

ABORIGINAL TRANSITIONS: Undergraduate to Graduate

PHASE II FINAL REPORT

Dr. Jo-ann Archibald UBC
Dr. Michelle Pidgeon SFU
Dr. Colleen Hawkey UBC

Hosted by
Indigenous Education Institute of Canada,
UBC Faculty of Education
EDUDATA Canada, UBC Faculty of
Education

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Aboriginal Transitions: Undergraduate to Graduate Studies (AT: U2G)

Phase II Final Report

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The Thunderbird Talking Stick was designed and carved by Musqueam artist Joe Becker

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Graduate Research Assistants

Shawna Burns
Keesic Douglas
Michele Johnson
m.d. caroline lefebvre
Donna Lester-Smith
Georgina Martin
Allyson Rayner
Jocelyne Robinson

SAGE Undergraduate Pod Assistants

Brandie Klyne (SFU)
Shelia McKee (VIU)
Rupert Richardson (UBC)
Rheanna Robinson (UNBC)
Morgan Wood (UBC O)

Undergraduate Research Assistants

Nahannee-fé Gillett
Kristi Haavisto

SAGE Undergraduate Provincial Coordinator

Amy Parent (also Graduate Research Assistant)

Partnering & Cooperating Institutions & University Contacts

Simon Fraser University (SFU), Jenna LaFrance, Indigenous Student Centre
Thompson Rivers University (TRU), Joanne Brown, Aboriginal Education Centre
University of British Columbia, Vancouver (UBC V), Madeleine Maclvor, First Nations House of Learning
University of British Columbia, Okanagan (UBC O), Dr. Greg Young Ing, Indigenous Studies
University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC), Dr. Tina Fraser, First Nations Studies & Faculty of Education
Vancouver Island University (VIU), Sylvia Scow, Office of Aboriginal Education
University of Victoria (UVic), Fran Hunt-Jinnouchi, Office of Indigenous Affairs

Supporting Aboriginal Graduate Enhancement (SAGE) Provincial Network, Heather Commodore

Advisory Committee Members

Dr. Jo-ann Archibald, (Chair), Faculty of Education, UBC
Dr. Michelle Pidgeon, Faculty of Education, SFU
Dr. Colleen Hawkey, Faculty of Education, UBC
Heather Commodore, Supporting Aboriginal Graduate Enhancement (SAGE), UBC
Dr. Mimi Lam, Fisheries Centre, UBC
Madeleine Maclvor, First Nations House of Learning, UBC
Tim Michel, Faculty of Science and Faculty of Land and Food Systems, UBC
Dr. Samson Nashon, Faculty of Education, UBC
Dr. Cynthia Nicol, Faculty of Education, UBC
Jocelyne Robinson, Faculty of Education, UBC
Dr. Robert Sparks, Faculty of Education, UBC



www.aboriginaltransitions.ca

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Aboriginal Transitions: Undergraduate to Graduate (AT:U2G) aimed to develop a province-wide support framework for encouraging and assisting Aboriginal undergraduate students transition into graduate school. This project was conducted in two phases: Phase I consisted of 1) a rigorous examination of graduate program/mentoring models in BC, across Canada, and internationally, with particular attention to those that serve Aboriginal graduate students; 2) a critical analysis of existing post-secondary student data and literature on the topic; and 3) a comprehensive research project, which included individual interviews, focus groups, and surveys, the outcomes of which provided a new, evidence-based and provincially transportable model for AT:U2G educational transition. For further information regarding Phase I of this project please see: www.aboriginaltransitions.ca.

The findings from Phase I informed the development of Phase II, which took place from July 2009 until October 2010. Throughout the AT:U2G project (Phase I and Phase II), an Advisory Committee and designated contacts at partnering/cooperating universities offered feedback and advice on data collection, methodology, data interpretation, knowledge mobilization, and framework development. The Advisory Committee members were mainly from the University of British Columbia and included faculty members, student service coordinators, a department head, and graduate students. The university contacts at UNBC, VIU, SFU, UBC V and UBC O were Aboriginal student service coordinators, Aboriginal managers, or Aboriginal faculty. SAGE (Supporting Aboriginal Graduate Enhancement) continued its involvement in Phase II as a supportive province-wide partner. The AT:U2G project team included the authors of this report, Aboriginal students at five partnering university sites, an advisory council, staff, and faculty members at each institution, and 55 Aboriginal graduate and undergraduate students, who worked as research assistants and storywriters to develop, implement, and evaluate three pilots that focussed on developing research and mentoring relationships, increasing access to graduate education, and using technology for province-wide portability and sustainability. Each pilot from Phase II is described below.

Pilot 1: RELATIONSHIPS – Research Awareness, Learning and Mentoring

A *province-wide symposium* was held with faculty members (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) who were identified by Aboriginal graduate students as being effective mentors. There were 8 faculty members present representing SFU, UBC V, UNBC, and UBC O. They discussed their mentoring approaches and suggested ways that faculty can be encouraged and prepared (in-service) to be mentors for Aboriginal undergraduate students who show promise and interest in graduate education. The other dimension of this pilot, building on what was shared through the symposium, was the *research mentoring initiative* between an Indigenous faculty member and an Aboriginal undergraduate student. Faculty members were invited from across the province to apply for funding support for a research assistantship (RA). In the end, the AT:U2G project funded 10 RAs with 8 faculty members who represented 3 institutions (UVic, SFU, and UBC V). Multi-media materials were developed by graduate Aboriginal RAs that included information about working with faculty research supervisors, thesis planning, and videos featuring Aboriginal graduate students and faculty talking about their research and sharing words of advice to future graduate students.

Pilot 2: ACCESS – Peer Support through a SAGE Undergraduate Provincial Network

Peer/faculty support and mentoring learning relationships were developed based on the Supporting Aboriginal Graduate Enhancement (SAGE) initiative, which is province-wide, inter-institutional, and multi-disciplinary. The initiative was called SAGE Undergraduate (SAGE U). A new dimension developed for SAGE U involved the development and piloting of multi-media resources about key transitions points to graduate studies such as access, admissions, first year, and program completion. Aboriginal graduate students and Indigenous faculty mentors developed these materials.

The SAGE Undergraduate pilot established pods at regional areas in the province with five partnering university sites (SFU, UBC V & UBC O, VIU, UNBC). Two additional universities (TRU and UVic) piloted the web portal. The SAGE U groups met every four to six weeks at each site; the SAGE U pod coordinator, who was either an Aboriginal graduate or undergraduate student, organized the meetings and assisted with the piloting of the materials. The meetings were co-facilitated by the SAGE pod assistant and the AT:U2G investigators (Dr. Archibald or Dr. Pidgeon). Aboriginal undergraduate students, Aboriginal graduate students, and Indigenous faculty from the hosting institutions attended the workshop sessions. There were 25 sessions across the five participating sites (SFU, UBC O, UBC V, UNBC, and VIU) with a total of approximately 80 undergraduate participants.

Each site varied in how participants ran their SAGE U sessions; some sessions had over 20 students attend while at times (influenced by the academic work of the semester) meetings were more intimate with simply one or two Aboriginal un-

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dergraduate students dropping by. These sessions, regardless of the numbers in attendance, provided both the researchers and the students with a wealth of information about available resources and with broader discussions about the Aboriginal students' experiences whether they were undergraduate or graduate students. The students were able to engage with the materials (e.g., Aboriginal graduate student stories or the resource sheets) in ways that guided discussions around their own questions of transition and most importantly, how they were thinking about graduate school. The graduate students involved in SAGE also acted as mentors to SAGE Undergraduate providing an inter-generational pedagogical approach; graduate students attended the SAGE U sessions for information sharing, mentoring, and supporting Aboriginal undergraduate students.

The feedback from the evaluation forms and pod assistant journals from the SAGE Undergraduate sessions indicated that overall students enjoyed having the opportunity to discuss the various aspects of graduate student life. They valued the information and resources and suggested that they were better informed about graduate studies and that they felt more empowered about accessing, being admitted, and completing graduate studies as a result of attending the SAGE Undergraduate meetings. Students appreciated getting to know each other, meeting Aboriginal graduate students, and Indigenous faculty members. This inter-generational approach to relationship building was an identified strength of the SAGE Undergraduate initiative.

Pilot 3: TECHNOLOGY – Indigenous Graduate Web Portal and Web 2.0 Approaches

Digital technology and Web 2.0 approaches were developed and piloted through the web portal: www.aboriginaltransitions.ca. It was designed as the ongoing living legacy of this project aimed at having provincial applicability and sustainability. The various activities and resources that were developed through pilots one and two, the relationships and access initiatives, have been placed on this web portal so that anyone can use them, much like open source material. The use of Web 2.0 approaches facilitated social networking as well as individual and group engagement. An example of the social networking component is the Community Forum/Blog, which provides on-line opportunities for students to meet each other, faculty members, and of course, simply blog about their experiences as Aboriginal post-secondary students.

The AT:U2G web portal was either piloted or launched at the following university sites: Vancouver Island University, University of Victoria, University of Northern British Columbia, Thompson Rivers University, University of British Columbia Okanagan and Vancouver campuses, and Simon Fraser University. During the pilot of the web portal, feedback was received through an online survey and focus group discussions. The web portal was revised to make the home page template more colourful and vibrant. Additional faculty videos and pictures were also developed and added.

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In order to have a successful province-wide transitional framework for Aboriginal undergraduate students to enrol in graduate education, the AT:U2G project authors conclude that:

1. Intergenerational learning relationships make a difference;
2. Student empowerment and agency are essential;
3. Flexible approaches facilitate province-wide applicability and sustainability;
4. Developing relationships, knowledge and skills takes time; and
5. Graduate studies is often not a priority for Aboriginal undergraduate students while they are completing their undergraduate programs.

The Aboriginal Transitions: Undergraduate to Graduate (AT:U2G) project successfully experienced and addressed the aforementioned findings using Indigenous and various research approaches, involving and building upon the experiences and knowledge of Aboriginal graduate and undergraduate students and faculty, and creating and testing a multi-media transitional framework that is province-wide, multi-disciplinary, and sustainable.

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For Appendices, please contact the authors at jo-annarchibald@ubc.ca or michelle_pidgeon@sfu.ca.

INTRODUCTION

Aboriginal student participation in post-secondary education has been growing over the last 30 years; it has been a journey that has not always been easy due to situational and institutional barriers. The aim of the Aboriginal Transitions: Undergraduate to Graduate (AT:U2G) project, conducted in two phases, was to increase Aboriginal undergraduate students' understanding of and participation in graduate level studies. Based on research on the graduate student experience and mentorship, in addition to lessons learned from an evaluation of SAGE (Supporting Aboriginal Graduate Enhancement), Phase I of the AT:U2G project provided in-depth insight into the barriers Aboriginal graduate students face as well as the successes they enjoy (Archibald, Pidgeon, & Hawkey, 2009¹). Findings from the research phase of the project were used to develop three Phase II pilots, implemented from July 2009 through October 2010:

Pilot 1: Relationships - Research Awareness,
Learning, and Mentoring

Pilot 2: Access - SAGE Undergraduate
Provincial Network

Pilot 3: Technology - Web 2.0 portal, www.aboriginaltransitions.ca

The next section of the report first describes how each pilot was conceptualized, developed, and implemented. Next, in the evaluation section,

we detail how each of these pilots supported the transition of Aboriginal undergraduate students to graduate school. Various techniques (e.g., survey, focus group, feedback forms, research meetings, and student reflective journals) were used to evaluate the materials and activities in each pilot.

In the final section of this report success indicators based on the evaluation, next steps, and lessons learned over the two years of this project are presented.

¹ See the Phase I report for a detailed literature review and research findings that informed Phase II, available at www.aboriginaltransitions.ca

IMPLEMENTATION & PROJECT DISCUSSION

To facilitate communication and organization across the three pilots and among project team members, including the investigators, project manager, and graduate research assistants, a communications forum using PHPBulletin was created. The forum allowed team members to share ideas and documents, post work in progress, and keep up-to-date on the various activities underway across the three pilots. Facilitating communications with team members was particularly important because activities in one pilot overlapped with or were dependent on the completion of tasks in another pilot. For example, research materials were developed (Pilot 1) for use in workshops with undergraduate students (pilot 2), and for development of the web portal (Pilot 3). Below, each pilot is discussed separately.

Pilot 1: Relationships - Research Awareness, Learning, and Mentoring

There were three components to Pilot 1: a faculty mentorship symposium; an undergraduate student research mentorship; and the development of research oriented multi-media materials and workshops.

Through a nomination process (see Appendix 1), Aboriginal graduate students identified faculty members (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) at research universities in British Columbia whom students felt were effective mentors. Nominees were then invited to participate in a half-day symposium on Mentoring Aboriginal Graduate Students held on November 20, 2009 at the Faculty of Education, UBC.

There were a total of eight participants from research universities across the province (UBC V, UBC O, SFU, and UNBC); faculty nominees from UVic could not attend due to previous commitments. Participants were asked about various strategies they have found to be successful when mentoring their graduate students, especially Aboriginal students. The outcomes of this meeting are presented in the evaluation section. Lessons learned from this meeting informed the establishment of the research mentorship initiative.

The research mentorship initiative provided one-time funding to faculty members to hire an Aboriginal undergraduate student (or in one case a graduate student) to work with them on a proposed project in a research mentorship capacity. The goals of the mentorship were to:

- introduce Aboriginal undergraduate students to research questions and approaches related to a specific field of study;
- develop an understanding of research in a specific discipline;
- provide hands-on experience with different aspects of the research process and learn specific research related skills;
- develop academic contacts;
- expand disciplinary and research knowledge; and
- encourage students to pursue graduate study.

In their applications for funding, faculty detailed the research activities to be undertaken by the student, identified the skills that would be

learned, and described the specific mentorship activities and goals. The following is an example one mentor’s goals:

My goal as a First Nations faculty member and researcher is to model ethical and respectful approaches to conducting research in our communities, to ensure the student feels supported yet challenged to learn new skills, and to provide avenues for the student to engage positively and in a culturally-congruent manner with community-based research and with our research partners and participants. Mentoring activities will include supervision of the student in all aspects of the project, providing training and feedback in a timely and respectful manner, supporting the student’s engagement with community members, and modeling a positive engagement with academia and research endeavors.

Table 1 shows the diversity of projects and fields of study represented by the faculty mentors. Two faculty members were each able to supervise the work of two students.

The third component of Pilot I consisted of the development of various materials for the

SAGE Undergraduate workshops (Pilot 2) and for the web portal (Pilot 3). The materials were both print and web based, and a number of strategies were used in their development.

Student Stories

Aboriginal graduate students were invited to write a short (500-700 word) story about some aspect of their graduate student experience. Students were instructed to select a part of their experience they thought would be of interest to Aboriginal undergraduate students who may be considering graduate work. The stories could be funny or serious, but they had to be true and had to include tips or words of advice for future graduate students. The call for stories was sent out in the beginning of August 2009; students submitted a story idea, which was evaluated by the research team and then had two weeks to submit their completed story. Twenty-seven story ideas were reviewed and accepted and all but one student submitted a completed story. (See Appendix 2 for a list of stories.)

Tip Sheets and Textual Information

Five graduate students were hired to research and write a variety of tip-sheets, checklists and other textual information about the different phases of graduate work. Four phases were used to guide the

Table 1
Faculty mentors, university affiliation and project title

Faculty	University	Project
Tracy L. Friedel	UBC V	Outdoor recreation/police
Nancy J. Turner	UVic	Ethnoecological restoration
Deanna Reder	SFU	Indigenous fiction
Deanna Reder	SFU	Indigenous fiction
Sandrina de Finney	UVic	Urban Aboriginal Adoptions
Sandrina de Finney	UVic	Off reserve adoption strategy
Jo-Anne Lee	UVic	Social cohesions, citizenship
Cynthia Nicol	UBC V	Culturally responsive math
Michelle Pidgeon	SFU	Post Secondary Education student success
Jo-ann Archibald	UBC V	Post Secondary Education Aboriginal student survey

writing (1) Getting to Your Masters Program, (2) First Year Transitions, (3) On to Your Research, and (4) Transition to Your Next Academic Goal. Topics covered included an explanation of the differences between research focussed and professional focussed graduate programs; what to consider when selecting a research supervisor; and how to write a fellowship proposal. As the materials were developed and pilot tested, additional materials were developed based on identified gaps in information, or specific areas of interest to students. For a complete list of topics covered, see the workshop summary in the next section.

As the development of workshop material progressed, it was determined that videos featuring Aboriginal faculty and graduate students speaking about research methodology and working with research supervisors and committee members would greatly enhance content delivery and be a valuable resource on the web portal. The video development is discussed in the Pilot 3 section.

Pilot 2: Access - SAGE Undergraduate Provincial Network

The Supporting Aboriginal Graduate Enhancement (SAGE) initiative is a province-wide, inter-institutional, and multi-disciplinary peer-mentoring program that has been operating since 2005, intended to increase the number of doctoral credentialed Aboriginal peoples in British Columbia. The SAGE Undergraduate framework was modelled on the successful SAGE practice of developing learning, social, and cultural relationships through peer support and faculty mentoring. However, a new dimension of SAGE U was the development and pilot testing of multi-media resources about key transitions points to graduate studies such as access, admissions, first year, and program completion. Aboriginal graduate students and Indigenous faculty mentors developed these materials.

During AT:U2G's Phase I, the researchers learned that to improve and support transition into graduate studies, Aboriginal undergraduate students must first understand the purposes, admissions process, and nuances of graduate school. To meet this objective, graduate students and faculty developed learning and mentoring resources through the SAGE U network and through specific symposia organized for this purpose.

The SAGE Undergraduate participants established regional pods in the province with five partnering university sites (SFU, UBC V & UBC O, VIU, UNBC). Two additional universities (TRU and UVic) gave feedback about the quality of the web portal and its future use at their respective universities. Each SAGE U university partner selected a contact faculty or professional staff who assisted with organizational matters such as selecting a student pod assistant, assisting with communications to students, scheduling meetings, securing meeting space, providing administrative and research support as necessary, offering feedback about the AT:U2G transition pilots, and often attending sessions. Their support role was very important throughout the pilot.

The SAGE U groups met every four to six weeks at each site; the SAGE U pod coordinator, who was either an Aboriginal graduate or undergraduate student, organized the meetings and assisted with the piloting of the materials. The meetings, co-facilitated by the SAGE pod assistant and the AT:U2G investigators (Dr. Archibald or Dr. Pidgeon), brought together Aboriginal undergraduate students, Aboriginal graduate students, and Indigenous faculty from the hosting institutions. There were 25 sessions across the five participating sites (SFU, UBC O, UBC V, UNBC, and VIU) with a total of 80 Aboriginal undergraduate student participants.

Each site varied in how participants ran their SAGE U sessions; some sessions were well-attended, with over 20 students, while others (influenced

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by academic schedules) were more intimate with simply one or two Aboriginal undergraduate students dropping by. Regardless of the numbers in attendance, these sessions provided both the researchers and the students with a wealth of information about available resources and with broader discussions about the Aboriginal students' experiences whether they were undergraduates or graduate students. The students were able to engage with the materials (e.g., Aboriginal graduate student stories or the resource sheets) in ways that guided discussions around their own questions of transition and most importantly, how they were thinking about graduate studies. Graduate students who attended the SAGE U sessions shared information, provided mentoring, and supported Aboriginal undergraduate students, providing an inter-generational pedagogical approach.

The SAGE U meetings were held primarily during the Winter Semester of 2010, although a few SAGE meetings did occur in late fall 2009. For example, in October 2009 there was an initial information session at UBC V and there were a total of four meetings (SFU, UNBC, UBC O, UBC V) in November 2009. One meeting (VIU) in November had to be rescheduled due to weather,

so it was held the first week of December. However, no other meetings convened in December 2009 due to final exams and universities closing for holidays. There were five pod meetings in January 2010, five in February (scheduled to accommodate the two week break in the Lower mainland as a result of the Olympics), five in March, and three in April. As well, SAGE Undergraduate members were invited to attend the 7th Annual Indigenous Graduate Student Symposium in March, which had 120 participants.

Each SAGE Undergraduate pod had to consider several factors when scheduling their meetings, including the academic calendar year (e.g., course schedules, mid-term breaks, mid-term exams and final exams) and the schedules of the students themselves (e.g., availability after class for meetings because of part-time work, or responsibilities for child care). Sometimes special arrangements were necessary to accommodate local conditions. For example, the pod assistant and faculty mentor implemented drop-by sessions at a site that had low enrolment, which proved to be very helpful in answering specific questions of individuals planning their future graduate timeline and application.

Table 2: Workshop themes and associated resources.

Workshop	Associated Resources:
#1	<p>Introduction to Graduate Education What is graduate school? Why go to graduate school? What is a research degree? Checklist: i) Program selection ii) Program application preparedness iii) Program application iv) Annual financial considerations Student Stories: i) Learning from home ii) Better than Indian iii) Stella heard the voices of her Elders iv) Swallowing your independence v) Highlighting the personal reflection involved with applying to graduate studies: A Métis student's journey vi) Navigating through my academic journey Graduate Student Videos</p>

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#2	<p>Planning and Admissions Graduate programs in BC Who can help me with my graduate school application? Applying and applications: What do I have to do What is the letter of intent and why is it so important for students' acceptance into graduate school? Sample letters of Intent (Donna Lester-Smith, Amy Parent) Student Stories: i) Mastering the "self" in Master's studies ii) Across the ocean and back iii) My transition to graduate school: Following through, setting fear aside, and confronting the challenges.</p>
#3	<p>Financial Planning & Support Services Funding and financial aid for graduate programs in BC Expenses Ways to save on... Applying for graduate student scholarships, bursaries, and awards Financial Budget Tool Phases of graduate school Links for support services Graduate student services to consider Student Stories: i) Following my instincts ii) Dreams do come true iii) Jumping through hoops iv) Work to be done v) Open the door vi) Full circle Graduate Student Videos</p>
#4	<p>Applying for Fellowships & Program Management What is tri-council funding? Tips for applying for funding Time management Creating a timeline Sample timeline Timeline web tool Tips for writing at the graduate level Student Stories: i) Music of my own ii) My road to biology iii) Adventures in Abstraction-land iv) Going 'round again v) A journey with doubt</p>
#5	<p>Research Awareness & Mentoring Things to do and consider when finding and working with a research supervisor Library resources in BC Research challenges: A graduate student's story about research challenges Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Indigenous Methodologies References Student Stories: i) A science experiment ii) Learning for family and community iii) Connecting soul with world of science iv) Life is full of obstacles: The Long Road to my PhD v) Getting to know grad school vi) Resourceful resistance Faculty videos</p>

* Not all the AT:U2G resources are listed above. Additional resources are posted on the web portal (www.aboriginaltransitions.ca). The graduate student stories and videos and faculty videos can be used for many different topics.

Despite the variation in how meetings were conducted or in the numbers of participants, comments on the evaluation forms and made verbally during the SAGE Undergraduate sessions indicated that students generally enjoyed having the opportunity to discuss the various aspects of graduate student life. They valued the information and resources presented and suggested that they were better informed and more positive about graduate school as a result of attending the SAGE Undergraduate meetings. Students appreciated getting to know each other, and meeting Aboriginal graduate students and Indigenous faculty members. This intergenerational approach and relationship building was clearly a strength of the SAGE Undergraduate initiative.

Fourteen RAs contributed to this project and many group meetings were held which included planning sessions where RAs either volunteered or were given topics to work on. Later in the year, a symposium was held with the RAs where they presented highlights of the material they developed and discussed successes and challenges they experienced in completing their tasks. Through the support of the RAs on the project, resources were developed into themed workshops. (See Table 2 for workshop themes and associated resources.)

Pilot 3: Technology - Indigenous Graduate Web Portal:

www.aboriginaltransitions.ca

The workshop materials developed for Pilots 1 and 2 were revised based on feedback received from Aboriginal undergraduate students. The web portal was designed for the purposes of provincial transportability and sustainability of the Aboriginal undergraduate to graduate transition project. The AT:U2G principal investigators and project director oversaw the web portal development, while one of the graduate research assistants designed the main web portal graphic. The four feathers in the design represent the four transition

phases: access, admission, first year, and completion. A second graduate student created the initial design and structure of the site. As the materials – stories, videos, tip-sheets – were developed and piloted at SAGE U meetings, they were added to the portal. Accordingly, in its initial stages the web portal was an iterative, constantly developing project. As members of a focus group, the RAs gave feedback on the initial template, providing their impressions of the overall design, look, and function. The initial design and content were also presented to the Advisory Committee, who provided valuable feedback and encouragement.

Collectively, it was felt that the site needed more media such as short videos. Three Aboriginal graduate students, one of whom was enrolled in a Master's of Fine Arts program and had experience developing and editing videos, one who was enrolled in an interdisciplinary PhD program that combined arts, education, and curriculum, and one who was enrolled in an education PhD program worked together to develop the videos. The result is a series of videos in which Aboriginal graduate students and faculty members from various disciplines (science, natural resources, fine arts, education, history, and First Nations studies) discuss their experiences regarding access to graduate studies, admission into various programs, first year transition, and completion of graduate studies; as well as words of advice to future Aboriginal graduate students. Each graduate student's video can be viewed in its entirety (about 5-8 minutes) or they can be viewed as themes (1-2 minutes) such as why they chose their program or their research topic, and words of advice.

One of the undergraduate RAs working on the research mentorship initiative was trained to develop, administer, and analyze an online survey of web portal feedback from Aboriginal undergraduate students at the five SAGE U sites. Four of the SAGE U pod assistants also facilitated focus group and individual feedback sessions using the online survey. Results of the web por-

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Table 3: Summary of Videos

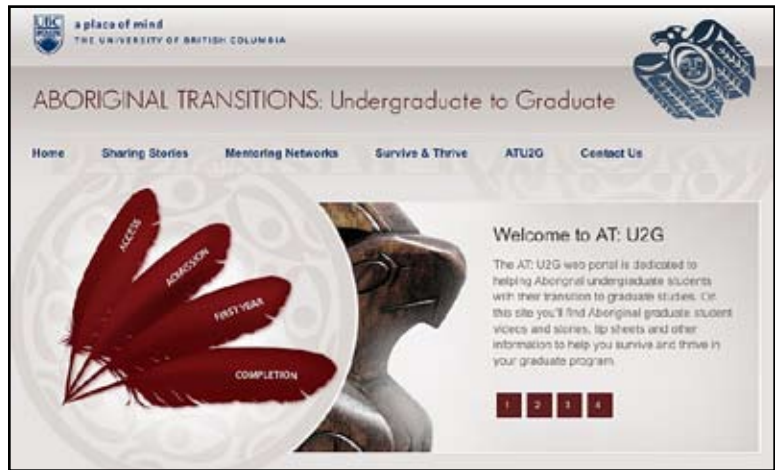
Video	University	Field of Study	Quote
Dr. Jo-ann Archibald	UBC	PhD Educational Studies	AT:U2G we looked at challenges and successes and how Aboriginal graduate students overcome barriers they experience.
Dr. Michelle Pidgeon	SFU	PhD Educational Studies	Talk to your professors, we really are approachable. Ask us questions about how we came to be professors and why we chose the job.
Melissa Carlick	UNBC	MA in First Nations Studies	Build relationships with people not only at your university but with anyone around you. That support is so vital.
Madeleine MacIvor	UBC	EdD in Educational Studies	When I finished my undergrad there was a lot of transition in my life, so I decided to stay in school because it provided me with some stability. It was a crazy reason, but I was intensely interested in learning.
Lyn Daniels	UBC	EdD in Educational Studies	I started out understanding what I wanted to research in a really broad way, a way too big way, and I had to take some time and really narrow that down.
Patrick Coon	UNBC	Future MA in First Nations Studies	The best advice I have is, "go for it." It is exciting. At first I didn't want to do this ... but then I got my undergrad degree and now there is an opportunity to get my masters, and I said "go for it."
Rick Ouelett	UBC	PhD in Interdisciplinary Studies	I hope that my research will allow me to provide some really core perspectives and worldviews that exist in my community around ways of bridging and blending ideas between different peoples.
Ryan Dickie	UBC	MSc Electrical Engineering	I looked around and I saw these other people getting masters degrees and I thought, "well I could do that."
Toni Carlton	UNBC	MA in First Nations Studies	Take a year, or a couple of years, or a couple of semesters to figure out what you want to get into. Taking the time you need to explore your interests will help develop a foundation of passion.
Veronica Haddon	UBC	PhD in Interdisciplinary Studies	I'm always looking and am always into activism, advocacy and change. I am hoping that what I am doing with my research is going that way.
Wesley Didier	UBC	PhD in Zoology	It is really important to find a mentor. Go seek out a professor that is doing research that you think you would like.
Keesic Douglas	UBC	MA in Fine Arts	Being a graduate student here at UBC has been really great because of all the faculty members I have gotten to know. I have a lot of faculty that I can go and visit and meet with. Everyone seems to be really generous with their time. I have a lot of questions and I need a lot of feedback and advice.
Georgina Martin	UBC	PhD in Educational Studies	I am hoping my research will make an impact in Education in terms of Secwepemc Identity. I feel like it is important to continue the vision my grandfather set out for me: he said that I needed to go out and get an education and bring it back to my people.
Amy Parent	UBC	PhD in Educational Studies	Some of the advantages for me, I can go back to my community and work with them to produce research that is relevant to their needs.

tal feedback will be discussed in the Evaluation section. In addition, two group sessions were held at Thompson Rivers University in April 2010 with 15 participants and in August 2010 at the University of Victoria with 12 participants. The web portal was revised based upon the feedback from the online survey and group discussions.

It was also decided to add blogging and forum/networking capabilities to allow Aboriginal graduate and undergraduate students to “meet” online and share experiences, and to provide peer support. A BuddyPress module was installed and all current Aboriginal students on the project were invited to join. To encourage as many people to participate in this virtual community as possible, a PhD student enrolled in an interdisciplinary program and who had research interests related to social networking was hired as an RA to research and develop an interactive blog, which we called the “Community Forum.” The RAs working on the pilots then gave feedback about the structure and content of the blog; many think there is great potential for an online community, but more work must be done to reach a critical mass of active members that will ensure the community is self-sustaining.

Because this part of the project was implemented late in the year, very few undergraduate students responded to invitations to join. We plan to give more focus to this blog and will change its name to reflect better and integrate more closely with the Mentoring Networks section of the web portal. In September, a photo contest that focused on transition themes and experiences was announced to elicit more interest. The principal investigators and project director continue to feel that this type of interactive web approach would interest more Aboriginal graduate students who feel isolated in their respective programs/univer-

Figure 1: Aboriginal Transitions Website Homepage



sities and who want some virtual interaction, as well as attract Aboriginal undergraduate students who are ready to apply to graduate studies. Interest among undergraduates is likely to pick up in the fall, as deadlines to apply for graduate studies are usually from December to February.

Above is a screen capture of the portal homepage. Clicking on any one of the four feathers will take users to workshop materials related to a specific transition theme. The banner shows the Musqueam Talking Stick carved by Joe Becker, Musqueam Artist, showing Thunderbird and the Scholar who search for educational excellence and social justice². The Sharing Stories section will take users to the graduate student stories, highlights of current graduate student research interests and fields of studies, and videos. Mentoring Networks will link to the online forum. The Survive & Thrive section will highlight the workshop materials that can be downloaded as PDF documents to be used by other universities. The AT:U2G link will provide users with information about project, the first year research report, and details about sponsors, committee members, and the Principal- and Co-investigators.

² The image of the Thunderbird and scholar is also the logo of AT: U2G's sponsor, the Indigenous Education Institute of Canada at the UBC Faculty of Education.

EVALUATION OF PILOTS

A wholistic (circular) Indigenous framework informed all aspects of the research project as portrayed in Figure 2 below (see Archibald, Pidgeon, & Hawkey, 2009 for detailed description of this framework).

Using this framework, researchers explored Aboriginal student transitions from the perspective of emotional, intellectual, spiritual, and physical factors that facilitate and hinder Aboriginal undergraduate transition to graduate study. The conceptual framework was inclusive of individual, family, and community aspects that reflect the interrelationships between structural, individual, and social and cultural factors associated with individual aspirations, intentions, and actions. Kirkness and Barnhardt's (1991) framework of

respect, relevance, responsibility, and reciprocity, commonly referred to as the 4Rs, provided an additional conceptual framework that complemented the wholistic Indigenous circle. The 4Rs speak to *Respect* for students' Indigeneity, culturally *Relevant* learning programs and student services, institutional *Responsibility* to facilitate access and retention of Indigenous learners, and fostering *Reciprocal* teaching and learning relationships all of which provided a philosophical foundation for this study.

Evaluation data were collected in various ways:

1. Individual interviews and/or group discussions with all participants who were involved in the research assistantships;
2. Analysis of student research assistants' journals;
3. Participant evaluation questionnaires of SAGE U sessions;
4. Web site hit counts and online feedback survey for evaluation of the web site/portal;
5. Focus groups with undergraduate students at participating university sites to evaluate web site portal; and
6. Interviews and/or surveys with Faculty and staff participants who were involved in the SAGE Undergraduate pilots and/or as Faculty mentors to research assistants.

Continuing from Phase I, the Aboriginal Undergraduate Survey remained open and active during Phase II to receive feedback from students regarding their understandings, expectations, recommenda-

Figure 2: An Indigenous Wholistic Framework



tions, and perspectives that helped shaped the content of the SAGE Undergraduate workshops.

The research team approached the study of Aboriginal undergraduate to graduate student transitions using multiple research methods. We received Behaviour Research Ethics Board approval from the University of British Columbia (principal investigator) and Simon Fraser University (co-investigator) (See Appendix 3 for Ethics Approval Letters). Support letters were received from the following universities indicating their willingness to participate in one or more of the AT:U2G pilots: UNBC, TRU, UBC O & UBC V, SFU, UVIC, & VIU.

Aboriginal Undergraduate Student Survey

The Aboriginal Undergraduate Student Survey was an online survey developed to receive feedback from students about their adjustments to undergraduate work, their intentions and expectations about graduate studies, reasons for choosing (or not choosing) to do graduate work in the future, and supports and services that they would find useful if they enrolled in a graduate program. It began in Phase I of the study, and continued to be used during Phase II. Information from the survey was used to shape the content of SAGE Undergraduate workshops. In total, 54 Aboriginal undergraduate students responded to the survey, of whom 67% were female and 32% were male (one respondent did not disclose his or her gender). The low response rate may relate to undergraduate students either not being interested in or ready to pursue graduate studies, which a number of the SAGE U participants mentioned; it is also difficult to determine how many Aboriginal undergraduate students actually received the invitation to participate. However, considerable effort was made to contact all eligible students via list-serves maintained by First Nations Centres, Aboriginal student associations, and SAGE Undergraduate pod assistants at partnering institutions.

The majority of participants were born between 1981-1990 (50%), with an additional 2% born between 1991-2000 illustrating the trend for Aboriginal undergraduate students to enter university at a younger age than previously (i.e., in their 20s) and some directly from high school. A few respondents were born between 1971-1980 (21%), 1961-1970 (19%), and 8% were born before 1960. This indicates that although the Aboriginal student population reflects a trend toward a younger population, there are still significant numbers of Aboriginal peoples who return to post-secondary education later in life. These dual demographic realities influence not only what students experience within the post-secondary educational system but also what they expect and need from the institutions. The majority of respondents (85%) had graduated from high school, while 9% had completed adult graduation, diploma, or certificate programs. The high level of high school completion may indicate that more Aboriginal peoples are finishing high school, but it may also indicate that the target population of the survey, students who go to university, are typically those who have completed high school or its equivalent to meet entrance requirements. Forty-one percent of respondents had in fact completed a diploma or certificate at another, non-university post-secondary institution; this group comprised the older Aboriginal respondents to the survey.

The respondents were also asked to identify their current year of study: 35% were in fourth year, 22% were in third year, 11% were in second year, and 11% were in first year; another 20% were completing some other form of education at the university (e.g., certificate program, diploma program) while others were in their fifth year of study. Respondents represented a wide variety of departments, faculties, and academic programs, including Anthropology and First Nations Studies, Architecture, Arts/Arts & Humanities, Business, Commerce, Criminology/Political Science, Education, Engineering, English, Forest Ecol-

ABORIGINAL TRANSITIONS: UNDERGRADUATE TO GRADUATE

ogy and Management, General BA, Geography, Health Sciences, History, Native Teacher Education, Nursing, Physics and Astronomy, Psychology, Social Sciences, Sociology, Visual Arts, and Women's Studies. The majority of respondents indicated their participation in Education and First Nations Studies (e.g., as major or minor).

As for living arrangements, 46% of respondents indicated that they rented their accommodations (e.g., apartment/house) during their studies, while 22% shared rented accommodations (e.g., rented a room). Approximately 15% of respondents lived on campus, while only 4% said they lived with their parents/guardians/relatives. Ten percent of respondents own their own home.

Respondents were asked to self-rate their success in adjusting to undergraduate studies. (See

Table 4). For the most part, survey participants felt that they were successful to very successful in making such academic adjustments as understanding content and information presented in courses (77%); performing adequately in written assignments (53%); meeting academic demands (49%); organizing time to complete academic work (45%); and getting academic advice (42%). Fifty-three percent of participants also shared that they felt successful to very successful in making new friends. Fifty-three percent of the students felt they were successful/very successful in maintaining their Aboriginal identity. The only area where students identified they were not feeling very successful was involvement with on-campus activities.

Table 4: Participants' success in adjusting to undergraduate studies.

	N	(1) (%)	(2) (%)	(3) (%)	(4) (%)	(5) (%)	(N/A) (%)
1. Meeting academic demands	53	3.8	11.3	34	30.2	18.9	1.9
2. Getting academic advice	53	1.9	15.1	39.6	30.2	11.3	1.9
3. Performing adequately in written assignments	53	-	9.4	37.7	39.6	13.2	-
4. Performing adequately in courses requiring mathematical skills	52	11.5	17.3	13.5	26.9	7.7	23.1
5. Understanding content and information presented in courses	53	-	7.5	15.1	41.5	35.8	-
6. Organizing my time to complete academic work	53	9.4	15.1	30.2	34.0	11.3	-
7. Making new friends with other students	53	7.5	13.2	24.5	34.0	18.9	1.9
8. Maintaining my Aboriginal identity	53	5.7	13.2	26.4	28.3	24.5	1.9
9. Becoming involved with campus activities	53	20.8	25.7	34.0	15.1	5.7	3.8
10. Feeling as if I belong to the university	53	17.0	18.9	26.4	28.3	7.5	1.9
11. Finding suitable, affordable housing	53	18.9	13.2	17.0	32.1	9.4	9.4
12. Finding my way around campus	52	5.8	3.8	5.8	36.5	44.2	3.8
13. Finding useful information and resources on careers and occupations	53	9.4	24.5	24.5	28.3	9.4	3.8
14. Balancing my academic and personal life	52	11.5	21.2	28.8	32.7	3.8	1.9
15. Other (specify	28	7.1	14.3	-	3.6	-	75

1= Not Very Successful; 5= Very Successful; N/A = Not Applicable

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Table 5: Respondents' rating of importance of various aspects of their current undergraduate program.

	N	(1) (%)	(2) (%)	(3) (%)	(4) (%)	(5) (%)	(6) (%)
1. Wanted to live close to home	50	6.0	4.0	20.0	14.0	14.0	42.0
2. Wanted to live away from home	50	4.0	2.0	16.0	10.0	14.0	54.0
3. Accessibility of the campus from my home	50	16.0	10.0	16.0	22.0	22.0	14.0
4. Offered financial assistance/scholarships	49	22.4	20.4	12.2	28.6	8.2	8.2
5. Specific career related program	50	8.0	12.0	16.0	36.0	24.0	4.0
6. University has a good reputation	50	-	8.0	18.0	28.0	44.0	2.0
7. Availability of Aboriginal program	50	8.0	6.0	14.0	34.0	30.0	8.0
8. Availability of Aboriginal courses	50	8.0	8.0	32.0	24.0	18.0	10.0
9. Aboriginal faculty at this institution	50	14.0	8.0	16.0	28.0	22.0	12.0
10. General faculty expertise	50	2.0	8.0	12.0	50.0	22.0	6.0
11. Size of university	50	2.0	4.0	32.0	44.0	22.0	8.0
12. Rich social life	50	12.0	8.0	28.0	18.0	22.0	12.0
13. Size of city/town	50	-	6.0	22.0	24.0	28.0	20.0
14. Availability of on-campus residence accommodations	49	16.3	8.2	12.2	8.2	10.2	44.9
15. Tuition fees	49	22.4	20.4	30.6	16.3	2.0	8.2
16. Parents wanted me to enrol here	50	4.0	-	2.0	10.0	4.0	80.0
17. Other family members currently attending here	50	4.0	-	2.0	4.0	6.0	84.0

1 = Not very important; 5 = Very important; 6=Not Applicable

Table 6: Respondents' participation in campus events during their undergraduate studies.

	Number	Percent
Attended an academic event like a conference or symposium	24	44.4
Participated in Aboriginal cultural activities on campus	24	44.4
Volunteering/participating in community service	22	40.7
Participating in club or intramural sports	16	29.6
Participate in community events or organizations (e.g. attended a local council meeting, served on a community committee)	13	24.1
Attended an athletic event	13	24.1
Participating in political activities (e.g. assisted with a campaign, attended a rally/fund raiser)	11	20.4
Participated in spiritual/religious activities on campus (e.g., worship, mediation, prayer)	10	18.5
Presented at an academic event like a conference or symposium	8	14.8
Served on a university committee with faculty/staff (e.g. search committee, awards committee, college/department advisory board)	7	13.0
Other: Fitness class through Rec Centre, None of the above, Participated in arts community on campus, Was in a play, Worked on campus	8	14.8

Participants were also asked about influences on their decision to enrol in their current undergraduate program. (Table 5.) The top five reasons students chose their institution were, in order: university has a good reputation (72%), general faculty expertise (72%), general size of university (66%), availability of Aboriginal program (64%), and specific career related program (60%). Fifty percent of respondents also indicated their choice was influenced by Aboriginal faculty present at the institution and another 32% felt that the availability of Aboriginal courses helped them to choose.

Table 6 presents the campus events in which Aboriginal undergraduate students who responded to this survey participated. The top three were: attended an academic event like a conference or symposium, participated in Aboriginal cultural activities on campus, and volunteered/participated in community service.

Those Interested in Going to Graduate School

In the survey, participants were asked whether or not they had explored, considered, or were applying to graduate school. Twenty-eight of the 54 respondents indicated “yes”. It should be noted that 64% of this group indicated they used the internet to find information about graduate studies programs, 50% relied on word of mouth from fellow students, family, or friends, 21% went to academic advisors at their institution, and 15% attended information sessions. The use of the internet and social relationships highlights the importance of having accessible information online and the important role mentors and relationships have in influencing a student’s consideration of graduate studies—reinforcing the importance of Pilot 1 and Pilot 2 in Phase II of this project. The following section describes what knowledge and awareness respondents had about graduate school.

Interestingly, 53% (n=15) of respondents did

not know what, if any, standardized tests were required to get into graduate school. This hints at the need for more thorough information and resources for students. Thirty-two percent felt that their programs did not require an entrance exam; those who knew of such requirements were considering professions like Law (14% knew to take the LSAT), or Medicine (7% knew to that the MCAT). However, 48% of the respondents who were planning to attend graduate school had identified professors or instructors who might provide reference letters. At the time of this study, only 3 of the 28 respondents who were interested in graduate school had actually applied; and 54% (N=14) indicated that they were applying to an institution other than the one where they were completing their undergraduate degree. Seven of these students were staying in their home province, while four were applying to areas outside their home province.

Of the eight students who addressed the item “Satisfaction regarding application to graduate studies”, two were not satisfied (25%) and four were neutral (50%) with the application process itself; and 25% were not satisfied with how the university handled their application (while 62% were neither satisfied or not satisfied).

For those who had already decided to pursue graduate studies, their most important reasons for choosing their program were general faculty expertise (88%); university had a good reputation (83%); specific career related program (80%); availability of Aboriginal program (80%); and offered financial assistance/scholarships (79%). (See Table 7.)

When asked, “who provides Aboriginal undergraduate students with advice about graduate school”, most respondents (54%) felt that fellow undergraduate students, faculty members or instructors (50%), or graduate students in the program they wanted to attend (36%) were the groups that would provide such advice. Least likely to provide advice (i.e., answered no they were

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Table 7: Reasons for choosing first graduate studies program.

	N	(1) (%)	(2) (%)	(3) (%)	(4) (%)	(5) (%)
a. Wanted to live close to home	25	28.0	-	20.0	12.0	40.0
b. Wanted to live away from home	22	68.2	4.5	13.6	-	13.6
c. Accessibility of the campus from my home	25	20.0	-	20.0	24.0	36.0
d. Offered financial assistance/scholarships	24	8.3	-	12.5	12.5	66.7
e. Specific career related program	25	4.0	4.0	12.0	12.0	68.0
f. University has a good reputation	23	8.7	-	8.7	30.4	52.2
g. Availability of Aboriginal program	25	-	8.0	12.0	24.0	56.0
h. Availability of Aboriginal courses	24	-	4.2	20.8	20.8	54.2
i. Aboriginal faculty at this institution	25	-	-	36.0	12.0	52.0
j. Aboriginal Elders to provide support and advice	23	4.3	4.3	21.7	13.0	56.5
k. Presence of an Aboriginal Students Association	24	-	12.5	33.3	16.7	37.5
l. General faculty expertise	24	-	-	12.5	33.3	54.2
m. Size of university	24	12.5	12.5	29.2	29.2	16.7
n. Rich social life	23	17.4	13	34.8	13	21.7
o. Size of city/town	24	25	4.2	16.7	29.2	25
p. Availability of on-campus accommodation	23	43.5	4.3	21.7	4.3	26.1
q. Availability of Family Housing	23	73.9	4.3	13	-	8.7
r. Availability of childcare services	23	87	4.3	-	-	8.7
s. Tuition fees	24	4.2	4.2	33.3	16.7	41.7
t. Parents wanted me to enrol here	22	86.4	-	4.5	4.5	4.5
u. Other family members currently attending here	22	86.4	-	4.5	4.5	4.5
v. Friends attending here	24	54.2	4.2	25	12.5	4.2
w. Advice from counsellors/teachers	22	18.2	-	31.8	31.8	18.2
x. Availability of public transport	24	25	4.2	16.7	12.5	41.7
y. Contact with students from the university	22	36.4	4.5	40.9	13.6	4.5
z. Computer facilities	22	27.3	13.6	27.3	9.1	22.7
aa. Opportunities for International work/study abroad	21	33.3	23.8	28.6	4.8	9.5
bb. Special needs services	21	52.4	23.8	9.5	-	14.3
cc. Other (specify)	6	100	-	-	-	-

1 = Not very important; 5 = Very important

Table 8: Information regarding financial assistance, bursaries, and scholarships.

	Yes (%)	No (%)	N/A (%)
Anticipates requiring financial assistance if accepted to a graduate program	91.7	8.3	-
Has been able to find adequate information regarding financial assistance for graduate studies	20.0	40.0	40.0
Aware of scholarship or bursary opportunities for graduate studies	24.0	56.0	20.0
Has applied to for scholarships or bursaries for graduate studies	8.0	60.0	32.0

not likely to provide advice) were local Chief and council (64.3%), student advising (53.6%), and other graduate students (46.0%). Table 9 below makes it clear that a strong majority of respondents (92%) anticipated requiring financial assistance if accepted into their graduate program. However, very few of these same students were aware of specific funding opportunities for graduate students or had begun applying for external funding. The need for increased awareness about funding options is noted in the resources developed for the SAGE Undergraduate pilots and presented in the aboriginaltransitions.ca portal.

This survey informed the kinds of workshops that were developed for each pilot (e.g., Mentorship, SAGE Undergraduate, and web portal). Therefore, the next series of questions asked those Aboriginal undergraduate students considering further studies what kinds of workshops they might attend to learn more about graduate school.

Table 9 shows their respective interest in a variety of workshops related to graduate school. There was strong interest in workshops pertaining to all aspects of writing, from writing a grant (96%) to writing research papers (92%) and proposals (92%). Respondents were also interested in how to do research for a literature review (71%) and how to write a literature review (70%). As for paid work experience while a graduate student, respondents favoured work with faculty members (92%) and teaching assistantships (83%). Seventy-four percent of respondents were interested in a week-long orientation to their graduate programs. This information is helpful in shaping graduate programs that not only recruit Aboriginal students but also support and retain them throughout their program.

Survey questions also asked whether respondents might participate in a peer mentoring program. Seventy-four percent indicated they would be likely/very likely to participate in a peer mentoring program. Participants were asked to

identify their interest in various components of such a program. Table 10 shows that the top three components in which respondents were interested/very interested were: hearing faculty discuss expectations for research work (91%); hearing faculty discuss expectations for graduate work (87%); and participation in research project with faculty member (82%). In response to these findings, Pilots 1 and 2 included direct interaction with faculty members who worked one-on-one with a graduate student in a research mentorship (RA) project or attended the SAGE U sessions to answer students' questions or were videotaped about research topics and expectations for graduate study/research.

Very few of those interested in attending graduate school indicated that they had participated in research projects relevant to their future studies, although they were aware that their program of choice would require a major paper or thesis. This finding along with supporting research from the literature review conducted in Phase I of the AT: U2G project informed the development of Pilot 1: Research Awareness, Learning, and Mentoring.

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Table 9: Respondent’s interest in workshops related to graduate school.

	N	(1) (%)	(2) (%)	(3) (%)	(4) (%)	(5) (%)
a. Grant proposal writing	23	-	4.3	-	30.4	65.2
b. Research proposal writing	24	-	8.3	-	29.2	62.5
c. Research for literature review	24	4.2	12.5	12.5	29.2	41.7
d. Writing literature review	23	4.3	8.7	17.4	26.1	43.5
e. Research paper writing skills	24	-	4.2	4.2	33.3	58.3
f. Paid work with a faculty member to gain research experience	24	8.3	-	-	16.7	75.0
g. Paid teaching assistantship	24	12.5	4.2	-	20.8	62.5
h. One week orientation to your chosen program	23	8.7	4.3	13.0	26.1	47.8

1 = Not very interested; 5 = Very interested

Table 10: Various aspects of a peer mentoring program that interested respondents.

	N	(1) (%)	(2) (%)	(3) (%)	(4) (%)	(5) (%)
a. Regularly scheduled face-to-face meetings	23	-	4.3	13	47.8	34.8
b. Online chat with peers	23	17.4	13.0	17.4	34.8	17.4
c. Sharing stories about graduate work with other students	23	4.3	4.3	21.7	43.5	26.1
d. Hearing faculty discuss expectations for graduate work	23	-	4.3	8.7	52.2	34.8
e. Hearing faculty discuss expectations for research work	22	-	4.5	4.5	54.5	36.4
f. Participating in a research project with a faculty member	22	4.5	4.5	9.1	36.4	45.5
g. Sharing experiences with peers	23	-	4.3	17.4	39.1	39.1

1 = Not very interested; 5 = Very interested

Pilot 1: Relationships - Research Awareness, Learning, and Mentoring

The development of Pilot 1 was informed by findings from Phase I of AT:U2G and the half-day symposium held in November 2009 with faculty members who were nominated by Aboriginal graduate students as good mentors. Pilot 1 aimed to increase research awareness and learning, and to provide mentoring opportunities for Aboriginal undergraduate students (and some graduate students) to work with faculty members as research assistants (RAs). As a result, as discussed earlier in this report, 10 research assistantships were established with 8 faculty members from UBC, SFU, and UVic. The evaluation of Pilot 1 occurred through individual interviews and group/symposium reflections of undergraduate student mentees, and reflective interviews with faculty members who participated in the project.

The half-day faculty symposium provided the research team with invaluable insight about how to structure Pilot 1. The participants were clear that engaging in research not only provided important skill development for students, it also helped the students better understand research processes and the kinds of work done by faculty members, and provided early exposure to research that helps inform their decision-making process about their own graduate trajectory.

Mentees were asked to keep a reflective journal of their experiences as research assistants. An excerpt from an undergraduate RA mentee's journal demonstrates that this student not only gained valuable skill development but also recognized the importance of developing connections, independence, and confidence that is culturally relevant and values the student.

My experience as a research assistant within this team has been rewarding not only because I have learned some technical skills and how to use a survey builder, but also through the relationships of this mentorship and because of the content

and purpose of the survey. As an undergraduate student, I am keen to learn about intergenerational Aboriginal learning processes. Working with [my mentors] was inspiring.... They were instrumental in my success as they offered guidance throughout all of my mentorship, while giving me ample space for independence. I have now learned how these relationships are key in graduate studies; working with leaders who are interested in helping students develop their own ideas is admirable and refreshing. (RA mentee)

For some students, being an RA led to further opportunities (e.g., a shared publication and conference presentation with their mentor or an offer of support in applying to graduate school). One research assistant had the experience of guest lecturing to undergraduate students about her research. As her mentor noted: "her talk was extremely well received by the 60+ students, and ... especially by Indigenous students in the class who saw their own possibilities for future careers in biology and ethnoecology" (University Faculty Mentor). This RA also had an opportunity to co-present with her mentor at a community meeting and to present a poster at a conference. In addition, the RA attended consultation meetings with local community agencies; provided research on resources to be published for use by an Aboriginal community-based Education department; and co-authored a manuscript for publication.

The mentor of the above student stated that she also learned from this project: "I learned that an 'apprenticeship' approach, working alongside the student, introducing her to people who will help her in her career, and jointly participating in conferences and other events is a great way to support the student." Similarly, other RA mentees not only experienced how to do research but were also active in other aspects of research (e.g., conference presentations). A mentor commented:

[My mentee] is a very talented, highly skilled and well-prepared [Aboriginal] student who did not seem to realize how extraordinary she is and how ideally suited she is for graduate study. While there were practical skills that she honed (library research, leading discussions, giving a presentation, proposal writing) what I think was the most important skill was to demonstrate the importance of networking. When she attended the publication conference with me in Winnipeg she easily held her own among the other professionals in the field and her natural social abilities enabled her to mingle in many different conversations. I encouraged her to ask direct questions about other Indigenous programs in order to determine which program would be the best fit for her. Not only did she impress my colleagues in Indigenous [discipline] but she also got a sense of the personalities of different programs and different people. (University Faculty Mentor)

Another RA mentee was also given opportunity to build on her skills and present at a conference:

Working as an RA for me gave her the opportunity to co-write a conference paper proposal, conduct primary research (she produced a bibliography of local Indigenous hip hop) as well as review a recent dissertation on the subject, which is in early stages of publication. While she was able to hone her skills in research and report writing, the main benefit to her was insight into the research, conference presentation and publication process. (University Faculty Mentor)

In reflecting on her experience as a faculty mentor, the above Mentor stated “This experi-

ence emphasized to me the need for Indigenous students not only to get the skills needed to conduct research but also, and more importantly, to be inspired to imagine themselves in the role as researcher.” In terms of the recommendations the mentees’ made about their experience, one RA stated:

Although I did not apply for an RA position until my last term of studies, I would encourage students to pursue such a position earlier in their undergraduate studies. Whether considering graduate studies or not, this type of employment is valuable because it extends learning into a professional and academic workplace. It has furthered my knowledge about options for my future, ways to connect to community, taught me how we can shape our educational experience and shown me how relationships are valued within post-secondary institutions. (RA Mentee)

The benefits of the faculty-student research mentorship clearly extended beyond the anticipated benefits. Longer term RAs of one year rather than one semester and longitudinal tracking to explore, for example, where the RAs end up in their education and career trajectories, would be important considerations in developing a mentor-mentee program on a provincial basis.

Pilot 2: Access - SAGE Undergraduate Provincial Network

The SAGE Undergraduate sessions were evaluated in a number of ways: 1) each SAGE Undergraduate pod assistant submitted meeting summaries to the provincial coordinator; 2) SAGE Undergraduate pod assistants maintained reflective journals of their own experiences as assistant site coordinators; 3) a meeting and RA symposium was held in March 2010 with the SAGE Undergraduate pod assistants, the provin-

cial SAGE Undergraduate coordinator, and project members to reflect upon the SAGE U sessions; 4) at each SAGE Undergraduate workshop, students were asked to complete an evaluation of the workshop materials; 5) ongoing feedback was received from students and SAGE Undergraduate pod assistants; and 6) the principal investigators kept reflective journals.

The workshops were organized around themes and each had a variety of resources (in the form of handouts and binders) available to the students. Table 2, presented earlier in this report, provides an overview of each workshop and the titles of the resource sheets developed. The graduate research assistants developed these resources (e.g., information sheet, checklists, and graduate students' stories) and the topics for each resource emerged from the research conducted in Phase I of the AT: U2G project. See Appendix 7, *Starting a SAGE U Pod* developed for university staff and faculty reference.

Reflections from Pod Assistants and the Provincial Coordinator

Based upon the reflective journals, interviews, and focus group discussion, the five SAGE U Pod Assistants and the Provincial SAGE U Coordinator felt that the Aboriginal undergraduate students who participated in the SAGE U pilot indicated very positive responses to the overall structure and content of the workshop materials. Students valued the interactions with Aboriginal graduate students and faculty mentors, and appreciated the sense of community with fellow Aboriginal undergraduate students. These findings are illustrated by quotes taken from the journals and reports written by the site pod assistants and the SAGE U provincial coordinator.

Most of the workshop material was generally easy to understand. The presence of Indigenous faculty members to answer students' questions about the transition topics and materials contributed greatly to students' positive feedback.

Participants commented on various things that they felt were the most memorable which included the information that was provided in the binders, summaries of what information was included, and the opportunity of a question and answer period. However, students expressed a genuine appreciation of the camaraderie and support for them as they contemplate graduate studies and the fact that [the Indigenous faculty mentor] was there was greatly appreciated. They also were very pleased that they always had a lunch provided. (Pod Assistant, Journal, April 2010)

In general, most students understood the workshop materials that were discussed at all meetings. The PAs offered a number of reasons why they felt students understood the materials with the number one reason being that conversation focused on the session's theme with active dialogue occurring between facilitators and students. They also felt that the take home materials were also useful for students to review at a later time. (Provincial Coordinator, Analysis & Reflection, May 2010)

The stories written by the Aboriginal graduate students were particularly appreciated as indicated by the following quotes:

One student in particular felt very connected to the graduate story used as an example [in one SAGE U session]. (Pod Assistant, Journal, March 2010)

They really appreciated having the stories provided – it was helpful to know that they weren't alone in their journeys of trying to make different decisions about their academic futures! (Pod Assistant, Journal, April 2010)

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Several Pod Assistants also noted the importance of the graduate student stories because they felt students could relate to them at a personal level and were great instructional tools. (Provincial Coordinator, Analysis & Reflection, May 2010)

The opportunity to meet and learn from Aboriginal graduate students who attended various SAGE U sessions had a very positive impact.

What made this such a success in my mind was the number of graduate students who were willing to come out and share their successes and trials with the undergraduate students. The undergraduate students were able to build connections and begin networking with graduate students and some faculty members as well. There was plenty of leadership and mentoring going on at each one of these meetings. (Pod Assistant, Summary Report, May 2010)

Another important outcome of SAGE U was developing a learning and social community with like-minded students.

I was really pleased to see that the students who attended this session had attended previous ones as well, so I believe this can speak to the fact that the students are finding such meetings interesting and useful as they consider graduate school. (Pod Assistant, Journal, Feb 2010)

Another thing I could comment on as being a kind of 'challenge' is the fact that these sessions are over. We have had a strong momentum and interest in SAGE U [here] and I am hoping there might be some way to keep these discussions going and provide space for the undergraduates to come together. (Pod Assistant, Journal, April 2010)

The major challenge for the SAGE U pilot was establishing and maintaining a student participant base. The five workshops of one-two hours were scheduled at times when students were thought to be available, such as over the lunch hour. Approximately 80 students participated in the SAGE U sessions, some for just one session and others for the majority of sessions. Exams, course assignments, and class schedule conflicts were some common reasons for low student turnout. One pod assistant noted that previous to SAGE U little interaction occurred between graduate and undergraduate students, which made it more difficult for undergraduate students to appreciate that Aboriginal people are enrolled in graduate programs in that individual's university. One site in particular had difficulty attracting students so the organizing group revised the promotional material to clarify the purpose of SAGE U, and changed the format from group workshops to individual consultations. The following excerpt from a pod assistant's journal describes how the initial communications effort used to attract Aboriginal undergraduate students was revised in order to increase student participation.

The first SAGE U meeting was scheduled today at [university]. When I arrived [the faculty mentor, SAGE U provincial Coordinator and the university contact] were there. Unfortunately, no students showed up and the session turned into a strategy session to promote future meetings. ... In preparation for this meeting, I talked with students at the Aboriginal student centre and the Aboriginal student association meeting. I also sent out various emails promoting SAGE U. [The Aboriginal Coordinator] sent out SAGE U reminders. I put up posters around campus, in strategic locations where Aboriginal students congregate. It was advertised on our television system on campus.

We decided to change the advertisements to the full word undergraduate as some students were unaware what the U stood for and that undergraduates could attend these meetings. We discussed ways to explain SAGE U so that it could be conveyed in emails in a more clear and concise fashion. Furthermore, it was decided to make 'free lunch' ten times larger on the actual notice to make it more enticing and visible to students... there was discussion [about] the idea of me going out to an upcoming potluck that was being put on by the Aboriginal student association so that I could speak with the students and get some feedback on SAGE U. It was decided to hold future meetings at the Aboriginal student centre as having meetings away from the center was not producing results. (Pod Assistant Journal, January 2010)

Topics of low relevance may have discouraged students from attending some sessions. Discussions about research and research assistantships, for example, are less interesting to undergrads who are not contemplating graduate studies or who are not exposed to research during their courses. These students are less likely to understand the benefits of assistantships, such as building skills and knowledge and establishing a mentor relationship with faculty members.

Feedback from workshop evaluation forms

The written evaluations of each workshop provided insight into what the students were taking away from each session, although the number of forms submitted after each workshop was modest (a total of 26 forms received at the time of this report). The evaluation forms were not always given to students at SAGE Undergraduate meetings and students did not always return them. So although the attendance at meetings was high, the final number of collected feedback forms was

low: Workshop #1 (N=4); Workshop #2 (N=11); Workshop #3 (N=6); Workshop #4 (N=4); and Workshop #5 (N=1).

Both faculty researchers associated with this project observed that students spent a lot of time in the meetings providing feedback and suggestions verbally, possibly making the written feedback forms appear unnecessary. Nonetheless, the forms did provide concrete feedback on students' thoughts during the workshops. In the written evaluation forms, as in verbal feedback, students commented that they valued having Aboriginal graduate students and faculty members attend to share their experiences and knowledge, build relationships, and get to know one another. For many students, it was their first time meeting each other although they attended the same campus.

The evaluation forms (See Appendix 4) asked participants to identify three main things they learned from the workshop, to suggest additional information they would have liked to have learned, and to provide other suggestions or comments. The following provides a summary of the main themes emerging across the workshops based on the 26 evaluation forms received.

Three main things learned from workshop:

1) Understanding processes (applying, researching, information about...how to...) (33 comments)

Whether in thinking about applying to graduate school or completing graduate studies, students communicated in their feedback forms that simply understanding the processes and the options available to them was an important take-away. Several students learned about the "steps to consider before applying" (Workshop #1; VIU) and the process of applying to graduate school. For example, one student stated that he/she learned the "first steps in application process" (Workshop #5; SFU).

Six students also noted that they also had a broader awareness of the options for going to graduate school within British Columbia.

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Masters' [sic] programs are offered at many institutions throughout BC (Workshop #2; UBC)

Learned about the masters' [sic] of education (encouraged me to want to eventually do it) (Workshop #3; SFU)

Choices for universities to attend for your area of graduate work (Workshop #2; VIU)

Variety of ways to apply for funding, support systems, and connections (Workshop #4; UNBC)

Others indicated that they learned that “Research is important to learn about graduate programs (e.g., teachers, mentors, focus areas/emphasis)” (Workshop #1; VIU). Three students specifically mentioned learning how to construct a letter of intent or learning what a letter of intent looked like. As one student said “plan ahead, while it may be straight forward, planning systematically in advance helps” (Workshop #1; VIU). Other comments included learning more about undergraduate program options and the process of advancing to a doctoral program.

The second theme of mentorship was also clearly an important lesson students took away from the workshops.

2) Understanding the benefit of mentoring (24 comments)

Students saw student-to-student mentoring and student to faculty mentoring as important to succeeding in graduate school. The feedback from students told us that the workshops helped broaden their understanding of how one actually gets a mentor, and emphasized the benefits of learning with graduate students about graduate school.

Ways to get a mentor (e.g., email, ask to have meetings) (Workshop #2; UBC)

Learn together with other graduate students (Workshop #1; VIU)

Students also commented that hearing from other students, their stories and voices, was important in creating a shared understanding connected to their lived experiences as Aboriginal students. As one student stated, “Insightful stories – relates to our experiences and challenges” (Workshop #2; UBC). Other comments also spoke to the importance of understanding that individual students were not alone and that mentoring is an important investment.

That there is already Aboriginal representation (already in graduate studies) and in undergraduate (Workshop #1; VIU)

The SAGE is a support group. I did not know what it was before. This group mentors students to help each other. (Workshop #3; UBC)

Networking and making connections, creating and investing in friendship, support, and to have a mentor (Workshop #2; UBC)

Many people, graduates, PhD's share insights from past experiences- very helpful (Workshop #3; UBC)

Choosing your mentoring committee for graduate studies (Workshop #2; VIU)

Other students commented specifically on student-faculty mentorships. One student learned that a student should “Introduce yourself to your professor and get to know your professor- build a relationship” (Workshop #2; UBC) while another UBC student at the same workshop stated, “Making connections with faculty can be a key strategy in boosting the quality of your application.” According to the evaluation forms, many students who attended these workshops came

to understand the importance of having a good relationship with faculty members and the value of having contact with faculty whom they may wish to work with as graduate students or ask to provide letters of support in their applications to graduate school.

Another important lesson under the theme of mentorship that a few students mentioned was the importance of family and support structures in the graduate process.

That support systems are very important (Workshop #2; UBC)

Maintain cohorts, familial relationship, support workers that believe in you (Workshop #3; VIU)

Very glad I was able to attend and gather info; it will make life a lot easier. (Workshop #4, UNBC)

These last three comments also connect to the personal reminders and lessons participants took away from the workshops.

3) Valuing personal support & sense of community (emotional; personal feelings) (19 comments)

Students clearly felt supported and sometimes even inspired by conversations during the workshop, as expressed by one student who stated “that there is hope!” (Workshop #1, VIU). Another student stated s/he learned the “Importance of education- reaching goals” (Workshop #2; UBC), while, another from UNBC stated that during the meetings it “was very easy to listen and ask questions”.

My anxiety is decreasing towards applying to graduate school (Workshop #1; VIU)

I'm not alone my fears are experienced by others (I loved the story of Jordan) (Workshop #2; VIU)

We are all significant with Indigenous perspectives, no matter what we choose to do (Workshop #3; VIU)

Students realized they were not alone, that their anxieties and fears were shared amongst others; a few students even learned that Aboriginal graduate students were just like them!

I learned the graduate students need help as well. (Workshop #3; UBC)

I assumed graduate student were elite independent students working successfully alone. (Workshop #3; UBC)

Reflections from Faculty Researchers

The Indigenous faculty researchers and mentors who facilitated these workshops also recorded their observations of the meetings and identified areas of strength and areas that could be improved in subsequent meetings. The SAGE pod assistants were invaluable to the faculty researchers as the pod assistants scheduled the meetings, booked space, ordered food, and most importantly, publicized SAGE Undergraduate and the meetings at their respective campuses. Sometimes, the pod assistants presented the session material to the participants.

Dr. Pidgeon facilitated SAGE Undergraduate meetings at SFU, UBC O, and UNBC, where the composition of students, faculty, and staff at each meeting varied. Pidgeon noted the ease with which students came and left meetings according to their needs. She also observed the development of supportive relationships among the faculty researcher, SAGE Undergraduate pod members/coordinators, the faculty and staff contacts at each institution, and the students themselves. Over time, the value of the SAGE U meetings came from the students themselves who actively participated in the meetings and formed bonds with each other (Aboriginal undergraduate and graduate students), faculty, and staff as illustrated in this excerpt from Dr. Pidgeon's reflection on

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the first meeting at UBC O

[The pod assistant] was very organized and had the food, sign up sheets, and posters around campus. She greeted people as they came into the space (arts atrium). We had a total of 23 people...the majority of the students were Indigenous, there were one or two non-Aboriginal students who came, as they are part of the First Nations minor/major at [university] whose classes were invited to come. There was an ebb and flow of people throughout the session. We ate first and then did an opening prayer. We did a round of introductions and when a new person joined the circle we gave them a chance to introduce themselves as well. I went over the SAGE U project, provided them with the handouts (the pod assistant had them already photocopied for everyone). We went through the first sheet: what is graduate school.

Students seemed to enjoy having a detailed conversation about their thoughts, reflections, and different experiences. I had them read silently through the stories, although I didn't specify which story to read - students picked up on some of the threads in the stories as part of their questions/discussions.

I invited the students to send their feedback/questions to either [the pod assistant] or myself. We did not do a formal session evaluation but will pick up this in our next sessions. I think that everyone was happy with the turnout and were impressed that so many students took the time to come. I emphasized throughout the meeting

the importance of relationship building that happens in SAGE U.

The SAGE undergraduate sessions hosted by Dr. Archibald were held at UBC V and VIU. Archibald also felt that the SAGE U sessions provided an important forum for Aboriginal undergraduate students to ask questions and to share their fears and excitement about graduate school. The journal excerpt below shows how workshop materials were used and presents her thoughts about the need to have both pertinent material and a safe space in which to create dialogue, to learn, and to build a sense of community.

***AT:U2G, [University], Dec 1, 2009, Workshop 2
12 participants, with 10 students, 1 Pod
Assistant, 1 Elder.***

The Elder welcomes us and opens with a prayer. She shares some encouraging words to the students about how important they are. We have lunch. The room we have has a great view of the surrounding environment and it is very pleasant.

In this second workshop, we went over considerations for selecting graduate programs, reviewed admissions steps and read/discussed three stories that contained experiences of students preparing for graduate school, being denied admission at first and then with persistence and preparation being accepted the following year(s), or putting off applying to graduate school for a few years.

The program sheet had the web sites of all the graduate programs at BC universities. It was easy to use. We used various examples of programs, such as Master of Business Administration, Political Science, Science, and

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Education drawing upon the students' interests of programs in which they are currently enrolled as undergraduates to see the progression from their undergraduate degree to graduate degree. The program tool is divided into regional areas of the province and then each university's grad programs are listed using their web site.

We looked at program descriptions and admission requirements. The students remarked that having all this info in one "place" would save time and lessen confusion in trying to find applicable information. Trying to find some of these graduate programs on one university web site can be confusing since one may not know where to look or even know that a particular grad program exists. Having the grad programs listed one after the other may help potential grad students think about types of programs that they had not originally thought about.

The students were grouped into 3's, each group was given one story to read so those in one group read the same story. They were given time to read the story individually and to discuss it with each other. What did they learn from the grad students' experience? What did they appreciate? What questions did they have about the story? We then had a whole group discussion with each group sharing aspects of their discussion. The stories generated lots of interest and other questions that related to some aspect of the story.

This group of students has lots of questions and perspectives about the topic

of graduate studies. The discussion at times feels fast and furious. They are not afraid to question such things as why Aboriginal students have such a difficult time being accepted into some grad programs, why would faculty members help them, or how can they consider leaving their homes/communities to take a graduate program located in a large city or even across the country? A couple of the students are seriously preparing for graduate studies and have an idea of the type of graduate program they want to take. Others have some interest, but not until they have worked a few years after completing their undergrad degrees, and some have not thought about graduate studies at all.

After the session, I pondered the value of SAGE U. So far the experiences at both SAGE U sites for which I am the Indigenous faculty mentor have reinforced the importance of having a faculty member familiar with all the phases of graduate studies available to answer participants' questions and to be able to guide their process of thinking about graduate studies so that they can begin to do some longer term planning. The materials that we develop certainly provide some key information and the personal stories add a richer human dimension. The interaction that happens amongst students in the group and between myself and the students makes the topics come to life and makes graduate studies seem more doable.

Pilot 3: Technology Indigenous Graduate Web Portal:

www.aboriginaltransitions.ca

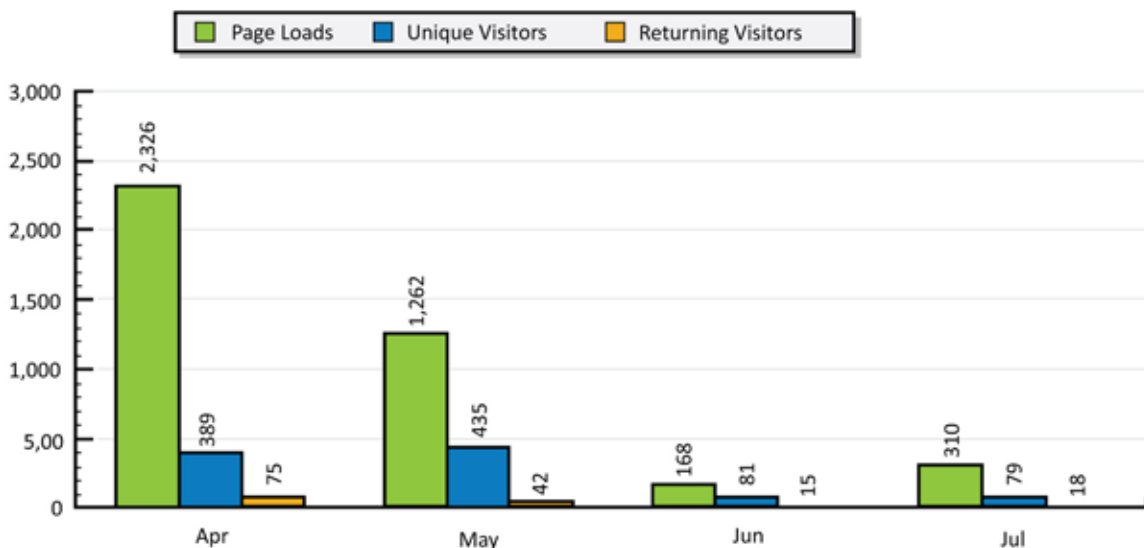
The AT:U2G web portal is the culminating interactive tool developed as a result of this two-year project. The aim of the portal is to provide relevant, timely, and coherent information regarding the various dimensions of graduate school to every Aboriginal undergraduate student in the Province of British Columbia. The portal contains video testimonials of current Aboriginal graduate students and Aboriginal faculty members, and houses the resources developed as part of the SAGE Undergraduate workshops. The web page data are organized according to each phase of the graduate study process (access, admissions, first year experiences, and completion). The portal also contains relevant resources and links to information about each phase of graduate study. In addition, there is a community social networking forum that allows undergraduate students and graduate students to engage in blogging, share dialogue through interactive chat, and also simply to connect with one another.

The earlier section of this report on IMPLEMENTATION described in detail the development of the [aboriginaltransitions.ca](http://www.aboriginaltransitions.ca) web

portal as informed by the evaluations of Pilots 1 and 2. As this development process was ongoing, the faculty researchers Dr. Archibald and Dr. Pidgeon demonstrated the portal’s layout and content only at the last two sessions of the SAGE Undergraduate meetings. At first, SAGE U participants were invited to provide feedback through an online survey tool embedded within the web portal and were offered a small gift of appreciation for completing this survey (See Appendix 5 for letter of invitation, online survey tool, and consent form). Subsequently, more students were invited to participate through wider distribution of information by SAGE pod assistants and others. An official launch of the portal took place in October 2010 at these sites: VIU, SFU, UBC V, UBC O, TRU, & UNBC.

The web portal traffic was monitored through a web counter at <http://www.mystatcounter.com> from April 2010 to July 2010, yielding the data displayed in Figure 3. It shows the number of times the web site was loaded, the number of unique visitors, and the number of returning visitors to the site. As expected, April and May had the highest traffic since these were the two months when the research team was actively recruiting students (SAGE Undergraduate participants,

Figure 3: Web portal tracking information



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SAGE Graduate members, and research assistants for the AT:U2G project) to evaluate and provide feedback on the portal. As well, Aboriginal undergraduate students were given a small gift (\$20 gift card) to encourage feedback, boosting traffic to the site during April and May. These months also coincide with the end of the academic semester, before the months of June and July when lower traffic would be expected. The fact that 389 and 435 users visited the site in April and May, respectively, of whom 75 and 42 were repeat users (in the same month), is a testament to the strong interest and relevance of the portal to the users. Not all visitors to the site provided feedback via the online form, but the views of those who did are summarized in the next section.

Twenty-three participants completed the online feedback survey. Although invitations were distributed widely the response rate was lower than expected. However, one must realize that the primary target audience of this survey was the Aboriginal student who actually attended the SAGE Undergraduate workshops and the Aboriginal undergraduate student attending our partnering institutions. This low response rate was also influenced by the time in the academic year when students were asked to give feedback on the site. Most of the respondents indicated that they had learned about the website survey through the AT:U2G project or the SAGE Undergraduate workshop meetings.

Overall first impressions of the website were positive. Most described the site as user friendly, pleasing to the eye, professional, informative, and containing relevant resources for Aboriginal students pursuing graduate studies.

The site is very pleasing to the eye and easy to navigate.

What a fabulous website, I can't wait to begin using the resources that are available.

Excellent website, very useful and valuable as a tool to help with decision making for future in post secondary studies.

Table 12 presents how survey participants rated the accessibility of the website, which further supports the feedback received in the open ended comments and during the SAGE Undergraduate presentations. For example, 100% of survey respondents who answered this question felt that the look and feel of the website was excellent or good. Similarly 95.5% of participants thought the resources were excellent or good, and 94.7% liked the checklists. Overall, 99% of respondents felt that the web portal content was useful.

The ADMISSIONS page of the website was equally highly rated by the participants, with approximately 95% feeling the page was easy to

Table 11: Participants' evaluation on the ACCESSIBILITY of the Web Portal

	N	Excellent (%)	Good (%)	Fair (%)	Poor (%)	Don't know (%)
a. Look and feel	21	57.1	42.9	0.0	0.0	0.0
b. Resources	22	68.2	27.3	4.5	0.0	0.0
c. Checklists	19	68.4	26.3	0.0	5.3	0.0
d. Timeline generator	21	57.1	33.3	0.0	4.8	4.8
e. Budget tool	21	47.6	38.1	9.5	0.0	4.8
f. Content usefulness	22	63.6	36.4	0.0	0.0	0.0

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use; 90% liked the look and feel of the web page; 90% also appreciated the resources, the sample letters, and timeline generator. Overall, 90% of the participants found the content useful on this particular webpage.

Some open-ended responses highlight the overall perception of the site, from ratings of perfection to a recommendation to liven it up and have more examples, like sample letters of intent.

From attending the meetings and everything, I feel that this website is perfect.

I think it needs to be livened up. Something about the look is slightly boring. Maybe different font? I'm not sure what you could do. The info is good though.

All looks good and possibly a little more variety in regards to sample letters of intent.

Participants also rated the FIRST YEAR page of the website highly (Table 13); 95% of them felt the site was easy to use and liked the resources. Approximately 90% liked the time line generator and found the content useful. Slightly fewer participants, 80% (albeit still a high rating) felt the look and feel of the website was excellent or good, while only 14% felt it was fair.

The time line generator looks like it could be useful but it seems like it is just thrown in there. Maybe there could be more of a description of what the timelines are for.

I love the pdf forms that are on the page!! Great tips and especially the scholarships pdf.

I'd say that there is too much text by showing the URL addresses. There is a way to click on it and it will link, rather than show all the addresses. This is just a suggestion as there is a lot of text.

Table 12: Participants' rating of the ADMISSIONS page of the website

	N	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Don't know
a. Easy to use	21	66.7	28.6	0.0	0.0	4.8
b. Look and feel	21	47.6	42.9	4.8	0.0	4.8
c. Resources	20	65.0	25.0	5.0	0.0	5.0
d. Sample letters	21	52.4	38.1	4.8	0.0	4.8
e. Timeline generator	21	61.9	28.6	4.8	0.0	4.8
f. Content usefulness	21	66.7	23.8	4.8	0.0	4.8

Table 13: Participants' rating of the FIRST YEAR page of the website

	N	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Don't know
a. Easy to use	21	47.6	47.6	0.0	0.0	4.8
b. Look and feel	21	42.9	38.1	14.3	0.0	4.8
c. Resources	21	61.9	33.3	0.0	0.0	5.0
d. Timeline generator	21	33.3	57.1	4.8	0.0	4.8
e. Content usefulness	21	57.1	38.1	0.0	0.0	4.8

Table 14: Participants’ rating of the components of the COMPLETION page of the web portal.

	N	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Don't know
a. Easy to use	20	45.0	45.0	0.0	0.0	10.0
b. Look and feel	20	60.0	30.0	0.0	0.0	10.0
c. Resources	20	65.0	25.0	0.0	0.0	10.0
d. Research challenge stories	20	60.0	30.0	0.0	0.0	10.0
e. Content usefulness	20	65.0	25.0	0.0	0.0	10.0

Similarly, visitors to the web site considered the COMPLETION page of the portal to be excellent or good (Table 14). Designed to discuss the experiences of finishing a graduate program and the supports available to do so, the page was deemed easy to use (90%) and with a good look and feel (90%). It provided relevant resources (90%), meaningful research challenge stories (90%), and useful content overall (90%).

Of the participants (N=20), the majority (90%) felt that the MENTORSHIP and the SAGE Undergraduate pages were both excellent or good. At the time of the data collection, these pages had very little content outside of information related to the Pilots. Participants could only comment on information presented, but nonetheless found this limited resource very helpful and suggested more.

I am a strong believer in mentoring so I was so pleased to see this on the site and a program that involves students and faculty - excellent.

I think that there could have been actual stories from people about mentoring. Things such as struggles, successes and just things that would be recommended.

I like the information available on the page. I feel that there could be more information. Links or PDF documents for more information or how to receive mentoring.

Used testimonials from people who attended these meetings. Also regarding the video, probably would have wanted to start the video talking about SAGE U instead of talking about it 2:30 minutes into the clip.

The video is great.

Participants were specifically asked about the video content of the website. Ninety-five percent of participants felt that the website was easy to use and liked the look and feel of the videos, and 90% of participants rated the content as useful.

Very useful information, very great to hear about the studies that are being done by the Aboriginal graduate programs.

The human element is really important. It's encouraging to see others achieving their goals.

The STUDENT HIGHLIGHT page also showed the importance of the human connection as students responded positively to other students' experiences (Table 15). Ninety percent felt the page was easy to use as were the linked resource files. Ninety percent valued the overall content as useful.

Eighty-five percent liked the graduate student links and 90% of participants valued the graduate student stories. Eighty percent of participants felt the budget tool was excellent or good and 90 percent indicated content usefulness was excellent or good.

Table 15: Participants' rating of the STUDENT HIGHLIGHT page of the web portal.

	N	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Don't know
a. Easy to use	20	50.0	40.0	0.0	0.0	10.0
b. Resources	20	70.0	20.0	0.0	0.0	10.0
c. Grad student link	20	55.0	30.0	0.0	0.0	15.0
d. Grad student stories	20	65.0	25.0	0.0	0.0	10.0
e. Budget tool	20	50.0	30.0	10.0	0.0	10.0
f. Content usefulness	20	65.0	25.0	0.0	0.0	10.0

Table 16: Participants' rating of the COMMUNITY FORUM page of the web portal.

	N	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Don't know
a. Easy to use	21	42.9	33.3	9.5	0.0	14.3
b. Resources	21	52.4	28.6	4.8	0.0	14.3
c. Content usefulness	21	47.6	28.6	4.8	0.0	19.0

The community forum was still under development at the time of evaluation; despite its beginning stages, participants did feel that it was easy to use (76%), the resources were helpful (81%), and the content was useful (76%) (Table 16).

However, respondents also made several suggestions to improve the website. They indicated that the home page, while respectful of Indigenous knowledge and providing access to detailed resources, was less than ideal in communicating the intention of the site. Other technologies, they suggested, could be utilized to make the home page more interactive and more explicit about what else could be found on the portal.

I like the tab format; perhaps a one-page map would be good

It has a nice aesthetic feel. However, I think it could have more colour.

Other electronic resources suggested for inclusion on the website were: examples of First Nations theses and research proposals, a testimonial page, success stories of graduate students in various programs, greater variety of letters of intent, and more explanation about the purpose of the timeline generator and how to use it. Further, the web site could include information on how to

network and how to approach professors to learn how they became professors and experts in their field.

Respondents to the survey also wanted to see additional stories on the site, including stories from Indigenous professors about students, more stories from undergraduates, and stories from graduates' family members sharing how graduate studies have impacted the family. The stories are mentioned several times as particularly important, especially when applying for graduate studies. Respondents advised: continue building on them. Similarly, another respondent asked for more stories and videos. Several would like to see more graduate programs or program options listed, which would be useful for those who prefer to consider many alternatives. Another would like to read statistics. Finally, respondents noted that there is no information about day care nor about support for mature students, single parents, or families.

Final suggestions for the AT: U2G web portal included: provide targeted information for students continuing from a specific program, such as UBC's Native Indian Teacher Education Program (NITEP); continue building on website and add more stories, tips, and resources; include information that seems obvious, such as noting

that the webpage is for post-secondary education; offer tutorials for those who are just beginning to use computers; address a range of audience and motivation; include step by step instructions when necessary; add more colour; and provide a tutorial session each semester for instruction in using the portal as well as to publicize the site.

Two institutional partners, Thompson Rivers University (TRU) and the University of Victoria (UVic), participated voluntarily in focus groups to demonstrate the web portal. On April 27, 2010, Dr. Jo-ann Archibald and a research assistant presented the AT:U2G Web portal at Thompson Rivers University in Kamloops to fifteen participants from diverse professions and areas of study. All were keen to pursue graduate studies either in a master's or doctoral program. Dr. Archibald introduced the session by asking what "burning questions" participants have regarding graduate studies. Participants replied with several questions that were directly addressed by the resources within the web portal; these questions directed the information session and informed revisions to the portal. In particular, participants were interested in questions about WHERE TO BEGIN (e.g., why go to graduate school; what kind of graduate school); PROCESS/REQUIREMENTS (e.g., entrance process, where to get help, program requirements); SUPPORT (e.g., how to find support, SAGE, and opportunities for partnerships); PART TIME or DISTANCE (e.g., how to pursue studies and remain in workforce; online studies options); and FUNDS (e.g., access to grants and funding for graduate students). Following the presentation, there were a few more questions such as:

- What are the minimum requirements for entry into a program?
- How many students will mentor/professor/faculty member/supervisor admit at a time?
- When do I need a PhD Western Deans' agreement?

Participants seemed receptive to the website and were encouraged to access information and resources that were pertinent to British Columbia. One participant suggested there be a more direct link to information about funding, as this would be their main area of need and interest. Another asked for information about finding a graduate cohort, as this person felt strongly that their success in graduate studies would depend on whether they worked within a cohort. The participants were also keen to know how the website will be linked to other institutions' websites so that more students can be made aware of the resources available to them.

The session at UVic was held on August 23, 2010 with 12 participants that included university faculty, student service staff, leaders, and potential Aboriginal graduate students. The participants felt that the web portal contained valuable practical information, easy to use resources, some innovative tools (i.e., budget planner), and engaging videos. Those who worked directly with students felt that they could easily use the web portal in their work, in small group or one-on-one interactions. The potential graduates felt that the web portal gave them a strong planning framework to undertake what they felt was a daunting task. One participant felt that the AT:U2G web portal would also be useful for non-Aboriginal students.

SUCCESS INDICATORS

Key Deliverables

The key deliverables are various types of multi-media materials that were developed, piloted, and revised according to key areas of transition encountered by students in graduate studies: access, admissions, first year, and program completion. Symposia, peer support sessions/workshops, faculty mentoring, survey and group discussion feedback, journal reflections, and research assistantships were the main mechanisms for developing the deliverables during the three transition pilot projects. All the materials that were developed during the three pilots are included as appendices.

Outcomes for Improved Transition to Graduate Studies

The AT:U2G Phase II proposal listed helping and hindering factors that impacted transition into graduate studies, which were the results of the Phase I research. The three AT:U2G pilot approaches and materials built upon the helping factors and worked to diminish the hindering factors. The discussion below provides examples of outcomes that aimed to improve the transition from undergraduate to graduate studies for Aboriginal people. The Evaluation section of this report contains details and examples about the quality of the outcomes (materials and approaches) from the perspective of both Aboriginal undergraduate and graduate students.

A. Helping factors

1. Mentoring and supportive relationships make a difference

The key mechanisms that resulted in positive mentoring and supporting relationship outcomes include:

- The research mentorships that had faculty members working with Aboriginal undergraduate students in a faculty-research assistantship on one of their research projects;
- The SAGE U initiative that had faculty members mentor the pod assistants and Aboriginal undergraduate participants in the pod, and that included Aboriginal graduate students who shared their experiences and knowledge of graduate studies

2. Individual responsibility to plan and prepare makes a difference

The AT:U2G team took into consideration the need to help potential graduate students identify the types of information and questions that they should consider during the transitions points of graduate education. The team also worked to help future students organize their own planning process so they could take individual responsibility for various phases of their graduate program completion. The materials developed for the SAGE U workshops and the web portal include:

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- easy to use graduate program information
- timeline management and budget/financial planning tools
- checklists for completing admissions process
- graduate stories about ways to plan for graduate admissions and research

These materials have been compiled into a Graduate Student Handbook (see Appendix 6).

3. People make institutions user & Aboriginal friendly and relevant

The importance of people in making universities friendly and relevant to Aboriginal students, Aboriginal knowledge, and Aboriginal research topics was demonstrated in the videos of students and faculty members and the stories written by Aboriginal graduate students. It is important for potential Aboriginal graduate students to know that they can and should talk to faculty members, departmental advisors, and graduate secretaries in order to select a program that addresses their learning and research interests. During the SAGE U sessions, the faculty mentors emphasized that Aboriginal people should be empowered to select a graduate program that meets their criteria instead of taking whatever is offered because they feel lucky just to get into a graduate program.

4. Working with and communications about university student services is important

The Phase I research revealed that many graduate students either did not know the range of student services available to them (such as disability services) or did not use them (such as child care). The AT:U2G team felt that potential Aboriginal graduate students required, at the very least, access to student services information. During the SAGE U pilot, the Aboriginal student service units at each site assisted with organizing and implementing the sessions. The principal investigators discussed the web portal and sug-

gested how SAGE U could continue with most of the Aboriginal student service units. It is hoped that each university will use the web portal and that the Aboriginal student service unit will play a pivotal role in organizing future workshops/sessions for Aboriginal undergraduate students. The following materials on the web portal address university student services and the value of using such services:

- student services offered at each BC university, available through web links
- stories written by Aboriginal graduate students

5. Sharing Aboriginal Knowledge and Aboriginal methodology for graduate education is necessary

Aboriginal methodology informed and shaped by Aboriginal knowledge is an emerging area in academe, although it is certainly not new to Indigenous communities/cultures. In Phase I, graduate students often felt that the use of their Aboriginal knowledge and epistemology as a research methodology was questioned, not understood, or not accepted. The following materials were developed to serve as a resource for this topic or to give additional support for the use of Aboriginal methodology:

- bibliography of Indigenous Knowledge and Methodology articles and books
- graduate student and faculty videos
- community forum/blog that features various resources about Aboriginal Knowledge and Methodology, and opportunities for discussion

B. Hindering Factors

The ways that AT:U2G developed outcomes for the following two hindering factors will be discussed together because they are inter-related:

1. **Depersonalized and colonial barriers still exist;** and
2. **Navigating racism is a critical challenge**

The graduate student experience stories dem-

onstrate the negative impact of these two factors on mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being. However, the stories also show personal resilience and resistance to on-going forms of colonization and racism. During the SAGE U sessions, participants related to and valued these stories. The range and scope of the 26 Aboriginal graduate stories and the 12 Aboriginal student videos is impressive and shows that despite various challenges, Aboriginal students can and do deal with them.

3. The challenges of navigating different learning expectations in graduate studies is a key reason for developing the three AT:U2G pilots.

In Phase I, Aboriginal graduate students often recalled how they were not prepared for the independent nature of graduate learning that included much more reading and fewer classes, and less direction from faculty instructors on how to structure their papers. The following materials were developed to address this particular challenge:

- graduate student stories
- materials in the “Thrive and Survive” section of the web portal

PROVINCE-WIDE APPLICABILITY

Any Aboriginal person (and all others, for that matter) interested in graduate studies in British Columbia will have access to the AT:U2G web portal. The information about graduate programs and the student services offered at BC universities is included in easy to use formats. The AT:U2G web portal, which is the culmination of the three transition pilots, has province-wide applicability as evidenced by the following:

- a. The graduate program information (program descriptions and student services) includes the web sites of all master’s and doctoral programs offered at the following BC universities: University of British Columbia (Vancouver & Okanagan), Simon Fraser University, Trinity Western University, Vancouver Island University, Royal Roads University, University of Victoria, Thompson Rivers University, and the University of Northern British Columbia. If a university did not offer a graduate program, it was not included;
- b. The services of all university and public libraries in BC are included as web links; and
- c. Financial awards, bursaries, and scholarships offered at BC universities offering graduate programs are included.

CONCLUSION

The Aboriginal Transitions Undergraduate to Graduate Studies framework is an evidence-based project that is the result of two years of research (2008-2010), resource development and implementation, and intergenerational mentoring relationships and learning. AT:U2G is innovative in its post-secondary approach that is province-wide, multi-disciplinary, and inter-institutional. Another innovative dimension is its focus on building upon the experiences, perspectives, and work of Aboriginal graduate students in order to better prepare Aboriginal undergraduate students to undertake graduate studies.

In year one, research was conducted with Aboriginal graduate students throughout British Columbia, with a focus on the participants of the Supporting Aboriginal Graduate Enhancement (SAGE) peer support and faculty-mentoring project. The following factors that facilitated and hindered Aboriginal access to and completion of graduate studies were identified as major findings:

- mentoring and supportive relationships make a difference;
- individual responsibility to plan and prepare makes a difference;
- people make institutions user and Aboriginal friendly and relevant;
- depersonalized and colonial institutional barriers still exist;
- navigating different learning expectations in graduate studies is challenging;
- navigating racism is a critical challenge;

- working with and communications about university student services is important; and
- sharing Aboriginal Knowledge and Aboriginal methodology for graduate education is necessary.

Based on the research findings in year one, the following three transition pilots built upon the facilitating factors and addressed the hindering factors through the development, piloting, and revision of multi-media resources, symposia, inter-active group workshops, and research mentoring projects:

Pilot 1 – Relationships: research awareness, learning, and mentoring

Pilot 2 – Access: peer support through a SAGE Undergraduate provincial network

Pilot 3 – Technology: Indigenous graduate web portal and web 2.0 approaches.

This final report focuses on the experiences and results of the second year of AT:U2G. The findings of year two will be presented as strengths and challenges. Additional information about how the researchers addressed the challenges is included.

AT:U2G STRENGTHS

Intergenerational learning relationships make a difference

Each pilot included some form of intergenerational learning relationship such as that between

faculty members and undergraduate students in a research assistantship project (Pilot 1); between Aboriginal graduate students and Aboriginal undergraduate students (Pilot 2); and between researchers, Aboriginal graduate and undergraduate students (Pilot 3). Personal experience oral, written, and video stories by graduate students were most important to the Aboriginal undergraduate students. These stories show the diversity of experiences, contexts, and graduate programs. Based upon the feedback received by Aboriginal undergraduate students, they were inspired and motivated to consider graduate studies as a result of AT:U2G; whereas before this experience, they either had not considered transitioning into graduate education, were afraid to do so, or doubted their ability to complete this form of higher education.

Student empowerment and agency are essential

In the Phase 1 research, Aboriginal graduate students often discussed their anxiety, frustration, or lack of preparation for applying to and transitioning into graduate studies. In response, the researchers felt that the assumptions underpinning the pilots and the outcomes/deliverables needed to position the future Aboriginal graduate applicant as taking control and assuming responsibility for selecting graduate programs and planning for their admission to them. Providing information about types of graduate programs and admission processes is necessary. However, AT:U2G also helps people think about what type of selection criteria they can develop in order to choose a university and program that fits their personal, family, and community contexts. The research relationship that a graduate student has with his/her research supervisor is very important for completion of a thesis. AT:U2G provides a range of considerations for selecting and working with a research supervisor so that a student can feel more empowered in this important mentoring relationship.

Flexible approaches facilitate province-wide applicability and sustainability

The researchers, university contacts, and student research assistants learned to adapt the pilots based upon student interest, availability, and learning needs. As discussed in the evaluation section, the SAGE U format started out as a group workshop and was adapted for one-to-one drop in at one site. Feedback received from the pilots was valuable in revising the multi-media resources so that a wide variety of learning material was available such as written information documents, check lists, written and video stories, web-based documents, financial planning and time management tools, and an interactive blog. Aboriginal people thinking about graduate education can use the web portal as an independent learning tool and universities in British Columbia can develop a SAGE U group or workshop format using the web portal resources. The time consuming work of developing and piloting the resources has been undertaken so that universities can readily implement AT:U2G resources. University graduate studies programs, counselors, or student service units can use the resources “as is” or adapt them as necessary.

AT:U2G CHALLENGES

Developing relationships, knowledge, and skills takes time

The timeline for developing materials, undertaking the pilots, evaluating them, and revising the materials took longer than anticipated for all three pilots. The researchers worked with 55 Aboriginal graduate and undergraduate student RAs and story writers throughout British Columbia and with five universities quite intensely in year two. Student mentoring was a very important part of AT:U2G, which took additional time given the large numbers of graduate and undergraduate students that worked on the project. The researchers provided research training, reviewed students’ work, gave individual feedback to those

who worked on pilots two and three, and made themselves readily available for individual and group planning meetings. Working with other universities also takes additional time and effort to develop administrative procedures for paying student research assistants, ensuring involvement in running SAGE U, especially, and maintaining communication with the university contacts. Even though this additional effort and time is a challenge, it is necessary. Provincial applicability and sustainability of the AT:U2G web portal is enhanced through the inter-institutional cooperation and working relationships developed with the AT:U2G participating universities.

Graduate studies is often not a priority for Aboriginal undergraduate students

The researchers found that more Aboriginal undergraduates had not thought seriously about graduate studies than those who had begun some exploration of advanced education. Various reasons for low participation in some of the SAGE U workshops were that topics may have not been immediately relevant and course scheduling and

other commitments conflicted with the SAGE U sessions. Some sites did not have many graduate programs and few Aboriginal graduate students, which limited the interaction between Aboriginal graduate and undergraduate students. In response to this challenge, the researchers increased the development of short video clips that features Aboriginal graduate and faculty members so that future Aboriginal graduate students will appreciate the scope of what Aboriginal graduate students are studying and become inspired to consider graduate studies in the future. The participation rate of the social networking component of the web portal (community forum) was disappointing. Reasons may relate to introducing it towards the latter part of the academic year or to undergraduates not yet ready to engage in the topic. The researchers have decided to re-try the social networking component in the Fall of 2010, when the web portal is launched. Both Aboriginal undergraduate and graduate students will be encouraged to use the community forum and the graduate part of SAGE may run the social networking forum.

Reference

Kirkness, V. & Barnhardt, R. (1991). First Nations and higher education: The four Rs - respect, relevance, reciprocity, responsibility. *Journal of American Indian Education*, 30(3), 1-15.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

Please visit the www.aboriginaltransitions.ca web portal for more information.

General inquires regarding the project may be addressed to:

jo-ann.archibald@ubc.ca or michelle_pidgeon@sfu.ca.

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