

**Aboriginal Access to Post-Secondary Education at the University of British  
Columbia: An Exploratory Study**

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## Abstract

This paper is intended to be placed within the Indigenous paradigm of educational research. Shawn Wilson (2007) has grounded the term *Indigenist* to relate to the specific research paradigm that is founded within Indigenous ways of knowing and understanding through the interaction with the wholistic environment which Aboriginal people have come to understand. The paradigm also places a focus on Indigenous human rights within a larger social context. Wilson argues that the “Indigenist paradigm can be used by anyone who chooses to follow its tenets” (p. 193). In this case, the Indigenist paradigm will be drawn upon to review how The University of British Columbia has enacted the Aboriginal Strategic Plan set by the institution in 2008. The available literature and research is limited as Aboriginal access to post-secondary education continues to be an evolving area of study. This paper intends to prompt a dialogue regarding Aboriginal student enrolment at the University of British Columbia. The paper focuses on the UBC Aboriginal Strategic Plan as well as the *Aboriginal Strategic Plan: Fifth Year Implementation Report* published in 2014. Canadian Census data from 2011 will be used to further understand aspects of educational realities that currently exist. More specifically, this paper compares and contrasts UBC’s Aboriginal student data with Aboriginal student data produced by Statistics Canada to further understand the current higher educational climate within which Aboriginal students navigate. This paper concludes with recommendations and thoughts for future research.

### **Preamble: Locating myself**

As I have been navigating my way through my Master of Education program in Higher Education, I have felt a personal draw towards understanding Aboriginal access to post-secondary education in Canada. As a *Métis* person, I have a personal connection to this field of study and take great interest in further understanding (and hopefully contributing to) the emerging discourse of Aboriginal access to education. The field of Aboriginal access to post-secondary education is continuously emerging and thus, I am aware that I must narrow my scope if I am to produce something that would fit within the constricted timeframe that is allotted from the UBC Faculty of Graduate and Post-Doctoral Studies. As I delved further into the Higher Education master's program, it has become apparent that little is known about access to post-secondary education at the University of British Columbia, or in a broader view, across Canada at our post-secondary institutions. I intend to explore who is impacted and the implications of the decisions made at an institutional level.

My overarching goal while reviewing the literature in this field is to better understand how Aboriginal educational policies have impacted Aboriginal access to graduate programs in post-secondary education. As a start to exploring these large phenomena, critically important questions must be recognized and addressed: 1) What does the data tell us about Aboriginal Student enrolment at the University of British Columbia? 2) Are Aboriginal students systemically disadvantaged in terms of enrolments at UBC? If so, in what ways?

The Eurocentric views of traditional European Higher Education systems can be oppressing in nature to others who may not be familiar with this system of formal education. Aboriginal ways of knowing or "Indigenous Knowledge (s)" has become a common thread when institutions are looking at ways to indigenize curriculum. For the purpose of this paper,

Indigenous Knowledge is defined as knowledge that is acquired by Indigenous peoples through everyday experience. Indigenous knowledge reflects the abilities, significances, and value system of both Indigenous peoples and communities. As we are aware, in the current climate of education in Canada, this is now commonplace within all levels of our formal Canadian education system. Childcare centers through to research intensive universities are all seemingly exploring ways which Indigenous knowledge(s) can be taken into consideration when developing or revamping curriculum. I intend to explore how the current literature on Aboriginal ways of knowing and Indigenous knowledge(s) is currently exploring Aboriginal access to post-secondary education in Canada.

The review of literature below is an ongoing endeavour which will continue to evolve and be used to inform my future research and shape the tools for data collection.

### **Introduction**

Like all people we have been adapting our traditions...it is important to note that each of us comes from a specific context: social, historical, political and geographic. We share similarities, hopes and dreams and lives full of oppression and denial of who we are as people. We all share a belief that our children's lives will be better because of what we do today. Noeliane Villebroun, National Dene Chief (Abu-Saad & Champagne, p. 14).

Historical educational policies have long had lasting impacts on Canadian Aboriginal access to post-secondary education. An example of this is captured through the forced assimilation of Aboriginal students through non-Aboriginal educational institutions. It is apparent that this creates a daunting challenge for Aboriginal youth who aspire to pursue a post-secondary or graduate education (Millennium Scholarship Foundation, 2005). As Blair

Stonechild points out “Residential schools were one of the most obvious symbols of paternalism, and, by 1965, Indian Affairs commenced the process of closing them. The policy shifted, without consulting Indian people, to entering into Joint Schools Agreements with local and provincial school boards” (Stonechild, 2006, p. 40). It is this type of governmental oversight in education which has led to many Canadian post-secondary institutions like The University of British Columbia to attempt to reconcile historically strained relationships through the creation and implementation of Aboriginal Strategic Plans. These strategic plans serve the purpose of recognizing Aboriginal students and Aboriginal ways of knowing with the educational institution. Scholar Amanda Parriag suggests in her 2011 review of *Factors that Support Successful Transitions by Aboriginal People from K-12 to Postsecondary Education* that Aboriginal learners often view post-secondary education as unattainable due to insufficient levels of Eurocentric academic preparation within the standard elementary, middle and high school levels (Parriag, 2011). The typical Canadian public education system has not traditionally incorporated Aboriginal values and knowledges into the daily structure of the system. Parriag points out that “many Aboriginal learners must invest substantial time and resources in development and preparatory programs following their public schooling. The current quality of academic preparation many Aboriginal people receive adds to the cost” (Parriag, 2011 p. 58). In the next section, I explore the literature on Aboriginal ways of knowing (with a push towards Wholistic education), which if fully recognized within the Canadian education system to a greater extent, may begin to dissolve some of the barriers that lead to low levels of academic preparation in the Canadian elementary and secondary education systems.

### **Aboriginal Ways of Knowing**

Historical educational policies have long had lasting impacts on Canadian Aboriginal access to post-secondary education (Stonechild, 2006). It is necessary to acknowledge the historical ramifications of government and institutionally implemented educational policy and the affects it has had on the access to education for Aboriginal people of today. In doing so, this literature review will focus on how historical and contemporary policies with reference to Aboriginal access to post-secondary education have shaped the graduate education landscape within our Canadian post-secondary institutions. Secondly the review of literature will give rise to the notion that access to education is an important concept along with Aboriginal ways of knowing while recognizing the need for Indigenous Knowledge to be incorporated into the post-secondary curriculum and admission criteria. Aboriginal access to formalized systemic education has been highly debated within Canada and remains a contentious topic of discussion in the current educational and political climate.

The Canadian Aboriginal population has seen a dramatic level of urbanization in the past forty years. Indigenous people bring a wealth of knowledge and choose to move to an urban setting for a variety of reasons, including the need for education, employment, housing and healthcare (The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). To ensure that Aboriginal people have the educational opportunities to remain competitive in the ultra-fierce labour market environment, post-secondary educational institutions must create proper scaffolding to ensure policies respectfully include and consider Aboriginal people and Aboriginal ways of learning. Educational policies must be able to accurately reflect the increase in urbanization among Aboriginal people as it changes the educational landscape. Jim Silver et al. (2006) state that

“Educational institutions have continued to be a problem for Aboriginal peoples. Even for those who did not go to residential schools, their educational experience was often a negative one” (p. 13). As researchers and policy influencers at higher educational institutions, we must adapt and change our views from within the academy and look to adjust our rigid policies to allow for post-secondary institutions to validate Aboriginal ways of knowing. Michael Marker (2003) explains,

It is this syncretism of Indigenous narrative that is so contentious and so problematic within the academy. That is, when Indigenous people speak in storytelling ways that blur conventional distinctions between rationality and ethnopoetics they are dismissed both as not being colorful and “pure” enough to be interesting to the outsider gaze and, at the same time, not “truthful” enough to be taken seriously with regard to what counts as evidence and cogency in universities, courts of law, and public opinion (p. 363).

Marker highlights a distinct tension between traditional Eurocentric ways of truth and research and Aboriginal ways of knowing within Canadian academe. Students through to administrators must be part of the solution and look to include Aboriginal ways of knowing into their decision making around educational policy creation and reform. Taking these types of considerations into account when reviewing student applications could be of tremendous benefit to the entire post-secondary landscape as well as diversify an expanding knowledge base.

Despite the varying conditions which play out in Aboriginal people’s lives; many scholars have noted how historical, structural and institutional inequalities are deeply rooted in Canada’s dark colonial history and therefore the lives of all Aboriginal people (Battiste & Youngblood, 2009; Lawrence, 2004; Schissel & Wotherspoon, 2001). Aboriginal people’s aversion to formal educational institutions can be attributed to the systematic imposition of residential schools. Educational limits in terms of curriculum are imposed by non-Aboriginal

governmental agencies with little consultation with Aboriginal leaders in regards to education reform (Royal Commission on Aboriginal peoples, 1996). This brings into light the importance of the ongoing and evolving discourse around Aboriginal ways of knowing. There is a dark colonial past that is ever present in the Canadian education system with the horrors of residential schools and the discussion of educational limits as stated in the Royal Commission (1996) and must be harmonized with Aboriginal elders in the field of education. Canada is seeing a greater effort from high educational institutions to involve Aboriginal leaders in the strategic planning of institutions, but it is a slow moving process which has come about in recent years.

As Schissel and Wotherspoon (2001) discuss, the systematic inequities of our educational institutions put Aboriginal students at an educational disadvantage. Canadian institutions ought to consider a democratic educational system as there is a need for a paradigm shift in education that confronts the disadvantaged, marginalized and oppressed within our educational systems. It is this paradigm shift that could lead to the inclusion of Aboriginal ways of knowing into our Canadian educational fabric that guides the curriculum. Verna Kirkness (2013) provides integral insight into this contradiction: “While universities generally have adopted the political rhetoric of ‘equal opportunity for all,’ (UBC’s motto is ‘It’s Yours’) many of the institutional efforts to convert such rhetoric into reality for Aboriginal people continue to fall short of expectations” (p. 1). This raises a significant point, is a university which claims to be yours equitable for all students, or are some students perhaps marginalized or disadvantaged? The individualization of an overwhelmingly social issue seems to be at the forefront of Aboriginal access to post-secondary education. How are higher educational institutions putting the learning needs of Aboriginal students in the forefront of educational policies? Aboriginal learners are often made



to feel as though their traditional ways of knowing are not accepted within our rigid education systems. Kirkness calls into question this very impression.

Aboriginal students do not readily adapt to conventional institutional norms and ... The institutional response, when faced with these internally-constructed and externally reinforced problems of inadequate achievement and retention, is usually to intensify the pressure on Aboriginal students to adapt and become integrated into the institutions social fabric, with the ultimate goal that they will be “retained” until they graduate. (2013, p. 2)

Indigenizing curriculum has recently become a buzz within the Canadian academic discourse, and has in many higher educational institutions been placed on the forefront of post-secondary curriculum reform. Yet, intuitions lag behind in their systematic processes of admission, revaluation and retention thus, not allowing for a smooth process of collaboration at the post-secondary and furthermore, graduate level. Kirkness (2013) highlights an example of this “If universities are to respect the cultural integrity of Aboriginal students and communities, they must adopt a posture that goes beyond the usual generation and conveyance of literate knowledge, to include the institutional legitimation of Indigenous knowledge and skills such a responsibility requires an institutional respect for Indigenous knowledge” (p. 5). This type of legitimization could lend itself to a more inclusive higher educational environment for students. Institutional change is occurring at an alarmingly slow rate within Canada which leaves Aboriginal learners caught up in the bureaucratic red tape. Perhaps a coordinated response to address and acknowledge Aboriginal ways of knowing is needed to ensure that we do not have other learners being left out of a quality education which is suitable for Aboriginal people of today.

**(W)holistic Education/Methods Discussion**

As well respected Indigenous scholar Jo-Ann Archibald discusses, Aboriginal ways of developing knowledge and to a greater extent, education comes from a wholistic understanding of one's cultural value systems. Aboriginal based education systems are often multifaceted and incorporate many different approaches to knowledge translation. Storytelling is one way that Aboriginal knowledge is often passed along (Archibald, 2008). Archibald leaves one to question how the wholistic understandings of cultural values are embedded within a formal application to post-secondary institutions within Canada. How is knowledge translation taken into consideration when reviewing Aboriginal student applications to post-secondary programs? Do higher educational intuitions have admissions committees who have backgrounds in Aboriginal cultural awareness? Could this be a barrier for Aboriginal students to attend universities?

Throughout this paper, traditional Aboriginal understandings of education are analyzed and discussed as they pertain to post-secondary admission and how Aboriginal ways of knowing and wholistic education are understood and taken into consideration by the institution. Wholistic education is referred to as traditional ways of Aboriginal peoples understanding of oneself in the world. Archibald (2008) further suggests that post-secondary education be reformed to a wholistic representation, incorporating storytelling and other oral traditions into the modern education systems. Peter Gamlin (2003) echoes the wholistic approach that Archibald uses in her Aboriginal educational discourse, "The key to creativity and transformational practice in Aboriginal literacy is found in taking a wholistic perspective, which is a manifestation of following traditional Aboriginal values...Traditional knowledge on thinking and problem-solving goes well beyond mainstream efforts to measure isolated parts of cognitive informational processes (p. 18). An Aboriginal competency framework would need to be in place during the

admissions process for an applicant to be accurately evaluated for admission into post-secondary institutions. The framework could help set students up for success at their institution by attempting to neutralize the application to suit the needs of applicants. Literacy can take different forms and thus should take into account a wholistic approach which has been widely used by Aboriginal learners and educators for generations (Gamlin 2003). Indigenous scholar Amy Parent (2011) suggests, “Wholistic education is rooted firmly in Aboriginal languages and relationship to the land, cultures, and the oral tradition” (p. 34). The wholistic understanding of oneself needs to be reflected within our higher educational institutions. It is imperative that our educational institutions take the wide-ranging lens of wholistic education into consideration when creating policy, and making recommendations for institutional reform. What has become evident in the Aboriginal educational literature is that the wholistic form in its purest sense differs drastically from the highly structured European based foundation which many of our highest esteemed higher education institutions are built upon.

Canadian post-secondary education systems have historically been structured on the basis of highly influential western (or in many cases Eurocentric) education and ideals. Scholars Jerald Paquette and Gerald Fallon (2014) state that “In many parts of the world, including Canada, Western education dominates teaching and learning and has replaced Indigenous/Aboriginal approaches to learning” (p. 2). Following this thread further, Africa, Asia, South America and the Middle East all have a number of countries which have adopted the Western educational system in lieu of the traditional approaches to education. Perhaps there is a financial implication as countries such as Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia have provided financial backing for the building of schools in these parts of the world. The dominant discourse within education is structured from the colonial past which provides the academic

scaffolding (example: The Academy, Collegium, etc.) on which many of our Canadian post-secondary intuitions to this day are based. The differences in ideals between the Eurocentric model and traditional Indigenous models become apparent within Brent Debassige's (2013) literature on Indigenous Knowledge (IK). Debassige describes how Indigenous Knowledge can be shared and distributed throughout academia, but must be done so in a respectful manner. Administrators and curriculum designers grapple with how to incorporate Indigenous Knowledge into administrative decisions such as policy, and program requirements which have proved to be challenging for post-secondary institutions. George Dei's (2000) work also further supports Debassige's ideals to strengthen Indigenous Knowledge within education, but furthers the point by making reference that teacher education is paramount to promoting Indigenous Knowledge(s) into the classrooms. Teacher education can set the expectations for Aboriginal students from their elementary through to high-school years. This could potentially lead to a greater number of Aboriginal students attending post-secondary institutions. Dei (2000) claims that "education about Indigenous knowledges must begin with the interrogation of Eurocentrism as a hegemonic knowledge system" (p. 59). Teacher education must prepare teachers to move beyond the rigid curriculum and have the cultural competencies needed to adapt lesson plans to do justice to Indigenous Knowledge(s). Dei goes on to state that "educational researchers, experts and consultants in curriculum guidelines, policy planners, school teachers and administrators, community leaders, elders, parents, students and youth should all have some input in developing the appropriate structures and procedures for delivering education" (p. 61). Dei's proposed way of integrating Indigenous knowledge into the delivery of Canadian education is not common practice within our post-secondary institutions.

Alan Corbiere (2000) offers that “First Nations education *sui generis* is synonymous with an education that is wholistic. First Nations education undertaken for cultural survival should take calculated measures to restore shared meaning and to affirm our way of life through the use of our story, our land, our identity, and our language” (p. 118). In British Columbia today we see that governments and educational institutions are taking Corbiere’s vision of wholistic education and attempting to implement it into curriculum. An example of this is ongoing discussions at the provincial level to ‘*Indigenize*’ educational curriculum. Post-secondary institutions will need to adapt to provincial curriculum changes made at the elementary and secondary levels. Post-secondary institutions have begun in a process to educate students and faculty in Indigenous Knowledge(s) and Aboriginal ways of knowing in relevant ways to support their topic of study (example: Education, Health Care, Land and Food Systems).

To conclude with this portion of the literature review, it is worthy of note that wholistic Education has multiple uses. For the purpose of this paper wholistic education is used in ways that support Corbiere’s (2000) definition where “Wholistic education describes the pedagogical approach to educating First Nations people that develops the whole child: intellectually, spiritually, emotionally and physically. A wholistic education is compatible with traditional tenets of First peoples’ conceptualizations of well-being and good life” (113). Wholism is often seen as synonymous with Indigenous Knowledge, and in many cases both are seen as fluid by nature. It is the fluidity that is at odds with traditional Eurocentric post-secondary educational systems. As the scholarly literature suggests, the traditionally rigid European based education systems should incorporate more flexibility to ensure that they are not accused of “othering” and suiting only the needs of those who conform to their educational structure and model. There is a consistent underlying pressure in our current educational climate that “Aboriginal education

must, in order to justify its existence, provide education that is grounded in Aboriginal cultures (including and especially ontology and epistemology) and/or languages in a way that mainstream education is not (Paquette & Fallon, 2014, p. 3). This has been seen as a form of “othering” within the higher education realm.

#### UBC Aboriginal Strategic Plan

In mid-December of 2008, the UBC Aboriginal Strategic Plan Development Working Group released the first ever UBC Aboriginal Strategic Plan. The document outlines guiding principles which provides a foundational framework of how the institution chooses to recognize and acknowledge its Aboriginal students. Acknowledgment of the land on which the institution is located, responsibility to Aboriginal education, and unique relationships with Aboriginal communities highlight the guiding principles. The University of British Columbia strategically uses a significant distinction within the guiding principles, as the document provides a grounded platform in terms of how the university chooses to use define “Aboriginal”. The document outlines that the term Aboriginal is used “in the spirit of its use in section 35 [2] of the Canadian Constitution, to refer inclusively to members of First Nations, status and non-status, treaty and non-treaty Indian, *Métis*, and Inuit Peoples in Canada recognizing in doing so that many people prefer the terms that are specific and traditional to their communities” (UBC Aboriginal Strategic Plan, 2008, p.2).

The UBC Aboriginal Strategic Plan lists 10 Key Areas of Strategic Engagement:

1. Pre-university, Recruitment and Access Initiative
2. Student Support and Retention
3. Curriculum and Public Programming
4. Recruitment and Support of Faculty and Staff

5. Research
6. Study and Work Climate
7. Community Relations
8. Internal and External Communications
9. Development Initiatives
10. Administration, Evaluation, and Resources

For the context of this paper, the focus will be placed on the following specific areas: Pre-University, Recruitment and Access Initiatives, Student Support and Retention, Research and Development Initiatives. To accurately provide recommendations on the UBC Aboriginal Strategic Plan, one must understand the demographics of the Canadian Aboriginal population.

### **Canadian Aboriginal Population**

To begin to understand the Aboriginal student population at UBC, we must first be provided with a snapshot of the Aboriginal population in Canada. Statistics Canada has provided a glimpse into the rapidly growing Aboriginal population in Canada. Quantitative data from the National Household Survey (NHS) bears out that 1,400,685 people had identified as Aboriginal in 2011. This is significant as Aboriginal people represented 4.3% of the total Canadian population. The significance lies in that the Canadian Aboriginal population is continuing to grow. In 2006, Aboriginal people accounted for 3.8% of the population. As of 2001, 3.3% of citizens identified as Aboriginal, and in 1996 only 2.8% of citizens identified as Aboriginal (Statistics Canada, *Aboriginal Peoples in Canada: First Nations People, Métis and Inuit*, 2011). To further delve into the rapid growth, the 2011 census reported that “The Aboriginal population increased by 232,385 people, or 20.1% between 2006 and 2011, compared with 5.2% for the non-Aboriginal population... The largest numbers of Aboriginal people lived in Ontario and the

western provinces” (Statistics Canada, 2011). If the recent trend continues to hold true and the Aboriginal population continues to grow within Canada, it is of vital importance that provisions are in place within our educational intuitions to ensure that Aboriginal ways of knowing and Indigenous knowledge(s) are recognized throughout formalized education in Canada. In 2013 the Province of British Columbia released its Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education and Training Policy Framework & Action Plan: 2020 Vision for The Future<sup>1</sup>. The government document suggests that “There is a need to increase understanding of data that describes Aboriginal post-secondary education so that governments, post-secondary intuitions and Aboriginal institutes can work together to improve policy decisions” (British Columbia Ministry of Advanced Education, 2013, p. 36). To begin to understand the data as the province suggests, one must have an understanding of formalized educational attainment of Aboriginal peoples in Canada.

The 2011 Canadian Census<sup>2</sup> divulges that 48.4% of self-identified Aboriginal people between the ages of 25 and 64 had at least some category of post-secondary qualification. In the aforementioned 48.4%, only a mere 9.8% of the population had obtained at least one university degree. Compare this statistic to the 26.5% of the non-Aboriginal population of the same age demographic who had at least one university degree and it becomes apparent that there is a significant gap (Statistics Canada, 2011). One has to inquire as to why there is a 16.7% discrepancy in Non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal Canadian university degree level of education. Why are there not more Aboriginal students completing the requirements to obtain a university degree? Is a university degree seen as an unattainable target? Have universities missed an opportunity to provide scaffolding to ensure Aboriginal student success? Whatever the case may

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<sup>1</sup>

[http://www.llbc.leg.bc.ca/public/pubdocs/bcdocs2014\\_2/543158/aboriginal\\_policy\\_framework\\_report\\_out\\_2013.pdf](http://www.llbc.leg.bc.ca/public/pubdocs/bcdocs2014_2/543158/aboriginal_policy_framework_report_out_2013.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/as-sa/99-012-x/99-012-x2011003\\_3-eng.cfm](https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/as-sa/99-012-x/99-012-x2011003_3-eng.cfm)



be, a trend has become evident in recent years with a higher proportion of Aboriginal people aged 35-44 (68%) completing a high school diploma compared to Aboriginal people who are in the 55-64 age range (58.7%) (Statistics Canada, 2011). If this trend continues as it is expected to, this could have profound implications for higher educational institutions.

Dissecting the 2011 Canadian Census data further uncovers that 27.1% of Aboriginal women in the 35-44 age range had achieved a college diploma whereas 21.4% of Aboriginal women aged 55-64 had achieved the same credential. Aboriginal males in the age range of 35-44 were also more likely to have obtained a college diploma at 18.3% than Aboriginal males in the 55-64 range where the likely hood of having obtained a college diploma was at 14.1%. This increase in Aboriginal students attending post-secondary in recent years can be is seen as a positive step towards the goals set by the UBC Aboriginal Strategic Plan. The increase also speaks to the need for incorporation of Aboriginal ways of knowing and Indigenous knowledge(s) into the institutional fabric of UBC. It has become apparent from the data that Aboriginal males are less likely to attend a post-secondary institution than Aboriginal females as of 2011. Perhaps having a targeted strategy for recruitment of Aboriginal males to better understand the educational needs of the population could increase the percentage attending post-secondary in years to come.

### **Aboriginal Strategic Plan – Fifth Year Implementation Report**

In July 2014, the University of British Columbia released its *Aboriginal Strategic Plan Fifth Year Implementation Report*. The document cited that “The most significant obstacles to improvement lay in administrative structure: because Aboriginal students comprise less than 2% of students, their systemic problems often appeared to be idiosyncratic, and their resolutions both difficult and time-consuming (UBC Aboriginal Strategic Plan Implementation Report, 2014, p.

2). This can be troublesome as a historically rigid system of academe (in this case, the administrative structure) is often lagging behind and tends to be reactive rather than proactive. Aboriginal students have struggled to have their needs met within higher education as administrative resources example: student services, financial aid, student associations have not always been available to support Aboriginal students in the capacity which they require.

The report goes on to mention that “The Aboriginal Strategic Plan set no enrolment targets. At a research-intensive university such as UBC, setting such targets may have perverse effects: rather than directing attention to the design of effective processes, they focus attention on meeting targets, and often result in stop-gap measures such as reduced enrolment criteria to expand enrolments” (UBC Aboriginal Strategic Plan Implementation Report, 2014, p. 2). What is not clear is why setting targets at research intensive institutions could have a perverse effect. At a research centered institution, one would surmise that it would be to the benefit of the institution and students who attend to engage with different perspectives to support the notation of wholistic education from the Aboriginal perspective. Aboriginal ways of knowing as outlined by Schissel and Wotherspoon (2001) can only add to robust conversations that are taking place within the educational institutions. With the increasing presence of Indigenous researchers within the academy, there is a greater potential for Indigenous knowledge to inform the policy process.

### **Aboriginal Student Enrolment at UBC**

An in depth review of the quantitative data of student enrollment at UBC is vital for understanding the current (and previous) climate for Aboriginal students at the undergraduate and graduate levels. The tables below are a breakdown of student enrolment demographics for the University of British Columbia between the years 2006 and 2015. Table 1 is has been generated based on the demographic information that has been gathered from open source data

from the University of British Columbia - Office of Planning and Institutional Research (PAIR)<sup>3</sup>.

The data used in the table is accurate as of November 1<sup>st</sup> 2015, which happens to be the annual snapshot of when enrolment data is collected and made public. For the purposes of this discussion Table 1 has been separated into Aboriginal Enrolment and Non-Aboriginal Enrolment. Graduate level Diplomas and Certificates have been left out of the discussion as the focus is placed solely on Masters and Doctoral Degree programs. Similarly, for the undergraduate level, Diplomas and Certificates, Non-Degree, and Post-Baccalaureate Degree have been excluded from the calculations. The individual focus is placed on students who are in Baccalaureate programs.

**Table 1: University of British Columbia: Aboriginal & Non-Aboriginal Enrolment**

Aboriginal	Program Type	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Graduate	Masters Degree	94	100	108	114	131	155	161	176	172	181
	Doctoral Degree	50	59	69	78	80	82	82	82	81	82
	<b>Total</b>	<b>144</b>	<b>159</b>	<b>177</b>	<b>192</b>	<b>211</b>	<b>237</b>	<b>243</b>	<b>258</b>	<b>253</b>	<b>263</b>
Undergraduate	Baccalaureate Degree	567	603	601	660	725	778	833	903	903	875
	<b>Total</b>	<b>567</b>	<b>603</b>	<b>601</b>	<b>660</b>	<b>725</b>	<b>778</b>	<b>833</b>	<b>903</b>	<b>903</b>	<b>875</b>
	<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>711</b>	<b>762</b>	<b>778</b>	<b>852</b>	<b>936</b>	<b>1,015</b>	<b>1,076</b>	<b>1,161</b>	<b>1,156</b>	<b>1,138</b>

Non-Aboriginal	Program Type	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Graduate	Masters Degree	5,177	5,306	5,548	6,017	6,386	6,625	6,555	6,460	6,608	6,252
	Doctoral Degree	3,151	3,302	3,389	3,534	3,631	3,832	3,925	3,880	3,798	3,642
	<b>Total</b>	<b>8,328</b>	<b>8,608</b>	<b>8,937</b>	<b>9,551</b>	<b>10,017</b>	<b>10,457</b>	<b>10,480</b>	<b>10,340</b>	<b>10,406</b>	<b>9,894</b>
Undergraduate	Baccalaureate Degree	29,247	29,953	30,640	32,358	33,294	34,628	36,181	36,828	37,572	39,798
	<b>Total</b>	<b>29,247</b>	<b>29,953</b>	<b>30,640</b>	<b>32,358</b>	<b>33,294</b>	<b>34,628</b>	<b>36,181</b>	<b>36,828</b>	<b>37,572</b>	<b>39,798</b>
	<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>37,575</b>	<b>38,561</b>	<b>39,577</b>	<b>41,909</b>	<b>43,311</b>	<b>45,085</b>	<b>46,661</b>	<b>47,168</b>	<b>47,978</b>	<b>49,692</b>

In the first section of the table, Aboriginal Student Enrolment has seen a relatively steady increase of its student population base, for both the graduate and undergraduate levels since 2006. This growth is also coupled with the general increase in the overall Non-Aboriginal student population at the university.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.pair.ubc.ca/statistics/demographics/demographics.shtml>

There are a few outliers that are worthy of being noted: There was a slight decrease in Aboriginal graduate student enrolment from 2013 to 2014. At the undergraduate level, the number of Aboriginal students enrolled had decreased off from 2013-2014 and following the same trend as above, as of 2014-2015 the institution has seen a decrease in the Aboriginal graduate student population.

It is worthy to note that the overall size of the Aboriginal student body has steadily decreased since 2012, while the total population of the non-Aboriginal students has continually increased each year since 2006. There has been no explanation as to why the University has experienced a decrease since 2012 in the 2014 *Aboriginal Strategic Plan: Fifth Year Implementation Report* (the most recent report that the institution has released).

### Percent Change Over Time

While Table 1 proves to be helpful when understanding the demographics of the student base at the University of British Columbia, Table 2 delves deeper into the Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal student population with a percent change over time through the years 2007-2015. The Table is designed to provide an understanding of the trends of enrolment in recent years.

**Table 2: University of British Columbia: Aboriginal & Non-Aboriginal Enrolment Percent Change Over Time**

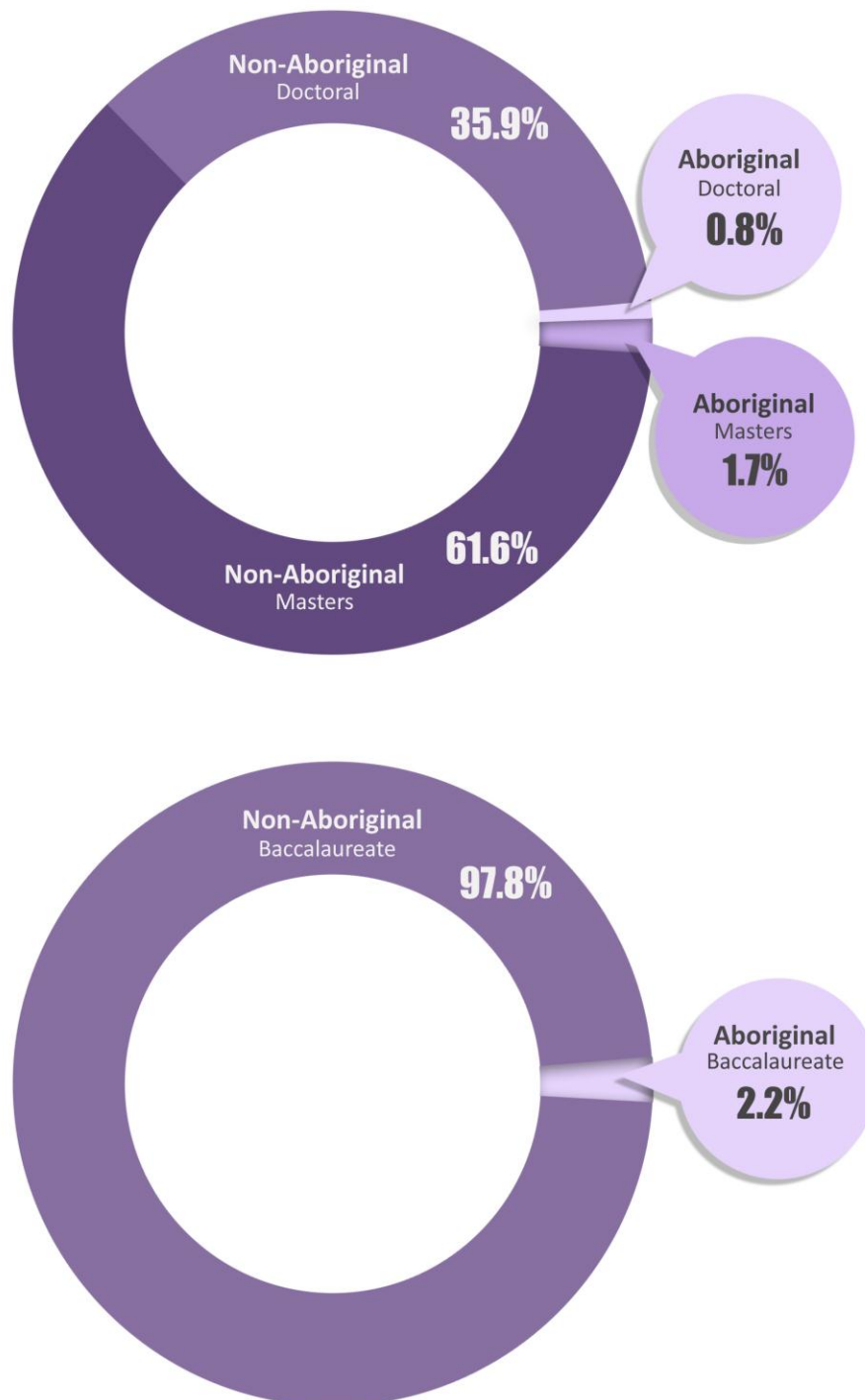
Aboriginal	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Graduate Degree	10.4%	10.1%	10.9%	9%	10.9%	2.4%	6.1%	-1.9%	3.8%
Undergraduate Degree	6.3%	-0.3%	7.3%	9.8%	7.3%	7%	8.4%	0%	-3.1%
Non-Aboriginal	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Graduate Degree	3.3%	3.8%	6.8%	4.8%	4.3%	0.2%	-1.3%	0.6%	-4.9%
Undergraduate Degree	2.4%	2.2%	5.6%	2.8%	4%	4.4%	1.7%	2%	5.9%

From 2007 through to 2011, UBC had experienced a steady rate of growth (generally 10%) within their Aboriginal graduate students. What is surprising given what we understand about Aboriginal graduate student enrolment is that in 2012 the rate of increase had slowed quite drastically, and even saw a decrease in 2014. This raises questions as to why the Aboriginal graduate student enrolment has slowed from a once steady 10%. Turning the attention to the Non-Aboriginal student population, we also see that as of 2012 there has been a decline of students enrolled in graduate degrees. The same cannot be said for the undergraduate student body of Non-Aboriginal students. In the most recent data we see a 5.9% increase in Non-Aboriginal undergraduate students at UBC, while the Aboriginal population has declined by 3.1% from the previous year. The recent slowing trend of Aboriginal undergraduate student enrolment should be monitored closely.

### **2015 UBC Student Percentage of Overall Student Population**

Figure 1 is intended to provide a visual representation of the most current snapshot of the overall 2015 graduate and undergraduate student populations at UBC (totaling 100% overall).

**Figure 1: Percentage of UBC Student Enrolment**



Of the overall reported number of 10,157 students enrolled in Masters and Doctoral programs at UBC, a paltry 1.7% of the graduate student population has identified as Aboriginal within a Master's program, and an even more troubling number of 0.8% has identified as Aboriginal within a Doctoral program. Representation at an undergraduate level is also low with just 2.2% of the UBC undergraduate student population identifying as Aboriginal. As Verna Kirkness (2013) explains, there are challenges that academic intuitions such as the University of British Columbia face. The motto 'Tuum est' does not hold true for the all Aboriginal students as if it did, one would expect the enrolment numbers of Aboriginal students to be reflective of the overall Aboriginal student population in Canada. Perhaps including Aboriginal ways of knowing and Indigenous knowledge(s) into the recruitment and admissions criteria could help mitigate the low percentages that the University of British Columbia has been experiencing in recent years.

A province-wide recruitment strategy with consultation of Aboriginal chiefs and elders of British Columbia communities could be implemented. This strategy could provide the basis help identify needs or gaps within Aboriginal communities. Identifying gaps may create an opportunity to work with leaders in the community to address the gaps in a respectful manner which would benefit all stakeholders, and increase the presence of the institution in line with the UBC Aboriginal Strategic Plan. Implementing a recruitment strategy at a community level could begin to instill that UBC motto does hold true to Aboriginal communities and that UBC can truly be 'yours'.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this paper is to highlight how the University of British Columbia has implemented an Aboriginal Strategic Plan to fulfill the institutional goals in *Place and Promise: The UBC Plan*. By reviewing current scholars in the Indigenous paradigm, this paper has

illustrated how Aboriginal ways of knowing and Indigenous knowledge(s) are critical in taking steps towards educational reconciliation. While the UBC Aboriginal Strategic Plan is a formalized starting point for the institution, until Aboriginal ways of knowing are firmly entrenched within the intuitional framework, and indigenous knowledge(s) part of the foundations in which curriculum is developed, the full potential may never be reached. It is recommended that the University of British Columbia set yearly targets for Aboriginal student enrolment for both graduate and undergraduate levels. The university has seen the rate of Aboriginal students enrolled in graduate and undergraduate programs slow and in some cases decrease since 2012. Setting targets would ensure that the overall student population of Aboriginal students enrolled at the University of British Columbia increase over .8% to 2.2% threshold which we have seen in 2015.

The Aboriginal demographic is increasing with each passing year in Canada and it is safe to say that as the Aboriginal population continues to grow, there will be a greater need for curriculum reform within our educational institutions. Aboriginal scholar Michelle Pidgeon states that a “successful university respects and honors Aboriginal student culture, identity, and ways of knowing and a successful institution also include the seen face” (Pidgeon, 2008, p. 227). By this Pidgeon is referring to students, faculty and staff who are part of and understand the Aboriginal Strategic Plan. At the current demographic percentages of students at the University of British Columbia, this will not be possible without a minimum of a 10% increase in Aboriginal students at the graduate and undergraduate level until the year 2025. The overall percentages of Aboriginal students enrolled at the institution must continue to rise past 2% if we are to see significant change in the acceptance of Aboriginal ways of knowing and the acceptance of Indigenous knowledge(s) into the mainstream decision making processes within



the institution. It is suggested that the University of British Columbia continue to review and revise their Aboriginal Strategic Plan to ensure that the needs of Aboriginal students are taken into careful consideration when moving forward as an institution.

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# ABORIGINAL ACCESS TO POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION:

Where do we go from here?



# Overview

- Sensitization
- Locating oneself – UBC Motto Tuum Est “It’s yours”
- Brief History / Literature
- Aboriginal Ways of Knowing
- (W) holistic Education
- UBC Aboriginal Strategic Plan
- Canadian Aboriginal Population
- Aboriginal Strategic Plan – Fifth Year Implementation Report
- Aboriginal Student Enrolment at UBC
- What Do We Know From This Data?
- Discussion



# Locating myself

HOW

How I am implicated in my own research?

WHAT

What is it that has brought me to this point?

WHY

Why is it that my research is important?



# Critical Questions

"Like all people we have been adapting our traditions...it is important to note that each of us comes from a specific context: social, historical, political and geographic. We share similarities, hopes and dreams and lives full of oppression and denial of who we are as people. We all share a belief that our children's lives will be better because of what we do today".

Noeliane Villebroun *National Dene Chief*

1. What does the data tell us about Aboriginal student enrolment at the University of British Columbia?

2. Are Aboriginal students systematically disadvantaged in terms of enrolment at UBC? If so, in what ways?

# Brief History

Historical educational policies have long had lasting impacts on Canadian Aboriginal access to post-secondary education.

“Residential schools were one of the most obvious symbols of paternalism”

Blair Stonechild (2006)

Governmental educational policy has been created and adapted in numerous cases **without consulting Aboriginal people.**

In an attempt to reconcile historically strained relationships, Canadian post-secondary institutions like The University of British Columbia have created **Aboriginal Strategic Plans.**

These strategic plans serve the purpose of recognizing Aboriginal students and Aboriginal ways of knowing with the educational institution.





# Aboriginal Ways of Knowing

- Although Indigenous groups in North America are distinct in their own right (e.g., customs, languages, histories,) similarities exist in terms of their guiding story, one that explains *"the universe, its origin, characteristic, and essential nature"* (Cajete, 2000, p. 58)
- Nii-ka-nii-ga-naa (Anishinaabe), or "all my relations." It is a part of a philosophy that signifies the relationship with the land and all life forms, and one that guides learning, development and behavior for Indigenous people. (Cajete, 1994)
- Stories, songs, dance, and teachings speak to the past, which gives rise to the present.

# (W)holistic Education

Jo-Ann Archibald

Aboriginal ways of developing knowledge comes from a wholistic understanding of one's cultural value system.

Storytelling is one way that Aboriginal knowledge is often passed along

Wholistic education is rooted firmly in Aboriginal languages and relationship to the land, cultures and the oral tradition

What has become evident in the Aboriginal educational literature is that the wholistic form in its purest sense differs drastically from the highly structured European based foundation which many of our highest esteemed higher education institutions are built upon.



How are wholistic understandings of cultural values embedded within a formal application to a post-secondary institutions in Canada?



Do higher educational intuitions have admissions committees who have backgrounds in Aboriginal cultural awareness?

# Indigenous Knowledge

- The dominant discourse within education is structured from the colonial past which provides the academic scaffolding (example: The Academy, Collegium, etc.)
- Administrators and curriculum designers grapple with how to incorporate Indigenous Knowledge into administrative decisions such as policy, and program requirements which have proved to be challenging for post-secondary institutions.
- Teacher education can set the expectations for Aboriginal students from their elementary through to high-school years. This could potentially lead to a greater number of Aboriginal students attending post-secondary institutions.



# UBC Aboriginal Strategic Plan

In mid-December of 2008, the UBC Aboriginal Strategic Plan Development Working Group released the first ever UBC Aboriginal Strategic Plan.

The UBC Aboriginal Strategic Plan lists 10 Key Areas of Strategic Engagement:

1. Pre-university, Recruitment and Access Initiative
2. Student Support and Retention
3. Curriculum and Public Programming
4. Recruitment and Support of Faculty and Staff
5. Research
6. Study and Work Climate
7. Community Relations
8. Internal and External Communications
9. Development Initiatives
10. Administration, Evaluation, and Resources



# Canadian Aboriginal Population

To begin to understand the Aboriginal student population at UBC, we must first be provided with a snapshot of the Aboriginal population in Canada.

Statistics Canada has provided a glimpse into the rapidly growing Aboriginal population in Canada.

- 1996 only 2.8% of citizens identified as Aboriginal
- As of 2001 3.3% of citizens identified as Aboriginal
- In 2006, Aboriginal people accounted for 3.8% of the population.
- 4.3% of the Canadian populous identified as Aboriginal in 2011

It is of vital importance that provisions are in place within our educational intuitions to ensure that Aboriginal ways of knowing and Indigenous knowledge(s) are recognized throughout formalized education in Canada.



# BC Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education

In 2013 the Province of British Columbia released its Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education and Training Policy Framework & Action Plan: 2020 Vision for The Future.

“There is a need to increase understanding of data that describes Aboriginal post-secondary education so that governments, post-secondary institutions and Aboriginal institutes can work together to improve policy decisions” (p.36)

To begin to understand the data as the province suggests, one must have an understanding of formalized educational attainment of Aboriginal peoples in Canada.

- The 2011 Canadian Census divulges that 48.4% of self-identified Aboriginal people between the ages of 25 and 64 had at least some category of post-secondary qualification.
- only a mere 9.8% of the population had obtained at least one university degree.



# Aboriginal Access Continued

26.5% of the non-Aboriginal population of the same age demographic who had at least one university degree and it becomes apparent that there is a significant gap.

A higher proportion of Aboriginal people aged 35-44 (68%) completing a high school diploma compared to Aboriginal people who are in the 55-64 age range (58.7%) (Stats Can 2011).

If this trend continues as it is expected to, this could have profound implications for higher educational institutions.

- Dissecting the 2011 Canadian Census data further uncovers that 27.1% of Aboriginal women in the 35-44 age range had achieved a college diploma whereas 21.4% of Aboriginal women aged 55-64 had achieved the same credential
- Aboriginal males in the age range of 35-44 were also more likely to have obtained a college diploma at 18.3% than Aboriginal males in the 55-64 range where the likely hood of having obtained a college diploma was at 14.1%.
- Aboriginal males are less likely to attend a post-secondary institution than Aboriginal females as of 2011.



# Aboriginal Strategic Plan-Implementation Report

In July 2014, the University of British Columbia released its *Aboriginal Strategic Plan Fifth Year Implementation Report*.

"The most significant obstacles to improvement lay in administrative structure: because Aboriginal students comprise less than 2% of students, their systemic problems often appeared to be idiosyncratic, and their resolutions both difficult and time-consuming."

The report goes on to mention that "The Aboriginal Strategic Plan set no enrolment targets. At a research-intensive university such as UBC, setting such targets may have perverse effects: rather than directing attention to the design of effective processes, they focus attention on meeting targets, and often result in stop-gap measures such as reduced enrolment criteria to expand enrolments"

What is not clear is why setting targets at research intensive institutions could have a perverse effect. At a research centered institution, one would surmise that it would be to the benefit of the institution and students who attend to engage with different perspectives to support the notation of wholistic education from the Aboriginal perspective.

Aboriginal ways of knowing can only add to robust conversations that are taking place within the educational institutions. With the increasing presence of Indigenous researchers within the academy, there is a greater potential for Indigenous knowledge to inform the policy process.



# Aboriginal Student Enrolment at UBC

An in depth review of the quantitative data of student enrollment at UBC is vital for understanding the current (and previous) climate for Aboriginal students at the undergraduate and graduate levels.

Enrolment data between 2006 and 2015 has been used for the creation a table

For the purposes of this discussion Table 1 has been separated into Aboriginal Enrolment and Non-Aboriginal Enrolment.

Similarly, for the undergraduate level, Diplomas and Certificates, Non-Degree, and Post-Baccalaureate Degree have been excluded from the calculations. The individual focus is placed on students who are in Baccalaureate programs.



# UBC: Aboriginal & Non-Aboriginal Enrolment

Aboriginal	Program Type	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Graduate	Doctoral Degree	50	59	69	78	80	82	82	82	81	82
	Masters Degree	94	100	108	114	131	155	161	176	172	181
	<b>Total</b>	<b>144</b>	<b>159</b>	<b>177</b>	<b>192</b>	<b>211</b>	<b>237</b>	<b>243</b>	<b>258</b>	<b>253</b>	<b>263</b>
Undergraduate	Baccalaureate Degree	567	603	601	660	725	778	833	903	903	875
	<b>Total</b>	<b>567</b>	<b>603</b>	<b>601</b>	<b>660</b>	<b>725</b>	<b>778</b>	<b>833</b>	<b>903</b>	<b>903</b>	<b>875</b>
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>711</b>	<b>762</b>	<b>778</b>	<b>852</b>	<b>936</b>	<b>1,015</b>	<b>1,076</b>	<b>1,161</b>	<b>1,156</b>	<b>1,138</b>

Non-Aboriginal	Program Type	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Graduate	Masters Degree	5,177	5,306	5,548	6,017	6,386	6,625	6,555	6,460	6,608	6,252
	Doctoral Degree	3,151	3,302	3,389	3,534	3,631	3,832	3,925	3,880	3,798	3,642
	<b>Total</b>	<b>8,328</b>	<b>8,608</b>	<b>8,937</b>	<b>9,551</b>	<b>10,017</b>	<b>10,457</b>	<b>10,480</b>	<b>10,340</b>	<b>10,406</b>	<b>9,894</b>
Undergraduate	Baccalaureate Degree	29,247	29,953	30,640	32,358	33,294	34,628	36,181	36,828	37,572	39,798
	<b>Total</b>	<b>29,247</b>	<b>29,953</b>	<b>30,640</b>	<b>32,358</b>	<b>33,294</b>	<b>34,628</b>	<b>36,181</b>	<b>36,828</b>	<b>37,572</b>	<b>39,798</b>
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>37,575</b>	<b>38,561</b>	<b>39,577</b>	<b>41,909</b>	<b>43,311</b>	<b>45,085</b>	<b>46,661</b>	<b>47,168</b>	<b>47,978</b>	<b>49,692</b>



# Percent Change Over Time

Table 2 delves deeper into the Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal student population with a percent change over time through the years 2007-2015.

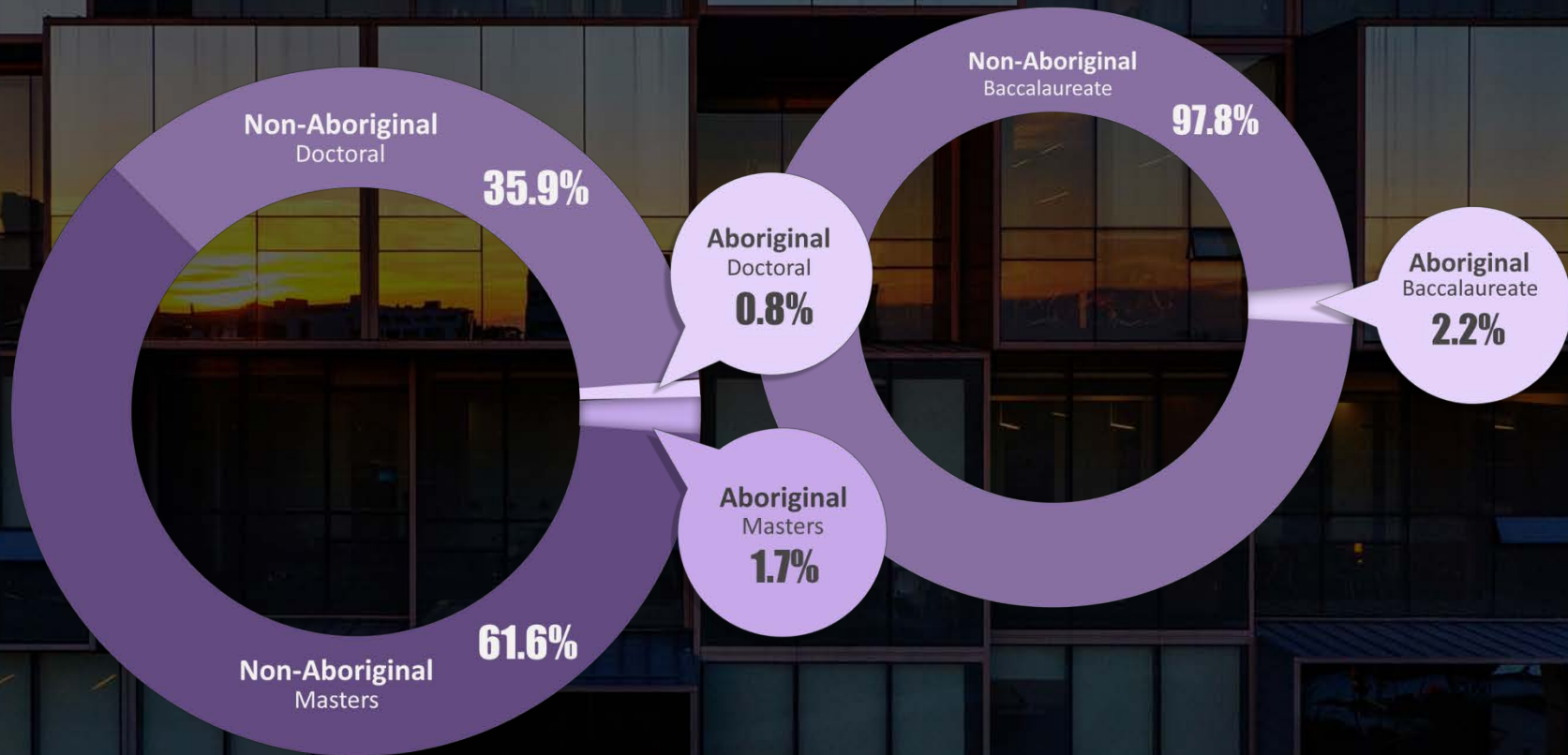
Aboriginal	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Graduate Degree	10.4%	10.1%	10.9%	9%	10.9%	2.4%	6.1%	-1.9%	3.8%
Undergraduate Degree	6.3%	-0.3%	7.3%	9.8%	7.3%	7%	8.4%	0%	-3.1%
Non-Aboriginal	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Graduate Degree	3.3%	3.8%	6.8%	4.8%	4.3%	0.2%	-1.3%	0.6%	-4.9%
Undergraduate Degree	2.4%	2.2%	5.6%	2.8%	4%	4.4%	1.7%	2%	5.9%

From 2007 through to 2011, UBC had experienced a steady rate of growth (generally 10%) within their Aboriginal graduate students.

Aboriginal graduate student enrolment is that in 2012 the rate of increase had slowed quite drastically, and even saw a decrease in 2014.



# 2015 UBC Student Percentage of Overall Student Population





# Percent Change Over Time

Of the overall reported number of 10,157 students enrolled in Masters and Doctoral programs at UBC, a paltry 1.7% of the graduate student population has identified as Aboriginal within a Master's program, and an even more troubling number of 0.8% has identified as Aboriginal within a Doctoral program.

Representation at an undergraduate level is also low with just 2.2% of the UBC undergraduate student population identifying as Aboriginal.

'Tuum est' does not necessarily hold true for the all Aboriginal students as if it did, one would expect the enrolment numbers of Aboriginal students to be reflective of the overall Aboriginal student population in Canada.

Perhaps including Aboriginal ways of knowing and Indigenous knowledge(s) into the recruitment and admissions criteria could help mitigate the low percentages that the University of British Columbia has been experiencing in recent years.

This strategy could provide the basis help identify needs or gaps within Aboriginal communities.

# Concluding Thoughts

- Aboriginal ways of knowing and Indigenous Knowledge(s) are critical in taking steps towards educational reconciliation.
- While the UBC Aboriginal Strategic Plan is a formalized starting point for the institution, until Aboriginal ways of knowing are firmly entrenched within the intuitional framework, and indigenous knowledge(s) part of the foundations in which curriculum is developed, the full potential may never be reached.
- A province-wide recruitment strategy with consultation of Aboriginal chiefs and elders of British Columbia communities could be implemented.
- Identifying gaps may create an opportunity to work with leaders in the community to address the gaps in a respectful manner which would benefit all stakeholders, and increase the presence of the institution in line with the UBC Aboriginal Strategic Plan. Implementing a recruitment strategy at a community level could begin to instill that UBC motto does hold true to Aboriginal communities and that UBC can truly be 'yours'.
- "A successful university respects and honors Aboriginal student culture, identity, and ways of knowing and a successful institution also includes the seen face" (Pidgeon, 2008, p. 227).



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# Discussion

