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University of Alberta debuts First Nations Colleges information gateway

Edmonton- For the first time ever, First Nations colleges in Alberta will have online access to their own collections and a wide selection of culturally significant academic materials shared by other post-secondary institutions in the province. The First Nations Information Connection will allow students and faculty in six First Nations colleges to take full advantage of the Lois Hole Campus Alberta Digital Library.

"We are especially grateful to the University of Alberta and the Alberta Government for the inclusion of our colleges in the Lois Hole Digital Library and for making it possible through sponsors to create the First Nations Information Connection" said Vivian Ayoungman, executive director of the First Nations Adult and Higher Education Consortium.

The First Nations Information Connection is a network of libraries including the Aboriginal Resource Centre, Blue Quills First Nations College, Maskwachees Cultural College, Old Sun Community College, Red Crow Community College and Yellowhead Tribal College. The colleges have each received computer hardware, software, technical support and training for their library staff. The system will formally launch at 4 p.m. on Nov. 13 at the Blackfoot Crossing Historical Park in Siksika Nation.

The network was built in response to a need to assist Aboriginal colleges get access to a large variety of regularly updated online resources, including digitized photographs and artifacts, historical and scientific information, Aboriginal themed e-books and other academic research materials. The First Nations Information Connection is a U of A initiative done in partnership with the Online Computer Library Center, Nexen Inc., Alberta Advanced Education and Technology and Sun Microsystems of Canada Inc.

"No matter where they live, students deserve the best, leading-edge technology to support their studies," said Doug Horner, minister of Alberta Advanced Education and Technology. "The Lois Hole Digital Library is a great example of Alberta's vision for greater collaboration and co-operation through our provincial post-secondary, Campus Alberta system."

"The result of this collaboration will enable participating First Nations colleges to provide their students and faculty with access to the rich digital research environment shared by learners across the province, so that their students can move forward confidently into other post-secondary institutions and into lifelong learning," said Ernie Ingles, U of A's vice-provost and chief librarian.

Bruce Crocco, vice-president of Online Computer Library Center for the Americas library services, said the initiative connects "people to knowledge through library co-operation." It also provides capacity-building opportunities for library staff at First Nations colleges. They can use the system to network with their colleagues and access educational and professional development resources.



Reference and other community resources are also provided by the First Nations Information Connection.

"Sun Microsystems of Canada believes that innovation is possible when academic institutions and private sector companies work hand-in-hand," said Lynne Zucker, director of education and research markets for Sun Microsystems. "Earlier this year, we partnered with the University of Alberta Libraries and The Alberta Library to create a new Sun Centre of Excellence for Digital Libraries, ensuring students have immediate access to the library resources they need to become successful learners and future leaders."

"Nexen is pleased to be able to provide financial support to this very worthwhile initiative," said Randy Jahrig, Nexen's vice-president, human resources and corporate services. "Bringing more resources to First Nations colleges throughout Alberta will increase chances for success and open up so many more opportunities within the workplace to Aboriginal people."

Additionally, the six libraries have received book donations secured by the U of A. The university has also provided training for college faculty and students, including students at U of A's Aboriginal Teacher Education Program at Blue Quills College. University staff will continue to develop Aboriginal resources for the network in partnership with the colleges.

For more information, contact:

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The University of Alberta in Edmonton is one of the top 100 teaching and research universities in the world serving some 37,000 students with more than 13,000 faculty and staff. Founded a century ago, the university has an annual budget in excess of \$1 billion and attracts more than \$480 million in external research funding. It offers close to 400 undergraduate, graduate and professional programs in 18 faculties.