summarized from authors’ interviews with representatives from UNB, CBU, and Dalhousie, 2009)
6. The Hunt for Employment

Once an Aboriginal person has completed high school and a post-secondary program, she or he still has the challenge of searching for and securing employment. Key informants were asked how Aboriginal people currently find employment and what can be done to help more Aboriginal people find jobs in the future. Recent students, both those who completed their studies and those who did not, were asked about their experiences finding a job after graduating or leaving school.

One First Nations Chief we interviewed explained that employment counsellors within First Nation communities will help those who seek them out to find jobs. In addition, the Band Council is able to employ students for the summer and often in their field of study. Furthermore, some First Nations have an Aboriginal Human Resources Development Agreement (AHRDA) through Service Canada which helps PSE graduates with career planning. Tribal organizations such as the Mi’kmaq Confederacy of PEI offer mentorship programs.

A representative with the Aboriginal Human Resources Council feels that graduates not only need a good education but also real world work experience and that when combined, the person has a lot to offer his or her First Nation community. She said, “People come home after their education and expect top paying jobs but they have no experience so they end up being underemployed for their education level but due to a lack of outside experience”. As an example, a recent graduate had trouble finding employment once she has a university degree: “I was only able to get cleaning jobs. I had no problem getting jobs before university, after my degree it was frustrating for me.”

An Aboriginal student success advisor with the Nova Scotia Community College system said that Aboriginal students can use services at their college to help them find work as well as accessing work placements. She explained that their slogan is “making our students employable”. Other key informants including First Nations Education Directors and Economic Development Directors and Advisors explained that people in their communities access the local human resources office for resume and career search skills workshops, as well as meeting with Human Resources Coordinators and Employment Counsellors. In addition, there are also Aboriginal Employment Coordinators at the provincial government level.

An Education Director in New Brunswick said her community uses the Pathfinder Program that fits students with jobs that suit them. It is a sort of career counselling program that helps students find work at different summer jobs such as music studios, with paramedics, home energy audit consultants, or with Natural Resources Canada. She said, “If they get the right fit, then they know what they want to do”.

A key informant with the Aboriginal Human Resources Council discussed the importance of recruitment fairs which target Aboriginal students and recent graduates, such as the recent high level national event in Vancouver (April 6-8, 2009) featuring 100 large corporations. Formats which provide one-to-one contact between employers and potential employees are very important, especially when combined with a trade show demonstrating the products, services, and attributes of employers. Events such as this have been developed in direct response to the
often-heard question by employers about where to find Aboriginal talent. Over the course of this particular event, each employer interviewed eight top notch Aboriginal students.

All key informants agreed that more could be done to help Aboriginal people find work. In particular, one First Nations Chief said that “those who do not get degrees can’t always find work at home at a reasonable pay level. We need to develop opportunity for them at home.... The other challenge is that while we need to build opportunities we also need qualified people.” She went on to say, that if she has to hire a non-Aboriginal person for a particular job, she will. She explained that at least the position is there and it will be ready for her people when they are ready for that kind of job. She said in her community they are creating research and technical positions currently. She said “It used to be there was no need to go to school to get a job in the community, but we are developing.”

One answer to the job hunt challenge is for First Nations to partner with local off-reserve companies requiring employees. For example, an Education Director from one community in Newfoundland and Labrador explained that at one point they needed a lot of infrastructure built in his community and so the Band employed a relatively large number of people. But this is coming to an end and so is the need to employ many people with skills as carpenters and mechanics. The community has begun to partner with local corporations for job placements. He said the Band Council provides their salaries and the off-reserve company provides the employment.

Another example comes from a New Brunswick First Nation that has partnered with NB Power Corporation to offer summer job placements and internships. Students work with human resources staff, photographers, energy conservation people, and others within the corporation. Students get to see if they really like a particular career path and what it takes to get a job. Some of the recent graduates interviewed explained how their student placement jobs helped them get full time work. One said, “I qualified for summer student placement the summer after graduation. Then I was able to transition from student placement to full time receptionist, which was very helpful.”

Similarly, an Economic Development Advisor with a district council said that more capacity development work is needed on-reserve and that he is becoming more and more involved. He said that First Nations communities cannot provide jobs for everyone but there is a lot of opportunity off-reserve. He explained the counselling and life skills training should be offered by district councils and tribal councils including role models, hearing from graduates of university programs, and listening to success stories.

An Economic Development Director in a First Nation community said that having mentors such as Elders and people from outside the community would benefit people during their employment search.

An Aboriginal Student Success Advisor said that what is missing is long term career planning. She gave the example of one student who had a university degree and two college diplomas but still could not find a job. When asked what could be done to help her, this person said there just
were not any jobs in her field near her home and she did not want to move. This Aboriginal Student Success Advisor explained:

*There is a general lack of wanting to relocate. There can be implications for them and their children. There are also myths and stereotypes about moving off-reserve – that they will get taxed to death, that they will get loads of money back if they file their taxes, that buying [a house is] so scary compared to renting. Why should they leave their support system? They get looked after by their Band. However, those who are self-reliant and do leave go on to have much success, but the question is how to persuade others to do the same* (Aboriginal Student Success Advisor Interview, 2008).

This Aboriginal Student Success Advisor would like to see incentives and programs to attract Aboriginal people to certain professions in Atlantic Canada, similar to programs in the Prairies. However, she explained that things are not as organized and developed organizationally in Atlantic Canada as they are in the west:

*There are so many issues here…. And they relate to first contact. We have had contact the longest. The west has a more solid foundation. We are still getting over our issues and the raw stuff like residential schools, suicide, drugs and alcohol abuse and the political BS that goes in our communities. We are still on shaky ground so it is hard. There is so much confusion and frustration. And if I do get a degree, why should I bother going back to my messed up community. I make it sound so depressing but there are many people working to make it better. (Key informant interview, 2008).*

In some First Nation communities a condition of post-secondary funding is having to return to the community to work. One graduate said, “[Finding work] was a given. It was one of the conditions of funding that I come back to the community for a matching amount of time. That was good. I have a job waiting. If there was no job available then I could go my own way, I owed nothing to the community.”

Those who did not complete their studies spoke of the difficulties they had in searching for a job. One person said, “It wasn’t easy finding jobs. Although I did find some janitorial jobs, they were nothing that was really great.” Other issues can play into the job search as well, regardless of whether or not a person graduated. One woman explained, “After stopping studies and moving back to [my community], I found it very difficult to get a job because they didn’t want to hire a non-Band member. I had changed my status when I got married and was considered a member of another First Nation community.”

Some graduates want to find a job in their field, and to work in or near their home community. A recent graduate said, “When I wanted to move back closer to home it was more difficult. I had job offers to work on-reserve in elementary but I’m a high school teacher. Or I could work in
another First Nation community nearby but there’s no job security, year-to-year contract. It’s difficult to get a permanent contract with the local school board because of competition and politics.” Another recent graduate had planned to return to his home community but the job did not exist anymore. He explained, “Before graduation I had a job lined up with the Band Council, but when it came time to move back and work, the job didn’t exist anymore. There was a lot of opportunity and contract type of work to do around the community for a while, but it wasn’t what I wanted to do. Eventually I got a job at [a university] as a lecturer.” One recent graduate said, “[My experience in finding a job was] good. I came back to the community, even though I had other offers. I chose to stay in the community because I wanted to give back to the community, and friends and family were still here.” Those who do return to their community have the potential to improve the socio-economic development of their communities, as discussed in the next section.
7. Connections between Post-Secondary Completion and Community Development

From the literature review and the primary data described in earlier sections, we know that completing post-secondary studies provides graduates with an increased chance of finding employment in their chosen field and also of finding work in their home community. Key informants were asked what they feel are the links between post-secondary education completion and social and economic development in Aboriginal communities. All key informants see a strong connection:

*Knowledge equals wealth. You learn to earn. The more individuals in First Nations that are retained in PSE, the more wealthy and self-sufficient the community will be. In a knowledge based-economy, knowledge is the commodity* (Interview with a Program Manager with Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour, 2008).

*The more educated Band members the better. We are able to better manage, budget, know what and what not to do. It creates a more favourable community. There are skilled and trained people to do the jobs and so they do them better. Skilled people get important jobs. And the socio-economic conditions of the community are better* (Education Director Interview, 2008).

*The more educated and skilled people you have, the more success stories you’ll have. And then you have the capacity to do the job* (Economic Development Advisor Interview, 2008).

One Aboriginal Human Resources Council member said there are two ways of going about completing one’s studies and returning home. She noted that first you can go and get additional work experience and bring it back to your community and apply it to the reserve situation. Or, students go right home and end up expecting a top paying job but they have no experience so they end up underemployed for their education level. She feels “they lack innovation and proactiveness that comes from working outside for a while.”

An Aboriginal Student Success Advisor felt that sometimes students who go to school with the goal of finding a particular job in their community may end up with a different job upon graduation. She explained, “They notice a need and go to school in order to go home and get that job, but when they do return home, that job may already have been taken. So they fall back into their comfort zone and the needs they have are taken care of. They don’t end up using their education effectively.”

Another key informant feels that there has been too much focus on university and that a community needs all kinds of backgrounds and skills such as trades and college diplomas to “build a strong community.” But, she said, education, in whatever form, is extremely important.
to the growth and development of a community and that the leaders need to be educated and literate too.

In summary, post-secondary education has the potential to benefit Aboriginal communities by bringing knowledge and skills and work experience back to the community. Informants noted that it is important to encourage all types of post-secondary training, not only university. In the next section we provide a series of recommendations for action by stakeholders to try to promote better labour market outcomes for post-secondary educated Aboriginal graduates in Atlantic Canada.
8. Recommendations for Action

One of the objectives of this research was to report on the experiences of Aboriginal people who recently graduated from post-secondary education in finding employment, and to compare their experiences with those of Aboriginal people who started a post-secondary program and did not complete it. The evidence from the interviews confirms that those who completed one or more post-secondary programs fared better in the labour market in terms of finding full time employment, in their communities, and in their fields of study. Related to this, another objective was to assess the experiences in post-secondary education with a view to identifying barriers to completion and to offer recommendations to address those barriers. A large number of barriers and issues were identified both in the literature and in the interviews with key informants and recent graduates / non-completers themselves.

The recommendations outlined in this section are designed to achieve the following 4 desired outcomes:

1) Ensure that there is adequate and appropriate preparation of young Aboriginal people in the school system so that they may be ready to attend post-secondary institutions if they so desire.
2) Increase the number of Aboriginal people who attend post-secondary institutions;
3) Improve the rate of post-secondary completion among Aboriginal people who attend universities and communities colleges;
4) Strengthen the linkages among post-secondary education, labour market opportunities, and the economic development needs and plans of First Nations communities;

These four issues strategies are closely linked. Success in the labour market is linked to completing a post-secondary program; completing a post-secondary program is linked to choosing to attend and being able to attend a program; and choosing and being able to attend is linked to being adequately prepared in P-12 education. The following principles, informed by previous policy studies on this issue and from the interviews, are used to guide the formulation of the recommendations which are provided:

- Changes to education and to post-secondary education systems must be led by Aboriginal leaders and communities, and be supported in meaningful ways (with appropriate monetary resources, and with changes in government and institutional policies);
- There needs to be cooperation and coordination among all stakeholders and partners – Aboriginal leadership, federal and provincial government departments and agencies, the private sector, and the public school system – in order for the necessary changes to take effect and have a positive difference in the education and labour market outcomes;
- There must be long term planning and linkages among education, economic development, and labour force development of Aboriginal people and communities.

A series of recommendations are offered for each of the four strategies that have been identified.
I- Ensure that there is adequate and appropriate preparation of young Aboriginal people in the school system so that they may be ready to attend post-secondary institutions if they so desire.

The Mi’kmaw Kina’matnewey approach to Aboriginal control and management of education on-reserve in nine Nova Scotia Mi’kmaw Kina’matnewey communities has proven to be successful in improving the overall education outcomes for Aboriginal students and can serve as a model for others in the region. In order to improve the education outcomes in other communities, it is recommended that:

1. Each Chief and Council direct their Education Directors to contact the Mi’kmaw Kina’matnewey to review the Mi’kmaw Kina’matnewey approach and determine what elements (such as Aboriginal content and language in curriculum, employment of Aboriginal teachers, use of Aboriginal language in the classroom through immersion and core language instruction, presence and role of Elders in the classroom, etc.), if any, might be locally possible and appropriate or which could be adopted. Discussions with other Education Directors in non-Mi’kmaw Kina’matnewey communities might take place about the possibilities for working together on shared approaches to Aboriginal-controlled education that use the Mi’kmaw Kina’matnewey approach to shared second level services to support educational learning.

2. In order to better prepare Aboriginal students for success in the labour market, it is recommended that elementary and secondary schools develop and implement more effective and meaningful career planning programs and activities. This should be developed by Education Directors and build upon successful initiatives in place in some schools/communities in the region. Furthermore, partnerships should be forged with employers to provide co-op placements and mentorships be established through the leadership of the Chief and Council, and through proactive efforts of business leaders.

3. Since Aboriginal students attending public schools face some challenges in their efforts to complete high school to move on to post-secondary education, provincial governments through their Departments of Education should be encouraged to a) adopt core language instruction (Inuktitut, Mi’kmaq or Maliseet as appropriate) for these students, with appropriate resource supports, b) development core language curriculum in consultation with Education Directors of representative First Nation communities, where immersion language instruction in these languages is offered, and with appropriate representatives of the Inuit and c) provincial governments through their Departments of Education should provide sufficient and appropriate resource support (i.e., teaching assistants, tutors, etc.,) in the public school systems for Aboriginal students to assist them with any learning and development challenges, especially as it relates to improving literacy and numeracy results for these students, and d) Departments of Education should offer cross-cultural training and awareness programs for students and teachers in the public school system concerning Aboriginal culture, language, and values, to minimize the potential for conflict and misunderstanding.
II-Increase the number of Aboriginal people who attend post-secondary institutions.

There is significant and consistent evidence from the literature review, from the interviews with recent students, and from interviews with key informants, that there is a need to provide more funding to allow Aboriginal people to attend post-secondary education institutions, and that there is a need for universities and colleges to have a visible and real presence in communities so as to improve the view that Aboriginal youth have of the potential for attending post-secondary education. The recommendations below build on and are consistent with the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People (section 3.5.21; 1996) and those of the House of Commons Standing Committee in Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development (Mayes, 2007).

4. In order to make it possible for the maximum number of Aboriginal people to attend a post-secondary education institution, a) the federal government should increase the total amount of money in the funding envelope for Aboriginal people wishing to attend post-secondary education. The amount must be sufficient so that all students who wish to attend should be able to do so, b) the funding should be in the form of non-repayable grants and not in the form of repayable loans, and c) the federal government should work with the Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nations Chiefs and Atlantic Aboriginal education authorities to determine the number of students who currently wish to attend post-secondary education institutions but who cannot due to a lack of funds in the programs, and to use this as a minimum base for determining the amount of total increase in funding available.

5. In order for Aboriginal people to afford the costs of post-secondary education, it is recommended that a) the funding program should be sufficient to cover the full costs of tuition to attend any recognized post-secondary education institution. This means that the amount of money in the program should be indexed to the increase in the costs of tuition, the funding program be revised to expand the range of eligible expenses that will be covered, b) the funding program should cover the costs of the following expenses incurred by Aboriginal people to attend post-secondary education: books, living expenses (rent, local transit, parking, child care) travel to and from their home community and the community where the post-secondary education institution is located (once per term).

6. To create a greater sense of the possibility of a post-secondary education, and to raise awareness about the opportunities available to Aboriginal people who attend a post-secondary education institution, there is a need for more universities in the Atlantic region to have a real presence in Aboriginal communities. It is recommended that a) each Chief and Council, with the support of their Education Directors, contact one or more universities to discuss potential opportunities to have a presence in their community. Universities, through their respective Presidents, could be encouraged to create the following types of opportunities, by directing their appropriate departments to implement these in partnership with host communities a) Summer programs held in communities where university students and faculty provide opportunities for Aboriginal youth to learn about university life and learning; b) One or more courses delivered to Aboriginal communities through distance education and outreach using mutually agreed upon delivery methods; c) Research and development outreach initiatives where members of
the Aboriginal community and members of the university community (students, faculty) co-research and co-investigate issues defined by the communities themselves; and, d) Recruitment of Aboriginal youth (using culturally appropriate means) to attend university, by having recruitment and admission staff come to each community. They should involve current and former Aboriginal students in the recruitment process who can relate to the youth the education opportunities available at the university and the subsequent employment possibilities.

III- Improve the completion rate of post-secondary education for Aboriginal people.

There is significant and consistent evidence from the literature review, from the interviews with recent students, and from interviews with key informants that much more could be done by publicly funded universities and other post-secondary education institutions to improve the success rate of Aboriginal students. The recommendations below build on and are consistent with the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People (section 3.5.24; 1996).

7. Aboriginal students rarely see their culture, language, and history discussed and debated in post-secondary curricula. It is recommended that Presidents of each university direct their committees responsible for academic matters to develop more Aboriginal content in various existing courses and more programs that are specifically responsive to and inclusive of Indigenous Knowledge systems.

8. Universities and community colleges should develop policies and practices to attract more Aboriginal students to their campuses by a) providing a broad range of supports and services in order to make their institutions a more welcoming and supportive environment focused upon creating an Aboriginal student centres and related support activities in which these students will have a much greater chance of success and completion, b) ensuring Aboriginal content be included in curricula and that admissions policies be proactive in ensuring access for Aboriginal people, and c) new core resources should be used to provide specific academic resource and life skills support for Aboriginal students such as tutoring, writing classes, career counselling, life skills coaching, staffed by Aboriginal people.

9. There is a need to create cross-culturally appropriate teaching and learning environments for Aboriginal students at all post-secondary education institutions by a) developing and implementing anti-racist policies that have specific strategies that support respectfulness of the culture and knowledge systems of Aboriginal people, and b) developing and implementing a strategy to increase the number of Aboriginal faculty and staff who are hired to fill vacancies.

10. There is a pressing need for a better system to track the attendance and completion of Aboriginal people at post-secondary education institutions. This information is important to all stakeholders for ongoing planning and program purposes. It is recommended that post-secondary stakeholders work together to develop a single, appropriate data tracking tool that will be used by all institutions, government departments, and communities. This
could be initiated by the Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nations Chiefs and involve senior management from INAC responsible for post-secondary education and Vice-Presidents responsible for academic matters from a selected number of universities and community colleges. Together they will identify the specific data capture fields required, the resources needed to develop and implement the data tracking tool, and the process by which it will be implemented.

IV.- Strengthen the linkages between post-secondary education, labour market opportunities, and the economic development needs and plans of Aboriginal communities.

11. Aboriginal people and employers would benefit from an employment support agency dedicated to the specific needs of Aboriginal people and communities. It is therefore recommended that the Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nations Chiefs initiate the development of an Atlantic Aboriginal Employment Agency to be responsible for matching inquiries from employers seeking Aboriginal graduates with known available Aboriginal people who match the qualifications and credentials required. The Agency could coordinate with and support the ongoing work of related organizations providing training and development for Aboriginal people and with Band Councils, post-secondary education institutions, and other Aboriginal organizations to develop a process for registering individuals with the Agency.

12. In order for Aboriginal communities to effectively communicate with their residents, especially youth, about the potential employment opportunities that will be available to them in their own communities in the future, it is important that communities undertake effective economic development planning by a) Chief and Council directing their economic development officers to carry out medium (5-year) to long term (10-year) economic development planning exercises which identify new business development opportunities and related employment / labour force development needs, b) Economic Development Officers making presentations to community youth (ages 12-15 and ages 16-18) each year (through the schools, if appropriate), to share with them the economic development plans and the potential employment opportunities and needs of the future, so that these youth may begin to plan appropriate career path options that will lead to employment in the community, if they so desire.

13. In order for Aboriginal youth to consider a broad range of employment options (both on- and off-reserve) it is important that the most reliable and appropriate labour market information be shared with Aboriginal youth in this regard, so it is recommended that the Aboriginal Human Resources Council (AHRC) in partnership with the Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nations Chiefs, HRSDC and INAC, undertake a review of current labour market information targeted to Aboriginal youth and recommend improvements to HRSDC that will more effectively respond to the information needs of Aboriginal youth.

14. To address the human resources shortage in many sectors and in many communities, there is a need for Aboriginal people (and youth in particular) to have a solid understanding of where and in which sectors the potential for meaningful employment

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lies and for the private sector to build relationships with Aboriginal communities and with post-secondary education institutions to position themselves as quality employers interested in hiring quality Aboriginal people to fill upcoming vacancies. It is recommended therefore that a) the Chief and Council from First Nations communities direct their Economic Development Officers to identify one or more private sector companies with which to develop a relationship for the purpose of creating internships, mentorships, and job placements for their youth, b) Aboriginal communities and their private sector partners identify a post-secondary education institution with which they can work collaboratively to identify and train Aboriginal youth to fill the job opportunities and vacancies they have together identified.
9. Future Research Directions

The findings suggest areas that require further research. Some of these include:

1) Interview more Aboriginal people who started but did not complete their studies.

2) Conduct a longitudinal tracking study of high school students as they enter post-secondary education and go on to find employment.

3) Interview administrators from all universities and colleges about the needs of and supports for Aboriginal students, especially as they relate to career preparation.

4) Examine administrative data associated with grants and research programs that target Aboriginal students.

5) Evaluate Aboriginal community strategic plans to determine their identification of employment needs and subsequent linkages to career guidance for youth.

6) Conduct a study that examines job satisfaction among Aboriginal people.

7) A future study could work to target students who leave post-secondary institutions or even those thinking of dropping out, to understand their reasons, as well as to explore their employment outcomes.

8) A longitudinal study of Aboriginal high school students as they enter post-secondary education and continue on to find employment would be very useful. This study would focus on fewer students but with more in depth qualitative research techniques such as ongoing interviews over a number of years.

9) A specific study on the full range of the programs and services available (or not) at each institution in Atlantic Canada could be conducted, relying primarily on interviews with university and college administrators about the needs of and supports for Aboriginal students, especially as they relate to career preparation. The study could also examine perceptions about the relative success of such programs; resource needs to ensure their success/continuity.

10) A future research study could examine the effectiveness of community strategic plans and evaluate their strength in terms of determining short and long term employment needs as well as the communication strategies used to make high school students aware of future careers in their community.

11) A future study could examine the career satisfaction among Aboriginal people working in key sectors such as the public service, business, education, health care, etc. Research questions could address their satisfaction levels with their current job, are they working in their chosen field, did their post-secondary education adequately prepare them for their job, did they
experience any racism on the job, what types of career planning (if any) was undertaken when they were in school, etc.

9.1 Sharing Research Results: Dissemination Strategies

In addition to the distribution of this research report to all participating communities and the Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nations Chiefs, the following specific activities will be undertaken to share the results of this research with a variety of audiences:

- Two journal articles will be prepared and submitted for publication; potential journals include the Canadian Journal of Native Education and the Journal of Canadian Studies.
- Policy recommendations/briefing notes will be prepared for the APCFNC to use in discussions with federal and provincial governments, related to post-secondary education access and success for Aboriginal students. These will be in the form of a two-page written submission suitable for quick reading by senior officials.
- A “community report” of less than 10 pages with an accompanying PowerPoint presentation (PPT) will be prepared. This report and PPT will be suitable for presentation to any Aboriginal community by the APCFNC – the results will not be presented as being specific to any individual community. The report/presentation will be prepared in such a way that it can be delivered by a member of the APCFNC or the AAEDIRP.
- A brochure will be prepared that is aimed at high schools, guidance counsellors, and others who have an opportunity to share with young Aboriginal students information about the possibility of pursuing a post-secondary education and some of the possible ways to achieve success.

All of the above materials will be posted on the Rural and Small Town Programme website. It is expected that the APCFNC and AEDIRP and others will make a link to the website.

In addition, two presentations have been delivered at two different conferences:

- The National Aboriginal Policy Research Conference in Ottawa, March 9-12, 2009; and
10. Conclusions

“Everyone loses when Aboriginal students fail to succeed” (Mendelson, 2006).

This study explored the labour market outcomes of Aboriginal people who completed post-secondary education in the 2003-2008 period, and of those who started but did not complete post-secondary education in that same time frame. The study employed a literature review, an assessment of secondary statistics from a variety of sources, interviews with 96 Aboriginal people who completed or left post-secondary education in the past five years, and interviews with key informants from communities, education services, government, and post-secondary institutions.

There were four objectives of the research:

- To understand the education and employment experiences of Aboriginal people who had completed PSE in the past five years, and to identify any barriers or challenges they experienced in moving into careers of choice and interest related to their field(s) of study.
- To understand the reasons why some Aboriginal students were unable to complete PSE in the past five years.
- To understand the direct and indirect linkages between PSE completion and the impact on economic and social development outcomes in Aboriginal communities.
- To provide recommendations for action which may lead to more positive Aboriginal PSE completion rates.

In terms of labour market outcomes, our research found that there were very important differences between those who completed post-secondary education and those who started but did not complete a post-secondary education program. A total of 69 interviewees both completed at least one post-secondary education program and provided details of their job search experience. Many more of them (compared to those who started but did not complete a post-secondary education program):

- Found a job;
- In their chosen field of study; and
- Were able to work in their chosen field of study in their community.

The same results were found for the subset of 45 interviewees who grew up on-reserve and completed a post-secondary education program, compared with those who grew up on-reserve and started but did not complete a post-secondary education program.

In terms of specific careers, the current occupation profile varies between the two groups. About one-third of those who completed their post-secondary education are working in social sciences, education, and general government services, while less than one-quarter of those who did not complete, are doing so. A larger proportion of those who completed their post-secondary education are working in business, finance, and administration, or in health care occupations,
while a larger proportion of those who did not complete are working in natural and applied science fields or in management positions.

It is not surprising that some people are working in fields that they were not trained for, or in fields in which they do not wish to be employed. Close to 60% of the interviewees who completed post-secondary education reported working in a field directly related to what they were trained for or what they were studying for. Among those who did not complete a post-secondary program, 46% were working in a field related to what they were training or studying for.

We also found that the primary barriers to finding careers of choice among those who completed their post-secondary education were: lack of employment opportunities in their home communities in their chosen fields; a lack of long term career planning and guidance; limited knowledge about employment opportunities outside of reserve communities; and lack of desire to relocate to an off-reserve community to take a job.

Although we were only able to interview a relatively small number of Aboriginal students who started but did not complete post-secondary education, we found that the two primary reasons for not completing were: changes in family status (such as a death in the family or an illness in the family) and academic problems (falling behind, failing, not adequately prepared). It is important to note that each individual’s circumstances is unique and it is therefore not surprising that a variety of “other” reasons were identified as the “single most important reason” for not completing their post-secondary program. Beyond the identification of a single most important barrier, some factors play a larger role in non-completion of post-secondary education. Interviewees identified that taking a break from post-secondary education (and then deciding not to return), struggling to find a balance between school and family, and feeling that they were not adequately prepared for post-secondary education were contributing factors more so than others.

Key informant interviewees identified a number of direct and indirect linkages between completion of post-secondary education and the impact on economic and social development in Aboriginal communities. In terms of direct impacts they noted: increased opportunity for employment and self-sufficiency and better job performance leading to better decision-making and socio-economic outcomes. In terms of indirect impact they noted: education leads to personal growth and leadership potential and external work experience brings new ideas and approaches to the community.

The 14 recommendations from our research address the following desired outcomes:

- Ensure that there is adequate and appropriate preparation of young Aboriginal people in the school system so that they may be ready to attend post-secondary institutions if they so desire;
- Strengthen the linkages among post-secondary education, labour market opportunities, and the economic development needs and plans of Aboriginal communities;
- Improve the rate of post-secondary education completion among Aboriginal people who attend universities and community colleges;
• Increase the number of Aboriginal people who attend post-secondary education institutions.

The following principles, informed by previous policy studies on this issue and from the interviews, were used to guide the formulation of the recommendations:

• Changes to education and to post-secondary education systems must be led by Aboriginal leaders and communities, and be supported in meaningful ways (with appropriate monetary resources, and with changes in government and institutional policies);
• First Nations should have control and management of the education of Aboriginal people on-reserve;
• There needs to be cooperation and coordination among all stakeholders and partners – Aboriginal leadership, federal and provincial government departments and agencies, the private sector, and the public school system – in order for the necessary changes to take effect and have a positive difference in the education and labour market outcomes;
• There must be long term planning and linkages among education, economic development, and labour force development of Aboriginal people and communities.

This report is more than a standalone study. It builds on the findings and recommendations from previous policy research in the region and nationally. The recommendations support those stemming from the recent (2007) House of Commons Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development report on Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education in Canada, and on the 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP). The latter focused on a vision of a new relationship, founded on the recognition of Aboriginal peoples as self-government nations with a unique place in Canada. The Commission called for early action on healing, economic development, human resources development and the building of Aboriginal institutions.
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Appendix A - Consent to Participate in an Interview

I am a student researcher with the Rural and Small Town Programme at Mount Allison University. I am inviting you to participate in this important study about the Aboriginal post-secondary labour force in Atlantic Canada. The purpose of the study is to understand the education and employment experiences of Aboriginal people, to identify barriers and challenges faced and to provide recommendations for action which may lead to an increased rate of post-secondary education completion.

This study involves a series of interviews with Aboriginal people from around Atlantic Canada who graduated from post-secondary institutions (colleges, trades, university) as well as those who did not complete their studies. The work will be completed May to July 2008. The final report is being prepared for the Atlantic Aborginal Economic Development Integrated Research Program (AAEDIRP) and the Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nations Chiefs (APCFNC) and they will be responsible for any actions they choose to take based on our findings. The interviews are strictly confidential and anonymous and will last no more than 45 minutes. Your name will not be used. Results of this study will be presented as a group and no individual participants will be identified through the results. Your participation is completely voluntary. You may choose to participate or not. You may choose to answer some or all of the questions without penalty. All interview notes will be stored in a secure box.

Your agreement to participate in an interview is your consent to allow me to identify you as an interviewee, in the manner in which you check below:

I, ____________________________________ (please print your name)

- may review the notes, transcripts, or other data collected during the research pertaining to my participation;
- may /may not (please circle one) be quoted directly;
- if quoted directly, hereby grant copyright permission to the researcher for the purpose of including my name in the report: yes / no (please circle one).

By signing this consent form, you are indicating that you fully understand the above information and agree to participate in this study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant's signature</th>
<th>Researcher's signature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date:</td>
<td>Date:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This research has been reviewed and approved by the Mi’kmaq Ethics Watch, the Nunatsiavut Interim Research Committee, and the Mount Allison University Research Ethics Board. If you have any questions or concerns about this study, you may contact Dr. Louise Wasylkiw, Chair of the Mount Allison University Research Ethics Board, by phone (364-2465) or by e-mail at lwasylkiw@mta.ca.
Appendix B - Interview Questionnaire for Recent Aboriginal Students

Date: 
Interviewee number: 
Interviewer: 

The Rural and Small Town Programme at Mount Allison University is studying the Aboriginal post-secondary labour force in Atlantic Canada Atlantic Canada for the Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nations Chiefs. The goal of this interview is to gather information about the experiences, challenges, barriers and opportunities you had during your post-secondary education, job search and employment. The interview will last no more than 45 minutes. It is voluntary and confidential. You will not be identified by name and all interview notes will be stored in a secure box. If you have any questions about this study, please contact David Bruce at 364-2395 or dwbruce@mta.ca. This research has been reviewed and approved by the Mi’kmaq Ethics Watch and the Mount Allison University Research Ethics Board and. If you have any questions or concerns about this study, you may contact Dr. Louise Wasylkiw, Chair of the Mount Allison University Research Ethics Board, by phone (364-2465) or by e-mail at lwasylkiw@mta.ca. Thank you for your time.

Part 1 – Your Background

1. Where do you live? (name of community)

2. Where did you grow up? (name of community; if more than one community, list all, and mark / flag the community where the interviewee lived while attending high school)

3. What post-secondary education (PSE) school(s) did you attend?

4. What is the highest level of education your parents have completed?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mother</th>
<th>Father</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elementary school</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some high school</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school diploma</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some trades or college</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade or college diploma</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some university</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s degree</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PhD degree</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Part 2 – Your Past Experiences

5. What led you to apply to post-secondary education?

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

(Probes: High school guidance/career counsellors, extracurricular activities, family, job prospects, etc.)

Part 3 – Post-Secondary School Experiences

6. Your college and/or university programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program 1</th>
<th>Program 2</th>
<th>Program 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name of program</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part time or full time student</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year started</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year graduated OR</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year last attended</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

7. Describe your experiences as a university/college student.

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
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______________________________________________________________________________

Probe for:
Positive experiences
Negative experiences
8. Did you complete your post-secondary studies?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Degree/Diploma</th>
<th>Second Degree/Diploma</th>
<th>Third Degree/Diploma</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes [ ]</td>
<td>Yes [ ]</td>
<td>Yes [ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In progress [ ]</td>
<td>In progress [ ]</td>
<td>In progress [ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No [ ]</td>
<td>No [ ]</td>
<td>No [ ]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you answered “no” for any of your programs, go to Part 5. If you answered “yes” for some, complete Part 6 as well. If you answered “in progress”, that’s great! We wish you luck with your current studies but we are only interested in programs you are no longer in.

**Part 5 – If You Did Not Complete Your Studies**

9. One scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is not a barrier at all and 5 is a huge barrier what were the challenges and barriers that prevented you from completing your studies?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>1 Not a barrier</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5 A huge barrier</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Too expensive/could not obtain funding</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Discrimination by other students</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Discrimination by teachers and staff</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Insensitive staff or faculty to my needs</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Not adequately prepared</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. A struggle to balance school and family life</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Lack of support from teachers when needed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Lack of support from friends when needed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Lack of support from family when needed</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Lack of support from my home community or Band when needed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Too far from my family</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. I got a job so I didn’t need to complete my studies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. I took a break and intended to return but life got in the way</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Other (please describe):</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

10. What was the main reason you did not complete your studies?

________________________________________________________________________

11. What could have helped you succeed?

________________________________________________________________________
12. What did you do after you stopped your studies?

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

13. Were you able to find a job? What was your experience like? (Probe: In your chosen field, in the community where you wanted to live, etc.?)

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

Please answer Part 6 if you also graduated from other programs. If not, go to Part 7.

**Part 6– If You Graduated**

14. On a scale of 1 to 5 how helpful were the following things in completing your studies:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1 Not helpful at all</th>
<th>2 Not helpful</th>
<th>3 Neutral</th>
<th>4 Helpful</th>
<th>5 Very helpful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Financial assistance from my Band Council</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Financial assistance from elsewhere</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Parents/family</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. A part time job</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. My community</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. My friends</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. PSE Teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. PSE Academic counsellor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. My high school experience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. My goal of wanting to find a good job</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Other (please describe):</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

15. What was the main success factor that helped you to complete your studies?

______________________________________________________________________________

16. What was your experience in finding a job after graduation? (Prompt: In your chosen field, in the community you wanted to live, etc.?)

______________________________________________________________________________
Part 7 – Suggestions for the Future

17. Thinking about your own experiences and thinking about other young people from your community who may want to go on to PSE or who should think about PSE, what would you like to see each of the following do to assist them in being successful:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>To support / encourage going to PSE</th>
<th>To support / encourage completing PSE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Band Council</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School System</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSE Institutions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal and Provincial Government</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Part 7 – Demographics (The information collected not be used to identify participants.)

18. What is your age?

- 19 to 24 years [ ]
- 25 to 29 years [ ]
- 30 to 34 years [ ]
- 35 to 39 years [ ]
- 40 to 44 years [ ]
- 45 to 49 years [ ]
- 50 to 54 years [ ]
- 55 to 59 years [ ]
- 60 to 64 years [ ]
- 65 to 69 years [ ]
- 70 to 74 years [ ]
- 75 years and older [ ]

19. What is your gender?

- Male [ ]
- Female [ ]

20. What is your highest level of education completed?

- Some high school [ ]
- High school diploma [ ]
- Some college or trades [ ]
- College or trade certificate/diploma [ ]
- Some university [ ]
- Undergraduate degree [ ]
- Masters degree [ ]
- PhD degree [ ]
21. What is your employment status?
Employed full time [ ]
Employed part time [ ]
Unemployed, currently looking for work [ ]
Unemployed, not looking for work [ ]
Other: [ ]

22. Current Occupation:

____________________________________________

23. What occupation you are trained for and/or wish to have, if different from above:

a) Trained for ____________________________________________

b) Wish to be employed as ____________________________

Other comments:
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

Thank you for your time!
Appendix C - Consent to Participate in a Key Informant Interview

I am a Research Associate with the Rural and Small Town Programme at Mount Allison University. I am inviting you to participate in this important study about the Aboriginal post-secondary labour force in Atlantic Canada. The purpose of the study is to understand the education and employment experiences of Aboriginal people, to identify barriers and challenges faced and to provide recommendations for action which may lead to an increased rate of post-secondary education completion.

Your participation is valued because you have critical insights into Aboriginal post-secondary education and labour force issues. The work will be completed May to July 2008. The final report is being prepared for the Atlantic Aboriginal Economic Development Integrated Research Program (AAEDIRP) and the Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nations Chiefs (APCFNC) and they will be responsible for any actions they choose to take based on our findings. The interviews are strictly confidential and anonymous and will last no more than 45 minutes. Your name will not be used unless you provide consent below. Your participation is completely voluntary. You may choose to participate or not. You may choose to answer some or all of the questions without penalty. All interview notes will be stored in a secure box.

Your agreement to participate in an interview is your consent to allow me to identify you as an interviewee, in the manner in which you check below:

I, _________________________________ (please print your name)

- may review the notes, transcripts, or other data collected during the research pertaining to my participation;
- may / may not (please circle one) be quoted directly;
- if quoted directly, hereby grant copyright permission to the researcher for the purpose of including my name in the report: yes / no (please circle one).

By signing this consent form, you are indicating that you fully understand the above information and agree to participate in this study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant's signature</th>
<th>Researcher's signature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date:</td>
<td>Date:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This research has been reviewed and approved by the Mount Allison University Research Ethics Board the Mi’kmaq Ethics Watch, and the Nunatsiavut Interim Research Committee. If you have any questions or concerns about this study, you may contact Dr. Louise Wasylkiw, Chair of the Mount Allison University Research Ethics Board, by phone (364-2465) or by e-mail at lwasylkiw@mta.ca.
Appendix D - Key Informant Interview Guide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee number:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewer:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Rural and Small Town Programme at Mount Allison University is studying the Aboriginal post-secondary educated labour force in Atlantic Canada for the Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nations Chiefs (APCFN). You have been selected for an interview because of your knowledge about the topic. The goal of this interview is to gather information about the state of post-secondary education and employment for Aboriginal people including challenges and barriers, as well as the implications and connections to socio-economic development in Aboriginal communities. The interview will last about 45 minutes. It is voluntary and confidential. You will not be identified by name and all interview notes will be stored in a secure box. If you have any questions about this study, please contact David Bruce at 364-2395 or dwbruce@mta.ca. This research has been reviewed and approved by the Mount Allison University Research Ethics Board, the Mi’kmaq Ethics Watch, and the Nunatsiavut Interim Research Committee. If you have any questions or concerns about this study, you may contact Dr. Louise Wasylkiw, Chair of the Mount Allison University Research Ethics Board, by phone (364-2465) or by e-mail at lwasylkiw@mta.ca. Thank you for your time.

Part 1 – General Questions (for all key informants)

1. What is your title and where do you work?
2. What has your experience been with Aboriginal post-secondary education (PSE)?
3. What challenges and barriers exist for Aboriginal students wishing to attend PSE?
4. Studies have shown that Aboriginal students have a much lower rate of PSE completion than non-Aboriginal students. Why have many Aboriginal students traditionally not fared well in PSE?
5. What needs to be improved for a greater success/graduation rate?
6. What can be done to help more Aboriginal people find work?
7. What do you feel are the linkages between post-secondary completion and social and economic development in Aboriginal communities?

Part 2 – Specific Questions (answer only those that apply to you)

School administrators (school principals, university and college presidents, deans, registrars, student success advisors in PSEs, etc.)

1. What programs and/or resources does your institution offer to help Aboriginal students graduate?
2. What programs or resources do you have to help recruit Aboriginal people to your school?
3. If you do not offer any supports, why is that?
4. What policies do you think need to be developed to help you help your current and perspective Aboriginal students?

Academic and employment counsellors (including entrepreneurship development officers and directors of educations)

1. What kinds of programs and/or resources do you offer to help Aboriginal students graduate and/or find employment?
2. Are these Aboriginal focused programs or are they for everyone?
3. What policies do you think need to be developed to help you help Aboriginal students in their academic and career planning?

First Nations Chiefs

1. What do you think is the role of First Nation Band Councils in ensuring Aboriginal student success at the PSE level?
2. What policies do you think need to be implemented to help Aboriginal students at the PSE level?
3. If more of your youth had PSE diplomas/degrees, how would your community be affected?

Economic development officers (and business development)

1. Have you seen any impacts of PSE completion among Aboriginal people in Aboriginal communities? Please provide examples?
2. Does PSE have any impacts on economic development? Please explain.
3. If more Aboriginal youth had PSE diplomas or degrees, how would it affect Aboriginal community economic development?

Government department – education

1. What is the Department of Educations’ role in helping more Aboriginal students obtain and complete PSE?
2. What have you done already and are there any changes for the future?
3. What policies need to be in place?

Government department – labour

1. What is the Department of Labour’s role in helping more Aboriginal students obtain and complete PSE?
2. What is the Department of Labour’s role in helping more Aboriginal students find employment?
3. What have you done already and are there any changes for the future?
4. What policies need to be in place?
Government department – Aboriginal affairs

1. What is the Department of Aboriginal Affairs’ role in helping more Aboriginal students obtain and complete PSE and/or find employment?

2. What have you done already and are there any changes for the future?
3. What policies need to be in place?