FNTI,

Ontario

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FNTI, formerly known as First Nations Technical Institute, was created in 1985 by a partnership among the Tyendinaga Mohawk Council, FNTI Board of Directors, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, and the Ontario Ministry of Colleges and Universities. The institute is part of the Indigenous Institutes post-secondary system, a unique and complementary pillar of post-secondary education in Ontario alongside the college and university systems.

FNTI is a mature, comprehensive, publicly assisted post-secondary institution that nurtures learners and communities and reinforces cultural self-determination through learning experiences built on a foundation of Indigenous worldviews, knowledge, and values. Education is a way of healing, connecting with identity, and nurturing wellness. The institute's vision, mission, and values are set out in its 2021-24 strategic plan:

Vision: We are the leading Indigenous Post-secondary Institute, recognized for providing high-quality, successful education founded in Indigenous Knowledge, for and with our learners in a healthy, harmonious, prosperous and vibrant learning and research environment

Mission: To provide a unique educational experience, rooted in Indigenous Knowledge, thereby enhancing the success and strength of our learners, families and communities

Values:

1. **ENVIRONMENT.** We provide an inclusive environment that ensures mutual trust and respect

2. **INDIGENOUS WORLDVIEWS, KNOWLEDGE, AND VALUES.** We incorporate Indigenous worldviews, knowledge and values into all of our programming and activities

3. **TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING.** We provide learners the opportunity to critically reflect on their own purpose, gifts, assumptions and belief systems in order to facilitate autonomous thinking, personal growth and self-determination

4. **LEARNER SUCCESS.** We commit to the success of our learners and this drives our program deliveries, policies, as well as learner and operational supports

5. **INNOVATION.** We continually evolve our programs and operations to facilitate sustainability, improvement and positive change

6. **INCLUSIVITY.** We value and practice sharing, authenticity, transparency and integrity in all of our relationships

FNTI serves 111 First Nations across Ontario and 187 First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities across Canada (2019-20 Annual Report). Programs are delivered primarily in community sites with local faculty and Elders to keep learners in or close to their communities. Virtual teaching and learning options are

available to students. FNTI also has two campuses, the Old York Road and Aviation Road campuses to support programming, including its full-time Aviation Technology advanced diploma. It is currently building a net-zero facility on campus to support program delivery.

FNTI supports the Tontakaiê:rine (It has become right again) Tyendinaga Justice Circle, a community-driven alternative program for youth involved with the justice system. FNTI also collaborates with Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte to support service and program delivery for the community.

Enrollment at FNTI has been increasing steadily, from 154 students in 2015 to 344 in 2020. Demand for programming continues to grow, even during the COVID-19 pandemic. Most students are female, and over three-quarters of students are between 20 and 40 years of age. Graduation rates are high, ranging from 89-92% in 2015-16 to 2018-19 and 99% in 2019-20.

Programming

FNTI's programming is grounded in traditional Indigenous knowledge and education as "medicine for the mind, body and spirit" (FNTI Annual Report 2019-20). Curriculum is designed by teams to embed Indigenous specific knowledge, be relevant to student's community contexts, and meet Western professional regulatory requirements (e.g., in aviation, social work, or midwifery). Indigenous cultural competencies are embedded into all programming as learning outcomes, woven in with skills development outcomes. All programming is reviewed by a cultural advisor and instructors can deliver both cultural and skills learning outcomes. FNTI's programming also maps pathways to ensure that learners have pathways to other programs within FNTI, to other Indigenous institutes, and to Western colleges or universities. This work is funded and supported through the Ontario Council on Articulation and Transfer (ONCAT). Micro credential programming is also used to support learners to upgrade and increase their employable skill sets.

Table 1. FNTI Programs

Area	Programs (2021-22)
Aviation	• First People's Aviation Technology – Flight Advanced Diploma
Health and Wellness	• Mental Health and Addiction Worker Diploma • Mental Health and Addiction Worker Fast Track Program Diploma • Bachelor of Health and Sciences in Indigenous Midwifery*

Area	Programs (2021-22)
Humanities and Social Sciences	• Early Childhood Education Diploma • Personal Support Worker Certificate • Bachelor of Social Work • Social Service Worker Diploma • Social Service Worker Fast Track Program Diploma • Master of Social Work • Bachelor of Indigenous Social Work* • Bachelor of Indigenous Justice*
Sustainable Food Systems	• Bachelor of Arts and Science Indigenous Sustainable Food Systems*
Public Administration and Governance	• Bachelor of Arts – Public Administration and Governance • Professional Master of Public Administration

*Programs will be submitted for accreditation by IAESC.

Most programs are offered in intensive professional modes, either in community or on campus, that condenses classes into a shorter amount of time to allow learners to study while maintaining their responsibilities to employment, family, and community. Programming follows an adult learning model where all participants (students, faculty, Elders, staff) are contributing and growing collectively as a cohort and becoming stronger.

Within programs, each cohort of students is supported by a student success facilitator, cultural advisor, faculty member, and program coordinator. The **student success facilitator,** who has trauma care and mental health support training, is the first point of contact for learners, available on an ongoing basis to work individually with students to remove barriers and facilitate access to a variety of supports, including academic, material, and financial. Student success facilitators develop relationships with learners and faculty to set up program delivery sessions and attend sessions to ensure they are set up to support learners and faculty. **Cultural advisors** play another key role in program delivery and student success, with roles in the classroom and program development. They share traditional knowledge, conduct ceremonies, and provide cultural support for learners and instructors. The advisors also review curriculum and work with faculty to ensure that Indigenous knowledge is a priority within programming. **Faculty** provide teaching, knowledge dissemination, and cultural support for learners, ensuring that Indigenous knowledge is a priority. **Program coordinators** support program teams in the planning and delivery of programs, and they facilitate cultural activities within the classroom along with faculty and cultural advisors. Students also have access to many other supports, including additional mental health supports and learning strategists to support learner accommodations.

The First People's Aviation Technology program exemplifies how FNTI's programming supports the academic and skills components required by graduates as well as learners' self-awareness, reflection, and healing. The program includes learning in navigation, flight dynamics, instrumentation, and aircraft components, and has its own Cultural Advisor/Elder and Student Success Facilitator. The program draws

from traditional and contemporary Indigenous ways of teaching and learning to support the well-being of learners, their understanding of themselves as Indigenous aviators, learning about the history and colonization of Indigenous communities, and the role they can play in supporting the resilience and health of Indigenous communities.

The Social Service Worker program is another example of how FNTI's programming supports learner's growth, cultural rootedness, and skills acquisition. Learners explore realities of Indigenous communities within the context of social services and gain knowledge and skills in Indigenous culture, values, and practices, exploring themes including social justice, empowerment of marginalized citizens, and ethics. Learners participate in a culture camp and complete a 420-hour field placement where they work with an interdisciplinary team and focus on individual growth and community and organization development, as well as gain skills in communications, program planning, interviewing, counselling, and family and group work. Graduates are eligible to register through the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers, and they can transfer credits from FNTI to Ontario colleges and universities.

The institute was engaged in advocacy that led to the Ontario Indigenous Institutes Act (2017), which enshrines in legislation the authority of Indigenous institutes, the third pillar of post-secondary education in Ontario, to grant credentials. In February 2020, FNTI was accredited by the Indigenous Advanced Education and Skills Council (IAESC)[1], granting FNTI the authority to confer its own standalone certificates, diplomas, and degrees. FNTI has developed four standalone Bachelor's degree programs in Indigenous Justice, Indigenous Social Work, Indigenous Sustainable Food Systems, and Indigenous Midwifery that are being submitted to the IAESC program for accreditation. Five further standalone Indigenous degree programs are being developed and submitted for accreditation: Education in Indigenous Language, Trauma Care Worker, Indigenous Shelter Worker, and Indigenous Leadership. FNTI also has partnerships with Canadore College, Ryerson University, Queen's University, and Wilfred Laurier University to grant credentials for the Ontario College Diploma, Ontario College Advanced Diploma, Bachelor's Degrees, and Graduate Degrees.

FNTI is also accredited through the World Indigenous Nations Higher Education Consortium (WINHEC) and a member of Colleges and Institutes Canada (CICan) and eCampusOntario.[2]

FNTI is the lead institution with sister institutions, Seven Generation Education Institute and Kenjgewin Teg, in creating entry-year, learner-centred programming that facilitates student mobility and transferability between institutes. This project is the first Indigenous-institutes-led project to be funded by ONCAT.

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1 The Indigenous Advanced Education and Skills Council (IAESC), an Indigenous-controlled and governed Council recognized under the Indigenous Institutes Act, 2017, establishes quality assurance standards and benchmarks for programs delivered by the Indigenous Institutes pillar. IAESC degree standards require programming to be founded in Indigenous principles, values, and community and responsive to community and/or region; employ Indigenous methods of knowing, doing, being, teaching and learning; prioritize learner's well-being through support of intellectual, emotional, and physical well-being and identity needs; have learning outcomes consistent with the institute's foundations and build and expand upon requirements of the Ontario Qualifications Framework; possess the capacity to deliver programming consistent with its administrative and governance structures; and demonstrate financial stability.

Student Services

Students at FNTI are supported holistically, with assistance for family, community, ceremonial, and cultural needs. The learning environment recognizes that each learner has been affected by residential schools and provides support services that students may need. For example, if students experience negative psychological experiences in the classroom, support is provided in the moment and within the classroom, rather than being delayed to after class or outside the classroom.

FNTI is committed to meeting students where they are in their learning journey. If students want to learn, FNTI will support their pathways into post-secondary education, including the design of alternative ways of demonstrating qualifications for their standalone and partner-based programming.

Growth and development

FNTI is continuing to realize its goal of self-determination in Indigenous education delivery that reflects its strategic themes of dedication to their learners, commitment to their people, and investment in their future. Continued growth will include renewing and maintaining FNTI's organizational accreditations, continuing to design and accredit standalone degree programs (Bachelor's, Master's, and Ph.D. level), maintaining and expanding infrastructure to deliver state-of-the-art programming (e.g., Indigenous Sustainable Food Systems science degree teaching greenhouse and laboratory), maintaining national professional regulatory recognitions, transitioning staff from project-funded part-time to continuing full-time positions, continuing to recruit and retain Indigenous knowledge scholars, and expanding its research mission. FNTI has also recently received its first SSHRC institutional grant to support its research.

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2 WINHEC provides and international forum and support for Indigenous peoples to pursue common goals through higher education. CICan is a national, voluntary membership organization representing publicly supported colleges, institutes, cegeps and polytechnics in Canada and internationally. eCampusOntario leads a consortium of the province's publicly-funded colleges, universities and indigenous institutes to develop and test online learning tools to advance the use of education technology and digital learning environments.

To learn more, please visit: www.afn.ca/policy-sectors/education