

## ***MEDIA RELEASE***

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# **SIAST's Aboriginal achievement plan builds on long-standing success**

*Eight-month study led to five-year, \$5.5 million plan*

**February 23, 2010** – SIAST unveiled a five-year, \$5.5 million Aboriginal Student Achievement Plan today. Dubbed SIAST ASAP, the initiative will enhance Aboriginal student participation and success at SIAST.

Long-standing education equity initiatives have contributed to consistently high Aboriginal student enrolment at SIAST. Additionally, a recent survey indicated high satisfaction among Aboriginal students; 91% surveyed said they would recommend SIAST to other Aboriginal students.

"We're proud of our success in Aboriginal student recruitment and support at SIAST," says Alison Pickrell, SIAST's associate vice president, Student Affairs. "But much work remains to be done. Our study shows that Aboriginal people often confront multiple challenges at every stage of their post-secondary experience – from the ranks of prospective student through to graduation and beyond. SIAST ASAP will help students address those challenges."

With Myrna Yuzicapi, Pickrell co-chaired the eight-month study that led to SIAST ASAP. A 28-person steering committee contributed to the process, which engaged 600 stakeholders, both internal and external.

"Aboriginal students face multiple barriers that affect all dimensions of student life," says Yuzicapi, special advisor to SIAST, Aboriginal initiatives. "That's why we used the medicine wheel as the basis for our plan. It pays attention to all aspects of their being."

"SIAST recognizes that recruitment and retention of Aboriginal students – the fastest growing demographic in a province with a shrinking labour pool – is essential to the province's economic and social prosperity," says Pickrell, adding that it is also consistent

with SIAST's organizational values, especially those concerning diversity and ethical behaviour.

SIAST ASAP will focus in particular on Aboriginal student completion rates and on recruitment in areas where Aboriginal people are under-represented. Shelley Belhumeur, a veteran in SIAST Aboriginal student affairs, has been named coordinator of the SIAST Aboriginal Student Achievement Plan.

SIAST is Saskatchewan's primary public institution for post-secondary technical education and skills training, recognized nationally and internationally for its expertise and innovation. More than 15,000 students were enrolled in SIAST programs in the most recent academic year; additionally, the organization drew almost 30,000 individual course registrations. Through program and course registrations, SIAST served almost 26,000 distinct students with programs that touch every sector of the economy. SIAST operates campuses in Moose Jaw, Prince Albert, Regina and Saskatoon, and provides a number of courses and programs through distance education.

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Information about SIAST can be found at [www.goSIAST.com](http://www.goSIAST.com).

## ***BACKGROUND***

### **SIAST Aboriginal Student Achievement Plan (ASAP)**

SIAST's Aboriginal Student Success Strategy initiative was directed by a 28-member, multi-disciplinary committee. The committee's work led to a five-year, \$5.5 million action plan – SIAST ASAP – to increase Aboriginal student success at SIAST. Research included extensive consultation, a review of literature and best practices and a student survey. More than 600 stakeholders including approximately 320 students were consulted.

### **Findings**

Findings confirmed that SIAST already has a number of excellent services and supports for Aboriginal students. SIAST has consistently high Aboriginal student enrolment, and the large majority of Aboriginal students are satisfied with their SIAST experience – 91 percent of Aboriginal students surveyed as part of this study said they would recommend SIAST to other Aboriginal students. An analysis of the findings, however, suggested that Aboriginal students still face multiple barriers that may negatively affect their post-secondary participation and program completion rates. Stakeholders suggest that SIAST should keep doing what it does well, but it should also examine ways to realign services and create new programming to support Aboriginal students in the most effective way possible.

### **ASAP goal and recommendations**

The ultimate goal of the initiative is to achieve a representative Aboriginal student population in all SIAST programs and to have an Aboriginal student program completion rate that is equivalent to the general student population.

The initiative includes 21 actions for SIAST to undertake to address systemic barriers that are faced by Aboriginal students. The strategy is holistic in nature, taking into consideration the physical, mental, spiritual and emotional health of students as suggested by the Aboriginal medicine wheel.

### **Full report**

<http://www.goSIAST.com/ASAP>

## ***BIOS***

### **Shelley Belhumeur**

Shelley Belhumeur has more than 25 years of post-secondary experience. Prior to her appointment as the SIAST ASAP coordinator, Belhumeur was coordinator of the Aboriginal activity centre at SIAST Woodland Campus for 11 years. Working closely with Aboriginal activity centre staff she has facilitated sessions on Aboriginal culture in both education and industry throughout Saskatchewan.

Belhumeur holds a chemical dependency worker diploma from SIAST, a certificate in interpreter training from Grant McEwan and is a certified life skills coach (University of Regina). She instructs the Driving Without Impairment program and has worked as an interpreter of American Sign Language, as an addictions counsellor and as a welder.

Belhumeur has served on SIAST's Advisory Committee on Education Equity (ACEE), the SIAST Aboriginal Council and the Aboriginal Student Success Strategy Committee.

Belhumeur is a Métis woman from St. Louis, Saskatchewan.

### **Alison Pickrell**

Alison Pickrell is SIAST's associate vice president, Student Affairs. The Student Affairs Division offers a wide range of support services including student recruitment, registration services, counselling, Aboriginal activity centres, disability services, learning services. Her responsibilities also include institutional research and analysis, recognition of prior learning and women in trades and technologies programming. Pickrell was co-chair of SIAST's Aboriginal Student Success Strategy initiative, which led to the Aboriginal Student Achievement Plan.

A native of Saskatchewan, Pickrell was educated in Canada, the United States and Europe. She completed a master's degree in post-secondary education through Memorial University of Newfoundland. Pickrell holds a bachelor of arts and an advanced certificate in psychology from the University of Saskatchewan and has studied university management and student affairs at the Centre for Higher Education Research and Development, University of Manitoba.

Before joining SIAST as registrar in 2003, Pickrell spent more than 20 years at the University of Saskatchewan in a range of student affairs positions.

### **Myrna Yuzicapi**

Myrna Yuzicapi is special advisor to SIAST on Aboriginal initiatives. Yuzicapi was co-chair of SIAST's Aboriginal Student Success Strategy initiative, which led to the Aboriginal Student Achievement Plan. Previously, she was co-chair of SIAST's Aboriginal Council. Yuzicapi joined SIAST as an Aboriginal student counsellor in Saskatoon in 1987.

Yuzicapi has been instrumental in advancing First Nations education throughout her career. She was named Educator of the Year, Aboriginal Education in 1997 by the Saskatoon Preschool foundation Awards Program. She was the founding coordinator of Joe Duquette High School (formerly called Saskatoon Native Survival School) and a founding director of the Indian Social Work Education Program, which later became the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College. Yuzicapi has also served as director of the Saskatchewan Indian Cultural College.

Yuzicapi has a bachelor of education degree from the University of Saskatchewan, where she specialized in Native studies and English, and a post-graduate diploma in educational administration. She has also studied social work at the University of Regina. Yuzicapi received a diploma in psychiatric nursing from Saskatchewan Public Health. She practised psychiatric nursing in North Battleford, Calgary, Prince Albert and Saskatoon.

Yuzicapi has served on the board of the Saskatoon Regional College and on the Child and Family Services Review Board of the Ministry of Social Services.

She is a member of the Okanese First Nation.