

President's Message – November 2013

Members of the University of Regina community,

Last week, I participated in a media announcement at which TD Bank Group made a \$350,000 donation to the University of Regina.

The sheer amount of this contribution is significant, but the true importance of this contribution does not lie in any dollar value. Rather, it lies in what this commitment means for current and future students of Aboriginal descent at our University and in our province as a whole.

Historically, Aboriginal people have been underserved in Canada's post-secondary education system, as recent graduation rates clearly show. According to the 2011 National Household Survey, for example, approximately 26% of all Canadians between the ages of 25 and 64 had a university degree. Among Aboriginal Canadians, however, this percentage was considerably lower, at just under 10%.

There are a variety of reasons for this, but two of the major ones are the accessibility of university education, and the need for mentors once students reach university – factors that TD Bank Group is helping to address. The company's recent donation earmarks \$100,000 for the TD Aboriginal Bursary, which will enable Aboriginal students in financial need to continue their undergraduate studies. At the same time, \$250,000 will be used to support the Neekaneewak Leadership Initiative, which will allow Elders on campus to help provide culturally relevant programming as well as mentorship and support for Aboriginal students.

These initiatives will complement others we have implemented in recent years, and follow in our longstanding tradition of promoting Aboriginal post-secondary education – a tradition which dates back to the 1976 founding of the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College (now First Nations University of Canada) on our campus.

Last year, we established an entrance scholarship for a student from each of Saskatchewan's 74 First Nations, and expanded our Aboriginal Student Centre. Working with Dr. Shauneen Pete, the University's Executive Lead – Indigenization, the Aboriginal Advisory Circle has been recommending strategies aimed at reducing the challenges faced on campus by Aboriginal students, as well as planning curricula and programming that will help attract and retain Aboriginal students and broaden the cultural experience for all students. Furthermore, we are welcoming Aboriginal students into designated seats in programs such as Nursing, and our Aboriginal Career Centre is supporting the academic and career-related success of Aboriginal students through the Co-operative Education Program and other services such as professional development workshops.

If the discussions I had last month with students and community leaders in First Nations communities in northern Saskatchewan are any indication, initiatives such as these are making a tremendous difference for Aboriginal students at our University and in our province as a whole. And one need only look at the increasing numbers of Aboriginal students on our campus to see further evidence of this. FNU's student enrolments are up approximately 20% compared to

last year, a strong demonstration of the increasingly important role which that institution is playing in our province. Across the entire University of Regina campus, there are over 14% more self-declared Aboriginal undergraduate students than there were last year, bringing the number of Aboriginal students on campus to nearly 12% of the undergraduate total.

By helping support these students and those who follow in their footsteps in the coming years, TD Bank Group has shown confidence in and optimism for the future of our University and its students. All of us at the University of Regina should share this optimism, because through our work, each of us is contributing to our strategic plan's stated objective to "prepare all our students to live in a Saskatchewan where First Nations and Métis peoples achieve their rightful place in society and the economy, and where their cultures are celebrated."

Sincerely,

Dr. Vianne Timmons
President and Vice-Chancellor