



PROJECT SNAPSHOT

Exploring the transferability of Preparatory Programs in Northwestern Ontario Post-Secondary Institutions

Type: Seamless Transfer

Project Number: S2018

Project Lead: Lakehead University

Collaborators: Anishinabek Employment and Training Services, Confederation College, Lakehead Public Schools – Adult and Continuing Education, Oshki Pimache-O-Win: The Wenjack Education Institute, and Seven Generations Education Institute were all equal collaborators on this project.

Project Summary

The purpose of this project was to develop a regional 'snapshot' of preparatory credentials delivered by post-secondary institutions in the Thunder Bay region using both quantitative data (enrolment statistics, Key Performance Indicators) and qualitative data (narratives from instructors and administrators). Preparatory credentials refer to programs offered by post-secondary institutions (universities, colleges and Indigenous education institutes) that act as a gateway to diploma and degree programs. Some examples include the Indigenous Transition Year Program and the Native Nurses Entry Program at Lakehead University and the Pre-Health, Pre-Technology and College Access programs at Confederation College.

The deliverables/key learnings that resulted from this project include:

- 1) An inventory of all preparatory credentials delivered by universities, colleges, Indigenous education institutes and other stakeholders in the Thunder Bay region and their connection to industry and credential "flow through."
- 2) A summary of the enrolment numbers and the success rates of students taking access credentials in the region.
- 3) A summary of themes in conversational interviews with faculty and administrative staff that help to inform the enrolment numbers and success rates.

This project provided an opportunity to engage in relationship building, leading to increased collaboration between the partnering institutions and was an important step towards serving Indigenous students and industry collectively.

Project Rationale

Student mobility stakeholders in Northwestern Ontario have observed that access and preparatory credentials are an essential educational stepping stone for many first-generation Indigenous post-secondary students in the region. Additionally, we observed that access and preparatory credentials are some of the most popular credentials in Ontario however there is no collective regional strategy for managing/optimizing transitions between post-secondary institutions and career-associated credential ladders. The current access credential environment is complicated and a collaborative approach to system navigation will save students and education advisors time and money

Main Collaborators

Anishinabek Employment and Training Services, Confederation College, Lakehead Public Schools – Adult and Continuing Education, Oshki Pimache-O-Win: The Wenjack Education Institute, and Seven Generations Education Institute were all equal collaborators on this project.

Outcomes

This project led to a final report that documents all the Access/Preparatory credentials offered by each project partner with some enrolment statistics and rates of transition. Additionally, it led to a successful ONCAT grant application to develop inter-institutional wrap-around supports and Indigenous-centred transfer pathway development that includes several of the partners from this project. This project also sets a precedent for sharing internal mobility data between regional partner institutions and will hopefully lead to a larger-scale student mobility data project in future grant cycles.

Key Steps

The following list contains the key steps taken in this project:

- (1) Opened the project and invited members from the Ogimaawin Indigenous Education Council.
- (2) Produced an internal enrolment statistics report in collaboration with Institutional Planning and Analysis at Lakehead University.
- (3) Shared this internal report with partners to show the format and level of data granularity required.
- (4) Scheduled consistent check-ins and individual interviews with the Project Leads at each institution. Focus groups were recommended by all Project Leads.
- (5) Scheduled and completed online focus groups with staff where the Project Lead determined it was beneficial and possible logistically
- (6) Generated a draft final report with all metrics and a summary of interview/focus group themes.
- (7) Conducted a catered but virtual group session to review and edit the report.
- (8) Completed the project and envisioned next steps.

Challenges

Staff turnover and the transition from in-person to virtual learning and meetings were the biggest challenges to completing this project

Student Outcomes

Students benefit when staff have an inter-institutional awareness of credential laddering opportunities, particularly during career and education advising. The Project Leads at all participating institutions now have access to a shared map of preparatory credentials in the region that they can share with their education counsellors and academic advisors. Through this map, it is likely that students can select preparatory credentials that best match their educational goals so they do not have to take duplicate/overlapping credentials.

Projects that build inter-institutional relationships between colleges, universities, Indigenous Institutes and other PSE stakeholders directly benefit future transfer students. In ONCAT funded reports produced by the Centre for Policy and Research in Indigenous Learning (now known as the Negahneewin Research Centre) on Indigenous pathways, emphasis on a relationship-oriented approach to project management is recommended. Having relationships that involve personal connection instead of simply detached job oriented interactions creates an environment where partners reach out on behalf of groups of students to facilitate seamless transfer and create new pathways.

Student Time Savings

Our project team identified that some learners require up to three successive access credentials to be admissible into a degree/diploma level credential. Inter-institutional awareness of the access program structure, resulting from this project, may lead to student advisors recommending more efficient pathways through the system. In some instances, students require the skills and learning of multiple access credentials to be successful.

Student Financial Savings

The increased awareness of regional access credentials and their intended destination credentials is likely to save time and finances associated with the completion of multiple access credentials where one access credential may be unnecessary.

Student Flexibility

Inter-institutional communication and increased awareness of the regional access credential opportunities will improve the experience and efficiency of post-secondary system navigation for Indigenous learners, First Nations Education Counsellors, and Third-Party Sponsors.

Student Work Alignment

This project may contribute to a more efficient pathway to the completion of a Bachelor of Science in Nursing for Indigenous and non-Indigenous learners who require the completion of an access credential to apply to the BSc Nursing program.

Institutional Outcomes

The process of sharing internal data sources and having group discussions about the student experience and the nature of access/preparatory credentials led to a more inter-institutional and collaborative approach to PSE delivery in the region.

An additional institutional practice that is likely to change relates to the data sovereignty of files in student information systems where Indigenous Institutes offer a credential through a partner institution. Clear communication between partnering institutions occurred leading to a process for access to student information.

Tips/Advice

For institutions who are interested in sharing enrolment data and collaboratively sharing program information to create seamless transfer experiences for their students we advise:

- (1) Leading by example when it comes to sharing data - In situations where partners are asked to share data that reveals the state and success rates of their programs and students, having the lead institution share their data first as a template and exemplar is beneficial.
- (2) Sharing internal data sets reveals a much more accurate picture of how students actually move through sequential post-secondary credentials between institutions than external SMA reporting tends to reveal.

Tools and Resource

The final report attached has revisions and has been reviewed and edited by all project partners over the course of March, 2021