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SIAST establishes Aboriginal council

Initiative builds on successful student recruitment efforts

March 14, 2005 – SIAST has established a council of advisors to build on the success of its Aboriginal student recruitment initiatives. The council will provide an Aboriginal perspective to SIAST president and CEO Dr. Bob McCulloch. It will also serve as a resource to people and departments across the organization.

“Our Aboriginal student enrolment is now in excess of 18 percent – an achievement of which we’re very proud,” says Dr. McCulloch. “The advisory council will help us maintain momentum and leverage our success.”

Myrna Yuzicapi points to Aboriginal employee recruitment as one area that she expects the council to focus on. Yuzicapi co-chairs the council with Shelley Belhumeur; both work in Aboriginal activity centres at SIAST campuses, although Yuzicapi now divides her time between counselling activities and coordinating the Aboriginal council.

“Demographics and the economy are driving Aboriginal student recruitment efforts, and one way to advance those efforts is to build a truly representative and inclusive working and learning environment,” says Yuzicapi.

The Aboriginal council will examine issues and solutions ranging from hiring processes to mentoring and role models, she says. Ultimately, its goal is to advance a transformation that will essentially institutionalize inclusiveness. “If we do this right,” says Yuzicapi, “in 10 years, there should be a pattern established that these things will just happen without intervention.”

The 18-member council includes student and employee representatives from each of SIAST’s four campuses. It was formed in response to extensive consultations with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students and employees, conducted by Dynamic Aboriginal Management Solutions on SIAST’s behalf. Approximately 200 people took part in focus groups and surveys designed to identify ways in which SIAST could further

its representative goals. In addition to its advisory role, the council will serve as an advocate of best practices and as a forum on various issues related to Aboriginal people within the organization.

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 12,000 students are registered in SIAST programs, which touch every sector of the economy; additionally, the organization draws almost 29,000 individual course registrations. It 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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SIAST Aboriginal Council Bios – Co-chairs

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Shelley Belhumer

Shelley Belhumer has been the coordinator of the Aboriginal Activity Centre at SIAST Woodland Campus in Prince Albert for the past six years. Together with Albert Myo, the elder at the campus, Belhumer has facilitated sessions on Aboriginal culture in educational and industrial settings throughout the province.

Drawing on earlier experience as an addictions counsellor, she instructs the Driving Without Impairment Program at the St. Louis Rehabilitation Centre, a treatment facility for impaired drivers. Belhumer serves on the centre's board of directors.

Previously, Belhumer was an American sign language interpreter in the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Program at SIAST Kelsey Campus in Saskatoon. A Métis woman from St. Louis, Saskatchewan, and a former welder, she has been involved with SIAST-wide and SIAST Woodland Campus education equity committees.

Myrna Yuzicapi

Myrna Yuzicapi has been an Aboriginal student counsellor at SIAST Kelsey Campus in Saskatoon since 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.

Yuzicapi was the founding coordinator of Joe Duquette High School (formerly called Saskatoon Native Survival School) and the founding director of the Indian Social Work Education Program, which led to the creation of 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 is a member of the Wanuskewin board of directors and has served on the board of 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.