

Pathways Partnerships with Indigenous Post-Secondary Institutes

Prepared for BCCAT by:

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October 2021



BCCAT

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Acknowledgements

We raise our hands in gratitude for the guidance and knowledge gifted to us by the Elders and those participating in the project.

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Executive Summary

Positive changes are occurring in Indigenous education across Canada. Both provincially and federally we see policy enacted that addresses the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) *Calls to Action* as well as a legal impetus to implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in all areas of education. With this progress remains a landscape of multiple barriers for Indigenous students when attending post-secondary institutions.

The literature review completed for this project uncovered that Indigenous students face a range of barriers in accessing higher education, including discrimination, financial needs, lack of proper support and culturally relevant program choices (Frawley et al., 2017; Guadry et al., 2018). Indigenous Adult & Higher Learning Association (IAHLA)¹ institutions help mitigate these experiences by creating culturally relevant and safe education for Indigenous students. However, Indigenous students continue to face complex barriers when accessing post-secondary education (Ottmann, 2017).

The goal of this study was to explore current practices that help support and enhance Indigenous students' experiences in post-secondary education. This project resulted in a deeper understanding of current transfer credit pathways between IAHLA and public post-secondary institutions.

Through the use of Indigenous ways of knowing and storytelling (Archibald, 2008), those supporting students at IAHLA and public post-secondary institutions gathered to weave together their stories of success, struggle, and perseverance in their journey to advance Indigenous education and improve the experiences of Indigenous students in post-secondary education.

These stories showed a wealth of positive policies and practices that support both pathway partnerships and Indigenous students, as well as areas of needed improvement. As with all Indigenous education, the research highlighted the importance of relationships, transparency, commitment, and compassion to create stronger transfer credit pathways.



The goal of this study was to explore current practices that help support and enhance Indigenous students' experiences in post-secondary education. This project resulted in a deeper understanding of current transfer credit pathways between IAHLA and public post-secondary institutions.

¹ The Indigenous Adult and Higher Learning Association (IAHLA) is a non-profit society created "to represent Aboriginal-controlled adult and post-secondary education institutes in British Columbia" (<https://iahla.ca/about/>).

Introduction

The British Columbia Council on Admissions and Transfer (BCCAT)'s call for proposals on *Pathway Partnerships with Indigenous Post-Secondary Institutions* responds to the provincial initiatives to improve educational access and outcomes for Indigenous learners. The stated purpose of the call, to support Indigenous learners by identifying successful practices in the development, implementation, and on-going maintenance of credit-transfer pathways, fits within the mandate of the Justice Institute of British Columbia (JIBC)'s Office of Indigenization.

The Office of Indigenization proposed to conduct a study, with consultation from the Indigenous Adult & Higher Learning Association (IAHLA) and Elders, on how to develop, implement, and maintain credit-transfer pathways that support Indigenous learners.

This project specifically examines how to improve the efficacy of pathway partnerships between IAHLA's and public post-secondary institutes. This is not only important to Indigenous students' success but is also a main goal of the *Aboriginal postsecondary education and training policy: 2020 Vision for the future* (Province of British Columbia, 2013). This Framework outlines ways to increase positive educational experiences and outcomes for Indigenous learners. Specifically, one of the main goals for achieving cultural, economic, and emotional well-being is "community-based delivery of programs that are supported through partnerships between public post-secondary institutions and Aboriginal institutes and communities" (Province of British Columbia, 2013; p. 13). Furthermore, the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) discuss the benefits of partnerships between Indigenous post-secondary institutes for students and to increase funding opportunities for Indigenous and public post-secondary institutes (Assembly of First Nations, 2018).

With these calls to action, it is surprising that in 2020 not all public post-secondary institutes in British Columbia had affiliation agreements² with IAHLA member institutions (IAHLA, 2020). IAHLA (2020) found that IAHLA students still struggled with understanding how to access supports and how to connect with recruiters. IAHLA respondents highlighted they needed support services for students whose issues included facing racism, accessing appropriate housing, finding funding and the lack of culturally relevant activities and education (IAHLA, 2020). While the 2020 study surveyed IAHLA students, it is possible that the Indigenous students who take part in the pathway programs face the same issues as the respondents in the 2020 study. The current research casts light on ways pathway partnerships between Indigenous institutes and BC public post-secondary institutions can navigate some of the factors that impact students.

This project specifically examines how to improve the efficacy of pathway partnerships between IAHLA's and public post-secondary institutes. This is not only important to Indigenous students' success but is also a main goal of the "Aboriginal postsecondary education and training policy: 2020 Vision for the future" (Province of British Columbia, 2013).

² IAHLA formalized relationships with public post-secondary institutions included "affiliation or service agreements, brokering, traditional knowledge and intellectual property agreements, partnerships, protocols, MOUs, federation agreements, etc." (IAHLA, 2020; p. 47)

This study had several objectives:

- To identify ways to increase transfer credit pathways for work-integrated learning initiatives by identifying what practices currently exist.
- To identify the success of current transfer credit pathways.
- To understand how to support evolving transfer credit pathways that specifically allow Indigenous students to stay in their home communities longer.
- To identify how IAHLA institutes and public post-secondary institutes informally support the successful transfer of Indigenous students between programs and post-secondary institutes.
- To provide a final report that will be made available to Indigenous communities and post-secondary institutes to increase the efficacy of transfer credit pathways for WIL initiatives for Indigenous learners.

The research aims to gain insights on the following questions:

- What policies, practices and services do post-secondary institutions have in place on transfer credit pathways that directly address the needs of Indigenous learners?
- What successful strategies are being used to support the success of Indigenous students during the transfer process?
- How is the success of transfer credit pathways for Indigenous students increased?
- What official and unofficial strategies are used to help support Indigenous students identify programs of interest during the recruitment phase?
- What practices can be developed to honour Indigenous traditions and support students to remain in their communities through WIL initiatives or transfer pathways?
- What barriers may prevent Indigenous students from accessing transfer credit pathways?

Background, Purpose and Methodology

The methodology was divided into a needs analysis and literature review, followed by conducting interviews with a variety of stakeholders and Elders who support Indigenous students accessing transfer credit pathways.

The results of our literature review and needs analysis informed us that most BC public post-secondary institutions, including the five institutions included in this project - Justice Institute of British Columbia (JIBC), University of British Columbia (UBC), Douglas College, University of the Fraser Valley (UFV) and University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC) - have formal Indigenization plans in place. These plans identify goals of the institution to address the TRC (2015) *Calls to Action*, to increase Indigenous student retention and to meet the unique needs of Indigenous students.

Participating Institutions

IAHLA Members Institutions

Nicola Valley Institute of Technology (NVIT)*
Native Education College (NEC)
Nuxalk College
Seabird Island College

Public Post-Secondary Institutions

Nicola Valley Institute of Technology (NVIT)*
Justice Institute of British Columbia (JIBC)
University of the Fraser Valley (UFV)
University of British Columbia (UBC)
University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC)
Douglas College

*NVIT was considered as both IAHLA and a public post-secondary institution

These needs have been identified by the five public post-secondary institutions in this study:

- “Increase, retain and ensure the success of those students” (Justice Institute of British Columbia, 2015);
- Create positive relationships with Indigenous institutions and create a welcoming environment for Indigenous students (UNBC, 2019);
- “Address faculty and educational support staff professional development needs related to Indigenous pedagogies, courses and programs” (Douglas College, 2019); and,
- Create pathways for students from the K-12 system and pathways from other institutions for Indigenous students (JIBC, 2015; UFV, 2019; UBC, 2015).

Furthermore, the needs analysis indicated that Indigenous students' needs are complex. Students rely on the post-secondary institutions to guide them in the application process not only for school, but for funding, housing, cultural connections, and peer support systems (Indspire, 2018). Students who attend IAHLA institutes often do so for multiple reasons; cultural understanding and individual support are two of the main reasons students choose to attend an IAHLA institute (IAHLA, 2020). Indigenous students attending public post-secondary institutions mentioned that they need support in navigating their funding requirements, including deadlines and requirements of their own home communities' funding policies (Indspire, 2018). Students reported fearing the breakdown of support that happens during the transition process to public post-secondary institutions, as they move from individualized support to a multi-person support system and larger institution.

The JIBC Office of Indigenization worked with the Native Education College (NEC), Nicola Valley Institution of Technology (NVIT) and four BC public post-secondary institutions that have specific experience in developing, implementing, and supporting credit-transfer pathways between Indigenous mandated post-secondary institutions and public post-secondary institutes in B.C. These institutions also have active Work Integrated Learning (WIL) programs. The intent of the study is not to exclude institutions that do not have WIL programs, but rather to focus on WIL programs that offer a greater range of support to students. The outcomes of this project indicate the importance of WIL programs for students in rural and remote locations, as they can achieve success in their learning journeys without having to move long distances from their families, communities, and homes.

The study used a concurrent mixed methods approach, allowing for emergent avenues of exploration based on constructing an understanding of the development, implementation, and maintenance of transfer credit pathways for Indigenous students. The methods include Indigenous research methodology grounded in the 4 R's of Respect, Reciprocity, Relevance and Responsibility as ways to ensure all research participants are heard, are safe and gain knowledge (Archibald, 2008). The participants' stories are valued as the truth, and we strive to uphold their experiences, knowledges, and suggestions as a critical and necessary component of engaging in research with Indigenous Peoples (Archibald, 2008). The project also collected data through surveys, questionnaires, and literature reviews.

The research focused on the sharing of stories done in a respectful and reciprocal way. This was done through creating virtual sharing circles through Zoom. The research questions were used as prompts to guide the participants' discussions. Based on this information and our own experience as Indigenous learners, educators, and support staff, we designed our research questions (Appendix A) to guide the sharing of stories. As we progressed with the initial stages of the research, we acknowledged the importance of the IAHLAs' voice and sent a digital survey out to all IAHLA institutes. Foremost for us was the inclusion of the Elders' voice as Elder participation, knowledge, and feedback are identified as a critical component of student success by both Indigenous students and the institutes supporting them (Indspire, 2019; Restoule et al., 2013). We engaged with Elders to guide us and bring to light important aspects of current practice which can help improve the experiences of Indigenous students as they participate in transfer credit pathways between IAHLAs and BC public post-secondary institutes, and to meet the objectives of this study.

TABLE 1: Research Participants: Participants' Affiliation and Roles

Institutions	Admissions/Registrar	Recruiting	Program Managers	Senior Management	Indigenous Student Support Services	Elders	Faculty
NVIT	x	x	x	x		x	x
NEC			x	x			
Nuxalk College				x			
Seabird Island College				x			
UBC		x			x		x
JIBC	x					x	
UNBC		x					
Douglas College			x				
UFV	x				x	x	

Note: This table shows a combined list of participants from all parts of the study.

Limitations

The findings of this research provide an in-depth and comprehensive understanding of the successes and barriers of transfer credit pathways between IAHLA institutes and BC public post-secondary institutions. Even with these findings, we acknowledge the absence of the student voices and the voices of smaller IAHLAs throughout British Columbia. Time and availability of participants added further limitations, and participants indicated their need and desire to share more of their experiences but lacked the availability to do so. It is important to acknowledge that the people supporting Indigenous students in academia take on many roles. While this added to the wealth of information gathered, this also meant the scope of the stories gathered were limited due to other obligations. Implications of Covid-19 restrictions created further limitations, especially in regard to how we gathered together. Indigenous research protocol focuses on the relational aspect of sharing information. These meetings would usually use proximity, food, and culturally safe spaces to share and gather stories. While we did our best to mimic these spaces in our virtual circles, we are aware that this may have limited some of the stories shared. We acknowledge the time and care each of the participants took in sharing their knowledge as an important part of the research findings.

As disclosed throughout the scope of the research, the lack of visibility and/or understanding of transfer pathway partnerships placed some limitations on the research gathered. This becomes evident through the findings, as not all the participants could address the transfer pathway questions. We honoured the information shared even when not specifically addressing the research questions as this is an important protocol when using Indigenous research methodology (Archibald, 2008). The authentic voice of those working with Indigenous students is honoured throughout the project.

Several, but not all, participating institutions have pathway programs listed on the BC Transfer Guide. This list of pathways can be found in Appendix B.



Office of Indigenization supports Orange Shirt Day at JIBC (Left to right: Jason La Rochelle, Director, Haida Nation, Heather Simpson, Coordinator, Secwepemc, and Kara Weintraub, Administrative Support, Settler heritage).

Results and Findings

As relationships and voices were an important aspect of the project, we wanted to honour the good work the research participants are doing at their institutions by sharing their experiences. All the knowledge shared in the project showed the dedication, empathy, and perseverance of those working to support students on their educational journeys. The graphs below show both the IAHLAs and public post-secondary institutions that participated and the diverse roles of interviewees. It is important to note that NVIT is unique as it is both an IAHLA and a public post-secondary institution. For this research, its IAHLA status is highlighted.

Six main themes emerged during the interviews with the IAHLA institutes and public post-secondary institutions. We engaged in sharing stories; and like with all stories, there is a cyclical, interwoven pattern to the themes that emerged (Archibald, 2008). Dividing these stories into themes is not meant to diminish the interconnectedness but to highlight specific aspects of each theme that creates the foundation of the transfer pathway partnerships. For example, we see the importance of relationships in all themes that emerged, but we understand the need to examine the importance of relationships as its own theme. Shared in this report are the six main themes, and with each theme recognizing the IAHLA perspective, the public post-secondary perspective, and the Elders' perspective.

"To understand that if you go to a place like UBC, it is a whole city by itself, and actually going into another city and you have to find people that you can connect with, just be a friend and not associate. There are 30,000 associates at UBC and probably 4 friends, right? Be a friend with an open mind." (Elder 1)

Relationships

Historically, relationships between Indigenous students and the educational system have been negative or non-existent (Lydster et al., 2019). Learning to create spaces in educational settings that nurture relationships with Indigenous students and their communities takes time and effort (Restoule & Cha-win-is, 2017). One of the main themes that emerged from the stories shared reinforces that relationships are key to creating successful transfer credit pathway partnerships between IAHLAs, public post-secondary institutions, and, ultimately, Indigenous students.

Cultivating Relationships

Participants from public post-secondary institutions all shared different policies and practices that focus on building relationships with Indigenous students. While all public post-secondary institutions identified the importance of building relationships with Indigenous students prior to them arriving at their institute, not all institutions had formal policies in place to support the formation of these relationships. One participant highlighted the importance of building these relationships as early as possible, to help eliminate barriers that prevent students from successfully accessing a post-secondary education. Some of these policies include regular communication with local Indigenous communities, strong relationships with their IAHLA partners, and pairing incoming students with an advisor that remains with them during the entire application process. Other institutions also shared strategies they use to develop these relationships with Indigenous students prior to them arriving, which include casual gatherings, physical presence of admissions staff and Indigenous student support staff at the partnering IAHLA, regular Zoom meetings, and casual pizza lunches.

Staff and faculty identified the importance of creating strong relationships with partnering IAHLAs and the faculty in the transfer credit pathway programs. These partnerships help identify ways the receiving school can decrease student fears, identify support services that may be needed when students arrive at the public post-secondary institution, and help navigate the application process.

"I think we all know how important that relationship is, especially with Indigenous students, whatever their age... an adviser who can be a part of their academic life through the length of the program is ideal. It can't always happen. People get promoted and move on." (Participant 5)

Disrupted Relationships

Although the relationships between IAHLAs and public post-secondary institutes are typically positive, the research identified several barriers that can prevent these relationships from growing. Staff turnover is one of the main reasons why relationships break down. Often there is one staff member that understands how the transfer credit pathways work, and when they leave their position, this knowledge can be lost. One participant shares how she spends time nurturing transfer pathway relationships, but she is aware these will be lost when she returns to her faculty role and worries this knowledge will be lost with her.

"As soon as I transfer back into my faculty role, that's lost." (Participant 8)

These relationships need constant nurturing, training, and revising. Long-term partnerships and relationships enhance the programs and create opportunities for new partnerships. Unfortunately, when these long-term relationships break down, the program may stagnate or become forgotten.

Program funding also plays a role in the breakdown or loss of relationships between IAHLAs and public post-secondary institutions. IAHLA programming often relies on limited or one-time funding, which does not support long-term relationships between IAHLAs and public post-secondaries. One of the IAHLA research participants shared their positive experience with a previous transfer credit pathway, and their hopes there would be future funding to revive the program.

"So, having been to more universities than I care to mention and having done more transferring than I care to mention in my own life, I can sort of say that that's nearly the industry standard, is you present your transcript to the other school and they look bewildered, and it goes on a case-by-case basis most times. I completely agree the parameters need to be widened...you know, my students find that it depends who you end up talking to on the other end and who you get on a particular day. If I don't know who to connect them with, this can be detrimental to their success." (Participant 3)

Navigating Relationships

Relationships become a large barrier for those supporting students at the IAHLA level as they try to navigate who to reach out to at the public post-secondary institutions. During one of the circles, a participant associated with an IAHLA stated, "So what it comes down to is whether I have a positive experience as an administrator. If I have a positive experience with a post-secondary institution, it's because my students are having a positive experience. There's the accessibility, there's a relationship as best you can have over technology and all that" (Participant 9). It is further

explained that these relationships with large public post-secondary institutions are challenging, as there are not always centralized services. Trying to know who to call to find support can lead to frustration, especially when dealing with funding issues. Many IAHLAs support students in all aspects of their post-secondary education, including working with their community funders. These relationships are important to both students and staff at IAHLAs, and one research participant shared that her experience was so wonderful at the IAHLA that even after she transferred out to complete her degree, she returned as a staff member.

Place and Space

*"But I ended up going to a different school for a little while with the support of my advisors and my Elders and all of the staff and faculty is that they don't try to keep you out and they want to make sure that you're going forward, going forward, going forward."
(Participant 14)*

Geographical location themes emerged in multiple ways, with three sub-themes of proximity, safe spaces, and geographical locations. These themes are strongly tied with the importance of relationship, but the frequency with which location was discussed indicated the importance of exploring this theme on its own. We acknowledge that the restrictions that COVID-19 has placed on all educational institutions have raised the awareness of the importance of physical space and connection. We will explore considerations that emerged from COVID-19 more in depth later in this report.

Proximity

*"We're in the very same space and the admissions officers as well. So, we're all right there in the office as the recruitment team. So, a little different than, say, UBC, where it's a little more like geographically spread out, as well as just bigger departments."
(Participant 13)*

Place, space, and connection are a critical component of Indigenous education and should be a major component of all areas of Indigenous education. Access to resources such as faculty, support staff, enrollment services, housing, counselling, and other student services is identified as a key component of student success. While all the participating public post-secondary institutions have these services in place, the services can be difficult to navigate due to the complexity of multiple student service departments. Students are used to being able to easily access the support they need without physically leaving the IAHLA and are often used to having one person that is helping them navigate all

areas of their education. The change into a large institution can create social isolation, stress, financial issues, and academic issues. "Students struggle to navigate these changes the first year. So just that social isolation, the huge campus, just the whole transition to university and there isn't one person they can turn to" (Participant 10).

Programs like NITEP (UBC's Indigenous Teacher Education Program) rely on proximity of staff to students to create positive transitions and build relationships. The physical closeness of support staff, faculty and administrators creates opportunities to easily connect them with new students and create community. Multiple participants shared how the proximity of staff is a critical component of student success. This proximity allows them to easily reach out to other members of student services and ensure the student is not left alone as they try to navigate their application or transfer process. Proximity to the students allows for student support staff to check in on students who are physically absent, showing signs of stress, or struggling with academics. This proximity provides opportunities to build stronger relationships with students and leads to the creation of safe spaces on campus.

Safe spaces

"I don't feel safe here." (Elder 2 shares a common statement they hear from students)

Indigenous students entering public post-secondary institutions often do not feel safe (Pidgeon, 2008). This statement often refers to both classroom spaces and physical gathering spaces on campus. Elders stated that creating safe spaces for students is a large component of their role. Students who are transferring in from IAHLAs can go through a grieving process as they miss home; they miss the sense of belonging and they can feel disconnected. Creating safe spaces on campus where they can connect with others helps ease this process. Public post-secondary institutions can struggle with replicating the safe and inclusive environment that the IAHLA provides. All the public post-secondary institutions involved in this research have Indigenous gathering spaces, which can provide a home-away-from-home environment and promote a sense of community. One participant shared that they have the students transferring in from their IAHLA partner spend time in the Indigenous gathering space long before they officially arrive. This practice creates a sense of belonging and security, and increases the likelihood that students will reach out for support instead of dropping out of their post-secondary program. The IAHLA staff accompany the students on these trips. This practice results in stronger partnerships between the IAHLA as a sending institution and the public post-secondary institution as a receiving institution.

These safe spaces of gathering also provide a space where students can discuss issues of racism, and share support. Participant 8 shared that, based on previous experiences, she fears that the faculty in the receiving institutions do not have the knowledge needed to meet the needs of the incoming Indigenous students, and that these classroom spaces can create instances of ongoing systemic racism. Wrap-around services in the Indigenous gathering spaces need to be carefully implemented and monitored, so as to not create a space of isolation or segregation. Wrap-around services aim to meet holistic needs of Indigenous students including housing, mental health, spiritual, social, academic, financial, and physical needs (Scott, 2013). Wrap-around support is designed to ensure the student does not get lost in the system. Multiple participants in the project shared how implementing wrap-around services could be successful for the retention of Indigenous students.

"So, we've connected with them already. And we've told them that, you know, we're your cheerleaders; we're here for you. You know, if you need anything, you guys come to see us and let us know. So that's how we reach out and support them and keep our connections with them and then try to get them connected with our with all the supports that we have in place because it's so different." (Participant 6)



Blanket Ceremony for the Justice and Public Safety Careers Preparatory Program.

Button Blankets at JIBC's New Westminster Campus.



Geographical Location

The distance students travel to the receiving institution plays a large role in the relationships that develop between IAHLAs and public post-secondary institutions. This was a significant consideration for several of the participants from both IAHLAs and public post-secondary institutions. The physical location of the institutions plays a role in the development of relationships between the IAHLAs and public post-secondary institutions. Participants from receiving schools shared the importance of being able to visit the IAHLAs and meet with students prior to them transferring. When staff from the receiving institutions can travel to the community, this helps gain trust of the IAHLA staff as well as the students.

The location and size of IAHLA institutions play a role in whether staff from a public post-secondary institution can physically visit a campus. Smaller IAHLA institutions in remote locations can find it difficult to create opportunities for students to meet public post-secondary staff prior to the students leaving the community. This can pose challenges for students as they arrive at larger institutions with no connections. Larger post-secondary institutions create a sense of culture shock for the students (Restoule et al., 2013). Without establishing these prior relationships, the sending institutions also have trouble tracking their students. One participant stated, "Most of my students that go off to the big world, if they show up in November and I ask you, why are you home? They'll tell me, well, I was homesick, and I had to come home. I said, did you ask for leave? Well, no, I just came home" (Participant 9).

Transferability

The theme of transferability was presented in a variety of shared practices, policies, and concerns from all research participants. As the transfer credit pathways between IAHLAs and public post-secondary institutions relies on the smooth transition of students between institutions, we paid close attention to this information, and identified sub-themes of triangulation, visibility, block transfers and competing priorities.

"But I did this kind of the trail of transferring... OK, well, it transfers to the University of... I can transfer it there. And then this transfers from UNBC to VIU and then you can transfer back to UBC. And it's kind of this thing that we have to do to say, OK, now I can say that your courses you took out of the IAHLA are valid." (Participant 5)

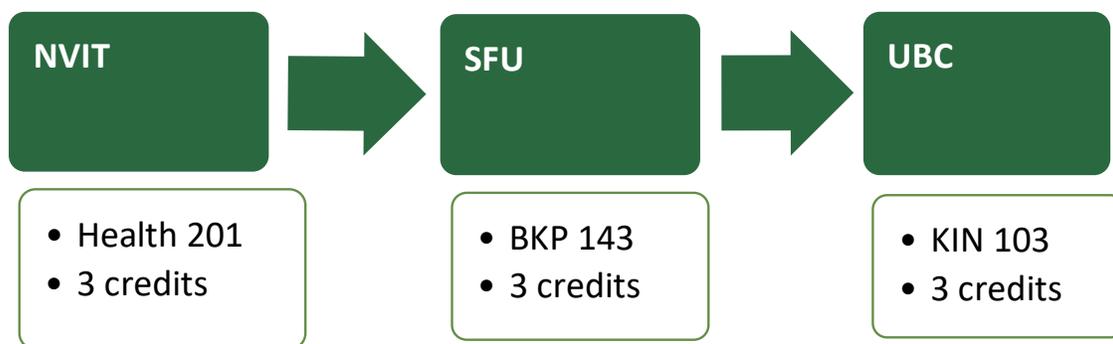
Triangulation

The strength of the transfer credit pathway, and ultimately the success of the students, relies on smooth transition of credits into the receiving school. Research participants associated with IAHLA institutes shared that when the transfer credit process works, it works well. However, if there are any areas or stumbling blocks, this situation can create what one participant referred to as a "non-starter". Students are already worried thinking about leaving their home community. They worry about funding and are nervous about leaving the security of the IAHLA institute. Struggling to transfer credits or being told a course does not transfer can result in added stressors for the student, and lead to the student not transferring. Participants from the IAHLA and public post-secondary institutions shared that navigating

how credits transfer can be challenging. One participant shared that using the BC Transfer Guide can be challenging, and that students can feel frustrated when navigating this guide on their own. With the support of admission staff, they can sometimes create a transfer path for specific courses that seem not to transfer. One participant stated that they often use a practice they refer to as triangulation to decipher how credits transfer. This practice requires using the BC Transfer Guide to track courses from one institution to another until a pathway is created. For example, if a student has taken Health 201 at NVIT and is transferring into UBC, this course does not directly transfer. Health 201 does transfer to Simon Fraser University (SFU) as BKP 143. BKP 143 then transfers to UBC as KIN 103 (Figure 1). While the practice can ultimately mean the credit can be transferred, it can “be hit or miss” and is not something that students can navigate on their own. Furthermore, it requires someone at the receiving institution to present this triangulation to the admissions department for the course to be accepted. The success of transferring students depends on the transparency of the transfer-pathway articulation agreement and the clarity of the BC Transfer Guide, as well as the staff having the time and knowledge to track these courses.

The IAHLA participants all shared the importance of understanding the transferability of all courses in a transfer credit pathway. One of their main goals is to build capacity in the Indigenous communities they work in. One way these institutions do this type of capacity-building is to ensure all the courses they offer are transferable and are listed on the BC Transfer Guide. This process is done through working closely with the community, as well as with all accreditation boards. “This can take a bit of time... when we work with the community, everything we do has to be those three things: transferable, lateral and accredited. That way, our students must be able to have transcripts” (Participant 12). This practice appears to be what many of the participants in the project hope to accomplish. These clear visible transfer practices strengthen the partnerships between IAHLAs and public post-secondary institutions.

FIGURE 1: An example of tracking courses to create a pathway among three institutions



Visibility

The success of transfer credit pathways relies on many considerations, and one of these considerations is relationship-based. The relationships between those supporting students who are attending an IAHLA institute, and the receiving institution, are critical; however, equally important is the relationship between the sending institution and the receiving institution. Multiple participants discussed the importance of the pathway programs being visible and not just being known by word of mouth. If the transfer requirements of the receiving institution are not clear, it creates difficulties in supporting students in the transition between institutions. One participant shared that every year students plan on utilizing one of the transfer agreements but states “again, if you asked me to pull the agreement, I’d have a tough time finding it so...” (Participant 3). The participants discussed not only difficulties in finding current agreements in their own institutions, but difficulties in connecting with anyone at receiving institutions that understand how the transfers

"So, I keep running into these articulation agreements. You know, somebody will just sort of come out of the woodwork with this piece of paper." (Participant 18)

work. A lack of information about current transfer credit pathways hinders the process for both staff and students. The turnover of staff also plays a role in how visible the transfer pathway programs are. As new staff comes in, the knowledge of these agreements can get lost.

Two of the receiving institutions shared that lack of visibility of the transfer credit pathways is an ongoing struggle. "That has been one of our challenges actually, is just having consistent advisers who know this program well and are going to advise the student adequately" (Participant 5). The lack of visibility of the programs not only creates issues for the students as they try to navigate the program, but also can create issues in the structure of the programs themselves. As the awareness of the program decreases, structural changes in how programs are delivered can mean that students no longer have the credits needed to successfully transfer. For example, if the receiving school changes when the courses in a specific program are offered, without consulting the partnering IAHLA, it can mean that the student no longer has access to critical components of the program. It can break down partnerships as the IAHLAs do not always have the resources to restructure their programs to meet these new requirements. These changes can prove particularly challenging with block transfers.

Block Transfers

"They cannot move forward on a block transfer unless they have a program, unless they have the full course." (Participant 12)

"Block transfer" refer to the transfer of a large block of credits from one post-secondary institution to another. This practice can work well when the individual courses offered in one program do not transfer directly into the receiving institution. Through articulation agreements, the two institutions come to an agreement on the collective value of the courses and how they will transfer. Multiple participants from both IAHLA and public post-secondary institutions identified articulation agreements as a positive practice that can create a smooth transition for students. Block transfers with IAHLA institutions allow students to stay in their home communities longer while participating in programs that are often culturally rich and relevant. There is no need for triangulation of courses to receive transfer credit, and students have a clear understanding of what courses they need to take upon successful transition to the receiving institution.

Although block transfers are a successful practice, they can pose issues to the transfer pathway partnerships as well as to the success of the students. In a block transfer, the courses are not evaluated individually, but instead the program is evaluated as a whole. Upon completion of a set number of courses or years of a program, the student is assessed as having the knowledge needed to proceed to the receiving institute and be enrolled in an advanced level of a certain program. If the sending institution is not able to offer the courses needed to complete the block transfer require-

ments, the students can get stuck in limbo. The lack of credits for individual courses means they cannot move forward until all parts of the transfer are complete. For small IAHLA institutions, this process poses a problem, as issues with enrollment numbers, access to instructors and community needs can delay the offering of these courses. Students who do not complete all the courses needed for various reasons, including attending part-time or not successfully completing a course, can end up waiting multiple years for the course to be offered again. The research participants from a number of the IAHLA institutions identified this situation as an area where they lose track of students.

Competing Priorities

"They will help you, it's all transferable skills that you learn, whether it's in a IAHLA institution or an academic post-secondary institution, and that and that's really important. And some of us are fortunate enough to be in an Indigenous post-secondary institution." (Elder 1)

Who decides what skills are transferable? This question raises concerns for both IAHLA and public post-secondary institutions. Elder 1 stressed the importance of understanding that all skills learned are transferable, whether learned at an IAHLA or public post-secondary institution, and of recognizing the importance of all knowledge. Some of this recognition can be addressed by using Prior Learning Assessment (PLAR). PLAR is a method of evaluating students' prior learning, including formal and informal learning, life experience and sometimes cultural knowledge (BCPLAN, 2019). PLAR could be used to evaluate courses that are offered by the IAHLAs and historically do not transfer to public post-secondary institutions. Participants shared that unfortunately many courses still do not transfer. The evaluation of what is considered valuable knowledge is raised as a concern by multiple research participants. Often, the local IAHLA institutes offer courses or programming that address the needs of the community. This approach can result in culturally-based programming that is not valued in the same way in receiving institutions as it is in the community. While the possibility of PLAR was mentioned by one research participant, no other participants could discuss this practice. This may indicate a need for further research on the use of PLAR. The devaluing of students' prior knowledge speaks to the need for strong partnerships and relationships that create the opportunity for dialogue on the value of culturally relevant programming.

These competing priorities of what is "valuable knowledge" can create long-term complications for students. Multiple participants from receiving institutions shared their experiences of telling a student that the cultural program the student studied at their local IAHLA was not valuable enough to transfer to the university. Participant 2 emphatically questions: "Who am I to decide this knowledge has no value?" The effect of these non-transfers on the student can be discouraging enough that they do not end up transferring. The Elders also identified the importance of valuing students' experiences in IAHLA institutions. Elder 1 states, "You're trying to hone their skills that you already have from a rural experience, from the Indigenous institutions. They have to do the very many things that are exactly the same as the public institutions, but they keep a focus on the Indigenous part of it. And in my eyes, those are things you don't have to let go. You keep your indigeneity wherever you go in your life. Because if you let go of your Indigeneity, who are you? Who are you?" The transfer pathway programs offer the opportunity to create strong, culturally relevant educational opportunities for students that keep them connected to home, and that value their Indigenous identity at all stages of their educational journey.

Interconnectedness

Community and cultural connections are an integral part of Indigenous education in Canada. In fact, these aspects are so important that they are identified as part of the *Calls to Action* recommended by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015). More specifically, the Calls to Action (TRC, 2015) recommend that educational institutions focus on “developing culturally appropriate curricula” and programming that focuses on “protecting the right to Aboriginal languages, including the teaching of Aboriginal languages as credit courses” (p.2). An increase of transfer credit pathways between IAHLA and public post-secondary institutions meets the *Calls to Action* (TRC, 2015) as well as the needs of students and communities.

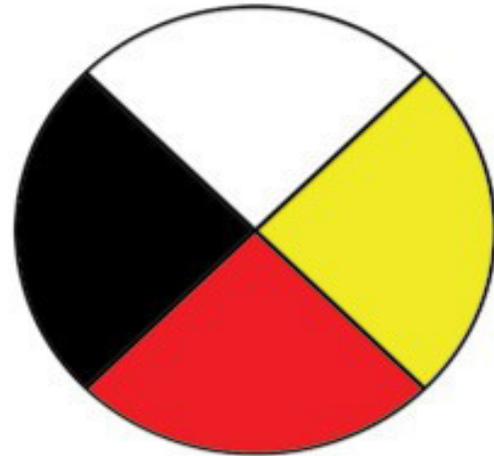


FIGURE 2: The Medicine Wheel. The Medicine wheel teachings remind us of the importance of interconnectedness. The four quadrants represent our emotional, physical, spiritual, and mental needs.

Community Connection

Elders’ guidance and knowledge has become an integral part of many post-secondary institutions (Ottman, 2017; Restoule et al., 2013). All the participating institutions have Elders on staff whose role includes sharing cultural knowledge, supporting students, and serving as a resource to staff and faculty in meeting the needs of Indigenous students. Meeting with each of the Elders highlighted the importance of community connections. Elder 2 felt that the longer students can remain close to their home community, the more successful they will be on their transition to public post-secondary institutions. Many students are worried about leaving home and moving away to urban areas, and attending an IAHLA institution provides the scaffolding needed to be successful as they move away from home. The community connection grounds a student and reminds them that they have a support system that will hold them up when school becomes difficult. Furthermore, those working in IAHLA institutions shared the importance of staying connected to students as they transition between institutions. One participant shared that they want to stay involved and wish there were more official policies in place to stay connected with students once they transfer.

"Another benefit that we have is that we have a crew of [sic] Elders, literally like a big gang of Elders. And when our students have a difficult time with leaving and our Elders have a huge part in that as well, it's because our students like our community feel and they like the family feel. But when our students have a difficult time uprooting, I feel I noticed that our students will turn to our Elders and ask for their sup[port] on them leaving and going off like flying the nest and going off into another school. So that's one of the things that you have here on our campus." (Participant 14)

Elders-In-Residence at JIBC (Left to right: Elder Phillip Gladue, Métis Nation, Elder Larry Grant, Musqueam Nation, and Elder Ken Pruden, Métis Nation).



Culture and Ceremony

For many Indigenous students, education provides a space of healing and learning (Restoule et al., 2013). Urban Indigenous students especially benefit from culturally relevant education that can provide a sense of belonging (Pidgeon, 2008). This research study shows that IAHLA institutions focus on providing a holistic educational experience that allows students to explore their own cultural ways of knowing, and to connect with Elders all while gaining important academic skills. The importance of culture and ceremony as a central part of the education provided at an urban IAHLA institution is identified as a crucial part of programming.

"And the community you come from, the cultural ceremonies you come from and how you belong to all of that, and then when you transition into going into a post-secondary that grounding will give you something. To reflect back on and give you support, because in post-secondary, it's quite different." (Elder 1)

Students look at the IAHLA as a home away from home, which is important for those who have left their home communities to pursue an education. Starting their education at an IAHLA institution provides essential building blocks that travel with them to their next destination. Bringing language, ceremony and cultural knowledge strengthens their sense of self and pride in who they are. Access to cultural activities is seen as critical for students' success. Even though the culture at the institution may be different than on the student's home territory, there are cultural similarities that resonate. Participating in ceremonies helps students make friends that last a lifetime, and these friendships and knowledge help them when they get to the big institutions. The relationships between IAHLA and public post-secondary institutions are important, as the institutions can share Elders and cultural teachings as well as opportunities to build cultural connections between institutions. These connections help the students and staff connect and feel like they are part of a larger family. Elder 1 shares that these familial and community obligations can drive the programs and keep students focused. All Elders who participated in this research stressed the importance of a combination of culture and education as a tool for healing trauma and overcoming fear of education.

Coming Home

The goal of students staying in their home communities by attending their local IAHLA institution requires a strong support system. Multiple IAHLA participants addressed how strong partnerships with public post-secondary institutions create opportunities for students to stay connected to home. For many students, the transition away from home is difficult. The desire to return home can mean students leave before completing the school year. Having students return to their home communities for work-integrated learning opportunities can be a way to navigate the lack of connection or homesickness students feel while away at school. One IAHLA participant shared how practicums within students' home communities build and enhance relationships with public post-secondary institutions. The relationship increases the plausibility that students will return home after graduation. It also creates a strong working connection as the local community or IAHLA works in partnership with the practicum advisors at the public post-secondary institution. Students can often secure employment in their home community prior to completing their program. This cyclical relationship encourages others to attend post-secondary institutions, further strengthening the transfer-pathway partnerships through word of mouth.

While the benefits of students staying at home or in their home community were identified by many research participants, one research participant shared that younger students often want to leave their community and head to a big city. The presumption that students want to stay in their home community needs further examination, as this presumption has implications for the success of transfer credit pathways. Multiple IAHLA participants share the need to prepare students for the transition to public post-secondary, but they struggle to find programming at public post-secondary institutions that piques the interest of younger students. Students' goals are often related to the stage of life they are in. Students with families and local employment are more likely to want to stay home or return home for work-integrated learning opportunities. Both public post-secondary and IAHLA participants shared the desire to find ways to encourage young students to stay in their home community longer. Participant 9 shared that they focus on ways to increase students' opportunities to take first-year courses at home, but also stated the following: "...but students don't like it because they don't want to stay at home. The young ones, they want to go out. So that's where I run into problems is ... getting people ready for... finishing." The goal changes from keeping students at home longer to ensuring the institutions provide as much support as possible, often as quickly as possible, to prepare the student for transferring out of the community.

Current Practices

Current practices of all participating institutions include positive policies and practices focused on meeting the needs of Indigenous learners in holistic ways. Admissions and student services are centralized in both IAHLA and public-post secondary institutes, but vary greatly how these services are implemented. The themes that emerged around current practices focused on three areas: admissions, financial resources, and accessibility services.

"So, I work with students sort of through the application process, including transfer students through application up to, but not including enrollment. And so, at that point they will have their specific academic advisors." (Participant 11)

Admissions

The admissions policy and procedures for IAHLA institutes and public post-secondary institutions can be a barrier that prevent prospective students from successfully applying to their choice of institute. Transfer credits play a role in these issues by creating extra hurdles a student must navigate, but there are other barriers that were discussed. The student service department at IAHLA institutions is often a "one-stop shop" and this helps students in the application process. IAHLA academic advisors often have all the needed information and help students in all aspects of their application, including funding, housing, and course selection. This ensures students have a successful start to their academic career. This successful start can provide the confidence that is needed if the transition to public post-secondary is difficult. One of the research participants shared the difficulties students can experience while navigating transfer agreements: "... because we are remote and we don't have a dedicated person, you know, down the hall that they can go talk to" (Participant 9). Success can be dependent on a good relationship with the partnering institution and knowing who to call at the receiving institution. Centralized services at public post-secondary institutions, or a "one-stop shop" model including student financial support, were identified as one of the key practices critical to strengthening partnerships and student experiences during the transfer process.

Financial Services

"And a lot of bias in the way Indigenous students are treated about their money and their funding, as opposed to non-Indigenous students, totally." (Participant 10)

Funding is identified as an ongoing challenge to students transferring between IAHLAs and public post-secondary institutions. Many students are funded by their Indigenous community and must adhere to stringent application guidelines. While direct transfers from an IAHLA to a public post-secondary institution can be fairly straightforward, the lack of centralized student services can cause extra work for the IAHLA support person as they try to help the student

navigate the transfer. What seems to create larger complications is when split enrollment occurs. Split enrollment is the result of students taking courses at both their local IAHLA and public post-secondary institution simultaneously. There were a number of issues identified with split enrollment, and one of the main concerns with split enrollment is funding. Directors of Education from the student's home community often struggle to understand how to pay tuition or who to contact for support. Split enrollment also causes student loan issues, as the siloed services of larger institutions can provide conflicting information to both the IAHLA institute and students. One IAHLA participant discussed the difficulty in explaining split enrollment to students and funders, and stressed that it would be helpful to work in partnership with the public post-secondary institution to provide consistent and concurrent information on fees. Furthermore, relationships with financial service departments could reduce stress during the transfer process. It is confusing for a student who is accustomed to receiving holistic support from one person at the IAHLA institute to move into a public post-secondary institution where different departments address different areas of student support.

Accessibility Services

Accessibility services, which include access to counsellors, tutoring support, and learning and disability resources, vary greatly between institutions. One participant shared the importance of creating wrap-around services for students when they arrive at the public post-secondary institution. These wrap-around services should address the basic needs of smooth credit transfer between institutions, financial support, housing, and accessibility resources, all of which become an integral part of the admissions process for Indigenous students. Connecting with receiving institutions prior to a student attending the larger campus can help identify a student's needs, including education supports. Those working with IAHLA institutions shared that it would be beneficial for them to have a clear understanding of the holistic supports available for students when they transfer. For students who need extensive academic support, transferring earlier could be beneficial. IAHLA participants identified that they do not always have the resources to support students with complex learning needs. The possibility of students with complex needs accessing service from both IAHLAs and public post-secondary institutions could help navigate this issue, as well as help create stronger pathway partnerships.



Traditional tobacco being grown at JIBC.

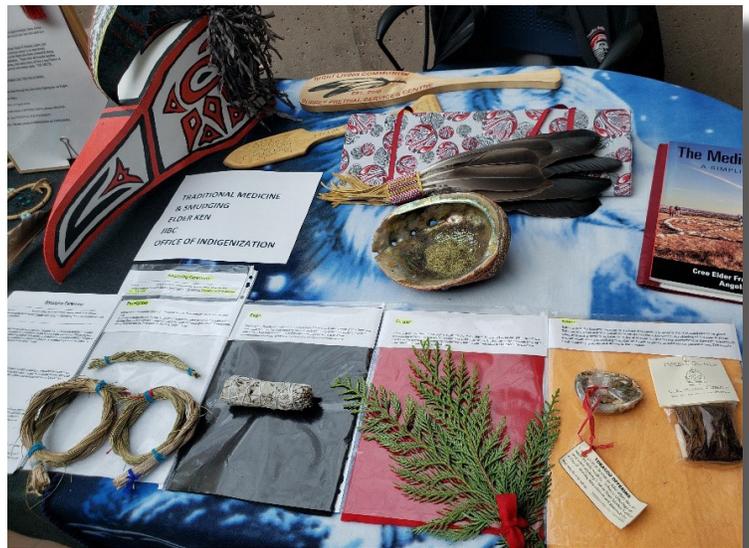
Restricted Pathways

Overcoming barriers is an ongoing journey in all educational institutions that participated in this research, and it was indicated that this is true for both students and staff. Indigenous students face greater barriers due to ongoing intergenerational effects of residential schools, systemic racism, and systems that do not fully meet the cultural and personal needs of Indigenous students (Pidgeon, 2008). Transfer credit pathways help navigate and lessen some of these barriers. The findings from this research project identified barriers that still hinder the success of student transfers. These barriers emerged as three themes: set up for failure, trust/mistrust, and shaping success.

"Yeah, that's huge. Yeah. Every official transcript, even if it's only ten dollars and some are as high as thirty-five dollars, it's problematic because it's the method of payment. Yeah, that's huge...I know it is a huge problem. I mean, people don't necessarily have electronic forms of money, visa cards, debit cards, things like that. So that is that is a legitimate obstacle, especially when you're doing these dual, whatever they're called dual entry." (Participant 9)

Set up for Failure

Multiple research participants discussed the positive policies and practices in place to support Indigenous students during transition into public post-secondary institutions. Pathway partnerships with IAHLA institutions are one of the practices that strongly support Indigenous students on their educational journey. Relationships that are developed between the IAHLA and public-post secondary institutions have the potential to set students up for success. But in some instances, these supports are not enough. IAHLA participants shared a number of ways that they struggle to maintain pathway partnerships. One challenge is difficulty in helping students navigate multiple steps in the application process. This can be as simple as students not having access to printers, difficulty in connecting with appropriate support staff, and issues with accessing official transcripts. Many IAHLA institutions compile courses from multiple institutions to create a



Mental Wellness from an Indigenous Perspective display for Bell Let's Talk at JIBC.

program. This can mean that a student may have to obtain multiple transcripts when applying to the receiving institution. As the IAHLA tries to navigate this, students may face impending application deadlines, funding deadlines, and cost issues. Complicating matters further, IAHLA programming may run on different academic calendars than other post-secondary institutions. Official transcripts can be delayed, leading to issues with a student being officially accepted into the partnering institution.

During this process, the question of transferability of credits can arise. One IAHLA participant shared that because of the compiling (“brokering”) of courses, often IAHLA staff do not know when a student is missing a needed credit until the transfer process has begun and the receiving institution is articulating official transcripts. This can lead to a student not being able to move on with their classmates and cohort and, potentially, the attrition of a student, as they return to the workforce while they wait for the course they need to be offered again in the future. Coordinators identified this as a “gap year” and stated this is often where they lose track of students.

Math and English requirements are identified as causes of students entering a gap year or enrolling in multiple institutions. In some cases, the IAHLA does not offer the math or English courses needed for acceptance into the partnering institution. This results in students trying to complete these courses through other institutions which the IAHLA is not connected to. Institutional policies can add to the difficulty in supporting students during this process. Sharing student information between institutions, even partnering institutions, can be challenging due to privacy issues. Without a formal agreement in place, IAHLAs and public post-secondary institutions cannot share personal information about a student. This can lead to a breakdown in communication between the IAHLA and the receiving institution, and ultimately result in a breakdown of trust between the student and both institutions.

Block transfer program delivery also poses an issue in terms of how prepared students are academically once they transfer to the receiving institution. Research participants shared the need for programs to have a clear understanding of how a block transfer agreement prepares a student for success at the receiving institution. Participant 19 and Participant 1 both identified concerns around block transfer. Participant 19 shared that when students transfer in from the partnering IAHLA, they are streamed into year two of the program, and are often missing the foundational knowledge to be successful in the second-year courses. This occurs because the transfer agreement gives credit for a block of courses that count as first-year courses, but the knowledge obtained in these courses varies significantly from the first-year foundational courses at the receiving institution. Faculty shared that this can lead to students struggling to succeed and to the feeling of being set up for failure instead of success.

Trust/Mistrust

The majority of participants indicated that trust between institutions is needed for a transfer agreement partnership to succeed. One participant identified the need for trust not just with admissions and student support departments, but also with the faculty who are supporting the students. She worries about the support the students are receiving, and relies on the faculty to tell her when students may be facing challenges. Without these relationships between staff and faculty, a student’s needs may not be addressed, and this can cause a student to distrust the system. Students also rely on the strong relationships between both institutions to ensure the success of their transfer.

Unfortunately, a high turnover of staff creates issues in maintaining these relationships, and can lead to a lack of understanding of what is needed for a student to successfully transfer. It was shared multiple times by different participants that the programs with a transfer agreement are not always visible. Even when they are visible, a lack of information may cause issues in building and nurturing these partnerships. There is a pattern of information about the transfer credit partnership getting buried when key employees leave. This loss of information affects recruiting,

admissions, financial services, and faculty/coordinator roles. Coordinators share that they often have to seek out the information by calling the partnering institutions, and the information gathered depends on who answers their call.

The student's trust in the IAHLA can dissipate as they struggle to smoothly navigate the transfer pathway. This is especially troubling to students if the program has been strongly promoted by the IAHLA. Coordinators and faculty who are supporting students during this process can find it difficult to use the BC Transfer Guide to navigate course transfer if the transfer agreement is missing or not up to date. Students who have been advised to take specific courses to transfer can feel frustrated if they encounter student services staff who are not aware of these transfer pathways.

Lack of cultural connections, isolation, and the demands of transferring to a big city can add to students' sense of distrust, which undermines the success of the transfer pathway programs. Students coming from a program that is culturally relevant and meeting their holistic needs can experience a sense of loss when transferring to a larger public institution. The extended communication between an IAHLA and public post-secondary institute is identified by participants in this study as a way to mitigate these student experiences, but they also recognize that this communication is difficult to maintain.

Self-identifying as an Indigenous student is often required to access supports services in public post-secondary institutions. Accessing priority housing and student services relies on the student's Indigenous identity. Students who fear being singled out, or who are struggling with identity and belonging, can be reluctant to identify themselves as Indigenous in a public post-secondary institution. This lack of self-identification also means that support staff is not there to support these Indigenous students. Enhanced communication between the IAHLA institutes and the receiving post-secondary institutions could help the staff at the receiving schools to identify incoming Indigenous transfer students.

Strategies for Success

With the identified struggles, IAHLA and public post-secondary participants shared strategies and policies that help create successful transfer credit pathways. The strength, dedication, and perseverance of all those involved in the project needs to be recognized. The following section emphasizes the importance of the 4 Rs of Indigenous education: Respect, Reciprocity, Responsibility and Relevance (Archibald, 2008). These 4 Rs are evident in the successful strategies highlighted for strengthening transfer credit pathways: cohort models, wrap-around services, and Elders' involvement.



Trilogy Mural by Sharifah Marsden in JIBC's New Westminster campus cafeteria.

*"We've fed people, walked dogs, babysit in the hallways, all those different kinds of things just to make sure that our students were successful in this whole entire transfer or transitional period where they're leaving home. They're trying to get into the institution. And then even that first month when it was so unsettling, like how did they establish, you know, maybe they got rent, but they don't have enough money for groceries. They've got home rent, food, but they don't have Wi-Fi yet, like those kinds of things."
(Participant 19)*

Cohort Models

Cohort models were identified as a successful strategy for strengthening transfer credit pathways. These models allow students to enter the program together at an IAHLA and travel together to the public post-secondary institution. Cohort models most often are found in programs that had block transfers between the IAHLA and the public post-secondary institution. Cohorts were identified as providing positive benefits for both the institutions and students. Research participants identified cohorts as a main source of support for students as they transfer between post-secondary institutions. Elder 2 reflected on her own educational experience and how her cohort provided a sense of family and belonging. Research participants from two of the urban IAHLAs shared that cohort models work well for them. When students move on together, students are able to utilize the same student support services. While the cohort model poses a problem for students who do not complete the expected courses prior to transition to the public post-secondary institution, the cohort model does provide a clear and direct transfer pathway into the receiving institution. Student support staff and faculty also identify the cohort model as beneficial as it allows them to easily track students' progress. This is especially beneficial for IAHLAs as they can provide clear and succinct programming that lowers costs of education.

Wrap-Around Services

To enhance the benefits of cohort models, both IAHLAs and public post-secondary institutions aim to offer wrap-around services for their Indigenous students. Participant 10 addressed the need to meet these student needs as soon as possible. A research participant shared that their IAHLA takes all of a student's needs into consideration. These include financial, academic, emotional, and social supports, as well as ways for students to stay connected to the community. This specific IAHLA addresses English and math upgrading challenges by building upgrading courses into the majority of the programs they offer. This ensures that the students' academic needs are met, and that students can smoothly continue into any program they may transfer to. Additionally, this IAHLA offers and uses PLAR for Elders and other mature students coming in who may not have all the academic requirements. This allows for greater accessibility and provides an option for students to enter a post-secondary institution in a way that feels safe and is culturally relevant.



The Eagle & Sun Welcome Post by Brent Sparrow Jr., Musqueam, at JIBC's New Westminster campus.

Safe gathering spaces were an important feature of both IAHLA and public post-secondary institutions. The implementation of Indigenous gathering spaces was identified as providing the opportunity to house some of the support services in a central location. This service design ensures that students' holistic needs are being met while providing culturally relevant support and access to Elders.

Elders

Access to Elders by students and institution staff was identified as important by all participants. Elders are often called upon to support students during transition periods. One participant recognizes that students have trouble uprooting from the IAHLA when it is time to transition, and this can cause students to disengage. Elders can support students during this time and stay connected to them even after they transition to their new school. Elders shared views about the importance of the work they do. While they are happy to be able to connect digitally, they acknowledge that their proximity to students is important.



Left to right: Dr. Michel Tarko, Métis-Cree, JIBC's President & CEO, Elder Phillip Gladue, Elder Larry Grant, Elder Ken Pruden, Jason La Rochelle, and Heather Simpson

COVID-19 Considerations

Given the current state of education and the effects that COVID-19 has had on community-based programs and public post-secondary education, some pandemic-related information was shared during the conversations. While this information was limited, it did provide insight on the importance of proximity and presence of student support staff and faculty in successful transfer credit pathways.

"Yeah. So, it's just not the same, the same interaction range. It's just not. Here for me, I'd rather be over at the student centre with the students and mingling and helping them, I can sit and [be] talking to them, you know." (Elder 2)

The importance of connecting with students to help them feel a sense of belonging at school was identified as a critical role for Elders. These connections with Elders, cohort members, and faculty members built confidence and enhanced inclusion. Research participants shared the importance of being physically present during the transfer process from IAHLA to the public post-secondary institution. Those from remote IAHLA institutions shared how the physical presence of student support staff increases the students' comfort level with contacting the receiving school. The lack of these community visits, both physically and virtually, has created issues of commitment from the students this year. Students in remote areas often rely on access to the IAHLA for computer use and reliable Internet service. Pandemic restrictions have decreased access to physical and social resources. This decrease in services has affected relationships with students and support staff, and the long-term effects of these changes are still unknown.

Conclusion

This research emphasized themes of relationships, visibility, geography, and identified barriers that weaken transfer credit pathways. All participants shared the importance of continuing transfer pathway partnerships, and building on to existing frameworks and creating safe and welcoming places of learning for Indigenous students. IAHLA institutions are an important community hub for Indigenous students. IAHLA institutions set students up for success by teaching skills and providing readiness the students take with them into larger post-secondary institutions. We end with three important final thoughts that draw upon the participants' stories, and a wish list (participants were asked to share one wish they hoped would come from the research) to help formulate the recommendations, future research, and challenging assumptions.

Participant Wish List

Participant 1 – All articulation agreements filed on BCCAT and easy to find.
Participant 2 "Yeah, I was I was just going to say, and I have no idea how this could even be done or what this would look like, but I think what would be really beneficial for students is to have some sort of resource that's almost like a road map where like obviously we know like advising transfer students is really you really get into nitty gritty detail"
Participant 3 "And the other thing is if there is some sort of training or way that, like us as a staff could connect about these things and make sure that, like, we're all on the same page and that we all understand each other's programs and transfer credits in the best way possible. I think that would also be really helpful because there is a lot of turnover and it sucks when students get misadvised just because someone just didn't know something or forgot something or is going off all the information or whatever"
Participant 5 "So it'd be really cool if there was like really straightforward, like a website that students could access that was just like I have X, X, X and this where can I go, you see this? And it showed exactly how much progress you get in each one"
Participant 6 "I hope that, you know, pathways will continue to develop and grow, you know, for our students. And, you know, it's important. And like I said, I love the ones that come through because I think that they're highly successful, you know, and we've seen that. And I just hope that we can continue to build with the IAHLA and with other institutions, you know?"
Participant 10 speaks on the need for more visibility needed for transfer programs between IAHLA and public post-secondary institutions as "I don't think I ever remember seeing any transfer students NEC from any like, you know, we just don't even have that kind of documentation.
Participant 11 "So if I had one wish, it would be that BCCAT would focus on NEC and other institutions across the province and would look more closely at any of these programs and courses and the transferable options there".
Participant 16 "We are just happy that we have an Indigenous person doing a research project on Indigenous education".
Participant 17 "To see a future where we don't do that to students, where we are able to honor the credits and have them fit in the degree program".
Participant 18 "That seems almost like we need a transition officer, a transition worker, which I think is normally within the recruiting area. If we have a specialized recruiter, they can really work that that piece through. But I think that's a that's a really big thing, is to help the students upon application, not when they start to take classes"
Participant 19 speaks on the wish for more partnerships between IAHLA's and public post-secondary institutions and the importance of the cultural knowledge that is present in the IAHLA classrooms and states "but imagine if they had that all the time because that person was in their classroom like, you know, I mean, I think it would be to their benefit to find a pathway to make time to find that pathway with us".
Elder 1 "An open mind to the point where you can do some critical analysis of the Indigenous person, not that not that it's a subject, it's just that for you to have a better understanding of from where Indigenous peoples are coming and their world view and Indigenous student's family and community".
Elder 2 "I think the encouragement for students to understand that staying at home, staying close to home is it makes things so much easier".
Elder 3 discusses the importance of counselling services to address the racism Indigenous students will face in public post-secondary institutions and states "And actually, people to go to that knows a lot about greater racism in the schools are just things I think would help the students along the way".

Recommendations

The Aboriginal Services and Reporting Guidelines (2017) released by the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Training (AEST), sets goals for Indigenous education by 2021 as:

1. "increase access, retention, completion and transition opportunities for Aboriginal learners; 2. Strengthen partnerships and collaboration in Aboriginal post-secondary education; and 3. Increase the receptivity and relevance of post-secondary institutions and programs for Aboriginal learners, including providing support for initiatives that address systemic barriers". (AEST, 2017, p.3)

The findings of this research project indicate that these goals are still in the process of being achieved. The following recommendations are drawn from the stories and experiences shared by participants. They not only increase the opportunity to strengthen and create partnerships between IAHLA and public post-secondary institutions; they also facilitate meeting the AEST goals.

Relationships were one of the main themes in the research findings. Our first recommendation addresses the need for careful consideration of the opportunities for relationship-building between IAHLAs and public post-secondary institutions. We ask: "How are these institutions meeting together and how often?" We recommend creating space and time for IAHLAs and public post-secondary institutions to connect, to create and nurture relationships. These meetings should not only be for institutions who have existing transfer pathway partnerships, but for all IAHLAs and public post-secondary institutions to spend time networking and identifying areas of possible partnership and transfer pathway development. There is a need for culturally relevant and safe spaces for IAHLA institutions to engage in dialogue and relationship-building with public post-secondary institutions. Intentional creation of space and time to build relationships and explore pathway opportunities could help prevent the disruption of existing relationships, become a way to keep articulated partnerships from being buried, and break new ground in transfer partnership pathways.

To enhance these relationships, we recommend further visibility of existing articulated pathway partnerships both at the institutional level and on the BC Transfer Guide. The position of a partnership navigator was suggested by multiple participants. A navigator who has knowledge of all existing pathway partnerships for Indigenous students could support both IAHLAs and public post-secondary institutions as they strengthen and develop new partnerships by providing e knowledge about existing transfer agreements. The design of the navigator job could also reduce the loss of information that happens with staff turnover. The knowledge, relationships and experience the navigator carries also needs to be preserved and passed down when they move on from this position.



Faceless Dolls made by Law Enforcement Studies Diploma Program students for the Moose Hide Campaign Day 2020.

Future Research

Story is an important consideration of all aspects of Indigenous education, and the importance of stories being heard (Archibald, 2008) was clearly evident in the findings of this research. As we listened to and honoured the stories of the participants, we recognized the value of those working in IAHLA institutions. We encourage further research with IAHLA institutions and envision research that highlights the different experiences of IAHLA institutions from around British Columbia. This research would provide a safe space for isolated IAHLA institutions to share their stories. We imagine future research to answer some of the lingering questions from this research, including: *What happens to students in gap years? How do we navigate the challenges of proximity? What motivates students to return home after completing their education away from home?*

Student voice was not included in this project, and further research would provide another level of understanding of what creates successful transfer pathway partnerships. We acknowledge that this project's findings are based on the shared experiences of people supporting students in IAHLAs and public post-secondary institutions. As we seek to better understand the makings of strong partnership pathways, we need to ask questions about cultural relevancy and meaningful engagement, and inquire *"How do we ensure these transfer pathway partnerships build on compassion, real relationships, and uphold Indigenous knowledges?"*

Challenging Assumptions

We conclude by acknowledging the importance of challenging assumptions about Indigenous learners. A student's motivation to choose a post-secondary institution is complicated. It is important to ask ourselves what we know, as opposed to what we assume. As Indigenous researchers, our own understanding of why students leave their community was challenged. Indigenous learners may not want to remain in their community, and this poses further challenges to consider in increasing the efficacy of transfer credit pathways. Who decides what knowledges are valuable? The stories gathered in this project indicated that there are discrepancies in what is valued, upheld, and accepted as knowledge at different public post-secondary institutions. This is a critical question that is yet to be examined. The answer to this question could provide a clearer understanding of what programming opportunities enhance pathway partnerships. Meeting the needs of Indigenous students mentally, emotionally, physically, and spiritually ultimately will create strong transfer credit pathways.

We close with sharing the power words of one of the Elders, who emphasizes the importance of the knowledge gathered in this project.

"I think it's important for students to stay connected to their home community. It's really, really helpful in the sense that you're not alone. Many times, when you move away or go on campus or into another town to go to university or school, you become disconnected and ... most of us are not able to cope with that disconnection, and you have a sense of not belonging to anyone. It's not that you belong to someone, it's that you belong to that peer group, and that peer group most of the time will be there to help you and support you. And there's always someone there that you're able to talk to, and unload things that you would never talk to other people about. And it's to keep you grounded as to who you are and where you come from and how you belong to a community. It's being grounded in all of those specific areas that will always be there to help you and hold you up, ... in a mental way and spiritual way, and give you the ability to know that you belong somewhere to someone and to someplace and that you're an important person, you belong...that when you transition into a post-secondary that grounding will give you something to reflect back on and give you support, because in post-secondary, it's quite different." (Elder 1)

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Appendix A: IAHLA Survey

Survey - Pathway Partnerships with Indigenous Post-Secondary Institutions Research Project Consent

Pathway Partnership with Indigenous Post-Secondary Institutions Project (PIIP) The Justice Institute of British Columbia (JIBC) and its Office of Indigenization (OI) respectfully invite you to participate in the Pathway Partnership with Indigenous Post-Secondary Institutions Project (PIIP). Our research team is seeking your experience and perspectives on how your IAHLA institute navigates post-secondary education and transfer credit pathways. In spirit, we place tobacco down in appreciation of your participation.

Consent Form

Pathway Partnerships with Indigenous Post-Secondary Institutions Research Project

Having received information on the Pathway Partnerships with Indigenous Post-Secondary Institutions Research project, I consent to participation in the study. I understand that I may be asked to participate in one-on-one Zoom interviews, round table discussions conducted by the research team, and/or individual follow up telephone calls or informal discussions. I understand that data gathered will be de-identified and that any quotes used in publications, presentations or other media arising from this research will not be accompanied by identifying information without written and informed consent. I understand that I may withdraw from the study and have my contributions removed at any time with no negative consequences.

Name
Date
Institute
Role
By clicking the "I agree" button below, you consent to being part of this research project. By clicking the "I do not agree" button, you choose not to participate in this research project. <input type="checkbox"/> I agree <input type="checkbox"/> I disagree
Do you have any current transfer credit pathway partnerships with public post-secondary institutions? <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes
If yes, what partnerships exist? <input type="checkbox"/> Indigenous Early Childhood Education <input type="checkbox"/> Indigenous Post-Secondary Prep Program <input type="checkbox"/> General Studies bachelor's degree <input type="checkbox"/> Social Work <input type="checkbox"/> Health Sciences <input type="checkbox"/> Justice Studies <input type="checkbox"/> Other - Please indicate below
Please describe the unofficial transfer partnerships you have with any public post-secondary institutions.
How do current transfer partnerships support Indigenous students learning and transition during the transfer process?
Do you have any work-integrated learning initiatives that allow students to stay in their communities longer? <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, please describe
What mechanisms help maintain the current transfer credit pathways and keep them going?
How can the current transfer credit pathways for Indigenous students be improved?
What barriers prevent Indigenous Students from accessing transfer credit pathways?
Please share any examples of partnerships or success stories you would like us to know.
Would you like to share anything else with the research team? Please provide your email or phone number below.

Appendix B:

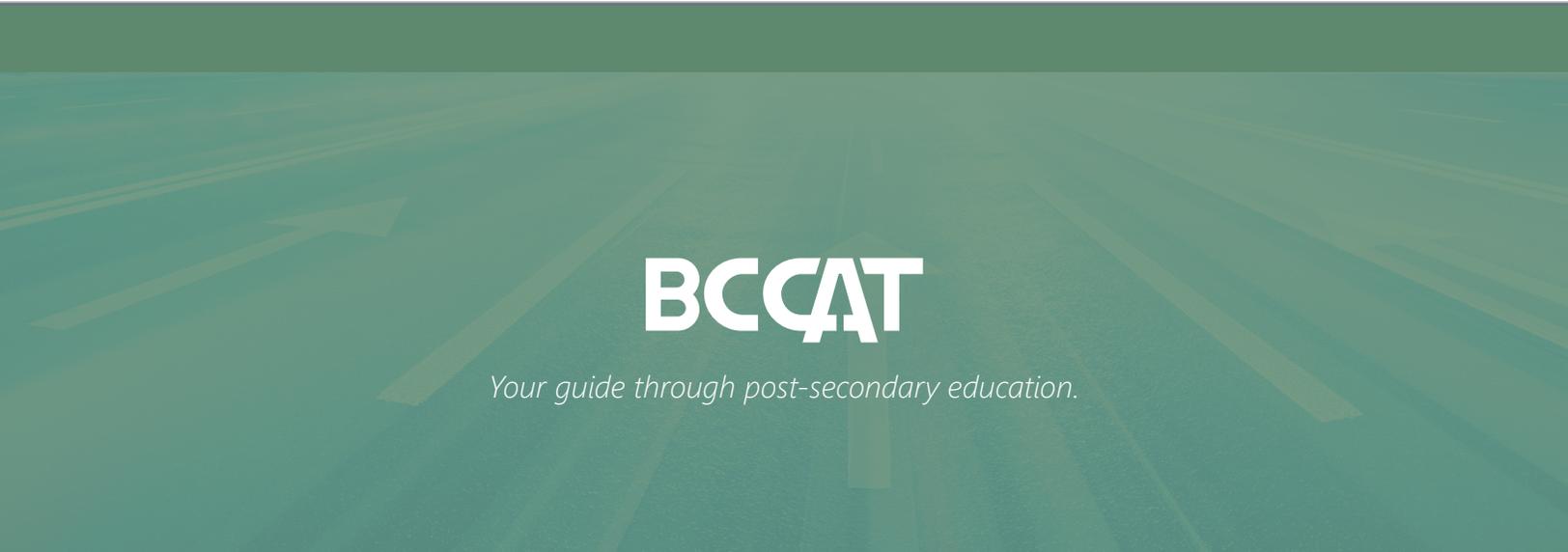
Transfer Credit Pathway Partnership List

The transfer credit pathways partnerships listed below are the only ones we could find in the BC Transfer Guide. We did not list pathways from and to institutions that did not participate in this project. Seabird Island College and Nuxalk College were not listed in the BC Transfer Guide. Furthermore, if one was unaware of how to use the Transfer Guide, finding these pathways could be problematic as each institution had to be searched individually.

The sender institutions with an asterisk were the only programs mentioned by participants from the receiving schools. In one instance the participant said she was unaware of any transfer agreements with IAHLA institutions.

Transfer Agreements Listed in the BC Transfer Guide

Sending Institution and Program	Receiving Institution and Program	Transfer Credits
NVIT Aboriginal Community Health Diploma	UNBC Bachelor of Social Work	Up to 15 credits
NVIT * Aboriginal Early Childhood Education	UBCV NITEP Bachelor of Education	Up to 30 credits
NVIT * Chemical Addictions Worker Advanced Diploma	UFV Bachelor of General Studies	Up to 90 credits
NVIT Environmental Resource Technology Diploma	UBCV Bachelor of Science (Natural Resources Conservation)	Direct transfer into year 3
NVIT Environmental Resource Technology Diploma	UBCV Bachelor of Science in Forestry	Direct transfer into year 3
NVIT * Environmental Resource Technology Diploma	UNBC Bachelor of Science in Forest Ecology	55 credit block transfer
NVIT Environmental Resource Technology Diploma	UNBC Bachelor of Science Wildlife and Fisheries	55 credit block transfer
NVIT * Law Enforcement Preparation Program Certificate	JIBC Law Enforcement Studies Diploma	15 credits
NEC * Aboriginal Early Childhood Education	UBCV NITEP Bachelor of Education	Up to 30 credits
NEC * Aboriginal Justice Studies Program	NVIT Associate of Arts Criminology	Up to 24 credits
NEC Indigenous Land Stewardship Certificate	UBCV Bachelor of Science (Natural Resources Conservation)	27 credit block transfer
NEC Indigenous Land Stewardship Certificate	UBCV Bachelor of Science in Forestry	24 credit block transfer
NEC Indigenous Land Stewardship Certificate	UBCV Bachelor of Urban Forestry	30 credit block transfer



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