Exploiting Northern Cultures

In November 2004, two students and three staff from Iqaluit’s Inuksuk High School travelled to Karasjok, Norway, for a preliminary meeting with staff and students from Samisk Videregående Skole, to identify common themes for a longer-term project. The project will be designed to enhance the identity of circumpolar youth. Shirley Wolff Serafini, Canada’s Ambassador to Norway, was also in attendance.

While there, the students were involved in meetings with other students from around the world based around a UN theme—celebrating the decade of indigenous peoples—and thus were able to meet with young people from New Zealand, Tanzania and Morocco through the UN organizers. “The best part however was, without question, the time spent with our hosts from Karasjok,” said David Lloyd, Assistant Principal, Inuksuk High School.

“It is our hope that this project will create bonds between our institutions and between pupils/staff at a personal level; and facilitate sharing elements from each other’s cultures to develop new cultural expressions,” said David Lloyd.

The overall aim of the project is to promote a circumpolar identity for young people in Iqaluit and Karasjok by studying traditional
rights and culture, and by focusing on previous, present and future lifestyles. The schools also envisage annual exchanges of small groups of teachers and pupils. Samisk Videregående Skole has been looking forward to cooperating with a school in another area of the North. The background for the visit was an initiative from the Mayor of Karasjok and the Canadian Embassy in Oslo.

**Six Dynamic Young Canadian Leaders Selected to Participate in the Circumpolar Young Leaders Program**

One of the greatest challenges for the North is engaging and building capacity among its youth who will ultimately bear the responsibility for implementing the policies and programs necessary for sustainable development. Awareness is growing internationally of the role the Arctic plays in global environmental and climate trends.

The Circumpolar Young Leaders Program assists participants in understanding how to strengthen collaboration among organizations and communities in the North, enhances their ability to undertake integrated sustainable development research and move that research into policy and practice, and learn about the tools for communication and leadership. Participants acquire professional competencies, enhance their cross-cultural skills and gain a broader understanding of circumpolar issues.

“Over the last few years the International Institute for Sustainable Development has placed more than 18 young Northern Canadians abroad, many of whom are now working in positions of leadership in their communities,” says Carolee Buckler, Project Manager at the International Institute for Sustainable Development in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Six new participants (Geoff Rigby, Cherie Arrow, Katy Dillon, Lauren Haney, Vita Hoyles and Ian Caldwell) will soon be leaving for six-month placements in Finland, Norway and Sweden to work with the World Wide Fund For Nature, Stockholm Environment Institute, University of the Arctic and UNEP/GRID-Arendal.

This program is supported by Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, Foreign Affairs Canada, The Walter & Dunacan Gordon Foundation, and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. For further information please see http://www.iisd.org/interns/arctic/

**Fourth Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting**

By Lee-Anne Hermann

A melting ice sculpture of a polar bear was the centrepiece at the WWF reception held on the margins of the Fourth Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting, which took place on November 24, 2004, in Reykjavik, Iceland. The melting polar bear was an appropriate symbol to hit home to delegates and observers the effects of climate change on the Arctic, one of the major themes for the one-day meeting. The biennial meeting saw ministers (and in the case of the USA, the Undersecretary of Global Affairs) meet to review the achievements of the Arctic Council under the Icelandic Chairmanship, approve the work plan and way forward for the Russian Chairmanship, and sign the Reykjavik Declaration.

The Arctic Council was established in 1996 in Ottawa, Canada, to advance circumpolar cooperation. As a high-level intergovernmental forum, the Council’s mandate is to protect the Arctic environment and promote the economic, social and cultural well-being of Northern peoples. It is one of the world’s first international fora promoting the principles of sustainable development.

The following were some of the key deliverables presented at the meeting:

- Completion of the Arctic Human Development Report. The Arctic Human Development Report was presented to Ministers at the Ministerial Meeting. The report provides a coherent framework by identifying priority issues and future challenges for Arctic livelihoods, human well-being and community viability. It identifies major issues related to sustainability in the Arctic and its findings will help the Arctic Council determine future areas of work.
• The report from the international conference on information and communication technology (ICT) to build the capacity of Arctic residents to shape their own destiny.

• The Arctic Marine Strategic Plan, which is a coordinating framework intended to improve how the Arctic coastal and marine environment is managed. The Plan attempts to address emerging issues (e.g., oil and gas, shipping activities), employing a risk assessment approach, taking into account the special needs and requirements of indigenous communities, to facilitate sustainable development decisions.

However, the major deliverable at the Ministerial Meeting was the Arctic Climate Impact Assessment (ACIA), a four-year comprehensive review and compilation of research on the science and socio-economic impacts of climate change in the North. Over 250 leading Arctic researchers from 15 countries from and beyond the circumpolar North have assembled and distilled available scientific information about the Arctic climate and the impact of climate change on it. Unique to the ACIA is that it also incorporates indigenous traditional knowledge and perceptions.

Overall the Ministerial Meeting was a success. The Arctic Council has proven once again that it can produce high-quality scientific assessments and reach consensus on concrete action plans. However, the success of the Arctic Council will ultimately be measured by its ability to turn all of this important scientific work into language and actions that individuals and communities can effectively use to understand the challenges and implement policies that will make their lives better.

“Healey-ing” the World

By Jordan Gold

If you ask Gwen Healey about her master plan she will tell you she “just wants to be a doctor.” While being a doctor is honourable and impressive in its own right, Gwen’s simple response does not nearly capture her intellect, contagious energy and passion.

Gwen was born and raised in Iqaluit in a culturally rich community heavily rooted in a traditional lifestyle. Growing up, running dog teams and connecting with the elders were a regular part of life, but so was her passion for community education and health. As a teenager, Gwen co-founded Kids on the Net, a science and technology program for children in Nunavut. She continued her work with Kids on the Net and her dedication to teaching excellence was recognized by Actua’s Shell Award. Before applying for her Arctic internship, Gwen received a physics degree from Queen’s University and spent her summers working for the Department of Justice and her hometown hospital.

Gwen says the people were by far the best part of her experience, from the interns, to IIID staff, to her Norwegian and Finnish colleagues and Bill, the owner of the Winnipeg hostel where interns stayed during their orientation. Initially placed in Norway with the University of the Arctic, Gwen quickly advanced to a position co-hosted by the University of the Arctic and UNEP GRID. Her work focused on indigenous health interests and made her realize that similar issues are dealt with very differently in Scandinavia and Canada.

She underlines that the skills and insights gained in her placement have given her a new perspective on familiar problems: “[Before going away,] I thought I had an understanding of circumpolar health just because I came from the region, but this was not the case.” Upon return to Canada, Gwen worked with the Nunavut territorial gov-
ernment as a Health Promotion Specialist where she was able to use her experience to develop programs such as the Aboriginal Diabetes Initiative and Care Close to Home. She is currently studying bone health of Aboriginal women as part of her MSc studies in Community Health Sciences at the University of Calgary.

“You Become Canadian When You Leave Canada”: Interview with Letia Cousins

By Maja Andjelkovic

Letia Cousins was raised in Iqaluit, the capital of Canada’s newest territory, Nunavut. Letia found out about the Circumpolar Young Leaders Program from her sister, who directed her to http://www.iisd.org/interns/arctic, and from other grad students at Dalhousie University. She interned with the Baphalali Swaziland Red Cross Society.

**How did it all start?**

In 1999, IISD was piloting its Circumpolar Young Leaders Program. It’s difficult to find young Northerners who are eligible and available for the program. Candidates who do qualify are great, but in short supply. I didn’t have the “usual” experience because I didn’t go through orientation and debriefing with a group of Canadians. After I finished the program, Carolee (Buckler) and I talked about how to better appeal to Northern youth. A lot of people here don’t have undergraduate degrees, and if they do, their job prospects are very good. Also, not many people from Nunavut have a lot of experience in southern Canada, let alone internationally. For some, it can be overwhelming.

**Looking back on the experience, how would you describe it to a stranger?**

Life-altering! It has really broadened my perspective and allowed me to see impacts of policies at all levels. This internship was my first real international travel experience and my first time living on my own. I was in Geneva for a week for Red Cross induction training before going to Africa. The length of the internship provides an opportunity to meet local people, and learn some of the social and political issues. It’s true what they say: you become a Canadian when you leave Canada. I’m Inuk and I felt very Canadian and very proud to be talking to indigenous people in Africa, to

Cousins: “Take advantage of those opportunities; use the knowledge and skills you acquire when you return to the North.”
learn about their cultural language and traditions and to talk about mine. It’s quite common that I meet a stranger and they already know about the program. IISD alumni are everywhere around the planet.

What did you do after your placement and how has your placement impacted your career?

I completed graduate studies at Dalhousie, and then went on to work with UNESCO in Zimbabwe on a program to increase the ability of ministries of education in eastern and southern African in new techniques to collect, process and analyze education statistics. I now work in intergovernmental affairs, so my international development work definitely complements my job, and has helped me gain this position. I’ve used my university and international experience to return home and work for the Government of Nunavut. Both my school and my international experience have helped me tremendously with what I want to be doing and what I am doing. I joined the Government of Nunavut’s Department of Executive and Intergovernmental Affairs in 2002. In 2004, I became the Director of Aboriginal and Circumpolar Affairs. This position reports directly to the Deputy Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, and is responsible for the overall management and co-ordination of the aboriginal and circumpolar strategy.

That’s a lot of responsibility! What advice would you give to new interns?

The world is full of opportunities to travel, to work and to learn. Take advantage of those opportunities; use the knowledge and skills you acquire when you return to the North.

You’re also involved in running an international placement program for high school students in Nunavut. Tell us more.

The Nunavut Youth Abroad Program enables youth of Nunavut aged 16 to 21 to acquire professional skills and training, hands-on work experience and high school credits through a cross-cultural work and learning experience in southern Canada and abroad. It allows Nunavut youth to travel outside the territory with other youth so this is like an incremental step towards independent travel. I am on the board of directors but also help out with orientation and re-orientation. I have used my experience overseas to help them prepare for travel and work placements as well as coping strategies for homesickness. We hope that this program will feed into the Circumpolar Young Leaders Program and others like it.