Survey of Education Choices Made by Indigenous Students

2013

Table of Contents

Executive Summary

There are many Indigenous perspectives in Canada and a diverse Indigenous student body, enrolled every year in a range of post-secondary programs. Indspire asked a sample of recent recipients of its *Building Brighter Futures*[i] financial awards what led to their educational choices. What resulted was a better understanding of trends and lessons Indigenous learners can teach policy makers and program service delivery agents about what is important to them.

Understanding the motivations and decisions that successful First Nation, Inuit, and Métis students make, contributes to building and supporting Indigenous student success. Do Indigenous students make the same choices about attending post-secondary institutions as other cohorts of students? What drives the choices Indigenous students make, what brought them to their college or university of choice, what keeps them there, and what is contributing to their graduation? Are there things that can be done differently to improve the recruitment, retention, and graduation rate of Indigenous learners?

Key findings from the survey were as follows:

- The majority of the Indigenous post-secondary students sampled were studying at university, enrolled in a four year program.

- The majority of students in the sample were studying in Ontario, Alberta, BC, Manitoba and Saskatchewan.

- The top six factors that influenced respondents when choosing their school were:
    o program of study;
    o school reputation;
    o faculty;
    o financial aid (bursaries/ scholarships);
    o Indigenous centre services; and
    o location was in close proximity to home.

- The six least important factors reported by respondents were:
    o athletics (varsity recruitment);
    o friends/peers attending same institution;
    o Maclean's magazine ranking;
    o secondary school guidance counsellors;
    o location was away from home; and
    o parental influence.

- The four services most used by these students were:
    o academic advising;
    o Indigenous services;
    o financial aid; and
    o faculty/division support.

Introduction

The educational experiences of First Nation, Inuit, and Métis students in Canada is increasingly a subject of concern and interest from a variety of perspectives[ii]. Indigenous populations are some of the youngest and fastest growing populations in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2011). The educational gap and the gap in skills and labour market supply and demand for Indigenous peoples continues to persist despite efforts to address these issues (TD Economics, 2013). Indigenous students have diverse experiences within their various communities and cultural contexts and at various educational institutions. Some of these experiences are good, others not so good. Indigenous learners are influenced by a number of individual and societal factors, including the motivation to leave one's community to attend higher education, for training, to find a job, or to seek other types of experiences. The Survey of Education Choices of Indigenous Students (2013)[iii] was an exploratory study of the factors influencing the choices made by a select group, with attention given to what this can tell us about supportive factors to assist Indigenous learners to enter and remain engaged in post-secondary education.

Indspire is recognized by learners, governments, and many in the post-secondary sector as a significant support for the participation and success of Indigenous learners in higher education. Indspire provides annual bursaries and scholarships to Indigenous college and university students across Canada. Indigenous students who receive *Building Brighter Futures* awards give back to the Indigenous community by advancing and supporting student success as role models. Their educational choices offer a unique set of perspectives on the important factors that attracted them to their particular school.

Student success at the post-secondary level does not take place in a vacuum. There are a number of factors that contribute to improving recruitment, retention, and graduation rates. As well, there are a great many more Indigenous students who need support, who are not receiving Indspire awards, and who are not graduating from secondary schools. Indspire has recently begun looking at ways of supporting K-12 Indigenous education to ensure students are making successful transitions from secondary to post-secondary education (PSE).

Survey Results

Location of post-secondary studies

The survey respondents attended post-secondary schools across all ten provinces and three territories in Canada. The top five provinces in which students reported attending school were Ontario, British Columbia (BC), Alberta, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan. Ontario had the most participants, almost doubling BC and Alberta combined.
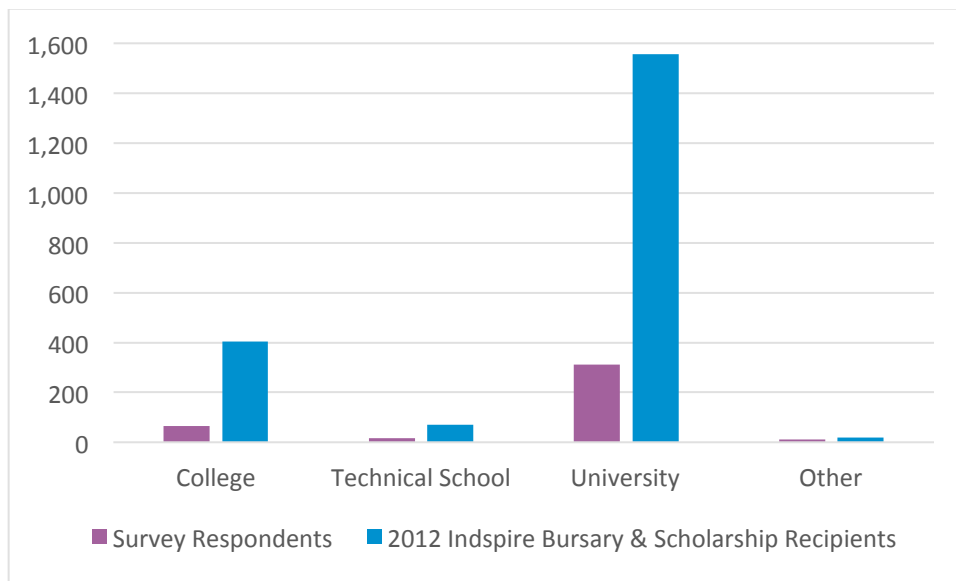
Table 1: Provincial Representation

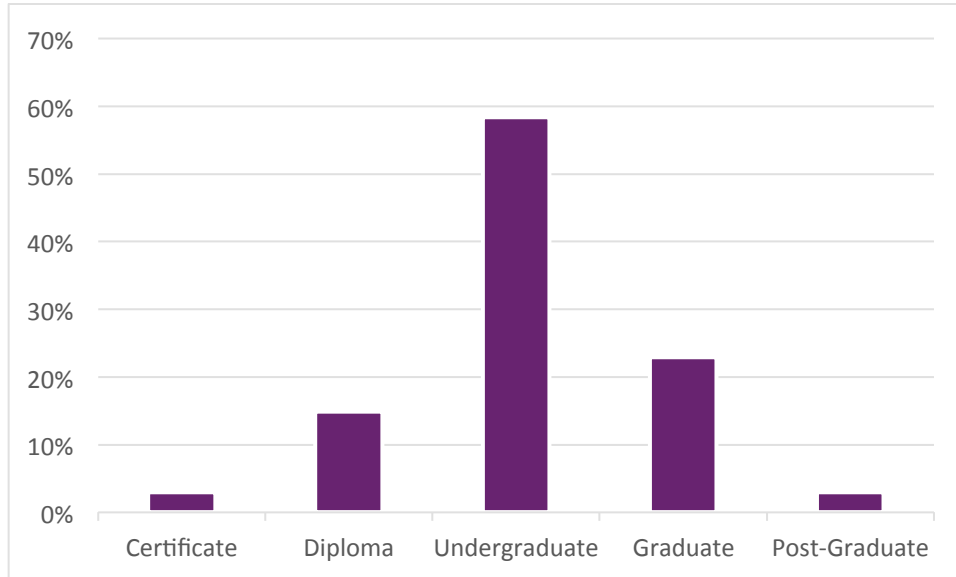| Province	# of Survey Participants	# of 2012 Indspire Bursary & Scholarship Recipients	Participation Rate by Province
Ontario	115	551	21%
Alberta	62	271	23%
British Columbia	66	297	22%
Manitoba	50	276	18%
Saskatchewan	37	259	14%
Total	**330**	**1,654**	**20%**

Type of PSE institution and level of program

Seventy nine percent of respondents were enrolled in a university program. The majority of students were in undergraduate programs. Seventeen percent of respondents were registered in a college program.

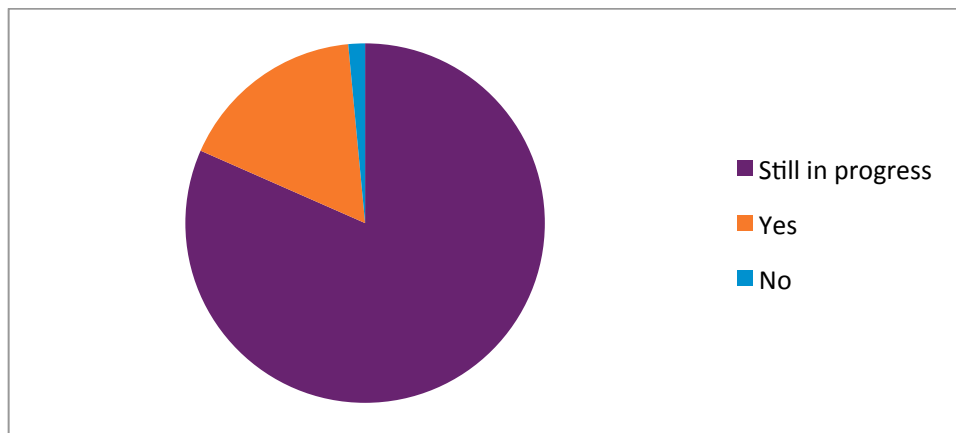*Chart 1: Enrolment by Type of Educational Institution*

The largest grouping of respondents were enrolled in undergraduate level studies, followed by graduate level, and college diploma.

Chart 2: Enrolment by Level of Program

The majority of students sampled were enrolled in their program of study during the survey period.

Chart 3: Graduated at Time of Survey

Factors influencing educational institution selection

Table two presents key responses from the survey, ranking the top six factors that influenced respondents' choices. Ranking was determined by combining responses to the very important and the somewhat important categories. The top six factors were 1) program of study, 2) school reputation, 3) faculty, 4) financial aid (bursaries/ scholarships), 5) Indigenous centre services, and 6) location was in close proximity to home.

The six least important factors respondents reported were 1) athletics (varsity recruitment), 2) friends/peers attending same institution, 3) Maclean's magazine ranking, 4) secondary school guidance counsellors, 5) location was away from home, and 6) parental influence.

Table 2: Factors Influencing Educational Institution Selection

Factors	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Important
Program of study	341	44	5
School reputation	167	173	38
Faculty	173	157	46
Financial aid (bursaries/scholarships)	177	135	54
Indigenous centre services	131	162	61
Location was in close proximity to home	161	122	84
Athletics (varsity recruitment)	9	33	235
Friends/peers attending same institution	26	56	240
Maclean's magazine ranking	24	55	209
Secondary school guidance counsellors	29	83	169
Location was away from home	30	62	148
Parental influence	48	94	142

On-campus support services most used

Respondents were given the list of twelve on-campus services listed in table 3. The top four services respondents reported using were 1) academic advising, 2) Indigenous services, 3) financial aid, and 4) faculty/division support.

Table 3: Utilization of On-Campus Support Services

On-campus Support Services	Percentage
Academic advising	67%
Indigenous services	64%
Financial aid	52%
Faculty/division support	39%
Academic support	31%
Personal counselling	30%
Student club/association	29%
Housing/student residence	20%
Student union	18%
Athletics (intramural)	14%
Athletics (varsity)	5%
Ombuds/student complaint	5%

(note: percentages are rounded to the nearest tenth)

The services least used were 1) athletics (varsity), 2) ombuds/student complaints, 3) athletics (intramural), 4) housing student residence, and 5) student union/council.

Table 4: On-Campus Support Services Influencing Success

	Use Service Often	Used This Service	Did Not Use This Service
Academic advising	89	199	89
Indigenous services	132	130	114
Financial aid	126	119	123
Faculty support/professors	106	138	118
Academic support (mentoring/tutoring)	51	111	206
Personal counselling	40	86	229
Student club/association	51	76	232
Student union/council	27	71	257
Housing/student residence	51	39	261
Athletics (intramural)	25	43	285
Ombuds/student complaints	6	33	311
Athletics (varsity)	11	14	323

Respondents were given the opportunity to list other influencing services. They identified disability services and the food bank. Media reports have covered the organizing of food banks on campus and many institutions have established disability services.

Conclusion

The PSE sector, including policy makers and program service delivery agents, would benefit from a more holistic and complete picture of the factors influencing Indigenous student choices relative to the various forms of institutional, community, and individual supports they are aware of and access in urban, rural, and remote areas. The Educational Choice Survey offered insights about the factors influencing the choices that a group of successful Indigenous students made regarding which post-secondary institution to attend. Respondents offered examples of areas where their choice of institution was based on positive factors, such as faculty support, financial aid, and Indigenous services.

There are many factors that contribute to Indigenous student success; understanding how these factors influence this particular group of students is of great value to education policy and support service providers, as well as the Indigenous community at large, in helping to close the gap in Indigenous education. The results should be put in context with the larger group of Indigenous students who are disengaging from formal education, a group of people who are complex and often the only focus of research because of the serious impacts and challenges they face.

Anecdotally, respondents reported they also tapped into broader community services and organizations around them, including but not limited to Friendship Centres, Family Services and Housing, Food banks, and more. Not all students used these services, but a considerable group contributed to and volunteered with these service providers. Furthermore, students often move in with family and it is

quite possible that they have extended family ties near their institution of choice. Understanding whether or not community and family supports are influencing factors for school of choice requires further research.

The findings show Indigenous students are not accessing some services available to them, including housing. The challenge is understanding why Indigenous students use some and not others; are services used differently from what the institution intends? The diversity of the Indigenous student body means a one size solution will not fit all. The diversity of First Nation, Inuit, and Métis students and the heterogeneity of Indigenous student experiences and situations are underlying conditions that influence choices and perceptions around those choices. The key to addressing these challenges may well lie in understanding tipping points that differentiate adaptations from maladaptation and disengagement of Indigenous students.

As the total number of Indigenous youth increases and as more enrol in post-secondary education programs, a concerted effort needs to be made by policy makers and program service delivery agents to address Indigenous students' needs in order to increase graduation rates and foster Indigenous student success.

Endnotes

i. *Building Brighter Futures: Bursaries and Scholarship Awards* is the main post-secondary student funding program of Indspire. Total funding available varies each year and comes from both private and public sources. Juries adjudicate individual applicants based on established criteria.

ii. In the fall of 2010, a National Working Summit on Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education, comprised of the Association of University and Colleges of Canada (AUCC), charities, private sector organizations, PSE stakeholders, and Indspire, met to discuss Indigenous PSE, specifically measures to increase the number of Indigenous PSE graduates. The results of that meeting led to 2013 Survey of Education Choices of Indigenous Students.

iii. In 2013, Indspire administered a survey of recent financial award recipients (n=2,050) who attended either a trades/technical school, college, or university. The voluntary survey was administered electronically through Survey Monkey over four weeks in the early winter of 2013.There were 396 respondents (19%) who provided input to the questions, as follows:

   1. Please indicate the type of post-secondary institution you are attending.
   2. What is the name of the institution you are attending?
   3. What is the length of your program of study?
   4. Please indicate the type of program of study
   5. Indicate how important the following factors were in selecting your educational institution?
   6. Did you graduate?
   7. Why did you not graduate?
   8. What services did you utilize at the educational institution? Check all that apply.
   9. Of the services utilized please indicate the ones you believe contributed to your academic success.
   10. Outside the education institute what other services/resources contributed to your success?

Appendix A: List of Colleges/Universities Attended by Survey Respondents

Acadia University
Alberta Construction
Algonquin College
Assiniboine College
Athabasca University
Bishops University
Blue Quills First Nation College
Booth University College
Boucher Institute of
    Naturopathic Medicine
Bow Valley College
Brandon University
British Columbia Institute
    Technology
Cambrian College
Camosun College
Canada's Royal Winnipeg of
    Ballet School
Canadian Academy of
    Enterstomal Therapy
Canadian Memorial Chiropractic
    College
Cape Breton University
Carleton University
CEGEP Heritage College
Champlain Regional College
    Lennoxville
College of Law, University of
    Saskatchewan
College of the North Atlantic
College of the Rockies
Concordia University
Confederation College
Dalhousie University
Douglas College
Dumont Technical
Fanshawe College
First Nations University of
    Canada
Fleming College
George Brown College
Grande Prairie Regional College
Grant MacEwan University

Institute for Human Services
    Education
Kings University
Kwantlen Polytechnic University
La Cite Collegiale
Lakehead University
Langara College
Laurentian University
Laval University
Lethbridge College
Loyalist College
Masters College and Seminary
McGill University
McMaster University
Memorial University
Minot State University
Mohawk College
Mount Allison University
Native Education College
Nicola Valley Institute of
    Technology
NorQuest College
North Island College
North West Regional College
Northern Ontario School of
    Medicine
OCAD University
Osgoode Hall
Portage College
Purely Inspire School of Beauty
Queens University
Red River College
Rhode Island School of Beauty
Ryerson University
Saint Thomas University
Saskatchewan Indian Institute
    of Technology
Sault College of Arts and
    Technology
Selkirk College
Sheridan Institute of Technology
Simon Fraser University
Six Nations Polytechnic

Southern Alberta Institute of
    Technology
St. Thomas University
St. Xavier Frances University
The Michener Institute for
    Health Sciences
Thompson Rivers University
Trent University
Tyndale University College and
    Seminary
Université de Montréal
Université de Sherbrooke
Université de St. Boniface
Université Laval
University College of the North
University of Alberta
University of Arizona
University of British Columbia
University of Calgary
University of Guelph
University of Lethbridge
University of Manitoba
University of New Brunswick
University of Northern British
    Columbia
University of Ottawa
University of Pennsylvania
University of Prince Edward
    Island
University of Regina
University of Saskatchewan
University of the Fraser Valley
University of Toronto
University of Victoria
University of Waterloo
University of Windsor
University of Winnipeg
Vancouver Island U
Western University
Wilfrid Laurier University
York University