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“The Development of Native Studies at Canadian Universities
Four Programs, Four Provinces, Four Decades,”

Supervisor: Robin Fisher
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ABSTRACT

This study traces the development of Native Studies at Canadian universities from its ivory
tower origins through its gradual descent to the grass roots by examining four programs which
emerged in four different decades in four different provinces. The unique characteristics of the
programs and the circumstances which led to these differences, namely, the times in which each
program was established, the location of the program, the program’s structure, and the level of
involvement of the First Nations in each university are explored.

The study demonstrates that since Native Studies first burst upon the academic scene in the late
sixties, the programs have steadily increased their responsiveness to First Nations’ needs by
expanding the curriculum, increasing the participation of Native students and instructors,
reaching out to the communities, and involving First Nations people as cultural consultants and
throughout the universities’ governing bodies. Through a series of interviews with those
involved in the programs and an examination of university records, the differences in the origins
of the four programs and the unique ways in which each program has approached Native Studies
are revealed.