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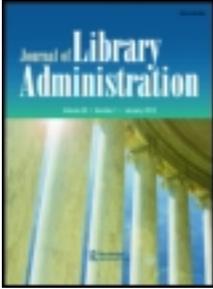
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### Aboriginal Students in Canada

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# Aboriginal Students in Canada: A Case Study of Their Academic Information Needs and Library Use

Deborah A. Lee

**SUMMARY.** This study involved the use of personal interviews of six Aboriginal students at the University of Alberta in the fall of 1999. This

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article includes a brief literature review of other articles that consider adult Aboriginal people as library patrons and a section on Indigenous knowledge and values. Findings include three main concerns: a lack of Indigenous resources in the library system; a lack of resource or research development concerning Indigenous issues; and a lack of services recognizing the Indigenous values of “being in relationship” and reciprocity. [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <getinfo@haworthpressinc.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2001 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

**KEYWORDS.** Aboriginal, Indigenous, Native, minorities, college and university libraries—services to North American Indians, multiculturalism, Indigenous knowledge, Indigenous epistemology, personal interviews, library anxiety, use studies

## ***INTRODUCTION***

This research was driven by several questions: How were Aboriginal students coping with a possible lack of library resources encapsulating a holistic worldview? Did they feel that most mainstream sources did not support their Indigenous worldview? How were they accessing meaningful articles and texts to assist with their coursework assignments and research? Was the University of Alberta library system meeting their academic information needs? If so, how? And if not, how might it do so? This project, then, had two intentions. One was to provide a venue to explore Aboriginal students’ experiences in an academic library setting. The other was to demonstrate how these students were or were not coping with relevant and meaningful information retrieval to succeed in their academic programs. What occurred, however, was that the information gathered turned out to be very rich in content and far more than anticipated. Indeed, the participants were frank in their discussions of not only their academic information needs and their library use but also their insights into concerns regarding the impact of library administration decisions on students and suggestions for improving library services.

The value of this research is threefold. First, there is a paucity of library and information studies (LIS) literature which considers Aborigi-

nal adults as library users; thus, this research is an attempt to partially fill an unacceptable gap in the literature. Second, there is a growing Aboriginal student population at post-secondary institutions across Canada who have not had an opportunity to express their concerns about academic library resources and services. In the fall term of 1999, the population of this student group at the University of Alberta in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada was approximately 900 students, about three percent of the total student population. Furthermore, published statistics on the growth of Aboriginal post-secondary student populations across Canada offer some revealing information:

Post-secondary enrollments [of Native people] have increased dramatically, with 60 Indian students going to university in 1960, 432 in 1970, 4455 in 1980 and 5800 in 1985. In 1989, 18,535 Indian students were enrolled in colleges and universities in Canada.<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, with the very low representation of Aboriginal people in the field of librarianship in Canada, there has been little advocacy done on behalf of Aboriginal people in general and their information needs. And third, if there is, indeed, a lack of representation of the Indigenous perspective in library resources, this would mean that non-Aboriginal faculty and students are missing the opportunity to explore or study this material and become more inter-culturally aware. It is all the more crucial given that this university offers both undergraduate and graduate programs in Native Studies and First Nations Education respectively.

### ***LITERATURE REVIEW***

A few recent and relevant resources on the topic of library services to Aboriginal people do exist. I have chosen the term Aboriginal to represent those people Indigenous to the land of North America and Australia, including those also known as Native, Indian, Métis, Inuit, First Nations and Indigenous. The following list is by no means exhaustive but includes most recent (from 1995 to the present) surveys that concern adult Aboriginal patrons. Hannum's 1995 article is the most relevant and recent Canadian source that considers adult Aboriginal people as a target user group.<sup>2</sup> There are two other more dated Canadian sources: a 1990 article on bookmobile services by Skrzyszewski, Huggins-Chan

and Clarke,<sup>3</sup> and Bright's 1992 work on the policy of five Canadian provinces in serving on-reserve populations.<sup>4</sup> Hannum's study surveyed librarians at public libraries across the province of British Columbia regarding library use by Native people. Some interesting observations were presented in this study, such as the kinds of library services used and factors which influenced Native peoples' use of the library. For instance, Hannum's analysis of the data indicated some rather sophisticated public library usage by Aboriginals such as use of interlibrary loan services and microform readers for historical research purposes. As for factors influencing this usage, the most telling were examples of commitments made to Aboriginal people, both by library personnel and by leaders in the Aboriginal communities. Some libraries consulted with Aboriginal people for their input into collection development procedures and initiation of culturally-oriented library programs. A few such examples included First Nations storytellers/writers events, puppet shows of legends, and the involvement of Native children in summer reading programs. In addition, two libraries had active Native board members soliciting materials for the library. Wherever this collaboration was in place, library usage by Aboriginal people was higher than in libraries which did not use such relationship-building practices. The primary drawback to this study, however, is that Native people were not surveyed for their input, something Hannum recognized and recommended for future research. She suggested querying both Native users and non-users.<sup>5</sup>

Patterson's 1995 study looked at information needs of and services to Native Americans but from the perspective of tribal libraries, of which very few exist in Canada. This study provides an historical overview of how Native libraries came to be, including reference to New York state legislation in 1977 which provided "permanent support for Indian libraries, allowing them to become full members of public library systems."<sup>6</sup> Patterson also reviewed tribal library information needs studies and categorized the earlier information needs as falling into two categories: problem-solving knowledge and resources dealing with cultural heritage, i.e., Native language materials and various formats of oral histories. Her own experience told her there were many other information needs, including a need for theses. The following quote from a Navajo elder explains why:

People are always coming out here studying us. They ask us questions. We tell them what they want to know we give them our time, then they go away and write their dissertations and theses. But we

never know what they write. We want copies of their studies so we can see what they write about us. We want our young people to see what others say about us.<sup>7</sup>

She concluded the article with some suggestions for future resource access for Native Americans via the use of technology and public awareness. Some of these included distance education for training staff, full-text CD-ROMs, publications and video productions in Native languages, access to tribal documents and photographs housed in national repositories and resource sharing by way of networked tribal libraries.<sup>8</sup>

The most helpful study I found is a more recent article by Novak and Robinson who used the focus group method to capture Aboriginal students' voices at a particular campus of the Queensland University of Technology in Australia.<sup>9</sup> This campus was chosen because it was one where Indigenous students had a lower profile and where a higher proportion of Aboriginal students were non-borrowers than at other campus locations. The library administration focused on cultural and motivational issues, with a secondary goal to explore academic library usage. Some areas covered by the study were:

. . . student consideration of their own learning strategies and possible links to library usage, attitudes to authority and how these might influence relationships with the library . . . and needs of [Indigenous] students in relation to library services.<sup>10</sup>

Efforts made to incorporate Indigenous values into the methodological procedures used in this research were of particular interest. For instance, the project was announced at a social gathering of Indigenous students and staff. Also, two community-based consultants were hired to see the project through: One was a storyteller whose role was to inspire everyone involved, including students, library staff and funding bodies, to tell their stories in an atmosphere of mutual respect. This occurred by having the storyteller explore her own vulnerabilities through story and then by having the others tell the stories back in a way that each would understand. The other consultant was an Indigenous theatre director and a graduate of the university with many contacts at the Indigenous unit on campus. He was successful in encouraging participation in the project.<sup>11</sup>

The results spoke of both a physical and psychological intimidation experienced by Indigenous students in the library. Students felt that the intimidation was brought on by a denial of their history and current ex-

istence and by evidence of racist graffiti. These students also expressed that “positive recognition would help to balance the cultural face the library represents.”<sup>12</sup> Other areas of concern included several dimensions of alienation felt by students. One dimension was that of alienation of culture, especially in learning a new language which made key word searching difficult. Another was alienation from staff because some students felt that staff had no time for them and some were ashamed to ask for help. Students also mentioned difficulties in finding specific Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander materials and a desire to be able to access other universities’ collections.<sup>13</sup>

Perhaps the most inspiring aspect of this article was the commitment of the Queensland University of Technology’s library to the Indigenous students evident in the recommendations formulated by the library as a result of the information gathered by this project. Some of these are listed below:

- pursuit of Indigenous artworks for installation in the libraries;
- library maintenance with an emphasis on removal of the racist graffiti;
- greater networking with the Indigenous unit on campus;
- a shift in the nature of bibliographic instruction for Indigenous students and in the location (to be delivered within the Indigenous unit) of the training;
- organization of awareness training for librarians to increase their sensitivity to the issues faced by Indigenous students;
- improvement of the library’s Indigenous collections;
- renewed efforts to employ Indigenous persons within the library.<sup>14</sup>

### ***THE INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVE***

In order for the reader to more fully appreciate the value of the information provided by the participants in this study, it is necessary to provide some background information on the Indigenous perspective. This task, for the most part, entails some exploration of Indigenous knowledge and values. The following text is based on my own experience as well as the work of others who are more accomplished writers in this area. A primary component of the Indigenous perspective is the importance of “being in relationship” to everyone and everything in one’s environment. Related to this is the concept of inclusion. For a better

understanding of the concept of being in relationship, I draw on the following passage by Thomas King:

“All my relations” is at first a reminder of who we are and of our relationship with both our family and our relatives. It also reminds us of the extended relationship we share with all human beings. But the relationships that Native people see go further, to all the animals, to the birds, to the fish, to the plants, to all the animate and inanimate forms that can be seen or imagined. More than that, “all my relations” is an encouragement for us to accept the responsibilities we have within this universal family by living our lives in a harmonious and moral manner (a common admonishment is to say of someone that they act as if they have no relations).<sup>15</sup>

It seems to me that Indigenous people, being tribal people living within a community-oriented mindset (and a small community at that, where everyone knows everybody), are generally apt to spend more time and energy in maintaining “good” relations, perhaps as a means of survival. For instance, we may be more generous with what little we may have because our future may depend on it. Many Indigenous people are influenced by the saying, “What goes around comes around,” such that we are generous because we strongly believe that the generosity will come back to us tenfold. At the same time, however, it seems that Indigenous people are also adamant about autonomous modes of being, which may also influence the ways in which they interact with people. By this I mean that Indigenous people are interested in self-determination; we want to tell our own stories using our own voices, and to find our own solutions to our problems. In the process, we resist and reject the paternalistic and arrogant approaches used by many non-Indigenous people. This sentiment is well expressed by Smith:

It appalls us that the West can desire, extract and claim ownership of our ways of knowing, our imagery . . . and then simultaneously reject the people who created and developed those ideas and seek to deny them further opportunities to be creators of their own cultures and own nations.<sup>16</sup>

Closely connected to the concept of being in relationship with one’s environment is the concept of reciprocity. In the Indigenous world view, reciprocity in relationships is often expected. Values of generosity and sharing are inherent in reciprocity, as is the responsibility of be-

ing concerned for others and the well-being of the community. A common motivation for any interaction in the community is the “win-win” situation. When both parties are concerned about beneficial interaction, they will be more interested in perpetuating ongoing interaction. Another factor to consider is that one’s reputation in the community is largely based on one’s service and commitment to the community; therefore, developing reciprocal relationships is paramount to one’s own well-being. As the stakes are high for not cultivating these relationships, Indigenous people often take this way of thinking for granted and are amazed when they encounter situations with non-Indigenous people who are not this way inclined.

Also implied in reciprocity is the notion that there is a preference for interpersonal interaction rather than interaction with automation or other inanimate entities, because the quality of interaction with people has the potential to be more satisfying. For instance, there is more opportunity for humorous, fun, trickster-like and, especially, synergistic interaction, when people bounce creative ideas off of each other. This does not preclude, however, Indigenous people’s use of automation for fun, creative and synergistic interaction, for instance, as occurs with their participation in e-mail, chat groups, listservs, etc.

Also paramount in Indigenous thought is the concept of “the circle,” a concept perhaps best known through Paula Gunn Allen’s *The Sacred Hoop*.<sup>17</sup> What follows is a brief explanation of the concept of the circle based on my own participation in the circle. The circle can be seen as a practical exercise for understanding the concept of “being in relationship,” as it encapsulates the Indigenous values of respect, kindness, honesty, patience and equality. Furthermore, the cultural understanding of the concept of the circle is that everyone who comes to sit within the circle is a valued member and is there for a reason, regardless of the extent of their externalized participation. The spiritual power of what is said in the circle generates much understanding and healing for those who absorb the words, thereby fostering an internalized participation for those who listen. It is often said within the circle that it is enough for people to simply be there, as they will benefit simply from listening. This understanding also demonstrates the inclusive nature of the circle.

Respect is shown to each person in the circle by offering each person an opportunity to speak, without interruption, as his or her turn comes up. This is usually indicated by the passing and holding of a feather or “talking stone.” Respect is also shown by honoring the understanding that each person has the choice to pass up the opportunity to speak and that each person is unique and has some quality or gift to contribute to

the circle. Another way that respect is demonstrated is by understanding that what is said in the circle remains in the circle and is not to be repeated outside of the circle. The value of kindness is reflected in the welcoming nature of the opening remarks of the person facilitating the circle as well as in the tone used by participants in the circle. Participants understand that what is said in the circle is said in such a way that everyone's integrity is left intact. Furthermore, there are times when tears and manifestations of various emotions are expressed within the circle and it is understood that when this happens, kindness and respect are demonstrated for the courage shown by the participant in sharing these emotions.

The value of honesty is reflected in what is said in the circle. There is an understanding that each person who speaks must speak from the heart. It is often stated within circles that the most difficult journey a person makes is travelling from the mind (from intellectualizing) to the heart (to the honesty of sharing feelings). Balanced with this honesty, however, is the responsibility of maintaining everyone's integrity so that communication is done honestly and directly but also with compassion. A speaker demonstrates compassion by subtly acknowledging some understanding that everyone makes mistakes, including him- or herself.

The value of patience is evident in that accommodation is made for the varying amounts of time required by people within the circle to both express themselves and to feel comfortable in doing so. For instance, some people may not speak at all in the first few circles they attend and no one is pressured to speak if they don't yet feel comfortable. In other cases, people may speak for quite some time. Regardless, it is recognized that people are in varying stages of their healing and the presence or absence of a patient environment is one factor influencing their healing journey. On the other hand, the person who is speaking for quite some time must also balance their need to speak with their understanding of respect for others, in that the circle may have some time limits and it is essential that all people in the circle have the opportunity to speak. Finally, the value of equality is demonstrated in the understanding that no one person in the circle is more important than another. The structure of the circle is conducive to this understanding in that all people are able to see each other's faces and no one is afforded a priority position.

As is evident from this discussion, the circle has many facets and complexities, especially given that so many values are interlaced throughout the governance of the circle members' participation. In addition, one value often influences others so that a balancing act between

values is often at work in the decisions participants make about what they say inside the circle. Thus, there are many checks in place to provide a safe environment. One last form of governance is that if the values of the circle are not respected, the circle will fall apart and few people would want to be responsible for this happening.

This section is by no means a comprehensive presentation of the Indigenous perspective; however, it does provide a basis for understanding something about the values of Indigenous people and how we think and interact in our communities. With this foundation in place, the reader can now better appreciate the value of the research undertaken with this group of Aboriginal students. In addition, many of the values discussed in this section are reflected in the studies presented in the literature review. For instance, Hannum found that where there was collaboration between the library and the Native community, participation in library programs and other use of the library by Native people increased.<sup>18</sup> This situation points to the values of respect and reciprocity, whereby the library management respected the input of Native people as well as the importance of establishing good relations through communication with the local or nearby Native people. Another example is provided by Patterson who wrote of the need, by the Navajo people, for theses and dissertations so that their youth had insight into what non-Indigenous people were writing about them.<sup>19</sup> This fact indicates a lack of reciprocity in the actions of non-Indigenous people. Clearly, if the researchers wanted to continue a relationship with the Navajo people they were researching, they would have supplied the people with copies of their theses and dissertations. Other examples of the Indigenous perspective can be seen in the Novak and Robinson study, such as the respect shown for Indigenous protocols and values by announcing the project at a social gathering of Indigenous people. Another show of respect in this study was the decision to employ the storyteller and community developer as a valid methodology for eliciting valuable information from Indigenous people.<sup>20</sup>

Throughout the remainder of this paper, I will attempt to relate various decisions made and responses provided to some of the values of the Indigenous perspective.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Qualitative interviewing seemed to be the most effective method of collecting data for this research project, primarily because it offers per-

son-to-person contact, which, as has been illustrated, is important for most Aboriginal people. Also, personal interviews are advantageous in that they can be done in a less formal and intimidating manner than other methodologies such as experimental. The focus group method might also be a consideration for future research with this target group; however, this method posed some drawbacks to this study. For instance, trying to gather all participants with busy schedules together simultaneously can seriously delay a research project. In addition, a skilled focus group facilitator who is also culturally sensitive is needed. As well, the common expectation that participants will be paid monetarily and receive refreshments at focus group gatherings may prove prohibitive without necessary funding in place. Because of the limited time and funds available to carry out this project, the personal interview method was determined to be the most suitable.

The most serious drawback with interviewing is that only a few participants can take part and share their thoughts and “voices” because of the time it takes to conduct and transcribe the interviews. Mail-in surveys have the potential to involve more participants, but are generally well-known for their low response rate.<sup>21</sup> In the case of Aboriginal people, without the personal contact, the response rate would most likely be even lower. This would be the case especially with studies done by emerging and less-established researchers, like myself, and on topics considered low priority by Aboriginal people. Unfortunately, libraries fall into this category at this point in time, as compared to land claim, poverty, unemployment and other social and political issues in the communities. Furthermore, the interviews were more likely to generate more in-depth responses. Thus, obtaining a few, qualitative and insightful interviews would be better than possibly even fewer responses and less probing survey data. Consequently, I developed a comprehensive interview schedule of 22 questions, some of which were multi-part (see Appendix).

Once the project was approved by the Ethics Review Committee of the School of Library and Information Studies program at the University of Alberta, the main obstacle to overcome was to find participants for the study. My first attempt was to present the project and solicit participants at an undergraduate Native Studies class on Research Methods. Although students in this class were keen to ask me questions about the project, none came forward to participate. A simultaneous approach was to develop an eye-catching poster and display it at six relevant locations on campus to attract Aboriginal students. Locations included the School of Native Studies bulletin board, the Office of Na-

tive Student Services bulletin board, the Aboriginal Students' Council lounge, and the First Nations Education Graduate program bulletin board. Posters were also left with representatives of the Aboriginal Law Student program and the Aboriginal Health Careers program. Only one student responded to the posters, a student who noticed them in the Aboriginal Students' Council lounge. My third and final approach was to present the project and solicit participants at a staff meeting of the Office of Native Student Services because many of the part-time staff were also students. This method attracted five participants, bringing the total to six students.

These methods reflect the Indigenous perspective and an Indigenous way of making contact. The local Native community on campus was approached in several ways and places, providing an opportunity for discussion in two of the three instances. My understanding of the Indigenous perspective manifested itself in my intent to be respectful of the students by approaching them in their space, with familiar surroundings and at times convenient for them, and by providing them with an opportunity for dialogue and reciprocity. The poster was developed with a Native art motif border which would be appealing to the target group. In addition, it was necessary for me to meet with the gatekeepers of two Indigenous programs on campus in order for them to spread the word in their respective programs about the project through the poster I left with them. It was important to take the extra time to meet with many people. In so doing, I was hoping to achieve the goal of attracting participants from all disciplines so that the research could be as inclusive as possible and thereby reflect multiple points of view.

Most of the taped interviews were conducted in the quiet room or Meditation Room at the Office of Native Student Services, which was offered by the coordinator of this office. This was satisfactory because many of the participants felt comfortable in this "familiar space" and because it was generally quiet and conducive to interviewing. One student, however, was interviewed in her office on campus because her schedule did not allow for interviewing at a quiet time at Native Student Services. It would appear that this different location did not have any significant impact on the study as all participants appeared comfortable with the taped interview session. More specifically, no participant asked to have the tape recorder turned off during the interview.

As for the interview schedule itself, time restraints did not allow the opportunity to pilot it prior to interviewing the study participants. As a result, there were a number of problematic questions that were asked of all participants. Question 11, for example, concerned Aboriginal-con-

tent periodicals which were not a part of the University of Alberta collection. Almost all participants responded that they could not think of many titles during the interview but that they would be willing to provide a list at some point in the future. A list of only five titles was generated during the interviews.

Question 14 asked about library services used and the responses are presented in Table 1; however, some aspects of the qualitative responses do not lend themselves well to the table format. Consequently, the value of some responses becomes lost in the translation, although I will attempt to expand on some of these during the discussion and in the interpretation of related survey data.

In addition, responses to some questions overlapped. For instance, question 10 asked about information that would be most useful in the participants' current studies. Often, answers also included services associated with providing certain types of information. One example was the response of "Native content in non-academic periodicals," followed by "and having these periodicals indexed in databases." In this case, I would transfer these answers to other questions, such as question 21, which asked for "suggestions for improvement."

## ***RESEARCH FINDINGS***

Due to the limited scope of this research paper, only the most salient sections of the information collected are discussed.

### ***Demographics***

Of the six participants, four were male and two were female. Three identified themselves as Cree, one as Ojibway, one had ancestry from a reserve in Eastern Quebec and one identified as a Native American. There were three doctoral students from the First Nations Education Graduate program, two Master's students (one MA and one MEd), and one second-year nursing student who had almost completed a science degree.

### ***Earliest Memory of University of Alberta Libraries***

Almost all participants stated that their earliest memories of the University of Alberta libraries were usually associated with fear. Terms used by participants included overwhelming, confusion, intimidating,

TABLE 1. Library Use of Aboriginal Students at the University of Alberta (Use of Type of Service by all 6 Participants)

| Type of Service                    | A  | B  | C  | D  | E  | F  | # of Yes Responses |
|------------------------------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|--------------------|
| Circ. Desk Checkout                | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | 6                  |
| GATE Catalogue                     | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | 6                  |
| Online Databases                   | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | 6                  |
| Info/Reference Desk                | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | 6                  |
| Photocopying                       | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | 6                  |
| Library Pamphlets                  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | 6                  |
| Inter-Library Loan                 | N  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | 5                  |
| Remote Access                      | Y  | N  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | 5                  |
| Microform Readers                  | Y  | N  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | 5                  |
| CD-ROMs                            | Y  | N  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | 5                  |
| Callbacks                          | Y  | Y  | N  | Y  | Y  | Y  | 5                  |
| Reserve Readings                   | N  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | 5                  |
| Reference Books                    | N  | Y  | Y  | N  | Y  | Y  | 4                  |
| Study Space                        | N  | Y  | Y  | N  | Y  | Y  | 4                  |
| Instruction (B.I.)                 | N  | N  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | 4                  |
| Suggestion Box                     | N  | N  | Y  | N  | Y  | Y  | 3                  |
| Print Indexes                      | N  | N  | Y  | Y  | N  | Y  | 3                  |
| Music Listening Room               | N  | Y  | N  | N  | N  | N  | 1                  |
| Automated Checkout                 | N  | N  | Y  | N  | N  | N  | 1                  |
| One-on-One Appt. w/<br>a Librarian | N  | N  | N  | N  | N  | N  | 0                  |
| Total Yes Responses                | 10 | 12 | 17 | 14 | 16 | 17 |                    |

Legend: Y = Yes N = No

scary, difficult and fearful. On the positive side, one student said he loved libraries and was content to explore the online catalogue, the table of contents of selected periodicals and how the library was set up. In this case, the participant had previously attended other post-secondary institutions.

The library locations used most by participants during their current program of study were the education library (four participants), the humanities and social sciences library (one participant) and the health sciences library (one participant). The reasons given for using these libraries generally concerned content of individual library holdings related to each student's program of study. In addition, convenience was a factor. For example, four students had courses and/or offices in the same building as the education library.

### ***Most Useful Information Sources***

The most useful information sources identified by this sample of students centred around those with Native or Indigenous content. Some examples of resources were current publications on Native Studies or by Aboriginal authors, Canadian videos with Aboriginal content, resources dealing with Indigenous methodologies and on Aboriginal post-secondary education, Aboriginal theses and dissertations and a bibliography of forthcoming Aboriginal literature. Half of these students noted that much of the information they needed was in journals whose subscriptions had been cancelled. Also, most of these students mentioned that they would prefer "research coming from another Native person."

Currently, the University of Alberta humanities and social sciences library lists a selection of six Native-content journals on its Web-site for Guides to Resources by Subject for Native Studies: *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, *American Indian Quarterly*, *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, *Canadian Journal of Native Studies*, *Inuit Studies* and *Native Studies Review*. This does not appear to be a very comprehensive collection of journals given that this library currently provides access to approximately 4500 electronic and print periodical titles. The Native-content journals most recommended by the participants in this study to be acquired by the University of Alberta were: *Tribal College*, *Winds of Change: A Magazine for American Indian Education and Opportunity*, and *Indigenous Knowledge Monitor*. However, as mentioned previously, these participants would have liked to have been able to provide a more comprehensive list, if given the time, tools and opportunity to do so.

Given these responses, it is not surprising that most participants spoke of a lack of resources on Native or Indigenous issues when asked about their overall impression of the University of Alberta libraries. Four participants stated that they bought a lot of their own books for re-

search purposes as a result. One in particular questioned why, if the University Bookstore carried copies of textbooks, could not the library provide one or two copies of textbooks for Native-content courses. Having library access to textbooks is important to most Aboriginal students because, generally, they are on a lower budget and face many economic difficulties.

In general, the textbook acquisition policy for the humanities and social sciences library at the University of Alberta is not comprehensive. Textbooks are considered to be an individual decision, depending on the needs of the discipline; therefore, only about one to five percent of the monograph budget is spent on textbooks. Also, other factors influence the purchase of textbooks. For instance, there is a high risk of theft and they date quickly. Usually, textbooks are purchased specifically to support the reserve collection. It has not been determined what percentage of Native-content textbooks has been purchased by the University of Alberta library system and if this percentage is at par with other subjects or disciplines or adequate to meet this particular need of Aboriginal students.

### *Types of Library Services Used*

Responses about the types of library services used were varied and informative. As is evident from Table 1, the services used by all or almost all of the participants included the circulation desk checkout, the online catalogue, the information or reference desk, online databases, photocopying, unassisted loading of CD-ROMs, remote access to the online catalogue and databases, interlibrary loan, microform readers, callbacks (requesting material already out on loan) and library pamphlets and pathfinders. This includes twelve of the twenty services listed, although all participants added other services to the list. These other services include: printing of database abstracts, use of audio-visual material, Internet searching, electronic journals, borrower information, phone-in renewal, ordering theses through UMI, use of the change machine (for photocopying) and the washroom. Interestingly, one participant commented that he rarely used Circulation because books were generally considered too old for research papers in the health sciences; consequently, this student's focus was on periodicals.

The one service that no participants used was the one-on-one appointment with a librarian. Most respondents indicated that they were not aware of this service, a finding which seems unfortunate given that

almost all are graduate students. Another service not used by this sample was the automated checkout. Although one participant indicated that he had used it once, he has never used it since because the security buzzer beeped as he was leaving. Likely, this lack of use of automated service is indicative of Aboriginal people's preference for interpersonal interaction and perhaps a distrust of some automated services. For instance, one participant referred to this preference in other areas such as banking, stating that she did not often use the automated teller either. Also, only one student had used the music listening room; others indicated that they knew about it but had not "needed" to use it yet. Lastly, in looking at the table vertically, it is apparent that two of the participants, A and B, do not appear to be using library services to their potential, as they have answered affirmatively to only ten and twelve of the twenty listed services. It is likely that these participants prefer to rely on people resources instead, again reflecting the Indigenous values of "being in relationship" and reciprocity. However, there may be other factors involved, such as feelings of intimidation about consulting with library staff, and these should be investigated further.

### *Frequency of Library Use*

When asked about the frequency of library use during the last twelve months, participants generally responded with complex answers. One student said almost every day for half of the semester while in tutorials, but only two or three times in the other half of the semester while in clinical courses. Another participant answered three times a week on average but this was less than usual because he was collecting his own research data. Another student said once per week on average, although he might not use the library at all for a month or so. Yet another participant stated that she would go to the library for several hours a day for the first two weeks of every term, specifically in January, May and September, then about twice per month the rest of the term.

Other libraries or information centres used by these students were the Edmonton Public Library, specifically for music and videos, the Physical Education Learning Lab, the mini-library at the School of Native Studies, the Office of Native Student Services for a few subscriptions to Aboriginal-content periodicals, community organizations, such as the Diabetes Association and the Canadian Lung Association, and bookstores because "it's easier to find new stuff there." In addition, one participant said he relied on the Internet and listservs for current information.

### ***Assessment of Help at the University of Alberta Libraries***

Generally, the participants were quite positive in their assessment of help at the University of Alberta libraries. Responses were as follows: “excellent” (one response), “very good” (three responses), “good” (two responses). No participant rated help at the University of Alberta libraries as fair or poor. When asking for guidance on finding information, these participants were most likely to approach faculty, although most also found classmates generally helpful. Four of the participants said they approached librarians for guidance fairly regularly, but usually when they were not helped by faculty or classmates. Two participants also found researchers in the field, such as people they had met at conferences, to be a valuable resource.

### ***Guidance to Find Available Information***

I also asked participants about their general opinion of various information providers and the information provided. Almost all participants respected librarians for providing a valuable and essential service but they sometimes qualified their responses. The following comments reflect some of this ambivalence:

#### *Librarians*

- I have a high regard for librarians but they can't know specifics in Phys. Ed. They can show you how to look for stuff but my classmates and profs will give me names.
- [Librarians] provide an important function. But they don't have the same perspective as I do. They are helpful to the extent that they can be. I don't fault them for it—my research topic isn't generally well-known so I can live with that.
- [Librarians] provide a very vital service and have very vital skills, being able to assess information. But I access information from everyone, not just academic folk. Because information comes from unlikely places.
- The reference people are very good but the circulation people aren't helpful.
- Librarians are essential. They can make the difference for students having a pleasant or very unpleasant experience.

Comments about other information providers were also thoughtful, informative and varied in their degree of enthusiasm:

### *Faculty*

- So-so, because I'm working with non-Native faculty and my subject area is in a Native field. A lot of them haven't read much on Native issues. I find I'm teaching them.
- I love the people in my faculty. They love what they do, they make an effort to know what's going on, the latest thing. They're opinion leaders so I get a lot of really good info from them.

### *Field Researchers*

- It depends on who they are and where they position themselves, the type of methodology they use. It depends on what they say and whether their research comes from their cultural base.
- The information provided by researchers is good, contemporary, bringing bits and pieces together into one place. You have to approach them differently, they're not as far-reaching as librarians. [Instead] they're very focused on one thing.

### *Classmates*

- They're really helpful. They've been out in the field. Two students from [a small Northern community] with quite a few doctoral graduates gave me a copy of one graduate's dissertation. I wouldn't have found it otherwise.
- The First Nations program may be unique—we share information and we're encouraged to share information. There's no competition—hoarding is unheard of. Also, I owe a lot to my classmates for giving me feedback. I consider my topic and methodology to be a group process, group generated.

From these comments, many Indigenous values can be observed. For instance, the concept of inclusivity rings loud and clear in the statement about accessing information from everyone because “information comes from unlikely places.” This also reflects the concept of equality because the speaker is open to listening to and approaching all people for information. In addition, the concept that all people have something of value to contribute to the circle is evident. Often, Indigenous people

prefer to remain low key or humble about their gifts and accomplishments, and loathe to attract attention, opting instead to mingle with “the masses.” Perhaps this explains why Indigenous people often encounter useful information serendipitously, particularly at social events. (Interestingly, many librarians value the information they come across serendipitously as well.) People from all walks of life will attend such social events as pow wows or gatherings of drummers, dancers and on-lookers usually in circle formations. Hence, it is not unusual to encounter someone there who will inform you of something you need to know at that point in time. This is the magic of community and the magic of the circle. In addition, the value of generosity has come into play because the information one receives at such events is a reflection of how generous one has been in helping others and this generosity is coming back to you. Similarly, even though an Aboriginal individual may be “just” an undergraduate at a university, this does not mean that he or she has nothing to contribute. Most likely this individual has a good deal of community-based involvement and life experience which provide useful insights into the Indigenous way of being and interacting.

Also apparent in some of these comments is the notion of reciprocity necessary for maintaining “good relations” which is so important to most Indigenous people. For instance, the student who spoke of the First Nations graduate program and its encouragement of information-sharing between classmates, also saw that this generosity and responsibility extended to providing feedback to each other and the group process of generating ideas for research and research methodology.

Some of these comments also have implications for library service at the University of Alberta. Primarily, librarians are not the sole, or even the first choice of, providers of information for this group of participants. One student mentioned the different perspective that librarians had in their manner of searching and that he did not have very high expectations of a librarian being able to help him with his obscure and perhaps foreign, from the viewpoint of the librarian, research topic. This differing perspective stems from each searcher’s epistemological view or knowledge base and influences the access to and evaluation of resources. Consequently, this factor makes a good case for the hiring of Aboriginal staff, whose experience and epistemology would likely be more in tune with the Indigenous student or researcher. Another student was more reliant on professors or classmates for obtaining specific names of people/authors for his research. Perhaps librarians need to advertise their abilities and research findings more in order to gain the confidence of Aboriginal students. For instance, if a librarian comes

across a mainstream periodical with a special issue on Aboriginal concerns, the librarian could showcase this information in some way, or otherwise let the Aboriginal community on campus know about this finding. Similarly, creating and showcasing a bibliography of other periodicals highlighting Aboriginal issues would also likely be useful and appreciated.

### *The Library Is the Heart of the University*

Another question asked of participants was somewhat hypothetical in nature. This question asked their opinion of the quote: “The library is the heart of the university.” Responses again were varied; some agreed but qualified their agreement, while others disagreed:

- I think it’s true because it brings out that the information is the “blood” and libraries circulate that.
- I’d have to agree with it from an educational standpoint. The whole university revolves around the library.
- I want to change it to be more accurate. I think the library is the core—the brain, not the heart. I think the heart and soul are the part of the community that comes from people. The libraries would then be the mental or the brain functions. But they should be the most important part of the university. They’re almost inseparable from the classroom and everything else.
- I would agree except that I’m not sure if that’s the case at this university.
- I don’t quite agree. I’d say the classroom is—the dynamic between the prof and the students is the heart of the university. But the library is a reflection of that.
- I don’t agree. I think the students are the heart of the university. Of course, I’m biased because I work at Native “Student” Services and because I’m a student. [Student’s emphasis]

My first interpretation of these comments is that most of these students see the library as a vitally connected part of the university system. They also see the library’s relationship to the classroom and the interaction between professors and students as important. Again, the concept of relationship is a focus of the students’ responses. Yet, on closer examination, the students appear to be saying something more. The metaphor about the “information” being the “blood” and that it circulates through the university system paints a portrait of libraries as being very

dynamic, leaving the reader with a thought-provoking image. In addition, this metaphor can be interpreted as a teaching tool, providing some insight into the Indigenous way of thinking. For instance, this quote attributes animate qualities to something usually considered inanimate, i.e., the library system, in the Western mode of thinking. Because of its reference to animation, this metaphor also brings attention to the people who make the library system work, and how important this interpersonal interaction is to Indigenous people. This is also reflected in the lack of use of the automated checkout system by this sample of students. Another insight provided by these responses is that there seems to be a feeling that the library does not value people interaction, the kind that represents the soul of the university community. Perhaps this is not something that can be changed, given the high percentage of repetitive transactions that occur in the library, such as circulation desk activities, and the lack of funding experienced by many libraries for much in-depth consultation with patrons.

### ***Suggestions for Library Improvement***

Possibly the most illuminating and insightful answers were those in response to the question about suggestions for improvement at the University of Alberta libraries. The suggestions were, again, varied in the range of services touched upon. Many related to increased collection of resources with Aboriginal content, especially current materials and databases. One improvement mentioned by most of the participants was the possibility of renewing cancelled subscriptions. Other suggestions were specific to individual libraries, such as taking out the entry turnstiles in the education library, and scheduling reference staff at the health sciences library on Sundays, a service offered at other campus libraries. Also of interest were suggestions for an increased commitment by the university administration to the library and increased commitment by the library to the Aboriginal community on campus. Some of these suggestions were expressed and interpreted as follows:

1. One participant suggested: “An Aboriginal Resource Centre or Learning Lab would take this university to a new level of service delivery.”

The idea here would be to have easier, one-stop access to Indigenous resources, rather than to be spread out all over campus. These resources could be compiled by staff who are more in touch with the academic in-

formation needs of Indigenous students because this would be the focus of the collection. Also an Aboriginal Resource Centre would be a more comfortable place for Aboriginal students to learn because it could display Aboriginal motifs and art and it could be located close to other services provided for and by Aboriginal people. In addition, library orientations could be offered here, a more welcoming and comfortable environment, which would enhance learning.

2. Another participant made this suggestion: "Have the administration really recognize the importance of the library and not just pay lip service to that sentiment—what I've noticed is important to this university is money and capital improvements while at the same time the library is cancelling subscriptions."

Some explanation is due here. One issue is the corporate sponsorship of the capital improvements currently being undertaken at the University of Alberta. The other consideration is the falling value of the Canadian dollar which has influenced the cancelling of many American and European journal subscriptions. However, this does not preclude the possibility of seeking out some additional funding, perhaps by way of corporate sponsorship or endowments, for maintaining the journal subscriptions most in demand.

One solution may be to consider having Aboriginal students do some fund-raising for subscriptions of Native-content journals, at least for the first year. Some of these subscriptions cost less than \$50 U.S. per year and may not be that much of a hardship if several students are willing to chip in. Another possibility is to consider requesting specific funding for journal subscriptions from the First Nations bands and Métis settlements which have a higher representation of students on campus from their communities.

Another suggestion here would be to have the library rep for the School of Native Studies or for the First Nations Education graduate program really lobby for increased funding. This could come from the project funding, available for the humanities and social sciences library, to support either large or expensive one-time purchases or to purchase "regularly priced materials which further develop or fill gaps in a specific subject or interdisciplinary collection."<sup>22</sup> Perhaps there are other funding sources, similar to the Equity Grant Project fund accessed by the Queensland University of Technology Library for the Novak and Robinson study.<sup>23</sup> Other options may be funding sources external to the university, such as the Millennium fund offered by the federal government of

Canada, a fund supporting many cultural projects. At any rate, it would take some time, commitment and energy to explore these suggestions.

3. Yet another participant suggested: “Having Aboriginal staff within the libraries would go a long ways to making new Aboriginal students feel more comfortable and more confident.”

This participant saw a huge need for Aboriginal students to see themselves reflected on campus, in various positions of authority, such as professors, administrators, business-owners and even library staff. These people serve as role models given the state of Aboriginal (dis)comfort levels in academia. Seeing that other Indigenous people have made it to these positions offers hope and confidence that current students can survive the struggle inherent in these achievements too. Interestingly, one of the studies discussed in the literature review also presented the idea of hiring minorities to work in libraries.<sup>24</sup>

4. One other suggestion made by a participant calls for: “More of a commitment to the Aboriginal student population—by asking Aboriginal student groups, staff and faculty to help library staff enhance the collection and provide input into the collection development process.”

The liaison librarian for Native Studies did purchase a considerable amount of Aboriginal-content material in the late 1980s when this undergraduate program first started. The initial purchase was made after consultation with Aboriginal-focused libraries such as the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College Library and the Gabriel Dumont Institute Library, both in Saskatchewan. However, it is only very recently that the selection process for Native Studies has been influenced by any other additional funding, over and above the small, annual budgetary allocations. Certainly, there are some very current and high-demand titles. Two examples are Taiiaki Alfred’s *Peace, Power, Righteousness: An Indigenous Manifesto*, a title held on reserve, and Linda T. Smith’s *Decolonizing Methodologies*. But according to the students, there are not enough such titles and not enough copies, usually only one, of each title. The policy that collection development funding is guided by the size of the user community and the amount of material published in that discipline can be disadvantageous to marginalized groups who face exceptional barriers to university enrollment and publication in the first place. There is a danger that collection development librarians face in not be-

ing aware of the “ways in which libraries contribute to the maintenance of an elite heritage.”<sup>25</sup> Manoff successfully articulated and reminded us of the politics of collection development as follows:

Most of us don't think much about how our reading functions provide us with reassuring images of ourselves and those like us. Nevertheless, we need to acknowledge the kind of delegitimizing functions libraries perform in their exclusion of certain kinds of materials—be they certain kinds of subject matter . . . or material addressed to certain minority or ethnic groups . . . the refusal of libraries to acknowledge, through their collections as well as their services, the multi-ethnic nature of their communities, are conveying a not particularly subtle message about who are the legitimate heirs to the knowledge they contain and whom they assume they are serving. The question of what libraries do not purchase has similar implications for scholarly as well as general materials. Library collections not only shape research patterns, but they affect the way library patrons view themselves and their relation to their academic community as well as to the larger culture.<sup>26</sup>

Other suggestions were community-oriented in nature, such as a Canadian dissertations abstract service which would benefit all graduate students on campus and the sponsoring of Aboriginal students to go to library school. This latter was felt to be a way to empower communities because information is seen to be an access point to power. The Aboriginal communities were not seen to have this access to information and, consequently, power, due to the absence of Aboriginal librarians in communities. Another student suggested that the Aboriginal community on campus should help produce a list of books and/or journals for the university library system as an ongoing process. This student also felt that it would be important for the Aboriginal community to critique some of the resources listed. One other student felt that the most helpful action the library could take would be to provide some staff with training in interpersonal skills and user-friendliness because he felt if this was in place, then it would also increase access to resources.

### ***RECIPROCITY AND RELATIONSHIP***

Not only did these participants express concern for their fellow students and for members of their communities, many comments also re-

flect the reciprocity and expectation of reciprocity so inherent to their interactions with others. Generally, participants spoke of many positive reciprocal interactions when they discussed interactions with other Indigenous people. However, comments about interactions with non-Indigenous people generally reflected a negative reciprocity, in that there was an expectation that a reciprocal interaction would occur but it did not happen. Some examples of anecdotes indicating positive reciprocity are as follows:

- I try to find what's contemporary—journals and Websites are fairly current editions of information. They give you a sense of what's happening and what's not happening, so you can anticipate what's going to be coming out. I look for expanded book reviews or article reviews or people having a debate. I want to see what people are saying—pro and con. That's the great thing about listservs and Websites.
- If people [in our cohort group in the First Nations Education Program] know what your research interest is, we help each other find information that's valuable. It may not be what I want to use but someone else could use it.
- [I ask for guidance to info from] Everyone, not just academic folk . . . I ask everyone, students, undergrads because info comes from unlikely places. We'll exchange info that way. I even get information from administrators about relevant books.
- To see some brown faces—we need to see ourselves reflected in this institution, I think especially in libraries. That would be interesting to have Aboriginal librarians, Aboriginal people working in the libraries. I suspect Aboriginal students would be drawn to them . . . and feel much more comfortable going to them.
- Attending conferences like the World Indigenous Peoples' Conference on Education brings Indigenous and Native educators together from around the world. While we are all different, the information and data and writing that's coming out of these different places is very similar, tells a similar story. So we can get support in our writing and research through what's happening in these other countries . . . It's exciting to network with others who are looking at the same kinds of things. The sharing, networking, exchanging names and addresses—that was empowering.

On the other hand, a sample of negative reciprocity is evident in the following passages:

- Aboriginal scholars can't get our papers published in "status quo" publications like *Education Today* because they don't want this kind of new look at education because it's not following the orthodoxy. Yet we need to be published. It's a Catch 22 situation. A contradiction. So we end up being published in Aboriginal-based magazines [which aren't indexed in mainstream databases].
- [Question 12: articles accessed through interlibrary loan?] No, I get them through Native Student Services or School of Native Studies, they have [subscriptions] to these. Or else I'll dig them up through some other process. First because reference isn't being made in the ERIC database, so you have to go somewhere else. But I bet there's other really good publications that we don't even know about because they're not plugged in.

In addition, comments about the importance of being in relationship were also made. Here are some of the most salient of these comments:

- If [the University of Alberta library] is prepared to meet the needs of Aboriginal students [Aboriginal students generating a list of Aboriginal resources] would be a good idea. Each time I come up with that frustration [of the library not carrying Aboriginal content materials], it would have been nice to be able to tell someone who cared, or who might do something about it. To say, "We really need this publication" and to think that someday we might get it.
- As an Aboriginal student, I have to wonder about the other non-European Canadian population here on campus, whether they'd find the same thing. There is general information about topics, nothing necessarily well-chosen. Where do they go to get their current new material? How do they get that? Are they Aboriginal people that they're going to? To ask what's new out there that's of interest to us. Because Aboriginal people at this university will tell you that they're not getting what they need from the non-Aboriginal authors. We're finding with the increasing number of Aboriginal students in grad studies that the worldviews are different . . . The research that's out there doesn't fit for us. It's frustrating for us to qualify new methodologies or new ways of doing things that don't restrict us.
- Sometimes you feel like you're stumbling around and no one's gone there before. But there's people out there who've done it and there's books that have been written about it but you don't know about it. Native people are starting to create their own links.

- When you write your thesis, you have an idea, but you have to support it with additional research. I can have an idea but if I have nothing to support it with, then it's just me speaking. But if other researchers or grad students have found the same thing, then it's not just me speaking but this body of knowledge saying that this is so [that's why it's important to have access to other theses written by Native people].
- But I do [look for Aboriginal authors and subject material] just in my circle of friends, which includes a lot of Aboriginal people. Because I've been a student for so long, I have a lot of academic people within the institution with connections. So, I think we get a lot through word of mouth and sharing information. In terms of what is new out there, what is current. What have other people come across?

These examples reinforce the importance of the concepts of reciprocity and "being in relationship" in the Indigenous worldview. It is a logical progression, then, to think that incorporating relationship-building practices into library services would strengthen the role libraries have when serving Indigenous people. Two such practices might involve a willingness to counter negative stereotypes of Aboriginal people and the implementation of effective cross-cultural training programs.<sup>27</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The information gathered through the course of this study has much in common with the few but related studies presented in the literature review. For instance, in the Queensland study, respondents expressed the need for increased access to Indigenous resources.<sup>28</sup> The Hannum study discussed the increased usage of libraries by Aboriginals when there was collaboration between the library and the Aboriginal communities.<sup>29</sup> Related to this were the positive effects that occurred when a commitment was made to relationship-building practices and the importance of Aboriginal people having input into collection development. Patterson also referred to the need for access to theses and dissertations.<sup>30</sup> In addition, these studies revealed Indigenous values in their participants' responses.

Furthermore, four main themes have emerged from a rudimentary analysis of the data from this study:

- Most of these participants were developing their own libraries for research purposes due to a lack of Aboriginal resources at the University of Alberta libraries.
- The use of people resources was common and perhaps necessary for these students' academic survival and success.
- Some participants had attended other post-secondary institutions and had made recommendations for improvements at the University of Alberta based on their experiences at these other universities.
- Most of these participants indicated a community-mindedness and reflected the concept of reciprocity (positive and negative) in their comments and recommendations. Interwoven throughout the data was a pattern of responses that often pointed towards the importance of "being in relationship."

In conclusion, there are two recommendations. The first is that broader research is needed. This study expresses the voices of only six students and cannot be taken to represent the whole University of Alberta Aboriginal student population, let alone Aboriginal students across Canada or North America. Therefore, it is recommended that future research into library use and information needs of Aboriginal adults be undertaken, particularly at academic and public libraries and at various locations across Canada. The sparse body of research in this area leaves an unacceptable gap. The idea here is to involve Aboriginal people in the studies and not to ask other people to speak on their behalf.

The second recommendation is for library administrators to consider acting on suggestions offered by the participants in this study. In response to the four main themes which have evolved from this study, it would help to alleviate the intimidation and frustration these participants feel about using the library if administrators would communicate an understanding of the participants' situation. Basically, there are three main concerns:

- A lack of holdings of Indigenous resources, evident in that students are buying their own books for research purposes and the common request to re-subscribe to cancelled journal subscriptions.
- A lack of resource or research development concerning Indigenous issues, as well as a need for support of this resource and research development.

- A lack of services recognizing the Indigenous values of “being in relationship” and reciprocity.

The next step would be to develop a process for accessing Aboriginal input into collection development. Two possibilities for such a process might be requesting a list of resources and organizing a forum/circle for representatives of all Aboriginal groups on campus to contribute to collection development procedures. In fact, there is such a Council already organized. As well, library outreach to the existing infrastructure, such as the Office of Native Student Services, would help to create a sense of trust. Other library outreach examples might include offers to customize library orientations and requests for guidance as to methods of contacting the Aboriginal community. Two other suggestions would help to create a more amicable climate of cooperation and “being in relationship.” One would be to have open discussion of the financial pressures faced by the library. Another would be to provide an opportunity to brainstorm solutions, such as those funding arrangements discussed earlier in this paper, by the Aboriginal community. Surely, if a small academic library in Australia can make such a commitment,<sup>31</sup> then the University of Alberta and the Province of Alberta, with their combined substantial resources, should also be able to take similar progressive action. Following through on some of these suggestions would indicate an appreciation of what Aboriginal students bring to this university. One of the participants in this study expressed this notion best in the following passage:

I’m not sure about other Aboriginal students doing their studies here, but I recognize that my particular interest is very specialized and very narrow. So I don’t expect the U of A to have what I need. But then again, if other Aboriginal students are having the same problem, because they come from the Northwest Territories or the Yukon or wherever, and the material is not available, then that’s a problem. We’re one segment of the student population but we bring something to the university as well. The theses and dissertations that we’re going to produce will bring, I think, honour and recognition to the university. And so if the university is intent on being a leader in the area of Native and Indigenous education, then they need to do something about increasing the collection to support programs.

The University of Alberta and other libraries can choose to respect inter-cultural knowledge and practices by making some accommodations for Aboriginal students. Libraries can also choose to acknowledge the importance of staff becoming culturally competent, a sentiment expressed by others in the library field:

We have outreach programs and minority recruitment drives, and we spout endless words in tribute to diversity. Yet, in a major error of omission, our otherwise enlightened profession takes little truly affirmative action to develop in all its members the genuine cultural competency to make serving all Americans, not just the white middle class, commonplace in our society . . . If librarians don't become culturally competent to effectively serve all the people in ways that are meaningful to them, we will become politically irrelevant.<sup>32</sup>

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24. Novak and Robinson, "'You tell us,'" 21.
25. Marlene Manoff, "Academic libraries and the culture wars: The politics of collection development," *Collection Management* 16 (4) (1992): 2.
26. *Ibid.*, 3-4.
27. For further discussion on relationship-building practices with Aboriginal people in the Canadian context, see Gilles Rhéaume, "A new spirit of partnership," *Canadian Business Review* 21 (2) (summer 1994): 6-11.
28. Novak and Robinson, "'You tell us,'" 21.
29. Hannum, "Do Native people use public libraries?" 26-9.
30. Patterson, "Information needs," 38.
31. Novak and Robinson, "'You tell us,'" 21.
32. John N. Berry, "Culturally competent service," *Library Journal* 124 (14) (1 September 1999): 112.

## APPENDIX

## Student Interview Schedule for Research Project

1. Tell me a bit about yourself and your current studies at the University of Alberta. Do you identify with a particular Aboriginal tribe or as a Métis or Inuit? \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No. If so, which one(s)?
2. What program of study are you taking?
3. What year of the program are you in?
4. Think back to when you began university and when you first used the library. What is your earliest memory of the University of Alberta Libraries?
5. Which U of A library location was it?
6. What was your impression of the library then?
7. Has your impression changed since then? If so, what factors do you think contributed to that change?
8. Which U of A library locations have you used since?  
[prompt: *Rutherford (Humanities and Social Sciences), Cameron (Science and Technology), John W. Scott (Health Sciences), the Law Library, the Business Library, Coumts (Education) Library*]
9. What library have you used the most during your current program of study?  
Is there a particular reason (or reasons) why you frequent this library?
10. What kinds of information are or would be most helpful for you in your current studies? [prompt: certain kinds of periodicals or literature, material of a certain nature, . . . ]
11. Are there journals dealing with Aboriginal issues that exist that you have needed for your studies but are not a part of the University of Alberta Library collection? \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No. If yes, what are they?
12. If yes, have you accessed the articles through inter-library loan?  
\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No. If no, why not?
13. What is your overall impression of the collection at the University of Alberta Library?
14. What library services have you used at the University of Alberta during your current program?

- Circulation desk checkout
- the GATE (catalog)
- Inter-library loan
- Microform readers
- Online databases
- One-on-one consultations with a librarian (appointment necessary)
- Print indexes
- Reference books (including encyclopedias, dictionaries, almanacs, etc.)
- Requesting material already out on loan (Callbacks)
- Study space
- Automated checkout
- Remote access to the Gate
- Library aids (pamphlets, instruction printouts, pathfinders)
- Music Listening room
- Unassisted loading of CD-ROMs
- Photocopying
- Suggestion box
- Formal instruction (B.I.)
- Information / Reference desk
- Reserve readings
- Other

15. In the last twelve months, how often have you used the university libraries?
16. How would you assess the University libraries in terms of helping you obtain the information you need to do assignments or research?  
 excellent    very good    good    fair    poor  
Please provide reasons for your answer.
17. In your current program of studies, do you access other libraries or information centres?    Yes    No. If yes, please name them and for what purpose. If yes, please state why you access them.
18. In your current program of studies, whom do you prefer to ask for guidance to find available information?  
 faculty    classmates    librarian    researchers in the field    other
19. What is your general opinion of librarians and the information they provide?  
What about faculty and the information they provide?  
What about researchers in the field and the information they provide?  
What about classmates and the information they provide?
20. What is your opinion of this quote: "The library is the heart of the university."
21. What suggestions do you have for improving library services for this university?
22. Is there anything else you would like to say regarding the University of Alberta libraries or the kinds of information you need for your studies?

Thank you for your participation.