

Truth and Reconciliation Commission Task Force Preliminary Report

I. Preamble

In December 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) released its final report on the history and legacy of Canada's residential school system for Aboriginal children. The report, entitled *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future*,ⁱ contains 94 calls to actionⁱⁱ to advance and sustain the process of Canadian reconciliation. The calls to action addressed directly to post-secondary educational institutions in Canada urge universities to develop Indigenous focused programs in specific fields, including education, health care and law; increase opportunities for intercultural competency training; and promote an awareness of Indigenous rights, histories and perspectives. The TRC's report also includes a number of calls to action that are addressed to government that would, if they were implemented, provide targeted funding to support related or additional initiatives in Canada's universities and colleges.

Recognizing that Queen's has a role in shaping public perceptions of Indigenous Peoples' rights, histories and contemporary issues, and that the university has a responsibility to respond to the calls to action in a meaningful way, a task force was established in April 2016. The task force will respond to those calls to actions that are pertinent to Queen's and will also consider how the university can play an active role in addressing the broader themes of the TRC report, including relationship building, changing perspectives and policy, and promoting an awareness of the rights, histories and contemporary issues of Indigenous Peoples. The task force recognizes that the responsibility for reconciliation should not be put on the shoulders of Indigenous people as it is for all Canadians to address and therefore, the changes have to take place within every aspect of society.

The provost has also struck a core group, comprised of members of the TRC task force, to help provide strategic direction, assist in preparing the final report, and ensure that the mandate of the task force has been fulfilled.

II. Mandate of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Task Force

The mandate of the TRC Task Forceⁱⁱⁱ is to prepare a comprehensive inventory of existing initiatives that are relevant to the TRC's calls to action and, within the context of the university's core mission as an educational institution, develop a set of recommendations that respond to those calls to action that are pertinent to Queen's, building, as appropriate, on existing initiatives.

III. Terminology

The task force acknowledges the social and legal complexities of using terminology related to Canada's First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples, three distinct groups with diverse cultures, histories and languages. For the purposes of this report, the task force will use the terms Indigenous Peoples and Aboriginal Peoples, which are generally understood to include First Nations (status and non-status), Inuit and Métis.^{iv} The word "Aboriginal" is the term most commonly employed in a legal context and the university is obliged to use this term when reporting enrolment data related to Aboriginal students. The term "Indigenous" has gained support as a global term that encompasses the diversity of histories, identities and experiences of peoples whose presence on these lands predates colonial contact^v and, as such, the task force will use this term whenever possible throughout this report.

Furthermore, the task force also recognizes that some individuals may prefer to be identified in words that come from their own languages or communities. The task force will respectfully explore the use of languages and terminologies associated with Indigenous Peoples throughout its information gathering process to inform its final report, and will attempt to be inclusive in its language.

IV. Preliminary Report

Purpose of Report

The purpose of the preliminary report is to establish the processes and strategies that the task force will employ to meet the objectives outlined in its Terms of Reference and complete its final report. This document also serves as a brief compendium of some existing initiatives that were designed with the intention of supporting Aboriginal students, creating an inclusive community, and promoting an awareness of Indigenous histories, perspectives, and knowledges. It is important to note that this is not an exhaustive list and therefore includes only a selection of the breadth of factors that the task force will consider throughout its work. More importantly, it should be made clear that this preliminary report does not address gaps that may exist in Aboriginal centered academic programming and student supports; this will comprise the work of the task force during the coming consultation phase. Furthermore, the report only lists initiatives from the perspective of delivery and does not address the experience of Indigenous students and communities with such initiatives; this will also be addressed in the consultation phase.

A central component of the task force's work will be to identify areas of strength and effective practices as well as areas in need of improvement. This work will be informed by exploring the lived experiences of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, faculty and staff at Queen's, as well as best practices found within the higher education sector.

Consultation and Information Gathering Process

The task force will consult extensively as it develops its final report, engaging with, among others, the faculties, student affairs, and the Aboriginal Council of Queen's University. The task force is committed to meaningful and comprehensive consultation, including consultations with local Indigenous communities to ensure an awareness of diverse perspectives outside the Queen's community.

A variety of consultation strategies will be used to ensure the task force reaches a broad audience, and to allow individuals and groups to provide feedback in both open and private settings. Strategies for soliciting feedback will include, but will not be limited to, an email address for confidential written submissions, a town hall, small group meetings and one-on-one meetings. Creating safe spaces for individuals to speak honestly about their experiences, and preserving the privacy of those consulted, is of utmost importance to the task force. The task force will also look to its peer institutions to benchmark the university's progress and identify best practices. As noted above, the task force will also ensure that Aboriginal students, faculty and staff have the opportunity for truth-telling about their experiences.

Formal consultation sessions will begin in fall 2016; however, this preliminary report begins the process of community engagement. Included in the report are themes and questions that the task force hopes will encourage dialogue and generate input among the broader Queen's community and beyond.

Given the task force's broad mandate and commitment to meaningful consultation, the task force is recommending that the principal and provost extend the deadline for the final report from November 30, 2016 to February 1, 2017. An extended deadline will allow the task force to ensure opportunities for extensive consultation with a wide variety of groups and provide sufficient time to develop their final report.

V. Environmental Scan

Learning, Curriculum and Academic Planning

The university's [Academic Plan](#) (2011) provides a broad set of principles and recommendations to guide the development of Indigenous-focused programming and the integration of Indigenous knowledge and perspectives into curricula at Queen's. Some examples of existing Indigenous-focused programming include the Aboriginal Teacher Education Program, a general Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) degree in Indigenous Studies and a Professional Master of Public Administration that offers students the opportunity to concentrate their elective courses in Indigenous policy and governance.

In addition to the university's existing offerings, faculties and schools continue to make progress with respect to advancing several priority initiatives related to Indigenous-focused programs and academic initiatives, examples of which include:

- the establishment of an advisory group within the Faculty of Health Sciences to develop inter-professional modules that will address the TRC calls to action
- the recent establishment of an Indigenous-focused internship program at the Faculty of Law, offered in collaboration with the Ministry of Attorney General and Indigenous community partners
- continued expansion of the B.A. General in Indigenous Studies within the Faculty of Arts and Science through the development of new courses
- prioritization of Indigenous Studies in faculty recruitment
- the development of a first year course on Population and Global Health in the School of Medicine. The course, developed through the Principal's Dream Courses program, includes a focus on the social determinants of health, health policy, and exposure to community-based organizations and special populations, including Indigenous Peoples.

Governance and Strategic Planning

Governance

The Aboriginal Council of Queen's University (ACQU) was established to act as an advisory resource to the Queen's Board of Trustees and Senate with respect to Indigenous programs, services and support resources and serves to promote the involvement of Indigenous Peoples in decision making within the university.

The ACQU is made up of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, faculty and senior administrative staff as well as representatives from local Indigenous communities. The ACQU also has three working groups which focus on enhancing Queen's Aboriginal Educational Policy Objectives including student access and support; Indigenous cultural awareness and programming; and Indigenous knowledge, curriculum and research across the university. The Director of Four Directions Aboriginal Student Centre is a member of Queen's Senate and acts as a liaison between ACQU and the university's senior academic governing body. The ACQU submits annual reports to the university's Board of Trustees and Senate.

Strategic Planning

The details of the university's commitment to improving access and recruitment initiatives, student support resources, and academic programs for Aboriginal students can be found in a number of university-wide strategic planning documents, including the [Long-Term Strategic Enrolment Management Framework](#) (2014), the [Strategic Mandate Agreement](#) with the provincial government (2014), the [Student Services Strategic Planning Framework](#) (2015) and the [Academic Plan](#) (2011). In particular, the Academic Plan outlines the university's responsibility to take meaningful steps to increase the participation of Indigenous Peoples in higher education, recognize and encourage an awareness of Indigenous issues on a local, national and international level, and provide an inclusive community where Indigenous values are embraced.

Aboriginal Student Support Services and Initiatives

Queen's Aboriginal students have access to a number of customized services and programs designed to facilitate academic success, personal well-being, and provide a culturally relevant support system. These services include academic and personal guidance from Indigenous advisors, transition support, peer mentorship programs, and dedicated campus space for a wide range of Indigenous cultural programs and events. Some examples of these programs and initiatives include:

Four Directions Aboriginal Student Centre acts as a vital resource for Queen's Aboriginal students as well as a space for non-Aboriginal students, staff and faculty to participate in and learn about Indigenous traditions. Four Directions provides numerous support services, including academic support, personal advising, a peer-to-peer support program, access to an Elder in Residence for guidance and leadership support, and a wide range of Indigenous cultural programs and events.

The Aboriginal Access to Engineering (AAE) program provides academic and transition support resources to Aboriginal engineering students while they pursue their degree at Queen's as well as a broad range of outreach resources and programming materials aimed at encouraging Aboriginal youth to gain the math, science and technology skills required to pursue post-secondary education in the pure and applied sciences.

Queen's University Self-Identification Project recently received funding from the Targeted Initiatives Fund of the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities for a project aimed at increasing self-identification opportunities at Queen's and enhancing the university student records management system to better track and support Aboriginal students. Currently, Aboriginal students are given the option to self-identify only during the application process. By implementing increased opportunities to allow students to self-

identify at any point during their studies, the university will be better able to understand and respond to the needs of its Aboriginal student population.

Queen's Supporting Aboriginal Graduate Enhancement (SAGE) Nest is an interdisciplinary and cross-institutional peer mentoring program designed to support Aboriginal graduate students with the successful transition into, and completion of, their graduate programs. The program also serves as a culturally relevant environment for students to share and discuss ideas, challenges and experiences.

Queen's Native Student Association provides opportunities for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students to engage in the Queen's community and discuss Indigenous issues while helping to promote an enhanced cultural understanding across campus.

An Aboriginal Academic Affairs Commissioner was recently established by Queen's Alma Mater Society.

Indigenous Studies Subject Liaison Librarians provide support to those pursuing research in Indigenous studies. This support service includes assistance with designing research strategies, providing support with accessing key information resources, and publishing research. These services are also offered to Faculties and Departments to build collections and to faculty members who wish to include Indigenous Studies resources in their curriculum.

The Aboriginal Alumni Chapter facilitates a connection between Aboriginal alumni and current Aboriginal students to share experiences and offer a broad range of advice.

Indigenous Spaces and Visual Presence on Campus

As noted above, Four Directions Aboriginal Student Centre houses a number of student support services for Aboriginal students, however, the dedicated building for the centre also provides space for cultural events and programming, and serves as a symbol of the presence of the Aboriginal community on campus. The visual presence of the Aboriginal community at Queen's can also be seen in several other areas on campus, examples of which include the Aboriginal Teacher Education Program lounge and medicine garden on west campus, and the Indigenous art collections found within the Agnes Etherington Art Centre which are managed by a Curator of Indigenous Art.

The [university acknowledges](#) that Queen's is situated on traditional Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee Territory.

Aboriginal Enrolment

Recruitment and Admission Strategies

As noted in the university's [Long-Term Strategic Enrolment Framework](#) (2014) and the [Strategic Mandate Agreement](#) with the provincial government (2014), broadening the diversity of Queen's student population is a priority for the university. In order to support increased rates of Aboriginal enrolment at Queen's, the university has developed a number of targeted strategies and initiatives which aim to increase access to qualified Aboriginal learners.

i. **Admissions**

- Under the Aboriginal Admission Policy, entrance criteria for first year undergraduate Aboriginal applicants to any faculty or school are expanded to include consideration of non-academic factors through the submission of a personal statement of experience and/or applicable supplementary essays. Successful applicants must meet the general academic admission requirements for each program.
- The Faculty of Law and the Faculty of Health Sciences offer alternative pathways for admission of Aboriginal students to graduate and professional programs.

ii. **Outreach and Communications**

- Queen's Aboriginal Outreach Liaison oversees a broad range of targeted outreach and recruitment activities, including attending numerous community-based events, hosting campus tours and conducting webinars with prospective Aboriginal students.
- [Queen's Aboriginal Student Guide](#) and various web pages provide prospective and current students with an introduction to Aboriginal-focused services, support resources, programs and community events at Queen's.
- Members of the Aboriginal alumni chapter are engaged to participate at various recruitment and conversion events to help answer questions and provide encouragement for prospective Aboriginal students.

iii. **Awards, Scholarships and Bursaries**

To help ensure Aboriginal students offered admission to Queen's have the opportunity to attend, Queen's currently offers a number of merit and need-based scholarships, awards and bursaries^{vi} at both the graduate and undergraduate level which are either specifically designated for Aboriginal students or designed so that preference will be given to Aboriginal students during the allocation process.

Enrolment Rates

As noted in the [2015-16 Enrolment Report](#), since the 2011-12 academic year applications from self-identified Aboriginal students entering their first year of a direct-entry undergraduate degree program at Queen's have increased by 58 percent, from 171 to 270, offers have increased by 123 percent, from 75 to 167, and acceptances have increased by 133 percent, from 27 to 63. The first to second year undergraduate retention rate among self-identified Aboriginal students was 93 percent in 2014 and 96 percent in 2015. Despite the recent increases in Aboriginal student enrolment, the Aboriginal student population at Queen's remains below a level that would be representative of the Aboriginal population in Canada.

There is currently no central mechanism to track enrolment rates of Aboriginal students beyond those who are entering into a first year, direct-entry undergraduate degree program and therefore the centralized enrolment data on Aboriginal students is somewhat limited. The university is exploring ways to track undergraduate second-entry and graduate program enrolment data from individual faculties and schools to enhance reporting. Many of these programs are currently collecting data and more information on Aboriginal enrolment will be provided in the final report.

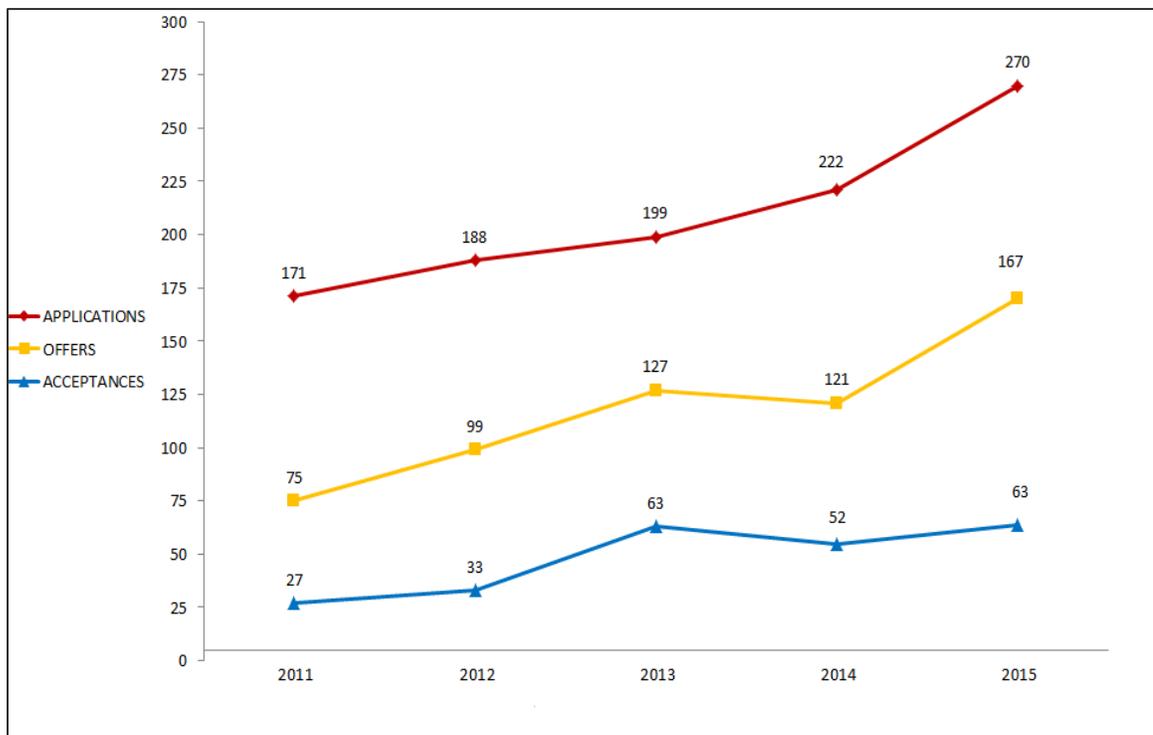


Figure 1: Rate of applications, offers and acceptances of self-identified Aboriginal students entering the first year of a direct-entry, undergraduate degree program at Queen's University

Indigenous Research

Queen's is home to numerous scholars conducting research pertaining to Indigenous Peoples. Many of these scholars, who work in a variety of disciplines including health sciences, arts, engineering, law and education, partake in community-based participatory research with Indigenous Peoples to study a variety of issues. Some examples include Aboriginal social and environmental justice; systemic barriers and institution structures between settler and Indigenous populations; contemporary Indigenous issues such as representation, environment, spirituality, education and self-determination; scholarship in First Nations treaties; Indigenous-municipal relations in the context of land use; and health equity priorities and medical education including identifying culturally sensitive approaches to care.

Recent faculty appointments have included researchers whose field of study includes elements of Indigenous knowledge, histories and perspectives such as Indigenous literatures and languages, Indigenous visual arts of the Americas, and Indigenous film and media. Internal recruitment programs, such as the Queen's National Scholar program, have played a critical role in attracting faculty with a specialization in Indigenous-focused fields of study to Queen's and the Human Rights and Equity Office has begun a funding initiative to support scholars in research related to racial and Indigenous areas of study.

Indigenous Faculty and Staff

Recruitment

Processes related to the recruitment of a significant portion of Queen's faculty and staff are governed by Collective Agreements, many of which include provisions that promote equity in the employment of persons who are members of equity-seeking groups. When developing advertising strategies for inviting applications, the university uses avenues that are focused on attracting equity-seeking groups, including those focused on Aboriginal communities.

Queen's Council on Employment Equity recommends and monitors procedures, policies and practices designed to promote an institutional culture of inclusivity and respect. Reporting to the Principal, the council is also responsible for monitoring and reporting on the university's compliance with the Federal Contractors Program (FCP). The FCP requires that Queen's has an employment equity program in place to address both numerical and qualitative goals relative to the representation of Aboriginal employees.

Training and Development

Human Resources recently introduced a certificate program for staff on diversity and inclusivity in the workplace. The certificate program seeks to engage Queen's staff and faculty in conversation, discovery and learning about diversity and equity, and to provide resources, knowledge and tools required to make Queen's an inclusive campus. One of the core courses focuses on incorporating Indigenous culture and practices into the workplace.

The Aboriginal Teaching Lunch and Learn sessions introduced in 2015 are designed to educate staff and faculty about the histories of Indigenous Peoples, medicinal practices, traditions, and the spiritual practices/beliefs of diverse nations.

VI. Summary of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Task Force's Activities

Two meetings of the TRC task force and three meetings of the TRC core group were held prior to the submission of the preliminary report. Summaries of the task force and core group meetings are included below.

April 14, 2016 Core Group

The first core group meeting involved a review of the Terms of Reference, the TRC calls to action, a draft framework for the task force's preliminary report, and a draft work plan.

May 3, 2016 Core Group

The core group reviewed the revised Terms of Reference, the draft agenda for the first meeting of the TRC task force, and discussed a plan for the consultation process.

May 16, 2016 Task Force

The task force discussed the draft framework for the preliminary report, endorsed the Terms of Reference and several members were asked to provide information about existing initiatives in their units. Task force members then worked in small groups to develop themes and questions to help guide the consultation process. The results of this exercise formed the basis of the themes and questions included in this report.

June 6, 2016 Core Group

The core group reviewed the task force's draft preliminary report.

June 23, 2016 Task Force

The task force approved the draft preliminary report and reviewed the plan for the consultation process.

VII. Themes and Questions for Discussion

The following themes and questions for discussion are included in the preliminary report to encourage discussion and generate input from the Queen's and broader Kingston communities. Throughout its work, the task force will explore which of these themes are areas of strength, which areas are in need of improvement and what existing effective practices can be expanded to ensure continued progress.

Governance and Strategic Planning

Possible discussion questions:

- What opportunities are there to further engage Aboriginal students, faculty and staff members in university governance and decision making?
- How can the university further embed a focus on the needs of Indigenous students, faculty and staff when undertaking strategic planning exercises in the areas of academic, operational, recruitment and campus planning?

Indigenous Faculty/Staff

Possible discussion questions:

- What strategies and initiatives could be implemented or enhanced to increase Indigenous faculty and staff representation as well as faculty with a specialization in Indigenous issues?
- What role can Queen's play in creating and improving employment opportunities for Indigenous Peoples?
- What opportunities exist for Queen's to expand existing mentorship programs and employee resource groups?
- What opportunities are there to increase equitable access for Indigenous Peoples to employment, leadership positions, and professional development opportunities at Queen's?

Research

Possible discussion questions:

- What role can Queen's play in advancing and promoting research excellence in Indigenous histories, contemporary issues, and reconciliation? How can Queen's support research that meets the needs of Indigenous communities?

- How can Queen's increase the number of faculty members with a specialization in Indigenous issues?
- How can Queen's support the use of research methodologies influenced by Indigenous practices and perspectives? How can Queen's best support Indigenous postdoctoral fellows?

Access, Transition, Recruitment and Student Support Services

Possible discussion questions:

- How can the university capitalize upon and leverage its distinctive strengths and identity in student recruitment (undergraduate, graduate, professional, etc.) to increase the number of Aboriginal students at both the undergraduate and graduate levels?
- How can the university engage with the Kingston and local Indigenous communities to improve support services, increase recruitment, and develop new pathways for Aboriginal students?
- What opportunities are there to improve and/or develop additional culturally appropriate academic support and peer mentorship services for Aboriginal students?
- How can the university further facilitate access to financial aid, both internal and external, for Aboriginal students?
- What are the systemic barriers faced by Aboriginal post-secondary students? How can Queen's help alleviate those barriers?

Academic Programming

Possible discussion questions:

- What role, if any, is there for undergraduate and graduate distance studies and off-campus (on reserve) delivery? What distance offerings could be pursued?
- What new credentials could be introduced at the undergraduate level?
- What new credentials could be introduced at the graduate level?

- How can we appropriately embed Indigenous practices, ways of knowing, and principles in our academic programs in a manner that is relevant to each particular field of study?
- How can the university encourage and support the use of Indigenous pedagogies?
- What opportunities exist for the university to engage with Indigenous communities to develop experiential learning opportunities for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal learners, as well as opportunities for learning beyond the “Western” approach?
- What opportunities exist for the university to engage with partner institutions to offer additional Indigenous focused programming?

Awareness and Climate

Possible discussion questions:

- What opportunities are there to develop new certificates or programs to educate staff and faculty on the histories, rights, and contemporary issues of Indigenous Peoples?
- What opportunities are there to incorporate Indigenous knowledge and practices into our support services, training programs, etc.?
- How can the university encourage a culture of inclusivity and respect for students, staff and faculty from a diverse range of backgrounds and beliefs in its policies and practices?
- What opportunities exist to increase the visual presence of Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous cultures on campus?
- What are the particular space needs of Indigenous faculty, staff and students?
- What opportunities exist to further profile the work of our Indigenous faculty, staff and students across campus?
- What issues impact the work climate of Aboriginal employees? Are additional support services and development resources required for Indigenous staff and faculty members?

The task force welcomes comments on these questions as well as general input from members of the community at trctaskforce@queensu.ca. All feedback will be considered as the task force develops its report.

ⁱ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Final Report:

<http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=890>

ⁱⁱ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Calls to Action:

<http://queensu.ca/provost/sites/webpublish.queensu.ca/provwww/files/files/Comittees/TRC%20Reports/TRC%20Calls%20to%20Action.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ Queen's University Truth and Reconciliation Commission Task Force:

<http://queensu.ca/provost/committees-and-reports/truth-and-reconciliation-commission-task-force>

^{iv} Queen's University Style Guide, Inclusive Language Guidelines:

<http://queensu.ca/styleguide/inclusivelanguage>

^v United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples:

http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf

^{vi} Lists of Aboriginal awards, scholarships and bursaries:

<http://www.queensu.ca/studentawards/financial-assistance/aboriginal-awards> and

<http://www.queensu.ca/sgs/aboriginal-students>