Aboriginal program checks boxes

GEOFF LEE WRITER

There is nothing like having quick access to mom’s home cooking and the bank of mom for financially strapped or homesick Lakeland College students.

Students who enrol in a University of Alberta Aboriginal Teacher Education Program (ATEP) this fall in collaboration with Lakeland at the Lloydminster campus, may be able to tap into both of those resources while also getting a four-year Bachelor of Education degree.

The main purpose of this collaborative educational partnership is to attract more Aboriginal students to pursue an education close to home.

“This is a bachelor of education only for elementary schools at the U of A, so it’s a four-year degree that they will emerge with,” said Judy Sarsons, dean of Lakeland’s School of Health, Wellness and University Transfer.

“It does include non-aboriginal students who want to become teachers in an elementary school.”

The program allows Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students to complete the first two academic years through Lakeland’s university transfer program and the last years of university studies at Lakeland as well.

Sarsons said it allows students in this region to stay closer to home in Lloydminster to complete to schools.

“Whether the schools are on First Nations or in cities or towns around the province, they felt it was important to provide that cultural awareness if the students didn’t have it in their background,” she said.

“There is certainly a need for students in a bachelor of education program to have that cultural awareness when they are teaching Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal students.”

Sarsons said especially in years three and four, U of A takes a very strategic approach to make sure that even when they’re learning in a science methods class they can think of it with the Aboriginal culture in mind.

“There is a focus on that,” she said.

In the bigger picture, the degree will help both institutions with their reconciliation process for the next generation of children.

“When we had an info session in November and the director and associate director of the ATEP program came from U of A, they voiced the message that reconciliation is one person at time,” said Sarsons.

She said they also noted the more individuals who go through an education program such as this and become teachers, the more they will be aware of what the process is, but also how to integrate an understanding within the classroom of elementary age school children.

“Children are the future of course, and I think that is a very important way to include reconciliation, and understanding what reconciliation can mean for all of us.”

Sarsons said it’s too early to tell how many students will enrol in ATEP, noting students will apply for the first two years of schooling to the Lakeland university’s transfer program.

“They can apply right up to the start of classes in September, so we won’t have those numbers probably until April or into May,” she said.