

MEDIA RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

SIAST leads health sector Essential Skills project for Aboriginal people

SIAST's goal is to increase employment success and ultimately the representation of Aboriginal people in health sector occupations

May 10, 2010 – SIAST is leading a national project to develop culturally appropriate ways of learning for Aboriginal adults working or hoping to work in the health-care sector. This \$55,000 project is funded by the Association of Canadian Community Colleges (ACCC).

“The project focuses on Essential Skills (ES), defined by the Essential Skills Research Project as the skills needed for work, learning and life,” says Lou Charlebois, business and industry consultant at SIAST. “Essential Skills provide the foundation for learning all other skills and enable people to evolve with their jobs and adapt to workplace change.

“If knowledge is the currency of our economy, and if people are the common denominator of progress, then learning provides the key to maintaining productivity, competitiveness and prosperity. Essential Skills have been described as the core components that provide the ‘velcro’ to which all other learning sticks.”

Many Aboriginal people face challenges and barriers to entering, succeeding and/or career laddering within health-care occupations due to gaps in Essential Skills. Current ES materials and practices do not address the manner in which Aboriginal people may build on existing knowledge and acquire Essential Skills in key areas such as document use and oral communication.

SIAST will lead and co-ordinate the activities of the project, work collaboratively with the test colleges and employer partners, and report findings to ACCC.

Test colleges include Lambton College in Ontario, Northern Lights College in British Columbia and Nova Scotia Community College in Nova Scotia. They will test the

Essential Skills tools/practices developed by SIAST with relevant stakeholders in their respective communities and provide feedback to SIAST.

SIAST is currently working with the Regina Qu'Appelle Health Region on this project and may target other health regions and authorities.

Expected results are:

- Student material and facilitator's guide specific to document use (with possible application to oral communication) in entry-level positions in the health-care sector.
- Materials that incorporate Aboriginal teaching/learning methodology, examples from Aboriginal heritage, and testimonials from Aboriginal health workers.
- Materials that have been vetted and piloted at SIAST and a minimum of three test colleges.
- Materials that have been validated by a minimum of five employers/experts in the health-care sector
- A minimum of 50 existing or future health-care employees will benefit from the tools/practices described above.

SIAST is leading one of three national projects focused on increasing Essential Skills in Aboriginal learners. Lou Charlebois was selected by ACCC and ES leaders to be a national ES expert and resource for all three projects.

SIAST is Saskatchewan's primary public institution for post-secondary technical education and skills training, recognized nationally and internationally for its expertise and innovation. More than 14,000 students were enrolled in SIAST programs in the most recent academic year; additionally, the organization drew almost 30,000 individual course registrations. Through program and course registrations, SIAST served almost 26,000 distinct students with programs that touch every sector of the economy. SIAST operates campuses in Moose Jaw, Prince Albert, Regina and Saskatoon, and provides a number of courses and programs through distance education.

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