

University of Regina

Supplement to 2018-19 Operations Forecast

Funding for a Community-Based Transitions Program Pilot

Summary

In response to information and pleas received from representatives of northern Saskatchewan communities, the University of Regina is proposing funding of up to \$1.2 million in the 2018-19 provincial budget to enable the creation and pilot delivery in selected northern Saskatchewan communities of a university transitions Pathways Program for students from northern communities.

Context

In September 2017, the President of the University of Regina, Dr. Vianne Timmons, accompanied by several deans and other university officials, visited the communities of Fond du Lac, Stony Rapids, and La Ronge, during the President's annual Northern Tour. They met with community and school leaders, including politicians representing the communities, mayors and councillors, school board members, school principals and directors of education, and band chiefs and councillors, as well as many other community members including University of Regina alumni.

A persistent and consistent theme during these discussions was the difficulties that residents of northern Saskatchewan have in accessing and being successful in university education. Identified barriers included educational preparation (readiness), lack of familiarity with university expectations and practices (especially for first generation students), culture shock when moving to major urban centres, lack of community and other supports and the burden of being far from home, and the expensive costs and limited accessibility of suitable accommodations and child care. Lack of support for students in on-line courses available in the northern communities was also identified as an issue.

In particular, community representatives called for transition programs that would prepare students to be successful in such professional programs as education, business administration and entrepreneurship, nursing, counselling and therapy (psychology), and social work, occupations where the community agencies have great difficulty in recruiting and retaining qualified staff. Upgrading of current staff in fields such as social work and education (e.g., physical education) is also a pressing need.

Community representatives volunteered an interest in engaging in a pilot project that would include entry-level arts and science courses with on-site instructors. A variety of other suggestions for program content were put forward, including Dene language content, particular content for social workers, indigenization features, and out-of-class supports.

It has been noted that First Nations University has largely withdrawn from its community-based program initiatives that included a transitions program because these activities were not financially viable without additional public funding.

As economist Eric Howe observed in 2016, closing the indigenous education gap could bring up to \$90 billion in economic benefits to Saskatchewan over the lifespan of its current population — about 20 per

cent more than the total value of all potash produced in the province to date. Johnson-Shoyama professor Ken Coates has added, “Unless the appropriate steps are taken, the alleged shift to a knowledge-based, high-technology economy could well exacerbate the challenges faced by rural, remote and northern communities and regions ... without well-developed and carefully considered policy, and without the direct engagement of universities, governments and business in responding creatively.”

Proposal

The University of Regina is requesting funding in the 2018-19 provincial budget to support the creation and pilot delivery in selected northern Saskatchewan communities of a university transitions Pathways Program for students from northern communities. The program will be developed and delivered, in partnership with northern regional colleges, school divisions, northern bands, and local governments, by academic and academic support units at the University of Regina and draw on experience at First Nations University of Canada and available local resources.

A blended model of delivery is under consideration combining on-site face-to-face instruction with on-line courses facilitated by on-site learning support personnel.

Initial thoughts on course content include the following:

- A one-year (two semester, fall and winter) program combining academic for-credit courses and non-credit student success workshops
- Credit courses could include “Academic Discourse, Writing, Research & Learning Strategies” (ACAD 100) and “Critical Reading & Writing I” (English 100), Indigenous studies courses, and and/or an introductory professional course such as Social Work 100.
- The non-credit component would focus on academic skill-building and student success with material developed by the Student Success Centre on such topics as financial literacy, accessing support services, time management, academic integrity, study planning, presentation skills, etc. It would also include career specific components prepared and presented by individual faculties at the university.

Admission requirements would be somewhat relaxed and successful completion would allow the student entry into the academic program of choice with perhaps 18 credit hours of credit (30 credit hours = one full academic year).

Funding requested is \$1.2 million for start-up and pilot delivery. Full accounting for expenditures will be provided.

If the pilot is successful, on-going support would additionally be required for continuing delivery, cycling through various locations and iterations.

Initial funding would enable:

- Curriculum development and instructional design
- Community partner consultations
- Delivery planning

- Pilot delivery in selected communities, including instructional costs, travel and accommodation, materials, etc.
- Evaluation of the pilot
- Financial support for student needs such as accommodation and child care, as required
- On-site academic and support services
- Facilities rental and preparation, as required
- Information technology assistance
- Other needs as identified in planning and delivery.

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