

New Program in Aboriginal Education Focuses on Aboriginal Learner; program first in Ontario

(Thunder Bay – March 28, 2007) Lakehead University's Faculty of Education has established a four-year Honours Bachelor of Education in Aboriginal Education to start in January 2008. The proposal was approved by Lakehead University's Senate on March 23, 2007.

The HBEd (Aboriginal Education) will be the first 4-year honours degree program offered by an Ontario university and the first to focus on critical foundations in Aboriginal education and Aboriginal pedagogy. The program prepares people of Aboriginal ancestry to become teachers with particular expertise to meet the needs of Aboriginal learners.

"This is a giant step forward for teacher education, especially Aboriginal teacher education in Ontario," says Dr. Julia O'Sullivan, Dean, Lakehead University Faculty of Education. "Graduates of this program will be highly qualified to teach primary and junior children using culturally relevant approaches and resources, and will have special expertise in early literacy and early numeracy education."

"For the past two years, we have worked in consultation with Aboriginal communities to design a program which will reflect the needs of these communities," says Dr. Ethel Gardner, Chair of Aboriginal Education at Lakehead University. "Aboriginal communities want their children to find academic success in education that is culturally relevant to them and responds to their learning needs. Several new courses have been created for the HBEd (Aboriginal Education) which address the issues brought up through our consultation process."

"This program provides graduates who will be well-rounded individuals who can teach in a context that is culturally relevant to Aboriginal students," says Goyce Kakegamic, recently retired Deputy Grand Chief of the Nishnawbe Aski Nation. "This program ensures that there will be First Nation teachers available for our schools, and this will help with the success of First Nations students. We are delighted with this development and thank all those who have put much effort and support into this initiative."

Students who graduate from this program will have an understanding of culturally appropriate education grounded in Aboriginal philosophies. The graduates will have a thorough understanding of the needs of Aboriginal learners at the primary/junior level, and will utilize knowledge of Native language and culture in lessons and unit-planning.

Members of the Media: Dr. O'Sullivan and Dr. Gardner are available for interview by calling Eleanor Abaya at 807-343-8372. Goyce Kakegamic is available by calling 807. 627-8070.

Lakehead University's main campus is located in Thunder Bay, Ontario, on the shores of Lake Superior. With a campus in Orillia, Ontario, Lakehead is a comprehensive university with a worldwide reputation for innovative programs and research. Lakehead has over 7,600 students and 2,200 faculty and staff, and is home to the west campus of the Northern Ontario School of Medicine. In 2006 Lakehead University was named Canada's Research University of the Year 2005 in the undergraduate category. For more information on Lakehead University, visit www.lakeheadu.ca.

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