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Indigenous Student Success Cohort Program: A Path to Enabling Indigenous Student Academic Success

Traditionally, Indigenous ways of knowing and learning (IWKL) are relational, hands-on, and practical and knowledge is passed on orally through story, language, ceremony, and traditional practice. This way of learning often creates a challenge for Indigenous learners in the traditional Euro-Western system of compartmentalized, theory-first and written methodological approaches to teaching and learning. Nowhere is this truer than in the sciences and mathematics.

The Indigenous Student Success Cohort (ISSC) program at the University of Lethbridge (UofL) in Alberta, Canada is a well-recognized, successful first-year program that provides a solid academic foundation and skill set to enable Indigenous students to succeed in their degree of choice. Key to the success of the ISSC, is the bridging of Indigenous and Western cultures, the creation of community, a culturally relevant, highly interactive, learning, and supportive environment, and attention to Indigenous Ways of Knowing and Learning (IWKL). Our statistics show that Indigenous students who enter university through this program are retained to graduation at a 10% higher rate than any student (Indigenous or not) who enters through the traditional mainstream way. As such, the ISSC has become a model for other cohort programs at the UofL.

This presentation will be a sharing of our journey the ups and downs, and lessons learned.