

## OPINION

### **YukonU as a path to reconciliation in the North, for the North, by the North**

By KAREN BARNES ([HTTPS://WWW.HILLTIMES.COM/AUTHOR/KAREN-BARNES](https://www.hilltimes.com/author/karen-barnes)) JUN, 18, 2018

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WHITEHORSE, YUKON – "Reconciliation is about establishing a mutually respectful relationship and we think, in the long term, that while education is what got us into this situation, we think education is the key to reconciliation." - Senator Murray Sinclair, chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

That is why it is time for a Canadian university north of 60°.

For many people living in the North, moving south for education or training purposes is not an option. The challenges of leaving family and moving to a large institution in the city limits educational success. This needs to change and the sooner it does, the better it is for Reconciliation in the North. We need a viable, local, post-secondary option to retain our bright and talented young people to build a strong and diverse future in the North. The time to do it is now.

Once a vocational school, then a college, it is a natural step for Yukon College to become "YukonU," the first Canadian university north of 60°. YukonU will focus on education and research relevant to northerners so that they may reach their potential without having to leave northern Canada.

Here's why it matters. Canada's North is on the frontline of critical issues. Climate change has a greater and faster impact on the North than other parts of the world. Over the past 50 years, Yukon's average temperature has increased by 2°C and winter temperatures have increased by 4 °C, two times the rate of southern Canada. This means changes in the amount of rain and snow, more extreme weather events, melting glaciers and sea ice and thawing permafrost is Yukon's new normal. Yukon's other new normal should be that northern students can study the impact of these changes close to home and earn a university degree that equips them to deal with these unique realities.

Yukon's natural resources are largely under-developed and the potential for renewable energy projects remains untapped. The Government of Yukon, together with Yukon First Nations, are exploring both renewable and non-renewable energy opportunities to strengthen and diversify Yukon's economy, particularly in sustainable resource extraction. There are many economic opportunities in Yukon's future. A stream of educated and skilled local post-secondary graduates could help bolster a strong economic future based on the principles of Reconciliation.

Reconciliation in the North is about putting decision-making power back into the hands of First Nations and their communities. It represents finding new ways of developing and implementing policies in order to re-set the relationship between Indigenous peoples and Canada. This includes the participation of Yukon First Nations in the economic and environmental future of northern Canada. Here, Yukon is already walking the talk.

Indigenous self-determination and governance is the underpinning in addressing these critical issues that face the North.

YukonU's first degree program, the bachelor of arts in Indigenous governance was launched this year and reflects the importance of Indigenous self-determination and governance. This made-in-Yukon degree was developed with extensive stakeholder input with Yukon First Nations to propel movement toward reconciliation and to create vocational experiences that will keep students who are from the North, who will work in the North, for the North. The program, with its first graduating class in 2020, will set the new benchmark for Indigenous government

workers and build public sector leadership and administrative capacity, particularly with respect to Indigenous governments.

A northernized bachelor of business administration will be anticipated for 2019, with extensive experiential learning components, followed by a bachelor of arts in northern studies, anticipated for 2021.

Yukon College currently offers approximately 50 programs including academic, professional, trades, and college/university preparation, including degrees that we co-deliver, or provide access to, in partnership with other institutions. As a hybrid university, YukonU will offer comprehensive programming including degree, diploma, certificate and skills training programs and university prep and enable hundreds of northern students to complete degrees close to home, beginning immediately.

Transitioning from a college to a university takes time, an investment in infrastructure, the development and offerings of degree-level programming, and requires a shift in governance towards a bi-cameral model. And we're ready. In fall 2017, Campus Alberta Quality Council confirmed that the college meets the organization criteria and standards to deliver degree programs. The Yukon University legislation will be introduced and passed in the 2018-19 session of the Yukon Legislature. The internal shared governance and academic programming is in place.

We are also set to launch a capital campaign to fundraise for university campus infrastructure suited for the North, including an Indigenous knowledge and science building, Indigenous gateway, and student hub and distance learning infrastructure.

The degree programs offered will attract students drawn to the history, culture, geography and opportunity Yukon presents. YukonU will enable students in Yukon, the North, from across Canada and around the world to receive made-in-Yukon degrees in dynamic, relevant fields where they will be able to find good jobs and contribute to enhance the vibrancy of the North and create a legacy of future leaders who live, work, and understand the territory. This is key to our journey of reconciliation.

The people of Yukon and northern Canada are ready for a post-secondary institution that meets their needs in the North, for the North, by the North. YukonU is ready for them.

*Dr. Karen Barnes is president and vice-chancellor of Yukon College.*

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