

**Master of Applied Health Services Research (MAHSR)  
Thesis Defense**

***Barriers to Aboriginal Student  
Retention in Post Secondary Education***

**Julie Puiras**

**Wednesday, June 8, 2011, 2:00 p.m.  
School of Nursing Boardroom, Lower level, Steel Building**

ABSTRACT

Education has been identified as having a positive relationship on health; those with more education tend to be healthier. In light of this, the markedly lower education level of Aboriginal Canadians is a significant concern, and the factors that influence Aboriginal retention and completion of post-secondary education deserve analysis. To identify factors that positively or negatively affect the experience of Aboriginal students attending the University of Prince Edward Island (UPEI), four Aboriginal women pursuing undergraduate and graduate degrees provided their perspectives through interviews. The participants of this study shared rich detail resulting in some clearly identified desired supports, and barrier and supporting factors to their educational experiences. Negative factors that emerged include discrimination and a lack of positive Aboriginal academic role models. Financial challenges also were identified as stress inducing and distracting. Positive factors include family and advocates whose influences were often helpful to the participants in overcoming some negative effects. Some factors were both positive and negative. For instance, family responsibilities often proved the most stressful and time consuming; yet, it was the desire to improve their families' circumstances that motivated these women. Finally, an overarching theme of caring was identified. When the students felt cared for and understood, their grades and confidence improved.