

Team Canada Mission Helps Promote Indigenous Educational Goals

Participating in the 1998 Team Canada trade mission took the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College (SIFC) one step closer to the creation of an international indigenous university. SIFC also signed MOUs and deepened its working relationships with educational institutions in Latin America.

Dr. Eber Hampton, President of the College at the University of Regina, who took part in the mission, has been working for a number of years on the concept of such a university.

"The reason is quite simple," he explains. "Indigenous people all over the world face similar economic and social issues, and lack of appropriate education is one of the more significant problems."

Hampton believes that his College is in a unique position to achieve this goal as the only indigenous college in the world with an established track record in international programming.

Agreements signed

SIFC signed agreements in Mexico and Chile that will give aboriginal students access to courses offered by participating universities via the Internet and other forms of distance-learning technology.

"These agreements," he says, "will increase the capacity of universities to recruit indigenous students and provide relevant curricula to communities, and will strengthen SIFC's International Centre and Department of Indian Studies."

Some of the agreements are with the Autonomous University of Chiapas for curriculum development in indigenous studies, which could lead to the development of a Master's program in indigenous education.

"As a matter of fact," Hampton says,

"some faculty members from our Department of Education and Indigenous Studies left last month for Chiapas to work on this project."

Team Canada a catalyst

Hampton fully credits Team Canada for these agreements.

"The strength of this mission is that it brings all kinds of people with



Dr. Eber Hampton (left) with Chief Roy Whitney of the National Aboriginal Economic Development Board in Brazil

different agendas – business, political, educational – together to achieve a common purpose, creating better communications and understanding within Canada between different sectors of society – educators and business-people – as well as internationally."

Team Canada's high visibility also raises, according to Hampton, the awareness of the co-operative approach taken between SIFC, the province and the federal government — through the Federal Department of Indian and Northern Affairs and the Saskatchewan Department of Education.

"Especially in Mexico," he says, "they are very interested in how this partner-

ship is working since there are a lot of similar educational, economic and social issues that indigenous people are facing everywhere. They are interested in adopting successful approaches from us."

Focus on global vision

Although Hampton cannot put a dollar value on his participation in the Team Canada trade mission, he strongly believes that helping other countries' indigenous people better understand their own social and economic environment, and giving them an international perspective, will help all members of society to better participate in the economic life of their respective countries.

"They can learn from the Canadian experience," he says, "and we can learn from theirs. As a matter of fact, over 100 students from Central and South America have already graduated from our College."

The proposed international indigenous university would not be a single campus but an amalgamation of geographically distant existing universities.

"It would be a group of partners in different parts of the world," Hampton explains. "Indigenous institutions that are developing education for their local communities could also draw on the strength of their partners to bring in a global perspective."

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