Briefing Note

Indigenous Education Council

UNESCO Indigenous Education Research Project

December 12th, 2019

Purpose: To seek approval to interview students and former students as well as staff who have been part of peer mentorship programs, and, in particular, the Bishkaa program at Fleming College. Peer Mentorship programs will be highlighted as a best practice in Indigenous Education in a global research project being conducted by UNESCO.

Main Points:

* This research is being conducted as a contribution to a global research project on Indigenous Education in support of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal to “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.” (United Nations, 2015) and is guided by the principles of UNDRIP. The specific goal of the global project is: “to develop policy recommendations on how to improve the quality of education for Indigenous youth” noting “that knowledge and experience gained are to be given back to communities and schools to strengthen Indigenous voices in education discussions.”
* Charles Hopkins, UNESCO Chair in Re-orienting Education Towards Sustainability, requested a partnership between Trent University and Fleming College that would contribute to the Global Project. A Memorandum of Cooperation was signed between these institutions and with First Nations Technical Institute to provide research on best practices within and between the three institutions.
* The first phase of the research was completed in June, 2019 and provided descriptions of Indigenous academic and student service programming at Trent and Fleming and highlighted the links between Indigenous education and the U.N. Sustainable Development goals as well as the importance of culturally based experiential education.
* This second phase of the project will highlight the critical importance of student support services that provide academic, cultural, financial, social, physical and mental health supports to Indigenous students and, in particular, Peer Mentorship programs which have been linked to student success at both Fleming College and Trent University. Fleming’s Indigenous Student Services has documented a 100% student retention rate and graduation success linked to the program.
* This part of the research will involve interviewing educators, Indigenous Student Service providers, and, in particular, present and past Mentors within Peer Mentorship programs. These participants will specifically be asked to talk about how the program helps students during their time in post-secondary education. Select interviews on best practices will also be conducted with senior members of FNTI.
* The final global report does not name participants but provides broad general findings based on research reports from around the world. Best practices, such as the Bishkaa program, will be shared with a global community of Indigenous and non-indigenous educators and policy-makers.
* The final report from this region as well as the final global report will be provided to the IEC. Recommendations will be sought on how these reports could best benefit expanded partnerships between Fleming, Trent and FNTI and the broader community.

**Background:**

In 2016, this region was named as a Regional Centre of Expertise in Sustainability Education (RCE) by the United Nations University through UNESCO with Fleming College and Trent University being lead partners. One of the principle objectives of our RCE has been *to recognize the vital importance of Indigenous Knowledge systems across all curricula.*

Because of our designation, UNESCO Chair, Charles Hopkins met with Dan Longboat and subsequently with Kylie Fox-Peltier to request that Trent and Fleming be part of a UNESCO global research on Indigenous Education.

The global research project involves 62 institutions and their partners in approximately 25 participating countries/Indigenous Peoples ́ territories. In Canada, these include Cape Breton University, Laurentian University, Queens University, University of Manitoba, University of Regina, Vancouver Island University, and RCE Peterborough-Kawartha-Haliburton with Trent University and Fleming College who invited participation from FNTI.

The first phase of the report from our region was completed and submitted to UNESCO in June, 2019. It described how quality education evolved over the last half century within these academic institutions grounded in culture, language and traditional practices, including experiential and land- based learning that are put into contemporary contexts. It provided descriptions of Indigenous academic and student service programming and made connections between examples of Indigenous Knowledges and pedagogies and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. This included recognizing the inherent interdisciplinary nature of Indigenous Knowledges including deep understandings of ecological functions within a given territory as well as relationships of human beings to those ecosystems.

This contributed to a draft global report on Indigenous Education based on reports from around the world. The draft report noted the Bishkaa program as a best practice stating: “Canada: RCE Peterborough Kawartha Haliburton with Trent University, Fleming College: A successful mentorship program for Fleming College students is the Bishkaa (Rise Up) program, originally started in partnership with Trent University, achieves a 100% retention rate and contributes to graduation success. The program involves cultural orientation with traditional activities and Elders.” The draft global report can be found here: <https://unescochair.info.yorku.ca/conference/indigenousesd-research-report-on-initiative-1/https://unescochair.info.yorku.ca/conference/indigenousesd-research-report-on-initiative-1/>

The second phase of the research will involve interviewing educators, Indigenous Student Service providers, and, in particular, present and past Mentors within Peer Mentorship programs. These participants will specifically be asked to talk about how the program helps students in their studies and their lives during their time in post-secondary education.

Prepared by: Jane Gray, Principal Researcher for the Project under Indigenous Student Services, Fleming College