

# A SPECIAL OBLIGATION

Report of the Presidential Task Force on Aboriginal Initiatives

November 2009

## Executive Summary

The Task Force was given the mandate of recommending enhancements to the recruitment and success of aboriginal students of all ages, with everything that task entails. The Committee, consisting of University administrators and representatives of Newfoundland and Labrador aboriginal communities began its work in October 2009. After extensive consultation, literature review and much deliberation, the Committee reports its advice and conclusions within the context of Memorial's mission to recognize "a special obligation" to the people of the province and the priorities set out in the University's Strategic Plan.

The report advances an integrated set of 22 recommendations that describe initiatives under four thematic issues:

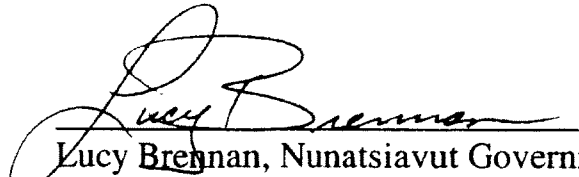
1. Interventions to encourage completion of high school by aboriginal people, including a new approach to teacher education and collaboration with the College of the North Atlantic
2. Succeeding in university through access to a more welcoming environment, peer-to-peer support and adequate gathering space
3. Appropriate educational programming, including undergraduate and graduate options in aboriginal studies and the professional training needed by aboriginal communities
4. Coordination of Memorial's considerable but scattered aboriginal expertise, including better integration of the Labrador Institute and a higher profile for aboriginal initiatives.

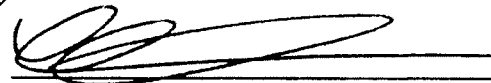
The Task Force recognizes that serious goals make serious demands upon an organization's human and financial assets. A number of initiatives can nevertheless be realized through revised practices rather than through major demands upon the University's resources. Other initiatives have budgetary implications totalling \$1,500,000 per year, an amount equal to approximately one half of one percent of the University's total annual net expenditures and less than the annual tuition income from an achievable level of aboriginal enrolment.

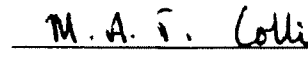
Memorial University has an opportunity to develop a new set of relationships with a dynamic and growing sector of the provincial population. Forging new partnerships with aboriginal communities that are making significant advances in self-government will benefit everyone.


**MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY OF NEWFOUNDLAND**  
**PRESIDENTIAL TASK FORCE ON ABORIGINAL INITIATIVES**

This report is respectfully and unanimously submitted by the undersigned:


  
Lucy Brennan, Nunatsiavut Government


  
Keith Chaulk, Labrador Institute

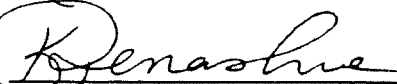
  
Michael Collins, Professor


  
Grant Gardner, Associate Vice-President (Academic)


  
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Annie Randell, Federation of Newfoundland Indians

  
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Evan Simpson, Honorary Research Professor (Chair)

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## Preface

Memorial University's Mission Statement stresses "our special obligation to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador." This commitment entails a duty to the aboriginal communities that comprise 4% of the province's population. In recognition of this obligation, a presidential Task Force on Aboriginal Initiatives was created in 2008 to identify best practices in aboriginal education and appropriate strategic initiatives for Memorial.

The Task Force is not the first such endeavour. Its predecessors include a comprehensive set of suggestions made by faculty members to the Vice-President (Academic) in 1980 in order to prevent recurrence of problems experienced by aboriginal students at Memorial. In 1987, a major report was made to the Senate Committee on Undergraduate Studies, advocating improvements in Native and Northern programs, including the Teacher Education Program in Labrador (TEPL). In the intervening years the essential problems have remained, native and northern programs are poorly subscribed, and TEPL is defunct. The Task Force believes that the following report should be the last of its kind. Unless Memorial decides to honour its special obligation now, any future inquiry will lack real seriousness.

The University has always had a simple choice. Historically, Memorial has treated its aboriginal students exactly like all others, offering them the same services within the same homogeneous environment. A clear rationale informs this choice. There is a certain equity in inviting all qualified residents of the province to study here and succeed or seek alternative goals. The consistently reiterated contrary opinion is that justice to the mission requires the more discriminating approach the University takes towards international students, who are valued because the diversity they represent enriches the educational environment through their exotic knowledge, traditions and experiences. The University understands that in recruiting international students it accepts responsibilities for their special educational needs and has added staff resources to assist them in their transition to a new environment. The province's own aboriginal students have reasonable claims to similar assistance. Their native language may be foreign to most Canadians. Their ways of learning differ from the Canadian standard. Their diverse traditions and backgrounds are resources for others at the same time as they make the transition to higher education difficult. As a result of these difficulties, too few aboriginal students enroll at Memorial and too few of those who come graduate.

Important new factors in this picture include advances in self-government by a number of aboriginal communities as well as the Strategic Plan adopted by the University in 2007. The Plan recognizes the remarkable advances of the Innu, Inuit, Métis and Mi'kmaq peoples. A great many of the Strategic Plan's goals stress initiatives in aboriginal education, research and outreach. The plan recognizes the virtues of a comprehensive set of partnerships between institutions of higher education and the aboriginal nations at this demanding time of transition. The University will either embrace an aboriginal vocation now or lose the opportunity forever as the communities seek out more eager partners.

### **Financial Fundamentals**

Serious goals make difficult demands upon an organization's human and financial resources. About this reality we make two observations.

(1) In the report to follow, the Task Force identifies a number of initiatives that can be realized through revised practices rather than through major demands upon Memorial's budgetary resources. On the strength of the commitments made in the Strategic Plan we have promoted a number of such revisions over the past year. The internal response has been encouraging. Many of our recommendations are designed to further these relatively costless reforms. Only a new institutional stance towards the province's aboriginal citizens is required.

(2) Other initiatives will cost money. Through participation in the Strategic Initiatives process, we have developed the case for these needs to be met through targeted provincial funding from a government that aims to promote its White Paper on Post-Secondary Education and its Northern Strategic Plan for Labrador. However, if this external support is not forthcoming, we submit that the University must provide for these initiatives nonetheless. In identifying its priorities an organization commits itself to any reasonable redistribution that is required. The cost of the initiatives in question is certainly reasonable. Our estimate is \$1,500,000. This amount is about 0.52% of the University's total annual net expenditures. It is less by an order of magnitude than the cumulative carry-forward in Memorial's budget. It is less than the annual tuition income that would be realized by an achievable level of aboriginal enrolment, which we estimate at 1000 students. It could be more than fully covered over two years by the annual 1% levy placed by the Vice-President (Academic) upon academic units for purposes of redistribution for priorities. In short, our proposals are entirely feasible propositions for an organization with the will to realize them.

### **Mandate and Principles**

The mandate of the Task Force flows from the goals of the Strategic Plan, including most saliently these:

- Goal 1: Foster Student Success and Retention
- Goal 2: The Teaching and Learning Environment
- Goal 3: Program Innovation and Development
- Goal 4: Increase Undergraduate and Graduate Enrolment
- Goal 5: Serve Off-Campus Students
- Goal 6: Enhance Student Recruitment and Financial Support
- Goal 7: Student Support
- Goal 8: Focus on High Need Areas
- Goal 9: Research Collaborations and Partnerships
- Goal 11: External Funding
- Goal 13: Accessibility
- Goal 14: Foster Regional and Rural Development
- Goal 15: Educational and Research Opportunities in Labrador
- Goal 16: Partnership with Aboriginal Peoples
- Goal 18: Provincial Linkages and Partnerships
- Goal 19: Lifelong Learning within the Province and Beyond

A fundamental objective was to articulate a strategy that would attract more aboriginal students of all ages and facilitate their success in a post-secondary certificate, diploma or degree program. The Task Force has reviewed research in aboriginal education and consulted widely within Memorial, with other universities, aboriginal organizations, aboriginal students and government officials. We prepared an Aboriginal Resource Inventory of existing interests and expertise. There is clearly considerable potential for increased enrolment, with corresponding benefits to the intellectual environment of the University. The same potential exists for increased research and its benefits to the communities whose people need the knowledge essential to their long-term development.

Because the communities are at different stages of development different understandings are called for. Some groups are not primarily interested in recruitment to university at this time because their priorities are to find teachers competent in their languages and able to encourage more students to complete their secondary schooling. In broad general terms Memorial needs to work with aboriginal communities in Labrador differently from those in Newfoundland. The common factor is the need to work with them in partnership. Only they can determine their educational needs. The role of the University is to explore with them how best its expertise can be used to address those needs.

The structure of the Task Force represents this approach. The committee consists primarily of representatives of the aboriginal communities, in particular the Federation of Newfoundland Indians, the Miawpukek Band centered in Conne River, the Labrador Métis Nation, the Mushuau and Sheshatshiu Innu Nations, and the Nunatsiavut Government. The link between these groups and the University is provided by the Chair, a former Vice-President (Academic), the Director of the Labrador Institute, the associate

Vice-President responsible for Labrador and undergraduate recruitment and a former associate Vice-President who is renowned for his detailed knowledge of the province and its communities.

### **Thematic directions**

Our research and consultations yielded four salient themes:

(1) *Early intervention.* High school graduation rates among aboriginal people are well below the provincial average. This pattern exists in aboriginal communities throughout the world, but numerous studies show that the difference has nothing to do with ability but much to do with reasons for staying in school. These reasons and the means for addressing them must be found locally in consultation with all those involved.

(2) *Individual success.* Aboriginal persons who get as far as Memorial are exceptional individuals, having overcome more than the usual obstacles to becoming educated people. Yet too few complete their programs. We are obliged to them for perceptiveness about their needs and what the University must do to improve retention.

(3) *Educational programming.* Across Canada, universities with a serious commitment to aboriginal education reflect it in their programs, making it easier for students to say, "I belong here." Memorial has neglected this dimension of its responsibilities, but it is not difficult to identify corrective measures.

(4) *Coordination.* The Aboriginal Resource Inventory shows activity across Memorial's broad expanse, but the elements rarely connect or reinforce one another. The aboriginal network is weak and needs development in order to take fuller advantage of many interesting opportunities.

A further theme is implicit in much of our discussion. Our subject is developing aboriginal capacity within the Canadian community. Development requires patience and determination. It is necessary to take the long view but to begin now. The next few paragraphs illustrate these points clearly.

### **1. EARLY INTERVENTION**

#### **Teacher-motivators**

As aboriginal communities in Newfoundland and Labrador become self-governing, their need for educated persons grows more urgent. In order to flourish bands, community governments and governing associations need knowledgeable civil servants, professionals in health care and social work, teachers and culturally literate people generally. This need is especially challenging because schooling often ends before

students reach the threshold of admission to University. There is general agreement that the long term solution will include a cadre of community based and culturally attuned educators who can communicate effectively with students and their families and encourage the most academically able.

The need for such teachers is especially acute in Innu and Inuit communities where English is a second language. For many years, the Faculty of Education contributed to this need through its Teacher Education Program in Labrador, but the structure and objectives of that program do not fit contemporary needs. In consultation with the aboriginal communities the Faculty has developed a new approach to training aboriginal teachers, developing a curriculum designed for aboriginal students and improving retention in the K-12 school system. The details of the proposed program are set out in the Faculty's document, "Community-Based Aboriginal Teacher Education," which is a submission to the Strategic Initiatives process for defining budgeting priorities .

This proposal has many virtues. It responds collaboratively and effectively to an acknowledged educational need. It honours its commitment to place-based education by calling for a faculty member to be based in Labrador. It recognizes the different needs of the Innu and Inuit and defines a direct path to a bachelor's degree. It also has the collateral benefits of augmenting the capacity of the Labrador Institute to link the University effectively with the region and further cements the advantageous co-location agreement between Memorial and the College of the North Atlantic (CNA) in Happy Valley-Goose Bay. For all of these reasons and for the proposal's consistency with Strategic Plan goals 1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 13, 14, 15, 16 and 18 we recommend as follows:

**Recommendation 1: The University should include the proposal of the Faculty of Education for Community-Based Aboriginal Teacher Education among Memorial's highest priorities.**

#### Peer-to-Peer Support

The fruits of teacher training will take years to mature, making it vital to implement the community-based approach in ways whose effects will be seen sooner. Young people and their elders need to understand the options and satisfactions that come from education. The advantages can be effectively conveyed by present college and university students and alumni from among the Métis, Mi'kmaq, Inuit and Innu peoples who engage with their counterparts and their families as early as the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grades. Stressing the need to stay in school, these "Ambassadors" can also encourage mature adults who have not completed high school to consider the advantages of higher education. Memorial University and the College of the North Atlantic have a common interest in maximizing the number of aboriginal people who are eligible to enter a post-secondary education program. The institutions have accordingly drafted a Memorandum of Understanding that defines the framework for a collaborative early-intervention program. It is attached to this report as an Appendix, together with further development of the ambassadorial concept. Given the fit between the proposal and Strategic Plan goals 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 13, 14, 15, 16, and 18, we make the following recommendation:

**Recommendation 2: The University should sign the agreement with the College of the North Atlantic for a collaborative early-intervention program, jointly pursue external funding with CNA and develop the practical details in conjunction with the aboriginal communities and organizations, schools and school boards.**

Stay-in-school programs are not part of the reasons for which the College and the University are funded by the provincial government, making the need for external support essential. The encouragement of the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs makes us confident that this support can be identified. Programs of this kind also require coordinating many activities that are occurring in any event and making them better connected. We discuss these matters further under our fourth main theme but need also to stress one further need. The University's administrative systems – including Financial Services, Human Resources and Risk management -- must be configured so that they encourage rather than frustrate Memorial's outreach objectives. We have heard repeatedly of impediments to ambassadorial efforts that make them unduly difficult. We are thus led to a further recommendation:

**Recommendation 3: Senior Administration should conduct an independent review of administrative systems in order to ensure that they facilitate ambassadorial activities. These systems should permit quick payment for services rendered, avoid rules that place ambassadorial functions at risk and accommodate the expectations of our partners in the field.**

An early-intervention program is a major undertaking. Although we presuppose external funding for its ongoing operation, local work will be required to get the pieces in place that will enable the initiative to thrive. A supplement to the Appendix provides some indication of the necessary elements. Someone must organize them and maintain connections with the external partners. Hence, the following crucial recommendation:

**Recommendation 4: Senior Administration should identify a member of the Memorial community to be responsible for organizing the University's contribution to a comprehensive early-intervention program and provide that person with the time needed to create the effective network required for its successful operation.**

#### Transitional Programs

Opportunities for early intervention can last up to the point of university entry, which poses some of the most intimidating prospects of continuing one's education beyond secondary school. City life is foreign to most aboriginal students. They have no regular occasion for developing the life skills for coping confidently with urban and academic environments. A high school diploma does not ensure survival in post-secondary education without some assistance in coping with issues of housing, transportation, childcare and separation from family. Memorial's Division of Lifelong Learning is practiced in enabling individuals to become comfortable and confident in two worlds and

can develop appropriate bridging activities and courses to achieve this result among people who are getting ready to experience a different sense of rhythm in their lives. (Strategic Plan Goals 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 13, 14, 15, 16, 18, 19)

There is also an academic dimension to early intervention. Core Math, Science, and English can be especially difficult for students in remote schools with small graduating cohorts and teachers who are not trained in these subjects. Until this large issue is better addressed, Lifelong Learning can constructively assist in developing these basic competencies in collaboration with CNA, schools and school boards wherever the expenses of transitional and bridging programs can be recovered from the participants, their native organizations, the provincial Department of Education or other partners.

**Recommendation 5: The Division of Lifelong Learning should proceed with the development of cost-recovery transitional and bridging programs wherever need for them is identified in consultation with the College of the North Atlantic, the Federation of Newfoundland Indians, the Innu Nation, the Labrador Métis Nation, the Miawpukek Band and the Nunatsiavut Government.**

## 2. INDIVIDUAL SUCCESS

Memorial recognizes that by increasing the numbers of students from around the world the diversity they bring enriches the educational environment for everyone through their knowledge, traditions and experiences. Aboriginal students from Newfoundland and Labrador bring all the same benefits to the University. Their diverse traditions and backgrounds are resources for others at the same time as different mother tongues and ways of learning create demands for support services. Lacking that support, too few of the aboriginal students who enrol at Memorial complete their degrees. Consultations with in-course aboriginal students and with other institutions yield a clear three-part picture of a framework for overcoming the “culture shock” faced by many aboriginal students when they come to Memorial. The University can be intimidating: “There are more people in one of my classes than in my home community.” Reasonable accommodation is appropriate in the interest of offering a welcoming environment, promoting mutually supportive structures and providing on-campus surroundings that mitigate estrangement.

### A welcoming environment

Services available to all students are of course available to aboriginal students as well, but generic programs are not designed to address special linguistic, academic and cultural needs. Welcome changes are under way. As part of honouring their distinctness, the University now invites aboriginal students to self-identify when they file application papers, providing an opportunity to serve them better.<sup>1</sup> The more students perceive the

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<sup>1</sup> 291 identified in September 2009, 271 undergraduate and 20 graduate distributed across the St. John's campus (180), SWGC (59), the Marine Institute (1), Distance

invitation as recognition that they are valued; the more complete this source of information will become and the better able the University will be to address their needs effectively. This perception will be enhanced by a number of complementary initiatives. Some of the most important are listed below.

Aboriginal students have rightly pointed out that Memorial does not offer scholarships or grants specifically for aboriginal students, although it does offer them to international students. Recognizing the heterogeneity of the provincial population, the Senate Committee on Undergraduate Scholarships has sent Senate a proposal to designate scholarships for aboriginal populations in Newfoundland and Labrador, in partnership with the Innu, Inuit, Métis and Mi'kmaq communities wherever possible. Please see Recommendation 6.

Some academic programs, notably the Faculty of Medicine, incorporate encouragement to aboriginal students by reserving places for properly qualified candidates. Others do not. The differences of practice sometimes express philosophical questions, but there are no relevantly different criteria for the admission of aboriginal students to a program in Education, Engineering, Kinesiology, Medicine, Nursing, Pharmacy or Social Work. It is desirable for there to be a clear institutional stance that recognizes the need for aboriginal practitioners of these professions in their communities. We believe that coherence will only come from a policy of explicit inclusion. See Recommendation 7.

By and large, sessions specific for aboriginal students have been absent from the annual orientation for new matriculants in St. John's. September 2009 marked the first time that their presence has been acknowledged through activities and materials designed for them in particular. Evaluations have been positive, indicating that participation will contribute to long-term achievement. This is reason to encourage all of the aboriginal organizations to inform the University of the students they are sponsoring prior to orientation, so that these students can be personally invited to participate. See Recommendation 8.

At one time, the Native Liaison Office (NLO) developed a "buddy system" for Inuit students. The lessons learned could be productively applied to a new system of peer mentors for all aboriginal students who would welcome this form of personal assistance. The mentors would require training, but those with the appropriate aptitude could find worthwhile incentives in the provision of volunteer points through Student Affairs and Services. See Recommendation 9.

A significant minority of aboriginal students are single parents whose lives include caring for children as well as attending classes. They often have housing and transportation issues that are not well addressed by existing arrangements in on-campus residences. In St. John's a couple with two children can live on campus but there is no suitable space for a mother with three children. As well as better physical facilities imagination and flexibility are called for in such cases. See Recommendation 10.

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Education (32), Western Regional School of Nursing (9) and the Centre for Nursing Studies (9). One was unidentified by campus. The total in September 2008 was 223.

Memorial has begun to partner with a number of external service agencies, such as the Friendship Centres in Goose Bay and St. John's. These agencies have valuable resources that the University is unlikely to develop in the foreseeable future, such as access to elders and other advisors, whom aboriginal students are often more comfortable in approaching than formal authorities within bureaucratic structures. Mutual interest in closer relationships will help Memorial develop an environment in which aboriginal students are encouraged to succeed. See Recommendation 11.

These reflections, in conjunction with Strategic Plan Goals 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8 and 13, support a series of recommendations bearing upon the welcoming structures that provide background conditions for academic success. Recommendation 6 and 7 promote our explicit academic openness to aboriginal students. Recommendation 8 through 11 call for enhancement to student services.

**Recommendation 6: Through Senate, Memorial should recognize its special obligation to aboriginal students by designating scholarships specific to them. At least one each should be available to Innu, Inuit, Métis and Mi'kmaq students, with additional awards developed in partnership with the communities.**

**Recommendation 7: Through the office of the Vice-President (Academic) in consultation with deans and directors the University should develop an inclusive institutional stance towards reserving places for qualified aboriginal students in all faculties and schools. The Faculty of Medicine offers an attractive model.**

**Recommendation 8: The aboriginal orientation activities and aboriginal handbook overseen by Student Affairs and Services should be maintained and developed further. Whenever units of the University plan activities and develop materials for students in general they should ask themselves whether an aboriginal component can appropriately be incorporated.**

**Recommendation 9: The Native Liaison Office should develop a volunteer "buddy system," pairing each new aboriginal student with a more experienced and suitably trained student colleague for help with registration, life skills and other needs that may arise..**

**Recommendation 10: Campus housing officials, the Native Liaison Office and the Office of Student Success Programs should meet as necessary in order to ensure that aboriginal students admitted to the University have access to needed housing and childcare.**

**Recommendation 11: The Director of Student Success Services should work with external agencies that provide services to aboriginal people. In particular, a formal understanding should be developed between the Labrador Institute and the Labrador Friendship Centre in Goose Bay and between Student Affairs and Services and the Native Friendship Centre in St. John's.**

## Mutual Assistance

Although our Innu, Inuit, Métis and Mi'kmaq students represent distinct cultures they also value partnerships that will promote their common needs. They presently lack good means for identifying these needs and communicating them effectively, but among the most useful consultations of the Task Force was an assembly of aboriginal students. Regularizing meetings of this kind in the form of periodic consultative gatherings of all interested aboriginal students at the Corner Brook and St. John's campuses can provide a crucial forum for advice on the conditions of students' success. We accordingly propose the creation of Aboriginal Students Councils formally sanctioned by the University and convened by one of its officers. We will further propose below that the modalities of these meetings be arranged by a Special Advisor to the President on Aboriginal Affairs, the full rationale for which is developed under the theme of coordination later in this report. These gatherings of all aboriginal students who choose to attend will be another way for Memorial to say "We value you" and "We hear you." It may also spin off the kinds of MUNSU-authorized social clubs that can enhance students' personal lives and educational experiences. (Strategic Plan Goals 1, 7, 8, 13)

**Recommendation 12: The University should at least once each year convene Aboriginal Students Councils on both main campuses for purposes of consultation and advice about the conditions of their personal and academic success at Memorial.**

## Gathering Space

Possibilities for self-help and mutual support are magnified by the existence of convenient space where aboriginal classmates can gather, talk and seek advice from persons they trust. More than one student has said that Memorial would not have been survivable without the meeting space and services provided by a Native Liaison Office on the St. John's campus. From the early 1990s the Labrador Inuit Association, followed by the Nunatsiavut Government, paid the salary of the coordinator while the University provided the space, which now consists of three small cubicles in the Student Centre. Most of the external funding was withdrawn this year because of declining numbers of Inuit students, although the Nunatsiavut Government committed \$20,000 for the 2009-10 year. The University is providing the balance of the costs from contingency funds. A clear decision is required to move beyond this unstable situation.

Properly managed, the present circumstances provide the opportunity for a new beginning. Under the previous arrangement, the coordinator reported to the Nunatsiavut Government. Although it was understood that the coordinator would provide services to Métis, Mi'kmaq and Innu as well as Inuit students, the external orientation of the office did not always make the others feel comfortable. We now need to find the means to develop a new NLO whose explicit mandate includes services to all aboriginal students and an orientation towards Memorial's other aboriginal initiatives. Useful steps in this direction have been taken by the appointment of a new coordinator who reports to the

Director of Student Success Programs and has already assumed responsibility for developing orientation activities and materials.

The instability of the present situation arises from two factors. First, the incumbent is on a short-term contract, making the services of the Office precarious and inhibiting longer term planning. Moreover, it is important that the NLO coordinator is conscious of aboriginal issues, is viewed as credible within the various aboriginal communities and has a post-secondary level of education. It is also preferred (and is currently the case) that the coordinator of this office be of aboriginal descent. These requirements make the position both hard to fill and hard to maintain, especially on temporary contract. (Another agency has already tried to hire away the incumbent.) Second, no university that is seriously committed to aboriginal students operates a gathering place with a single coordinator. As services provided to aboriginal students increase and better connections are forged with relevant university offices, the coordinator must be provided with the assistance required to carry out new demands and to have time to plan effectively for the future. If the NLO evolves in ways that reflect a number of our recommendations, these demands will grow, but for the immediately foreseeable future one supporting staff person will permit the necessary developments. Two recommendations follow:

**Recommendation 13: The University should make the position of coordinator of the Native Liaison Office permanent without delay and identify the funds required for the Office's operation.**

**Recommendation 14: The NLO should assess its staffing needs and develop a schedule for incremental increases as required.**

Across the country many positions in liaison offices or the equivalent are project-related and paid through funds obtained through external funds, typically from the federal government. Such arrangements are not ideal but may be unavoidable when budgets are constrained. We comment further about sources of funding below.

Space is a particularly vexing issue on the St. John's campus and is becoming so for the NLO. The present rooms can accommodate only 8 to 10 persons at any particular time. Responsibilities to the whole of a growing cohort entail that the space available for aboriginal students must be reassessed. Fortunately, this is less a problem for aboriginal gathering space than for many other legitimate needs, since there is under-utilized room devoted to aboriginal purposes in the Education Building and in the immediate vicinity of the Canada Research Chair in Aboriginal Studies (CRC) in the Inco Innovation Centre. Some rationalization of these resources in the context of other demands needs to be developed. We therefore recommend as follows:

**Recommendation 15: The Office of Student Affairs and Services should undertake a study of aboriginal space in consultation with aboriginal students, the Manager of Space Planning and Administration and other interested parties in order to identify adequately expanded room for the NLO near the centre of the St. John's campus.**

The issue for Sir Wilfred Grenfell College appears to be less pressing but the examples of initiatives in St. John's may provide guidance for subsequent improvements in Corner Brook. On all these matter see Strategic Plan Goals 1, 7, 8 and 13.

### 3. EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMING

The aboriginal realities of Canada are represented in the educational programs of universities that have chosen to take these realities seriously. They speak convincingly about recruiting more aboriginal students by providing aboriginal content in their curriculum, having found that a welcoming environment must include the option of learning more about one's origins and ways of life. These circumstances do not now exist at Memorial. The proposal to develop a teacher training program for Labrador schools begins to address this issue but only for a small section of the student body. Without other changes too many aboriginal students will continue to find themselves in a "revolving door" resulting from an intellectual milieu in which they often feel alienated and unwelcome. They cannot identify themselves in their courses and textbooks and opt out of a foreign environment.

#### Aboriginal Studies

The University does offer an Aboriginal Studies Minor, but students reasonably complain about delays in completing it because the required courses are often not offered in a timely way, as well as about the minimal aboriginal content of most of those that are available. As the Faculty of Arts has proposed, creating a properly staffed undergraduate major in aboriginal studies is the convincing way for an educational community to affirm that aboriginal issues hold interest and value. Many universities will lack the rationale for developing and maintaining such a program, but in a province with the highest proportion of aboriginal people east of Manitoba a bachelors program in Aboriginal Studies is part of the appropriate academic response to the reality of place.

The Task Force believes that a new program in aboriginal studies will bring many substantial virtues with it. It can become an essential part of invigorating healthy awareness of the aboriginal reality in Newfoundland and Labrador. It will prepare people to contribute to the development of their indigenous communities and give other Canadians an opportunity to know more about an important part of the province's heritage. It should also make Memorial attractive to aboriginal students from other provinces. In partnership with DELT it will permit elements of community-based instruction within the program, which can also offer an attractive suite of core options for professional programs that are important to the development of aboriginal communities, including Business Administration, Education, Nursing and Social Work. Such a program can also provide a service to schools and faculties whose students may opt to do a major, a minor or an Honours program in Aboriginal Studies combined with another subject.

The University made an initial commitment to aboriginal studies by seeking and securing a Canada Research Chair in the subject. With renewed stability in that Chair Memorial is well placed to develop new programs in this burgeoning area of study in partnership with the province's Mi'kmaq communities in Newfoundland and the Innu First Nations, the Métis Nation and the Nunatsiavut Government in Labrador. As a further step, the Faculty of Arts has made a commitment from its existing budget to a new position on gender and aboriginal matters – a major cluster of central issues. The position, along with the CRC, provides a basis for the critical mass essential to a successful program. Three further faculty members should be sufficient to complete the necessary complement. If one or more candidates of aboriginal origin are acceptable, they will add intellectual resonance, community connections and resources for advising students who are often reluctant to seek help from people they find culturally remote.

**Recommendation 16: The Faculty of Arts should lead the development of a bachelors program in Aboriginal Studies, supported by funding for three additional faculty positions required for a vigorous course of studies.**

The detailed academic content of the program will be determined by the disciplinary expertise of the persons hired to lead it and consultations with aboriginal communities and Memorial departments about their needs. In both the developmental and operational stages the program will thus facilitate connection and communication beyond Memorial to the communities it serves and within Memorial to scholars with aboriginal expertise in Education, Social Work, Music, Earth Science, Biology, Nursing, Law and Medicine and other academic disciplines as revealed in the Aboriginal Resource Inventory. It will thereby help to repair the problem that as long as expertise exists only in isolated pockets, one person's work does not reinforce another's as well as it should. It will be part of the mission of the program to link these scholars in a network of information that will be invaluable to its students.

The addition of these resources will make the University better able to meet central goals of its Strategic Plan, including the following the following commitments: Under Goal 2, "Making instructors more aware of the different academic needs of ... aboriginal students"; under 3, "Explore ways to increase inter-disciplinary programs"; under 4, "Increase the number of ... aboriginal students"; under 5, "Serve off-campus students"; under 8, "focus on established areas of need, further refining and explicitly assigning resources to them, including ... aboriginal cultures"; under 9, "Facilitate the organization of cross-disciplinary groups"; and under 16, "Memorial recognizes the need to create an environment that welcomes and promotes the success of aboriginal students." In addressing these goals, the objectives and design of the Aboriginal Studies program should also make it appealing in the context of priorities set out in the White Paper on Public Post-Secondary Education, in particular its stress on adult learners (section 5.1), aboriginal education (5.2), and rural participation and distance education (5.4).

It is worth stressing that the place-based modes of instruction championed by the Faculty of Education should also be integral to the design of Aboriginal Studies. In

addition to web-based instruction, which will be especially beneficial for mature learners, the students connected with a masters program being developed by the CRC in Aboriginal Studies and the professors participating in a Community-University Research Alliance in Labrador can be available for instruction in rural communities and at CNA campuses. The needs of the aboriginal communities and governments also lend themselves to the development of a co-op component within the program. As indicated above, these elements will be developed in partnership with the communities and governments in question.

If Recommendation 16 should languish there will be a significant hole in the Task Force's integrated package of proposals. It would mean neglecting a selective advantage for Memorial in virtue of the limited number of Aboriginal Studies programs in Canada (serious competitors are limited to the University of Saskatchewan and the University of Victoria and to a lesser extent Trent and York Universities). It would also mean that Memorial is not doing all it can to provide relevant options for the labour market in aboriginal communities, making their development more difficult.

### Graduate Programs

We mentioned above that the CRC in Aboriginal Studies hopes to begin a masters program in this area. Such a development is greatly to be encouraged. Graduates from the bachelors program would be natural candidates for an advanced degree whose output would undoubtedly include some of the future leaders of their aboriginal communities. Stated succinctly, the graduate program would address Strategic Plan Goals 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 13, 14, 16 and 18.

In principle, the proposal for a masters program requires little extended discussion. In practice, some administrative support will be required until there is sufficient expertise dedicated to aboriginal studies. Significant expertise already exists at Memorial – the CRC and the Task Force have identified over 100 individuals capable of making an excellent contribution – but because the personnel are assigned to present programs in various departments, schools and faculties they are not generally available for instruction in other offerings. Many inter-disciplinary programs have had to address a similar problem of instructional resources. Proceeding on the assumption that aboriginal initiatives are priorities for Memorial and following a precedent established by Women's Studies suggests a solution that should be transferable to other subjects to which the University has assigned importance but not provided the resources necessary for them to flourish.

**Recommendation 17: In reviewing requests to fill faculty positions the Vice-President (Academic) should consider the potential of appointments to address needs for graduate instruction in aboriginal studies, seeking agreement where appropriate that those hired will be dependably and regularly available for teaching in an approved program. Alternatively, searches could be approved on condition that suitable present members of the academic staff will be released for this purpose.**

With such administrative support the instructional components of a masters program in aboriginal studies can be accommodated within the teaching responsibilities of the CRC and a cross-disciplinary team, making it unnecessary to seek major new funding for this initiative.

Another teaching-related problem makes it difficult for the CRC to supervise graduate students in departments other than his own even when he would be ideal for their students in that role. This is an example of a more general problem. Inter-disciplinary work is hampered when professors must negotiate contributions beyond their academic "silos" on a case-by-case basis. We suggest this way of mitigating the nuisance:

**Recommendation 18: Graduate students should be able to seek out professors with appropriate expertise as their principal supervisors. If the proposed supervisor has appropriate qualifications, permission will not be unreasonably denied.**

#### Future Programs

Memorial is not viewed as particularly responsive to the programming needs of aboriginal organizations and governments. The TEPL illustrates the problem. While the proposal from the Faculty of Education is the harbinger of a new institutional approach, in order to flourish that approach will require concerted administrative support. The problem is not a lack of good will. It is the absence of channels through which aboriginal interests can receive authoritative encouragement of the kind that a vice-president can offer to a dean or director. Such encouragement did assist in the creation of an Integrated Nursing Access Program conducted in cooperation with CNA in Goose Bay, and the Task Force actively promoted a new agreement between the School of Social Work and the Nunatsiavut Government to offer the BSW in Labrador; but there are at present no regular means of providing such support. We attempt to address this matter in the course of discussing how to coordinate Memorial's considerable depth of aboriginal expertise with the needs of aboriginal communities. We turn, then, to identifying institutional means for imparting momentum to the initiatives we have proposed.

#### 4. COORDINATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

Memorial is well positioned to become prominent in aboriginal education and research, but we are not yet institutionally well configured to exploit existing talent effectively because our islands of expertise do not connect, communicate, engage or reinforce effectively. Several years ago Memorial confronted a similar problem with respect to rural and regional development. There were significant levels of relevant activity but they were almost invisible to one another and the external community. As a result they failed to create a whole greater than the individual parts. The answer was the Harris Centre,

which has provided a focal point for all interested stakeholders in this province and beyond. The approach has been reinforced by a reorientation of the Labrador Institute, whose coordinating and facilitating roles have introduced new coherence into the University's activities in the region. Aboriginal initiatives at Memorial need a similar network for realizing their objectives fully.

### The Aboriginal Network

The Harris Centre and Labrador Institute will be part of this network. The Labrador Institute in particular provides the main presence of the University within a vast geographical area but its potential for carrying the University brand is limited by its place within the system. It is too far down the administrative chain for it to be part of institutional planning in a strong enough way to be very meaningful to Labrador. Equally, it is not positioned within the system to provide effective institution-to-institution contact between Memorial and such bodies as the University of the Arctic, in which we should participate more fully. A change in the reporting line of the Director of the Labrador Institute would be a major corrective these deficiencies. Like the Harris Centre, the activities of the Institute substantially include research, so that this line should include the VP (Research) as well as the VP (Academic). At the same time, the effectiveness of the Director depends upon direct access to the President. We therefore recommend:

**Recommendation 19: The Director of the Labrador Institute should report directly to the President, with the understanding that the President will delegate the reporting role to the Offices of the Vice-Presidents (Academic) and (Research) for operational matters.<sup>2</sup>**

Although the Labrador Institute provides a vital connection to the almost 10,000 aboriginal residents of Labrador, the Director's responsibilities extend to the University's presence among the larger remainder of the region's population. The challenges specific to the aboriginal population of the entire province, including the almost 10,000 aboriginal residents of the island portion,<sup>3</sup> can only be satisfactorily addressed through a complementary arrangement. Our preferred arrangement is a Special Advisor to the President for Aboriginal Affairs. Following the successful practice at the University of Saskatchewan, a high-level position is necessary to keep the University reminded of the special needs of its aboriginal students, to ensure aboriginal leaders of dependable access to the right places within the University's senior administration and to support the strong internal and external networks needed to help move the University's aboriginal agenda forward. The fundamental responsibility is thus to promote and, as appropriate, coordinate initiatives mandated by the Strategic Plan and the many University activities that reflect the Plan, not to mention the provincial government's Northern Strategic Plan for Labrador.

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<sup>2</sup> This recommendation was developed without the involvement of the LI Director.

<sup>3</sup> Aboriginal numbers for Labrador and Newfoundland are taken from Census Canada reports. They appear to be considerably understated. The Qalipu Mi'kmaq First Nation Band, which is currently in the enrolment process, has received 14,000 valid applications for membership from Newfoundland residents.

**Recommendation 20: In consultation with the aboriginal communities, the President should hire a Special Advisor for Aboriginal Affairs, who will occupy the same reporting level as the Director of the Labrador Institute and promote Memorial's aboriginal initiatives throughout the University.**

A few additional reminders will complete the rationale for this position. We have noted the diversity of Memorial's aboriginal students, whose separate cultures do not encourage their self-organization. They and their communities find the University entirely too vast to navigate within it without assistance. As a result aboriginal organizations and governments have found it difficult to fast-track academic programming they deem necessary for their development. Even within Memorial, individuals and units are often surprised to learn that others are engaged in aboriginal activities of mutual interest. These major networking challenges can be addressed through a modest investment that will bring major advantages through improved communications.

The specific terms of reference appropriate to this position flow from its essential functions, which explicitly reflect Goals 1, 3, 13, 14, 16 and 18 of the Strategic Plan and implicitly many more of them:

Terms of reference:

- Facilitate relevant communication within the University, ensuring that nodes of aboriginal activity connect and sustaining the network in healthy condition.
- Ensure that there is a reliable system of navigation for aboriginal students who need assistance from the University.
- Convene the Aboriginal Student Council regularly and be a source of the expert advocacy aboriginal students need in order to maximize their ability to succeed.
- Provide a well-marked point of access into the University for external agencies, following the model proven by the Labrador Institute and Harris Centre.
- Establish a ready and reliable point of high-level institutional connection with aboriginal, provincial and federal governments.
- Facilitate appropriate professional programming and research assistance sought by aboriginal communities.
- Assist in resolving conflicting expectations when they arise between academic researchers and administrative departments.
- Work with the Employment Equity Officer to encourage an appropriate level of aboriginal personnel among the employees of the University.
- Coordinate pursuit of funding opportunities in conjunction with the Aboriginal Funding Officer described below.

Although the organizational details can be addressed at a later stage, there should be a defined relationship between the Presidential Advisor and elements of the University concerned with rural and regional development, in particular the CRC in Aboriginal Studies, the Harris Centre and the Labrador Institute. The Centre and the Institute have

much to teach through their resourcefulness in securing external funding for a wide variety of projects.

### Facilitating Funding

The example of universities across Canada shows that the capacity to raise external funds will be essential for the development of aboriginal initiatives at Memorial. We are unlikely to escape the reality that much support for aboriginal activities comes from the federal government, national foundations and the Canadian private sector. With those opportunities comes the disadvantage that the coordinators of native liaison offices, academic programs and outreach activities often spend great amounts of time preparing applications for support rather than providing service. Because these efforts are often opportunistically rather than strategically focused, more appropriate opportunities may be missed. The amounts of money available are large. We need systematic means for identifying and pursuing advantages without making undue demands upon busy offices and tight operating budgets. These means can be obtained by creating a dedicated grant facilitation officer for aboriginal initiatives.

**Recommendation 21: Memorial should hire a grant facilitation officer for aboriginal initiatives. The incumbent will help the University be aware of the range of funding possibilities, seek agreement about those that make sense for Memorial, and assist the University's departments, offices, centres and institutes to develop compelling applications.**

The result should repay a salary many times over. Common sense and Strategic Plan Goal 11 fully warrant this initiative. It is integral to the present set of proposals, which define a realistic new beginning for Memorial's relationship with a dynamic part of the population of Newfoundland and Labrador.

### Ahead from here

In one respect the injunction for a new beginning marks the conclusion of this report, but a conclusion is not what is really appropriate. Having set out a number of initiatives to realize goals the University has already declared for itself, we recognize that they will be meaningless unless the means also exist to move them along and monitor progress on the actions proposed.

We have defined a great deal of work for Memorial University. Much of it can be accomplished through established channels, but some of our recommendations can be achieved only through extraordinary actions. Our recommendation for a collaborative early-intervention program between Memorial and the College of the North Atlantic is a notable example. Some system of monitoring and encouraging progress during the early months is important for maintaining forward movement. The Task Force is prepared to remain in existence as a consultative body with this responsibility until the proposed framework of aboriginal initiatives is in place. Our final recommendation entails the availability of a modest operating budget.

**Recommendation 22: The Task Force on Aboriginal Initiatives should remain in place in order to monitor and encourage progress until the previous recommendations have been satisfactorily implemented.**

In lieu of formal conclusion and as indication of many of the matters requiring ongoing monitoring we offer the following table from *Say* magazine, the largest national publication for and about aboriginal youth. It lists the most frequently asked questions by aboriginal students who are considering a university and provides a good measure of the distance Memorial has to go before it can claim to take this constituency seriously.

FAQ:	Yes	No
Degree Course: Our institution offers an Aboriginal degree course, e.g. Native Studies		
Focused Course: Our institution offers programs with an Aboriginal component		
Transition Course: Our institution offers a transition program to assist students to integrate into regular programs		
Aboriginal Centre: Our facility has an Aboriginal student center		
Aboriginal Coordinator: Our facility funds a coordinator position to assist Aboriginal students		
Aboriginal Association: Our institution supports and has an Aboriginal student association		
Recruitment Initiatives: Our institution has developed and implemented an Aboriginal recruitment strategy		
Scholarship/Bursaries: Our institution offers Aboriginal specific scholarships and bursaries		
Childcare: Our institution offers childcare services including daycare		
Community Services: The community where the institution is located offers services to Aboriginal people such as friendship centres		
Emergency Financial Aid: Our institution offers emergency financial aid to students such as assistance with rent, food		
Housing: Our institution has a specific number of units for Aboriginal students on and/or off campus		
Employment: Our institution assists students and or their spouses with locating employment part-time or full-time		

**Postscript**

While this report has focused largely upon the relationship between Memorial University and aboriginal students, the Task Force keenly recognizes that where there are students there must be professors whose responsibilities include research as well as teaching. This professional expertise can be enormously valuable to aboriginal communities whose practical issues lend themselves to learned exploration. We have heard repeatedly that our financial and administrative systems sometimes collide with efficient research methods on account of clashes with the expectations of aboriginal assistants in

the field. It would therefore be useful to extend the scope of the review called for in Recommendation 3 to the facilitation of research activities.

Not only administrative flexibility but also cultural change will be needed to fully realize the University's capacity for research into aboriginal issues. The reward structure of the academy tends to favor theoretical activity and publication by premier presses and journals in matters of tenure and promotion. For Memorial to fulfill its special obligation to aboriginal communities would mean looking more favorably upon the forms of applied research that presuppose and express sound theoretical expertise. Cultural change of this kind cannot be embodied in recommendations, but it can be encouraged by administrators at all levels. We commend such leadership across the full range of aboriginal initiatives.

Finally, the Task Force wishes to express its appreciation and extend its thanks to the larger Memorial community and its external partners for generous contributions towards the conclusions expressed in this report. The Office of the Vice-President (Academic) and the Centre for Institutional Analysis and Planning have provided invaluable assistance along with countless individuals who have supported the timeliness of aboriginal initiatives at this University.

## Summary of Recommendations

Recommendation 1: The University should include the proposal of the Faculty of Education for Community-Based Aboriginal Teacher Education among Memorial's highest priorities.

Recommendation 2: The University should sign the agreement with the College of the North Atlantic for a collaborative early-intervention program, jointly pursue external funding with CNA and develop the practical details in conjunction with the aboriginal communities and organizations, schools and school boards.

Recommendation 3: Senior Administration should conduct an independent review of administrative systems in order to ensure that they facilitate ambassadorial activities. These systems should permit quick payment for services rendered, avoid rules that place ambassadorial functions at risk and accommodate the expectations of our partners in the field.

Recommendation 4: Senior Administration should identify a member of the Memorial community to be responsible for organizing the University's contribution to a comprehensive early-intervention program and provide that person with the time needed to create the effective network required for its successful operation.

Recommendation 5: The Division of Lifelong Learning should proceed with the development of cost-recovery transitional and bridging programs wherever need for them is identified in consultation with the College of the North Atlantic, the Federation of Newfoundland Indians, the Innu Nation, the Labrador Métis Nation, the Miawpukek Band and the Nunatsiavut Government.

Recommendation 6: Through Senate, Memorial should recognize its special obligation to aboriginal students by designating scholarships specific to them. At least one each should be available to Innu, Inuit, Métis and Mi'kmaq students, with additional awards developed in partnership with the communities.

Recommendation 7: Through the office of the Vice-President (Academic) in consultation with deans and directors the University should develop an inclusive institutional stance towards reserving places for qualified aboriginal students in all faculties and schools. The Faculty of Medicine offers an attractive model.

Recommendation 8: The aboriginal orientation activities and aboriginal handbook overseen by Student Affairs and Services should be maintained and developed further. Whenever units of the University plan activities and develop materials for students in general they should ask themselves whether an aboriginal component can appropriately be incorporated.

Recommendation 9: The Native Liaison Office should develop a volunteer "buddy system," pairing each new aboriginal student with a more experienced and suitably trained student colleague for help with registration, life skills and other needs that may arise.

Recommendation 10: Campus housing officials, the Native Liaison Office and the Office of Student Success Programs should meet as necessary in order to ensure that aboriginal students admitted to the University have access to needed housing and childcare.

Recommendation 11: The Director of Student Success Services should work with external agencies that provide services to aboriginal people. In particular, a formal understanding should be developed between the Labrador Institute and the Labrador Friendship Centre in Goose Bay and between Student Affairs and Services and the Native Friendship Centre in St. John's.

Recommendation 12: The University should at least once each year convene Aboriginal Students Councils on both main campuses for purposes of consultation and advice about the conditions of their personal and academic success at Memorial.

Recommendation 13: The University should make the position of coordinator of the Native Liaison Office permanent without delay and identify the funds required for the Office's operation.

Recommendation 14: The NLO should assess its staffing needs and develop a schedule for incremental increases as required.

Recommendation 15: The Office of Student Affairs and Services should undertake a study of aboriginal space in consultation with aboriginal students, the Manager of Space Planning and Administration and other interested parties in order to identify adequately expanded room for the NLO near the centre of the St. John's campus.

Recommendation 16: The Faculty of Arts should lead the development of a bachelors program in Aboriginal Studies, supported by funding for three additional faculty positions required for a vigorous course of studies.

Recommendation 17: In reviewing requests to fill faculty positions the Vice-President (Academic) should consider the potential of appointments to address needs for graduate instruction in aboriginal studies, seeking agreement where appropriate that those hired will be dependably and regularly available for teaching in an approved program. Alternatively, searches could be approved on condition that suitable present members of the academic staff will be released for this purpose.

Recommendation 18: Graduate students should be able to seek out professors with appropriate expertise as their principal supervisors. If the proposed supervisor has appropriate qualifications, permission will not be unreasonably denied.

Recommendation 19: The Director of the Labrador Institute should report directly to the President, with the understanding that the President will delegate the reporting role to the Offices of the Vice-Presidents (Academic) and (Research) for operational matters.

Recommendation 20: In consultation with the aboriginal communities, the President should hire a Special Advisor for Aboriginal Affairs, who will occupy the same reporting level as the Director of the Labrador Institute and promote Memorial's aboriginal initiatives throughout the University.

Recommendation 21: Memorial should hire a grant facilitation officer for aboriginal initiatives. The incumbent will help the University be aware of the range of funding possibilities, seek agreement about those that make sense for Memorial, and assist the University's departments, offices, centres and institutes to develop compelling applications.

Recommendation 22: The Task Force on Aboriginal Initiatives should remain in place in order to monitor and encourage progress until it's the prior recommendations have been Satisfactorily implemented.

Appendix

Proposed MOU and Conceptual Exposition of an "Ambassadors" Program

**MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING**  
**between**  
**COLLEGE OF THE NORTH ATLANTIC (CNA)**  
**and**  
**MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY OF NEWFOUNDLAND (MUN)**  
**for**  
**A COLLABORATIVE EARLY-INTERVENTION PROGRAM**

*I Rationale*

This agreement builds upon the principles of the co-location agreement between MUN and the CNA campus in Happy Valley-Goose Bay. Those principles invite extension to collaborative arrangements between all campuses of both institutions that are designed to maximize the pool of students eligible to undertake higher education at either the College or the University. The institutions recognize that too many aboriginal people cease their schooling before graduating from high school, making many college and university programs unavailable to them. This partnership is therefore designed to further the common interests of the aboriginal communities, the College and the University in increasing access to higher education.

*II Basic Understandings*

(A) The institutions recognize a joint responsibility to contribute to the well being of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador through participation in post-secondary education in the province. The partners intend to develop collaborative mechanisms for maximizing the number of individuals eligible for admission to their institutions.

(B) The institutions also recognize a special responsibility to contribute to an educational environment that welcomes and promotes the success of aboriginal students wherever in the province they reside but especially in Labrador, where dropout rates are highest. The partners are committed to developing means of encouraging young people to remain in school and encouraging mature adults to complete their secondary education.

(C) Immediate and sustained consultation and collaboration with aboriginal communities and organizations is a central tenet of the proposed approach. An ambassadors' program of this kind will also require the collaboration of other stakeholders, including school boards, aboriginal organizations, departments of the provincial government and willing participants from the extra-governmental sector.

(D) The means developed will include, but not be limited to, identification of aboriginal ambassadors – present college and university students and recent graduates from among the

Métis, Mi'Kmaq, Inuit and Innu peoples – who return to their communities for motivational conversations and interventions with their counterparts and their families as early as the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grades. It is anticipated that subsequent inquiry will yield strategies for the junior high (7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> grades) and senior high (10<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grades). Existing best practice strategies (e.g. Mini Courses/Science Camps) for partner institutions targeted at the school-age demographic will be identified and evaluated in terms of their adaptability for the aboriginal cohort and rural settings.

(E) Because motivating 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders to stay in school lies outside the core mandate of the College and the University, an ambassadors' program of this kind will require external funding. The partners recognize that their ability to proceed with this program entails identifying the necessary resources and undertake to secure them.

### ***III General Operational Principles***

(A) This partnership will report to a Senior Management group ("Senior Management") consisting of the Vice-President (Academic) of the University and the Vice-President, Academic and Learner Services of the College, who may empower designated officials to act on their behalf. In cases of institutional disagreement Senior Management will refer the issue to the Presidents of the institutions for resolution.

(B) An Operational Management group will be created for purposes of developing funding applications and overseeing operational protocols regarding inter-institutional communications and coordination of activities.

(C) In the case of all functions of the Operational Management group decisions will be normally be consensual. Either partner may refer a relevant issue to Senior Management as defined in section III (A) for adjudication.

### ***IV Assessment and Improvement***

The partners recognize that their ambassadorial activities will take some time to bear fruit. The institutions will develop means of assessment, report annually on retention trends and continuously identify areas for improvement.

### ***V Approval and Termination***

Upon approval by the College and the University, this memorandum of understanding shall remain in effect for an initial period of five years unless modified by mutual agreement. Such modifications will become parts of the present MOU. Either institution may terminate the arrangement earlier. Such termination by one institution shall normally be effected by giving the other institution at least one year's advance written notice of its intention to withdraw from the agreement.

On behalf of College of the North Atlantic:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

On behalf of Memorial University of Newfoundland:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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## THE AMBASSADORS: CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT

Higher education may mean little to young people who have never heard of a bachelors program, who have lived close to the land rather than with books and whose traditional ways of learning little resemble academic instruction. In many respects the ideal response is provided by effective teachers in the K-12 system. Satisfying the need for enough good teachers of aboriginal students will be a large challenge that can be met by rejuvenating teacher education in Newfoundland and Labrador as indicated in the proposal for Community-Based Aboriginal Teacher Education from the Memorial Faculty of Education. However, this is a long-term response to needs that can be addressed immediately in other ways. The complementary models include student recruitment teams who advise potential recruits about the virtues of their institution. By itself, this approach is inadequate for a number of well-understood reasons, including these:

- Recruiters often address students with whom they have not had time to build a trusting relationship.
- The expense of visiting remote communities is great, minimizing contacts and thus further limiting their effectiveness.

- Visits typically occur only late in students' secondary-school experience so that they mainly address the minority who aspire to higher education.
- Effective partnerships with school principals and counselors and potential collaborators are only weakly developed.

These circumstances call for concerted action by a number of interested parties. The ideal program will include aboriginal ambassadors – present college and university students and recent graduates from among the Métis, Mi'Kmaq, Inuit and Innu peoples – returning to their communities for regular motivational conversations with their counterparts as early as the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grades. The chief objective is to instill in young people an understanding of the options and satisfactions that come from taking advantage of educational opportunities. In order to attain this objective many parties within and beyond Memorial University will need to subscribe to a supporting role.

### *Within Memorial*

The University currently has an Ambassador Program in which several departments actively collaborate: the Division of Student Affairs and Services, the Division of Marketing and Communications, the Office of Alumni Affairs and the Office of Student Recruitment. This selective program seeks to advance Memorial through the participation of students in campus tours, affinity events in other provinces, high school visits, leadership events and university ceremonies. These departments will be essential players in an Aboriginal Ambassador program designed to encourage young people to stay in school and work hard. The broader program could be designed either as part of the Memorial Ambassador program or in parallel with it. The parallel arrangement may be the more practical one, given the particular objectives of Aboriginal Ambassadors, different criteria of selection and the role of other partners, but the four Memorial departments will have at least an essential advisory role.

Many entities within the University reach out beyond it in useful ways. Sir Wilfred Grenfell College has developed mini-university programs for aboriginal youth. The School of Music conducts tours throughout the province. Traveling athletic teams provide another presence. Students in Free Enterprise (SIFE), Women in Science and Engineering (WISE) and similar organizations are able to offer encouraging perspectives to their natural constituencies. As they increase in number, holders of co-op placements with aboriginal groups provide another source of inspiration for young people who are thinking about a plan for their lives. The Labrador Institute coordinates some of these and other activities. Certainly an overall means of coordination is needed, especially when the need to develop partnerships beyond Memorial is understood.

### *Beyond Memorial*

A significant part of aboriginal educational needs is the challenge of motivating children to stay in school in order to have the option of college or university and the opportunities flowing from higher education. Memorial has a number of natural partners in this endeavour, including the College of the North Atlantic (CNA), aboriginal governments and organizations, the Department of Labrador and Aboriginal Affairs of the provincial government and various non-governmental organizations.

*College of the North Atlantic:* Since meeting the challenge of motivation means beginning early, before the distinction between college and university has much meaning, it is desirable for Memorial and the College of the North Atlantic (CNA) to collaborate in any Aboriginal Ambassadors program. At a minimum, the institutions should keep one another informed of relevant activities in areas of aboriginal concentrations and agree on a coordinated message, especially for the earlier grades. This will require a level of trust and communication that has not always existed, but it is warranted by a common interest and responsibility for encouraging all students in Newfoundland and Labrador to understand the importance of post-secondary training and education.

*Aboriginal Governments and Organizations:* Only the aboriginal communities fully understand their educational needs. As they increasingly take responsibility for the K-12 education of their children, they also provide the keys of access to their students. Because travel to their communities can be expensive and the cost of the Ambassadors' visits is not provided for in the budgets of the college and university systems, aboriginal governments and organizations may also need to be convinced that financial assistance to this initiative is warranted. This may not be difficult (the Nunatsiavut Government already sponsors some activities for their students), but for all the above reasons they are essential partners.

*Department of Labrador and Aboriginal Affairs:* The mandate of this department of the provincial government, along with several other ministries, entails an obvious interest in the concept of Ambassadors. To a greater or lesser extent, all of the above points concerning aboriginal governments and organizations apply. Assistance with gaining financial support from federal agencies may turn out to be especially important.

*Non-governmental organizations:* Interest in the flourishing of aboriginal communities is wide and deep, creating many points at which an Ambassadors Program will naturally connect with the activities of other bodies. They obviously include the Friendship Centres in Goose Bay and St. John's. Junior Achievement of Newfoundland and Labrador (JANL) offers entrepreneurial and leadership education to elementary, junior high and high school students, making them natural partners. Private-sector companies with an interest in the development of rural Newfoundland and Labrador may likewise be interested in a project that will have the effect of increasing the number of skilled potential employees in the areas of their activity. As the Lower Churchill and other developments come on stream, this interest can only increase. Natural connections also exist with such national initiatives as the Paul Martin Aboriginal Education Initiative.

### *Practical Steps*

Because motivating 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders to stay in school is not part of Memorial's core mandate an Aboriginal Ambassador's program should not be its alone, but the University can be a champion and help the program get well started. Some initial steps:

1. Seek agreement in principle from the post-secondary partners
2. Identify an individual to negotiate terms of operation with the partners
3. Develop an internal management group, including players from the east and west coast campuses

4. Develop an economic model and sources of budgetary support for the program
5. Establish the schedule for phasing in the program

Achievement of the first of these steps is indicated in the preceding MOU with the College of the North Atlantic, but it leaves many practical questions to be addressed. They include:

- What training will the Ambassadors require and who will provide it?
- What recognition can be offered the Ambassadors?
- How will they be identified and selected?
- Is "Ambassador" a good title or is there a better aboriginal word?
- How will we develop a comprehensive, stable network necessary for pursuing opportunities?
- How can the program extend to mature students who need encouragement to try higher education?
- Who will negotiate operations with our partners and help develop the financial dimension?

Addressing and answering these and other question will require the input of many players within Memorial alone. They include the following elements of the necessary internal network, whether through the individuals identified or their delegates:

Harris Centre	Rob Greenwood, Director
Sir Wilfred Grenfell College	Holly Pike, Principal
Marine Institute	Glenn Blackwood, Director
Faculty of Medicine	Carolyn Spurge, Aboriginal Initiative Coordinator
Faculty of Arts	Noel Roy, Acting Dean
Faculty of Education	David Dibbon, Dean
School of Music	Tom Gordon, Director
Labrador Institute	Keith Chaulk, Director
Recruitment Office	Shona Perry-Maidment, Director
Marketing + Communications	Victoria Collins, Director
Student Affairs & Services	Tom Brophy, Manager of Student Success
Alumni Affairs	Penny Blackwood, Director
Lifelong Learning	Karen Kennedy, Director
Distance Education	Ann Marie Vaughan, Director
Alumni Native Liaison Office	Sheila Freake, Coordinator
MUN Students Union	Daniel Bennett, Aboriginal Representative

In addition, several other individuals from the University who have expertise in aboriginal issues would be valuable participants. They include:

Marguerite Mackenzie, Innu expert  
 Doug Wharram, Inuttitut expert  
 Lisa Rankin, Principal Investigator for CURA on Inuit occupation of southern Labrador  
 Tony Adey, SWGC student recruiter  
 Geoff Rayner-Canham, SWGC Labrador activist