



UNIVERSITY OF THE ARCTIC

Module 6

Northern Post-Secondary Education

Developed by Ken Coates, University of Saskatchewan

Key Terms and Concepts

- post-secondary education
- knowledge-based economy
- multiversity
- adult upgrading
- transition and bridging programs
- college diplomas and university degrees
- north-centred research opportunities
- business and industrial partnerships

Learning Objectives

This module allows students to explore the following themes and issues:

1. The evolution and nature of post-secondary education in the Circumpolar North
2. The impact on northern society of the delayed development of post-secondary institutions
3. The unique challenges and opportunities facing colleges and universities in the Circumpolar North
4. The development, mandate, and scale of individual post-secondary institutions in the region
5. The relationship between social and cultural development in the North and the availability (or absence) of post-secondary institutions
6. The contributions that northern research institutions make to the understanding of northern ecosystems and northern societies



Module Readings

Read the Overview and Lecture for Module 6, then read the assigned readings from the *Reading File* given below.

Reading 15: University of the Arctic (reading will be assigned by your instructor) <http://www.uarctic.org/index.html>

Reading 16: James Ryan, “Native Education: Obstacles and Pathways to Cultural Integrity”

Reading 17: Thomas Dunk, “Taking the Locals Seriously: The Social Determinants of ‘Useful’ Knowledge and their Implications for Northern Development”

Reading 18: Per Langgaard, “To Be a Very Small University in a Very Small Society”

Overview

This module discusses the evolution, nature, and importance of post-secondary education in the Circumpolar North. It introduces the unique challenges and opportunities facing colleges and universities in the region. The first part is a description of the evolution of the post-secondary education after the Second World War. The second part discusses the general patterns in the post-secondary experience of Northern peoples. Following this, the module reviews of the development, activities, and contributions of colleges and universities in the Circumpolar World. The final section describes the impact and possibilities of post-secondary education in the Circumpolar World.

Lecture

In the knowledge-based economy of the twenty-first century, governments and societies around the world have agreed that advanced education is essential to the development of economically, politically, and socially successful countries. Nation after nation, from the industrial world to developing countries, have made formidable political and financial commitments to the establishment of college and university systems. They believe that such investments will produce the skilled, knowledgeable, creative, and flexible individuals required in the contemporary work force. There is widespread acceptance, as well, of the idea that universities, technical schools, and colleges contribute significantly to the social and cultural well-being of a region or community, slowing the outflow of talented youth and adding to the economic base of the district.



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These assumptions about the merit and contributions of post-secondary education have, for much of the post-Second World War era, driven the demand across the Circumpolar World for greater access to post-secondary education, training, and research. And, if proponents of college and university development needed solid evidence to back their demands for greater investment in this area, they would do well to turn to this region. From a tiny base in the pre-Second World War period, communities and regional and national governments have made substantial investments in post-secondary education in the Circumpolar World. The results have been dramatic, transformative, and far-reaching. More than simply adding to personal choice and training opportunities in the region, northern colleges and universities have had a major effect on the intellectual and public understanding of the North and have had significant impacts of government policy, regional development, and the celebration and understanding of northern cultures.

The Evolution of Post-Secondary Education After the Second World War

Before the Second World War, post-secondary education remained the preserve of the select few. Most universities and institutes were either church-based or specialized professional and technical training institutes. The “multiversity” (large, diverse, multi-disciplinary and research intensive) establishment that is now associated with the concept of the “University” was exceedingly rare. After the war, and particularly sparked by the scientific competition of the Cold War and the “race” to the moon, national governments invested heavily in post-secondary education. New priorities took hold, driven by nationalistic rivalries and the need to provide a trained and skilled workforce for the rapidly developing industrial economies of the northern hemisphere. Governments responded to the demands for greater access to advanced education by opening up new colleges, training institutes (the latter often in co-operation with local or national industry) and universities. In both socialist and capitalist countries, women found greater access to post-secondary opportunities, as did members of minority groups that had long been locked out of advanced education.

The expansion of post-secondary education was linked to a greater international emphasis on research. Universities were being transformed from quaint and quiet institutions of reflection and contemplation into research “engines,” designed to explore issues and topics of pressing national importance and potential economic benefit. Similar considerations took hold in the social sciences and humanities, which likewise placed ever greater emphasis on research and publication. The result was a global surge in academic inquiry and the publication of research results. With a few exceptions, northern regions were late in participating in this rush to research, both as focal points for investigations and even more as a base for academic study. As years passed, and as the gap between opportunities and research intensiveness grew between northern and southern regions,



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regional demand for attention to post-secondary needs and aspirations grew dramatically.

The development of a post-secondary institutions reflected and promoted the value systems of the host nations. Soviet institutions operated within the intellectual traditions and barriers of the Communist political system. Students and their professors lacked the academic freedom that western scholars valued so highly and were often constrained in their investigations by the parameters of Soviet scholarship and Marxist theory (where appropriate). While debate flourished more openly in the western nations, and while individual researchers enjoyed considerably more freedom in the selection of topics and means of inquiry and analysis, many western institutions and scholars found themselves boxed in by the other side of the Cold War struggle. While Marxist scholarship eventually became a staple in many academic disciplines (and quite influential in several fields, including economics, sociology and political science), many scholars advancing these ideas ran into severe difficulties in the 1950s and early 1960s. The social turmoil on university campuses across the western world in the 1960s and early 1970s (which reached a high point during campus protests against American involvement in the Vietnam War) provided telling evidence that the students, in particular, were unhappy with the ideological and cultural biases of their university instruction.

Universities, technical schools, and colleges emerged as a dramatic force in national and regional development after the Second World War. These new institutions, highly sought after by local politicians, parents of university-age students, and regional industry, served a variety of social, economic, and political purposes. Universities and colleges were caught up in the post-war enthusiasm for science and for the application of academic research to the social and economic needs and aspirations of the host nation. They reflected, as well, the social and political challenges and limitations of their age, reflecting both the optimism and commitment of competing ideological systems and the narrowness of vision that proved very influential in many countries after the Second World War. Increasingly, over time, post-secondary education was seen as integral to economic success and was deemed by many regional leaders as fundamental to the development of a “complete” society. Without such institutions, they argued, a region lacked the human resources, opportunities for reflection and research, and outlets for creativity and innovation required for economic prosperity. In the northern hemisphere, the Circumpolar regions were among the most poorly served in post-secondary terms. For many in the North, the promise of regional development and social evolution would remain unrealized without the expansion of post-secondary institutions.



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**General Patterns in the Post-Secondary
Experience of Northern Peoples**

Modern post-secondary education of the modern sort came late to Northern districts. Most universities and colleges clustered in and around urban centres, and few countries gave much thought to the educational needs and aspirations of northern residents. Only a very small number of northern residents had access to advanced education close to home, and even the twentieth century development of correspondence and distance education services provided only rudimentary opportunities for people living in northern districts. Those wishing to pursue post-secondary education, typically recent graduates of secondary school, had little choice but to head south. A few districts—Alaska is one of the most clear examples—provided university training in the North. Even there, however, parental and employer bias against northern institutions ensured that most young people seeking advanced studies headed to southern institutions. Nationalism factored in significantly as well. Although Yukon students had comparatively easy access to university education at the University of Alaska, the overwhelming majority opted to pursue their studies in southern Canadian institutions.

Easy and inexpensive access to college or university education is a central factor in determining post-secondary participation rates. With few northern role models, either in the form of professors/instructors or northern students, and with the costs of travel and room and board added to tuition, it is hardly surprising that small numbers of regional residences opted to pursue college or university studies. Non-Indigenous young adults, particularly those from professional families, were more likely than Indigenous people to continue their studies at college or university. But participation rates among non-Indigenous people from the North lagged well behind southern and national norms, even when generous government subsidies were available. Indigenous people, experiencing in the 1950s the impacts of the development and government frontiers, also had to contend with systematic difficulties with the imposed primary and secondary educational systems. Often unhappy and unproductive educational experiences, further complicated by aggressive colonial curriculum aimed at changing Aboriginal culture, meant that very few indigenous students had the preparation or the inclination to continue their studies at the post-secondary level.

The implications of these general patterns of post-secondary education in the North were wide-ranging and had a significant impact on social and economic development in the Circumpolar World. Among the major consequences were the following:



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Limited Northern Perspective on Northern Research Themes

While northern districts have long attracted considerable interest from southern-based researchers, the research (particularly in the social sciences and humanities) often lacked a regional perspective. Southern scholars, who typically came North in the summer months, viewed the region through the prism of national and international scholarship. They took their lead from scholarly and southern concerns, and less often from the imperatives and requirements of the people of the region. Regionally focused research in other districts typically accompanied the establishment of research universities in those areas. With very few northern universities, northern research lagged far behind. Moreover, it generally lacked the passions and insights of regional scholarship from other, southern areas.

Few Northerners Trained for Professions and Technical Jobs

As the resource and government frontiers expanded in the 1950s and 1960s, raising the demand for highly skilled technicians and professionals, companies and governments discovered that few qualified northern residents were available. This meant, in turn, that employers had to devote considerable resources to the identification, training, and relocation of workers from the south. The recruiting costs and difficulties were compounded by the fact that southern employees often demonstrated little commitment to the region, moving back to the south within a short period of time. As well, the technicians and professionals—from carpenters and millwrights to social workers and lawyers—typically had little experience in northern climatic and social conditions. Often ill-prepared for northern realities, these workers often faced a difficult adjustment to the North.

Loss of Youth to the South

Employers' desire for northern-raised technicians and professionals resulted, in all regions of the Circumpolar World, in a concerted effort to convince young people to pursue their studies at colleges or universities. Governments, in particular, offered subsidy programs designed to encourage greater participation. When the young adults headed to college or university, typically a considerable distance to the South, they faced a difficult, often traumatic adjustment. Depending, of course, on family circumstances, they might well be experiencing southern and urban environments for the first time. Post-secondary courses rarely used northern examples or cases; curriculum and projects typically revolved around southern settings. (State-dominated education systems, particularly in the Soviet Union, were more prescriptive and, where appropriate, included more northern-based material.) Anecdotally, it appears that many young adults had difficulty with



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the transition and returned to the North without the intended training or education. Among those who succeeded academically, a very substantial number chose to stay in the South. The North, once again, lost a significant portion of its potential to the South.

Loss of Families to the South

In western, democratic nations, non-Indigenous northerners were typically short-timers and first-generation regional residents. Faced with the absence of post-secondary education opportunities in the North, many families opted to leave. As their children neared university or college age, the prospect of having to send students out of the region for education convinced many families to relocate. This, in turn, added to the instability of northern society and increased transience rates. Multi-generational northern families, in contrast, appear much less likely to relocate for educational purposes. For northern areas struggling to establish and maintain greater stability and to hold key trained personnel in place, the absence of local educational opportunities was a serious disincentive. Some governments attempted to offset the challenge by providing subsidy programs to northern families. By off-setting some of the costs of attending southern institutions, governments hoped to convince the families to stay in the North. Such initiatives were limited in number and scope and did not address the broader and more complex family issues related to the relative absence of post-secondary options in the North.

Absence of a “Complete” Society

When these implications and impacts are drawn together, they describe a society that is “incomplete” in a modern, industrial, and technocratic sense. Northerners had fewer options, often dramatically fewer, than citizens in southern areas. Young adults wishing to pursue specialized studies typically had to leave the region. Quite routinely, they did not return. The combination of southward migration for educational purposes, the southern bias of much scholarship and teaching, and the absence of local options, in turn, meant that the region had to import southern-trained professionals and technicians. These individuals, facing a complicated adjustment of their lives and expertise to the nuances of the North, typically did not stay long, adding to the impermanence and transient nature of non-Indigenous society in the region. Without northern institutions, Aboriginal students faced even higher social, financial, and cultural barriers to participation, and as a consequence found themselves locked out of many key economic and administrative sectors. Post-secondary education, in the science, government, and technology-based realities of the post-Second World War era, had become a central element in the maintenance and enhancement of social and economic opportunity. Within an appropriate set of educational institutions or opportunities, the regional society would remain “incomplete” and in some ways unsustainable.



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Creating a Circumpolar University System after the Second World War

The situation has improved dramatically since the Second World War. National and regional governments, although ever-conscious of the small size of the northern population in most countries, gradually realized the importance of post-secondary education. Among a large number of post-Second World War government initiatives designed to increase economic opportunity and spark social and cultural development in the North, many jurisdictions made substantial investments in advanced education. In several countries, much of the money was spent initially on southern institutions, supported financially to expand research and instructional opportunities. Local pressures, which paralleled international demands for accessible, locally-oriented universities and colleges, melded with government interest in raising educational performance in the North.

The evolution of post-secondary education varied from nation to nation and region to region, as will be discussed later. Several key elements emerged in varying degrees across the North, as outlined below.

Adult Upgrading

Given the poor performance, particularly of Aboriginal students, in state and church-run elementary and high schools, much of the early effort was focused on provide upgrading opportunities. The intention of such initiatives has been to provide basic employment and life skills to individuals who were failed by earlier educational opportunities.

Transition and Bridging Programs

Governments have accepted as a given that northern populations could sustain, in most instances, a narrow range of academic and technical programming. Moreover, many individuals who wished to pursue advanced studies lacked certain required skills or had been out of school for a long period of time. To address these needs, governments established transition programs, which helped aspiring college and university students to make the often substantial step to advanced education. They also, in a model that proved particularly popular in North America, established regional centres or colleges designed to offer first- and sometimes second-year academic programs in a variety of locations. Students could then relocate, when they were academically and social prepared for the shift, to larger centres and multi-purpose institutions where they could continue their studies through to diploma or degree completion.

College Diplomas and University Degrees

When student demand warranted, or, more commonly, when governments felt that symbolic investments in post-secondary opportunities were essential,



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institutions offered regular college diplomas and university degrees. On occasion, these programs originated with southern institutions, offered in and adapted to a northern setting. As northern institutions matured, they developed the capacity and the status to offer full degree programs of their own, many designed specifically to address northern concerns and perspectives. The attainment of diploma and degree granting status is a critical stage in institutional development; the emergence of comprehensive institutions in northern settings was a critical element in the development of regional self-confidence and assertiveness. In some instances throughout the Circumpolar North, national and regional governments established flagship programs in northern settings (specialized professional schools, such as a medical college, mining institute, or permafrost research centre) or one-of-a-kind national programs attached to northern institutions, designed to attract students from outside the region. The latter have proven to be particularly critical in the development of stronger and more widely recognized post-secondary institutions with national mandates that offset concerns about the potential parochialism of entirely region-centred institutions.

North-Centred Research Opportunities

One of the least recognized, but most critical, elements in the development of post-secondary education in the North has been the enhancement of regional research capacity. The ability of a region to analyze itself and to spark debate about local issues and concerns is a key factor in the maturation and evolution of a society. Northern-based research about Indigenous peoples, rights, and concerns, for example, has played a crucial role in supporting and shaping debate in the North. The establishment of colleges, and particularly universities, in the North gave the region a local research capability. Researchers based in the North could conduct research about the North. In explaining their results to northerners and, through normal academic channels, to southerners, these scholars could and did add new dimensions to the understanding of the region. The ability of northern researchers, as well, meant that governments, businesses, indigenous groups, and other organizations could and did draw on local resources when tackling major regional problems and issues. Over the past thirty years, the expansion of northern research capabilities has contributed substantially to the understanding of regional concerns and to the enhancement of the North's ability to develop regional solutions to regional problems.

Business and Industrial Partnerships

The development of stronger links between universities and colleges and regional businesses has been a hallmark of post-Second World War institutions. Northern businesses, in particular, long argued that they lacked both the skilled employees (particularly those with strong regional knowledge) and local research capabilities. They worked closely with politicians and educational promoters to secure locally-based research institutions. The resulting partnerships ranged from corporate scholarships to well-funded research institutes. Universities were encouraged to create regionally-appropriate training and degree programs, and to develop



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research capacity in fields of particular relevance to northern development. Thus, considerable emphasis was placed on Indigenous studies, resource-related fields (forestry, mining), and regional science.

Northern Institutions: Illustrations of Expanding Northern Post-Secondary Capacity

The range of sub-Arctic and Arctic post-secondary institutions has expanded dramatically in the past half century. From a very small base, the college and university has grown in response to regional needs, political organizing, and academic priorities. While it is not possible to review all of the institutions in the region (and those outside the geographic confines of the sub-Arctic and Arctic which have nonetheless developed important research and academic programs related to the North), a sample of the colleges and universities demonstrates the diversity and contribution of this rapidly expanding system.

Canadian Community Colleges

In Canada, education is a provincial responsibility and is therefore not managed on a national level. Much of the educational effort in the Canadian Arctic and sub-Arctic is offered through community colleges. These institutions can be quite comprehensive; offering university transfer courses (first and second year), brokering degree programs from universities, and providing adult upgrading, technical, and college-level professional and upgrading programs. With a few exceptions, they are not charged with research responsibilities although individual faculty members can be quite active in this regard. In the far North, **Yukon College** (the most active northern college in Circumpolar educational development), **Nunavut Arctic College** and **Aurora College** (Northwest Territories) provide these services through core campuses and numerous satellite facilities. Arctic College, for example, has three main campuses and 24 community-based satellite centres. The institutions have fairly lengthy roots in the North (Yukon College began in the post-war period as the Yukon Vocational and Technical Training Centre and evolved out of a partnership with the southern-based University of British Columbia; the college system in the Northwest Territories originated in the 1960s with the establishment of the Adult Vocational Training Centre in Fort Smith), but expanded rapidly in the 1980s and 1990s, supported by territorial and federal governments. Across the provincial North, a sizeable number of community colleges provide preparatory and technical training. These institutions work closely with regional businesses and governments in preparing students for local job opportunities and endeavour to facilitate regional economic development through co-operative initiatives with communities and major employers.

Lakehead University



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Among the universities on the fringe of the sub-Arctic, Lakehead University has been one of the most active in promoting northern studies and supporting the development of northwestern Ontario. The university, established in Thunder Bay in 1965 as part of a general Canadian expansion of post-secondary training, is a non-medical institution with limited graduate programming. It is best known for its science programs, and has over 6,000 students in attendance.

University of Northern British Columbia

One of the newest post-secondary institutions in Canada, UNBC has emerged after its official opening in 1994 as the country's flagship northern university. UNBC is based in Prince George, British Columbia, with satellite operations in major centres throughout the region and innovative partnerships with First Nations communities. The university is built around an "in the North, for the North" philosophy and has established Northern Studies as a central academic and research theme for the campus. Under its founding president, Geoff Weller, the university took an active role in the promotion of circumpolar university links and in the development of north-centred curriculum. It currently has over 3,500 students and active research and graduate programs specializing in aspects of northern and circumpolar studies.

University of Greenland (Nuuk)

One of the smallest post-secondary institutions in the North is found in Nuuk, Greenland. This institution is specifically targeted at the Greenlandic speaking people of the country and has a firm commitment to research and academic program development related to the region. The university enrolls approximately 110 students in program areas: Business Administration, Cultural and Social History, Greenlandic and Literature, and Theology, with degree programs available at the bachelor's and master's level. While the University of Greenland is a small institution, it is devoted to the study of Greenland and its people and thus holds a central place in Greenland's plans for cultural sustainability and economic development.

University of Lapland

Based in Rovaniemi, a city of 40,000 in northern Finland, the University of Lapland is built around a solid devotion to northern Scandinavian studies. With over 3,400 students enrolled in its degree programs, the University is active in a variety of northern fields, particularly in the areas of education, law, social sciences, and art and design. It operates the Arctic Centre, one of the Circumpolar world's most significant research facilities. Like most other northern universities, the institution had to battle with a southern educational bias in Finland. In the 1970s, the government shifted to a process of decentralization and, in 1979, the University of Lapland opened. The university capitalized on a mix of standard academic programs (social sciences, law) and nationally specialized offerings (design) to establish a national and international presence. The University of Lapland has long



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been one of the most active participants in the development of a circumpolar academic community. Within Finland, the institution continues to play a vital role in the promotion of northern development and greater national understanding of the issues of northern Finland.

University of Akureyi

Iceland is not uniformly viewed as part of the Circumpolar World, although regional scholars have long maintained strong academic ties with Scandinavia. The University of Akureyi, established in 1987, has been a significant force in connecting with other circumpolar institutions. The university has a strong professional school orientation, with programs in health sciences, management studies, education, fisheries science, and attracts over 500 students per year (not including those studying through continuing education programs).

Research Center for North Eurasia and North Pacific Regions

Japan's northernmost island, Hokkaido, has long had an active interest in other northern regions. Although Hokkaido is not geographically part of the Circumpolar World, Hokkaido University's Research Center for North Eurasia and North Pacific Regions was established in 2000 to further research links with the sub-Arctic and Arctic academic world. Research groups in terrestrial environmental change, oceanic environmental change, and network development has been established to promote research activities related to Hokkaido University's wide-ranging northern academic interests.

Bodø Regional University

Located with 100 km of the Arctic Circle, Norway's Bodø Regional University was formally established in 1994 (although several of the independent colleges merged to form BRU had been in operation for much longer, some back to the 1920s) to provide post-secondary training opportunities for the residents of Bodø (population 40,000) and the surrounding area (through regional centres). The institution's 80 academic programs are available through faculties of business, fisheries and natural sciences, social sciences, nursing, humanities and teacher education. The university also manages the Nordland Research Institute (established in 1979). Like most other northern institutions, Bodø Regional University is fairly small, with close to 3,600 students.

Saami College

Saami College, devoted to the study of Saami culture and society and dedicated to the training of Saami people, was opened in 1989 in Gourdageaidnu, Norway. The institution sought to address the deficiencies in Saami education, including in teaching training. As of 1995, the Saami College managed all Saami teaching training in the country. As an active



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participant in international indigenous education, Saami College explores the contributions of indigenous knowledge and seeks to integrate Saami culture and western intellectual traditions. It works, as well, to enhance Saami economic development, help preserve Saami language use, and conduct research on topics of importance to the Saami people. As the only Saami-based post-secondary institution in the world, the institution attracts Saami speakers from throughout Scandinavia and provides access to its programs through distance education services.

University of Tromsø

Located in a spectacular setting at 70 degrees on the northern Norwegian coast, the University of Tromsø is one of the North's most important universities. The institution opened for students in 1972, and quickly emerged as a vital research and training centre. Political supports of the university argued that the creation of a full-service institution in the region would promote regional development, transform southern stereotypes about the North, and attract young people from throughout the region and the South to complete their studies in the North. The addition of a medical school and health sciences to the institution's other academic offerings made the University of Tromsø an attractive option for northern and southern students alike. By the mid-1990s, the institution had over 6,000 students. Research specializations include the Northern Lights, space and ocean research, Saami studies, and Arctic issues generally. The university draws on the research capabilities of the nearby Norwegian Polar Institute and the Polar Environmental Centre. These, together with the university's own Centre for Saami Culture (1990) and Roald Amundsen Centre for Arctic Research (1989), have solidified the University of Tromsø's reputation for leadership in northern research. The success of the University, likewise, has been often cited in other countries as an example of the considerable potential of university education and research.

Petrozavodsk State University

PSU is one of the larger post-secondary institutions in the Circumpolar World and has emerged as an active participant in the promotion of international academic and research linkages relating to the region. Founded in 1940, initially as the Karelian-Finnish University, it grew steadily in the post-war period. It is well known, especially in the Russian Northwest, for its academic programs in education, engineering, medicine, economics, and agriculture. With a current enrollment of over 6,000 students and a series of active research centres in the region, Petrozavodsk State University provides training for the residents of Petrozavodsk and surrounding area. The University also maintains a branch campus in Apatity, Kola.

Syktyvkar State University

Like many northern institutions, SSU has its origins in the 1970s expansion of post-secondary education. Based in Syktyvkar in the Komi Republic (in what is described as the European North of Russia), the University has over



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3500 students studying in such diverse academic faculties as physics, mathematics, chemistry and biology, finance and economics, management, history, philology, Finno-Ugric studies, physical training, psychology, social work, art, and humanities. Once a centre for Soviet-era labour camps, the Komi district has emerged as an important resource region. Like many of its counterpart circumpolar institutions, SSU seeks to contribute directly to the regional economic development.

Tyumen State University

This Western Siberia institution is another of the Soviet institutions founded in the early 1970s. It is also one of the most dynamic and fastest growing in the region, drawing on the 600,000 residents of Tyumen and on the larger population in the surrounding districts. When it opened in 1973, it attracted over 4,400 students—demonstrating the advantages of a state-run system where students could be readily directed to regional institutions (unlike North American colleges and universities, which had to compete for student applications). By the end of the century, TSU had over 16,000 students. The comprehensive institution (which does not include a medical school) offers such diverse programs as law, linguistics, chemistry, Roman-Germanic philology, mathematics, history, teaching, economics, and accounting. Tyumen State University has expanded aggressively throughout its region, opening branch campuses in ten other centres. Because the Tyumen district is rich in oil and gas production, the institution has not suffered the same magnitude of economic difficulty faced by other former Soviet universities.

Luleå University of Technology

Sweden, like other northern countries, undertook extensive efforts to expand regional post-secondary opportunities in the 1970s. Luleå University of Technology was established in 1971, catering to the needs of the 70,000 residents of the Luleå district. In 1997, the University College was renamed Luleå University of Technology. It was the first university college in the country to be changed into a university. Its mandate includes a substantial research component and through many academic and research units, particularly related to engineering, the University maintains close ties with local industry. The university is heavily weighted toward science, engineering, and technology and hosts a series of major scientific laboratories and research facilities, although it also has significance arts, humanities, and cultural programs. Luleå attracts over 10,000 students, primarily at the undergraduate level.

Umea University

Umea University, located in a resource town in northern Sweden, is the country's most self-consciously sub-Arctic institution. The university offers programs in business and economics, design, fine arts, technology, environmental studies, and an interdisciplinary college (Idrottshögskolan). Much of the research focuses on regional concerns, including indigenous and borderlands studies, and on scientific aspects of northern ecology and



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resource development. Umea University is particularly active in international exchanges and co-operative research programs, but its hallmark is its extensive contributions to regional economic and social improvement.

University of Alaska

The University of Alaska is one of the most important in the north-centred post-secondary system. Its long and distinguished history of research and teaching on northern themes has provided the State of Alaska (and, less directly, the United States of America) with a formidable advantage in the area of northern studies. The university was formally established in 1917, initially as the Alaska Agricultural College and School of Mines, and enrolled its first students five years later. The institution, based in the interior city of Fairbanks, was renamed as the University of Alaska in 1935. Major growth awaited the post-war era, with the first major initiative being the founding of the Geophysical Institute in 1946.

The University of Alaska made a strong commitment to northern research and established a series of important research facilities around the state. Economic and population growth in Alaska, fueled by the discovery of oil on the north slope, combined with growing interest in post-secondary education and concern about the low participation rate of Aboriginal people, to convince the government to expand the University of Alaska system. Fairbanks remained the centre of research activity in the state, attracting over 5,000 students by the early 1990s and over 9,000 by the end of the century.

On a broader scale, the establishment of the statewide system in 1975 resulted in a major expansion of the system and the integration of community colleges with the University of Alaska. The University of Alaska Statewide system developed into a formidable Alaskan institute. Campuses in Anchorage and Juneau expanded rapidly. Smaller centres opened in sizeable communities around the state. University of Alaska Southwest operated its main campus in Juneau and developed campuses in Sitka and Ketchikan as well. Major investments in distance education, including television-based delivery, ensured greater access to post-secondary training throughout the state. Research activity remained focused on the University of Alaska Fairbanks campus, which ranked among the top 100 research universities in the United States. Its geophysical, permafrost and related Arctic studies initiatives remain world leaders.

This review of the development, activities, and contributions of colleges and universities in the Circumpolar World tells only part of the story of the evolution of northern studies and sub-Arctic and Arctic research. Until northern institutions came into existence—and the above list demonstrates that this development was largely a post-Second World War phenomenon—by definition this research impulse came from southern universities. Major Arctic and sub-Arctic research institutions, most notably the Scott Polar Institute (Cambridge University), Institute for Arctic Studies (Dartmouth



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College), and Arctic Institute of North America (McGill University, later moved to the University of Calgary), added to the contributions of universities in many non-Arctic countries. Denmark, in particular, made a notable commitment to Greenland and Arctic studies. Many other universities, from the University of Aberdeen in Scotland to the University of Alberta and the Université de Laval in Canada, maintain active research and teaching interest in the North. Through these institutions and the research and teaching of hundreds of northern scholars, southern universities made a consistent and important contribution to the understanding of northern issues and realities.



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The Impact and Possibilities of Post-Secondary Education in the Circumpolar World

The Circumpolar World has experienced a vast expansion in post-secondary education in the years since the Second World War and particularly since the 1970s. New universities have been developed. Branch campuses have been added to existing institutions (which have also grown in size and complexity. Technical schools and colleges have opened in major centres throughout the region. A complex web of distance delivered courses and programs (of which the University of the Arctic is among the most important and promising initiatives) provides upgrading and technical and academic opportunities throughout the region. These developments reflect the evolution of the North itself, more assertive, increasingly international, more influential Aboriginal peoples and organizations, better financed, more politically autonomous, and more confident of their place within their respective nation states and the world. Post-secondary institutions and initiatives have played a significant role in the enhancement of regional self-confidence and determination.

If the intent of these initiatives was to improve social stability, enhance personal and regional economic opportunity and, more broadly, to encourage the development of more “complete” northern societies, there is ample evidence that the investment and commitment have paid off. Northern participation rates have increased dramatically, and are closer to national norms (although indigenous participation continues to lag behind in most countries). Young northerners and mature students are able to study at or closer to home. As a consequence, they can pursue their education with less personal dislocation, greater comfort and often dramatically reduced costs. Families that once contemplated moving out of the North as their children neared university age now have credible options in the region itself.

To a greater degree than most government officials anticipated, northern institutions attracted a significant number of non-northern residents. These students, educated in the North, by northern instructors and in a curriculum oriented toward northern concerns, obviously had the opportunity to learn a great deal about the region. There is significant evidence that many of these students opt to stay in the region upon graduation, providing a net addition to the region’s population of trained technicians and professionals. Those who leave upon graduation take with them a diploma or degree shaped by northern imperatives and an extended and highly influential exposure to northern realities. They take these insights with them to southern settings, spreading information about the region and helping to remove the long-distorted stereotypes about Northern life and conditions.

Other substantial benefits have accrued to the North. Northern institutions have attempted, often with striking success, to respond to the needs of the indigenous population or local ethnic groups. They have become central institutions in the preservation and enhancement of indigenous languages, cultures and traditions; specialized professional programs have provided



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indigenous organizations with locally trained and culturally aware graduates. Specialized upgrading and preparatory training have greatly expanded the number of Indigenous people able to proceed to formal post-secondary study. More generally, employers find themselves with a well-trained and educated workforce, including many more individuals who are committed to staying in the region. The technicians and professionals, in turn, have been trained in a northern setting and in a curriculum strongly influenced by regional concerns. The often long period of regional training and preparation required by employees trained in the South has often been shortened considerably. Northern colleges and universities, now connected through a series of international networks, have established a sizeable regional research capability, based in the region and able to address regional problems and concerns. The increased emphasis on northern problems and northern solutions has enriched a wide variety of scholarly disciplines, provided improved research data on northern subjects, and has helped introduce northern residents, companies, and governments to the value of academic research.

Northern societies have changed significantly in the past quarter century. Some of the changes, such as the transformation of Siberia as a result of the collapse of the former Soviet Union or the demilitarization of Alaska after the end of the Cold War, have broad geo-political origins. Other trends, from the re-emergence and re-empowerment of Indigenous peoples to the reduced transience of non-indigenous populations, from greater regional autonomy to increased emphasis on environmental sustainability, are tied to a complex interplay of regional, national and international influences. Post-secondary education and the institutions associated with the programs of study have been an integral part of the evolution of the North. As northern societies stabilize—with less transience, more opportunities and reasons to stay in the region, and with greater ability to recruit employees and professionals from among the graduates of local institutions—there will be greater appreciation of the contributions that colleges, technical institutions, and universities have made to regional development.

Study Questions

1. What role have colleges and universities played in the social development of the North?
2. Why were there very few post-secondary institutions in the region before the 1960s? What impact did this have on the North?
3. Why has it been important for the global understanding of the Circumpolar North to have research institutions based in the region?
4. How (if at all) does the evolution of post-secondary institutions in the former Soviet Union compare to the development of northern colleges and universities in the Western world?



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5. How important is the availability of a northern-based college and university to family decisions and the career opportunities of northerners?
6. What role do post-secondary institutions play in the economic development of the North?

Supplementary Readings/Materials

There is little scholarly writing on this important theme. For information on the various post-secondary institutions, see the Circumpolar Universities Association website: <http://www.urova.fi/home/cua/members.html>

For information on Canadian universities with strong northern connections, see the Association of Canadian Universities for Northern Studies: <http://www.cyberus.ca/~acuns/>.

American universities involved with northern studies can be found through the Arctic Research Consortium of the United States (ARCUS): <http://www.arcus.org>. The University of Alaska is the premier northern universities in the country. The Website for the University of Alaska statewide office is <http://www.alaska.edu>.

A very useful collection of essays on this subject is *The Role of Circumpolar Universities in Northern Development*. Thunder Bay: Lakehead University Centre for Northern Studies, 1991.