Attracting Aboriginal Youth to The Study of Business: Mentorship, Networking, and Technology

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ABSTRACT

There is widespread recognition that Aboriginal Canada needs more community members with business training to work in economic development and management, particularly with the growing development of natural resources in Aboriginal territories and self-governance initiatives. Yet, only 12% of funded Aboriginal students pursue post-secondary education in business or commerce. Barriers to the pursuit of tertiary education include inadequate student preparation and career guidance, lack of funding, and attitudes surrounding the ability to do math. The Purdy Crawford Chair in Aboriginal Business Studies at Cape Breton University addresses these barriers via its program for Aboriginal youth, which combines mentorship, networking, and technology to facilitate the transition from high school to post-secondary studies and engage students in business education. This article outlines the model employed by the Purdy Crawford Chair and assesses the initiative in relation to relevant literature on mentorship and technology.

INTRODUCTION

In his report *Aboriginal Peoples and Post-secondary Education in Canada*, Mendelson concludes:

> Aboriginal peoples are a growing part of Canada's population, especially in the West and the North. While there are many Aboriginal people who are doing quite well, on average the Aboriginal population suffers from higher unemployment, lower levels of education, below average incomes and many other indicators of limited socioeconomic circumstances. These problems will have an increasing negative impact on the well-being of *all* of Canada, particularly in the West and the North. It is critical for all Canadians that this dire situation changes for the better. The way to effect change is through success in education. Numerous studies have shown that Aboriginal people

> who achieve a post-secondary education do as well on most indicators (though not quite as well in employment levels) as the general population. But everyone loses when Aboriginal students fail to succeed. (2006, p. 35)

The Canadian reality is that fewer Aboriginal students go on to study at colleges and universities than do their non-Aboriginal counterparts. Not surprisingly, then, the number of Aboriginal students pursuing business education at post-secondary institutions is also low. While 18.3% of all students in Canadian post-secondary institutions study business, management, or public administration,[1] only 12% of funded Aboriginal students pursue post-secondary education in business or commerce.[2] There is widespread recognition, however, of the need for more Aboriginals with business training to work in economic development and management in communities across Canada, particularly with the growing development of natural resources in Aboriginal territories and self-governance initiatives (Colbourne 2012, p. 73; Kirkness 1995, p. 34).

The ability to respond to this need is constrained by student preparation in junior high and high school. Many note that secondary schools do not adequately prepare Aboriginal students for the reality of workforce and advanced studies (for example, Bruce and Marlin 2012; Restoule et al. 2013). Further, our research with Aboriginal students and economic development officers across Canada[3] has revealed the need for higher quality career guidance programs, improved academic guidance[4] to ensure that students are eligible for direct admission into post-secondary programs (instead of having to upgrade to meet entrance requirements), and improved financial literacy. Participants indicated that students were often counselled out of academic math because it is not required to graduate and, indeed, Aboriginal students may be led to believe that they are less capable of doing math (Wagner, 2011) or pursuing post-secondary education more generally (Restoule et al. 2013, p. 5). Our consultations also revealed that due to limited funding available for post-secondary education, students are often encouraged to pursue technical programs or trades instead of university programs because they often cost less.[5] Consequently, many Aboriginal high school students are not effectively prepared to consider the value of a business education, are graduating without the pre-requisites required to enter their chosen programs, and in some cases are not being encouraged to follow particular educational paths.[6]

Faced with the challenge of how to overcome these educational barriers and encourage more Aboriginal youth to study business, the Purdy Crawford Chair in Aboriginal Business Studies at Cape Breton University (CBU) launched a pilot business mentorship program in

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[1] Enrolments for 2013–2014 according to Statistics Canada (http://www.statcan.gc.ca/tables-tableaux/sum-som/l01/cst01/educ72a-eng.htm, accessed 26 September 2016).

[2] Statistics (cited for 2010–2011) are only available for First Nations and Inuit students receiving funding from the federal government and so may be misleading as they do not capture all Aboriginal students in Canada (AANDC, personal communication, June 4, 2012).

[3] Student roundtables were held in Sydney, Nova Scotia on October 19, 2011, in Ottawa, Ontario on January 24, 2012, and in Edmonton, Alberta on March 19, 2012. The roundtable with economic development officers was held in Eskasoni, Nova Scotia on October 28, 2011.

[4] Participants noted that often guidance counsellors are doing the best they can, but they themselves have not received adequate training. This echoes Mendelson\'92s (2008) finding that First Nation-run schools may not be able to provide professional development opportunities for staff (p. 3).

[5] A recent survey of Aboriginal students in Ontario indicated that less than 50% of First Nations students receive funding to pursue tertiary education (Restoule et al. 2013, p. 3).

[6] Similar observations might be made of STEM education (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics).

Nova Scotia in 2011. Then referred to as the Business Network for Aboriginal Youth (BNAY), the program combined mentorship, networking, and technology to facilitate the transition from high school to post-secondary studies and engage students in business education. In this article, we describe the establishment of the Purdy Crawford Chair in Aboriginal Business Studies, review relevant literature on mentorship and technology that shapes and contextualizes our work, and explain how the Business Network for Aboriginal Youth developed, identifying key components of the program. We then assess the effectiveness of the Business Network for Aboriginal Youth, outline changes made as a result of the three-year pilot, and comment on the expansion of the program as In.Business — A Mentorship Program for Indigenous Youth across Canada.

ESTABLISHING THE PURDY CRAWFORD CHAIR IN ABORIGINAL BUSINESS STUDIES

Cape Breton University has a forty year history of supporting Aboriginal communities through engagement and partnership (Cape Breton University, n.d.) and, compared to other universities in Atlantic Canada, has had higher application and admittance rates for Aboriginal students (Bruce et al., 2010). The majority of students, however, are enrolled in the Bachelor of Arts (BA) or Bachelor of Arts in Community Studies (BACS) programs. The percentage of applications received from Mi'kmaw students to study business is significantly lower than for many other programs.

When CBU established the Shannon School of Business Advisory Board, the late Purdy Crawford, a distinguished and respected Canadian lawyer, asked several questions of fellow board member Chief Terry Paul of Membertou. Was there a reason why more Aboriginal people are not involved in or educated in business? Was there something the board could do — *should do*? Crawford's questions revealed his insistence that the creation of viable and vibrant economies for Aboriginal communities requires that both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people rise to the challenge. The only way Aboriginal people can fully engage in such initiatives is by understanding business and the economy, and by finding ways to make them work for and with their communities. The advisory board determined the best course of action was to build on existing partnerships and networks to put in place an applied research chair dedicated to Aboriginal business studies. This research chair would have practical project deliverables related to research, curriculum, and recruitment as they pertain to Aboriginal business. Research would lead to the creation of educational resources for post-secondary business programs, with the hope that having more culturally inclusive and appropriate curriculum materials would make the study of business more attractive and relevant to Aboriginal students. The first holder of the research chair was Dr. Keith G. Brown, Vice President, International and Aboriginal Affairs at CBU until June 2016. Early in his career as an educator, he taught in a remote northern community and saw firsthand the challenges faced in such communities.

In December 2010, a concept paper was prepared at the request of the SSOB Advisory Board. It defined the need for a research chair in Aboriginal business studies and the business case for establishing it as a fully endowed project that would continue in perpetuity after five years of fundraising. Cape Breton businessman Joe Shannon and Membertou Chief Terry Paul presented this proposal to representatives of the federal government, thereby initiating a discussion that led to partial funding from Aboriginal Affairs and North-

ern Development Canada (AANDC, now Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada). Additional funding was obtained from Enterprise Cape Breton Corporation (ECBC), which established an endowment fund to enable the work of the Chair to continue beyond the initial five-year start up phase.[7]

As part of the funding arrangement, AANDC required that there be provincial government and private sector support for the research chair. Since the Province of Nova Scotia was willing to fund a project that was complementary to, but distinguishable from, that funded by AANDC, there was a need to identify a specific initiative. *A Study of the Atlantic Aboriginal Post-Secondary Labour Force* had revealed the importance of adequate and appropriate preparation of young Aboriginal people in the school system so that they will be ready to attend post-secondary institutions if they so desire:

> In order to better prepare Aboriginal students for success in the labour market, it is recommended that elementary and secondary schools develop and implement more effective and meaningful career planning programs and activities. This should be developed by Education Directors and build upon successful initiatives in place in some schools/communities in the region. Furthermore, partnerships should be forged with employers to provide placements and mentorships be established through the leadership of the Chief and Council, and through proactive efforts of business leaders. (Bruce et al. 2010, p. 75)

While this study focussed on the Atlantic Provinces, it was clear that similar challenges existed elsewhere. A variety of Aboriginal youth programming initiatives had been established in other areas of Canada, such as the Ch'nook program[8] in British Columbia which incorporated networking and mentorship.[9] As Rao and Mitchell (1998) have noted, "relationships play an important role in developing new leaders," but they warn that "too many of today's learners have come to think of networking as a substitute for mentoring" (Rao and Mitchell 1998, pp. 46–48). Recognizing the potential for impact through mentorship, but also the need to create a new model where students and mentors could be connected across space and time, the Purdy Crawford Chair in Aboriginal Business Studies envisioned a pilot project that combined mentorship, social media and networking, and technology that could be supported by the provincial government and Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey (MK).[10]

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[7] ECBC was a Crown corporation located in Sydney and dedicated to supporting economic development in the region. In 2014, operation was transferred to Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and Public Works and Government Services Canada.

[8] Since 2003, the Ch'nook Initiative has focused on increasing Aboriginal participation in post-secondary business education studies in the province of British Columbia and across Canada. Ch'nook offers a wide range of business education opportunities, some of which are aimed at promoting business education to Aboriginal high school students (for example, their "Cousins" program). Other programs provide extended learning opportunities for post-secondary Aboriginal business students enrolled in institutions across British Columbia and Canada (for example, the Indigenous Business Education Network). For more on the program, visit <http://www.chnook.org/>. See also Colbourne 2012.

[9] Other initiatives include eSpirit, a business plan competition for Aboriginal high school students sponsored by Business Development Bank of Canada, which ran until 2015 (https://www.bdc.ca/en/resources/espirit/espirit-competition.html, accessed 26 September 2016), and the Martin Aboriginal Education Initiative, which runs an Aboriginal Youth Entrepreneurship Program and an Accounting Mentorship Program (http://www.maei-ieam.ca/, accessed 26 September 2016).

[10] Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey is the education authority in Nova Scotia in which 12 of the 13 First Nations are partnered.

As a result of these partnerships, the Purdy Crawford Chair in Aboriginal Business Studies was established at Cape Breton University with four primary objectives: research on what drives success in Aboriginal communities, the development of resources that support and enhance business curriculum, the recruitment of Aboriginal students to the study of business, and mentorship at secondary and post-secondary levels. The mentorship initiative for secondary students was originally referred to as the Business Network for Aboriginal Youth.

MENTORSHIP, TECHNOLOGY, AND INNOVATION

Traditionally, mentorship refers to a relationship between an adult and a child or youth. For example, Erickson et al (2009) state: "Mentors are non-parental adults who take a special interest in the lives of youth. They step outside their normal social roles as teachers, relatives, youth workers, ministers, and employers by helping to guide young people in the transition to adulthood with advice and emotional support and by serving as role models" (2009, p. 344). Such relationships may develop informally or formally. Those that develop formally do so "with organizational assistance or intervention, which is usually in the form of matching mentors with protégés" (Ragins 2000, p. 1177). The efficacy of formal mentoring relationships is sometimes questioned, since formal mentors "may be less personally invested" than informal mentors who enter such relationships with particular individuals by their own initiative (Ragins 2000, 1179). Nevertheless, "when relationships with nonparental adults are experienced by youth as meaningful and supportive, they can serve as a catalyst for several intertwined developmental and interpersonal processes that, in turn, help young people to both avoid problems and reach their full potential" (Dubois et al. 2011, p. 66).

In the past few decades, formal mentorship programs have emerged largely as an intervention strategy for at-risk populations (see DuBois et al. 2011, p. 58). Such programs are often established with both "soft" and "hard" outcomes or goals. Soft outcomes are subjective and more difficult to measure, and include such goals as attitudinal change or improved self-esteem. Hard outcomes are more objective and easier to measure, such as improved academic performance or employment rates (DuBois et al. 2011, p. 74; Colley 2003, pp. 524–525). While we have never used the language of "intervention" in relation to the development of our program, it was designed to address the specific issues of the lack of support and guidance available to Aboriginal high school students and the relatively low enrolment rate of Aboriginal students in post-secondary business programs. For our purposes, the soft goals would include a reduction in the feeling of isolation experienced by students as the "only" student interested in business in their school and improved self-esteem or confidence. The hard goal for the program would be an increase in the number of Aboriginal youth studying business at the post-secondary level, and a recent study in the United States supports this goal, finding that youth with mentors are more likely to pursue post-secondary education than those without (Bruce and Bridgeland 2014, p. 3). Simply put, we wanted students to establish a vision for their future, to understand the possible pathways for attaining that vision, and to have the confidence to make the vision a reality.

While the traditional arrangement between one adult and one youth is common in mentorship programs, studies show that a variety of mentoring relationships are effective.

Group mentoring and older peer mentoring can be used to reach a program's goals and objectives (DuBois et al. 2011, p. 74). As Erickson et al. (2009) note, "peers can also serve as a positive resource for young people" (p. 346). Further, peer learning can lead students to "care more about their work" (Kitsis 2008, p. 30). Ultimately, the outcome of mentor-protégé relationships is more dependent on the quality of the arrangement than the specific type of relationship established (Ragins 2000, p. 1190). While it may be advantageous to have an ethnic or cultural match between those in a mentoring relationship, Syed et al. (2012) note that what "works" in any situation is dependent on the individuals involved: "Many often assume that ethnic minorities prefer to have mentors that share their background. Although our findings did support this notion, they also revealed important individual differences" (pp. 905–906). In short, having Aboriginal mentors for Aboriginal students would help to ensure a cultural match, but just as important was the match of personalities, experiences, and interests (among other factors).

While it is often assumed that mentoring relationships are in-person, face to face interactions, increasingly they are being mediated by technology. As Boris-Schacter and Vonasek (2009) observed of their own mentoring relationship, email mentoring "reduced the typical isolation a school principal faces and provided mutual emotional and intellectual nurturance" (494). This suggested, then, that mentoring at a distance could be viable in our program with the appropriate technology.

Technology can be a powerful tool for learning if efforts are made to improve competency in using it. That technology is appealing to students is an advantage. As Istance and Kools (2013) observe, youth "expect technology to be: a) a source of engagement to make learning more interesting and relevant, b) a means to make school work more convenient, and c) a means to make it more educationally productive" (p. 44). Indeed, these notions undergirded the design of our mentorship program, which endeavours to educate Aboriginal students about business in a way that is enjoyable, engaging, and easy.

The way that youth use technology is important to understand. Engagement with technology can be spoken about in terms of "messing around" and "geeking out." While these may appear to be discrete categories, they represent a continuum of engagement. Messing around is more about the consumption of content, while geeking out refers to the active creation of content. Most youth consume content, but never progress to creating content (Warschauer and Matuchniak 2010, pp. 192–194). Designing a mentorship program that promoted "geeking out" would expand the skill sets of participants while developing creative and innovative thought processes — key for future business leaders.

Wankel proposes several possible innovations to education that could capitalize on these competencies. For example, he suggests that, given the prevalence and relatively low cost of technology today, it would be possible to require students to purchase inexpensive video cameras rather than a textbook for a course and have them conduct interviews as part of course content (2009, p. 253). Indeed, with the advent of smartphones, it is likely that the majority of students would already have access to a handheld device with video capabilities. Wankel also describes the use of live tweeting during presentations, which allows students to be engaged and provide "instant feedback" (ibid, 254). The potential of such innovations for student engagement is significant. Indeed, such innovations, and technology more generally, "can redefine who are the teachers" (Istance and Kools, 2013, p. 52). A mentorship program, then, could be constructed to allow mentors, peers, program facilitators, community members, and others to share in this educational role. As such, we

attempted to employ technology in ways similar to those outlined by Wankel in the design and delivery of our program.

THE BUSINESS NETWORK FOR ABORIGINAL YOUTH

The Business Network for Aboriginal Youth (BNAY) was established to connect Aboriginal learners with an interest in business to their futures as business leaders. The following value statements were foundational to the program:

- Encouraging the study of business will help improve the economic future of Aboriginal communities;
- Connecting students with peers and mentors establishes support structures that will help students transition into post-secondary business studies;
- Exploring a variety of business options helps students make informed decisions regarding their education and career paths; and
- Connecting students in person and virtually helps to address issues of psychological and physical isolation.

From 2011 to 2014, the provincial program based in Nova Scotia connected thirty students with six mentors annually to explore business concepts and opportunities. The program had two primary components: in-person conferences and interaction via social media. In the sections that follow, we describe the application process for students, recruitment of mentors, role of advisors, and content of the program during the three-year pilot.

APPLICATION PROCESS AND STUDENT RECRUITMENT

At the start of each school year, the project manager, Allan MacKenzie, visited the high schools in Nova Scotia that had a significant number of Aboriginal students, and presented the program to Aboriginal students in grades 10, 11, and 12. A promotional video was created and introduced as part of the recruitment kit in the second year of the Nova Scotia pilot; however, the presentation also featured a PowerPoint presentation and question and answer period.[11] Students were informed that the program was meant to be both fun and educational, and were invited to apply if they had any interest in business. The application form requested basic information, as well as parental consent to apply to the program. Letters of reference (introduced in the second year of the pilot) were also required to be considered for the program. A scoring system developed in consultation with an advisory council was used to select successful applicants.

Students chosen for the program were asked to sign contracts that outlined their commitment to the program, as well as guidelines for the appropriate use of smartphones. Students were then placed in groups and matched with mentors who would guide their learning experience. Initially, students were grouped according to their specific interest in busi-

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[11] Promotional videos are available online at <https://www.youtube.com/user/PurdyCrawfordChair>.

ness (such as marketing or tourism) and a mentor with an appropriate background was assigned to that group. Following the first year, however, it was determined that students would benefit from exposure to many different aspects of business so that they could better determine their interests for the future. In the second year of the pilot, groups of students were instead created with an eye to diversity (age, grade, location, and gender) and assigned to a mentor. Each group was named after Mi'kmaw animals, such as *tiamuk* (moose) or *muinaq* (bears), as recommended by the advisory council.

RECRUITMENT OF MENTORS

In consultation with the advisory council, we determined that the ideal mentor for the BNAY was someone who was Aboriginal and relatively young (to ensure students could relate to mentors and vice versa), had recently graduated from business or a related discipline, and understood the value of a business degree and the effort required to attain one. Further, as a group, it was desirable to have mentors with diverse training backgrounds, work experiences, and geographic locations throughout the province. This profile for mentors was established with the belief that students could relate better to mentors from their own Aboriginal communities. Further, these mentors would hopefully understand the challenges faced by students and, therefore, be better able to support students in culturally appropriate ways.

Like students, mentors signed contracts that set out expectations for their involvement and interaction. As Paterson and Hart-Wasekeesikaw (1994) suggest, to ensure the best possible experience for those involved in a mentoring relationship, "Mentorship should be a contractual agreement in which the roles and expectations of each are made clear at the onset" (p. 75). Mentors were also required to provide criminal record checks annually. To assist mentors in their program work, resource binders were prepared and distributed. These included a variety of cultural and practical materials, including the Mi'kmaw Resource Guide (Bernard 2007)[12] and an excerpt outlining the seven sacred teachings (Bones et al., 2012); resources for conflict resolution, bullying, harassment, and discrimination; and the general admission requirements for colleges and universities in Nova Scotia. The binders also included sample activities referred to as "challenges" that could be used or modified as part of their programming and copies of the terms and conditions for both mentors and students. Mentors were responsible for providing guidance based on their experiences, creating a positive atmosphere for open communication, and offering constructive criticism in a supportive way.

ADVISORY COUNCIL

An advisory council comprised of Aboriginal educators, Elders, and business leaders was established to guide the development of the program and policies surrounding participation. Importantly, this group provided advice regarding content that students should be exposed to so that they become leaders in their communities. Members of the council emphasized that students should not be made to believe that choosing a business education meant

[12] Available online at <http://cmmns.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/MIKMAWRGPrint.pdf> (accessed 26 September 2016).

sacrificing anything about themselves or culture; rather, culture and community-focused projects should be seen as integral to the success and future of their communities. Elders were specifically asked how cultural teachings could be more intentionally integrated into the program and, as a result, they regularly participated in conferences, sometimes leading ceremonies and sometimes sharing their personal experiences.

TECHNOLOGY AND PROGRAM CONTENT

Studies have observed that today's students are experienced with technology. For example, Wankel (2009) states, "students are digital natives ... who have been involved with computers from the time they were toddlers" (p. 251). Further, "they generally feel comfortable with computer-based collaborations such as those using social media" (ibid). Warschauer and Matuchniak (2010), however, caution that this notion of today's youth being "digital natives" is largely a myth, arguing that inequity still exists (p. 218). Though access to technology has increased significantly, it can still be uneven and limited by a number of factors, including income level and physical location (see Warschauer and Matuchniak 2010, p. 185). Similarly, Istance and Kools (2013) note that, the notion of the current generation being referred to as "digital natives" is flawed because digital literacy remains a problem (p. 45). There is a need to teach youth how to use technology. Levy and Murnane (2004) refer to this as a new "digital divide":

> Today the digital divide resides in differential ability to use new media to critically evaluate information, analyze, and interpret data, attack complex problems, test innovative solutions, manage multifaceted projects, collaborate with others in knowledge production, and communicate effectively to diverse audiences. (Warschauer and Matuchniak 2010, p. 213)

As this literature suggests, it is important not only to ensure youth today have access to technology, but also that they receive instruction on how to use it effectively, ethically, and safely (Greehow et al. 2009, p. 252; Kitsis 2008, p. 34).

In our pilot mentorship program, technology allowed for regular interaction between mentors and students without the need for travel. Further, it provided an environment in which students could interact with different people and explore new ideas and experiences. In urban areas with larger populations, there are usually a variety of social and service groups that allow youth to "try on" different personalities and experiment with ideas and beliefs by finding like-minded individuals. The same opportunities often do not exist for youth in rural and isolated communities. Interactive platforms such as instant messaging and Facebook seem to be the preferred communication tools of youth. By embracing these technologies, youth from rural, isolated areas could expand their networks and be exposed to a wider variety of positive educational opportunities.

Given the physical distance between participants in the program, smartphone technology was initially an effective way to connect students to one another and mentors while delivering a fun and challenging program that was culturally appropriate and supportive. To ensure that all participants had the same minimum level of access, BlackBerry devices were provided to participants. We taught them how to use these devices in appropriate ways and harness their power to create a pathway to the future. The result was a virtual community of Aboriginal students who shared similar interests using BlackBerry Messenger, Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter. Students worked within small groups (five members each) on bi-

weekly challenges facilitated by mentors that explored various facets of business and were submitted via social media. For example, students learned about the stock market, how it works, and different investment strategies through a stock market simulation. They engaged in a friendly competition to make the most money in a specified time period and win a prize. Business culture and expectations of the "real world" drove us to ensure the program was rigorous, yet supportive and fun.

CONFERENCES

Although the majority of the program was delivered virtually, in-person interaction was important as well, both for removing the feeling of isolation some participants experienced in their home communities and for developing bonds with each other that were then maintained through smartphone technology. We observed that this type of approach worked well in the Ch'nook program, where the students' interactions with one another created energy that was critical to keeping students interested and engaged.

At the start of each year of the program (usually at the end of November or early December), mentors and students were brought together to engage in team building activities. The opening conference allowed mentors to connect with students and get to know their personalities more quickly, facilitating the virtual interaction that was to follow. For students, the trip away from home (staying overnight in a hotel) and the visit to the university (CBU) helped them to imagine themselves comfortably moving through and being in such spaces in the future. Bruce et al. (2010) note that Aboriginal students tend to be less successful at university because they do not feel welcome on campus (p. 14), while Kirkness (1995) says they do not "feel at home" (p. 34). While students in our program were on campus, they attended business classes, ate in the dining hall, and toured campus, learning about support services and visiting a dorm room. It was hoped that this orientation would allow students to feel more comfortable on campus in the future.

Both the opening and closing conferences featured team business challenges and provided an opportunity to showcase individual work. Awards named after Purdy Crawford and referred to as "Purdy Awards" were established to recognize the winners of challenges; however, they could also be used to acknowledge the efforts or contributions of individuals in the program. Mentors in the program and employees of the Purdy Crawford Chair observed participation during the conferences and then suggested individuals worthy of recognition, such as someone who is a team player, supportive, polite, professional, or particularly enthusiastic.

The conferences were also designed to showcase successful Aboriginal businesses and communities, and ensure a cultural connection to the study of business. To this end, conferences were held on reserves throughout Nova Scotia, including Eskasoni, Membertou, Millbrook, and Wagmatcook. Conferences integrated technology and social media, for example with "live tweeting" during presentations. Such presentations and workshops featured a variety of speakers to inspire and educate students, such as journalist, politician, and rap artist Wab Kinew (who has a degree in economics), lawyer and comedian Candy Palmater (of The Candy Show), local entrepreneur Robert Bernard of Waycobah and Chief Leroy Denny of Eskasoni (to name only a few). Wherever possible, conferences supported and incorporated Aboriginal owned and/or operated businesses as venues or suppliers.

After the opening conference, mentors and students interacted in a mediated form, completing challenges and learning from each other (as described above) before coming together at the end of the year for a closing conference. The closing conference was very similar to the opening conference, but it was always held in a location different from the opening conference. Closing conferences also featured a final challenge called "Rant Your Resume" for which students prepared a video "selling themselves" in a Rick Mercer style rant (not unlike an elevator pitch) between 30 and 45 seconds in length. The winner each year received an entrance scholarship tenable at CBU should he or she study business there. The closing conference also featured a completion ceremony to recognize the hard work and success of the student participants.

SUCCESS OF THE PILOT

A review of the three-year pilot of the mentorship program demonstrated that it had been a success in the short-term. This review was based on the feedback we received from participants, their pursuit of business education at the post-secondary level, and continued interest in the program, often as a result of word-of-mouth among students. For example, we now have siblings and friends of former participants enrolled in the program.

Of the grade twelve students who completed the program, 56% had enrolled in business at a post-secondary institution. While not all students who completed the program chose to study business, several students have realized that business is complementary to their chosen career paths and intend to take business electives to learn, for example, the business side of running an architecture firm or a veterinary office. There have also been students who discovered that they are not interested in business and we consider that to be a valid outcome, since they were able to make better-informed decisions about their post-secondary education.

Year	Enrolled in Program	Completed the Program	Grade 12 Completion	Attended Post-secondary	Enrolled in Business
1	30	21	6	4	2
2	30	26	12	9	7
3	30	22	12	12	5

In addition to collecting anecdotal evidence, we also implemented exit surveys to collect data to improve the program and determine its success during the pilot program period. A sampling follows:

- **Feedback received via exit surveys (2011–2012):**
    - 100% of respondents say that, given the opportunity, they would participate in the program again.
    - 94% of respondents say that the social media challenges provided a fun way to learn about business concepts.
    - "I've always wanted to own my own business, and after this program, I know that I can!"
    - "I want more people from my community in this program."

- **Feedback received via exit surveys (2012–2013):**
  - 94% of respondents say they gained valuable experience through this mentorship program
  - 100% of respondents would recommend this program to a fellow student
  - "They helped me get excited about business."
  - "I want other students to have the same great experience I did."

- **Feedback received via exit surveys (2013-2014):**
  - 100% responded that, given the opportunity, they would participate in this program again
  - 95% responded that they would recommend this program to a fellow student.
  - "This program has helped me grow, kept me in touch with my culture, and gave me a whole new sense of confidence as an Aboriginal female."
  - "It has provided me with irreplaceable knowledge, experiences, and friendships."
  - "It gets better every year!"[13]
  - "It made me want to own my own business when I finish school!"
  - "It is a life changing experience. You get a sense of accomplishment when you finish challenges because you walk away with new knowledge."

CHANGES TO THE PROGRAM

As a result of feedback collected through surveys and discussions with participants, changes have been made to how the program is run. At the end of the first year, we were challenged by one mentor's question: What makes the program Aboriginal? Was it just that the participants are Aboriginal? In response, we designed some challenges to have more of a focus on Aboriginal culture (for example, looking at tourism initiatives in communities) and added cultural components to conferences. For example, to end the December 2013 opening conference, Eskasoni singers Michael R. Denny and Sulian Denny were invited to lead the group in a round dance to honour the new friendships that had been made. For some students, it was their first opportunity to participate in a round dance.

Some graduates of the program began taking on responsibility for promoting and recruiting students to the program. In fall 2013, half of the presentations to high school students were made by program graduates (sometimes paired with a mentor). They became involved in conferences and on Facebook, participating in activities and providing feedback and support to students in the program. As junior or peer mentors in the program, they are gaining valuable work experience in the process.

Since mentorship relationships are "bidirectional" (Kelehear and Heid 2002, p. 77), we realize that it is important to better understand how mentors benefit from participation in our program. We have only begun to interrogate this question, but are committed to making exit surveys a required component for mentors (previously, they were only used with students). Our preliminary work in this area has demonstrated both personal and professional benefits

[13] Students are permitted to enroll in the program more than once.

for mentors. Mentors have noted a sense of satisfaction from being able to help students discover and follow their life paths, as well as observing improved self-confidence in their students. In the design of challenges, mentors also learned more about various topics through their research. Professionally, mentors have noted that they have met industry professionals who they do not normally network with in their current work environments and the program serves as a refresher for the aspects of their business education that are not required or often used in their current positions. These surveys also indicate that we need to provide additional training for mentors, particularly in the areas of crisis intervention, conflict resolution, and technology.

Finally, there has been a shift to the use of Android devices instead of BlackBerrys. The original attraction of BlackBerrys was the BBM application (BlackBerry Messenger), which allowed us to connect mentors, students, and program coordinators in virtual groups and facilitated communication and the distribution of challenges. Increasingly, however, students wanted to be able to use their own devices (usually Androids or iPhones) and we needed to be able to access and use a greater variety of applications. Games and simulations such as GoVenture Entrepreneur, GoVenture Personal Finance, or Market Millionaire Enhanced (stock simulation) were not available on BlackBerry. In November 2013, the program rolled out on Android smartphones (with some students using their personal iPhones) to improve the experience for students.

REBRANDING AND EXPANDING

Based on the initial success of the provincial pilot, discussions began around the potential for expanding nationally. The Purdy Crawford Chair in Aboriginal Business Studies submitted a proposal titled *A Capacity to Imagine, Plan, and Strategize a New Economic Future for Aboriginal Canadians: Success in Business, A National Model* to the federal government. The proposal spoke to the need for national capacity building in business studies, encouragement in entrepreneurism, and dissemination of best practices in proven economic models — all with the goal of substantially increasing the participation of Aboriginals in business and a concomitant emulation of best practices. The funding received as a result of this proposal enabled the program to begin a national expansion. In 2014, as the Nova Scotia-based Business Network for Aboriginal Youth was expanding into the Atlantic Provinces and across Canada, it was rebranded as In.Business — A Mentorship Program for Indigenous Youth.[14]

To achieve its expansion goals, Cape Breton University partnered with post-secondary institutions across the country: Nipissing University in North Bay, Ontario; University of Winnipeg in Winnipeg, Manitoba; Vancouver Island University in Nanaimo, British Columbia; and Yukon College in Whitehorse, Yukon. As part of the expansion, a number of resources were developed to facilitate the implementation of the program in other regions, including a database of challenges that mentors could select from and deploy in their mentoring groups, an operations manual to standardize delivery across the country, and the educational business simulation Music Mogul.

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[14] More on the current program can be found at <http://www.cbu.ca/indigenous-affairs/purdy-crawford-chair-in-aboriginal-business-studies/in-business/>.

Music Mogul puts the player in the role of manager for a Canadian Aboriginal musical group. As the group tours across Canada, the player chooses the communities that are visited on each tour, selects and purchases merchandise for sale at shows, and arranges advertising campaigns. The player also negotiates the cost of venue rental, sets the ticket prices for each show and the mark-up for merchandise, and takes out and repays loans throughout the game. Through a logbook, the player tracks the growth of their fan base, as well as their income and expenses. The ultimate goal is to become a Music Mogul by making $1 million dollars or playing in 39 towns or cities from coast to coast to coast. By playing the game, students learn about money and banking, management and operations, entrepreneurship, advertising, mark-up and pricing, public relations, budgeting, and inventory management. This game is played by all students in the program.

For the 2014–2015 school year, the In.Business program operated in two regions: Atlantic (Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and Québec) and Central (Manitoba and Nunavut). By the 2015–2016 school year, it was operating in five regions (Atlantic, Eastern, Central, Pacific, Northern) with students from all provinces and territories. While there are common elements of the program, such as Music Mogul, some elements are designed to be flexible to ensure cultural fit. Not surprisingly, the focus on Mi'kmaw culture and language (particularly in the naming of mentoring groups) has lessened as the program expanded to take in students from other Aboriginal communities. Some elements, such as Rant Your Resume, have been replaced with other activities, such as the 60-Second Sell.

Having only one year of the national program completed, we still consider the program to be in a pilot stage (now a national pilot, as opposed to the original three-year provincial one). Response to the program continues to be positive. In 2016, a survey was conducted with all students in the program from coast to coast to coast. The results suggest that In.Business is making a difference in terms of students' understanding of and interest in business. For example, 80% of students who completed the program indicated that it had changed how they thought about business. Upon entering the program, 11% of the students felt that they were very knowledgeable about business for their age, but after completing the program, that number increased to 20%. Of the grade 12 students who completed the program, 71% indicated that they would be attending post-secondary institutions in the fall and 20% of those students were choosing business.

Year	Enrolled in Program	Completed the Program	Grade 12 Completion	Attended Post-secondary	Enrolled in Business
4	116	64	25	17	7
5	232	144	72	51	10

During the first five years of the program, then, 63% of students enrolled in In.Business completed the program. Of the students completing the program who were in grade 12, 73% went on to post-secondary studies, with 33% choosing business.

	Enrolled in Program	Completed the Program	Grade 12 Completion	Attended Post-secondary	Enrolled in Business
5-Year Total	438	277	127	93	31

THE FUTURE OF IN.BUSINESS

Ultimately, we are striving to create social networks through which students can support one another as they transition into post-secondary studies, even if they are in different locations and at different universities. Since our access point is through high schools, our work is necessarily tied to the high school calendar. DuBois et al. (2011) observe that mentorship initiatives that are tied to the academic or school year may produce “less enduring” relationships (p. 59). One way that we address this concern in our program is by permitting students to participate in the program for multiple years. We also invite students who have completed the program and graduated from high school to remain engaged with the program as peer mentors to new students or paid employees helping to run the program.

Rightly, DuBois et al. (2011) also note a lack of longer term studies that test whether the effects of mentorship programs endure into the future (p. 74). Similarly, Erickson et al. (2009) observe,

> The establishment of mentoring relationships is a potential life-altering event when experienced at a pivotal time in a person’s life. Thus, we need to gain a better understanding not only of the short-term gains from social relationships, but of how these experiences contribute to longer-term patterns of attainment and resource accumulation across the life course. (p. 362)

The long-term impact of the In.Business mentorship program is unknown, but based on the tracking of our students from the first five years of the program, it does appear that our program is impacting their decisions to pursue post-secondary education and, in particular, business.

In terms of programming, studies suggest that virtual worlds specifically may encourage innovative thought: “Frauenheim (2006) reports that people are willing to be more flexible in their thinking and to experiment in virtual worlds” (quoted in Wankel 2009, p. 256). Consequently, the use of simulations and gaming can be very beneficial for the development of problem-solving abilities and innovative thought processes. Certainly the trend in education seems to be toward virtual learning. As we work to incorporate additional simulations and gaming in our program, we also intend to study and evaluate the impact of Music Mogul on student learning.

While the future of education surely is in technology and virtual learning, it has also been suggested that partnerships between institutions will become increasingly important to the delivery of education. Istance and Kools (2013) suggest that, “The contemporary learning environment will instead have well-developed connections with other partners which will extend the environment’s resources and learning spaces” (p. 50). In an article focussed on a mentoring partnership between middle school students and university students, Russ (1993) observes, “Both university and middle school students have and will continue to benefit from the experiences that are provided by the collaborative efforts of an university and middle school when working toward a common goal” (Russ 1993, p. 287). Productive mentoring relationships can be established between youth and university partners, and In.Business — A Mentorship Program for Indigenous Youth is one model for how this might occur.

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