PROPOSAL TO ESTABLISH
THE
CENTRE FOR ABORIGINAL INITIATIVES
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

September 2006

1. Introduction: Summary of the proposed unit
In the spring 2004 review of the Aboriginal Studies Program, the Review Committee made the following statement: “The existence of a viable ABS program has to be felt throughout the University of Toronto. It has to pierce the culture of the university if it is to be accepted and embraced; it cannot be built on goodwill alone” (page 6). The Centre for Aboriginal Initiatives will build the Aboriginal presence at the University of Toronto, and will involve the hiring of two new faculty positions in Social Justice and Aboriginal Communities and Aboriginal Healing, positions that strengthen initiatives in the urban Aboriginal experience with a focus on health and community-based research.

The University of Toronto is home to a small and vibrant Aboriginal Studies program, an undergraduate program, as well as a number of other Aboriginal initiatives including First Nations House, the Indigenous Education Network at OISE, the Transitional Year Program, the recently approved Collaborative Program in Aboriginal Health, and the Faculty of Social Work’s Aboriginal Advanced Practitioner Initiative. The Centre for Aboriginal Initiatives will draw these diverse initiatives together to create a hub for intellectual activity, student support and community engagement. It will position the University of Toronto as a global leader in research and pedagogy with urban Aboriginal communities and will make a significant intervention nationally by tackling the shortage of junior faculty specialists in social work and in counselling/healing with urban Aboriginal populations. The Centre develops a unique cross-campus collaboration, bringing together the Faculty of Arts and Science, the Faculty of Social Work and the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE/UT) in a joint initiative that builds capacity in all three faculties. The Centre also generates synergies between undergraduate programs and graduate professional programs, connects with the broader Aboriginal community and improves educational access and equity for Aboriginal students.

The lead partners in this initiative are Aboriginal Studies, an undergraduate program in the Faculty of Arts and Science, First Nations House, part of student services, the Faculty of Social Work and the Department of Adult Education and Counselling Psychology at OISE/UT. The following units have also expressed an interest in participating in developing the Centre: Department of Anthropology, Department of Geography, Department of Linguistics, Indigenous Health Research Development Program and Department of Public Health, Institute for Women’s Studies and Gender Studies, Equity Studies, Centre for the Study of the United States, Anthropology UTSC, Sociology and Equity Studies OISE/UT, and the Transitional Year Program.

2. Background
2.1 Aboriginal Post-secondary Education: Meeting The National Challenge
Despite efforts to improve access to post-secondary education for Aboriginal people during the past two decades, enrolment and completion rates nationally remain significantly lower than for non-Aboriginal Canadians. According to a report on Aboriginal Peoples and Post-Secondary Education produced by the Canada Millenium Scholarship Foundation, Aboriginal students continue to face significant barriers to success. These include poverty, inadequate preparation, discrimination, cultural insensitivity, limited access to Aboriginal-relevant curriculum, family responsibilities, alienation and isolation. The report concludes that “Combined with a history of forced assimilation through educational institutions, the barriers to Aboriginal participation in post-secondary education are formidable.”
Toronto is home to the largest urban Aboriginal population in Canada and the University of Toronto should be at the forefront in creating innovative and effective strategies for recruitment and retention of Aboriginal students. At present, however, the University’s Aboriginal initiatives are under-resourced, fragmented and ill equipped to compete with better-funded programs. The University has the academic and student services expertise to develop the culturally appropriate teaching, research, and support needed to address the barriers facing Aboriginal students. The creation of the Centre for Aboriginal Initiatives, working closely with First Nations House, will enhance our ability to attract and retain Aboriginal students.

2.2 The Need for Aboriginal Expertise
Aboriginal Studies, the Faculty of Social Work and the Department of Adult Education and Counselling Psychology at OISE/UT have pressing staffing needs that are addressed in this proposal. The 2004 review of Aboriginal Studies makes the following recommendation with regard to faculty: ‘In order to meet the current structural and developmental needs of the program it is recommended that ABS receive an additional full-time faculty position, …’ (page 9). Through the Faculty of Arts and Science planning process, Aboriginal Studies has been allocated one .49 position, with .51 in Political Science and one .4 position, with .6 in English; in addition, Anthropology has a commitment to hire a faculty member that will advance Aboriginal Studies. These positions, while very welcome, fall short of the review committee recommendation.

In the past few years, the Faculty of Social Work (FSW) has developed a number of initiatives that aim to build bridges with the Aboriginal community and to provide access to graduate social work education by Aboriginal practitioners. The centrepiece of FSW’s strategy is the Aboriginal Advanced Practitioner Initiative (AAPI). This pilot program, launched in 2004-05, brings together FSW, the Transitional Year Program, Ryerson University School of Social Work, First Nations House, and the Native Child and Family Services of Toronto to construct innovative educational pathways to social work education for experienced Aboriginal practitioners. In order to increase the capacity of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal practitioners to provide culturally-appropriate services to Aboriginal clients, FSW is committed to developing Aboriginal relevant content in the curriculum, including a possible specialization in Social Work with Aboriginal Communities. However, the Faculty is severely hindered in that goal by the lack of an expert in this area. The FSW plan states ‘we currently lack a full-time aboriginal faculty member at FSW. … In the longer term, we will need a tenure-track position and one of the objectives of the AAPI is to produce Ph.D. graduates who can join our Faculty.’ In order to build FSW’s Aboriginal initiatives, and attract Aboriginal PhD students, a faculty specialist in social work with Aboriginal communities is essential.

OISE/UT has long been a world leader in Aboriginal education with specific expertise in Aboriginal adult education, Aboriginal literacy and in the sociology of education. It has the largest Aboriginal graduate student enrolment in the University of Toronto and is the home of the Indigenous Education Network. Following the loss of key Aboriginal faculty in recent years, OISE/UT seeks to re-build and further develop its strength through the hiring of a new faculty member in Aboriginal education beginning in 2005-2006. However, this is insufficient to give OISE the strength it requires to deliver its program, and cannot meet its education, training and counseling mandates. Recent Canadian initiatives in the general area of Aboriginal health and counselling have highlighted the need for specialists in Aboriginal healing. This hire would again give OISE the strength to be a world leader in both research and training in this area.

3. Description of the unit
3.1 Goals of the Centre for Aboriginal Initiatives
The Centre for Aboriginal Initiatives will be a hub for teaching, research and community collaborations. The Centre will be housed alongside First Nations House, part of student services, and the
undergraduate Aboriginal Studies program. These three units will be jointly located in the North Borden Building, the current home of First Nations House. First Nations House provides a supportive and culturally relevant space for Aboriginal students and staff as well as offering services for all students of the university. Aboriginal Studies is an undergraduate program. The Centre for Aboriginal Initiatives brings together people from these units and elsewhere across the University of Toronto and the larger Toronto environment to offer opportunities for the University and wider community to learn about Aboriginal issues, to engage with cutting edge research in Aboriginal studies, and to access advice and information on best practice in Aboriginal post-secondary education. The Centre has five aims:

1. To develop innovative participatory research with urban Aboriginal populations and support research partnerships on critical issues facing Aboriginal communities.
2. To develop collaborations with Aboriginal communities and community organizations.
3. To develop pedagogy and research that focuses on Aboriginal peoples as cultural workers, social change agents, leaders and thinkers rather than as social problems or victims.
4. To develop research and pedagogy on Aboriginal methodologies and epistemology.
5. To support the recruitment and retention of Aboriginal graduate and undergraduate students and enhance the visibility of the Aboriginal presence at U of T.

The Centre, Aboriginal Studies, and First Nations House will be based in dedicated space that includes classrooms (ABS classes range in size from ten to 120), offices, research facilities, library facilities, student organizations, a lounge, a kitchen and a seminar room. Bringing the two components – student services and scholarship – together, in a single location, will enhance our ability to attract and retain Aboriginal students. In the spring 2004 review of Aboriginal Studies, the strong relationship between ABS and First Nations House was recognized, and the following statement was made: “we were convinced that housing ABS and FNH together would be very beneficial to both. We recommend a single space, …” Both the 1999 and 2004 reviews of ABS suggest that housing the two units in a single location, while at the same time ensuring that they maintain their distinct identities, would enhance the functioning of both units and create a unique centre on campus. The building will house counselors, elders, artists and scholars in residence, financial advisors and a recruitment officer from First Nations House. It will also house faculty and administrative staff from Aboriginal Studies. The following activities will be located there:

- Aboriginal Studies classes and graduate research seminars
- Distinguished Lecture Series
- Scholars and Artists in Residence
- Community/university collaborative workshops
- Computer equipment
- First Nations House library
- Recruitment activities (FNH)
- Academic counseling (FNH)
- Admissions information (FNH)
- Personal counseling (FNH)
- Academic tutoring (FNH)
- Financial aid and planning services (FNH)
- Spiritual guidance (FNH)
- Native Students’ Association
cultural and social events (FNH)
3.2 Faculty Position in Social Justice and Aboriginal Communities

One position set out in the AIF proposal is in Social Justice and Aboriginal Communities, a joint position between ABS and the Faculty of Social Work, with an undergraduate component in ABS and graduate component in Social Work. The ABS review committee recommends: ‘ABS receive an additional full-time faculty position …’, ‘… courses be created that survey the range of qualitative and quantitative methods and theories that have been utilized in the study of Indigenous history and life,’ ‘… the development of a field placement course,’ ‘… develop interdisciplinary methods/theory classes.’

A joint position between ABS and FSW meets the needs of both programs. For ABS, the position helps in the development of a focus on the urban Aboriginal experience and creates strength in community-based research, goals of ABS laid out in the 2005 review. For FSW, the position assists in the development of Aboriginal-relevant content in the curriculum, supports the long-term sustainability of the Aboriginal Advanced Practitioner Initiative and provides the opportunity to develop a new specialization in Social Work with Aboriginal Peoples. At present there are several undergraduate programs nationally that focus on training Aboriginal social workers to go back to work in rural or reserve communities. However, there are few MSW programs with this focus, and none that specialize in urban Aboriginal communities. Our location provides an opportunity for U of T to develop a unique leadership role in social work education and research with a focus on urban Aboriginal communities. Expertise in this area is essential for all social workers working in a diverse urban environment. This hire will teach a survey course on Social Work with Aboriginal Communities, with an emphasis on social justice responses to deep-rooted social problems, courses for undergraduates and graduate students on Indigenous Methodologies and Participatory Research, and an undergraduate course in the urban Aboriginal experience. She/he will also develop collaborative research initiatives with organizations serving Aboriginal communities in the GTA and will create opportunities for the involvement of graduate and undergraduate students in these projects.

This position will enable FSW to attract and supervise Ph.D. students working on Aboriginal issues, thus meeting the long-term goal of addressing the national shortage of junior faculty with expertise in this area. For ABS, it provides the vital link to the community to develop the field-based studies that are vital to the growth of the program. This combination of pedagogical innovation, with cutting-edge participatory research, is likely to become a model for Aboriginal social work and participatory research and education in Canada, as well as the U.S. Australia and New Zealand.

This position was advertised in 2005-2006. A three-year position has been offered to Cynthia Wesley-Esquimaux, currently a CLTA in Aboriginal Studies. This position is split between Social Work (51%) and Aboriginal Studies (49%) and will begin in July 2007.

3.3 Faculty Position in Aboriginal Healing

A position in the Department of adult Education and Counselling Psychology at OISE/UT in Aboriginal Healing also meets a dual set of needs. The recent development of the graduate Collaborative Program in Aboriginal Health has highlighted the need for additional resources in the general area of Aboriginal health and specifically in healing
and counselling. The inclusion of a scholar in this area is critical to the new Collaborative Program and to the development of the Centre for Aboriginal Initiatives.

The position in Aboriginal Healing will bring an Aboriginal counsellor and scholar to promote awareness of general Aboriginal healing issues, needs and practices; community development; counsellor training; and health promotion. The scholar will bring together Aboriginal perspectives and knowledge in research, teaching, and practitioner training as well as broad community outreach and liaison with the goal of increasing the number of scholars and practitioners in Aboriginal health and education. As well, this position will serve to facilitate collaboration and cooperation with community-based Aboriginal health centres such as Anishnawbe Health Toronto and Noojimawin Health Authority. The hire will teach courses in Aboriginal healing, traditional healing, and counselling. This may include Aboriginal perspectives on trauma and abuse, substance abuse treatment, community development, community health and wellbeing and mental health and health promotions. The study of culturally-based healing practices is a burgeoning field of scholarship which must include Aboriginal Healing as a central and vital component of psychospiritual interventions.

The proposed hire will work closely with the FSW hire and with ABS faculty to build programming at the Centre for Aboriginal Initiatives, develop collaborative research projects, and work with graduate students from the three faculties.

This position is being advertised in fall 2006.

3.4 Administration
The Centre for Aboriginal Initiatives will bring together faculty and students from across the University interacting with the larger Toronto Aboriginal community. This broad mandate calls for dedicated administrative staff who can meet the demands of the Centre to work with many academic units, First Nations House, and the larger community. The administrator will also increase the Aboriginal staff presence at U of T, and serve as a role model to the Aboriginal students.

4. The Stepping UP context
The Centre for Aboriginal Initiatives contributes directly towards the goals of Stepping UP, as follows:

The student experience will be enhanced through the hiring of additional Aboriginal faculty and staff who will serve as mentors and role models to Aboriginal students. Aboriginal faculty open up Aboriginal worldviews to the larger student body, providing students with a different, and rich, intellectual tradition. Bringing the Centre and FNH together in a single building will allow student needs to be met in a comprehensive and coordinated way. The administrative position will allow for a better student experience through the provision of extra-curricular activities.

Interdivisional and cross campus collaborations figure strongly in this proposal. The interdivisional collaboration between ABS (FAS), FSW, and OISE is unique, and serves the needs of units which are distinct but share common goals. Shared space for the Centre, Aboriginal Studies, and First Nations House will enhance the already unique cross-campus collaboration between ABS and FNH.

Undergraduate and graduate students both are afforded unusual research opportunities through this proposal. Undergraduates in ABS will be involved in
community-based research through the Centre. Graduate students in FSW and OISE will have the opportunity to develop Masters theses and PhD dissertations with a focus on work with Aboriginal peoples, to collaborate with the new hires on community-based research projects and to receive training as Research Assistants for the new hires.

The ways in which this proposal connects the University with the broader community are exciting. ABS is grounded in the responsibility of U of T to educate a citizenship that respects the diverse intellectual heritages that go to make up Canada, with particular recognition of the unique position that Aboriginal people hold in Canadian society. This Centre enhances cooperation between U of T, the Nojimoowan Health Authority, the Wellesley Central Health Corporation, Native Child and Family Services and other community agencies. The community-based research component of the proposal will bring students and faculty together with the urban Aboriginal community in Toronto. The FSW initiative brings community practitioners to U of T as graduate students. The Initiative also brings U of T into contact with Ryerson in a joint program that is of value to both; the hirings will enhance such relations. The new hire in OISE will also interact with the local Aboriginal community, especially through the Aboriginal health authorities.

ABS is itself based in improving equity and diversity in all ways – through increasing the number of Aboriginal students on campus, hiring Aboriginal faculty, and hiring Aboriginal staff. FSW seeks to build on its pilot Advanced Aboriginal Practitioner Initiative to increase the number of Aboriginal social workers in the program. OISE seeks to attract additional non-traditional students. Overall then, we seek to improve equity by providing opportunities for non-traditional students, and to improve diversity by increasing the presence of Aboriginal people, as an integral part of the U of T community.

This Centre enhances current programs through creating new and unusual synergies, building bridges, and creating new opportunities.

5. Goals/milestones and strategies for achieving goals
The major goals are listed below:
- hirings
- space
- increase in the total number of Aboriginal graduate and undergraduate students,
- increase in the number of graduate students pursuing research on Aboriginal issues,
- increase in the number of Aboriginal faculty at the university,
- increase in the number of courses with Aboriginal content at both undergraduate and graduate levels,
- enhanced connections with the Aboriginal communities in Toronto and Ontario,
- increased research partnerships between the U of T and the Aboriginal community in Toronto.

6. Time frame
1. Two new positions: one (joint FAS, FSW) to begin July 2007 (three-year position; appointment approve already), a second (OISE) to begin July 2007 (being advertised now)
2. Space: to create a designated space by Fall 2007 (first phase, office space, will be ready in Fall 2006; second phase, classrooms, library, student space, language lab, in Fall 2007)
3. Increase in number of MSW, MEd, and Ph.D. students: ongoing
4. Increase in number of Aboriginal students: ongoing
5. Expansion of FSW program to other Native social work agencies: 2007-08

7. Establishment
The Centre for Aboriginal Initiatives has received enthusiastic support from across the university, and received the major proportion of the funds requested in the second round of AIF applications, which were approved by the University’s Governing Council in its meeting of June 29, 2005.

Should the General Committee of the Faculty of Arts and Science approve this proposal, we expect that the Centre for Aboriginal Initiatives will begin its operations in the fall 2006, once it is approved, and will commence full operations as soon as space is available, hopefully in the spring 2007.

8. Director
The Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Science will strike a Committee to recommend a Director of the Centre for Aboriginal Initiatives. The appointment will follow the University’s Policy on Appointment of Academic Administrators for EDU3. The Director will take up his or her duties no later than January 1, 2007.

The responsibilities of the Director shall include the general operational and financial management of the Centre, including its relationships with the Aboriginal Studies Program, the Faculty of Social Work, OISE, and other units, its public lectures and conferences, its public relations, and its building of community partners.

9. Organization, Reporting Authority and Governance
The Director will report directly to the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Science, who will constitute an Advisory Committee including the Deans of the faculties involved or their representatives, the Director of the Aboriginal Studies Program, the Principal of University College (home of Aboriginal Studies) or representative, the Director of the Transitional Year Program, and the Director of First Nations House. The Director will consult regularly with the academic leaders of its partner units to coordinate program planning and will submit the Centre’s annual report for their review and comment. The Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Science will be responsible for the formal review of the Centre and its Director on a five-year cycle.

The internal governance of the Centre will be led by the Director. The Centre will have an Associate Director, to be appointed by the Director in consultation with the Advisory Committee. The operation of the Centre will be guided by its Executive Committee, which will comprise the Director, the Associate Director, the Director of First Nations House, up to six members of the University of Toronto faculty drawn from among its partner units, and up to three community members.
Members of the Centre will include faculty from across the University and community members. Membership will be by application, but will be open to all University of Toronto faculty. Benefits of membership include notification of Centre events and participation in program planning. Responsibilities of membership include regular participation in Centre events.

10. Teaching/Programs
As an EDU:C, the Centre for Aboriginal Initiatives will not directly register students. Faculty hired through the AIF funds will be appointed to the Aboriginal Studies Program, the Faculty of Social Work, and OISE.

The Centre will establish community partnerships in order to meet its goals. It will offer opportunities for members of the Centre, members of the University, and members of the broader community to learn about Aboriginal issues. Through these partnerships, the Centre will aim to develop pedagogy that focuses on Aboriginal peoples as agents of change and leaders, as is the current goal of the Aboriginal Studies Program.

11. Research
A major goal of the Centre for Aboriginal Initiatives is to develop innovative participatory research with urban Aboriginal populations and to support research partnerships on critical issues facing Aboriginal communities. In order to undertake such research, the development of collaborations with Aboriginal communities and community organizations is essential. A major aspect of the research involves questions of Aboriginal methodologies and epistemologies, research that is foundational to any work with Aboriginal communities.

12. Faculty Appointments
As an EDU:C, the Centre for Aboriginal Initiatives will not make primary faculty appointments.

13. Budget and Budgetary Authority
The proposed budget for the full realization of the Centre for Aboriginal Initiatives has two components: one-time-only costs for renovations and operating costs. For the former, we have a commitment of funding from the AIF. For the latter, our funding comes from the AIF. We will seek to close the gap between our anticipated needs and our existing funding through applications for external funding (for example, conference grants through SSHRC, Government of Ontario funding) and advancement.

The Director will have authority for the Centre’s day-to-day budgetary operations, but ultimate budgetary authority will rest with the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Science.

The space and facility requirements of the Centre are detailed under 15 below.
14. **Reviews**

In accordance with the *Guidelines for Review of Academic Programs and Units*, a formal review of the Centre will take place at the end of the Director’s term, i.e., every five years. This review will be commissioned by the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Science.

The Centre’s success in achieving its goals and priorities will be measured by the following quantitative and qualitative criteria:

- Hirings in Faculty of Social Work and OISE
- Increase in the total number of Aboriginal graduate and undergraduate students,
- Increase in the number of graduate students pursuing research on Aboriginal issues,
- Increase in the number of Aboriginal faculty at the University,
- Increase in the number of courses with Aboriginal content at both undergraduate and graduate levels,
- Enhanced connections with Aboriginal communities in Toronto and Ontario,
- Increased research partnerships between the University of Toronto and the Aboriginal communities in Toronto

More specifically, our goals for the first year of the Centre’s full operation (2007-2008) include:

- Mentoring of hirings in Faculty of Social Work and OISE/UT
- Further development of space, as required
- A public event to launch the Centre’s activities (an official opening will take place in spring 2007, once the first phase of the space is ready; a major public event will take place when the second phase of the space is completed)
- A speaker series attracting speakers of interest to the full range of partners including the Aboriginal communities of Toronto (discussion is underway)
- The development of community research partners
- Application for external conference funding for a conference on social justice and Aboriginal healing in the 2008-2009 year
- Advancement activity

15. **Space and Facility Needs**

Once it is in full operation, both First Nations House, Aboriginal Studies, and the Centre for Aboriginal Initiatives will be housed in common space. Shared space between these units and academic space is estimated to be as follows:

- **Shared**
  - Lounge
  - Meeting room
  - Library, including language lab
  - Kitchenette
  - Health office
- **Academic**
  - Offices: 12 (including administrative, director, space for visitors, journal space, TA/PhD research office)
  - Seminar room
The Centre will be located in the North Borden Building, where First Nations House is currently housed. Renovations to this space are currently underway. The cost of renovations has received AFD approval, in accordance with the Policy on Capital Planning and Capital Projects.

16. **Library**
The First Nations House library will form part of the Centre for Aboriginal Initiatives, and the Librarian at First Nations House will work with the Centre to develop the collection so as to further support needs of the Centre.