

# Campus Cousins: Building Community on Campus

Who better to support and guide Indigenous students completing WIL/Co-op programs than Indigenous students themselves? This information sheet suggests some ways that WIL Coordinators can collaborate with existing peer networks on campuses to increase Indigenous WIL recruitment and better support community relationships, initiatives, and goals.

## Who are Cousins?

Cousins are peer-mentors and supportive friends that offer incoming students support in the form of knowledge and networks. The language of 'cousin' reflects both the relatedness and the diversity of Indigenous students attending post-secondary institutions. Having already navigated a transition to campus life, cousins are well-positioned to provide support for students encountering similar challenges and opportunities.

### Community and Relationality

Some students may speak of Campus Cousins as creating a 'second family' or a 'community away from community'\*

Through these networks, students **find support and confidence** to complete their programs, embrace their stories and identities, and pursue their ambitions.

Indigenous educators have also described these avenues for community-building as essential to **reclaiming Indigenous pedagogies** and relational ways of knowing and being\*\*.

### Program Examples

Many BC PSIs offer funding and support for Indigenous peer-mentorship programs. These programs typically facilitate campus **relationship-building, student retention, and cultural revitalization** by offering cultural workshops, study sessions, and social gatherings (Campus Cousins, UVic).

Further, and focusing on post-graduation success, some programs provide access to **leadership and job-skills training** (Campus Cousins, UNBC) and others maintain strong **alumni engagement and community networks** ('Su'luqw'a' Community Cousins, VIU).

*"As a campus cousin, I helped facilitate study nights, outdoor and land-based activities as well as cultural events such as Métis Mondays. During my time as a cousin, I gained work experience and confidence in a safe environment with my peers. I also got to know the staff in the First Peoples House which helped me network and build connections on campus. I learned about campus resources, services and employment programs and shared as much as I could with my peers."*

— Yvonne Houssin, Métis student, former Campus Cousin at UVic

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We recognize the initiative and leadership of Indigenous students in coordinating community service and support programs. In developing partnerships and collaborations with the cousins, it is important for WIL/Co-op Coordinators to listen and respond to the specific needs of these campus communities. Some communities might welcome partnerships with the WIL/Co-op office, but others may hold different and changing priorities. Below are a few suggestions for how you might build relationships with, and offer support to, Campus Cousins programs.

## Connection and Support

- **Be known and available to community leaders and organizers.** More than providing contact information for the WIL/Co-op office, identify and personally introduce a specific staff member as a point of contact. Likewise, get to know the community organizers and their work to sustain long-term partnerships.
- **Offer to host casual information sessions or career-skills workshops.** Provide snacks and a space for socialization at events oriented towards student recruitment. Ask campus community organizers what workshops or training sessions would most align with their goals; collaborate to support these initiatives.
- **Provide employer networking opportunities for students.** This might be as involved as coordinating recruitment sessions and inviting employers to training sessions, or as simple as sharing relevant job postings and career or training opportunities with the community.
- **Expand existing mentorship networks by engaging with Indigenous WIL/Co-op alumni.** Many students experience anxiety about transitioning out of their academic programs and finding career paths. Offer honorariums or gifts to alumni who volunteer as community mentors after graduation.

\* Community Cousins at Vancouver Island University. (2017). YouTube Video, 3:08.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mmvICzWsy6Y>.

\*\* Campus Cousins – Building Community Connections at the University of Northern British Columbia. (2018). Video, 36:07.  
<https://www.nccie.ca/story/campus-cousins-building-community-connections-at-the-university-of-northern-british-columbia/>.



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