



# The First Nations Information Connection

## About the Initiative

The First Nations Information Connection (FNIC) was developed by the University of Alberta Libraries (UAL) to ensure that First Nations colleges in Alberta had the technology and expertise to benefit fully from the Lois Hole Campus Alberta Digital Library, a province-wide initiative which licenses electronic resources for all post secondary institutions. UAL undertook this project to support the University of Alberta's strategic goal of improving access to the University for rural, Aboriginal, and non-traditional students through partnerships with colleges across Alberta. FNIC would not have been possible without the generous financial support of Alberta Advanced Education and Technology and Nexen Inc., as well as in-kind contributions from OCLC and Sun Microsystems.

FNIC provides access to a variety of information gateways. The Integrated Library System includes a web-based library catalogue that enables students to view print and electronic resources held by all six First Nation college libraries. The Integrated Library System also provides cataloguing and circulation functions, enabling staff to effectively manage library materials. Students and faculty of First Nations colleges are able to search their own collections, a wide selection of culturally significant web resources, and the Lois Hole Campus Alberta Digital Library which provides access to the collection of online resources licensed for all provincial post-secondary learners. A collection of eBooks with an aboriginal theme greatly extends the library catalogue. FNIC also leads users to carefully curated web resources and guides them in their search strategies.

As well as online solutions related to the FNIC, the broader First Nations Library Initiative has enabled other improvements to the college libraries. Through the University's connections in the publishing industry and book trade, the print collections of the six libraries have been enhanced by donations of curriculum-appropriate books. Libraries also received computer workstations, printers and barcode scanners to support the work of the library and to facilitate students' access to the online

resources. First Nations college library staff members have improved their professional skills by attending Alberta Library Conferences and the Tribal College Librarians Institute in Montana. UAL staff members provide additional ongoing training and technical support for library staff, faculty and students.

The First Nations Library Initiative is guided collaboratively by the University of Alberta Libraries and the staff of the First Nations college libraries. A project team from the University of Alberta Libraries staff implemented the Integrated Library System and developed the FNIC website. Staff initially visited all the libraries to assess their individual needs, and subsequently have made multiple visits for training and hardware installation. UAL information technology and Bibliographic Services staff worked with each of the libraries to load its records into the library catalogue; in the case of one library this involved cataloguing the entire collection. These activities continue to provide opportunities for community building among the libraries.

The UAL project team continues to devote its energy and expertise to working with the First Nations college library staff to ensure that the colleges are fully integrated into the educational fabric of the province and its vision for the 21st century.

## Benefits of the Initiative

For the first time, First Nation colleges in Alberta have online access to their own collections and equitable access to the same resources as students at other Alberta post-secondary institutions. Barriers of geography, culture and family obligations have been alleviated and there is potential for new and extended programs. The initiative supports the Campus Alberta vision by helping to ensure that students transferring to other institutions are prepared for the research experiences they will encounter, facilitating more successful transitions. Faculty are better positioned for research in their disciplines and have better resources to incorporate into their courses. First Nations library staff can offer enhanced



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library service to their communities, and are building a collegial and collaborative relationship. The University of Alberta Libraries has forged new connections with the First Nations colleges leading to stronger relationships with these communities.

## Program Participants

- Aboriginal Resource Centre / Nechi Training, Research and Health Promotions Institute
- Blue Quills First Nations College
- Maskwachees Cultural College
- Old Sun Community College
- Red Crow Community College
- Yellowhead Tribal College

## Program Partners

- University of Alberta Libraries
- Alberta Advanced Education and Technology
- Nexen Inc.
- OCLC
- Sun Microsystems

## Future Directions

The First Nations college libraries are beginning the first full year of using the Integrated Library System. UA staff will be working with them as they develop new practices in their libraries. UA staff will continue to develop the rich aboriginal web resources made available via FNIC, in partnership with the colleges. Other avenues of resource sharing will be explored, including sharing print collections among the colleges and UAL.

**[fnic.sirsi.net](http://fnic.sirsi.net)**