

**HISTORY AND RATIONALE OF THE AFFIRMATIVE  
ACTION PROGRAM, COLLEGE OF ARTS AND  
SCIENCE, UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN<sup>1</sup>**

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**ABSTRACT/RESUME**

The author reviews the reasons for establishing an Affirmative Action Program at the University of Saskatchewan in 1987. The program was intended to benefit Aboriginal students, and included specific support services for students admitted under its provisions.

L'auteur passe en revue les raisons pour l'établissement d'un Programme d'Action Affirmative à l'Université de la Saskatchewan en 1987. Le programme avait pour but de profiter aux étudiants autochtones, et comprenait des services de soutien explicites destinés aux étudiants qui ont été acceptés selon les dispositions du programme.

## INTRODUCTION

The concept of affirmative action is rather new in Canada. According to the University of New Brunswick report (1989), about twenty-five Canadian universities have established seventy-five special programs for Native students, although not all of these are affirmative action programs.

In 1984 the Abella Commission Report (Abella, 1984) pointed out that certain groups (Native, women, persons with disabilities, and visible minorities) in Canadian society are systematically excluded from meaningful participation in employment in some crown corporations. To correct this situation, the federal government passed the Employment Equity Act in 1986. Under this legislation, various institutions, firms, and businesses which hire more than one hundred persons and depend upon federal funding of \$200,000, have to submit employment, promotion, and other data to the Federal Contractors Department every year. The main objective of the Employment Equity Program is to increase the participation rate of these target groups in our institutions and business firms. In Saskatchewan, a Human Rights Code also includes provisions for the establishment of affirmative action programs for these target groups (Natives, women, and persons with disabilities).

The main objective of this paper is to examine the rationale behind the establishment of Affirmative Action Programs, and to discuss the history of the Affirmative Action Program in the College of Arts and Science of the University of Saskatchewan. It is hoped that other organizations and educational institutions can learn from our experience and can appreciate the need to establish affirmative action programs in their own situations.

Before I discuss the history of the Affirmative Action Program, it may be useful to examine some theoretical and empirical questions which are often raised in reference to such special programs.

## THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL QUESTIONS IN REGARD TO THE AFFIRMATIVE ACTION PROGRAM

### What is Affirmative Action?

The Affirmative Action Program can be defined as "a policy for correcting the effects of discrimination on the employment or education of members of certain groups such as, women, Blacks, Natives" (Ponterotto et al., 1986:318). According to the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission, an affirmative action plan should include three target groups: people of Native ancestry, persons with physical disabilities, and women. In the College of Arts and Science at the University of Saskatchewan, the objective of the Af-

firmative Action Program is to increase the participation of students of Native ancestry in higher education. Once Native students are admitted, the goal is to create a support system to help them complete degree requirements. Such a support system includes bridging programs; informational, referral, and counselling services; tutorials; and orientation programs.

### **Why Should We Establish Affirmative Action Programs Only for Students of Native Ancestry?**

There is substantial evidence in social science literature to show that Native people, women, visible minorities, and persons with disabilities experience both individual and institutional discrimination in Canadian society. Without affirmative action programs as corrective measures, these groups will continue to be denied opportunities to which all Canadians are entitled.

The situation of Native people in Canadian society is unique. A brief discussion of their historical and present conditions, in general, and their educational problems, in particular, is vital to realize the importance of establishing an affirmative action plan for people of Native ancestry at the university level.

The history of educating Natives in Canada reveals a process of exploitation and domination of Natives by non-Natives.

Most of the treaties signed in western Canada include, in return for the cession of land, provisions guaranteeing health, welfare, and education. Formal education of Native people began with the arrival of missionaries along with the White settlers. The first schools created by the missionaries were residential schools which emphasized more Christianization of the Natives than the education that they received. As Hull states, "Indian language, dress and culture was forbidden and children often did not see their parents for as much as 10 months of the year" (1984:11).

In 1945 the federal government introduced integrated joint schools which allowed for the education of Natives off reserves at provincially administered schools. The federal government bought seats for Natives in (White) provincial schools. Most Native children attended federal day schools on reserves until about grade six, and were then transferred to one of the integrated joint schools (Frideres, 1988:179). Native students were forced to assimilate into White culture. Aside from experiencing high failure rates, Native students felt a sense of alienation, frustration, and powerlessness. Natives had no input into educational materials and methods that were controlled by White teachers and school boards.

For at least 130 years before 1970, when the shift to Native control of education began, the education of Native people was dominated by non-Natives. Although the Native education system was purportedly established

for Native people, they were never consulted regarding the kind of education they wanted or needed. As a result, there was never an educational system designed specifically for the needs and interests of Native people.

The dependence of Natives upon non-Native society can be attributed in part to the shortfalls of the educational system for Natives in the past. Today, failure rates in schools and universities for Natives remain high. Although Native people now control their secondary schooling, more and more the education that Native students receive is often inferior. For example, only 13 percent of teachers in reserve schools have university degrees compared to 88.5 percent of Saskatchewan teachers who have one or more university degrees. Also, the staff in these schools have no professional support such as language consultants or curriculum development specialists. While participation in post-secondary education has increased dramatically, only 10 percent of Native students actually graduate from grade twelve (Frideres, 1988:185-89). In 1980-81, the Saskatchewan cumulative dropout rate (grades 7-12) was 90.5 percent among the Native students compared to 40.0 per cent among non-Native students. In Saskatchewan about 68 per cent of non-Native students graduate from grade twelve. Most Native dropouts interviewed mentioned examples of racial discrimination in the schools they attended (Saskatchewan Department of Education, 1985:2; 65). In 1981, only 2.4 per cent of Native males and 1.6 per cent of Native females (fifteen years and older) had university degrees, compared to 8.2 per cent of Canadian people as a whole (Statistics Canada, 1984).

The demographic and socio-economic profile of the registered Indian population in Saskatchewan illustrates further the plight of Native people today and how these problems will affect both Native and non-Native society in the future:

- 1) The average income of all Native people in Saskatchewan is about half that of the average non-Native in Saskatchewan: \$7,044 as compared to \$12,775 (Statistics Canada, 1985:31, 47).
- 2) According to the 1986 national census, the Native population comprises 3 per cent of the Canadian population. However, Native people make up 12.8 per cent of Saskatchewan's population. Between 1977 and 1987, the Saskatchewan Indian population increased by 42.5 per cent. The increase for non-Native people was 7.4 per cent during the same period. Almost half of the Native population is now under 15 years of age, compared to only 20 per cent of the non-Native population. In 1987, the Saskatchewan Department of Education estimated that by 1990, 25 per cent of all new entrants to the labour force will be of Native ancestry (1987:12).

- 3) In Saskatchewan, Natives make up approximately 40 per cent of the Federal inmate population (Correctional Services Canada, 1989:B0206-B0220) and about 60 per cent of the Provincial jail population.
- 4) As of 1986, 26.1 per cent of all registered Indians over 15 years of age in Saskatchewan were employed. This compares to 62.6 per cent for non-Natives (Statistics Canada, 1985:46-7).
- 5) It is estimated that between 30 and 35 per cent of all Saskatchewan Indians are chronic alcohol abusers, and about one-quarter abuse drugs, both legal and illegal.
- 6) In 1981, only 44 per cent of reserve housing had running water, 30 per cent had indoor toilets, 33 per cent had telephones, and 82 per cent had electricity.
- 7) As of 1986, 56.6 per cent of registered Indians in Saskatchewan relied upon government transfer payments as their main source of income. This compares with 18.5 per cent of the non-Native population of Saskatchewan (Gavin, 1989: 27). In 1980-81, 59 per cent of all Indians living on reserves received social assistance (Riches, 1986:80).
- 8) The age-standardized mortality rate among Indians was 9.0 per 1,000 population in 1986 compared to 6.6 in the general population. If we consider persons under age 35 (between 1983 and 1986), Indian death rates were at least three times greater than those for all Canadians in this age group (Bobet, 1989:11).
- 9) In 1986, the Indian infant mortality rate was 17.2 deaths per 1,000 live births, compared to 7.9 for the general population (Ibid.:11-12).
- 10) Accidents and violence accounted for 32 per cent of all Indian deaths reported over the 1978-1986 period, compared with just 8 per cent of those in the total population (Ibid.:12).
- 11) During the 1983-1986 period, the suicide rate among Indians averaged 34 per 100,000 population, compared with an average of 14 for all Canadians over the years 1983-1985 (Ibid.). The highest Indian suicide rate occurred among men aged 20 to 24.
- 12) In 1986, the rate of new active cases of tuberculosis among Saskatchewan Indians was 125 per 100,000 population, compared with just 6 for the province as a whole (Ibid.)

Beyond the obvious humanitarian reasons for improving Native education there are also economic reasons. Increasing the level of useful education for Natives would result in a corresponding decrease in their dependence upon non-Native society. As the Saskatchewan Indian Nations

have stated, "... it costs the government about \$30,000 to help Native students to graduate from university, whereas it costs \$500,000 to support that person on Welfare" (Saskatchewan Indian Education Council, 1989:2).

### **Is Affirmative Action Reverse Discrimination?**

Some people believe that affirmative action is reverse discrimination against non-Native students. However, when the accumulated effect of discrimination against Natives, their exclusion from participation in Canada's major institutions, and present discriminatory practices against them are taken into consideration, then affirmative action must be viewed as a corrective mechanism to create a just and fair society. There are a number of studies (Abella, 1984; Hull, 1982; Li and Basran, 1986) which indicate that Native persons are systematically discriminated against by employers and individuals in our society. The only way that we can correct the impact of this accumulated discrimination is to provide people of Native ancestry with special opportunities to enter the educational institutions and to help them to complete their education. Affirmative action is not reverse discrimination, but a mechanism which can be used to undo past injustices and to correct the impact of present discriminatory practices against Native people.

### **Dose Affirmative Action Mean Second Class Education for Native Students?**

Students of Native ancestry are admitted into the College of Arts and Science at the University of Saskatchewan with the College's minimum entrance average (65 per cent). Under a quota system, other students must have an average of about 73 per cent to be admitted. Native students must have completed all other requirements for entrance to the College. Once admitted, they are treated just like any other student. In the university, they are encouraged to take advantage of various bridging and accessing programs and to use counselling and other services. Some of these services are created primarily for Native students. Native students do not get a second class education, but have access to the same education as any other student.

Some people seem to think that if more Native students are encouraged to enter university with a lower grade twelve average than other university entrants, they will have a difficult time in the competitive atmosphere. As a result, students of Native ancestry might experience frustration and alienation, which could lead to high failure rates. These high failure rates could then be seen as reinforcing the Native students' perception that they are failures, and that this will continue to damage their low self-images. I do not support this point of view. The system of support services should prepare

the Native students for university life, and it will later help them cope with any problem that may arise. If the failure rates remain high among Native students, questions regarding the quality of the support services should be raised so that the best possible support system can be developed.

### **Why Should the University Try to Resolve Problems Created by Society?**

Educational institutions cannot solve all the problems which Native people face. Problems of poverty, high unemployment, treaty rights, land settlements, drug and alcohol abuse, crime rates, and family breakdown are beyond a university's direct control. Educational institutions can, however, play an important role in helping Natives to break away from the cycle of poverty and deprivation. Education is the most important avenue of social mobility. It can help Native people secure employment. It can take them out of the welfare trap, and integrate them, in a dignified way, into society. With an education and a stable job, they are not as likely to participate in substance abuse or crime, because they would experience less alienation, powerlessness, frustration, and rejection. If they are integrated into society, they are in a better position to care for other members of their family, community, and society. Dosman noted that affluent Natives with steady employment own their own homes, have stable family systems, and are not involved in alcohol abuse, petty crime, or other deviant behaviours (1972:47-54).

### **Why Should Affirmative Action Programs be Developed, Run, and Controlled by the University?**

Some Native leaders take the position that education programs for Native people must be controlled by Native people. The question of Native self-government is extremely important for Native people. Natives have made significant progress in controlling their own educational programs. Not only do Natives control many grade schools, high schools, technical and community colleges, but, in Saskatchewan, Natives also control some areas of university education. A university should be supportive of the concept of Native self-government in general and of Native control of their educational institutions in particular. In reality, though, Native post-secondary institutions are not that well developed. The Saskatchewan Indian Federated College is the only Indian-controlled college in Canada. It will take time before various universities provide affiliations to Native-controlled colleges. This is particularly true where professional colleges are concerned.

We can not wait for the day when Native-controlled colleges will provide general and professional education to Native students. We should attract more Native students in our universities now so that they can play an impor-

tant role in the future development of Native institutions. The establishment of the affirmative action programs will facilitate the implementation of Native self-government in general and the establishment of Native-controlled colleges and universities in particular.

### **THE HISTORY OF THE AFFIRMATIVE ACTION PROGRAM, COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCE**

In response to increasing enrollment pressures, the College of Arts and Science implemented a quota on its first-time applicants in 1987-88. Between 1979 and 1989, student enrollment increased in the College by 70 per cent while permanent faculty positions were increased by only 12 per cent. A special meeting of the College of Arts and Science was called on February 12, 1987, to approve the quota, which would limit the number of students (1,600 in first year) in the College of Arts and Science. Before 1987, any student with a 65 per cent average in high school was admitted. The college of Arts and Science was the last college on the campus without enrollment quotas. Prior to this meeting, approximately ten members of the Faculty of Arts and Science met to discuss the possibility of exempting Native students from the College quota. It was agreed that the matter would be discussed with other members of the faculty on an informal basis. Each member of the initial group was expected to contact ten other faculty members to discuss the possibility of establishing an Affirmative Action plan in the College.

At a special faculty meeting on February 12, 1987, the Faculty of the College of Arts and Science also discussed the effects of the establishment of the quota system on educational opportunities for students of Native ancestry. A motion "that the College of Arts and Science proceed to establish Affirmative Action programs leading to increased participation of students of Native ancestry as Arts and Science students," was received and approved by the Faculty. Also approved was a motion to recommend that "the College of Arts and Science explore ways to establish programs, when needed, for students of Native ancestry in order to improve their chances for success in their chosen University programs." Both of these motions were passed with an overwhelming majority.

To investigate the establishment of an Affirmative Action program and to develop the administrative details involved in the implementation of such a plan, Dean Art Knight of the College of Arts and Science established the Committee on Affirmative Action Program in March, 1987. The Committee was chaired by Dr. G.S. Basran (Department of Sociology); other committee members were Dr. P.T. Millard (Head, Department of English), Dr. J.A. Brooke (Department of Mathematics), Dr. F.L. Barron (Head, Department of Native Studies), Mr. Dan Purich (Director, Native Law Centre), Dr. H. Nixon

(Assistant Vice-President, Student Affairs & Services), Dr. D. Scott (Assistant Dean of Student Affairs, College of Arts and Science), Ms. C. Ross (Student Representative), and Ms. C. Carr (Secretary).

The Committee on Affirmative Action Programs met throughout the spring of 1987. To plan the establishment and administrative processes of an Affirmative Action plan, the Committee studied several existing Native programs. These included programs established in the Department of Native American Studies at the University of Lethbridge, the Wascana Institute of Applied Arts and Sciences in Regina, and the Indian Teacher Education Program and the Native Law Centre at the University of Saskatchewan.

The Committee submitted its final report to the Dean on May 5, 1987. It recommended that the College of Arts and Science apply to the Saskatchewan Human Rights commission for approval to implement an Affirmative Action plan. Mr. Rene Roy of the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission had advised the Committee that the Commission would take approximately nine to ten months to grant formal approval of the College's application. Therefore, the Committee also recommended that the College seek the approval of the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission to grant interim exemption of students of Native ancestry from the College's quota system for the 1987-1988 session.

The Dean submitted the College's application for interim exemption of students of Native ancestry from the quota system for the 1987-1988 session on June 2, 1987.

The Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission granted its approval of the College's plan on July 6, 1987. On July 10, 1987 the following letter was sent by Emily Farnham, Director of Admissions, to all first year students who were not admitted to the College of Arts and Science.

Due to the large number of applications we are not able to accept all applicants to the College of Arts and Science. The enrollment quota has been filled by those whose averages were 74% and higher. I regret that we are unable to offer you a place in the College of Arts and Science this year. The Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission has recently granted the College of Arts and Science permission to exempt persons of Native ancestry from the enrollment quota for the 1987-88 academic year. Persons of Native ancestry (Treaty, Non-Treaty, Métis, Inuit or other) may apply in writing to the Registrar's Office to be exempted from the enrollment quota. Please indicate the group to which you belong.

Due to the interim exemption from the College quota system, 21 students of Native ancestry were admitted to the College of Arts and Science for the 1987-1988 session under this exemption.

The preparation of the formal application of the College of Arts and Science to the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission required several months of study. On January 8, 1988, Dean Knight submitted the College's proposal for the implementation of an Affirmative Action Program to the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission. The application to the Commission defended the College's decision to include only one of three target groups in its program at that time. Women were not underrepresented in the College (in the 1987-88 session, 782 male students were enrolled in first year courses, compared to 896 female students). Although the College did not have statistics on the proportional representation of physically disabled people in the College, it told the Commission that it would enforce University policy on access for disabled students when that policy is developed.

In its application to the Commission, the College of Arts and Science said that the development of an affirmative Action Program to increase enrollment of students of Native ancestry in the College was necessary for a variety of reasons. The College pointed out that the Aboriginal peoples of Canada, and, in particular, of Saskatchewan, have historically been excluded from participation in major institutions, including educational institutions. People of Native ancestry have been identified as not enjoying equal access to University education and the barriers produced by the establishment of the quota system were seen to further restrict access to post-secondary education by Aboriginal peoples. The College used three sources to support its argument—the *Abella Commission Report* (Abella, 1984); *Preparing for the Year 2000* (Saskatchewan Department of Education, 1987); and the *Education Equality Report* (1985). According to these three sources, peoples of Native ancestry in Saskatchewan, as well as in all of Canada, had been participating in educational institutions in lower numbers than non-Aboriginal peoples because of limited access to these institutions, as well as barriers created by social, political, and economic situations.

While granting interim approval, the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission stipulated that the College supply figures to the Commission that would establish the proportional under-representation of students of Native ancestry in the College. In November, 1987, the College conducted a survey which was administered by student members of the College of Arts and Science Students' Society. Of the 6,119 students registered in the College, 2,913 students responded to the questionnaire voluntarily. Of those students who responded to the survey, 67 students (2.3 per cent) indicated that they considered themselves to be of Native ancestry. As the Saskatchewan

Department of Education could not supply statistics on the number of Native high school graduates, it was not possible to determine if proportionately fewer Native high school graduates attended university than non-Native graduates and/or set numerical goals for the Affirmative Action Program.

The Dean sought the permission of the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission to include a question on registration forms that would determine the numbers of students of Native ancestry by the method of voluntary self-identification. The question was approved by the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission in March, 1988. The question, which first appeared on registration forms for the 1988-89 session, read as follows:

Response to the following question approved under Sec. 47 of the Sask. Human Rights Code (SPA42/88) is voluntary. Information obtained is confidential. Do you consider yourself to be of Native ancestry? Y ( ) N ( ). If yes, please check one: Status (Registered) Ind. ( ) Non-status Ind. ( ) Métis ( ) Inuit ( ) Other/Specify:

The Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission granted approval to the College's application for the implementation of the Affirmative Action Program on February 28, 1988. However, the Commission attached some conditions to its approval. The conditions were as follows:

1. The College of Arts and Science must file the University's policy on disabled students' access with the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission as soon as that policy is made available; the College must also indicate how it plans to implement the University's policy.
2. The College will also report to the Commission regarding the admittance of women to the College, particularly their enrollment rates in the area of the Natural Sciences, and indicate the inclusion or exclusion of women in the Affirmative Action Program.
3. The College will report to the Commission by September 30, 1988 on its efforts to obtain statistics on the numbers of students in Saskatchewan high schools that are of Native ancestry.
4. When the students referred to in Condition #3 become available, the College will set numerical goals in regard to the Affirmative Action Program.
5. The College must submit its first annual monitoring report to the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission by April 30, 1989.

The implementation of the Affirmative Action Program in the College of Arts and Science resulted in the admission of 19 students of Native ancestry

for the 1988-89 session who otherwise would have been turned away from the College due to the restrictions of the quota system.

As mentioned earlier, the first Affirmative Action Committee was appointed by the Dean as an advisory committee. Its status changed in 1989. On December 14, 1989, the Faculty of the College of Arts and Science approved the following recommendation of the Task Force on Committees, in reference to the Affirmative Action Committee: "This Committee should consider and recommend ways and means to encourage and assist students of Native ancestry to register in, and complete degree programs in the College of Arts and Science." This is one of the Special Committees of the College of Arts and Science, and its membership is nominated by the College Nominations Committee.

## **SUPPORT SYSTEMS**

At the time of its formal application to the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission in 1988, the College did not identify the specific support services that it would offer to students of Native ancestry enrolled in the College. The College did state, however, that students of Native ancestry would have access to the support services already offered on campus to all students, as well as to special advisory sessions which would be provided by the Assistant Dean on the Affirmative Action Program. The College also stated that an Elder's Program sponsored by the Department of Native Studies might be enlarged to accommodate all the students in the College of Arts and Science who might be interested in taking part in the Program.

In 1988, an Assistant Dean, responsible for the Affirmative Action Program was appointed to administer the Program. The Assistant Dean offers advocacy for Native students, as well as follow up services. The incumbent provides information services on financial aid and daycare services, liaises with student groups and other campus groups interested in the promotion of Aboriginal students, as well as with other Native groups and organizations.

The administrators of the Affirmative Action Program in the College of Arts and Science have developed a strategy for the establishment of a system of support services. Counselling is a vital component of the support system. Student Counselling Services, which is open to all students on campus, offers personal, career, and crisis counselling.

Individual academic counselling is offered to each student admitted under the Program by the Assistant Dean, Affirmative Action Program. In the 1989-90 regular session, for example, all students who gained admission through the Affirmative Action Program were contacted in September or October of 1989 by the Assistant Dean to discuss their program of studies. 🖨

Throughout the year, the Assistant Dean maintained contact with the students and acted as a referral source to other services, such as career counselling, library tours, "how-to-study" workshops, and individualized instruction, if it was deemed necessary.

After the implementation of the formal program in 1988, the Faculty of the College were invited to make themselves available for consultation with the students of Native ancestry. Sixty-five faculty members from twenty different departments within the College made themselves available for this purpose (College of Arts and Science, 1989:3). Professors initiate and maintain contact with the students, who are generally reluctant to make the initial contact with members of the faculty. During the period of contact, professors keep a record of the students' progress and difficulties. At the end of the year, professors are expected to send these reports to the Assistant Dean. These reports were reviewed in 1989-90 and a decision was made to initiate bridging, study skills and special orientation programs in August 1990. Individualized instruction is an extremely important segment of the Affirmative Action Program.

Tutoring services are also offered to the students as part of the academic counselling. In early 1990 tutorial services were arranged for students who required academic assistance. Funds for these services were provided by the Department of Indian Affairs, individual Tribal Councils, or individual Bands. Tutoring services are provided by graduate students in the appropriate disciplines.

A buddy system has been implemented, giving first year students a chance to meet and learn from upper-year students of Native ancestry. The Indigenous Students' Council has compiled a list of senior Aboriginal students willing to volunteer to spend some time with a first year student. The Assistant Dean provides new students with the list from the ISC and encourages them to make contact.

The Elders' Program, offered by the Department of Native Studies, is open to all Aboriginal students in the College of Arts and Science. The elders offer spiritual and personal guidance to students of Native ancestry.

The College of Arts and Science, in collaboration with several other University programs, student associations, and campus services, has published the *Indigenous Students' Handbook*, which specifically addresses the concerns and needs of Native students.

Beginning August 1, 1990, students who are admitted through the Affirmative Action Program to the College of Arts and Science for the regular winter session are to be involved in a four-week course titled English for Academic Purposes. The program will focus on communication skills (specifically reading and writing comprehension). In addition, students will

participate in study skills and time management seminars, as well as a two-day special orientation session. The main objectives of the program are to improve the writing skills of the students, and introduce them to the University before regular classes begin. It is also hoped that the friendships created during this time will continue throughout the year, creating a support system among the students themselves.

## EVALUATION

The immediate goal of the College is to increase the number of students of Native ancestry enrolled in the College. The long-term goal of the College is to better reflect the population of Saskatchewan in its student enrollment. The College realizes, however, that both goals may be difficult to obtain because of the general situation in society regarding people of Native ancestry. These people face racism, inequality, poverty, high unemployment rates, and a distinct powerlessness that is not faced by other Canadians. Due to these problems, the pool of Native students qualified to attend university is limited. However, as it is beyond the power of the College of Arts and Science to affect this limitation, it has committed itself to ensuring that those students of Native ancestry who are qualified to access post-secondary education are able to obtain that education with as few difficulties as possible.

Since 1987, 52 students have been admitted through the implementation of the Affirmative Action Program to the College of Arts and Science. At the end of writing, in 1990, 27 students are still registered in the College. Despite the success of some students who are still registered in the College, the overall success rate still appears to be relatively low. However, these success rates correspond with those of any students admitted to the College of Arts and Science with a grade twelve average below quota requirement of almost 73 per cent.

It is hoped that as the program continues, the support system will expand. The expansion of the system of support services, in turn, will provide for a greater level of success among students of Native ancestry who will take advantage of those services offered them. This will lead to a greater amount of success, not only for the program itself, but, more importantly, for the students who are vital to the continuation of the program.

It should be noted that about 220 students identified themselves as being of Native ancestry in the College of Arts and Science in 1990-91. The actual number of Native students in the College is probably higher than 220, as some Native students may not identify themselves. Through the Affirmative Action Program, 21 students were admitted in 1987-88, 19 in 1988-89, 12 in 1989-90, and 20 in 1990-91. A large number of Native students are admitted to the College under the regular admission procedure or under the

Special Admissions Program (Mature Students). A large majority of the Native students are admitted with averages as high or higher as those of other students.

## CONCLUSION

Some people may express concern about the necessity and quality of the Affirmative Action Program. However, despite the relatively low success rates of students admitted under the program, the implementation of the Affirmative Action Program is imperative. The Affirmative Action Program is vital because it is through the implementation of such programs that people of Native ancestry can gain not only a university education, but also a chance to improve the overall condition of lives in Native communities. These students act as role models in their own situations. As university graduates they will play leadership roles in improving the socio-economic conditions of Aboriginal people as well as contributing to Canadian society. These Native graduates will likely play an important role in Native self-government. Universities face important challenges and opportunities to serve the needs of Native communities in Canada.

## NOTE

1. The opinions and analysis presented in this paper are those of the author, and do not represent the views of the institution with which he is affiliated. In the writing of this article, Jacqueline Andre contributed much. However, the responsibility for this article lies with the author.

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