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### Stu Mackay, Yukon College--CIPS Accreditation; Future Mission; Top Educational Challenges/Solutions

This is the next interview in the [continuing series](#) of Computing Canada's (CC) [Blogged Down](#) (BD) which is featured here "first" in the Canadian IT Managers (CIM) forum.

In this blog series, we continue our talk with Stu Mackay, Dean at Yukon College—a leader in innovative educational programs and advanced delivery of these programs.

Thank you and Enjoy!  
Stephen Ibaraki, [FCIPS](#), [I.S.P.](#), [MVP](#)



Stephen: Your College recently received CIPS accreditation. What is the value proposition of accreditation? Describe your experiences, and vision with accreditation—for 2007 and beyond?

Stu: One of the more widely held myths in post-secondary education is that the larger the institution, the more valuable the education. Yukon College is small and our students, employers and public need to be assured that the quality of services provided by us is comparable to those delivered at other institutions. Accreditation provides this accountability.

I must admit, the CIPS articulation process is not for the faint of heart. We needed to examine every area of our operation from the qualifications of the instructors and the curriculum to the employment market and advisory groups. It was very thorough and we certainly learned much about our students, community and ourselves as we moved through the process.

As ICT field expands and becomes more specialized, we will be continually challenged to develop new partnerships and expertise so that our students will have the best education and training. This may mean that our students will receive their courses from multiple institutions or from instructors who may never see them "face-to-face". How will accreditation work in these situations? Perhaps CIPS will need to develop a regional or "blanket" accreditation process? Interesting questions.

Stephen: What do you see as your mission in 2007 and 2008? What do you hope to accomplish?

Stu: In the short term, the College is a major partner in the hosting of the 2007 Canada Winter Games. These games will be the biggest event ever staged in Canada north of the 60th parallel. They will run for two weeks from February 23rd to March 10th, 2007. Over 3,600 athletes, coaches and managers will gather in Whitehorse to compete for a total of 1,122 medals in 22 sports. Yukon College is the site of the Athletes' Village and we will be providing the accommodations and food services.

Just how do you provide over 85,000 meals in 2 weeks? Our solution is to partner with other post-secondary institutions and make this event an extraordinary teaching opportunity. A consortium of Culinary Arts Programs from 5 colleges and universities will be producing the meals to feed all the athletes, coaches, and managers. Malaspina University College (Nanaimo), Northern Lights College (Dawson Creek), Northwest Community College (Terrace), Thompson Rivers University (Kamloops) and Yukon College (Whitehorse) have joined together to take on this task. Students will be involved in other areas as well. For example, our IT students have been tasked with the set-up and configuration of the internet cafes. This project will test their abilities to take the "theory" and put it into practice. On a broader scale, as our connectivity improves, we will be increasingly challenged to develop more courses and services to meet the demand. Learners will want to access their education and training at times that are convenient for them. The College has seen this growth and, in the Yukon, our video conferencing capability is now at its maximum output. As educators, we wish to meet the needs of every learner. Our roles must change from instructors to facilitators who know how to connect the learner to their goal. In a practical sense, this will mean increasing the resources for education technologies and building new partnerships.

Stephen: Globalization, community involvement and diversity, inclusion, women in technology, declining enrolments, skills shortage, skills gap, productivity gap, political uncertainty, ICT adoption rates, and more are in the news. Can you share your views on the top challenges facing the educational community in 2007 and beyond? Ultimately, why should government, business, industry, the public, and media be concerned?

Stu: I was at a conference recently when Dr. Sam Shaw, President of NAIT, was speaking on this topic. He stated that



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there are only 3 priorities: human resources, human resources and human resources. This may be a simplistic way of describing Canada's need to develop a workforce that is qualified, flexible, adaptable and innovative. As the skill shortages grow, the demographic shifts continue and competition from the emerging global economies increase, we need to engage everyone in an inclusive manner to maintain our innovative and competitive edge thus securing our standard of living. We must renew our investment in people.

Easier said than done. In the north, we are faced with some unique challenges. With a small population dispersed over a vast geography, economies of scale are difficult to achieve. We have the full range of education and training needs experienced by our more populous provincial neighbours, but must be quite strategic in our program and service planning in order to make the most of our resources.

With devolution of federal responsibilities and the implementation of First Nations governments, we are experiencing accelerated requirements for well educated and well-trained local personnel to conduct this work. In many cases, Yukoners need to combine employment with the pursuit of advanced credentials. This requires flexible and accessible course and program delivery. Like the rest of Canada, we are losing a generation of skilled workers as they approach retirement age. In our case, however, the impacts are greater than elsewhere, as our labour force is small, and every individual counts with respect to the viability of our economy. Further, attracting skilled workers to the north, and keeping them here, is frequently problematic.

Literacy levels are still unacceptably low, and a large proportion of our secondary school students either drop out, or complete a credential with less than the minimum academic requirements to enter post-secondary studies. We are faced with a high proportion of prospective students who need to gain essential academic skills to ensure that they can succeed.

Our economy is still developing in breadth, with a relatively small private sector, and large public sector. As new initiatives are undertaken, we must be nimble in developing appropriate, timely, accessible, and high quality training programs. At the same time, there have been increasing labour shortages in key areas of the Yukon economy and unemployment rates have remained low for the past 2 years. This is an excellent opportunity to engage under-representative populations in the economy such as First Nation communities and disadvantaged groups.

Lastly, new relationships among our people are being developed. First Nations and newcomer cultures are learning to work together to build a stronger future. Our programs and services must reflect an ethos of inclusivity and mutual respect. We must create new ways of learning, and incorporate differing traditions of knowledge.

Stephen: What are your proposed solutions to these challenges? How should public policy be changed, or updated in 2007?

Stu: From a College perspective, the first solution is to restore the federal funding to post-secondary education to 1993-94 levels adjusted for inflation and demographics. This would immediately infuse \$4.9 billion into the system for necessary expansion, equipment upgrades and student support. This is not a new idea as all the premiers, as well as most national education bodies, have been calling for this initiative for some time. Perhaps its time is high.

The national agenda must be based on the principle of inclusivity, providing access to learning opportunities for all Canadians. They must have the opportunity to develop and use their skills and knowledge to the fullest as everyone will be needed. This includes:

- upgrading the current workforce, including the underemployed and working poor,
- accelerating the provision of skills training, specifically in areas of significant labour shortages.(e.g., trades, nursing),
- emerging opportunities stemming from the implementation of Yukon First Nation Land Claim and Self-Government Agreements,
- facilitating the application of new technologies,
- facilitating immigrants labour market integration,
- providing enhanced learning opportunities for people disabilities,
- targeting the waste productivity of the unemployed, adult learners with low/basic essential skills, older displaced workers who lack the necessary skills to successfully re-enter the job market, and the untapped pool of skilled women in non-traditional roles.

In the next blog, Stu will talk about:

- Major events shaping ICT education in the past 3 years;
- Societal issues needing attention.

I also encourage you to share your thoughts here on these interviews or send me an e-mail at [sibaraki@cips.ca](mailto:sibaraki@cips.ca).

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Posted: Thursday, January 04, 2007 8:44 AM by [ednitmgr](#)

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