



INDIGENOUS ACCESS TO POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

How Federal Policy Can Help Close the Gap

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Abstract

This paper will explore the PSE access gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians. It will review the size of the gap and some of the barriers that Indigenous people face to access PSE by drawing on previous studies. It will then discuss the existing federal programs at Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada that work to address this gap and will identify some of the key shortcomings of the federal response to the Indigenous PSE access gap. It will finish by providing suggestions for improvements to the existing programs and ideas for potential new policies that could be implemented.

List of Abbreviations, Acronyms and Definitions

| | |
|---------------------------|---|
| AANDC | Aboriginal and Northern Development Canada (now INAC) |
| AFN | Assembly of First Nations |
| APS | Aboriginal Peoples Survey from Statistics Canada |
| ESDC | Employment and Social Development Canada |
| FNUC | First Nations University of Canada |
| INAC | Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada |
| IRSS | Indian Residential School System |
| ISSP | Indian Studies Support Program (now PSPP) |
| NHS | National Household Survey from Statistics Canada |
| NSC | National Selection Committee for the PSPP |
| PSE | Post-Secondary Education |
| PSPP | Post-Secondary Partnership Program |
| PSSSP | Post-Secondary Student Support Program |
| Tertiary education | Another name for post-secondary education |
| UCEPP | University and College Entrance Preparation Program |
| YITS | Youth in Transition Survey |

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Abstract..... | |
| List of Abbreviations, Acronyms and Definitions..... | |
| Table of Contents | 1 |
| Introduction..... | 3 |
| Section Overview | 4 |
| The Indigenous Post-Secondary Education Access Gap..... | 6 |
| The Size of the Indigenous Education Gap..... | 6 |
| The Benefits of Closing the PSE Access Gap..... | 8 |
| Barriers to Accessing PSE for Indigenous People..... | 9 |
| <i>Underlying Socioeconomic Conditions</i> | 10 |
| <i>Low High School Completion Rates</i> | 13 |
| <i>Euro-centric Education System</i> | 16 |
| <i>Lack of Indigenous Control of Education</i> | 18 |
| <i>Geographical Distance</i> | 19 |
| <i>Lack of Financial Resources</i> | 20 |
| <i>Lack of Information</i> | 21 |
| Existing Policies and Programs | 23 |
| Policy Landscape..... | 23 |
| Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP) | 24 |
| University and College Entrance Preparation Program (UCEPP) | 29 |
| Post-Secondary Partnership Program (PSPP) | 30 |
| Future Policy Proposals..... | 32 |
| Improvements of Existing Policies..... | 32 |
| <i>Separate Funding Pool for Off-Reserve Indigenous Students</i> | 32 |

| | |
|---|----|
| <i>Establishment of Consistent Rationing Requirements</i> | 34 |
| <i>Performance Measurement and Accountability</i> | 37 |
| <i>Expansion of PSPP Funding</i> | 37 |
| New Policy Proposals | 38 |
| <i>Indigenous Leadership and Strategy in PSE Institutions</i> | 38 |
| <i>Fostering Indigenous Controlled Institutions</i> | 39 |
| <i>Indigenous National PSE Strategy</i> | 40 |
| <i>Canada-wide Peer Mentorship Program</i> | 44 |
| Conclusion | 46 |
| Bibliography | 48 |

Introduction

Indigenous people in Canada face many challenges that are foreign to non-Indigenous Canadians. There is a gap between the outcomes of Indigenous Canadians and non-Indigenous Canadians for virtually every socioeconomic indicator, with Indigenous Canadians worse off. As a result of past government policies that systematically tried to assimilate Indigenous people and destroy their culture, including the Indian Residential Schools System (IRSS), Indigenous people suffer from substandard housing, lower employment rates, higher incarceration rates and poorer health outcomes than non-Indigenous people.

This is also true for education, as Indigenous people are less likely to graduate high school and less likely to attend a PSE institution than non-Indigenous people due to both financial and non-financial barriers. This gap in PSE access not only leads to lower levels of educational attainment, but also affects their standard of living and is correlated with lower socioeconomic outcomes and employment opportunities. Because of this, the federal government has implemented programs to improve Indigenous peoples' educational outcomes and help Indigenous students access and attain PSE. This paper will explore both the PSE access gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians as well as the federal programs that aim to help Indigenous people access PSE.

There have been many studies and papers written on the PSE access gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians. Studies have explored both the size of the PSE access gap as well as the reasons for the gap, and the specific barriers to PSE that Indigenous students face, both financially and non-financially. These studies have been done by academics, provincial governments, Senate committees, Indigenous organizations, federal government departments and

PSE institutions, among others. Most of these studies were done in the 21st century, and this paper prioritizes recent studies that use the most up-to-date information as of June 2016, from either the National Household Survey (NHS) in 2011 or the Aboriginal Peoples Survey (APS) in 2012.

This paper will build on this literature by discussing the PSE access gap and examining federal policy on Indigenous access to PSE. By focusing on federal policy within the context of the many barriers to PSE that are discussed, this paper is intended to provide possible directions for federal policy development in addressing PSE access barriers for Indigenous students. Of particular importance is the second half of the paper which includes a discussion of some of the problems with the existing federal programs coupled with an introduction of possible solutions by building on the preceding research. It will finish with ideas for new policies that could be explored by the federal government in order to improve PSE access for Indigenous students and close the PSE access gap.

Section Overview

This paper is organized into four sections. Section one will discuss the PSE access gap between Indigenous Canadians and non-Indigenous Canadians. The first part will lay out the size of the PSE access gap according to various studies. It will then move into a discussion of the various barriers to PSE that Indigenous people face which impede their access and contribute to this gap.

Section two will provide an overview of federal policy regarding Indigenous PSE access. It will start with a short background on the evolution of federal policy up until the present day, and then proceed to discuss the three current federal programs under their Indigenous PSE portfolio.

This discussion will include background information about the programs as well as evaluation and criticism of their effectiveness.

Section three will build upon section two and provide suggestions for potential future federal policy regarding Indigenous access to PSE. The first part of this section will focus on the improvement of existing programs and how they could better address the access gap. The second part of this section will focus on new policy proposals.

Finally, the paper will end with a concluding section which summarizes each section and the findings of the paper, particularly how federal policy can be improved. It may help to provide policymakers with possible next steps on how to address the access gap moving forward.

The Indigenous Post-Secondary Education Access Gap

The Size of the Indigenous Education Gap

Indigenous people have lower educational attainment and participation than non-Indigenous people, and this includes PSE attainment and participation. According to Ferguson and Zhao (2015), who use 2011 NHS data, 48.4% of Indigenous people aged 25-64 have a post-secondary qualification compared with 64.7% of the non-Indigenous population of the same age. This is a significant gap of 16.3 percentage points. Finnie et al. (2011), who use *Youth in Transition Survey* (YITS) Cohort A data which surveyed youth born in 1984, found that the gap for PSE participation was more pronounced at 24.3 percentage points between Indigenous and non-Indigenous respondents. Given that the YITS did not survey Indigenous youth on reserve, this reported participation gap is likely lower than reality.

More Indigenous Canadians attain less than a high school education than non-Indigenous Canadians while non-Indigenous Canadians have a higher percentage of people with some sort of PSE. The gap for high school graduation and university completion are particularly acute (Ferguson and Zhao 2015). Ferguson and Zhao determined that the percentage of Indigenous people aged 25-64 who do not have any “certificate, diploma or degree” (i.e. those that neither have a high school diploma nor a PSE certificate or degree) was 28.9%, while it was 12.1% of non-Indigenous peoples of the same age group, a gap of 16.8 percentage points (2015).

The two areas where there is not a substantial gap is with trade and apprenticeship programs and college programs. Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples are on par when it comes to trade

and apprenticeship, while the gap with college attainment has been small and stable, at 2% (Gerber 2014; Gordon and White 2014).

Within the category of Indigenous people, on-reserve First Nations and Inuit have the lowest levels of education. Status First Nations are less likely to have a PSE qualification than non-status First Nations. The rate of having a post-secondary qualification for status First Nations aged 25-64 was 42.3%, compared to non-status First Nations at 52.1% (Ferguson and Zhao 2015). On-reserve First Nations had less qualifications than their off-reserve counterparts. Among those aged 25-64, 21.2% of off-reserve status First Nations had a college diploma and 10.9% had a university degree compared with 14.8% of on-reserve status First Nations had a college degree and 4.7% had a university degree. Bougie et al. (2013) use APS data which does not include on-reserve First Nations so they do not report on the PSE rate for on-reserve First Nations, but state that 43% off-reserve First Nations, aged 18-44, had a PSE qualification. The proportion of Inuit Canadians who had a post-secondary qualification was 35.6% for individuals aged 25-64 using the NHS and 26% of those aged 18-44 using the APS (Ferguson and Zhao 2015; Bougie et al. 2013). Despite the fact that approximately 70% of First Nations youth on-reserve aged 16-24 stated that they hoped to go to PSE, according to Gordon and White using data from the NHS in 2011 and previous censuses, the level of education for on-reserve First Nations has been stable since 1996 whereas Inuit are seeing a decrease in education levels (2014; Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation 2005).

For Metis people, the gap was significantly smaller as 54.8% of Metis people aged 25-64 had some sort of post-secondary qualification based on the NHS 2011 and 47% of Metis aged 18-44 had some PSE based on the APS (Ferguson and Zhao 2015; Bougie et al. 2013)

The Benefits of Closing the PSE Access Gap

The presence of a PSE access gap is not problematic just for educational outcomes, but it also affects the standard of living for Indigenous people. Stonechild (2006, 1) calls PSE the “new buffalo” that could “ensure a strong and prosperous future for First Nations.” PSE has been linked to many positive socioeconomic outcomes, including employment, higher standards of living and better health (Sharpe and Arsenault 2009; University of Saskatchewan et al. 2008). As Indigenous people have some of the lowest socioeconomic outcomes in Canada for many indicators including housing, employment, income and health, improved educational attainment and more specifically PSE, could be a gateway to brighter futures.

Employment is especially correlated with PSE, and unemployment rates drop substantially with each increasing level of higher education (Sharpe and Arsenault 2009; Gordon and White 2014; Bougie et al. 2013). According to a study by Frenette, higher rates of education are associated with a larger decline in unemployment for Indigenous peoples in comparison with non-Indigenous people (Frenette 2010a). As Indigenous Canadians tend to have higher unemployment rates and lower incomes than non-Indigenous Canadians, these positive employment outcomes are imperative to improving their communities and contributing to the Canadian economy, particularly in Western Canada, where Indigenous peoples account for a higher proportion of the population (Calver 2015; University of Saskatchewan et al. 2008; Sharpe and Arsenault 2009).

There is, in general, an income gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. However this gap decreases with higher levels of education. Indigenous people with a Bachelor’s degree have incomes only slightly below that of the non-Indigenous population, which represents

a much smaller gap than those with just high school, or those with less than high school education (Standing Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology 2011)

Additionally, higher education has been associated with an improved standard of living, including better health (Preston 2008; University of Saskatchewan et al. 2008). Therefore, PSE could be used as a tool of empowerment by Indigenous peoples, allowing them to better their quality of life and future possibilities (Pidgeon 2008).

As the Indigenous population is the fastest growing population in Canada, with the population significantly younger than the non-Indigenous population. The median age for Indigenous people was 28 in the 2011 NHS in contrast to 41 for the non-Indigenous population. Children under 14 represent 28% of the Indigenous population (Government of Canada 2013). This means that all the current challenges faced by Indigenous peoples will grow exponentially unless they are adequately addressed (Preston 2008).

Barriers to Accessing PSE for Indigenous People

While the PSE access gap varies in significance, dependent on the specific Indigenous population group and the level of PSE, there nevertheless remains a large gap between Indigenous people accessing PSE and the non-Indigenous population. This section will discuss some of the main barriers to access that have been identified in the literature. These include poor socioeconomic conditions, low high school graduation rates, a euro-centric education system at all levels, a lack of Indigenous control of their own education and a lack of resources both financially and human.

Underlying Socioeconomic Conditions

As noted in the previous section, closing the PSE access gap would allow for better standards of living and more employment opportunities for Indigenous people. However just as education can influence the socioeconomic conditions within an Indigenous community, these same conditions can influence the educational success of Indigenous people. In other words, education does not exist in a vacuum, and the poor socioeconomic conditions that many Indigenous people face, inhibit their ability to access PSE. In general, Indigenous people face substandard housing conditions, rampant abuse and violence, and higher participation in the child welfare system as a result of centuries of colonization and marginalization. These factors, among other socioeconomic problems, limit Indigenous people's ability to participate and to succeed in education, including PSE. While this paper will only examine federal policies related specifically to increasing Indigenous students' access to PSE, it is important to note that other policies that address these underlying socioeconomic factors will also influence the Indigenous PSE access rate.

Housing

Many Indigenous communities suffer from substandard housing, leading to both overcrowding and buildings in a state of disrepair. According to the Community Wellbeing Index developed by Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC), in general First Nations communities scored lower for housing quantity and quality than non-Indigenous communities. While there is evidence of a gradual increase in the number of houses until 2006 from 1981, which is helping to address overcrowding, there was a general decrease in the quality of housing over the same time period (AANDC 2014). According to the 2001 APS, approximately one third of Indigenous people on reserve and 15% of off-reserve Indigenous people lived in crowded

households. At the same time, approximately half of on-reserve Indigenous people were living in “dwellings in need of major repairs” while approximately 15% of off-reserve Indigenous people were living in these conditions (Hull 2010, 20).

These poor housing conditions in Indigenous communities can influence a student’s participation and success in education. This could be for a range of factors including overcrowded housing inhibiting a student’s ability to study or poor quality housing leading to poorer health outcomes and poorer educational attainment. Evidence from past APS suggests that there is a correlation between housing quantity and quality and educational achievement in Indigenous communities. For instance, in 2001, among those who lived in crowded housing on reserve, about 40% had less than high school completion and 27% had a PSE certification, compared with those who did not live in crowded housing, where 31% had less than high school completion and 37% had a PSE certification. This APS also produced evidence that those who lived in subpar housing also had lower rates of high school completion and PSE certification (Hull 2010, 80; 84).

Abuse and Violence

As Bopp et al. note, there is widespread family violence and abuse within Indigenous communities that has spanned generations as a result of Indigenous community history and current dynamics. Considered to be part of the norm in some communities, it is present at both the family and community levels and “a constellation of social problems that operates as a syndrome.” (Bopp et al. 2003, 10). According to Statistics Canada, Indigenous people 15 years and older are more than twice as likely to be a victim of a violent crime than non-Indigenous people of the same age, with victimization being the highest among youth (Boyce 2016).

Children and youth who are exposed to violence are likely to be at “risk for harmful impacts to the development of normal brain functions,” and experience more difficulties than their peers (Bopp et al. 2003, 44; Wolfe et al. 2003). Additionally, youth who suffer abuse or violence are likely to display signs of post-traumatic stress disorder even after the incidents of violence or abuse stop. They are also more likely to exhibit violent and abusive behaviour as adults. Children are impacted by violence even if they have not been directly abused, but rather, have witnessed (Bopp et al. 2003). Their exposure to violence can lead to destructive behaviours and impact their schooling. Children who have experienced violence can have “difficulties with school, poor concentration...difficulty in self-expression...[and] rapid change in school performance, usually from good to bad.” (Bopp et al. 2003, 43).

Children in Care

The 2011 NHS determined that almost half of the children in care across Canada are Indigenous, with 14,200 Indigenous foster children. Indigenous children accounted for over 85% of foster children in Saskatchewan and Manitoba and almost all foster children in the territories. Given that Indigenous children account for only 7% of the child population, they are extremely over-represented. According to the Assembly of First Nations (AFN), it is estimated that currently there are more children in care than at the height of the residential school system (2013). Indigenous foster children were not necessarily put in the care of other Indigenous families as only 44% of them were placed in a household where at least one parent had an Indigenous identity (Government of Canada 2016).

Research has proved that children in care tend to have lower academic achievement than children not in care, with fewer high school completion rates and PSE access rates. This can be a

result of changing schools, skipping school, repeating a grade and receiving less parental support (Brownell et al. 2015, 5). A Manitoba study showed that among children in care, Indigenous children had lower educational outcomes than non-Indigenous children (Brownell et al. 2015).

Low High School Completion Rates

While this paper focuses on PSE access, and not the state of Indigenous education overall, most of the reviewed studies on Indigenous PSE access give considerable attention to the low rates of high school completion in Indigenous communities. Many of the reasons for low high school completion rates are the same as for PSE access and therefore, low high school completion rates could be seen as a symptom, just like low PSE access, of a wider problem. Recognizing this, this paper will not delve into the problem of low high school completion in too much detail. But due to the amount of attention low high school completion rates gets in the literature, it is important to mention some of the key discussions in this area.

According to many scholars, improving high school completion rates is a critical step in improving Indigenous PSE access (Gordon and White 2014; Preston 2008; University of Saskatchewan et al. 2008; Mendelson 2006; Carr-Stewart et al. 2013). In fact, Mendelson states in his paper that high school completion “is likely the single most critical factor,” to PSE access and attainment (2006, 18). Therefore this section will briefly discuss why the low high school education rates in Indigenous communities are a barrier to accessing PSE and provide an overview of some of the factors that contribute to this problem.

Overview

Many Indigenous people do not meet admission requirements for PSE programs, particularly that of obtaining a high school diploma, and need to fulfill these requirements before

they are able to access PSE (Holmes 2005). As few as 40% of young adults aged 20-24 on reserve have graduated from high school in comparison to approximately 90% of non-Indigenous young adults (Anderson and Richards 2016). According to Mendelson in an appearance before the Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples, Indigenous people who do obtain a high school diploma go on to PSE at a rate similar to that of the non-Indigenous population (Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples 2011).

Academic Disadvantage

Yet even those who have completed high school tend to be at an “academic disadvantage” due to the quality of education, particularly in northern and reserve schools (Usher 2009). For Indigenous students who do graduate, a lack of resources and inconsistent quality in their schools puts them at a disadvantage in many core subjects, including math and science, relative to their non-Indigenous counterparts (Carr-Stewart et al. 2013). According to Frenette who used Statistics Canada’s *Youth in Transition Survey*, low academic performance in high school by Indigenous students can account for almost one half of the access gap (2010b).

Lack of resources

One of the problems identified in the primary and secondary school system which inhibits First Nations students from succeeding is the lack of resources. Compared to the provinces, many have argued that there is a resource gap which affects First Nation communities’ ability to pay competitive teaching salaries, impacting their ability to keep qualified staff on-reserve, and leading to high turnover (Drummond and Rosenbluth 2013; Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples 2011). Drummond and Rosenbluth (2013) look at the cap on federal funding growth at 2% and compare it with the provincial funding growth which has averaged 4% annually. This is

despite the fact that the Indigenous population is younger than the general population and there has been a large increase in the number of school-age Indigenous people (Drummond and Rosenbluth 2013).

The size of this resource gap is difficult to calculate, as the education funding formulas of the federal and provincial governments are different and the federal funding includes the amount it pays for First Nations students' tuition to provincial schools. As an example of the differences, the provincial formula is more amenable to local concerns. The geographical cost variability is not factored into the federal formula, whereas it is one of the features of the provincial funding formula. As a result, the provinces tend to give a lot more money to rural and isolated school districts compared to urban ones, which differs from the federal approach. As many First Nations schools are located in rural and remote locations, critics have argued that these schools should receive the same amount of funding as their provincial counterparts which is significantly more than they are currently receiving (Drummond and Rosenbluth 2013).

About 30% of the funding given by the federal government to First Nations communities is project-based and not a sustainable source of funding. Project-based funding does not cover basic costs such as teachers' salaries. This can further the disparities between different schools and bands, making a federal-provincial comparison almost impossible (Drummond and Rosenbluth 2013). While it is important to note that funding alone will not solve the high school graduation gap between Indigenous people and non-Indigenous people, it does need to be considered when devising how to move forward (Drummond and Rosenbluth 2013; Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples 2011; Usher 2009)

The federal government does not track the money it gives to individual bands or schools, so it is difficult to know if all the funding for individual schools is indeed put towards education (Drummond and Rosenbluth 2013). As the Standing Senate Committee noted, there is no accountability for the funding and there is no guarantee that the band council is spending it on education (Standing Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology 2011).

Finally, another difficulty for ensuring that First Nations schools have enough resources is that the federal government funds individual schools whereas the provincial government funds many schools at once through school boards. For First Nations schools, each school operates individually without any governance or administrative structures such as school boards that the provincial education system has (Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples 2011). Therefore, many First Nations schools have to rely on provincial education departments for their learning materials, standards and pedagogy (Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples 2011).

Euro-centric Education System

Prior to the 1960s, very few Indigenous people attended PSE, as it was considered to be a tool for assimilation and coercion, a concern which continues until the present day (University of Saskatchewan et al. 2008). In the past, education was used as a tool to assimilate Indigenous peoples, taking away their culture and their language, the legacy of which still provides challenges for Indigenous communities (Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples 2011).

While the situation has improved and more Indigenous students are attending PSE institutions, even today, Indigenous students do not find their culture, values, experiences or languages reflected in many mainstream PSE programs (Carr-Stewart, Balzer, and Cottrell 2013).

According to Paquette and Fallon, Indigenous students face culture shock and “perceived and real anti-Indigenous bias and hostility,” in PSE institutions (2010, 124). For instance, the epistemic practices in the Canadian education systems tend to be Euro-centric and ignores the colonial history of education, marginalizing Indigenous students (Cherubini 2010; Paquette and Fallon 2014; Battiste, Bell, and Findlay 2002).. This is especially acute for some Indigenous communities, since many Indigenous students have a first language other than English or French, or speak a variation of English that is based in their home communities, and come from a different cultural background. In sum, PSE can be seen as alien and this discourages Indigenous students from attending (Carr-Stewart, Balzer, and Cottrell 2013; Standing Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology 2011).

One problem with the PSE system is that it is currently very competitive and individualistic, which is in contrast to Indigenous worldviews that focus on cooperative and collective knowledge (Carr-Stewart, Balzer, and Cottrell 2013). Therefore, PSE should better reflect Indigenous students’ worldviews and cultures, taking a more holistic approach rather than one focused on the individual (Pidgeon 2008). In order to do this and “indigenize” PSE institutions, Indigenous knowledge needs to be incorporated into all aspects of the institution, from curriculum to programming (Pidgeon 2016). Incorporation does not mean that aspects of Indigenous cultures should be added on to current curriculum as an afterthought, but rather it should form part of the basis of the curriculum (Kirkness 1999). While incorporating Indigenous knowledge is critical, it is important to note that not all Indigenous nations are the same and while they hold commonalities, there are variances across cultures that should be taken into account (Jerald Paquette and Fallon 2014; Pidgeon 2008)

Another problem with the PSE system is the differences in what is considered to be successful and the overall goals of the education system. Two of the most commonly used indicators, standardized tests and grades, are Western ideas of success and do not reflect the traditions or learning styles of Indigenous people. They are markers of individual proficiency instead of a more holistic approach which includes a “collective sense of community well-being.” This is especially pertinent to admission to PSE institutions, where some Indigenous students may be denied entry solely based on their grades. (Cherubini et al. 2010; Cherubini 2010; University of Saskatchewan et al. 2008). In order to help close the PSE access gap, more needs to be done to reflect Indigenous culture within PSE institutions and make their programming more accessible for Indigenous students.

Lack of Indigenous Control of Education

Indigenous people continue to have a distrust in government and the educational system, concerned over the potential loss of culture and language (Anderson and Richards 2016). Many Indigenous people argue that the best way to ensure Indigenous knowledge and culture is incorporated into the education system at all levels is to have Indigenous control of education (Cherubini 2010). According to the Assembly of First Nations, “First Nations have the inherent right to be responsible for the learning of our people” and that the “federal government continues to have the fiduciary obligation to ensure that First Nations can implement [their] inherent right to exercise jurisdiction over lifelong learning,” (The First Nations Post-Secondary Education: Access, Opportunity and Outcomes Panel 2010, 9).

Indigenous controlled institutions also provide a safe space for Indigenous students who come from small remote and isolated communities who may not feel comfortable in an urban environment (Standing Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology 2011).

Currently, there are many examples of Indigenous controlled PSE institutions in Canada, including the First Nations University of Canada (FNUC) in Saskatchewan and the Nunavut Arctic College. These institutions are managed by Indigenous leaders and incorporate Indigenous knowledge, culture and social needs into their curriculum and programming which allows Indigenous students to learn within a culturally appropriate environment (University of Saskatchewan et al. 2008).

Geographical Distance

According to Finnie et al. (2011), using YITS data, rural students are less likely to attend PSE, particularly university, than their urban counterparts. Many Indigenous people live in remote communities, isolated and not within close proximity to a PSE institution (Standing Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology 2011). Therefore, many have to move away from their families and communities in order to access PSE. According to Bougie et al., approximately “40% of off-reserve First Nations people, 50% of Inuit, and 42% of Métis with postsecondary credentials moved to pursue their education,” particularly those attending university (2013, 7). Moving may not be possible for some Indigenous students who have familial obligations or who cannot afford to pay the heavy financial cost (Holmes 2005). Additionally, there is also a general distrust of leaving the community for school due to the legacy of the residential school system (Holmes 2005).

Moving away from one's community and family can be a major drawback to attending a PSE institution and a huge disruption for the potential student. Some may have never left their home communities and the idea of living in a new place can be daunting, particularly when you are removed from your culture and language (University of Saskatchewan et al. 2008; Holmes 2005; Lane 2013). Once they leave their communities, many Indigenous students feel stress and isolation in their new place of residence (Council of Ministers of Education Canada, Statistics Canada, and Canadian Education Statistics Council 2010).

It also can be expensive to go away to a PSE institution, including the cost of travel and housing. As many universities are located in cities and far away from the home, Indigenous students opt to attend college instead, as colleges tend to be closer to their remote communities (Council of Ministers of Education Canada, Statistics Canada, and Canadian Education Statistics Council 2010).

It is, therefore, no surprise that many Metis and off-reserve Indigenous people tend to have better educational attainment than the Inuit and those on-reserve as they are able to stay within their communities and maintain their responsibilities (Gordon and White 2014; Mendelson 2006).

Lack of Financial Resources

Many PSE students face financial barriers to accessing PSE. These students do not have the financial means or support in order to pay for their schooling and living costs (Finnie 2012). As Mendelson notes in his paper, research has demonstrated that those at the lower end of the socioeconomic spectrum are much less likely to obtain higher levels of education, which includes many Indigenous people (2006). This is confirmed by a 2010 survey of urban Indigenous peoples,

where participants cited the high cost of PSE as the largest barrier to attain more education (Environics Institute 2010).

Indigenous people, particularly First Nations people on-reserve and Inuit, are disadvantaged in terms of socioeconomic standing and thus face financial barriers (Council of Ministers of Education Canada, Statistics Canada, and Canadian Education Statistics Council 2010). Many Indigenous students cannot rely on their family for financial support (University of Saskatchewan et al. 2008). This lack of personal financial resources inhibits their ability to access PSE programs, which are getting increasingly more expensive.

Lack of Information

In addition to financial resources as a factor as to whether a student will attend PSE, other non-monetary factors such as parental education, influence students' decisions to go to PSE. According to Bougie et al., an Indigenous student who completed high school was more likely to have a parent with at least a high school education than those who left high school (2013). A parent who has gone to a PSE institution would have a better idea of the costs and benefits of obtaining PSE. Evidence suggests that the decision to go to PSE is not made at the point of access but rather earlier in a child's life (Finnie 2012). As for many students, the decision to attend PSE happens prior to the student being in grade 12, the lack of familial knowledge can inhibit a student's choice to attend (Vaccaro 2012) .

As a result of being one of the first in their families to attend a PSE institution, many Indigenous youth lack role models to encourage them to pursue PSE (R.A. Malatest and Associates Ltd. 2010). Many Indigenous students live in a remote region, far away from any PSE institution, without the opportunity to see the positive outcomes of obtaining PSE. This inhibits the amount

of information they have about PSE and attending a PSE institution, including the benefits derived from obtaining further education (University of Saskatchewan et al. 2008).

Existing Policies and Programs

Policy Landscape

The responsibility for PSE for Indigenous students is complex. PSE institutions are under provincial jurisdiction, yet under the *Indian Act* education for Indigenous people is under the jurisdiction of the federal government. This responsibility for education is interpreted as primary and secondary education by the federal government, which view their Indigenous PSE policies and programs as part of their overall socioeconomic development policies (Stonechild 2006). The government does not, however, see itself legally responsible for the PSE of Indigenous peoples, in contrast to the viewpoint of Indigenous leaders and organizations which view them as having legal jurisdiction over all educational matters (Pidgeon 2016; Audit and Assurance Services Branch 2015; Helin and Snow 2010; OAG 2004). While the federal government has affirmed their responsibility for primary and secondary education through the Indian Act, they do not share the same view with PSE. First Nations leaders on the other hand believe that when their ancestors were negotiating the treaties with the federal government, formal education was understood to be one part of lifelong learning; education was not just for children but for youth and adults as well (Carr Stewart et al. 2013; The First Nations Post-Secondary Education: Access, Opportunity and Outcomes Panel 2010; Stonechild 2006).

PSE programs and policies for Indigenous students are provided by the federal government through INAC. According to an audit done by INAC (when it was AANDC), PSE programs “are very important to both First Nations and the Department in terms of their support to capacity development and self-sufficiency,” (Audit and Assurance Services Branch 2015, 1). The programs are in place to help improve access to and success in PSE.

Currently INAC has three programs in their PSE portfolio: Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP), the University and College Entrance Preparation Program (UCEPP) and the Post-Secondary Partnerships Program (PSPP). The PSSSP and UCEPP programs garner most of the funding of the department's PSE budget at \$314 million in 2014/2015 or 93% of the overall budget (Audit and Assurance Services Branch 2015).

Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP)

The PSSSP is a federal program designed to “improve the employability of First Nation and eligible Inuit students by providing them with funding to access education and skills development opportunities at the post-secondary level” (INAC 2015). Costs covered under this program include tuition and costs of school supplies such as books. There is also a provision for a travel fund in order to help First Nations people relocate to go to school and to cover some living costs such as childcare, but only for full-time studies (Standing Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology 2011; INAC 2015).

The PSSSP is only available to First Nations and Inuit students registered under the Indian Act and therefore non-status First Nations and Metis cannot apply. While non-status First Nations and Metis have access to other funding options such as the Canada Student Loan Program and the Canada Student Grant Program like all other Canadian students, they nevertheless do not have access to special funding to help them overcome their financial barriers (Standing Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology 2011).

It is important to note that Inuit students are eligible for PSSSP only if they do not live in the Northwest Territories or Nunavut. This is due to the fact that these territorial governments have their own funding mechanisms which cover Inuit students. Additionally, those status First Nations

who are covered by the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement (JBNQA) and Northeastern Quebec Agreements with the Cree Nation are not eligible to receive funding from the PSSSP due to the fact that each of these school boards have financial support programs for PSE (INAC 2015).

PSSSP funding covers programs that must require secondary school completion or the equivalent, be at least one year in duration and be held in a recognized PSE institution. Eligible expenses include the costs of tuition, initial professional certification and examination fees, required textbooks and supplies, and some living and travel allowances (INAC 2015).

The PSSSP does not directly fund students, but rather the federal government allocates funds to First Nation bands and organizations through INAC's regional offices. The bands and organizations, in turn, allocate the funding to their students. (Helin and Snow 2010; Audit and Assurance Services Branch 2015). This funding has been capped at 2% since 1996 even though the Indigenous population eligible for this funding and tuition rates has increased by a larger percentage (AFN 2012). Funding methodologies for the PSSSP and the UCEPP is not consistent across INAC's regional offices. It is allocated through block funding agreements, fixed funding agreements and grants. In 2013-2014, more of the funding was allocated towards fixed funding (\$179 million), followed by block funding (\$132 million) and then grants (\$1 million) (Audit and Assurance Services Branch, Aboriginal and Northern Development Canada 2015). According to AANDC's audit (2015, 12–13):

For block funding arrangements, the Department applies a formula to apportion an amount to PSE programming out of the total block funding allocation (as set out in the block agreements) for each region. The Region then allocates to individual recipients based on their respective block agreements. PSE recipients that are funded under block arrangements are allowed to reallocate funds to other programs provided they can demonstrate progress towards achievement of PSE's Program objectives.

For fixed funding arrangements, Program funding is based on historical funding patterns subject to a nominal annual increase of approximately 2%. The Department may allocate the 2% to mandatory expenditures in other educational programs.

The audit also found that fixed funding incorporated some consideration for the recipients funding needs. (2015, 13).

As the funds are allocated to students by the First Nations bands or organizations, in order to receive funding, the student needs to get approval from their band. This makes it difficult for those First Nations people living off-reserve, who rarely receive funding (Helin and Snow 2010; University of Saskatchewan et al. 2008). As Helin and Snow describe, once the money is allocated to the band councils, there are few accountability mechanisms in place and there is evidence of regional variations in funding and long waiting times (2010). While INAC has created national guidelines, they have little influence over how the funding is allocated to students (Audit and Assurance Services Branch 2015).

Numerous problems with the PSSSP have been discussed by various government bodies and scholars including the Audit and Assurance Services Committee of INAC and the Auditor General of Canada. In their paper, Helin and Snow state that as long as minimum requirements are met, the bands can keep any excess funding at the end of the year despite the fact that there could be shortages of funds elsewhere in the country. Additionally, since the funding is given to bands from the INAC regional offices, the funding formula for the PSSSP differs by region and is not the same across the country, putting First Nations students in some regions at a particular disadvantage (Helin and Snow 2010; Usher 2009). Many smaller bands may lack the capacity and necessary training to implement the program and allocate funding (Usher 2009).

There has also been concern that without any performance measurement or accountability, bands can allocate funds as they see fit and not based on predetermined criteria, leading to potential favouritism. This is particularly a problem in that there is not a consensus, among both the

government and the bands, as to whether the PSSSP is predominantly a needs-based program or a merit-based program (2010). This is a fundamental gap in program delivery as eligible students across the country are subjected to different criteria. For instance, some students who were at the top of their class may not receive funding by their band because of their program's structure as a needs-based program while they would have received funding if they lived in another part of the country where a band decided on a merit-based system. Some bands may implement a needs-based program which would allow for those who have the least amount of financial resources to take priority over those who are relatively better off financially. Other bands may determine that a merit-based program is better and allocate funds based on the student's performance in school or in the community without reference to an individual's socioeconomic circumstances or financial need for attending PSE. Other communities may have a hybrid model including elements of both systems.

The type of student who should have priority is also up to the individual band councils. For instance, according to INAC's guidelines, a band council should consider whether "continuing students (students already being funded through PSSSP or UCEPP); recent high school graduates; deferred students (eligible but not funded in the past due to limited funding); recent PSE graduates who wish to further their studies; new students already studying at a post-secondary level (students who have already completed part of their program but were not previously funded by PSSSP); returning students; and/or part-time students," should be considered a priority for selection (INAC 2015). As each band council will differ on their decision, this means different treatment across the country as to the type of student that is able to benefit from the program.

These concerns are not new. In its 2004 report, the Auditor General of Canada felt that the structure of the PSSSP does not "ensure equitable access to as many students as possible," nor

does INAC know “whether the funds allocated have been used for the purpose intended,” (2004, 1). While the government has taken steps to address this by including terms and conditions in some of their funding agreements, there has not been an assessment which reviews if there is sufficient funding to cover all eligible students nationally (Audit and Assurance Services Branch 2015, 13). The regions do some monitoring for compliance to the program but it is limited to reviewing program expenditures to ensure that administrative costs are not more than 10% of the expenditures and reviewing recipient forms to ensure that they received the funds allocated to them. There is not comprehensive monitoring to ensure compliance to all national program guidelines in the regions, however there is a movement towards creating a sector-wide compliance regime for PSE programs that may be in place by 2016-2017 (Audit and Assurance Services Branch 2015).

Recently there has been an increase in the number of students hoping to pursue PSE has put pressure on the amount of funding available and many students are unable to access it (2014). According to INAC, not all students who apply will receive funding and some students may receive only the partial amount requested (2015). There are no specific guidelines on how to allocate funding in a situation where the requested amount of funding exceeds the available amount of funding, or whether the amount of funding per student should decrease or the number of students funded should decrease (with most bands favouring the latter) and who should receive priority when there is a shortage of funding (Helin and Snow 2010; Usher 2009).

Therefore, while the number of Indigenous people attending PSE is increasing, the number of students being funded by the program has been decreasing (Preston 2008). Like other Indigenous education funding, the PSSSP has been capped at 2%, which has not kept up with the rapid increase in the number of Indigenous students who want to go on to PSE (Standing

Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology 2011). On many reserves there is a wait list of students that want to pursue education beyond a secondary school level but are unable to due to a lack of funds; raising questions about the effectiveness of the program (University of Saskatchewan et al. 2008).

University and College Entrance Preparation Program (UCEPP)

Transition programs help Indigenous students who may not meet the admission standards to certain PSE programs right out of high school obtain the prerequisite academic requirements (University of Saskatchewan et al. 2008; INAC 2015).The UCEPP is a transition program that aims “to provide financial support to eligible First Nation and Inuit students who are enrolled in university and college entrance preparation programs offered in Canadian post-secondary institutions, to enable them to attain the academic level required for entrance into degree and diploma credit programs,” (INAC 2015). The program has a similar structure to the PSSSP but with additional requirements which are described below.

Similar to the PSSSP, eligible students are registered First Nations or Inuit who have lived in the country for the 12 months prior and can provide documentation that they are enrolled in a UCEPP program at an accredited Canadian institution. However, students wanting funding from UCEPP also need to provide a letter from the PSE institution that states that the program which the student is registered in will allow them to gain the necessary academic level to enter into a college or university program and that states that after the completion of the program, the student will be eligible to be accepted into a “regular university or college program on completion.” In addition, they cannot have received any previous funding for PSE programs, unless they are exempted from this requirement due to medical reasons (INAC 2015).

Concerns with the UCEPP mirror those concerns of the PSSSP. Like the PSSSP, students cannot apply directly to the government for funding but rather obtain the funds through band councils or organizations designated by band councils (INAC 2015). The UCEPP also has no clear criteria as to whether the allocation of funds should be need-based or merit-based and there are also concerns as to whether funding levels are even across the country and if individual bands have the capacity to administer these programs.

An additional concern for the UCEPP is that students are only eligible for coverage under this program for one academic year. As the program is to help transition students to PSE, a blanket requirement of one year may not be enough for some students who need more time and training to get to the level needed to access and succeed in PSE.

Post-Secondary Partnership Program (PSPP)

The PSPP differs from the previous two programs as it funds the institutions themselves, and not the students. The objective of the program is to “assist Canadian post-secondary institutions in the design and delivery of college and university level courses that respond to the educational needs of First Nations and Inuit students.” An expected outcome of this program is that there will be more tailored courses for Indigenous students in areas with high labour market demand as well as Indigenous governance and business development (Audit and Assurance Services Branch 2015, 2).

Replacing the Indian Studies Support Program, ISSP, the PSPP was introduced in 2014 with more emphasis on the labour market need and employment of Indigenous students as well as the creation of a National Selection Committee, (NSC) which replaces the decisions on the proposals by the regions. Twenty percent of the proposal rating is based on labour market needs,

although tying the program to labour market outcomes is not a mandatory requirement. Labour market need is based off of ESDC's labour market needs list and regional staff's knowledge without any input from stakeholders. In one of their internal audits, INAC was critical that a lack of Indigenous and stakeholder consultation may mean that the funding decisions are not taking into account the "greatest needs" of Indigenous communities and students (Audit and Assurance Services Branch 2015, 17–18).

The proposals from the institutions are collected by INAC's regional offices which score each proposal out of 100. Two other regional offices or officials at headquarters then do a review of the proposals, giving it a score out of 100 as well. Then the three scores are averaged, creating a final score which is used to decide which proposals to fund with "other factors." In 2014/2015 they received 220 proposals out of which they reviewed 213 and funded 87 (Audit and Assurances Branch 2015). The success of the program is up for debate as the PSPP lacks clear objectives and indicators, making it difficult to evaluate the success of the program (Audit and Assurance Services Branch 2015).

Institutions apply for funding for eligible programs and if successful receive one-year contribution agreements. The funding level for the PSPP is relatively small, at approximately \$22 million in 2014/2015, of which \$7 million is used to support the operations at FNUC. This means that only \$15 million is used to help develop courses for Indigenous students in the rest of Canada's PSE institutions (Audit and Assurance Services Branch 2015, 7). With the exception of FNUC, institutions cannot apply to the PSPP for capital expenditures or to help with their daily operations (INAC 2016a).

Future Policy Proposals

Improvements of Existing Policies

While the PSSSP, UCEPP and PSPP all serve important purposes, they have serious limitations and shortcomings. As discussed above, problems regarding each of the three federal funds that need to be addressed if they are to be improved. For both the PSSSP and UCEPP, improving accessibility for off-reserve Indigenous students and making the program more consistent across the country and ensuring that all eligible students receive funding should be a priority. For the PSPP, more money should be allocated to Indigenous-controlled institutions.

Separate Funding Pool for Off-Reserve Indigenous Students

Currently, many students who live off reserve do not receive PSE funding from the programs (Stonechild 2006). This is due to the fact that they may not have ties to a specific band or community and may not understand how they are able to apply. At the same time, Indigenous people living in urban areas rely primarily on Indigenous funding for PSE and less so on family support, job income or government student loans (Environics Institute 2010).

Therefore, there should be a new program in addition to the PSSSP and UCEPP that is exclusively for off-reserve students and is advertised as such. This fund would be allocated by INAC's headquarters and receive applications from off-reserve status First Nations students across the country. As INAC would be allocating the funding, the federal government would need to work with provincial governments and Indigenous organizations to connect with off-reserve status First Nations students and make the application consistent and easily accessible for all areas of the country. The national standards (see below) would act as criteria for priority in the presence of

funding shortfalls and program administrators at INAC's headquarters would make decisions as to who would be funded. This way, people who are status First Nation but do not belong to or have close connections with a particular band would be able to receive funding and not have their lack of band connections hinder their application.

Additionally, Metis and non-status Indigenous students should also be eligible to apply for this new funding pool for off-reserve Indigenous students through INAC's national office. This is due to the fact that they are legally considered to be Indigenous people as a result of the *Daniels v. Canada* decision in 2016.

In *Daniels v. Canada*, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that " Métis and non-Status Indians are "Indians" for the purpose of federal Parliament's law-making jurisdiction under subsection 91(24) of the Constitution Act, 1867." After this decision INAC stated that this does not mean that Metis and non-status First Nations can apply for status under the *Indian Act* and therefore it follows that INAC programs for status First Nations, including their educational ones, would not open eligibility requirements for Metis and non-status First Nations (INAC 2016b). In other words, INAC does not believe the decision will result in any changes to their PSE funding programs.

However, as noted above, INAC does not believe it has a legal responsibility to provide PSE for status First Nations and Inuit people but rather includes their PSE program as part of their socioeconomic policies to improve the standard of living for Indigenous people. Indigenous people with status under the *Indian Act* are not the only Indigenous people who face an access gap when compared to non-Indigenous Canadians, as discussed in earlier sections. Given this, one could argue that the *Daniels v. Canada* ruling should impact the PSE program and that eligibility for the

PSSSP should be expanded to include all Indigenous people, regardless of their status under the *Indian Act* which could help to close the PSE access gap.

Establishment of Consistent Rationing Requirements

In the context of scarce resources, Usher states that a challenge for the PSSSP (and UCEPP) is to set up guidelines on how to allocate funding “across all eligible First Nations students,” to make it more consistent across the country and determine if it should be based on merit or need (2009, 13). This paper agrees with this statement. While local circumstances are important to take into account, the system should have the same underlying basic principles across the country. Indigenous organizations and the federal government need make a decision as to whether the PSSSP and UCEPP should be either a merit-based or need-based system or incorporates aspects of both. This will help to determine which type of student should have priority in the selection process with some flexibility for local circumstances.

A call for a consistent underlying principle for the PSSSP across the country may seem at odds with Canadian federalism, where access to PSE and student financial aid programs differ across provincial lines for the general population. The provinces have jurisdiction over PSE and as a result there are various student assistance programs. However, according to Finnie et al. (2004, 10), “most student loan and associated need-based grant systems follow a single paradigm.” For instance, a strong majority of need-based and grant assistance systems are for full-time students and aid is given on assessed need rather than income. Grants are given after the student has reached the maximum amount for loans which differs by province and governments pay the interest on the loans while the student is still in school full-time. Additionally, there is the Canada Student Loan Program (CSLP), in which that provinces can choose to participate. Through this program, the

federal government provides assistance equal to 60% of need. Currently, only Quebec, the Northwest Territories and Nunavut do not participate in CSLP. In these cases, the federal government provides contributions through a system of alternate payments (Finnie et al. 2004, 12).

Additionally, it is important to acknowledge before proposing changes to the PSSSP and UCEPP that this paper recognizes that Indigenous people belong to nations and have the right to control their education and decision-making regarding PSE. In order to develop and to implement any policy, the federal government needs to respect and partner with Indigenous people and work with them in a nation-to-nation relationship. The following changes are suggestions only, Indigenous people and communities must have the opportunity to engage with the federal government in creating and strengthening INAC's PSE programs.

In order to address the lack of consistency and to respect Indigenous' sovereignty over education, this paper proposes the creation of a national PSSSP centre which would allocate funding directly to students. In order to allow their students to use the centre, a First Nation band council could choose to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the federal government which would outline each party's understanding of the purpose of the MOU as well as their responsibilities. Through the MOU, the parties would agree that the federal government would manage PSSSP funding and allocate it directly students through a set of national criteria. The federal government would also be responsible for to provide annual reports for the First Nation which discuss any program changes as well as the take up rate for their community. This new program would guarantee that all eligible students are funded for their PSE expenses. In return, the First Nation would be able to review the program on a biannual basis, and pull out of the

agreement at any time. They would also be able to be consulted in the decision-making for the creation of criteria, and able to make suggestions and amendments based on local concerns.

The centre would be managed by a board of directors that would include representatives from Indigenous communities, provincial governments and the federal government. Indigenous people would have a majority of the representation on the board of directors. The board would be in constant consultation with Indigenous people across the country and would be required to get input before making a major decision that affected criteria or structure. It would be staffed by federal public servants, with an emphasis on recruiting Indigenous employees. Ideally, the long-term goal of the centre would be that it is run exclusively by Indigenous people.

If the First Nation community decided that they did not want to enter into this program, they would not be penalized in any way. They would be able to maintain the status quo and receive the same funding as they do now, whether through block or fixed funding, and they would have to invest time and resources in order to facilitate the application process and allocate the money.

The centre would have two funding pools, one which is needs-based and one which is merit-based, which would have slightly different criteria for prioritizing students. The students in the band would have the choice to apply for both the pools with a single application. Eligible First Nations students as well as those who live off-reserve, including Inuit and Metis, would apply directly to the centre which would then process their application. The centre would have an online application process as well as a paper application process in order to facilitate easy access from anywhere in Canada, especially remote communities.

The creation of this centre could be beneficial for Indigenous communities and it would be their prerogative as to whether or not they choose to use it. This centre would allow for consistent

Canada-wide standards that would be based on both need and merit, with two separate funding pools. Students would not need to worry about their relationship with the band council members affecting funding. Additionally, it could help the communities which do not have the resources to facilitate the PSSSP and UCEPP, as it would free up their leaders' time and energy to address other concerns within their communities that may be more pressing. It would streamline the application process and make it faster for funding to be allocated directly to the students.

Performance Measurement and Accountability

INAC does not collect data from First Nations bands beyond the number of students who receive funding and the number which graduated the previous year. Therefore, there is no accurate information about how much money each student is getting, the number of years a student is in the PSSSP, how many students have yet to receive money as well as dropout rates. Ironically, while this program is intended to improve access to PSE, INAC is unable to determine the accessibility of their own program (Helin and Snow 2010). While INAC is working towards improving this, more effort should be made to use performance measurement to ensure that all eligible students are able to receive the funding.

Expansion of PSPP Funding

Currently, the PSPP accounts for a small percentage of INAC's overall Indigenous PSE program. With over 200 proposals vying for only \$15 million, many institutions do not receive much-needed funding to support their Indigenous programming. Additionally, making operational funding not eligible for PSPP allocation, puts Indigenous-controlled institutions at a disadvantage as they have to rely on other sources of income such as provincial grants, as many do not get

operational funding from the provinces. Therefore, this paper proposes that PSPP funding be expanded.

This expansion should take the form of a specific fund for Indigenous-controlled institutions. As currently they have to compete for funding with large PSE institutions which have many more resources at their disposal and experience with writing grant proposals, putting aside funding specifically for Indigenous-controlled institutions would give them a better chance at gaining funding. This specific fund should also explore the use of multi-year funding that would give Indigenous-controlled institutions some security and allow for more long-term strategic planning. They should be able to apply to use this funding for some operational expenditures.

New Policy Proposals

As noted in Usher (2009), the only national programs that are specifically designed for First Nations students, focus on the financial barriers to accessing PSE. While some of the financial programs do indirectly address some of the non-financial barriers such as geographic distance, more could be done to address the Euro-centric educational system, lack of Indigenous controlled-institutions and difficulties with information. The following section provides suggestions for new policies that seek to address the non-financial barriers for PSE access as well as the financial barriers in order to establish a more comprehensive federal Indigenous PSE program.

Indigenous Leadership and Strategy in PSE Institutions

To incorporate Indigenous knowledge into the PSE education system, institutions need to view it not as an addition to curriculum but as something that needs to permeate all facets of PSE. According to Stonechild (2006, 68), the incorporation of Indigenous knowledge and worldview “depends on whether Aboriginal people are granted a significant presence in the institution’s

governance system,” in addition to funding. In many PSE institutions, there has been a formal leadership role established for an Indigenous person to drive systematic change to incorporate Indigenous knowledge and values within the governance and practices of the institutions (Pidgeon 2016).

Additionally, some PSE institutions have Indigenous strategic plans that cover policy, programs and goals to better Indigenous people’s experiences within PSE institutions (Pidgeon 2016). This should be expanded across the country and every PSE institution, particularly universities where there is the largest gap in access, should have a strategic plan that clearly articulates a vision for Indigenous education in their university. The federal government should work with institutions to ensure that local Indigenous people are engaged with the governance and long-term planning at each PSE institution. This should be mandated and each institution should have to demonstrate to INAC how this is being done and the results of this should be reported to Parliament.

Fostering Indigenous Controlled Institutions

According to the AFN, there are 60 Indigenous-controlled PSE institutions across Canada and Stonechild remarks that most of these institutions are funded “tenuously at a level below that of mainstream public institutions,” (2012; 2006, 69). Currently, as most of the federal budget for Indigenous PSE goes towards individual students, Indigenous controlled institutions struggle to obtain and maintain funding and have difficulty gaining the accreditation necessary to award degrees to their students (Assembly of First Nations 2012). Many partner with non-Indigenous PSE institutions to deliver programs and are not available across the country. As the federal government only provides some operational funding to the FNUC (which in 2015 was \$7 million,

covering less than half of their reported expenses) and not to other Indigenous controlled institutions, it is difficult for any to become established and provide a range of programs to Indigenous students, relying on proposal-based funding sources such as the PSPP, or other provincial based grants (Assembly of First Nations 2012).

One good example of Indigenous controlled PSE is the Wānanga in New Zealand which are Māori controlled institutions. These institutions receive core funding through multi-year agreements like other New Zealand PSE institutions. This funding allows institutions to plan for future programming without worrying about if the funding will be available in the next year (Stevenson et al. 2010). Even though there are only three institutions, they are all able to grant diplomas and 33% of all Indigenous students attended them in 2008 (Stevenson et al. 2010). Part of the success of these institutions is that they provide culturally relevant educational experiences to their students and have also set up campuses throughout the country in order to allow Indigenous students to stay in or near their home communities (Stevenson et al. 2010).

Indigenous National PSE Strategy

Currently there is no national framework or strategy to improve PSE access and attainment for Indigenous peoples. While there is a general consensus that it is important to encourage more Indigenous students to attend PSE and to close the PSE access gap between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous population, there are no agreed upon outcomes, indicators or guaranteed funding. Further to this, the AFN states that the federal government, when speaking of support for Indigenous PSE attainment, mentions the funding programs available through INAC and has “no reference to the vision or expectation of the kind of education that is expected to be achieved,” (Assembly of First Nations 2012, 17)

In New Zealand, there is a Māori education strategy that encompasses PSE and aims to have “Maori succeed at higher levels of tertiary education.” It outlines targets and measurable outcomes for the Indigenous population. The strategy was first created in 2008 with three phases, the second of which started in 2013, called *Ka Hikitia Accelerating Success 2013-2017*. This strategy has five underlying principles including putting the Treaty of Waitangi’s (signed between the Māori people and the Crown) principles in action; recognizing Māori students’ potential to excel and be successful; understanding teaching and learning as a two-way process; emphasizing identity, language and culture; and building productive partnerships between all stakeholders. In tertiary education, this means ensuring that PSE institutions provide the right incentives for better outcomes for Māori students to succeed and increasing their accountability (New Zealand Ministry of Education 2013).

It is important to recognize that in Canada the circumstances are different than in New Zealand and certain issues will prove to be more challenging for the creation of a national strategy. For example, the Indigenous population represents a smaller proportion of the population in Canada (3.8% in 2010) than in New Zealand (at 17.7%) (Stevenson et al. 2010). In New Zealand, the Māori are one Indigenous group whereas in Canada, there are many groups including the various First Nations, Inuit and Metis with many different languages and cultures. Additionally, there is not one treaty assigned by the Crown as is the situation in New Zealand but a plethora of different treaties, including the 11 numbered treaties as well as various agreements and land claims with the different First Nations across the country that stipulate various expectations that the Crown is expected to provide in that region, few of which have been completely settled. Finally, the difference in interpretation of the Crown’s responsibility in the area of Indigenous education between the federal government with the view that it is one of their many socioeconomic policies

and Indigenous people which view that PSE is a treaty right may impede efforts to create a national strategy. However, it is important to have a vision for the future of access to PSE for Indigenous students and all sides should work together towards a strategy with broad goals to guide the Indigenous PSE policy-making in the future.

The strategy should provide a vision for PSE for Indigenous people. A literature review for the Council of Ministers of Education noted that “it would be useful whether the end goal is training or education,” (2010, 54). In other words, is the goal of PSE to prepare Indigenous students for the labour market or is it to educate them. The current INAC programs have clear objectives related to the improvement of labour market participation of Indigenous youth through the obtaining of PSE accreditation. Proposals for funding in the PSPP in particular have to emphasize the gains their programs will help Indigenous people to make in the labour market in order to get funding, with this being 20% of their overall score, more so than responding to the educational needs of Indigenous students (which is only 15%) (INAC 2016a). However should that be the only goal of improving access to PSE for Indigenous people? As noted above, PSE has the ability to improve many aspects of a person’s life other than employment opportunities such as health outcomes. As PSE is an important tool for bettering the living conditions in Indigenous communities in other ways outside the labour market, training should be just one aspect of a larger vision statement. The federal government should work with Indigenous communities to determine their hopes and aspirations for Indigenous youth who access PSE and the implications for their communities in order to come up with a broader vision for the future.

Additionally, since PSE in Canada is delivered by the provinces, while at the same time funding for Indigenous PSE is carried out through federal programs, a national strategy would allow for a cohesive approach to improve access for Indigenous students which incorporates both

the federal funding programs and the provincial PSE institutions. The creation of this strategy should include discussions about the jurisdiction over Indigenous PSE between the federal, provincial and Indigenous governments and how this applies in practice. All parties should work together to clarify responsibility and make sure that Indigenous students are not negatively impacted by a jurisdictional gap.

Finally, this strategy should touch on more than funding and be a comprehensive approach to addressing the PSE access gap. As noted above, there are many reasons why Indigenous students do not access PSE programs besides a lack of financial resources, including low high school graduation rates, a euro-centric curriculum, geographic distance and a lack of information. While currently the UCEPP does address the problem of students lacking the prerequisites to enter PSE and allows students to take classes to gain the necessary skills to enter PSE, it is not nearly enough. The strategy needs to take a holistic approach and consider all facets of access during its creation. This may mean that more emphasis is placed on changing the high school education structure and providing more opportunities closer to Indigenous communities as well as ensuring Indigenous control and involvement over education and incorporating Indigenous culture into the curriculum. An example of this can be seen in New Zealand where the strategy emphasizes PSE's important role in revitalizing Māori language and culture and therefore one of the goals is to increase participation and completion in Māori language courses at higher levels," (New Zealand Ministry of Education 2013). Unless issues other than funding are addressed in the strategy, it is likely that PSE access will not improve.

Canada-wide Peer Mentorship Program

As discussed in the literature review, many Indigenous students are the first in their family to go access PSE and they lack role models to encourage and support them. Therefore, Indigenous students need someone outside their family that could provide guidance to access PSE and help them to navigate through the PSE environment when they arrive. According to Rawana et al. (2015), peer mentorship programs in institutions help to engage Indigenous students and to address their needs while preserving their culture.

Peer mentorship programs can help improve self-esteem and increase awareness of ethnic identity, reducing isolation. Peer mentorship can allow Indigenous students to feel connected to their culture even when they are far away from home. It can also have a positive impact on academic achievement, allowing for better teamwork, communication and decision-making skills (Rawana et al. 2015).

Despite the positive effects of a peer mentorship program and its ability to help Indigenous students access PSE, only 2% of English-speaking colleges and 29% of English-speaking universities have an Indigenous peer mentorship program as of 2015 (Rawana et al. 2015). Therefore, many Indigenous students do not have access to a peer mentorship program. The federal government could address this gap by creating a Canada-wide network of mentorship for Indigenous students. This program should be developed and run by, or in partnership with, Indigenous communities in order to make sure it is responsive to Indigenous people's needs and reflects their culture.

Indigenous students who are currently in PSE or who have recently completed PSE would be paired with an Indigenous high school student. Recognizing that there are many different

Indigenous cultures across Canada, efforts should be made to match mentors and mentees based on communities or similar cultural groups, where possible. Both the mentors and mentees would be volunteers but incentives such as course credit, free school supplies or gifts should be considered to attract people to the program.

The mentors would be able to support mentees through their last years of high school, the transition to PSE and their journey through PSE. They would be given access to information and resources from their current or former institution as well as a newly created government database for the program. These resources should include information about the PSE institution including the application process and specific Indigenous programs and supports, but also information pertaining to other important factors such as housing support, scholarship opportunities and job opportunities. This support would help address both the lack of information on PSE in some Indigenous communities by providing a role model for students who are thinking about going to PSE as well as the potential Euro-centric environment at PSE institutions as it would give them an Indigenous person to talk to, who would both understand what they are going through and be able to suggest possible resources.

Conclusion

This paper has discussed how addressing access for Indigenous people to PSE in Canada is one of the greatest opportunities for Canadian society in the future. As proved by various researchers, Indigenous Canadians have lower rates of education compared to non-Indigenous Canadians, particularly in the area of high school graduation and university attainment. The gap is particularly acute for First Nations on reserve and Inuit people who consistently achieve education levels below other Canadians, a trend which has not improved over the last decade. Addressing the PSE access gap will allow for better living standards for Indigenous people including improved employment opportunities, higher incomes and greater health outcomes.

In order to address the PSE access gap, the barriers to access PSE for Indigenous students must be mitigated. While the federal government has programs in place to help Indigenous people overcome a lack of financial resources through the PSSSP and UCEPP, other barriers such as low high school graduation rates, Euro-centric curriculum, lack of Indigenous control of educational institutions, geographical distance and lack of information are not adequately addressed by these programs.

It is also important to note that the federal programs in place have limitations and shortcomings and need improvements particularly in accountability. The PSSSP and UCEPP struggle from lack of clarification if they are merit-based or need-based programs and suffer inconsistent program delivery across the country in terms of funds allocated and the structure of allocation. Therefore this paper proposes the creation of a national PSSSP centre which directly funds students in order to make sure that Indigenous students all have access to the funding programs and that the funds are being used for the correct purpose.

With the PSSP, the limited amount of funding available and the large number of applications coupled by the fact that institutions cannot apply for any operational funding, severely limits the effectiveness of the program, especially for Indigenous-controlled institutions. This funding pool should be increased with a specific amount set aside for Indigenous-controlled institutions. This specific allotment should also allow for Indigenous institutions to use it for operational support when necessary to ensure that these institutions continue to operate in the future.

Additionally, new policies should be put in place to help address the access gap. Of particular importance is the creation of a national Indigenous PSE strategy that is established through the cooperation of the federal government, provincial governments, Indigenous organizations, Indigenous students and post-secondary institutions. Providing a vision and goals for Indigenous PSE that are consistent across the country is important for ensuring all Indigenous students are supported and can access PSE institutions as well as ensuring that all barriers to access are taken into account and that there is recognition that the access gap does not exist because of inadequate financial resources alone. In the meantime, the federal government should look into creating a peer-mentoring program to help Indigenous students access PSE.

While creating programs and policies to improve access for Indigenous students to PSE, policy-makers should strive to create and establish programs that address as many barriers to PSE as possible, especially non-financial barriers which have largely been ignored by INAC's PSE program. It is important that these programs are delivered in partnership with Indigenous people so that their voices are at the forefront and that they are able to shape policies that directly affect the future of their communities and close the PSE access gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians.

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