

Leading Practices in: Partnerships Camosun College

Background

In 2012 Camosun College and WSÁNEĆ School Board (WSB) signed a Relationship Agreement that solidified the long term partnership between the two organizations, and articulated an ongoing commitment to work together. This agreement was not about any particular program, education plan, or facilities need. It was about the relationship, the shared values related to education, and the shared commitment to collaboration.

The WSB houses, delivers, or partners with other education providers to deliver, educational services to the WSÁNEĆ people ranging from early learning (daycare and preschool) to K-12 to post-secondary. The Saanich Adult Education Centre is the arm of the WSB that delivers high school curriculum to adults and partners with post-secondary institutions, including Camosun College, to deliver accredited post-secondary education. The Saanich Adult Education Centre is a member of the Indigenous Adult Higher Learning Association (IAHLA) and is the part of the WSB that Camosun interacts with most deeply.

The WSÁNEĆ School Board and Camosun College have been working together since 1972. Their first Affiliation Agreement was signed in 1995, and it was renewed in the early 2000s. In 2010 the two organizations decided that instead of just renewing the agreement again, they would engage in a process to build a new agreement.

Three planning sessions took place, the first facilitated by Indigenous consultant Monique Grey-Smith. Participants of all the planning sessions included the late Marie Cooper, Elder and member of the WSB; Curtis Olsen, WSB Administrator; Kendra Underwood, the Director of the Saanich Adult Education Centre; John Boraas, then Dean of the School of Access at Camosun; and Janice Simcoe, then Chair of Aboriginal Education & Community Connections at Camosun. These sessions enabled the articulation of shared values and vision and the development of a framework.

The sessions also determined that the agreement would be called a Relationship Agreement rather than an Affiliation or Partnership Agreement. With the framework and much of the content agreed upon,

Marie Cooper, Kendra Underwood, and Janice Simcoe took on the task of writing the agreement. It took about a year, over a series of meetings, to complete the Relationship Agreement.

Purpose & Goals

The purpose of the Relationship Agreement is to solidify the shared commitment to working together to serve the educational needs of WSÁNEĆ people and communities.

Camosun committed to:

- Provide a range of programming as long as there was clear demand;
- Involve WSÁNEĆ knowledge keepers in its delivery of curriculum;
- Provide support services, such as Indigenous Advising, to students at the Saanich Adult Education Centre;
- Include WSB on hiring committees for Camosun faculty who would be teaching onsite;
- Encourage Camosun employees working onsite to engage in WSÁNEĆ community events;
- Fairly compensate the WSB for facilities used by the college;
- Work with WSB to seek funding for shared education and training programs; and
- Foster continuous collaboration with the WSB to establish and maintain good communication.

The WSB committed to:

- Provide space and context for community based and focused learning;
- Support Camosun to access WSÁNEĆ knowledge keepers;
- Provide a safe and welcoming environment for Camosun students, staff, and faculty;
- Provide recruitment services for Camosun programs housed at the Saanich Adult Education Centre and other WSÁNEĆ facilities;
- Provide space and welcome for visiting Camosun education and service providers;
- Welcome Camosun staff and faculty to engage in WSÁNEĆ community events;
- Work with WSB to seek funding for shared education and training programs; and
- Foster continuous collaboration with the WSB to establish and maintain good communication.

Camosun also agreed to ensure that WSÁNEĆ education professionals would continue to be represented on its Aboriginal Advisory Council (now its Indigenous Advisory Council). The two entities agreed to

regular meetings to ensure the Relationship Agreement was working for both partners. Both entities also agreed to maintain an up-to-date operations manual, share the agreement with students at the Saanich Adult Education Centre, and communicate any concerns that could adversely affect the partnership, the communities, or the students jointly served by the partners.

The Relationship Agreement, as well as the long-standing partnership and the involvement of long-term employees of both organizations, have enabled the two organizations to work together as trusted partners and to support each other's vision. For example, Camosun supported the Saanich Adult Education Centre to work with the University of Victoria to establish a SENĆOŦEN language program, even though doing so may have impacted Camosun's access to some funding, because the college knew that language training is a priority for the WSÁNEĆ community and knew that the university was best positioned to provide such education. The Relationship Agreement has also provided a model through which students at the Saanich Adult Centre can learn about ways that Indigenous and non-Indigenous organizations can work together, share power, and weave vision.

Challenges & Future Plans

Funding and capacity deficits create the greatest challenges to living the values and visions articulated in the Relationship Agreement. During the years when Camosun was dealing with serious budget cuts, it had to question its ability to ensure program delivery at the WSB. In the end Camosun continued all of its Indigenous community based delivery, including that at WSB. It was a decision that was made in deference to the importance of its partnerships with Indigenous communities, including the kind of commitment articulated in the Relationship Agreement. Currently it is the Saanich Adult Education Centre that is facing financial challenges related to funding mechanisms.

Camosun and the Saanich Adult Centre have both faced challenges with capacity. There have been years when the Saanich Adult Education Centre was in such high demand as a facility that it was not able to house available programming simply because of lack of space. Camosun, in the meantime, is receiving more and more requests for education services and programs in other Indigenous communities and is unable to meet all of the demand.

The WSB and Camosun College agreed many years ago that they consider each other "first wives," as practiced in polygamous cultures. Both know that there are advantages to working with multiple

partners, and each of them does so, but they also mutually recognize the value, depth, and primacy of their long-term relationship. They consider each other first when there is opportunity for community based educational growth. They serve each other when asked. They follow the commitment they made in the Relationship Agreement to honour the values of “respect, reciprocity, responsibility, and relationship.”

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