

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 18, 2025

Twenty-two students graduate from first-of-its-kind MBA in Advancing Reconciliation

VICTORIA, B.C. – The BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres (BCAAFC) and the University of Victoria (UVic) Peter B. Gustavson School of Business celebrated the graduation of the inaugural cohort of the first-of-its-kind MBA in Advancing Reconciliation on June 12, 2025. The program focuses on dialogue, knowledge sharing, and actionable steps to move past colonial structures within the social services sector and towards Indigenous-informed organizational models.

Of the 22 graduating students, 15 are Indigenous. Eleven students are representatives from the BC Friendship Centre Movement, a network of Indigenous-led urban service delivery organizations under BCAAFC's umbrella. Together, they make a powerful network of leaders committed to advancing change in the social service sector.

"For those of us working within the Friendship Centre Movement, the impact of this MBA cannot be overstated," said Julie Robertson, Interim Executive Director of BCAAFC, who is also one of the graduates. "With over 80% of Indigenous Peoples in B.C. living away from their traditional lands, the presence of 15 Indigenous graduates in this first cohort is a profound step forward. It represents a new generation of urban Indigenous leadership that is ready to strengthen our communities, advocate for equity, and lead transformative systems change."

The MBA in Advancing Reconciliation was funded by the Province in 2022 as part of an \$8.4-million funding announcement aimed at creating an action framework to integrate reconciliation into community social services. The program critically examines barriers faced by Indigenous peoples accessing mainstream social services and centers Indigenous-led solutions and Indigenous-defined metrics for success to inform the steps needed to achieve inclusivity and cultural safety in the sector.

Thanks to a dedicated and reciprocal partnership between BCAAFC and UVic, two more cohorts will be launched. The intake for the 2026 cohort will open in July 2025.

"The Gustavson School of Business is honoured to continue partnering with BCAAFC in offering the MBA AR for a further two cohorts," said Jen Baggs, acting Dean at the Gustavson School of Business. "Learning is never a one-way street. Our instructors, administrators and leaders gain immeasurably from the knowledge and experiences of the students, and the chance to deliver this program with BCAAFC."

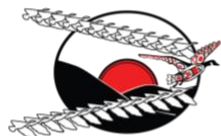
To learn more about the MBA in Advancing Reconciliation, visit <https://bcaafc.com/mbaar/>.

To read the Province's funding announcement, visit <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2022SDPR0046-001075#:~:text=The%20Province%20is%20investing%20%248.4%20million%20to%20advance,reconciliation%20in%20the%20B.C.%20community%20social%20services%20sector.>

Quotes

Amshen – Joan Phillip, Parliamentary Secretary for Community Development and Non-Profits, Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction – "B.C.'s social services sector is essential to our communities, and we need more leaders to strengthen it. This program is building the expertise needed to create inclusive, culturally safe services across the province - advancing reconciliation in a meaningful way."

Nox Stikine, Annette Morgan, Executive Director, Dze L K'ant Friendship Centre Society and President of BCAAFC – "Reflecting on my time at Gustavson, I am filled with gratitude for the experiences that have shaped my understanding of reconciliation. Personally, the journey of completing my MBA has transformed me in ways I never anticipated. I have deepened my understanding of the systemic barriers our communities face and the imperative to address them through an Indigenous lens. This program has reinforced my belief that reconciliation is not just a concept; it is a call to action that requires us to engage with our communities and empower our people. I have emerged with a renewed sense of purpose, ready to advocate for change with the wisdom of my ancestors guiding me."



BC Association of Aboriginal
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Francois Bastien, Gustavson School of Business professor, incoming Associate Dean Indigenous, and Academic Director of the MBA AR – "Advancing reconciliation is sacred and often difficult work. It calls for deep commitment from all of us, walking together with humility and purpose. Journeying alongside the students, our partner BCA AFC, and the instructors has been a deeply rewarding experience — one rooted in relationships, learning, and the shared hope of a more just future. I'm humbled by the opportunity to continue this journey together — to help shape a path in education that is co-created, shared, and evolving, rather than static or owned."

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