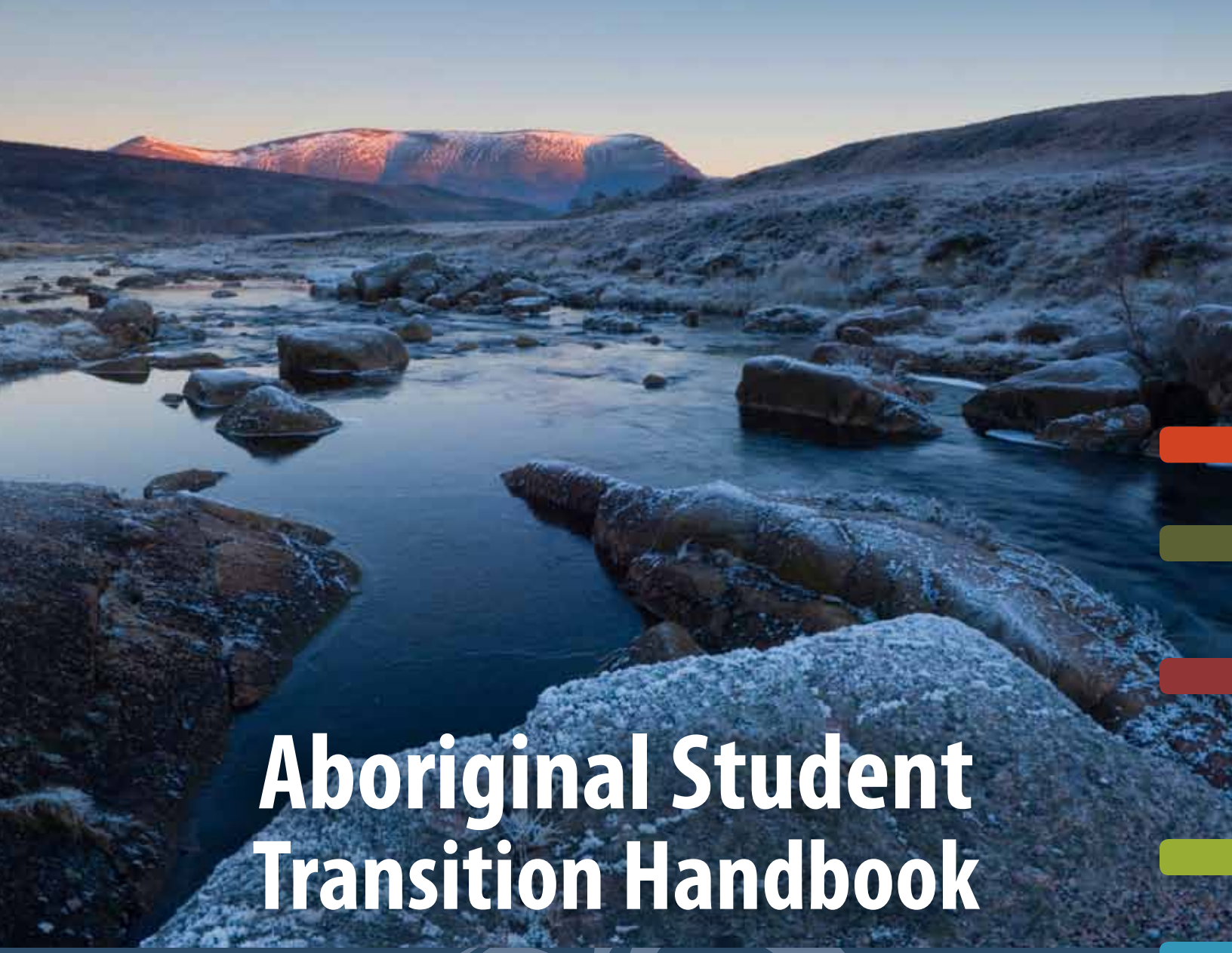

Aboriginal Student Transition Handbook

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The Best Place on Earth

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"Seek out and use resources such as this Handbook. They are designed to help make your transition as smooth as possible. Last, but not least, don't be afraid to ask questions. The more you ask, the better-informed decisions you will be able to make."

INTRODUCTION

Congratulations on what you have accomplished thus far and for choosing to explore your dreams by pursuing higher education. You have the power and the responsibility to shape your own future, and education is one of the most powerful, and at times most entertaining, ways of doing that. A post-secondary education gives you not only an education that lasts a lifetime, but a myriad of social skills and new friendships that can last a lifetime as well.

University can be the best time of your life. It is a lot of hard work, but there is no better opportunity to explore what the world has to offer and connect with others from across the province, the country and even the world.

Transitioning can certainly be a difficult time. For many of you, this journey is an even more challenging one as you balance family responsibilities. Many of you will be leaving your community to pursue your education. It is important to stay connected with your family and with your community and to surround yourself with a positive support system. This will go a long way in achieving success. While the transition can be tough at first, remember that this is a journey and an adventure.

As Aboriginal peoples we are living in a time of great opportunity. First Nations are the fastest growing population in Canada and soon all employers will need to rely more and more on our citizens to fill both existing and emerging occupations. This means there will be more opportunities for qualified and well-educated Aboriginal people. You are in the position to be a part of the change that is occurring, or is going to occur, in your community.

Where do your dreams and desires want to take you? Think hard about that. The reason being is, for you to be successful, you have to put a lot of time and effort into it, so make sure to do something that interests you and seek out new opportunities.

Seek out and use resources such as this Handbook. They are designed to help make your transition as smooth as possible. Last, but not least, don't be afraid to ask questions. The more you ask, the better-informed decisions you will be able to make.

So go forth and take every opportunity that you can! Have courage; persevere, and remember that the rewards will be endless!

Gilakas'la

Jody Wilson-Raybould
Regional Chief,
BC Assembly of First Nations

FOCUS ON *YOU*

Let's start off by taking a moment to reflect on what you have accomplished so far…you have already taken the first step in your educational journey by going to your Indigenous Adult and Higher Learning Association (IAHLA). And now that you are nearing the end of your studies and thinking of transitioning to another institution, **CONGRATULATIONS** are in order!!

This is an important milestone for you. Take the time to think back to how you got to where you are today…what helped you get through the tough times? Who was there to support you? What did you learn from the challenges you faced? Remember these things and – most importantly – these people. They will be instrumental in supporting you through this next step in your educational journey.

HANDBOOK OVERVIEW

This handbook was created to help answer some of your questions and to prepare you for the next step in your journey. The contents of this handbook reflect on the concerns and struggles of Indigenous students who are currently enrolled in, or have graduated from a post-secondary institution. The handbook covers a wide variety of topics including: finding suitable childcare in an urban setting; accessing affordable housing; and, meeting new people in an unfamiliar city. This handbook is meant to serve as a living, dynamic document for you to build upon. It's important to note that while your initial goals may change over time, this process is a strong starting point from which you'll be able to embark in many different directions. All the information is current as of May 2010 and through your own exploration, you may find new related links or resources that will be beneficial throughout your journey.

To use this handbook most effectively, consider where you're at today. If you're thinking of pursuing a degree or diploma at a public post-secondary institution but you aren't sure what program you'd like to take, you will likely do well to start at Stepping Stone 1. If you already know what program you'd like to take and/or you have already figured out which institution you'd like to attend, you might want to skip the first stepping stone and start partway into Stepping Stone 2 with "Connecting with the Aboriginal Post-Secondary Coordinators". If you have already completed your application but are just looking for more information on the transition, you might want to jump right over to Stepping Stone 3 – Preparing for the Transition from an IAHLA Institute to a Public Post-Secondary Institution (PPSI).

If at any point in your journey, you feel unsure or lost, consider going back to Stepping Stone 1 and "Identifying Your Strengths". It's always nice to be reminded of the gifts you have, especially in hard times – and it can help you feel more confident in yourself and the decisions you are making.

Finally, before we start, it is important to acknowledge how this handbook came to be. Its roots began with recognizing how students' experiences as they transition from a rural place to an urban one may be overwhelming and uncertain. A partnership was initiated between IAHLA and the University of Victoria with the Aboriginal Transitions Research Project, funded through the Ministry of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development (ALMD). Through this project, several IAHLA students participated as researchers and conducted interviews with other IAHLA students to identify barriers and opportunities in the transition process from Aboriginal-controlled institutes to public post-secondary institutes. The topics and recommendations that you find here are based on their findings. We would like to thank the students who were involved both as researchers and as interview participants, and all the IAHLA, University of Victoria, and ALMD staff who were involved.

STEPPING STONE 1:
EXPLORING YOUR AREAS OF INTEREST

Deciding on what you want to do for the rest of your life sounds very daunting for many people – and others have known what they want to do since they were in elementary school or high school. Whichever boat (or canoe) you're in, it's a good practice to do some self-reflection every now and then to identify and acknowledge your gifts. It's also a good idea to connect with one or more people who know you well and ask them to help you identify your strengths – they may identify something that you haven't thought of!

Identifying Your Strengths

There are many different personality tests and quizzes that can help you identify your areas of strength and areas requiring development, but you can also do it on your own with a little self-reflection. Think back over your life to the key moments where you did something you were particularly proud of, whether it was accomplishing something difficult, reaching a goal, or making a difference in someone else's life. What qualities and characteristics did you demonstrate (e.g., patience, leadership, decisiveness)? It's very likely that many of your greatest gifts will be identified this way.

If you're having trouble identifying your gifts, ask those closest to you for what they feel your strongest assets are. Ask them to be completely honest – and it's important for you to be willing and open to hear their feedback! You might hear different opinions depending on your relationship with the person/people you ask. Be sure to include someone who knows you mainly through your educational journey. They might have key feedback that others might not be aware of. One such person might be your Post-secondary Counsellor (if you are status), a teacher or Post-secondary Advisor at your IAHLA institute.

Once you know what your natural skills are, you can start your path towards a field that will best serve you and those around you.

Connecting with Your Post-Secondary Counsellor/Advisor

If you are a status student, you have likely already met your Post-Secondary Counsellor (PSC). If you haven't, RUN, RUN, RUN to your Band office, school board office or community education department and get to know them! It's important to make this a priority because your PSC will be an important resource and community contact, not only as you transition into your PPSI, but throughout the length of your studies! If you are non-status, you likely have a Post-Secondary Advisor or some similar support person at your IAHLA institute who will be a huge support. Get to know them well. They will help you navigate through all these processes.

Whether you're working with a PSC from your Band or an Advisor from your IAHLA institute (or both!), you will benefit from the wealth of knowledge that this person/people have and the resources they can connect you to.

STEPPING STONE 2:
CHOOSING YOUR PATH

There are many paths to post-secondary education – some people know exactly what they want and the program that they want – others aren't sure and just want to get their foot in the door. Whichever path is yours, know that there is flexibility to change programs, even if you've already started your courses. Just be sure to speak to an academic advisor at your PPSI – they will help you ensure that you are taking the right courses for a smooth transition from one program to another. Also, if you're a funded student, be sure to check with your PSC to make sure that your funding won't be exhausted, because fundable months are limited and have specific guidelines to be followed. So, which PPSI will you attend?

Choosing the PPSI that you want to attend is an important decision – you will be living in that city for an extended time, so it's important to do some background research. If you can, it's a great idea to go visit the institution's campus in person to really get a feel for it. Can you picture yourself studying there? You may also have the opportunity to meet and chat with a few people, including Aboriginal students and employees who could assist you with the application process, and even some professors who may teach your classes if you end up at that PPSI. It may take a lot of fundraising efforts, but it will be well worth it if you can make it work!

Before booking your campus tour, make sure that the PPSI you would like to attend has the program that you're interested in for the career that you are striving for. Still not sure about that? Here's something that may help…

What is the difference between a college and a university?

Universities generally have a larger range of courses and more degree programs than colleges. Most colleges are smaller, have lower tuition rates (costs), and may have fewer entrance requirements. Many colleges also offer trades programs.

Choosing a Career Path

Knowing that you want to go to a PPSI but not knowing what you want to study is a common concern for a lot of people. You've already worked at identifying your strengths – now the trick is to figure out what fields of study require skills from your areas of strength and to try to find a career that interests you from there.

There are surveys that can help you discover what you are really interested in and can help you focus on an area of study at a PPSI. These surveys are often called career tests/quizzes and aptitude tests/quizzes and can be found on the Internet. Note that some charge a fee to get your full results. One that has been recommended by students and teachers can be found at **www.schoolfinder.com**. You must become a member to take full advantage of what this site has to offer, but it's free! This site also provides information and links to which schools in Canada offer courses and programs related to the career you are interested in. Another great site is **www.careercruising.com**. You can access over 550 career profiles, information about college, university and apprenticeship programs, interest and skills assessment tools, personal portfolio tools with built-in resume builder, and so much more! Contact your IAHLA institute for free login and password information.

Even with all these quizzes and tests, many students still aren't sure which career path to take. It's important to know that you don't necessarily have to determine your eventual career right now. Most fields have built-in flexibility – you can change your major to something different if you decide you want to go another route. Many programs have a general first year of study, which means that you can try out courses from different faculties. You'll also learn more about other programs and courses just by talking with others. If you end up liking a different faculty or program better than the one you applied to, in most cases, you are able to switch programs. Be sure to talk to an academic advisor at your PPSI to make sure you are making the right course selections and to make sure you don't wind up four years in and missing one course to graduate! If you build your contacts and allies at your PPSI, and stay in contact with your PSC/Advisor from your Band and/or your IAHLA institute, you should be able to set yourself up for success!

What is a major and a minor?

Generally a major and a minor are specializations of courses in a single subject area within a degree. The difference is in the number of credits you need to qualify for a major or minor. For example, a major in Anthropology requires 60 credits of anthropology courses, whereas a minor in anthropology requires 30 credits. You should speak to an academic advisor in your institution to get more information.

Connecting with the Aboriginal Post-Secondary Coordinators

Okay – so you've gotten a list of the PPSIs that offer the program that you're interested in, either through the link above or through your own research. Great start! Now it's time to start narrowing down your choices and find out more about the institutions by emailing or calling those schools. To make this part a little less intimidating, the Ministry of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development has compiled a list of the Aboriginal contacts at the universities, colleges and institutes across BC – this list can be found by clicking on the appropriate link at **www.aved.gov.bc.ca/aboriginal/ab-list.htm**.

These contacts are usually Aboriginal people who are happy to help you out. They are great contacts to have, as they should be able to answer your questions or put you in touch with someone else that can. So just what kind of questions should you be asking? Here's a list compiled by the First Nations Education Steering Committee that can get you started:

- What support services do you have for Aboriginal students?
- Is there an Aboriginal student union or other student advocacy group available on campus?
- Is there a meeting place for Aboriginal students?
- Is there an organization on campus that offers information on housing, transportation, childcare, financial assistance or social services?
- Are there computer labs available for Aboriginal student use?
- What extra-curricular activities are available?
- Is there an elementary school or secondary school nearby?
- Do you have an Aboriginal admissions policy? If so, please explain how it works.
- Are the courses I plan to take accredited? Is the program I'm planning to take recognized by other post-secondary institutions? Will my courses transfer to other post-secondary institutions?
- What types of student housing does your institution offer? Do you have dedicated student housing for Aboriginal students?
- How many Aboriginal students are currently enrolled at your institution?
- What type of financial assistance can I apply for through your institution and how do I find out more information? Are there any financial assistance options specifically for Aboriginal students?
- Can you give me additional names and contact information of people at your institution who can assist me in applying to your institution or who I can contact for more information?

These people will be instrumental in helping you decide which PPSI is right for you – they will give you a good idea of the kind of support that you are likely to receive as a student should you choose their institution, so take the time to make the connection by phone and/or email! Consider their answers to these questions carefully – the institution that you choose is going to be your new home for an extended period of time.

NOTE: You're going to want to keep a list of these contacts and the other contacts that they might provide you with – these people may be VERY helpful through the application and registration steps!

What are transfer credits?

These are course credits that you can transfer from one post-secondary institution to another post-secondary institution and get credit for them. For instance, you might take an English 120 course at Langara College that can be transferred to UBC so this course counts toward your degree at UBC. To find out how courses transfer to other schools, go to the BC Transfer Guide website. The address is: www.bctransferguide.ca.

Be aware that some schools and courses are not accredited and therefore they may not transfer to other colleges and universities AND they may not count toward your degree. Before you apply to a post-secondary institution, be sure to ask what courses are transferable.

If you are calling your PPSI and the phone call is long distance, you may want to go to your local employment centre, Band office or IAHLA institute to ask if you can call from there so that you don't have to pay the long distance fees. Also try finding out if the PPSI has a toll-free number that you can call.

Applying to a Post-Secondary Institution

First things first…for students with First Nations status and registered Métis Nation students, be sure to check with your Band or agency for sponsorship information! Check with your PSC to review the steps for applying for sponsorship/funding. Apply early!! Most Bands and agencies require several months notice (often three or many more months) prior to your registration and fee payment dates. Any questions about sponsorship funding should be directed to your Band or agency. You may want to ask them:

- What types of PPSI programs will you sponsor? (e.g., degrees, certificates, diplomas, cooperative education)
- Do you fund part-time studies? How does it affect my living allowance?
- How does the Band define a full-time student? Note that this may be different than the PPSI definition and may affect your eligibility for funding through your Band.
- What documents are required in order to get funding? (e.g., letter of acceptance from the PPSI, a copy of course registration)
- What other steps and forms are required for sponsorship?
- What are the deadlines for applying and for submitting documentation?
- What might jeopardize my funding/sponsorship? (e.g., failing a course)

Your PSC may also have a list of contacts for you at your PPSI of choice and/or a few suggestions for mentors in your area of study!

Okay – now take a deep breath…it's time to APPLY FOR ADMISSION. This can be a very time-consuming process, so be sure to have that list of Aboriginal contacts handy. They can help walk you through any stage of the process – or put you in contact with someone else who can. Note that in BC there are generally two ways of applying for admission. The first is the paper application – many institutions are trying to phase this out, so it may be difficult to get your hands on a paper application. You may have to phone or email the institution's Registrar's Office and ask them to send you one.

The second way is applying online at **www.pas.bc.ca**. You will be required to create or use an existing account in the BCcampus Portal website to access the application form pages. The online form consists of two parts: (1) the Post-Secondary Application Service (PASBC) part that has the PASBC logo at the top of each page and (2) the institution-specific part, which is identified with the institutional logo or crest at the top.

When you submit your application form, you will pay a non-refundable application fee – you will need a credit card to do this! If you don't have a credit card, you can buy a VISA or Mastercard giftcard with enough funds on it to cover these costs

Applying to a Post-Secondary Institution (continued)

online – or you can obtain a paper application from your PPSI to pay with cash, cheque or money order. If you are Band or agency funded, be sure to keep your receipt and submit a request for reimbursement. Not all Bands or agencies cover this fee, but some do, so it's worth asking! Note that if you do not get accepted to the PPSI, you do not get your application fee back, as the PPSI uses the fee to pay for their staff's time to process and evaluate the application.

Here are some helpful hints for applying for admission:

- Check the website of the PPSI that you are applying to. They should have detailed instructions on how to apply.
- If you apply online you will need a credit card to pay for the application fee – be sure that you are using a safe computer! Also, if the computer asks you to save your password, click 'NO' so that there is no history for other people to access your account.
- If you apply by paper, you have the option of paying by credit card, money order, certified cheque or cash.
- When the PPSI receives your application and fee, they will send you a notification letter either by mail or email that tells you if you have any missing items from your application, and it will also contain your student ID number – this number is very important! It gives you access to check on the status of your application and allows you to apply for on-campus housing – and later on, you will use it to register for courses!
- Speaking of on-campus housing – apply for it as soon as you get your student ID number. Spaces are limited, so if you would like to stay on campus, apply as early as possible and be sure to pay the housing application fee.
- Apply for scholarships right away! Scholarships are gifts of money generally awarded based on academic merit and/or personal achievement. Most institutions have one form to complete for a number of awards and scholarships.
- Don't forget about bursaries! You have a little more time for these, but make a note that the deadline for applying for bursaries at your PPSI is generally within the first month or two of classes. Bursaries are gifts of money that are generally based on financial need. Remember to ask the Aboriginal Coordinator at your PPSI about these once you are there.
- If you are accepted to the PPSI, CONGRATULATIONS!!! Most PPSIs have an online registration process now. You will likely get a note with a date and registration time. Be sure to register as soon as possible on this date – classes can fill up early and you want to be sure to get the courses that you want.
- Spend some time familiarizing yourself with your PPSI's website, and be sure to create a username on the PPSI's website that is linked with your student number – this is where a lot of important information from the Registrar's Office will likely be sent to.
- If you are accepted but you aren't sure which courses to take, make an appointment with an academic advisor BEFORE your registration date to map out your courses.
- All of these processes can be very intimidating – and sometimes frustrating – particularly the registration process. If you have a friend or family member who has gone through the process before, ask them for help. Your PSC, your IAHLA Counsellor/Advisor and/or your Aboriginal Coordinator at your PPSI will also be able to help.

STEPPING STONE 3:

PREPARING FOR THE TRANSITION FROM AN IAHLA INSTITUTE TO A PUBLIC POST-SECONDARY INSTITUTION

Identifying strengths…check. Choosing a career path…check. Applying to a PPSI…check. Getting accepted to a PPSI…CONGRATULATIONS!!! Some would say the tough part is now behind you, but now it's time to start preparing to leave your home community – which for many is the hardest part. It's a step that is often disregarded or rushed through by many, but one that is very important to ensuring that you start off with a solid footing. There will be many loose ends left dangling if you don't take the time now to think of how you will tie them up – and keep them tied – while you're away from home.

Taking the First Step…OFF the Reserve

Whether you live on reserve or not, there are many important things to consider before you leave your current home. Here's a list of questions and things to look into – not everything will apply to everyone, so ask someone if you aren't sure!

Housing

- If you are moving out, how much notice do you need to give? Does it have to be in writing? If you are planning on moving back into your current home, can you arrange to rent out your home or find a house sitter?
- If you currently live on-reserve, do you have to contact CMHC (Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation)? Make sure you keep all documentation!
- Will you be selling, giving away, storing or taking your furniture and other belongings?
- How much would freight services be for moving your furnishings and personal belongings to your new city?
- Can you still keep your current home address, or will you have to do an address change with the post office?
- Will you have to cancel phone/internet/other services?
- How much will it be to travel to your new city? Note that there are high volume seasonal travel times when roads and/or ferries can be extremely busy and/or flights can be more expensive – try to avoid these if possible.

Work

- Will you have to quit your job or can you take an educational leave? Note that applying for an educational leave can be a lengthy process.
- How much notice do you need to give your employer?
- Do you have to cancel or give notice for any childcare arrangements you had?

Community

- Do you need to make arrangements for someone else to take over any community responsibilities that you have?
- Who do you need to notify at your children's school(s) about a transfer of records to their new school(s)?
- Can you make arrangements with an Elder or other community member to stay in contact with via email, phone or mail while you are away?
- Do you have someone in your community that you've looked up to and hold a lot of respect for – a mentor – who you can stay in contact with while you are away?
- What traditional foods (e.g., seaweed, preserved foods) can you bring with you to remind you of your home community, maintain your nutritional diet, and help subsidize your living costs away from home?

That should take care of most things on the home front and we will talk about some things on the other end a little later.

“Elders are the ones who hold the key to our success. They hold the key, but we have to take that key and use it to unlock the doors that are holding the native people back.”

— Current Student

Staying Connected to Community and Culture

We know that there will be many opportunities and challenges ahead as you embark on your educational journey, but before we get into the nitty-gritty, it's important to take the time to consider how this journey will impact your relationships with family, friends and community. Here are some questions to consider and discuss with loved ones BEFORE you leave:

- How do your family and friends view your academic aspirations? Do they feel getting a degree/diploma will benefit you?
- Do they know why you are leaving the community? Do they know whether or not you plan on returning to your community?
- Do they feel like they are losing you to the big city and the white world?
- How does your community feel about young people leaving for school?
- If you are dating someone or in a serious relationship, how will this change when you move? Will they be moving with you? If not, what are some of the challenges of a long distance relationship?
- Do you have a cultural and/or leadership role in your community and how will this change when you move?
- How have other community members who moved away for school been treated by their family, friends and community when they returned home?

It is important for you to think about how you will remain connected to your community because they can be your biggest supporters and providers of strength when you are faced with challenges in the big city – not to mention how important it is to have them share with you in your educational milestones and celebrations. Maintaining connections with people who inspire and support you will keep you grounded in who you are and where you come from.

Another important connection to have is with a support person from your IAHLA institute. This person will be your champion if you run into any bumps along your path to attending and/or studying at your PPSI of choice. If you aren't sure of who this should be, just ask. Most IAHLA institutes have designated someone to be that support person for you as you continue on your educational journey.

It is especially helpful to have a connection to an Elder while you are away – they will be that constant reminder of your culture, your roots and your spirit. If you do not have a relationship with an Elder, try to think of someone who you respect and admire that will be able to take the role of being the tie to your culture and your home. You may also want to bring something from home – a symbol of yourself and your culture – to keep you balanced while you are away.

Here are some ideas on how to acknowledge your supporters and to plant the seeds to encourage continuing connections while you are away:

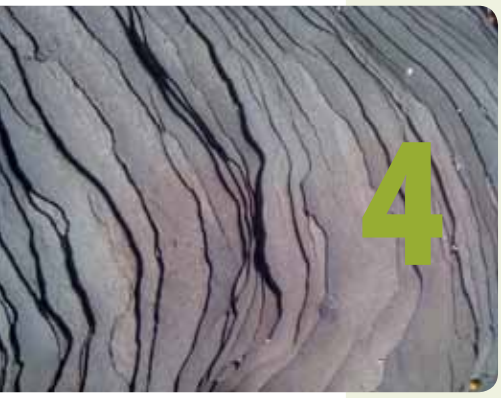
- Have a going-away gathering with your family and friends. Plan this with your family so that they can be involved and share with you what is important for them to give you a proper send off. At some point in the gathering, acknowledge how each person has supported you in your journey and how much they mean to you. Depending on your family and cultural traditions, the exchange of gifts may be appropriate. Be sure to hand out your contact information to everyone, including email address. Also be sure to let them know who you will list as an emergency contact at your PPSI.
- Involve your family and friends as you make decisions around school and admissions so that they understand the process you are going through.
- Talk with your family and friends about your dreams and their dreams so that they can see why this is important to you – and so that you have a better idea of where their support and/or concerns are coming from.
- Once you are in school, make trips home whenever possible to ensure that you maintain a connection and presence in your home community. Some Band sponsored students may have one or more trips home supported by their Band – be sure to contact your Band office to see what their policy is.
- Have an exit plan from your job and/or any leadership roles you have in the community so that you feel good about leaving on good terms and so you know that people and responsibilities will be taken care of in your absence.

Finding a Mentor

A mentor is someone with experience who gives advice and support. This person can be a great help when you face barriers, challenges, or just need someone to listen. You may want to have a couple of mentors that will support you through different areas. For instance, you might want to have a community mentor – someone from your community who has gone away to post-secondary and returned – and a career/program-specific mentor who is currently taking a program that you are interested in or who is currently working in your field of interest.

When choosing a mentor, keep these things in mind:

- A mentor understands that you don't need to be lectured or scolded, but rather to share words of advice and encouragement;
- An appropriate mentor has experienced challenges similar to those that you may face on your journey and has come through them successfully;
- Potential mentors in your community could be Elders, family members, community leaders, employers or teachers;
- If you are having a hard time finding an appropriate mentor, consider talking to your IAHLA institute to see if they can recommend someone to you – keep in mind that you may have to connect with this person via email or phone if they live in a different community.



> “If you don’t know where you come from, you sure don’t know where you are going to go. The more you learn about our roots, the easier it will be for you to live in this world today, then you know where you are from, who you are.”
>
> — Elder

STEPPING STONE 4:
YOUR NEW HOME

Moving to a new city and meeting new people is an exciting adventure, but it can also be pretty intimidating when you don’t know where things are or who to talk to in order to get the support you need. There are both on- and off-campus resources available to you – the trick is knowing how to find them. Look at this as an adventure and a way to hone your problem-solving, time management, and organizational skills! Hopefully, the following resources will get you started…

On-Campus Resources

Your new campus will have many resources available, some of which are specifically for Indigenous students. The first thing you can do when you arrive is to seek out your Aboriginal Student Union/Centre/Office/Lounge (each institution calls it something different, but it shouldn't be too hard to find). There will be students and staff who can help you find and access resources both on- and off-campus, and give you more information about support programs available to you. Here's a list of some on-campus resources that many PPSIs offer – please note that not all PPSIs offer all of these resources.

- ***Elders-in-residence***: The process for accessing Elders is different at each PPSI, but generally, one or more Elders are available for students for guidance, advice, and support.
- ***Student Union Building***: This building will house a number of resources, including retail shops, food shops, food banks, photocopying, book stores, and different student associations (e.g., Native Student Union, Students of Colour, Women's Centre, Pride, Students with Disabilities) – a one-stop shop for students on campus.
- ***Student Health Centre***: These centres have doctors and nurses (and sometimes other care providers such as dentists and chiropractors) available for students and staff, and are extremely helpful if you aren't able to find a new doctor as someone new to the community.
- ***Student Counselling Centre***: This is a place where students can go if they are feeling overwhelmed, homesick, or stressed out. Staff can provide a listening ear as well as many resources to help you through tough times. Aboriginal counsellors are available on some campuses.
- ***Student Career Centre***: Most PPSIs have career centres where staff can help you build your resume and work on your interview skills. They also have job banks that can help you find a job. In the long-term, they can help you build a professional portfolio and find out what types of careers your area of study can lead to.
- ***Resource for Students with a Disability***: For those students whose learning is affected by their disability, there are a variety of learning assistance services available on PPSI campuses. Learning strategists, learning skills workshops, and course tutoring are just a few of the resources that may be available to you.
- ***Chaplaincy Services***: For students wanting to connect with religious services, your PPSI's chaplaincy services can connect you with a church or gathering place in your denomination – most have a non-denominational church where anyone can go for some quiet prayer or reflection.
- Check out your PPSI's website for more! If you aren't sure where to find these or other resources, ask the Aboriginal Coordinator at your PPSI. Also, be sure to participate in your PPSI's Orientation – you'll most likely find out about even MORE resources and services available to you!

Community Resources

While some institutions are cities in their own right, it's also good to see what's available outside the campus borders. You may be looking for off-campus housing, childcare, schools for your child(ren), or just trying to figure out where to go for a good cup of coffee. This section should help you out with that.

The first place you may want to locate is your local Aboriginal Friendship Centre. You can find a list of these centres at **www.bcaafc.com/bcfriendshipcentres/listings**. Friendship Centres offer many services, which may include Child and Family Services, Family Literacy, Youth Programming, Good Food Boxes, Community Kitchens, Health Services, Cultural Support and Financial Aid, among others. It's also a great place to find out more about the city that you live in. Their staff – and the people who go there – may have great advice on where to look for off-campus housing, where to eat, where to hang out, job opportunities, recreation and culture opportunities, and many other things. All in all, it's a great place to go to meet other friendly faces, whether you are accessing their services or just popping in to say hello.

Off-Campus Housing

If you are looking for a place to stay off-campus, there are a lot of options to look into. The first place you should look is your PPSI's website – they likely have a page where you can search for student-friendly apartments, houses, rooms or other shared accommodation…or they will offer links to other sites that will help with this. As mentioned above, the Friendship Centre should be able to provide some assistance with this too. Some questions to ask when looking for off-campus housing include:

- Is it close to campus?
- Is there a parking spot? If so, is it an additional cost?
- Is there public transit close by that will take me to campus?
- Is there childcare close by for my child(ren)?
- Is there a good school for my child(ren) in the neighbourhood?
- Is it a safe neighbourhood for walking?
- Are the services I need nearby (e.g., grocery stores, medical, laundry)?
- If I get part-time work, is it close to my job?
- Will the monthly rent include hydro, heating, television, phone, internet, etc., or are these additional costs?
- Do I have to pay a damage deposit? The Residential Tenancy Act states that a security deposit cannot be more than half of a month's rent. (http://www.rto.gov.bc.ca/content/calculator/default.aspx)
- Do I have to sign a lease/rental agreement? If so, what is the length of the lease? Some leases are for a year, but many students only stay in town for the school year (i.e., some go home for the summer months) – if this is you, then you may want to ask about getting a shorter rental term.

If you are staying in off-campus housing, it's good to know what your rights are as a tenant, especially if you end up having problems with your landlord. Here are a couple of resources to check out:

- Residential Tenancy Act – **www.rto.gov.bc.ca**
- Tenant Resource Advisory Centre (TRAC) – **www.tenants.bc.ca**
- Vancouver Area Hotline Phone: 604-255-0546
- Outside the Lower Mainland Hotline Phone: 1-800-665-1185

Subsidized Housing

If you require assistance with housing, there are some organizations that provide subsidized housing – which means that they calculate your rent based on your household income. This is especially beneficial for students who don't have much time for a job. You should apply very early to these organizations because there is limited space and high demand. Include with your application a letter of intention outlining why you are moving, how long you intend to stay in the area, and letters from people who support what you are planning to do (e.g., counsellors, teachers, friends, family or anyone who knows you well). Here is a list of some organizations that offer subsidized housing, and the cities that they serve:

- Luma Native Housing – **www.lnhs.ca** - serving Vancouver
- Vancouver Native Housing – **www.vnhs.ca** - serving Vancouver
- Kekinow Native Housing – **www.kekinow.ca** - serving Surrey
- M'Akola Group of Societies – **www.makola.bc.ca** - serving Victoria, Duncan, Nanaimo, Port Alberni, Courtenay and Campbell River
- BC Housing – **www.bchousing.org** - serving all of BC
- Co-op Housing Federation of BC – **www.chf.bc.ca** - serving all of BC

Childcare

This can be a tough choice since you always want the best for your child(ren), but you're also likely on a tight budget. The best advice here is to start looking – and applying – EARLY…as in, as soon as you know where you'd like to go to school. It shouldn't cost anything to get on a waitlist, and if you don't end up going, you can just call them and remove your name from the waitlist. This is particularly true for if your PPSI has childcare available. Space is very limited, so the earlier you apply, the better your chances are of being offered a spot. Still, there are never guarantees that you'll get a spot, so you'll likely want to look into other options. The Ministry of Child and Family Development website (**www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/childcare/index.htm**) gives you information on childcare subsidy programs (**www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/childcare/subsidy_promo.htm**) and also has a search engine of licensed daycares, preschools, and out of school care service in each city. You can search by postal code and by city to find childcare services in your area (**http://childcareinfo.gov.bc.ca/childcaresearch/search.aspx**).

Aboriginal Head Start for Children 3-5 Years

An early intervention preschool program designed for urban and northern (off-reserve) Aboriginal children, this program's primary goals are to support the early childhood development of Aboriginal children and to instill pride in their Aboriginal heritage before they enter the mainstream school system. It focuses on 3-5 year olds with the intent of bringing them to the school readiness stage to help ensure an easy transition into kindergarten. This program is fully funded by the Government of Canada, so there is no cost to the participants. It includes transportation, snacks and/or appropriate meals (i.e., breakfast or lunch). Check out the one in the city you will be living in at **www.ahsabc.net/viewcategory/5**.

Enrolling Your Child(ren) in School

There are two types of schools in BC that you can enroll your child(ren) in:

- ***Public Schools***: Regulated by the BC Ministry of Education, they offer public education to children. For the different school districts and contact information, go to **www.bced.gov.bc.ca/schools/bcmap.htm** and click on the geographic area that you will be living in. It will identify a list of school districts in that area.
- ***Independent Schools***: These schools offer parents an alternative to a public school education. Some parents choose to send their child(ren) to independent school because these schools provide a particular religious, cultural, philosophical or educational approach. You can find out more at **www.bced.gov.bc.ca/apps/imcl/imclWeb/IndSchoolAuthority.do**.

Community Resources (continued)

The most important element in selecting the school that your child(ren) will attend is where you will be living. Most schools require that you live within that district for your child(ren) to attend that school – so once you know where you are going to live, you can proceed with this step.

If you want to choose where you live based on the school you want your child to attend, the following website can help you find a school based on themes at the provincial, district or community level: **www.achievebc.ca/choices/search_start.aspx**. You can browse by location, grade level or the specialties and themes that you're interested in, such as Aboriginal programming.

Whichever school you choose, be sure to bring their school report cards and other information needed for enrolment purposes at their new school! You may want to check with your child(ren)'s school to find out what the process is for transferring their files to the new school.

Where to Go When…

Where do you buy your groceries, do your laundry, connect with other Indigenous students, get a good cup of coffee? These are all important questions! One place to start is the Visitor Information Centre – they will have free maps as well as some great information (and maybe even some coupons!) for navigating your new city.

Here are some other things for you to consider as you get to know the community resources in your new town.

- ***Traditional territory***: For some students, knowing the traditional territory of the city and school is an important part of understanding their new home and being a visitor to the territory. Check out the local Band/tribal/Métis Nation offices in the Guide to Aboriginal Organizations and Services in BC at **www.gov.bc.ca/arr/services/guide.html**. Or ask your Aboriginal Coordinator at your PPSI – they should be able to tell you!
- ***Cultural meeting places***: Some PPSIs have cultural gathering places, such as the First Peoples House at UVic and the House of Learning at UBC. Also, as mentioned previously, there are local Friendship Centres in most urban centres – they bring together Indigenous people from all nations to meet each other, share food, meet local Elders, participate in cultural activities, and offer support in accessing services in the city. If you missed that link, here it is again: **www.bcaafc.com/bcfriendshipcentres/listings**.
- ***Grocery Stores***: You'll likely see many grocery stores when you go through the city, but ask around – sometimes certain stores offer discounts for students…you just have to show your student ID card! And don't forget about coupons!
- ***Good Food Box***: The Good Food Box runs like a large buying club. Twice a month, individuals place orders for boxes in their neighbourhood and receive a box brimming with fresh, tasty produce for between $10-$35 per box, depending on the size they choose. For a list of Good Food Box locations in BC, go to **www.foodshare.net/train13.htm**.
- ***Food banks***: When asked, most students identified food banks on campus or in the city as being an important resource. Some people use them for emergencies, and others for long-term support. Some PPSIs have a food bank located right in the Student Union building – which makes it easy to access! There are also interfaith agencies that provide free meals throughout the month – the locations and times are usually posted at the PPSI Student Counselling Office or Chaplain Services.
- ***Buying furniture and other household items***: If you're like most students, you'll want to look for used items rather than brand new – it saves a lot of money, which means there's more in the bank for that latte, or that movie you've been wanting to see. There are online sites for used household stuff, such as **www.craigslist.org** and **www.usedcanada.com** (just scroll down and see if your town has it's own site) – sometimes the items are just like new and you can get them for a great deal! Of course, there are the regular retailers that you can buy your items at new – just ask around to see what places others recommend! And always ask to see if there is a student discount.

As for everything else, ask, ask, ASK! People love to share about their favourite coffee shop, their favourite book store, their favourite yoga studio, their favourite hiking trails, their favourite tattoo parlour, you name it!

Transportation

How are you going to get to school? How will you get your child(ren) to school? If you are working while in school, how will you get to work? These are important questions, especially if you are moving to an unfamiliar city. Even if you have a car, you might want to consider public transit, as some cities can have high parking fees – not to mention the rising price of gas! If you are a full-time student, a universal bus pass should be included in your tuition fee – your student ID card doubles as your bus pass. Some cities have better transit than others, so check it out and see if it meets your needs. You can access the BC Transit website at **www.bctransit.com** to find out more about how they operate, the routes, the schedules, etc.

If you choose to drive, you will need to consider a few things that may be different than when you were living back home:

- Car insurance: Contact your insurance agent to let them know your new address and city – they will most likely give you a new quote for your insurance since different cities often have different rates.
- Parking: Some apartment/rental units include a parking space, but some don't – so don't forget to ask before signing your rental agreement!
- Parking on campus: Parking fees can be very expensive on campus, so check out your PPSI's website for their rates.
- On-Reserve Gas Stations: To see if there is an on-reserve gas station where you can use your status card to save on taxes, check out **www.rezgas.com** or **www.uslces.org/gas**.
- Carpooling: Check out your PPSI's website or calendar – they may offer discounts for carpooling if you're able to share the driving with others.

5 STEPPING STONE 5: PREPARING FOR CHANGE

> "It was kind of a culture shock to go into [public post-secondary institute] because all of a sudden, they were teaching me things that were different from what they were teaching here. I had to go to an Elder…and I said, "They're contradicting everything they taught me at [IAHLA institute]" And he said, "Well, go and learn what they teach you anyway because you're going to need that degree and then you can go out and teach what they taught you at [IAHLA institute]"
>
> — Former Student

Along with the excitement and anticipation of taking this step in your educational journey, moving to a new city comes with a lot of emotional, physical, and psychological stress. Some of the main issues students face as they transition from home to the city are: culture shock, feelings of isolation, lack of cultural connection (e.g., feasts, potlatches, spiritual practices), and a lack of sense of community and belonging. One thing that might help is just knowing that EVERY student goes through these same fears and feelings in some capacity – you're not alone.

Culture Shock

What is culture shock? Culture shock is experienced when someone spends an extended period of time in a new or different culture – the shock of adjustment is normal and refers to the anxiety that results when one experiences the loss of their home culture, family and support system and is confronted with the task of understanding a new culture and environment. It is the clash between values, beliefs and perspectives, and sometimes, just not knowing how systems operate.

Many IAHLA students who transitioned to a PPSI experienced culture shock because they didn't know what to expect. At the IAHLA institute, they attended classes with other Indigenous students and typically had Indigenous instructors who were familiar with their life experiences or were possibly from the same community. Then they suddenly realized that they were one of the only Aboriginal students in a classroom of 35 to 200 (that's not a typo!) students, or they didn't know anyone in the apartment complex they rented. Some students spoke about getting singled out in a classroom and felt as though they were expected to be the "Aboriginal expert".

There are resources available to help if you are experiencing culture shock. If available, you may want to go and speak to an Elder – or you can go and speak to one of the counsellors at the Student Counselling Centre (some PPSIs have an Aboriginal counsellor), speak to other Aboriginal students, or go to your Friendship Centre and speak to someone there. Stay in contact with your friends and family – they will provide your connection to home even if they are physically far away.

Most students who have been through this will tell you that what helped them through this tough time was getting involved in groups, clubs or organizations that were meaningful to them…in other words, defining and creating what will be your new community.

> “Students don’t like being ‘singled out’ as the Native Expert…[there is a] need for sensitivity around Aboriginal issues and Aboriginal students.”
>
> — Former Student

Creating Community

To overcome the sense of isolation, students identified involvement in Aboriginal culture as playing a large role in building a sense of community. They encourage students to connect with local Elders, drum groups, local Friendship Centres, and the Native Student Union/ Association on campus to get involved and create community. You can find other students, just like you, who can show you the ropes and introduce you to other students and community members. It’s also a great idea to get to know your neighbours early on – they are another source of support in your new community. You also have a lot to contribute to this new community – remember that the lessons and knowledge that have been passed down to you are for you to share!

Community and Cultural Resources

> "I went through a regular school system up to Grade 11. I decided to move down and get experience in the education system down south. Holy smokes! When I left here after grade 11, I couldn't keep up, down in Nanaimo. This was 1996. I mean because the work level was ten times what I was doing in the school here and I just wasn't ready. I was able to pass but I didn't pass in a lot of academic courses. I passed in the basics so I had to come back here. I wasn't ready to go to college. I had to do two years of upgrading at the [IAHLA institute]"
>
> — Former Student

In larger urban centres there are community resources that are available to support you when you need them most. Some on-campus and off-campus community resources have already been highlighted in Stepping Stone 4. Here are some additional community resources that may be of use, particularly in tough times.

- Crisis Centre: If you are feeling overwhelmed, depressed, confused, suicidal or just needing someone to listen, the Crisis Centre can be reached at 1-800-784-2433 (BC wide).
- Family Planning and Pregnancy Support: Need birth control, condoms, or think that you might be pregnant? There are community family planning centres that have doctors and nurses on staff that can provide Pap smears, birth control options, gynecological examinations, STD testing, pregnancy tests, and counselling. Their services are free and provide birth control at reduced cost (some agencies provide them for free). For more information and to find a clinic nearest to you, go to **www.optionsforsexualhealth.org**. On Vancouver Island, go to **www.islandsexualhealth.org** or call 250-592-3479 for more information.
- Native Courtworker and Counselling Association of BC: This association provides services and access to counselling and referral services to clients with substance abuse and detox support issues, advocacy services for Aboriginal family and youth, community outreach and much more. Contact them toll free at: 1-877-771-9444.
- Family abuse or violence: Many of these agencies or safe houses are anonymous and are not identified by a sign. The first step is to call the hotline numbers in the city you live in and you will be connected with someone who can help. If you are in a violent relationship or know someone who needs a safe place to stay, these resources may help.
- Call a transition house – **www.cd.gov.bc.ca/women/contacts/th.htm** gives a list of transition houses in BC. To find the nearest one, look at the emergency numbers in your phonebook or call the crisis line.
- In the Lower Mainland, call 1-800-563-0808 to find a transition house or emergency shelter close to you. They provide emotional support and counselling; legal, medical and financial advocacy; food and emergency clothing; and support from others in similar situations.
- Alcoholics Anonymous and Family of Alcoholics: AA and Al-Anon provide a safe space to talk about alcoholism

> "My culture has been invaluable and acted as an anchor in the very Eurocentric world of academia. My culture has always acted as a touchstone. With new information I always compared it to my culture's more holistic worldview"
>
> — Former Student

and connect you with a support group who are going through similar issues as you. To find the nearest AA meeting, go to **www.aa.org/lang/en/meeting_finder.cfm?origpage=29**. You can also go to the link for AA for Indigenous Peoples in North America at **www.aa.org/lang/en/catalog.cfm?origpage=155&product=46**. To find information about Al-Anon and Alateen for family members affected by alcoholism, visit **www.al-anon.alateen.org/english.html**. For meeting information, you can call 1-888-4AL-ANON (1-888-425-2666) Monday through Friday, 8:00am to 6:00pm EST.

Cultural Resources

"Find out everything about your culture and where you come from because if you are equipped with these things about your cultural heritage, it doesn't matter where you go in this world, you'll succeed."
— Former IAHLA student

This quote summarizes what Aboriginal students, administrators, and research has found to be the key to Aboriginal student success in PPSIs – knowing your culture. Aboriginal students shared that when dealing with conflict and adversity in their new space, they harnessed the strength from their culture and self-identity to help them move forward. Knowing who they are and where they come from gave them a strong sense of self that helped them confront the racism they encountered in school and day-to-day living.

What will help you stay connected with your community, culture and family while you're away at school and in a new city? For each person, the answer will be different. Is it a picture of your home, family, or your favourite fishing hole? Is it a rock from the river you would go to swim or hang out? Is it a medicine bag filled with medicine? Or are they actions such as smudging in the morning, or going to do your morning exercises, or drumming and singing songs from your home? Are they foods such as salmon, berries, elk, deer, or your mom's bannock? Whatever it is, prepare to bring it with you so that you can stay connected. Think about what gives your strength back home and bring something that will remind you of that strength to help you along when times get challenging and you are missing home.

Elders are an amazing source of knowledge, wisdom and love. Most PPSIs in British Columbia have Aboriginal programs and services, and some even have Elders-in-Residence whom you can meet with to listen, learn, and get to know. This cultural resource is a gift – Elders possess immense strength that can support you as you walk on your journey – and they want to meet YOU!

Life and Study Skills

With all these changes, the best way to equip yourself is to make sure you have the life and study skills to help you on your path. Former IAHLA students have identified key areas that can help you prepare for your PPSI courses. These include study habits, library and computer skills, preparing for writing assignments, public speaking, classroom and school dynamics, and assertiveness. It's also important to know how to navigate PPSIs by being aware of the potential differences between your current IAHLA institute and a university or college setting. And last but certainly not least, is self-care. It's extremely important to stay healthy if you want to succeed in your studies – after all, this is all about YOU!

Study Habits

All PPSIs will have resources where you can learn how to practice good study habits, such as how to take good notes, how to read a textbook, time management, and organizing study groups, among others. Ask your Aboriginal Coordinator where to access these resources – **but remember, your classroom attendance and attention is the key to being prepared for tests, exams and assignments!**

Library and Computer Skills

PPSIs have extensive, state of the art libraries and computer labs. Once you pay your tuition for the term or year, you will have access to both the library and computer labs using your student ID card. The libraries offer courses (for free!) on how to use their resources effectively, which is strongly recommended, as most PPSI libraries can be very intimidating if you don't know where to find what you're looking for. The Computer Help Desk will also offer short courses that can help you develop your computer skills in a variety of areas, including online research, e-learning technology and many other programs – which is great considering that you may be expected to use these types of computer programs and technologies for presentations and/or assignments…and these courses are usually free!

Preparing for Writing Assignments

A well-written essay or research paper follows a structure and format that is specific to your faculty or discipline. Be sure to find out what format your instructors would like you to use! Most PPSIs offer Writing Tutorials/Clinics where peer tutors assess your writing skills and support you to improve your areas of weakness. They can also help you develop an outline or format for a paper and review grammar rules with you if needed. If you are a little insecure about your writing or just want a second opinion, look into this resource early to start the school year off on a strong footing!

Public Speaking

In some of your courses, you may be required to make an oral presentation to your class. It's completely understandable that most people get nervous before speaking in front of an audience, but it's learning how to control the 'butterflies' that is key. It's important to find your own style and approach so that you're comfortable. For example, if you are a strong drummer, you may be able to incorporate that somehow into your presentation if it fits with your message; or you may be able to use story-telling as your medium to share your knowledge. Every time you make a presentation, take time afterwards to reflect on what worked and what you would do differently so that you continue to build on your public speaking skills. If you'd like more tips on how to give better presentations, check out the Toastmasters International website at **www.toastmasters.org**.

Classroom and School Dynamics

Since you will be attending a new school, you will have to learn the new classroom dynamics that are unique to the PPSI, faculty, students and each course. You may encounter a learning environment that is extremely competitive, where your peers do not share any notes or offer any support in the course, or you may find yourself in a faculty that prides itself in creating a collaborative learning environment where you are graded as a team instead of as an individual. So it is important for you to take time to observe and listen to the people in your new space of learning to understand the new dynamics. There are some common classroom and school dynamics that Aboriginal students encountered throughout their PPSI experience.

Nicola Valley Institute of Technology (2008) identified some considerations when preparing for the transition in "How to Get Good Grades at a College or University:"

- ***Varying class sizes***: From 30-200 students in one course.
- ***Need for critical thinking***: You are expected to draw conclusions, form opinions, and evaluate the ideas of others, not just read and understand the text or lecture.
- ***More emphasis on tests and less on busywork***: Mid-term and final exams are generally worth more than the assignments done outside the classroom.
- ***The need for personal responsibility***: You are responsible for you own academic progress and success. Your instructors will generally NOT monitor if you are going to class, finishing assignments or having difficulties.
- ***Consequences for low grades***: If after your first term you have low grades, most PPSIs will put you on academic probation. If you do not pull up your grades by the end of the next semester, you will be withdrawn or transferred to another program.
- ***Most of the curriculum is Eurocentric***: Most textbooks and instructors come from a Eurocentric training and do not integrate Indigenous perspectives. This may be challenging, as some of the content material that you will be studying may be untrue or offensive about Indigenous Peoples.
- ***Writing and computer skills***: There is an expectation from the instructors that you have a proficient level of writing and computer skills before you start their class. They will not support you in class to develop these skills.

Assertiveness

What do you do when:

- Your classmate skips class all the time and asks you for your notes?
- You disagree with someone's opinion?
- You feel that you have experienced racism in your class or workplace?

These are social situations that you may encounter in your new PPSI and how you respond to them will impact how you feel, the response from the other person, and the outcome of the situation. Ultimately, how you communicate your thoughts, feelings and ideas – whether positive or negative – to others without abusing their rights, is considered assertiveness. This type of response tends to be the most beneficial to you and the other person with whom you are communicating.

Being assertive is not the same as being aggressive – it's not about getting your own way at all costs or through the manipulation of others. It's about voicing your true feelings openly, honestly and firmly while being appropriate, flexible and respectful of others. It's difficult to be assertive all the time, especially when we feel vulnerable or angry, but most of us can benefit from learning to be more assertive in certain areas of our lives – such as:

- Being responsible for ourselves;
- Finding a compromise where there is conflict;
- Saying 'no' to other people;
- Standing up for our rights;
- Sharing our opinions, feelings and ideas in an open and honest manner;
- Expressing what we think while valuing the opinion of others and being open to exploring areas of conflict and/or new learning.

There are some fun online assertiveness quizzes that you can take to see how assertive you are in different situations and they also provide tips on how you can develop your assertiveness skills. Here are a few to get you started:

- **www.thewclc.ca/edge/issue6/AssertiveQuiz/AssertiveQuiz.html**
- **www.thewclc.ca/edge/issue6/AssertiveQuiz/SevenTipIntro.html**
- **www.leadership-and-motivation-training.com/assertiveness-quiz.html**

Self-Care

We've talked about how to prepare and succeed at school, but we've left out the most important piece until now…YOU! In order to make the most out of your educational journey, it's important to stay balanced and healthy – physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. How you stay balanced is a very personal choice – what works for others might not work for you – so it's important to identify what works and to incorporate these things into your daily and/or weekly routine.

- Physical Health: take advantage of your PPSI's resources! Go to the school gym, enroll in a yoga class, or join an outdoors club! Many PPSIs also have great walking paths and trails that you can explore while getting the blood pumping. It's also important to ensure that you're eating a healthy diet – while it's fine to indulge in the greasy fries with gravy every once in a while, be sure to balance it with healthier choices as well. School cafeterias will have an array of options of both healthy and not-so-healthy foods – one idea is to choose one 'indulgence' each day (like a bag of chips or a burger and fries) and try to choose healthier foods for the rest of your meals and snacks.
- Mental Health: whether working through stress and anxiety, dealing with a relationship breakup, or trying to manage your time and tasks, the counselling centre at your PPSI will have people and resources to help you build and maintain your mental health. They have services that cater to improving academic practices as well as personal counselling for supporting you through tough times.
- Emotional Health: social relationships and friendships where you are able to connect with others through feeling are important for maintaining your emotional health. Talk to friends and family from home, make friends with your neighbours and classmates, and/or join a club or sports team – being able to relate and talk to others about your day will help you cope with your new surroundings!
- Spiritual Health: devoting time for prayer and/or reflection is important whether you consider yourself a spiritual person or not. Everyone has their own beliefs, and allowing yourself time to honour those beliefs is important in remaining true to yourself and staying rooted in your culture. Giving yourself and your spirit the time to breathe is important in maintaining an overall balance, whether it is time spent at a gathering place or church, or taking a walk and just being with nature.

As a final thought on this topic, remember that the power of Mother Earth and staying connected to the land – the trees, the rivers, the soil, the ocean, the wind, the animals, the rain, the sun – can help with a sense of physical, emotional, and spiritual renewal. Many campuses are situated in or near natural settings where you may find peace and solitude right in the heart of busyness – seek them out to recharge or find balance as needed.

6 STEPPING STONE 6: BUDGETING

Check out http://www.fnesc.ca/iahla/financial_aid.php to find links to sites with information about scholarships and awards for Aboriginal students!

Now for the boring part…but wait! Don't go! While it is a little dry, it's a very helpful section that should help you plan so that your funding or income will stretch and last for the entire school year… and there are even some suggestions of what to do if it doesn't.

Creating a Budget

Your budget is the most important key to your survival away from home, and a vital consideration before you move away. If you know how much money you are going to have each month this makes budgeting a little bit easier. Having a realistic budget in hand is absolutely crucial so that you don't run into money problems and added stress in the middle of the term when you have papers and exams. You will need to make decisions about your budget so you know how much you can spend each month. It's also important for funded students to know that you cannot survive on Band funding alone – you WILL need alternative sources of money, such as scholarships, bursaries or part-time work. Some things to think about:

- How much are you willing to spend on a place to live?
- Can you afford to have a place on your own or are you going to need a roommate?
- How much can you afford to spend on food?
- How much will you have to spend on childcare?
- Can you afford to have phone, internet and/or cable TV?
- If you have a vehicle, is it cheaper to drive to school and pay for parking or take the bus?
- If you are getting a student loan, when do you actually get the money in your bank account?
- If you are Band funded, when do you get your cheque? If you get your cheque at the beginning of the month, remember that you will have moving expenses towards the end of the month once your school year has ended – plan ahead!

There are many decisions to be made when considering your budget. When you finalize your budget, it is best to stick to it so you have enough money to get through each month/term/year.

"If I had the funds, I would help all students with food, clothing, and shelter while they are upgrading. When students are upgrading and on provincial welfare, they get cut off if they're attending school full-time. Those who are on Band welfare do not lose their welfare, however they find it a huge challenge to make it from month to month. Many times students do not even have their basic needs met, that is why our facility provides a breakfast and lunch program."

— Administrator

Check out the CanLearn website for an education cost calculator at http://tools.canlearn.ca/cslgs-scpse/cln-cln/40/fp-pf/fp-pf.clindex.do?langcanlearn=en. This is a great website that can tell you how much your education will cost based on the PPSI that you want to attend. You pick the PPSI and they give you all the fees associated with it. The site then leads you to a budget estimator that calculates your income and expenses and shows you the bottom line (how much you will need to save in order to make it through the term, year, and the life of your degree).

When writing down your expenses it is always better to overestimate your costs rather than underestimate them. You never know when prices for necessities will increase or when unexpected costs may arise.

Money-Saving Tips

- Grocery shop with a list and stick to it so you don't buy expensive impulse items that may throw off your budget. Whenever possible try to buy in bulk.
- Take advantage of flyers! Shop sale items and use coupons whenever possible to help reduce costs.
- Get your U-Pass (bus pass) as early as possible.
- Ask about student discounts - for groceries, travel, restaurants, etc.
- Join a club on campus! There is a wide range of clubs covering a variety of interests ranging from sports to writing poetry and everything in between.
- Shop around for the best long distance phone rates – or use Skype.
- If you plan on driving, consider carpooling.
- Use the campus gym – it's already included in your school fees.
- Dining out is expensive! Brown bag your lunch as much as possible.
- Buy used textbooks whenever you can.

Skype is a software application that allows users to make voice calls over the Internet. Calls to other users within the Skype service are free! You can also use it to call phones from your computer at reduced rates.

http://www.skype.com/intl/en-us/home

Getting Back Home

If you are a Band funded student, your funding may include a trip home every term, semester or year, and some will cover your travel home in the case of a family emergency. Talk to your Post-Secondary Counsellor to find out more.

If travel home is not included, this could be a big expense that you may want to still include in your budget. Often, it is that trip home and visiting family that has helped students persevere through their studies! Talk to your family and friends and see if they can help – maybe they know of someone who is driving that way and you can catch a ride. Some families will host fundraisers for their student to come home for a visit. Most PPSIs will have a board in the Student Union Building where people can post where they want to go and/or where they are driving to – then others wanting to go to the same place can connect and share the driving, gas and company!

Emergency Funds

As you know there are many things in life that you cannot plan for or even predict that will affect your financial situation. Your car breaks down, you get sick and cannot work, your daughter's school supplies cost more money than you budgeted for, etc. So what do you do when emergencies come up and after paying for the emergency bills, you have no money left over to pay for food?

Enter the **BC Students Emergency Loan program**. This program provides interim assistance to students experiencing unusual financial circumstances. Funds allocated under this program are adjudicated on a case-by-case basis. Therefore, all interested applicants will need to set up an interview with a Financial Aid and Awards Advisor at their PPSI to discuss the particulars of their situation. Note that Emergency Loans cannot be granted to pay a student's outstanding institutional debt (i.e., tuition fees).

Your PPSI may also have other options available through the Aboriginal Student Centre/Services. Talk to your Aboriginal Coordinator to find out what is available at your PPSI.

Emergency Shelters

Former students shared that there were times that they were literally homeless because their funding from the Band was not transferred to them at the beginning of term and they could not secure a place to rent, or pay tuition or books. There are countless stories of students couch surfing with friends and family as they waited for their sponsorship money. There are also students who did not have any family or friends in the city and had no couch to surf on. There are emergency shelters you could go to that can help you so that you are not on the streets. Talk to your Aboriginal Coordinator and/or your Friendship Centre to find out more.

Health Care Costs

Most PPSIs automatically enroll part-time and full-time students in their Extended Health and Dental Plans and the fees are included in your tuition and registration fees. The Extended Health and Dental Plans cover expenses not covered by basic provincial health-care plans such as prescription drugs, dental care, massage therapy, and more.

If you already have health coverage and wish to opt out of the PPSI Health & Dental Plan, you can do so during the Opt-Out Period and either the fee will be removed from your Tuition Fee Statement or you will be reimbursed the fee. All opt outs must be completed within the Opt-Out Period. Each institution has their own Opt-Out Period and process to opt-out of the health and dental plans. **The Opt-Out period is a short timeframe, so make sure that you opt-out as soon as you get there or else you will be paying for health and dental that you do not need!** To find out the details to Opt-out, contact the information desk at the PPSI's Student Union.

STEPPING STONE 7:

TRANSITION BACK TO COMMUNITY

7

Staying Connected

Staying connected to your home community is the key to helping to make your transition back home easier – particularly once you have completed your studies. Think back to the third Stepping Stone in this handbook where you identified some key people from your community to stay in contact with. It's one thing to say it and quite another to actually follow through. Finishing your degree or diploma seems like such a long way off, and things can and do get busy. Making the effort to stay in touch with people from home might be the key to your success while away from home, and also the key to having a smooth transition when you return home after you've completed your studies.

As mentioned in other sections, it is important to stay in contact with friends and family from home, and also to travel home if at all possible. Former students who have gone to PPSIs emphasized how important it was to visit home, to stay balanced and stay firmly rooted in their culture.

Planning Your Return

You may be thinking that it's going to be at least 2 years until you're finished your degree or diploma, so why should you start planning your return? Ask one of the many students who have gone to school and went back to their community only to find out that there weren't any jobs for them when they got there. Talk to your Post-Secondary Counsellor about your plans – and also talk to your Chief, your Band council, and community business owners. Go to organizations and anywhere else you think you may be interested in working when you are finished your studies. Let them know your plans. Find out if there are upcoming opportunities for you and what you can do to help make it YOUR opportunity.

Closing Thoughts…

This educational journey that you are embarking upon is an exciting one – but one that requires a lot of internal strength and courage, and at times, sacrifice and compromise. Be confident knowing that you made it this far already. Be humble and willing to accept help, guidance and support throughout this journey. Be strong and hold true to your beliefs, your values, your visions, your family, your community, and your SELF. But most of all, have FUN!

Remember that maintaining strong family ties back home is an important survival tool – stay in touch as much as possible. Your family and community will be your most consistent and loyal supporters. And lastly, don't forget the value of building a strong relationship with your Post-Secondary Counsellor, your IAHLA Advisor/Counsellor, your Aboriginal Coordinator at your PPSI, and with your local Aboriginal Friendship Centre!

GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS

ALMD – Ministry of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development
IAHLA – Indigenous Adult and Higher Learning Association
PASBC – Post-secondary Application Service of BC
PPSI – Public post-secondary institute
PSC – Post-secondary Counsellor

NOTES

LINKS & RESOURCES

Connecting with Your Post-Secondary Counsellor/Advisor

www.fnesc.ca/iahla/

Choosing a Career Path

www.schoolfinder.com

www.careercruising.com

Connecting with the Aboriginal Post-Secondary Coordinators

www.aved.gov.bc.ca/aboriginal/ab-list.htm.

Applying to a Post-Secondary Institution

www.pas.bc.ca

Community Resources

www.bcaafc.com/bcfriendshipcentres/listings

Off-Campus Housing

www.rto.gov.bc.ca

www.tenants.bc.ca

Vancouver Area Hotline: 604-255-0546

Outside the Lower Mainland Hotline: 1-800-665-1185

Subsidized Housing

Luma Native Housing – www.lnhs.ca - serving Vancouver

Vancouver Native Housing – www.vnhs.ca - serving Vancouver

Kekinow Native Housing – www.kekinow.ca - serving Surrey

M'Akola Group of Societies – www.makola.bc.ca - serving Victoria, Duncan, Nanaimo, Port Alberni, Courtenay and Campbell River

BC Housing – www.bchousing.org - serving all of BC

Co-op Housing Federation of BC – www.chf.bc.ca - serving all of BC

Childcare

www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/childcare/index.htm

www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/childcare/subsidy_promo.htm

http://childcareinfo.gov.bc.ca/childcaresearch/search.aspx

Aboriginal Head Start for Children 3-5 Years

www.ahsabc.net/viewcategory/5.

Enrolling Your Child(ren) in School

www.bced.gov.bc.ca/schools/bcmap.htm

www.bced.gov.bc.ca/apps/imcl/imclWeb/IndSchoolAuthority.do.

www.achievebc.ca/choices/search_start.aspx

Where to Go When . . .

www.gov.bc.ca/arr/services/guide.html

www.bcaafc.com/bcfriendshipcentres/listings

www.foodshare.net/train13.htm

www.craigslist.org

www.usedcanada.com

Transportation

www.bctransit.com

www.rezgas.com

www.uslces.org/gas

Community and Cultural Resources

Crisis Centre: 1-800-784-2433 (BC wide).

Family Planning and Pregnancy Support: www.optionsforsexualhealth.org. Vancouver Island, go to www.islandsexualhealth.org or call 250-592-3479 for more information.

Native Courtworker and Counselling Association of BC: toll free at: 1-877-771-9444.

Transition house – www.cd.gov.bc.ca/women/contacts/th.htm

In the Lower Mainland, call 1-800-563-0808 to find a transition house or emergency shelter close to you.

Nearest AA meeting, go to www.aa.org/lang/en/meeting_finder.cfm?origpage=29.

AA for Indigenous Peoples in North America at www.aa.org/lang/en/catalog.cfm?origpage=155&product=46.

Al-Anon and Alateen for family members affected by alcoholism, visit www.al-anon.alateen.org/english.html. For meeting information, 1-888-4AL-ANON (1-888-425-2666) Monday through Friday, 8:00am to 6:00pm EST.

Cultural Resources

www.thewclc.ca/edge/issue6/AssertiveQuiz/AssertiveQuiz.html

www.thewclc.ca/edge/issue6/AssertiveQuiz/SevenTipIntro.html

www.leadership-and-motivation-training.com/assertiveness-quiz.html

Public Speaking

www.toastmasters.org

Assertiveness

www.thewclc.ca/edge/issue6/AssertiveQuiz/AssertiveQuiz.html

www.thewclc.ca/edge/issue6/AssertiveQuiz/SevenTipIntro.html

www.leadership-and-motivation-training.com/assertiveness-quiz.html

Creating a Budget

http://tools.canlearn.ca/cslgs-scpse/cln-cln/40/fp-pf/fp-pf.clindex.do?langcanlearn=en.

Keeping in Touch

http://www.skype.com/intl/en-us/home

Transition to Graduate School

http://www.aboriginaltransitions.ca

Design by Pink Sheep Media

Find out everything about your culture and where you come from because if you are equipped with these things about your cultural heritage, it doesn't matter where you go in this world, you'll succeed.

— Former student

It is incredibly empowering to realize that you can achieve good grades and relate to what is being taught, and actually know that you are getting the necessary skills to make a difference in the lives of Aboriginal children and their families.

— Current Student at Public Post-Secondary Institute

Office of Indigenous Affairs
University of Victoria

Indigenous Adult and Higher Learning Association

Office of Community-Based Research

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