

# CASE STUDY: Algonquin College helps Cree students focus on records management

## The need

Appraising—folder by folder—the 3,000 boxes of archived material dating back to the 1970s at the Cree Regional Authority was a limitless assignment. Joanne Prince, at the time was sitting on the Cree Regional Authority Archives and Records Management Committee and had waded through some 600 boxes, discarding roughly half their contents and meticulously indexing the rest.

One of Prince's main challenges is a lack of any pattern or predictability among the materials.

"One box was full of 1983 catalogues for hunting gear," she sighs. "Buried in another were letters about the James Bay Agreement signed by grand chiefs and other officials." Prince has found invoices for writing pads tucked in beside minutes of a meeting with the prime minister. "There was no pattern to work with," she said. "We needed to do something about the Cree nation's historical documents."

## The challenge

Thanks to some visiting archivists, Joanne recognized she needed a systematic records and information management (RIM) program. The Cree Human Resources Department (CHRD) was willing to fund a study program for 15 students.

However, there was a major catch. The students were scattered in remote areas of Quebec, some requiring 18 hours of travel to reach learning centres that offered two-year, part-time RIM programs. Joanne needed better options. She found Algonquin College.

## The solution

Algonquin's Archives and Records Management Certificate Program gives students the basic principles and practices associated with records and archives, the preservation of collections,

information management and the policies and procedures governing records. But it, too, was a two-year, part-time program.

On hearing Joanne's need, Algonquin College offered to customize its program, transforming it into a week of study per month over eight months with full certification at the end. It allowed the students to travel during weekends and still work their jobs.

## The implementation

Algonquin College taught the students how to implement RIM, best practices, standards, the importance of archives and why organizations should have them. The students also learned how to explain to decision makers the best way forward and the steps they need to get there. The custom program was an accelerated means of teaching them all the knowledge they needed.

In 2010, 11 students graduated. They hailed from the nine Cree communities of James Bay, representing the band offices, the Cree Health Board and Social Services of James Bay, Cree Policing and the Grand Council of the Crees (Eeyou Istchee)/Cree Regional Authority (GCC(EI)/CRA).

"There's a major need for this program within the Cree territory so this is only the beginning," says Louisa Saganash, Co-ordinator of Programs and Services at CHRD. "We plan to fund more students to attend the Archives and Records Management Program."

## The outcome

The outcome is work on a policy statement to provide a framework for managing the GCC(EI)/CRA records.

"We'll need professionals to help us along the way, but I now know what type of professional to bring in, when and where to find them," she says. "I have the background knowledge to help me make the right decisions."

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